

1993

## Buying into the world of goods: Eighteenth-century consumerism and the retail trade from London to the Virginia frontier

Ann Smart Martin  
*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Business Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Martin, Ann Smart, "Buying into the world of goods: Eighteenth-century consumerism and the retail trade from London to the Virginia frontier" (1993). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1539623835.

<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-q2mr-b119>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

**This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.**

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.**

**In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.**

**Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.**

**Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.**

# **U·M·I**

University Microfilms International  
A Bell & Howell Information Company  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
313/761-4700 800/521-0600



**Order Number 9407425**

**Buying into the world of goods: Eighteenth-century  
consumerism and the retail trade from London to the Virginia  
frontier**

**Martin, Ann Smart, Ph.D.**

**The College of William and Mary, 1993**

**Copyright ©1993 by Martin, Ann Smart. All rights reserved.**

**U·M·I**

**300 N. Zeeb Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106**



**BUYING INTO THE WORLD OF GOODS:  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CONSUMERISM AND THE RETAIL TRADE  
FROM LONDON TO THE VIRGINIA FRONTIER**

---

**A Dissertation**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

---

**by**

**Ann Smart Martin**

**1993**

**© Ann Smart Martin, 1993**

APPROVAL SHEET


This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

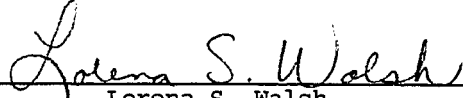
Doctor of Philosophy

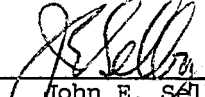
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Author


Approved, March 1993

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
James P. Whittenburg

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Barbara Carson

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lorena S. Walsh

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
John E. Selby

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Bernard L. Herman  
University of Delaware

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
ABSTRACT .....	x
INTRODUCTION .....	2
CHAPTER 1. CONSUMERISM: A PROBLEM IN AMERICAN CULTURE .....	13
CHAPTER 2. CONSUMERISM, MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE MEANING OF GOODS .....	45
CHAPTER 3. THE CONSUMER WORLD OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ANGLO-AMERICA .....	90
CHAPTER 4. THE RISE OF THE RETAIL TRADE IN ENGLAND AND THE CHESAPEAKE .....	158
CHAPTER 5. VIRGINIA STORES AND THE WORLD OF GOODS .....	187
CHAPTER 6. A MERCHANT AND THE WORLD OF GOODS: JOHN HOOK AND HIS BUSINESS .....	219
CHAPTER 7. CONSUMERS AND THE WORLD OF GOODS IN BEDFORD COUNTY .....	258
CHAPTER 8. TEADRINKING IN A NEW CONSUMER WORLD: A CASE STUDY OF CULTURAL MEANING .....	319
CONCLUSION .....	355
APPENDICES .....	365
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	369



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project of this length and breadth incurs many debts, and I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge the help of many. My first thanks is to my committee, beginning with James Whittenburg, who patiently guided my stumbling steps in quantitative analysis a decade ago, and later gave me the courage to return for my doctorate and the stamina to see it through. Most importantly, I watched him magically transform a classroom, and through his example I saw how to treat students with respect and kindness. Barbara Carson has been my inspiration for so many years and who now I feel privileged to call a colleague and friend. They both provided immense guidance, and read and commented early on the entire draft of the manuscript. Lorena Walsh also has helped me through the quantitative thickets and her work has given me a model of scholarly excellence that I can only hope to achieve. Bernie Herman has helped me push my thoughts about material culture to new levels and I am greatly in debt for his thoughtful comments on the manuscript. Finally, to John Selby I owe thanks for his extraordinary knowledge of colonial Virginia and long-standing encouragement of my work.

One of the great joys of research is the sharing of ideas and information with one's colleagues, particularly at the wonderful atmosphere of Colonial Williamsburg. I have received references and help from so many I can only list them here: Harold Gill, Pat Gibbs, Liza Gusler, Nancy Hagedorn, Jan Gilliam, Jay Gaynor, Marley Brown, Joanne Bowen, Andy Edwards, Meredith Moodey and Greg Brown. Of particular note was Carl Lounsbury's long trip out to Franklin County to measure the Hook store and permission to use the photographs and files of eighteenth-century stores at the Department of Architectural

Research. Photographs were provided by the helpful audiovisual staff and CAD drawings were done by Kim Wagner.

Other scholars were extremely generous. Unpublished manuscripts were also critical to parts of this work, provided by John and Emily Salmon, Turk McClesky, and my dear friend, Camille Wells. John Hook was brought to life for me by the delightful Dr. Warren Moorman who not only gave me a tour of New London, but was a gracious host on my visits to the Hook store on his property. His own knowledge of John Hook and local history gave me fresh insight and new ideas. The same was true of Anne Carter Lee who graciously shared her own local manuscript material.

On the other side of the Atlantic, I also have incurred large intellectual debts and made wonderful new friends. I was fortunate to study with Peter Clark during his tenure as Harrison professor at William and Mary who gave me my dogged trans-Atlantic perspective. More recently, John Styles has provided me with key critical manuscript sources, his wonderful forthcoming manuscripts, and an opportunity to share this research on consumerism with English scholars. His intellectual curiosity to call up a lonely visiting scholar in London has led to a wonderful collegial relationship. Terence Lockett not only was an extraordinary host in England but also led me to new sources.

Portions of this work have been presented at conferences, and I have benefitted enormously from the advice of commentators or participants. These include the Economic History Association, the Society for Historical Archaeology, the Shenandoah Seminar, the Third Textile History Conference, the Winterthur Colloquium, and special conferences at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Colonial Williamsburg. Scholars who have helped focus my work, offered suggestions or served as commentators on portions include Carol Shammass, Lois Green Carr, John Lyons, Laurel Ulrich, John Styles, Richard Bushman, and Vanessa Patrick. Funding was provided through a Virginia Commonwealth fellowship, Daughters of

the American Revolution fellowship, and minor research grants from the Commonwealth Center and the Department of History at William and Mary. While many archivists deserve my thanks, Linda McCurdy and the staff at the Manuscript Department, Duke University Library made my long visits with John Hook materials a pleasure.

Nor can I imagine a group of people more supportive than my colleagues in the Winterthur Program of Early American Culture. Katherine Martinez, James Curtis, J. Ritchie Garrison and Bernie Herman not only cheered me to the finish line, but provided an extraordinary scholarly climate for the study of material culture. My students continually push me to think about material culture in fresh ways. Teresa Gawinski helped transform my words into a real manuscript. Finally, Kate Hutchins, Neville Thompson, Dot Wiggins, and especially, Pat Elliott have made Winterthur a fine home.

I was also blessed with the luck of a wonderful class at William and Mary where Julie Richter, Mary Ferrari, Wade Shaffer, Chris Hendricks, and Tom Legg have been extraordinary supportive throughout coursework and on through the lonely process of finishing my dissertation. Without them, research trips will never again be so fun. Julie Richter in particular provided extraordinary last-minute help with my frantic calls from Delaware for sources. I must also acknowledge a special group of colleagues and friends to whom I owe too much to detail. These include Cary Carson, George L. Miller, Mary Corbin Sies, and Patricia Samford. My parents, Morgan and Nancy Smart, have been cheated of many visits and long holidays by this dissertation. Their support and example helped make me who I am today. Finally, while it is almost a cliché to say that a dissertation would not have been possible without one's spouse, in my case, there is absolute truth. Without Carl's patience, love, and, most importantly, laughter, not only would I have despaired long ago, but my life would be empty indeed. To him, this work is dedicated.

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Classification System for Virginia Stores . . . . .	191
2. Dimensions of 18th-Century Virginia Stores: Documentary Evidence . . . . .	199
3. Dimensions of Standing Virginia Stores: Outside of Williamsburg . . . . .	199
4. Square Footage of Williamsburg Stores . . . . .	199
5. "Sundry articles contained in Pidgeon Holes" in Hook's Store . . . . .	207
6. Slaveownership in Bedford County, 1768-1777 . . . . .	265
7. Landownership in Bedford County, 1782 . . . . .	265
8. Total Wealth in Bedford County Inventories, 1768-1777 . . . . .	285
9. Mean Number of Chairs per Household, 1768-1777 . . . . .	285
10. Mean Number of Tables per Household, 1768-1777 . . . . .	285
11. Consumer Wealth in Bedford County Inventories, 1768-1777 . . . . .	285
12. Ownership of Knives and Forks per Household, 1768-1777 . . . . .	286
13. Ownership of Books per Household, 1768-1777 . . . . .	286
14. Ownership of Teawares in Virginia, 1768-1777 . . . . .	298
15. Slaveownership of Hook's Daybook Customers . . . . .	299
16. Purchases in John Hook's Store, September- December, 1771 . . . . .	300
17. Most Common Items Sold and their Average Price . . . . .	302
18. Purchase Frequency of Selected Functional	

Groupings .....	302
19. Purchase Frequency of Selected Objects .....	302
20. Women and Slaves in Three Hook Account Books .....	307
21. Purchase Frequency of Selected Objects by Women in Hook's Daybook .....	307
22. Purchases of Henry Fuqua, 1771-1774 .....	312

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Constraints of Consumer Choice . . . . .	47
2. Interior of Wall Store, Lunenburg County . . . . .	200
3. Prentis Store, Williamsburg . . . . .	203
4. Hillsborough Store, King and Queen County . . . . .	203
5. John Hook Store Plan, New London, Bedford County . . . . .	206
6. Interior Shelving, Hook Store, New London . . . . .	206
7. Farish Print Shop, Port Royal, Caroline County . . . . .	207
8. Farish Print Shop Plan, Port Royal . . . . .	207
9. Hook Lumber House, New London . . . . .	207
10. John Hook store plan, Hale's Ford, Franklin County . . . . .	207
11. John Hook store photo, Hale's Ford . . . . .	207
12. Detail of modillioned cornice, Hook store . . . . .	207
13. "A New and Accurate Map of Virginia," John Henry 1771 . . . . .	222
14. Detail of Bedford County, John Henry map . . . . .	222
15. Plan of New London . . . . .	223
16. John Hook house plan, New London, 1772 . . . . .	274
17. Fancy farm, Bedford County . . . . .	277
18. John Hook house plan, Hale's Ford, 1782 . . . . .	278

## ABSTRACT

This is a study of the cultural problem of consumerism. It examines the complex, rich, and multi-varied world of consumer goods in eighteenth-century Anglo-America, when traditional notions of hierarchy were increasingly challenged by new patterns of social and geographical mobility and changing measures of human worth. It was also a time when more and more consumer goods came into the lives of average men and women.

Few historians have scrutinized the role of those goods or the means and motives for their acquisition. Objects become an important part of the story of consumerism, however, by examining affordability (commodities and value), availability (local and long-distance access) and desirability (a complex bundle that includes differentiation or solidarity of group, formation of identity, and symbolism). Studying the retail trade of Britain and Virginia further focuses on how goods moved from manufacturer to consumer, and the environment and behavior of shopping.

This study then asks how the world of goods, often defined by elites and the fashion system in England, extended even to the fringe of the empire in backcountry Virginia. Careful examination of the merchant John Hook in Bedford County reveals an intensely competitive retail trade. Hook worked hard to attract and keep customers—middling and poorer men and women, free and enslaved—through his stock of high-quality, fashionable goods.

Everyday purchase choices—a ribbon or nails, rum or tea—demonstrate how men and women responded to larger Anglo-American changes and how local and market economies intertwined through trading home production and personal services for imported goods and groceries. It was the purchase of small, inexpensive items coupled with slowly-changing behaviors within an inherited cultural shell that defined backcountry consumerism. Thus, while many in the middling ranks of Bedford society fought and drank in small log-built structures, they also added small items of household comfort and dressed with an eye to fashion. Ultimately, Virginians below the economic elite and far from the cultural core were part of the hegemony of fashion-makers, but also chose to reject them through locally determined consumer choice.

**BUYING INTO THE WORLD OF GOODS:  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CONSUMERISM AND THE RETAIL TRADE  
FROM LONDON TO THE VIRGINIA FRONTIER**



## INTRODUCTION

In late July 1801, a man was spotted crossing the river between Bedford and Franklin counties with a "Sack Bag filled with something on his horse." The witness could not swear positively "but from the shape of the article in the Bag, I have no hesitation in saying I believe they were the Books."<sup>1</sup> The books in question were the missing thirty-year old accounts from the Virginia store of John Hook; the man was Hook's son-in-law. For six years, those documents had been the subject of litigation between Hook and his partner David Ross, who claimed that Hook had not fully paid when the Revolutionary war closed their partnership. Hook had steadfastly refused to produce the books for the court commissioners to examine and had been held in contempt of court. His property was finally ordered to be seized until he removed his contempt charges by producing the books.

The stage had thus been set. On an early morning in July, a group of four men gathered outside in the yard of John Hook's large house in Franklin County. Three were commissioners with hammers and nails in hand to board up the doors and turn Hook and his family out of the house. When they arrived that morning with their court order to inventory Hook's property, they found wagons waiting outside of the store loaded with goods to be removed from the premises, a bold act in defiance against the court's order. Hook had also hidden the keys to the store and cellar. In the face of such brazen action, it is remarkable that the commissioners allowed Hook and his family to remain in their home.

---

<sup>1</sup>"Answer of John F. Price to the Interrogatories of John Hook," sworn June 15, 1808. Ross vs. Hook, Circuit Court of Virginia. Loose Hook papers on microfilm at Perkins Library, Duke University.

The account book drama continued. Hook invited the angry officials in for dinner and explained that it was his understanding that the books were not to be taken as part of the court order. According to testimony of the clerk of the commissioners, when they returned the next day, Hook first acknowledged that he had arranged to have the books removed, then said they were stolen, speaking with tears in his eyes "which were those of a Crocodile merely shed to deceive." Hook finally accused the commissioners of having themselves stolen the books by obtaining information on their hiding place (outside the locked store) from his "mulatto servant man Dennis" or a neighbor's slave who was his "confident and associate."<sup>2</sup>

The saga of the books then becomes even more chaotic. Price claimed he saw Hook's son-in-law with the books on his horse in late July. The acting commissioners testified in September that they had taken Hook's personal ledger into their possession, but that Hook "or some of his young men," secretly snuck it away without their notice and hid it with all his other books. Somehow the missing books fell into the hands of Charles Simmons—a local "drinking man"—who returned the books for the thirty dollar reward offered by Hook. When pressed for information about where he had obtained them, he would only say he found them by a "magic rod or divine stick." The story continues. Just as the court was about to rule—without access to those documents—Hook's lawyer, Edmund Randolph, claimed that the books had been in his office for some time, but he needed more time to examine them. The case would not be settled for another forty years.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>"Answer of John F. Price to the Interrogatories of John Hook, sworn June 15, 1808." Ross vs. Hook, Circuit Court of Virginia, 1795, 1801. Loose Hook papers, microfilm, Duke University.

<sup>3</sup>Questions of John F. Price by John Hook, June 15, 1808. Answer of John F. Price to the Interrogatories of John Hook, sworn June 15, 1808. Deposition of George Turnball and Skelton Taylor, acting commissioners, September 5, 1801. Other testimony in Ross vs. Hook, Circuit Court of Virginia, 1795, 1801. Loose papers microfilmed at Perkins Library, Duke University. By July 1808, at the advice of counsel, Hook had given up on his hopes that his books were outside the bounds of the suit and sent for a servant to bring them express from Franklin County to Richmond. Hook hoped that the man could cover fifty miles a day by travelling from daybreak and into the evening on good roads. By September at least some of the books were

We don't know whom to believe about John Hook's account books, but it is rare to find such a combination of intrigue and comedy—books whisked from behind the backs of officials, drunks with divining rods, conspiring slaves, mysterious gunny sacks, and a sprinkling of crocodile tears. But in those books was the evidence of company profits and losses, sales and debts—all the documentation of a significant mercantile venture on the western frontier. Also encoded there are the world of goods of eighteenth-century Anglo-America, the cornucopia of lustrous silks and printed teapots and gleaming brass locks that linked backcountry Virginia to the bustling streets of London.

This is a study of that complex, rich, and multi-varied world of goods. It does not fit the traditional bounds of history, for it ranges over two continents and two centuries. It might be called a cultural view of economics or an economic view of culture, but neither completely captures the problem of understanding the transmission of a host of new material goods into the lives of ordinary men and women in eighteenth-century Virginia. The problem is a gordian knot; it cannot be easily untied, but must be carefully worked through by pulling first one string, then another, from many disciplines. From economics comes scrutiny of wages, prices, production, and distribution. From social history comes an interest in hierarchies and group boundaries and the strategies people used to get ahead and get along. From material culture studies comes a concern for all of these themes by privileging objects to be part of that larger economic and social story; not just products, but artifacts made and used by people. A material culture study focuses attention on what these common objects were, their uses, quality, and decoration. It asks what functions they performed and behaviors they enabled, leading outward to the discourse of consumerism—what meanings objects may have had to those who made, purchased, used, and witnessed them.

---

passing in a cart under the escort of the commissioners across Richmond. Within a month, John Hook was dead.

To understand the world of goods at any place and time in the eighteenth-century English empire, we must not only look at broad trends in western society, but also carefully construct a particular local context. The goal is the definition of culture, but that is no easy task. Indeed, Clifford Geertz describes culture as the entire web of meanings in which every individual is suspended.<sup>4</sup> Yet, culture is not a neat pattern created by any master spinner. While its major threads are large social patterns, equally important is what is locally or personally necessary or useful. Many of those significations are unspoken and taken-for-granted, summed merely in "the way things are done." We must tease meanings from behaviors and ideas and objects refracted imperfectly in contemporary documents.

Why are objects important evidence in the study of eighteenth-century culture? Material objects matter because they are complex symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meaning fused into something that can be seen, touched, and owned. That very quality is the reason that social values and meaning can so quickly penetrate into and evaporate out of common objects. It is also why they are immensely important in times of social and cultural transformation. One such context of intense social pressure was eighteenth-century Anglo-America, as traditional notions of rank and place began to be challenged by new ideas about social mobility and new measures of human worth.

The historical problem of this study is, on the surface, quite simple. Over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the material world of many people in England and America improved. Better-built houses were filled with more things for comfort, convenience, even luxury. But historians continue to argue about the scope, scale, and timing of these changes. More importantly, however, the debate has yet to untangle the complicated knot of why changes occurred at all. This debate has raged under the umbrella term of consumerism, or the rise of a consumer society.

---

<sup>4</sup>Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in The Interpretation of Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-32.

After nearly two decades of work, historians have defined a picture of changing lifestyles, mostly based on the study of probate inventories. But these records only reveal one part of the world of goods. They do not allow us to study the movement of goods into people's lives, only the aggregate result of that activity. Nor do they capture important forms of consumption, for some categories of goods are well enumerated (such as household furnishings and other durables), while other categories, such as groceries, clothing, or other items that are rapidly replaced are often undocumented.

One way to resolve the problems of the probate record is to turn to the records of the retail trade, where the majority of Virginians after the mid-eighteenth century acquired most of their goods. This is where we return to the stubborn John Hook and his stores in Bedford County, and later Franklin County, in western Virginia. Located some 150 miles from the head of navigation of the James River, wagons channeled tobacco, hemp, butter, and skins eastward to the fall line and returned laden with manufactured goods from Hook's partner in Petersburg. Bedford County was established in 1757, but a flourishing economy had already created New London, a trading town on a major east-west artery and home to four or five merchants by 1770.

Modern historians' understanding of these new settlements is problematic. As Virginia's population spread ever westward in the eighteenth century, new societies were formed in the piedmont, southside, and backcountry. Allan Kulikoff and Jack Greene suggest that these places simply replicated tidewater society as speculation and migration led to similar economic conditions in the backwoods.<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Rhys Isaac and Richard Beeman, maintain that these societies were essentially different in social, economic, political, and

---

<sup>5</sup>Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Jack P. Greene, "Independence, Improvement, and Authority: Toward A Framework for Understanding the Histories of the Southern Backcountry during the Era of the American Revolution," in An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry During the American Revolution ed. Ronald Hoffman, et al (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985).

religious terms, and even in their attitudes about deferential behavior and luxury goods.<sup>6</sup> A third view, suggested in the writings of James Whittenburg, looks at the ways that the backcountry drew upon their eastern culture, but ultimately chose to reject the parts they found objectionable or unnecessary.<sup>7</sup>

John Hook's records are remarkably complete and include both sides of the correspondence between him and his partners, particularly David Ross in eastern Virginia.<sup>8</sup> Ross kept his backcountry partner well-informed on the broader economic and political events of the day, and offered continual advice on—and complaints about—tobacco prices, transportation, the extension or contraction of debt, and the acquisition of West Indian and locally-made goods from his wholesale warehouse in Norfolk. Hook, on the other hand, provided Ross with the details of the local economy, as well as a running commentary of the prices and quality of the goods he received.

Most of those mysterious Hook account books are extant: daybooks, ledgers, and lists of debtors, including an assessment of their current condition and ability to pay. Detailed "shop notes" recording specific London and Glasgow suppliers, invoices and shipping costs, and contracts for crops are also included in his loose papers. Hook's memorandum books are also surprisingly useful. They contain a wide range of the jotted

---

<sup>6</sup>Richard Beeman, The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry, a Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

<sup>7</sup>James P. Whittenburg, "Planters, Merchants, and Lawyers: Social Change and the Origins of the North Carolina Regulation," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, 34 (April 1977): 215-237.

<sup>8</sup>Hook's papers include 7,439 items and 103 volumes at Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C. Most, however, relate to a later period than examined here. Scratch copies of letter books and other items are found in the John Hook Papers, Business Records Collection, Virginia State Library, Richmond. Copies of some materials at the Virginia State Library are found at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Parts of each collection are on microfilm at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Five letters are in the collection of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

notes of day to day business. The documentation of the lawsuit between Hook and Ross further outlines their business relationship. Finally, detailed architectural plans of Hook's store and a standing store built in 1783 provide a unique look at the environment in which Hook's business took place.

This extraordinary wealth of detail will be combined with primary materials such as tax lists, probate inventories, accounts of sale, Loyalist claims, court records, and other local documents to sketch the economic base, social structure, and material world of Bedford County. Any extant records of other stores in the surrounding region are also examined. The result is an in-depth analysis of how rural Virginians responded to larger cultural trends in the Anglo-American empire in the midst of broad social, economic, and political changes. This study bluntly asks how the world of goods—often defined by marketing and the fashion system in England—extended even to the fringe of the English empire, far from the established tidewater Virginia elite in both space and wealth, and even farther from the cultural core of London. It asks whether Virginians below the economic elite and away from the cultural core were part of these larger trends set by the fashion makers of England, or whether they chose to resist them. Thus, it will ultimately assess the cultural hegemony of consumerism.

This work is carefully organized to achieve these goals. It contains three broad parts: 1) the problems of consumerism and the meaning of goods as material culture, 2) the vast changes in the way goods were used and sold in eighteenth-century England and America, and 3) a careful study of one merchant's role and place in backcountry Virginia. All three parts build on each other to construct a picture of the way people, behaviors, and objects intersected in eighteenth-century culture.

A more specific outline of the structure of this work may also be useful. Chapter One presents consumerism as a problem in modern American culture and traces it back to the

early modern era. This provides a survey of the rapidly growing scholarly literature on consumerism. In Chapter Two, a vast interdisciplinary literature is combed to identify the multiple ways material objects function in society and culture and the meanings they might carry. This is accomplished by producing a general model for studying consumer goods, by asking questions and looking for definitions of affordability, availability, and desirability that might be called the constraints of consumerism. This chapter also identifies periods or situations when material goods become more and less important.

Chapter Three will then turn to consumerism in eighteenth-century Anglo-America and ask those same questions about the constraints of a consumer economy. It seeks to understand why this new consumerism was observed in this particular time in the broad context of English economic expansion, and how that growth may have enabled more people to consume more and different things. The argument then examines that most protean question of desirability, and examines broad cultural patterns in the rise of metropolitan culture and standards of gentility. From there, it asks if traditional explanations, particularly social emulation, can explain a rise in consumer demand by highlighting the newly important middling ranks of society. The chapter then returns to the absolute centrality of objects themselves in changing consumer behavior.

Chapter Four describes the changing nature of the act of consumption itself through the rise of the retail trade and its immense importance in the changing consumer culture. Beginning with the retail trade in England, it then narrows its scope to the Chesapeake to examine how goods were supplied to an anxious population some four thousand miles away. Chapter Five uses the correspondence of small Virginia merchants to demonstrate the importance of a proper, fashionable stock of goods to their business and how consumer goods linked the common man in the far-flung reaches of the English empire with metropolitan London.



Chapter Six takes a microscopic view of the retail trade as seen in the business life of one backcountry merchant, John Hook, by piecing together evidence of the extraordinarily competitive local market in which he functioned and the intense scrapping for business among neighboring merchants. Rather than engaging in spirited local bidding wars over the price of commodities, Hook's partner Ross believed that the way for the company to remain profitable was to keep prices offered for commodities low. Hook, however, articulated a different approach, arguing to his partner that the quality and kind of goods for sale was what brought in and kept customers. Thus, he was competing with a different strategy; he was drawing upon the power of the world of goods.

Chapter Seven examines the consumer world of those who shopped at John Hook's store. First, Bedford County's economy, society, and social relations will be briefly assessed. Second, the culture of Bedford County is studied through housing and furnishings—the material world. Third, the multiple means of acquisition, such as inheritance, barter, and the commercial economy, especially peddling and the retail trade, is examined to understand the way in which those furnishings and consumer goods came to be in those houses. Fourth, it will analyze the purchase patterns at John Hook's store by looking at how purchases mirror or diverge from traditional measures of wealth, and vary by rank, sex, and race. Finally, it will turn to particular cases to ask what may have motivated such consumer desires. By identifying who was purchasing what and when, a concrete picture will emerge of consumerism in a new society.

Chapter Eight steps back again to the importance of new commodities and behavior as indicators of consumer society. It will specifically ask how those broad trends of increasing refinement and sociability identified in Chapter Three were felt in the backcountry. The degree to which those of lesser economic means joined the fashion race or expended valuable resources in the drinking and serving of tea has been seen by some scholars as a new measure

of civilized behavior and elite performance. To some degree, this is true. The drinking of tea in precise scripted rituals established in London was a powerful means for local elites to solidify their group. Yet, as tea moved down the social scale—powered by extraordinary drops in prices of the leaf and new cheaper equipment for its drinking—these meanings did not come in a cultural bundle. This chapter will examine the multiple meanings of tea that gradually evolved and seek to understand how Bedford County residents selected components of cultural changes in the larger Anglo-American world.

The concluding chapter will summarize the argument of this work and suggest larger implications. The result leads to a better understanding of how the new world of things and the new world of behaviors and values intersected and became a world of consumerism. Few problems are more critical to modern America. A profound paradox has risen in our culture as we stand at what has the potential to be the first major re-definition of consumer goods since the seventeenth century. Wealth and prestige have been measured by material things since our very founding; the drive for production and consumption of more and better things defines American capitalism. Therefore, the American success story is bound up in the ability to live better—"better" as all too often defined by "more," but also including notions of choice, expectation, and comfort. The cultural critique of these values has, of course, ebbed and flowed. Religious tenets have usually decried the pursuit of worldly things. Subgroups of our population—from the Shakers to the Arts and Crafts movement to the counter-culture of the 1960s—have rejected materialism and its products or attempted to reshape it time and time again.

But consumption has now emerged as a threat to our very civilization through the toxic by-products of the making of those very desirable consumer goods and the mounting garbage of our own affluence. As the gulf between the haves and the have-nots in American society widens, fear has begun to grip those that display too much wealth, and a new

conservatism may emerge. At the same time that new concerns about consumption are raised, old ones have re-emerged. A global economic restructuring and a changing locus of world production has once again led to old mercantilist notions of market protection and the dangers of foreign consumption. For the first time in our history then, perhaps the perils of consumption can move from moral and nationalistic persuasion to a worldly concern for physical and economic well-being. That is where this story begins.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONSUMERISM: A PROBLEM IN AMERICAN CULTURAL HISTORY

So often our needs are defined by things that don't get us much: the comfort of having lots of stuff, the image we want to portray, the social pressure to appear to be affluent, the bizarre idea of having something new for its own sake, like a new car or new TV or the latest fashion. . . . Today, more than ever, the direction of an environmentally conscious style is not to have luxury or conspicuous consumption written all over your attire. . . . We believe this can be achieved by simply asking yourself before you buy something (from us or any other company) whether this is something you really need.

Advertisement for Espirit clothing,  
July 1990.

In the summer of 1990, a full size advertisement appeared on the front two pages of the Utne Reader urging consumers to think hard about the role of goods in their daily lives. It acknowledged the multiple roles that consumer goods play in modern life; the emotional joys of acquisition and display, their capacities as cultural symbols or image-manipulators, the social pressures of conspicuous consumption, and the irrational ("bizarre") obsession in modern society with having the latest or the newest. They then urged consumers not to buy.

Espirit—"a company that is trying"—was issuing a plea to deny the foibles of fashion, and to save the environment by responsible consumption. Admitting that their approach was "heresy in a growth economy," they asked consumers to buy for "vital needs, not frivolous ego-gratifying needs." The advertisement pointed to a number of events in the world that signified a reversal in the old materialistic ways, with "big changes in people's

attitudes about some extremely important philosophical issues and values: racial, feminist, and economic systems such as what we're witnessing in Eastern Europe." The advertisement closed with a call to preserve the environment lest "our place in history will be that of the greatest mismanagers of the Earth."<sup>1</sup>

Surely there must be something afoot when mavens of Madison Avenue call for consumers to stop spending, a major corporation suggests that individuals are empowered to make global changes through personal consumption, and changes in value systems are heralded as harbingers of a new world order where responsible consumption is the goal. Equally peculiar is the fact that the corporation issuing this plea mainly produces trendy fashions for teenagers, surely a group of consumers least likely to be concerned with "need" in purchasing their clothes. Admittedly, this company was targeting a particular consumer group through a specialist magazine, but the point remains that this advertisement is a remarkable inversion of the very purpose of advertising itself, and an extraordinary commentary on changing social values.

As the 1980s drew to a close, social critics discerned a new era dawning. The greedy, grubby, "me" decade was gone, they claimed, along with all the accoutrements of Yuppiedom, from status cars to hedonistic vacations. Marketers quickly saw this new mood of restraint as a call for images of family and home in advertising.<sup>2</sup> Popular health and women's magazines described the excesses of impulse spending and conspicuous consumption in the language of drug and alcohol abuse, and offered self-help tips to prevent using

---

<sup>1</sup>"A Plea for Responsible Consumption," Advertisement in The Utne Reader, July/August 1990.

<sup>2</sup>"Accounting for Taste: The Modest American," Economist, February 11, 1989. Judy Harrigan, "Redefining Consumer Goals," Advertising Age, February 27, 1989.

shopping as an emotional fix or proxy for excitement, gratification, and love.<sup>3</sup> The new agenda for the baby-boomers who put George Bush in office was to mobilize to feed the poor, clean up the earth, house the homeless—in all, create a better world to raise their families. Consumerism was out; social consciousness was in. Even Madonna, the quintessential pop icon of the 1980s was no longer the "material girl."

But what could explain such trends—if indeed they are true? Can variation in spending patterns really be explained as surface signals of marked changes in social values? Turned the other way, can social values be so quick to translate into changing consumer needs and actions? What social and economic factors could lie behind such marked notions about materialism? And if so, what historical implications might there be?

Social scientists scurried to explain these changing values at the end of the 1980s. The demographers charted changing social conditions: working women, a baby boomlet of childbearing, female-headed households, an affluent elderly population, and even the kiddie market, about to reach two percent of the U.S. economy.<sup>4</sup> The marketers busily traced the effect of these changes on the products they sold. Tell us someone's values and lifestyles, they said, and we will sell them your product.<sup>5</sup> The experience of acquiring goods was itself undergoing transformation as the line between shopping and entertainment blurred. A 1988

---

<sup>3</sup>See for instance, Janet Damon, "The Curse of Consumer Spending," Cosmopolitan, September 1988, 142-147; Georgia Witkin, "The Shopping Fix," Health, May 1988, 73-78; Maryann Bucknum, "When the Urge to Spend Strikes," McCall's, July 1989, 39-41; Anne H. Rosenfeld, "The All-Consuming Passion," Psychology Today, May 1988, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Exter, "Feathering the Empty Nest," American Demographics, June 1990, 8; Peter Newcomb, "Hey, Dude, Let's Consume," Forbes, June 11, 1990, 126-131.

<sup>5</sup>Psychographic research exploded when Arnold Mitchell established nine psychological profiles of particular value patterns entitled The Nine American Lifestyles. By 1985, much of the advertising industry had been won over to the approach. Its importance seems to be abating, however. For a popular discussion, see Berkeley Rice, "The Selling of Lifestyles," Psychology Today, March 1988, 46-50. For a variety of studies using psychographic research, see Robert E. Pitts, Jr. and Arch G. Woodside, Personal Values and Consumer Psychology, (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1984).

survey found that the British considered shopping their favorite leisure time activity.<sup>6</sup> The centers of shopping have become the new social arenas for Americans, as well; the shopping mall now ranks only behind home and work as the place where Americans spend their hours.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the political and economic climate of the 1980s had pointed to the benefits of consumerism. Supply-side policy of the Reagan presidency theorized that consumer spending could prime the nation's economic pump, and the style set from the White House down was the acceptance—even duty—to spend.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, the wealthiest American elite could well afford to fulfill their ideological obligations. The 1980s can join the 1890s and the 1930s as a decade of a marked redistribution of wealth, as the top one percent were able to markedly increase their share of the pie.<sup>9</sup>

Other ideological and political shifts of the 1980s meant that the long trend of increasing government action that began with the New Deal had reached its final point, and public mood began its perhaps inevitable shift back to notions of laissez-faire. Government intervention—in both economic and social terms—was out. The great welfare state was a failure. American downscaling of the federal bureaucracy, and European—especially

---

<sup>6</sup>Carl Gardner, "Spend, Spend, Spend," New Statesman and Society, December 16, 1988, 40-41.

<sup>7</sup>John Naisbett, Megatrends: Ten Important Transformations That Are Affecting Your Life (New York: Warner Books, 1982), p. 45.

<sup>8</sup>This argument is persuasively made in Debora Silverman, Selling Culture: Bloomindale's, Diana Vreeland and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America, (New York: Pantheon, 1986), pp. 137-161.

<sup>9</sup>The media quickly siezed upon this startling finding in Kevin Phillips, The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath, (New York: Random House, 1990).

British——privitization of government enterprises both reflected the move from government to corporation, commonweal to individual initiative.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the movement toward a so-called global economy led to a critical reexamination of government activities in the market. The creation of a single European market and the opening of eastern Europe to western economic activity had given American producers visions of untapped markets and led to a new scramble to understand consumer behavior in a cross-cultural perspective. Consumerism even seemed to play an important role in the East German people's wish to rejoin their western neighbors, as the pent-up wish for video recorders and other consumer goods may indeed have been a strong enough force to help topple the Berlin wall.

How could material things come to be so important to so many people? Conversely, how could social attitudes toward those things change so quickly? Material objects matter because they are symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meanings fused onto something we can touch, see, and own. That very quality is the reason that social values can so quickly penetrate into and evaporate out of common objects. To understand our consumer society, we must reach back to discover how and why this came to be. It will be no easy task.

#### Consumerism as an Interdisciplinary Problem

Consumerism, consumption, and materialism are all terms used to describe the complex position that objects have in society, particularly, although not exclusively, describing modern or industrial society. Before moving on, a few clarifications are in order.

Consumerism may be defined as the cultural relationship between humans and consumer goods and services. It includes a vast range of related problems and topics, and is,

---

<sup>10</sup>Isabel V. Sawhill, "Reagonomics in Perspective," in Perspectives on the Reagan Years, ed. John L. Stockman (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1986), pp. 91-116.



in itself, a description or area of study, not a judgment. These inquiries into consumerism might center on economic or symbolic product values, but move to notions of taste, style, social competition, and the emotional pleasures of acquiring material objects. They would also plumb the minds of individuals to question the meanings that consumer goods take, and the process of acquisition from the point of information seeking throughout the decision-making process. This intellectual interest would continue on to understand how that particular object gave pleasure in the coming days or years or, conversely, why it did not.

Consumption, as a term, is more often associated with its Latin root—to waste, to decay, to be used up. Because it is the necessary parallel to production (what is produced must be "used up"), consumption implies, specifically, a process or means by which consumer goods and services are moved through the general economy. Thus, the study of "consumption" would range widely to include the institutions that produce, market, and retail those goods and services. However, many scholars seem to use these terms interchangeably.

Finally, materialism, suggests a value system in which goods play a central role. According to Russell Belk, materialism is merely a measure of the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. When materialism is greatest, possessions become central and are believed to provide the greatest satisfaction and dissatisfaction in life.<sup>11</sup> Marsha L. Richins and Scott Dawson have amended Belk's definition to highlight the two key components of materialism: the importance placed on certain end states of happiness and achievement and the notion that possessions are appropriate means to achieve those goals.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Russell W. Belk, "Three Scales to Measure Constructs Related to Materialism: Reliability, Validity, and Relationships to Measures of Happiness," in Advances in Consumer Research, vol. 11, ed. T. Kinnear, (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1984), p. 291.

<sup>12</sup>Marsha L. Richins and Scott Dawson, "Measuring Material Values: A Preliminary Report on Scale Development," in Advances in Consumer Research, vol. 17, eds. Marvin E. Goldbert, Gerald Gorn, and Richard W. Pollay, Provo, UT: (Association for Consumer Research, 1990), p. 171.

Such conditions are not without their moral implications. Belk also associated the three traits of envy, non-generousness, and possessiveness with materialism.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the term is often given a perjorative or judgmental tone to suggest a modern society obsessed with the material—as opposed to the spiritual—world. But materialism has been decried throughout history and denounced in every world religion. To study materialism then is not only to study consumer behavior, but also to examine shifts in intellectual feelings about the very core relations between man, God, and society. These three terms intersect and overlap in many ways. Most importantly, they center around one key theme—the interaction of people, ideas, and material objects. The term "consumerism" is used throughout this work, however, because it is more inclusive and, as a whole, describes rather than indites.

The complexity of the problem of consumerism is indicated by the many disciplines that study it. Social scientists analyzing consumer behavior have freely borrowed from each other in a remarkable cross-fertilization. Theories of culture from anthropologists, views of the formation of self from psychology, concerns with social groups and status from traditional sociology, questions of style and design from art historians, and the findings of a whole rank of economic, social, and intellectual historians of western civilization have all been brought to bear on this problem.

No group is more prolific than the host of scholars interested in describing modern consumer behavior, many of whom have a larger goal to promote the sale of goods and services. Their work is invaluable in the study of American consumerism not only for their insights into modern patterns, but also for the behavioral and psychological aspects of human behavior that lead consumer preference. These scholars also look backward to understand long-term trends, and outward to examine cross-cultural tendencies.

---

<sup>13</sup>Belk, "Three Scales," p. 291.

Only a small group of scholars, however, has traditionally studied material objects and their broad relation to culture in historic times. They might be found tucked in history, American studies, and art departments, squirreled away among cases in museums, or standing behind a shovel on an archaeological site. But all are engaged in the study of those aspects of the physical world that are modified by cultural behavior.<sup>14</sup>

Consumerism is but one part of the intellectual milieu of material culture. These scholars are interested in topics ranging from the landscape of rural farmsteads to the symbolism of the Victorian pump organ. All, however, stress the ways man-made things fit with one another or interact with humankind, moving their collective intellectual eye in a spiral from objects to people to social group to culture or the other way around.

Much past scholarship in material culture has been concerned with describing (what is it?), identifying (who made it?), dating (how old is it?), and judging (is this as good as that?) Refining those analytical tools has enabled sophisticated studies of the relations between objects, makers, buyers, and users in their historical and cultural context. These studies increasingly now turn to the roles of objects in the everyday world. Following the Annales school of Fernand Braudel, some material culture historians have turned to scrutinize the material world as "limits of the possible," the base on which complex economies and societies were built.<sup>15</sup> Other scholars are more interested in the uses of particular objects in that larger context of the drama of daily life.

---

<sup>14</sup>James Deetz, In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1977), p. 24. For further definition of material culture and a discussion of its methodological history and recent issues, see Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture Studies in America, 1876-1976," in Material Culture Studies in America, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), pp. 1-78.

<sup>15</sup>See, for instance, J. Ritchie Garrison, Landscape and Material Life in Franklin County, Massachusetts 1770-1860 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

Economists also study consumers. Implicit in much of their work is the notion that consumers are rational and that laws can be found to understand them and their behaviors. People are part of the orderly workings of a market——part of the invisible hand of Adam Smith, if you will. For example, humans calculate ways to use goods to fulfill functional or status goals and choose goods based on those criterion. They thus enact strategies for survival and social advancement. These ideas underpin most scholarship on consumerism and material culture.

But some more recent scholars maintain that consumers are irrational. Goods somehow provide pleasure and hedonism; like drugs, they can release powerful emotions. What else can explain that continual need to acquire, the eternal power of fashion, and the attraction of things? What could be rational about the yearly styling of shoes?

Thus out of the work of a host of scholars have emerged several conflicting themes to explain relationships between humans and material objects. Their work also introduces the two most important thrusts of the study of consumerism: the way material goods mark or confer social status and the role of fashion in spurring economic growth and social competition. But much confusion still reigns. One of the most contested questions falls in the lap of historians; when and how did these phenomena occur over the broad trajectory of the American past? The paradox was clear: how could a Weberian model of a puritan aesthetic of prudence and frugality ultimately result in a hedonistic consumer culture with a seemingly insatiable desire to acquire consumer goods? How could consumer goods come to fulfill so many roles in modern society?

#### Consumerism as a Historical Problem

While historians have long studied the cycles of godliness and decline implied in materialism, they have only recently embraced consumerism as a central problem in

America's heritage. Joyce Appleby recently noted that the study of consumerism or a consumer society is one of the most exciting new trends in historical and economic scholarship.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, a recent survey of the literature of early American economy called for new studies to increase our knowledge of the "spending side" of the "getting and spending" formula of economic activity.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, modern historians are not the first to call attention to the role of consumer goods in their varying forms in the formation of American society. Thorstein Veblen's blistering critique of the lifestyles of the new leisure class produced by industrial society lent key terms and ideas to progressive scholars of the early twentieth century who pointed to the consumption excesses of the "robber barons" of the gilded age as certain proof of their wickedness.<sup>18</sup> These historians also pieced together the budgets of laboring families to demonstrate the harsh human cost of an industrial society.<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, consensus historians such as Daniel Boorstin saw the benefits of the industrial/consumer revolution in the democratization of clothing and other consumer goods. Writing in the 1960s, Boorstin saw that that the result of economic prosperity was a slow eradication of the gulf between rich and poor in the standard of living and the creation of

---

<sup>16</sup>Commentary at the conference, "The World of William and Mary," Williamsburg, Virginia, January 1989.

<sup>17</sup>John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, The Economy of British America, 1607-1789 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 277.

<sup>18</sup>Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: New American Library, 1953). The classic progressive criticism is Matthew Josephson, The Robber Barons (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934).

<sup>19</sup>Margaret Byington, Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town (Russell Sage Foundation, 1910; reprint, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974).

consumption communities bound as tightly by their Sears and Roebuck catalogs as any other system of values.<sup>20</sup>

But the 1960s also produced a counter-culture that rejected the institutions that packaged and advertised symbols of affluence. This cultural revolution began to question the materialism of modern society and called for a return to nature or at least to the "roots" of the American ideal. Historians looked for this America in the simple life of the frontier, perhaps to be found in eighteenth-century colonial life or the west a century later. Thus, for nearly twenty years, questions about the movement from frontier simplicity to modern complexity have raged under the guise of the self-sufficiency debate of early American social history. Many of these historians sought—in essence—the un-consumer.<sup>21</sup>

The problem with the self-sufficient eighteenth-century farmer was that historians could find few to fit the bill. Wage labor and store trade followed quickly on the heels of settlers pushing westward, and an understanding of the workings of market economies and consumer desires has become paramount to understanding early development. Indeed, if we remove big labels like "capitalist transformation" or "preindustrial mentalité," we find simply that people began to care more and more about the things that money could buy—imported

---

<sup>20</sup>Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The Democratic Experience (New York: Viking Books, 1973), pp. 91-164.

<sup>21</sup>The self-sufficiency debate has produced a voluminous literature. One of the most famous exchanges took place between James Henretta and James Lemon. See James T. Lemon, The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972) and James Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-industrial America," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, 35 (January 1978): 1-31; and Lemon and Henretta's replies, William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, 37 (October 1980): 689-701. Other important studies are Michael Merrill, "Cash is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," Radical History Review 4 (Winter 1977): 42-70; Winifred B. Rothenburg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1855," Journal of Economic History 41 (June 1981): 283-314; and Betsye Hobbs Pruitt, "Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Merchants," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, 41 (July 1984): 333-364.

consumer goods available mainly through a market economy.<sup>22</sup> The argument then becomes one of scope, scale, timing, and regional variability. Put more bluntly, we might ask, when did people come to care more or less about material goods and how did that concern translate into the raising of crops or the spinning of wool?

About the same time that the insular American frontiersman was reaching his demise, the self-sufficient early modern peasant was being exposed. As the beginnings of the industrial revolution were pushed further back into the seventeenth century through new discoveries about the prevalence of a verlarger system of production and slower than expected rates of economic growth in the early nineteenth century, traditional explanations no longer seemed to work. Indeed the whole notion of an industrial revolution soon lay in tatters; modern scholarship has now shown us a long-term period of change, moving forward quickly in some industries and places, lagging back in others.

As economic historians began to argue most heatedly about the nature, scale, and timing of industrialism, new voices were heard. Was it not possible, they argued, that consumer demand was the prerequisite for—not the result of—the industrial revolution? If there was a "take-off" of industrialization after a long slow period of economic growth and change, there may well have been a parallel phenomenon in consumption. There must have been growth in demand before efficiency of production could be maximized and large-scale manufacturing made profitable.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>The call to move beyond big labels comes from persuasive arguments in Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 46 (January 1989): 120-144.

<sup>23</sup> While Elizabeth Gilboy made just this argument in 1932, it would take another half century before she would be joined by a whole host of scholars. Her original article "Demand as a Factor in the Industrial Revolution," is reprinted in *The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England*, ed. R. M. Hartwell (London: Methuen and Co, 1967), pp. 121-138. This debate will be summed in a later chapter.

Where did this demand come from? Not only did historians find the founding fathers of our country begging for the latest fashion from England, but the very frontiersmen and "peasant" farmers themselves seemed to be anxious for ribbons and dishes. A new synthesis has begun to emerge that finds an Anglo-American "empire of goods" linking the British colonial empire to the metropolitan core of London with bonds far tighter than the customs collector. At the heart of it is a new desire for the latest, most fashionable consumer goods.<sup>24</sup>

This argument about rising consumerism was most boldly advanced by Neil McKendrick, J. H. Plumb, and John Brewer in their joint work The Birth of Consumer Society. McKendrick, in particular, couched no qualifications in his assertion that the "first of the world's consumer societies undoubtedly emerged by 1800," and declared it to be as profound a revolution as the Neolithic one. Never before had so great a part of the population been so involved in the "convulsion of getting and spending." While fashion itself was not new to the eighteenth century, what was new was the speed of change and the scope of the population that ran the race. Put simply, McKendrick suggested that the engine of change was emulative spending, the increasing desire of those below to dress and live like those above, and they were increasingly spurred to consume by innovative and aggressive marketing techniques.<sup>25</sup> McKendrick's polemical claims have not stood unchallenged. One group of scholars maintains that much of what he described occurred much earlier, another suggests somewhat later. Lorna Wetherill refutes his claims about social emulation by demonstrating that it was often the urban merchant that led the way in fashion innovation, not

---

<sup>24</sup>The best summary is T. H. Breen, "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicanization of Colonial America, 1690-1776" Journal of British Studies 25 (October 1986): 467-499.

<sup>25</sup>Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, The Birth of Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).



the entrenched elite.<sup>26</sup> Colin Campbell merely asks why a middling English society—largely Puritan in leaning—would even want to act like an elite they found so odious.<sup>27</sup> Cary Carson has elaborated McKendrick's thesis by suggesting that it was rapidly increasing and diffusing patterns of migration that put people into positions where status could be won by dress and material goods.<sup>28</sup>

Others continue to chime in. Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold powerfully reject McKendrick's ideas about the servant class as mediators of elite fashion, and their use as explanation of increasing consumer consciousness. They point out that servants' buying power was simply too minimal for them to participate in the fashion of their employers, and deride the notion that fashion moved from top to bottom in any fluid and unifying manner.<sup>29</sup>

It remains true though, that with one bold sweep, McKendrick managed to bring the notion of fashion into the legitimate scope of intellectual inquiry, and send a host of scholars scrambling to test his claims. Few now doubt that something happened in the early modern era to produce quantitative and qualitative changes in the role of consumer goods in the lives of Anglo-American society.

The consumer as a legitimate historical figure has emerged from many disparate camps. Economic, intellectual, and social historians have all turned their eyes to the consuming American as both symbol and result of larger transformations in early America.

---

<sup>26</sup>Lorna Wetherill, Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760 (London: Routledge and Paul, 1988).

<sup>27</sup>Colin Campbell, The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>28</sup>Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America: Why Demand?" in Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Cary Carson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

<sup>29</sup>A servant's annual income was often less than the cost of a single dress of her employer. Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, "Consumerism and the Industrial Revolution," Social History 15 (May 1990): 151-179.

This remarkable confluence of interest from so many historical streams has led a host of new scholars to reexamine some of the cornerstones of our understanding of early American life. Indeed, one recent summary of scholarship of the early modern era suggests that the old ascetic Puritan is tangential to understanding American society, for it was the new commercial man that conquered the New World.<sup>30</sup> In other words, Americans have always been materialistic.

But the debate is far from won. If historians are busy examining consumerism, they are hardly in agreement about the nature of consumer society, and even less on the details of its evolution. Intellectual ambiguity is pervasive; definitions are nebulous. What are "mass produced" goods? Are we searching for economic measures of real change, or merely growth? Do we measure shifts in spending or those in attitudes? What defines consumerism?

These kinds of questions have yet to be answered. Carole Shammas has recently suggested we may never have the answers we seek. She cites the inability to chart in real economic—that is, testable—terms whether changes in consumerism were matters of scale or real shifts in preference. She feels pessimistic, given the documents available, that we will ever truly be able to gain enough precision to locate and explain real change.<sup>31</sup>

But Shammas' concern is for measuring precise economic change. She does not suggest that remarkable changes did not occur, and merely is calling for more care in their study. Indeed, what is perhaps most remarkable about the historical study of consumerism is that while there seems to be general agreement that the new consuming man is a legitimate figure on the historical stage, there is little consensus on when he made his entrance. Historians have placed a (or the) pivotal turning point for consumerism in American society at

---

<sup>30</sup>Jack P. Greene, Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 36.

<sup>31</sup>Carole Shammas, "Explaining Past Changes in Consumption and Consumer Behavior," Historical Methods 22 (Spring 1989): 61-67.

many different times. There now have emerged two bodies of literature about the movement to a consumer society—one describing the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, the other the late nineteenth and early twentieth. Each lays claims to "revolution," yet paradoxically describes rather different phenomena. One group of scholars—those writing of the early modern period—stress the proliferation of things, the new comforts and amenities of everyday households, as well as the larger economic, social, and cultural phenomena that made them more desirable and useful. To a large degree, the second group focuses more on changing attitudes about things and how the experience of consumption as an act of acquisition changed, without so much examining the things themselves.

Such distinctions deserve further explanation and description. Many of those writing about the period between about 1880 and 1930 are describing intellectual or cultural shifts, a turning point in consumer values. Rosalind Williams brilliantly describes the dream world of the French department store of the late nineteenth century, where the physical milieu of shopping was transformed into a paradise and goods were exotic carriers to foreign places.<sup>32</sup>

This theme is seconded by Michael Schudson who draws upon Theodore Dreiser's novel Carrie to describe the transforming power of urban department stores to seduce and transform the small-town heroine.<sup>33</sup> William R. Leach also finds a "transformation in the culture of consumption" in the roles of women through department stores of the late nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Not to be left out, rural Americans could have their own consumer

---

<sup>32</sup>Rosalind Williams, Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>33</sup>Michael Schudson, Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 147-152.

<sup>34</sup>William R. Leach, "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925" Journal of American History 71, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 319-342.

revolution at the end of the century due to the rise of mail order catalogs, country fairs, and the addition of national brands to country stores.<sup>35</sup>

Jackson Lears uses the broad theme of exoticism in the form of peddlars, immigrants, and department stores to demonstrate how such threats of the 1830s were essentially neutralized by the end of the nineteenth century as advertising agencies legitimized ads and licensing put peddlars behind store counters. He too sees an epochal "reorganization of cultural meaning" between 1880 and 1920.<sup>36</sup>

Daniel Horowitz further argues for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the watershed in the creation of a modern consumer society.<sup>37</sup> He argues that it was only after the creation of a modern industrial capitalist work force that producers seriously began the effort to create a class of consumers for the products they made. Advertising, then, was the key to the movement of mass-produced goods throughout the population, not just to the middling ranks but to the workers, as well.

Unlike most of the intellectual studies above, Horowitz also looks for evidence of real measurable change in family spending during the Progressive era. While writing of the 1920s, Martha Olney also looks for real quantitative change. She discusses the "Consumer Durables Revolution" of the 1920s when the development of new credit institutions facilitated real—and measurable—change in household spending from saving toward acquiring

---

<sup>35</sup>Thomas J. Schlereth, "Country Stores, Country Fairs, and Mail-Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America," in Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W. W. Norton for Winterthur Museum, 1989), pp. 339-375

<sup>36</sup>Jackson Lears, "Beyond Veblen: Rethinking Consumer Culture in America," Consuming Visions, pp. 73-97. That a conference was organized around this time period and theme speaks for itself.

<sup>37</sup>Daniel Horowitz, The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society, 1875-1940 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985).

consumer durables.<sup>38</sup> These two studies come closest to the methods and aims of those writing of the earlier period, for both link household level quantitative data to qualitative intellectual issues.

Among these writers, Horowitz is also the most modest in his claims of revolution and careful to point to the long-term precedents and preconditions to any such revolution. He suggests that it was the preceding period of transition leading to a modern society that holds many keys to its culmination and describes them in the terms of modernization—the movement from a preindustrial to an industrial world. By tracing out the strands, the question of when America became a consumer society becomes more complicated, but also more fruitful.

Looking backward through time, already by the 1830s foreign travellers noted the differences between the Old World and the New World in the values placed on money and material objects. In an aristocracy, Alexis de Toqueville wrote, "the people in the end get as much accustomed to poverty as the rich to their opulence."<sup>39</sup> The wealthy show no anxiety over material goods and the poor have little knowledge or hope of obtaining them. In America, he pointed out, there was a general equality of conditions. But because fortune was so ephemeral, Americans were obsessed with material well-being, comfort, and the pursuit of wealth.

Other contemporary travellers seemed to agree. "At the bottom, then, of all that an American does is money; behind every word, money," observed Michael Chevalier, reiterating later that "the American is devoured with a passion for money."<sup>40</sup> He described

---

<sup>38</sup>Martha L. Olney, "Demand for Consumer Durable Goods in 20th Century America," Explorations in Economic History 27 (1990): 322-349.

<sup>39</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America II (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), p. 136.

<sup>40</sup>Michael J. Chevalier, Society, Manners and Politics in the United States, ed. John William Ward (1836; reprint ed., New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), pp. 298, 304.

attending a party where every introduction was prefaced by a notation of the man's fortune. He complained "had I been presented to so many bags of dollars, instead of to their possessors, the ceremony would have been quite as interesting, and perhaps less troublesome." In a nation where the pursuit of the dollar was so pervasive, few could understand his lack of interest in financial histories.<sup>41</sup>

If Americans loved money, they also generally shared a "passion for well-being." Tocqueville also felt that the wish "to provide the little conveniences of life is uppermost in every mind." But because Americans valued wealth so highly, they only coveted "small objects that are within reach," rather than conspicuously consuming in luxuries.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Americans were "too prudent a people to invest in objects of mere taste, that which in the more vulgar shape of cotton or tobacco would tend to the replenishing of their pockets."<sup>43</sup>

These travellers felt that the Americans who were so in love with money did not express it in conspicuous ways. Chevalier thought that the "condition of the richest merchant and that of the mechanic or farmer are not essentially different, the difference is merely in degree, rather than kind." Distinctions in wealth were subtle. Their houses were similar and built on a similar plan; the rooms and furniture similarly arranged, although the richer man's home was a bit wider and one or two stories higher. Both groups slept in high post bedsteads, one of mahogany, the other of cherry; one had fine carpets, the other coarse.<sup>44</sup> Describing Boston, Captain Frederick Marryat also found difficulties in describing social distinctions through housing and material goods. "One family will live at Number 1, and another at Number 2 on the same street, both have similar establishments, both keep their

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, 302.

<sup>42</sup>Tocqueville, Democracy, pp. 258, 136.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1833; reprint ed., New York: Augustus R. Kelley, 1968), pp. 103-104.

<sup>44</sup>Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics, p. 302.

carriages" yet one will tell you the other is "not of the right sort."<sup>45</sup> These travellers had their own interests in describing a republican spirit in lifestyles and equality of access to material gain. But they were wrong. Perhaps their lack of perception partly sprung from their vantage point: all too often, they did not stray from the large urban areas of the northeast, which was more like urban Europe than most of the United States. But few in America lived in those urban mansions, however republican in style in comparison to their European counterparts. If those visitors travelled into the countryside they would have found most houses small and in poor repair. At least, at the turn of the nineteenth century, housing was less equally distributed than it is today with the top ten percent of households owning over half of the nation's housing value.<sup>46</sup> At the bottom, over eight percent of the houses taxed that year were valued under ten dollars, and the average (mean) was a mere \$262.<sup>47</sup>

Neither did many Americans have those carpets or bedsteads that Chevalier described in the homes of mechanics. Only two in ten households in the Virginia cities of Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, or Fredericksburg had any carpet worth over \$20 in 1815. But one in a hundred households of rural Surry or Westmoreland County Virginia were so equipped.<sup>48</sup> Inequality was indeed present in America, but much less so than in Europe, the reference point of those very observers.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>Captain Frederick Marryat, A Diary in America. Quoted in Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 31.

<sup>46</sup>Jack Larkin, The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840 (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 111.

<sup>47</sup> The corresponding median and mode values were \$96 and \$8. See text and Table 93 in Lee Soltow, Distribution of Wealth and Income in the U.S. in 1798 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), p. 245.

<sup>48</sup>Ann Morgan Smart, "The Urban/Rural Dichotomy of Status Consumption: Tidewater, Virginia, 1815" (M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1986).

<sup>49</sup>Soltow, Distribution of Wealth and Income, Table 89, p. 238.

But beneath these commentators' scathing inditements of materialism lay a basic point. Americans worked hard to get ahead, even if they did not always succeed. Chevalier admired the busy, bustling, building, can-do attitude of American society. "The manners and customs are altogether those of a working, busy society," he wrote. Their very "habits of life are those of an exclusively working people. From the moment he gets up, the American is at his work."<sup>50</sup> Behind that industrious behavior was the most basic American myth of the Jacksonian era; with only hard work "your son shall have as good a chance to be made President as the son of the President himself."<sup>51</sup>

For all their problems of interpretation, Tocqueville and his fellow travellers paint a startling picture of a nation obsessed with economic gain. Yet if we can find the quintessential materialistic American by the 1830s, we might also find him in the 1750s. Alexander Hamilton marvelled that the shops in Philadelphia opened at five in the morning.<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Franklin also urged "the sound of your Hammer at Five in the Morning or Nine at Night," insisting that the "Way to Wealth. . . is as plain as the Way to Market." The promise of colonial society was that each man's prosperity lay in his own hands for "he that gets all he can honestly and saves all he gets. . . will certainly become rich."<sup>53</sup>

Even as Poor Richard urged society to work hard and save, a torrent of complaints decried the new "luxury" running rampant through society. Americans were obsessed with fashion, they claimed, and excessive consumption leading to ruin was a common theme from

---

<sup>50</sup>Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics, p. 283.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid, p. 287.

<sup>52</sup>Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., German's Progress: the Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton in 1744 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), p. 19.

<sup>53</sup>"Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One," in J. A. Leo Lemay, Benjamin Franklin: Writings (New York: Library of America, 1987), pp. 320-322.



all quarters—social critics, politicians, preachers, and merchants. The fact that similar jeremiads could be heard in 1650 and 1450 notwithstanding, the eighteenth century has emerged as the period most intensively scrutinized to understand the beginnings of a consumer society.<sup>54</sup>

The evidence comes from a complex interweaving of intellectual, social, and material changes in English and American society. For, unlike the stories told of Jacksonian America, colonial developments followed distinct English patterns. Indeed, recent scholars have argued that one of the greatest ironies of the eighteenth century was that colonial culture was growing more English, right up to the decade before the Revolution. The intellectual reformulations about the proper role of government and the moral pillars of society that were argued so prominently in English society were part of a reaction to the stream of consumerism that was slowly rising around their very feet, and the same streams were engulfing the colonies. Such trends were felt not only in the form of new and different material objects, but changing ideas about how people should live, how social position should be measured, how government should mold society, and how individual striving can contribute to, even if it broke from, the common good.

What made Americans come to the conclusion that they were somehow different from English men and women, and that they were somehow better off to pursue their own national destiny is perhaps the most intensely studied problem in American history. That is not the story here, even though in this study will be found some small clues. The question here might better fall under the old historical rubric of the move from traditional to modern culture, from village to city, from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from face-to-face exchange to capitalism. For instance, larger cultural transitions from traditional labor relations to

---

<sup>54</sup>For the earlier period, see N. B. Harte, "State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England," in Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays Presented to F. J. Fisher, ed. D. C. Coleman and A. H. John (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), pp. 141-143.

rationalized efforts to maximize time and profit, ascribed to achieved statuses, community values to individual ones all had to be in place for any such larger cultural shift in consumerism to take place. Those old polarities have guided historical scholarship for decades, and their weaknesses are clear. They describe an idyllic world that never existed and contain an inevitability of progression that was never so.<sup>55</sup> They can only describe, not explain. But their reference does take our enquiry back to the larger questions about the consuming man that was not found in a medieval world. They also refocus our attention to eighteenth-century English and American society where so many structural and intellectual elements of "modern" life came together.

Problems remain. But we can summarize what we do know. The outlines of the remarkable changes in early modern society are now easy to describe.<sup>56</sup> Looking back to medieval England, we can see a proto-typical landscape of many villages. Most houses were small, poorly-constructed, without windows or chimneys. Most peasant spending was directed toward food. Their furnishings were sparse—even spartan—from modern perspectives. Their most important priority in consumer goods was the acquisition of a soft,

---

<sup>55</sup> While it is important to note that modernization theory can only describe not explain processes of change, these "checklists" of characteristics enable the rough comparison of rates of change, as some people and places surge forward and others hang back. For further criticism, see Joyce Appleby, "Value and Society" in Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 297.

<sup>56</sup>This outline is only easy to describe because of the diligence of a host of scholars. Several important articles are forthcoming in Of Consuming Desires: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, ed. by Ronald Hoffman and Cary Carson. In this volume, see Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?" and Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake." For a brief summary of the long-term changes, see Carole Shammas, "Consumer Behavior in Colonial America," Social Science History 6 (Winter 1982):67-86; and "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," Journal of Social History 14 (Fall 1980): 1-25. This work is expanded into an important new volume, The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Focusing only on England's story is Lorna Wetherill, Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760 (New York: Routledge, 1988).

warm, decorated bed covered with hangings for warmth and privacy. Over half of their consumer wealth was invested in a bed, extra linens, brass, and pewter. As wealth increased, more of these goods were added, but only to a certain point. After that small constellation of things were acquired, additional wealth was put to consumption (cows or gold), hoarding, or increased leisure.<sup>57</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, that everyday landscape had been remarkably reshaped. First, new towns had sprung up, and old ones had either grown apace or been eclipsed. All across rural England and the colonies, houses had been rebuilt or restyled, even if vernacular traditions led to differing results. What one historian thirty years ago dubbed "The Great Rebuilding of England" was a massive improvement in living conditions, as houses were increasingly built of permanent materials, with chimneys, windows, and ovens, and their two stories partitioned into multiple spaces. The result was a population warmer and drier, with more light and better facilities for baking and cooking. Of course, not all were so lucky. Even in the eighteenth century, dilapidated shacks with dirt floors were found in city and country. But by 1700, housing had been remarkably improved in England and in the colonies.

Another broad pattern then began to take shape. At the end of the seventeenth century and before 1720, there was a basic improvement in the number, quality, and variety of the things that were found in those structures. For young families beginning their households in Maryland, the first possessions were often pans, pots, and spits for better cooking; sheets, blankets, and beds for improved sleeping; a few tables, perhaps even chairs for seating.<sup>58</sup> With additional wealth came a few more things, such as candlesticks for better

---

<sup>57</sup>For probate results, see Carole Shammas, "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," p. 10.

<sup>58</sup>The most intensive study to look at priority of choices at particular stages of the lifecycle is Gloria L. Main, Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650-1720 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); for example, see Table 5.3, 5.2, 7.3.

lighting, more linens for table and bed, and finally, silver or other forms of wealth. That silver plate was indeed a clear marker of social position, but was also notably convertible to cash, and hence an immensely practical form of consumption. Again, as wealth improved, a certain grouping of possessions proliferated, but the rich did not live essentially different. They had more things, and better quality things, but their daily material world was not different.

Up to this point, we can describe a world in which modern Americans would not understand how space was used or furnishings arranged. Beds may have jostled with tables and barrels. Visitors may have been seated on chests pulled out from the wall to a long table, if there was a table at all. Eating of hominy or simple stews was done hurriedly from a hodge-podge of eating vessels—some communal—and drinks may have passed hand to hand.

But already, we must begin to qualify our picture—knives, forks, and napkins were making their appearance in the homes of the more wealthy. Chairs, some with new-fashioned cane bottoms and backs, were beginning to replace benches and stools. Stylized cases for display were found in some homes to secure away newly-purchased valuables, such as china tea things or silver. A mirror or a dressing table, a bookcase or chest of drawers—these were the first of many household furnishings that began to elaborate and define wealth.

In the homes of the elite can be seen the beginnings of a vast flood about to break in over England and America. By the 1740s and 1750s, that maelstrom was well on its way to engulfing the less wealthy. All across the colonies and in England, varying only in scope and timing, manufactured household goods began to make their way into the lives of more and more people even as the very pace of household life was undergoing a transformation.

One of the first harbingers of changing lifestyles was more elaborate equipment for dining, as leisurely consumption of food and drink left the ale houses and feast days and came

into the parlors. Leisurely eating of more elaborated foods—we might now call dining—required a host of new equipment and furnishings; tables and more chairs for seating, more and different kinds of dishes for "genteel victuals," and knives and forks and napkins to eat in a new civilized manner. Also new was the equipment for tea—an increasingly elaborated set of props for brewing, straining, pouring, serving, and eating. The popularity of card games led to card tables; night time sociabilities required more lighting. New attention to fashion led to a proliferation of forms for the storage of clothes, wigs, and jewelry, for sewing, the dressing of hair, and, of course, for the viewing of the results.<sup>59</sup>

What is most remarkable is how quickly these kinds of things moved into average households. If few in the seventeenth-century colonies even knew of tea, nine out of ten of the wealthy elite of the colonies, whether in Massachusetts or the Chesapeake, had tea equipment in their inventories by the eve of the American Revolution. Contemporaries found tea-drinking so common that neither slaves nor Native Americans could be excluded. The spread of tea-drinking is but one symptom of how the home had gained increasing importance in social intercourse, visiting had become *de rigeur* among the rich and middling ranks, and material things took on new importance in the ways that men and women created and measured their worlds.<sup>60</sup>

Several more aspects of this change are important. First, many of these new items indicate an interest in gentility, or at least sociability. At the same time, households were remarkably lacking in items relating to cleanliness. Full body bathing was hardly known until after Lord Chesterfield admonished that kind of cleanliness to prevent offending others in 1774.<sup>61</sup> Tea things proliferated where brooms did not; elite households of the Chesapeake

---

<sup>59</sup>On grooming, see Carson, "The Consumer Revolution," pp. 69-72.

<sup>60</sup>This evidence is presented in detail and discussed in Chapter Seven.

<sup>61</sup>Richard Bushman and Claudia L. Bushman, "The Early History of Cleanliness in America," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 4 (March 1988): 1213-1238.

were more likely to contain buckets, brushes, mops, and the like, but only one-quarter of that group by the time of the Revolution had such items, and that number had not markedly increased since the turn of the century.<sup>62</sup> Part of that may have been the fault of the attention of inventory takers, whose evidence is most often used. But we do know that wash basins and ewers, finger bowls, and similar items were late eighteenth-century popularities.

It seems also that new consumer goods like teacups were chosen in many households rather than items adding to real comfort and convenience that, as a group, almost form a housekeeping kit basic to modern life. Put another way, the host of specialized tables, chairs, lighting instruments, and varied cooking equipment in any particular household did not necessarily precede investments in mere items of show or gentility. Objects that expressed new sociability and gentility appeared in households that had little light, were cold and drafty, and probably filled with dirt and vermin.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, we cannot think of the new consumer world arriving en toto in any one household. For many below the most wealthy, the acquisition of those consumer goods was a lifetime process, and inventories can trick the historian by only showing the end result. Several travellers in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Virginia give us clues to what may have been common disjunctions in wealth, housing, and material possessions. Stopping at a tavern, Francis Calley Grey found "the house was unfinished and contained only one room, which even here, was considered habitable," although he added "in New England it would not have been considered fit for a merino." But the house gave little indication of

---

<sup>62</sup>Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," Table 5 and page 40.

<sup>63</sup>Few scholars have intensively studied the down side of everyday life. One who has is L. O. J. Boynton, "The Bed-Bug and the 'Age of Elegance'" The Journal of the Furniture History Society 1 (1965): 15-31. Tutor Philip Fithian records that a turtle was put in his room to "catch the Bugs & Cockroaches" in Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed. Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1957), p. 134.

what lay inside. Behind a door that would not close was a "very good bed." He concluded that "there was no appearance of poverty, the inhabitants were all well-dressed, the bed covered with a very good counterpane, and one side of the room occupied by a handsome desk." At the same time, he was puzzled that there was "nothing to drink from but broken glasses."<sup>64</sup>

Ferdinand Bayard also travelled through Virginia at the end of the eighteenth century. He too was struck by "that mixture of wealth and poverty, of studied elegance and negligence." He described a house that presented a "picture of poverty . . . [where] old hats and old clothes took the place of window panes." He was shocked to find "in that place of debilitated appearance, well brought up and elegantly dressed young ladies" and the serving of tea "in beautiful china cups." At the same time, the parlor floor was full of holes, and daylight came in through cracks in the walls.<sup>65</sup> The Duc de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt found all too often in Virginia "a table well-served and covered with plate, in a room where half the windows have been broken for ten years past and will probably remain for ten years longer."<sup>66</sup>

These men were travelling in rural areas and were witnessing a slower and uneven pace of change. But they do give larger testimony that new consumer lifestyles were not always of a piece. Indeed, it may have been the attempt to make all a household's social symbols congruent that created a sense of inevitable progress from one kind of luxury spending to another.

---

<sup>64</sup>Francis Calley Grey, Thomas Jefferson in 1814: Being an Account of a Visit to Monticello, Virginia (Boston: Club of Odd Volumes, 1924), p. 36.

<sup>65</sup>Ferdinand Bayard, Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia with a Description of Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1791 trans. and ed. Ben C. McCary. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edward Brothers, 1950), p. 35.

<sup>66</sup>Francois Alexandre Frederick Rochefoucault, Travels through the United States of America in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London: R. Phillips, 1799), vol. 2, p. 119.

The words of Grey, Bayard, and Rochefoucault-Liancourt are important in other ways. First, their descriptions indicate that people made particular choices to buy certain things, rather than spending money on others. Buying teacups to put in a house with holes in the walls simply seems incongruous to us, considering the discomfort caused by those chinks in the cold winter months, particularly in houses where most rooms were unheated.<sup>67</sup> Second, these comments raise important questions of consumer priorities. If one wanted to invest in consumer things, what would come first? What was more important, a carriage or finished plaster walls? A tea-cup or window panes? Well-bred daughters or more slaves? Where in the life-cycle did these decisions come and who made them?

There were perhaps greater choices in how to allocate one's resources in the eighteenth century than ever before. Certainly, colonists built up stock in land, labor, and livestock just as they had in the seventeenth century. But so many new options in household goods were now available that their task must have been difficult. Striking the proper balance between acquiring one's wealth and displaying it is always a tricky business, especially when one's worth was measured by one's standard of living.

A broad sketch has been drawn about vast changes in the standards of living from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Most of that summary was only possible because of heroic long-term study of probate inventories by a handful of remarkable historians.<sup>68</sup> The

---

<sup>67</sup>Some sense of this comes from one Virginia gentleman who carefully recorded the rise in temperature from forty-one degrees to sixty-three degrees, by stoking a roaring good fire on Christmas Eve, 1767. He does not, however, report how close to the fire one had to be to enjoy that warmth. C. Malcom Watkins, The Cultural History of Marlborough, Virginia: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation of the Port Town for Stafford County and the Plantation of John Mercer, Bulletin 253, (Washington: Smithsonian University Press, 1968), p. 59.

<sup>68</sup>For discussion of the problems of probate inventories and the potential for correction of these biases, see Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Inventories and the Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1658--1777," in The Newberry Papers in Family and Community History, Paper 77-4C; Harold B. Gill, Jr., and George M. Curtis III, "Virginia's Colonial Probate Policies and the Preconditions for Economic History," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 87 (January 1979): 1-73; Gloria L. Main, "Probate



travellers cited here remind us of one problem, however, that the use of those documents creates. Probate inventories record many household possessions of part of the population at their death, and often assign a value to those things.<sup>69</sup> The biases of those sources are well-known, particularly in their over-representation of the estates of the rich, and attempts have been made by those historians to correct them. The fact that these documents are recorded at death also means that they over-represent an older population; this, too, has been statistically corrected in many studies. By their very nature, probate inventories record a sum total of consumer behavior over the lifetime of a particular household. They cannot tell the story of the process of choice, played out every day in every household. Nor can they account for the myriad items that come into a household and go out before time of death, particularly through breakage or inheritance. Moreover, because they cannot tell us when an object was acquired, they cannot precisely track whether its owners are precocious and fashionable, or traditional and conservative.

One way to correct these problems is to study the records of the retail trade—the single most important avenue to new, more fashionable manufactured goods in eighteenth-century Anglo-America. Merchants' account books help solve those three major drawbacks to probate records. Store accounts precisely trace purchases over the life cycle, from a

---

Records as a Source for Early American History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series, 32 (January 1975): 89-99. Daniel S. Smith, "Underregistration and the Bias in Probate Records: An Analysis of Data from Eighteenth-Century Hingham, Massachusetts" *Ibid.*: 100-110. Margaret Spufford, "The Limitations of the Probate Inventory," in *English Rural Society, 1500-1800*, eds. John Chartres and David Hey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 139-174. Books by Shammass and Wetherill also contain measures for correcting biases.

<sup>69</sup>For instructions on the taking of inventories, see Elie Vallete, *The Deputy Commissary's Guide within the Province of Maryland Together with Plain and Sufficient Directions for Testators to Form and Executors to Perform their Wills and Testaments; for Administrators to Compleat their Administrations and for every Person any way Concerned in Deceased Person's Estates, to Proceed therein with Safety to Themselves and Others*, (Annapolis: Ann Catherine Green and Son, 1774). For Virginia laws of probate, see William Walter Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being A Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session in the Legislature to 1823* (Richmond: 1823), p. 150.

household "set-out" for a young couple to an upwardly mobile planter's need for slave clothing. That temporal precision is also a key to understanding the transmission of fashion, the process blurred by time in probate inventories. Finally, store accounts are not biased toward the wealthy—if anything, the stores studied here tend to exclude the most wealthy who ordered many goods from England, mainly turning to local stores for emergencies or whims. Rural merchants' account books are overwhelmingly the records of the middling and lower ranks of society.

Through their record of the multitude of goods purchased by the lower and middling ranks of society, merchants' account books enable the testing of Neil McKendrick's notions of emulative spending. By untangling what kinds of goods were available and affordable, we can then begin to ask how desirable certain household goods were to colonial consumers. By looking for the material evidence of a concern for fashionable or elite clothing or the "props" necessary for genteel behaviors such as refined dining and tea-drinking, we can test the spread of new behavior patterns.

Because retail stores mediated the local exchange of goods and services, it is also possible to study the complex patterns in which market and local economies intertwined with home and community production. By the 1770s, small local stores stocking a wide variety of goods were the main conduits for the sale of primary agricultural commodities like tobacco and wheat. But many who had little access to cash or control of the profits of their labor—notably women and slaves—were also able to participate in the larger economic system through the exchange of home-produced items such as cloth, butter, cotton, and poultry. Rather than make such households more self-sufficient, these bartering strategies drew women further into the market economy by granting greater access to manufactured goods and enabling greater autonomy over their own consumer decisions. Indeed, it seems that items requested by women were an important part of wooing business in Virginia stores.

Slaves, too, traded the products of their personal agricultural patches for manufactured goods, thus supplementing standard uniforms and rations provided by their masters. Local merchants enabled the participation of a much broader cross-section of society in new trends of consumerism by providing barter credit for manufactured and processed goods.

The everyday purchase choices of countless men and women—a new apron or a tea cup, rum or ribbons—will demonstrate how potent this "consumer revolution" was in changing patterns of capital and consumer spending. Only in this way can we know both the range of economic sacrifices and the strong social impulses that can explain increasing consumer demand.

So we return to our original question. How did Americans become a consumer society? We now know that the answer lies far back in our history and that it is not merely economic, or intellectual, or social; rather, it is cultural and hence includes all of these changes. We also know that it cannot be understood without examining the Anglo-American empire. But two large tasks remain. We need to test carefully how consumer goods came into the lives of average men and women in a particular place and time in the early modern era, and we need to look carefully at why those very things should become so desirable.

CHAPTER TWO  
CONSUMERISM, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND  
THE MEANING OF GOODS

Why do people acquire material goods? To answer, one must ask what material objects mean, how they acquire those meanings, and how that information is shared among unrelated people. One way to begin this task is to delve into the "black box" of consumer behavior—the mental process by which people choose. More precisely, the question must be, why does a person or group of people choose any object over another in a particular time and place. To approach an explanation, one must look at all the extrinsic reasons for choosing a particular good or product over another. As John O'Shaughnessy reminds us, "Products are bought to perform certain functions or to produce certain effects." Thus, one's choice stems from a desire to achieve these functions or effects. O'Shaughnessy suggests that criteria of choice fall into at least one of five categories: evaluations of technical performance or physical attributes, requirements or input of outside agencies, attempts to better integrate self or community, adaptations to too much information and uncertainty about the correct decision, and attempts to rank alternatives on the basis of economic sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

O'Shaughnessy is merely describing the multiple factors that affect any consumer decision-making process and how the selection of any item identifies complex patterns of evaluation. First, the object is judged in certain intrinsic ways. Is it attractive and can it perform its function well? How much does it cost in comparison to others like it? Then, information is

---

<sup>1</sup>John O'Shaughnessy, *Why People Buy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 6-7.

drawn from extrinsic sources, such as advertising or family. The object is also examined for its ability to perform social functions. At any point, a consumer may fall back on tradition, what he knows or has used before, simply because reliance on tradition is an easier task than evaluating new things. Thus, a vast array of information is gathered and processed—from the marketplace, individual experience, and social groups.

O'Shaughnessy is describing how a consumer makes up his mind in the face of an explosion of available choices in the marketplace. But the story of consumerism told here also addresses the path of those goods to the consumer; we cannot yet assume a mythical supermarket aisle where the vast harvest of American capitalism is conveniently displayed.

Three simple prerequisites for an object to make its way into the possession of any person are affordability, availability, and desirability. Conceptualizing the acquisition of goods in this way facilitates combining traditional studies of economics, anthropology, history, and material culture. It creates a method to organize and evaluate a wide variety of evidence about any particular object merely by asking whether all three of these conditions must be met. Implicit also is the assumption that the lack of any one of those conditions brings the acquisition process to a halt. Most importantly, it reinforces our need to constantly bring theory down to individual realities.

This chapter will examine the theoretical issues of availability and affordability by looking at artifacts as products in exchange systems and commodities with exchange values. It will then unpack the multiple components of the idea of desirability by examining how artifacts function in ritualized behavior, differentiation of social rank, formation of social group, and how meaning is conferred, circumscribed, and changed. It will examine consumption as rational decision-making and emotional pleasure, and how it varies at differing points in the life-cycle and at differing times of social flux. While the previous chapter focused on consumerism changing across time, the goal here is to provide a number of case studies crossing time and space, piecing

together a theoretical tool to apply to different contexts. In sum, it provides a model of consumer behavior (fig. 1).

### Are They Available? Artifacts Are Products

The first question that might be asked about the relation of an artifact to any given society is its role as a product. Put simply, for any given individual to possess an object, it must be available to him or her. When artifacts are examined in this way, the focus is turned to their role as products, as part of a system of exchange between individuals or societies. We can thus track the actions of people through these products—they become meteors of human behavior. This viewpoint also highlights their role as information carriers, the ways in which these products carry technical and cultural values. Particularly in western society, it brings our attention to notions of cultural cores and peripheries, markets and hinterlands, and the complex process by which face-to-face exchange evolved into mediated exchange through the development of markets, wholesaler and retail distribution, and all associated functions that move goods from one place to another.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, the movement of precious metals and materials between prehistoric cultures and peoples enables the study of ancient trading routes, technologies, and social structures. The presence of these goods thus become proxies or markers for the economic activities themselves. If Dutch ceramics litter the sites of English colonies in the seventeenth century, we can begin to learn about the vast traffic in undocumented trade or smuggling.<sup>3</sup> Goods can also reveal the physical movement of people as they carry cultural traits spatially across the American landscape. Witness the nineteenth-century spread of alkaline-glazed stoneware pottery as its makers moved

---

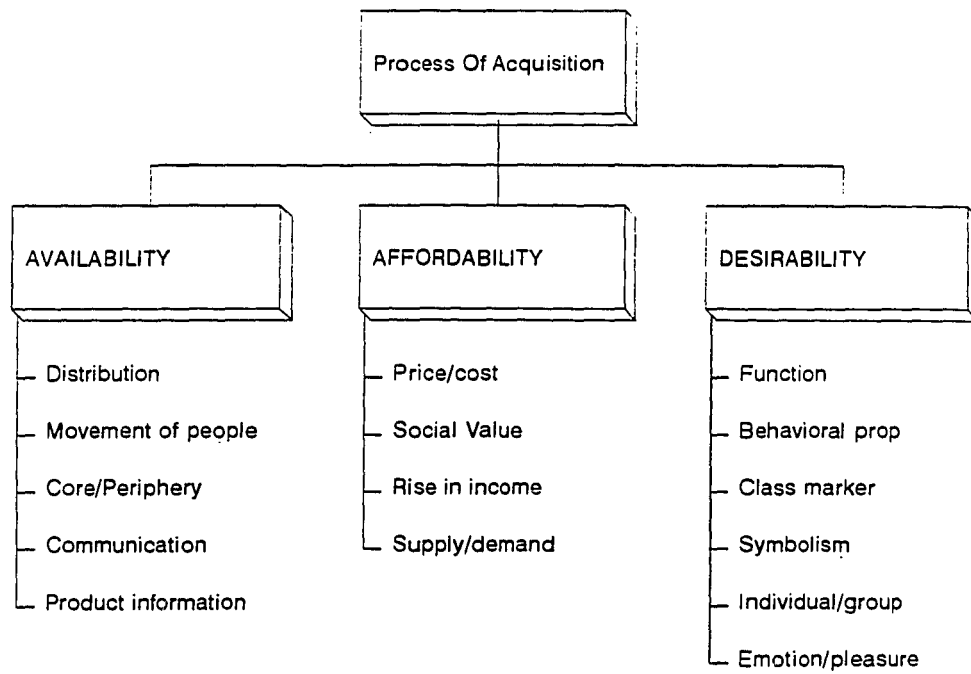
<sup>2</sup>James E. Vance, Jr., The Merchant's World: The Geography of Wholesaling (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>Charlotte Wilcoxon, Dutch Trade and Ceramics in America in the Seventeenth Century (Albany, N.Y.: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1987), p. 93.

Figure 1.

# Constraints of Consumer Choice

---



south and west from the Carolinas.<sup>4</sup> In another example, Fred Kniffen points to the spread of folk patterns of house forms westward from their original cultural hearths in eastern New England, southeastern Pennsylvania, the Tidewater Chesapeake and Carolina Low Country. By tracing special patterns of housing, such as the I-house, Kniffen locates cultural traits spatially and relates them to the influences of the people that brought them.<sup>5</sup>

In the same way, the presence of cowrie shells on archaeological sites can signify the presence of African-American slaves in colonial America. Ironically, these shells were not native to west African seas, but east African ones. Arab or Portuguese traders obtained large quantities of those shells that had immense cultural values in African society, and traded them in abundance to West Africans, many in exchange for slaves themselves. These items were then carried by slaves as portable symbols of their home culture to the New World, where once again they crossed the paths of Europeans. Thus, one object linked multiple cultures in complex trading systems. At each node of exchange, an object gained meaning, sometimes overlaid with older ideas, sometimes altogether distinctive.<sup>6</sup>

One particular way to understand goods as cultural symbols is to understand their position in a relation between a cultural core and its periphery. In this situation, the role of goods as information carriers may be heightened. Arjun Appadurai points to two kinds of knowledge inherent in any artifact; production knowledge (How is it made? What is its design?) and

---

<sup>4</sup>See Catherine Horne, Crossroads of Clay: The Southern Alkaline-Glazed Tradition (Columbia, S.C.: McKissick Museum and University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup>Fred B. Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," in Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), pp. 3-26. These notions of cultural diffusion are explained more fully in Wilbur Zelinsky, The Cultural Geography of the United States (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>Grahame Clark, Symbols of Excellence: Precious Materials as Expressions of Status (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 26. It should be noted, however, that cowrie shells had meanings for many cultures, and have been found in prehistoric cultural contexts from Egypt to Sweden.



consumption knowledge (How is this to be used? What is its symbolism?).<sup>7</sup> The paradox is that the more isolated from the cultural core, the greater the information role of goods, and the more important they are for any social group to share cultural values. Unfortunately, the greater the distance between two societies—spatial, temporal, or institutional—the more fragmentary and confusing those meanings may become.<sup>8</sup> Hence, as the importance of the meaning of any particular good increases, the chances of its correct translation decreases.

Goods as commodities are carriers of other kinds of cultural communication.<sup>9</sup> The early nineteenth-century writer Charles Lamb could transport himself to China through the aromatic pleasures of tea and the painted scene on his tea cup.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, more information was probably gained about the Orient from the Chinoiserie style of decorative objects in the early modern era than from either the written word or actual travel.<sup>11</sup> That the information was produced explicitly for the Western consumer and based on Asian understanding—or misunderstanding—of what they thought the European market wanted makes no difference. Products for the consumer market were a main source of communication between two cultures halfway around the world.

---

<sup>7</sup>Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 41.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 56. Richard D. Brown discusses the major importance of manufactured goods in the dissemination of information to elites on the periphery of the English empire in the eighteenth century in Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup>Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

<sup>10</sup>Charles Lamb, "Old China," in A Book of English Essays, ed. W. E. Williams (New York: Penguin English Library, 1980), pp. 92-100.

<sup>11</sup>One Englishmen claimed that Englishmen knew more about the Chinese than any other distant people. Robert Southey, Letters From England (London: 1807). For more on the effect of Asian design on Western culture, see Oliver Impey, Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977).

To be available then, an artifact must have a path to a customer. But the problem is not so simply answered: one must ask if information about the good is available: What is it? How does it work? Can I see it or handle it? Is it only pictured in a catalog or mentioned by a friend in the cultural core? What is the group reference point? This information forms as important a part of the received meaning of any good as its physical properties.

The availability of any given object is, of course, a story of power relationships. While "choosing" what we wish to buy, we seldom have significant impact on what we have to choose from. Judith Williamson points out that the very popularity of consumerism in modern Anglo-America comes from just that lack of control over production—or for that matter, much else in our lives.<sup>12</sup> Our range of choice today comes from preselected categories, or as Henry Ford once said, the consumer could have a Model-T of any color as long as it was black. It is the nature and range of that preselection that changes across time and space through modes of production and exchange and a host of intermediate economic, political, and social factors such as sumptuary laws, mercantile policies, and access to transportation and capital.

On the other hand, as long as competition exists in the market place, producers cannot force consumers to consume. Put another way, consumers are not powerless to affect their options. The power of capitalism is indeed that the multiplication of individual preference toward or away from any item leads to market innovation. For instance, one scholar found that children's favorite candies were "inverse transformations of the acceptable qualities of adult foods." Favorite candies were inedible (taboo fauna such as bats, spiders, and snakes, or colors that don't appear in nature) or items most disapproved of by parents (grinning skulls, vampires, death.)<sup>13</sup> How can this be explained? Evil ghouls do not run candy companies. Children are

---

<sup>12</sup>Judith Williamson, Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture (London: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 230.

<sup>13</sup>Daniel Miller, Material Culture and Mass Consumption (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 168.

not dominant groups in the marketplace. Profit motives have led to a dialectic between consumer and producer that affects what is available. This interplay produced an even greater variety of children's candies in the forms that children seem to like the most, despite adults managing candy production.

Availability—or lack thereof—turns the study of material objects outward to the systems that produced them, and the processes of information, communication, and distribution that moved them from place to place. But the availability of an object is also intertwined with price or value. One early seventeenth-century English writer put it simply: "the value of goods depends on these two elements, their scarcity and the difficulty in acquiring them." He elaborated by pointing out that scarcity can be broken down into two other elements; "the number of those demanding [the good] and the usefulness thought to inhere in the good or service and which can add to the utility or pleasure of human life."<sup>14</sup> The interconnecting webs of availability, value, and human desire are already entangling.

#### Are They Affordable? Artifacts Are Commodities

When Adam Smith wrote so engagingly of the many steps in the division of labor required to produce a pin, he was, of course, writing of objects in the way most of us would now think of them—products of capitalism created to maximize profit to the producer. Even design is most often subjugated to such needs.<sup>15</sup> But commodities are not only products of capitalism. The definition of commodity can be greatly expanded merely by considering commodities as

---

<sup>14</sup>Gershon Carmichael quoted in H. M. Robertson and W. L. Taylor, "Adam Smith's Approach to the Theory of Value," in Adam Smith: Critical Assessments, ed. by John Cunningham Wood, vol. 3, (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 72. Smith does not pursue these notions of general use (as compared to strict utility) and nowhere considers scarcity in The Wealth of Nations.

<sup>15</sup>See, for instance, Adrian Forty, Objects of Desire: Design and Society from Wedgwood to IBM (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

goods where "exchangeability is the most relevant feature." Since meanings and uses change in the history of any one item, any object can exist in a "commodity situation."<sup>16</sup>

While economists have long studied the pricing of consumer goods, the economic side of artifacts has been partially neglected. If one is examining goods in terms of distribution, price is not as important as quantity or other such considerations. For scholars examining a particular item, price has perhaps been ignored because of the emphasis on unusual or folk artifacts that stood outside the realm of "real" markets. Other writers have been more interested in quality and workmanship, focusing on design or craft competence as divorced from market constraints. Vernacular houses and fanciful face jugs are no less products because they are not high-style; each continues to represent a negotiation between maker and client where price——what should it cost——is a real part of any mental system.<sup>17</sup> Both approaches generally ignore the role of cost as a social constraint. Benno Forman and Philip Zimmerman have demonstrated that eighteenth-century craftsmen produced ready-made items with a keen attention to economies of scale, reduction of error, stockpiling of parts, and other cost-saving measures.<sup>18</sup> Price-fixing lists were an important means in preventing cut-throat price competition at least by the 1780s, as manufacturers of household goods such as furniture, earthenware, and china met to establish a going-rate. Some price lists for furniture, for example, broke down an individual item to its

---

<sup>16</sup>Appadurai, The Social Life of Things, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup>Glassie does not include price as a concept in his studies, but he does point to the many constraints that limited the competence of designers, including the conservatism of clients, and that any final product was a negotiation between builder and client. "What a house should cost" is no less a part of a mental template than "what a house should look like." This work will be discussed in more detail below. Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts (Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

<sup>18</sup>Benno M. Forman, "Delaware Valley 'Crookt Foot' and 'Slat-Back' Chairs: The Fussell-Savery Connection," Winterthur Portfolio 15, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 42-64. Philip D. Zimmerman, "Workmanship as Evidence: A Model for Object Study," Winterthur Portfolio 16, no. 4: 283-307.

many parts based on the cost of a journeyman's wages.<sup>19</sup> London china merchants formed a club in 1785 pledging not to buy at "night sales" or auctions, marketing practices that threatened to ruinously undercut their price structures.<sup>20</sup>

Price lists offer strong evidence of the growing role of price as a market force even before full-fledged capitalism or industrialization. Yet, even such objects as gravestones and other highly idiosyncratic items were part of an exchange system. All exchange systems involve reciprocity and obligation and hence cost. Thus, whether called goods, products, or commodities, artifacts must be considered in terms of their exchange value: what is their monetary cost?

The notion of exchange value, however, is not as simple as it first seems. For instance, an object will not become a luxury merely because it is rare; there must also be a heightened level of desire. This is because an object's exchange—or economic—value is never absolute, but always determined by the culture in which it exists. There is no single use value or exchange value. Morton F. Plant traded his Fifth Avenue Mansion valued at \$1.2 million to the jewelry firm of Cartier for a "two-strand, Oriental pearl necklace" in 1917. At the time, the exchange value of the two items were equal. Three-quarters of a century later, however, the necklace is probably worth only about \$200,000, but that prime New York real estate (Cartier's current showroom) is worth well over \$20 million. The exchange value of the real estate is now worth more than one hundred times the pearl necklace.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>Patricia E. Kane, "Design Books and Price Books for American Federal-Period Card Tables," in The Work of Many Hands: Card Tables in Federal America, 1790-1820, ed. Benjamin Hewitt, et al, (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), pp. 39-54.

<sup>20</sup>"Minutes of the China Club, 1785-1788," Manuscript Department, Guildhall Library, London.

<sup>21</sup>John Steele Gordon, "The Problem of Money and Time," American Heritage, May/June 1989, pp. 57-65.

This example, of course, can be explained by the simple economic laws of supply and demand under capitalism. In this case, the number of pearls (supply) continued to grow, but the amount of available prime Manhattan real estate remained fixed. Whereas the population who wanted to be on Fifth Avenue grew, the popularity of pearls (demand) declined as it became no longer fashionable for elite matrons to wear dozens of multiple strands.

Perhaps the most famous "bad consumer deal" in American history should be considered in this light. The modern student snickers that the Native Americans who sold Manhattan for \$24 were immense fools does little to understand the cultural value of such "geegaws" to those who acquired them. In the American way, those Mohawks huckstered these goods to the next tribe and may have rolled in mirth at the silly Dutch who settled for a swampy island.

Even in their most basic roles then, goods defy simplification. Appadurai borrows from Georg Simmel the notion that objects are not difficult to acquire because they are too valuable, but become valuable because they "resist our desire to possess them." Economic objects exist in the "space between pure desire and immediate enjoyment, with some distance between them and the person who desires them, which is a distance that can be overcome."<sup>22</sup> Framed this way, an exchange system is merely the trading of something one must sacrifice in order to obtain his or her more recent or more strongly felt desire, which meanwhile is the focus of the desire of another.

Goods and products thus allow a window to the values of the societies that produced, traded, or purchased them. On the other hand, in the same way that products allow the inference of values, they can also obscure them. Witness the sale of Native American religious masks or artifacts on the American art market—in this instance, their religious significance heightens

---

<sup>22</sup>Appadurai, The Social Life of Things, p. 3.

their exchange value, but, ironically, is also lost in it. Their primary role has become a commodity on the art market.<sup>23</sup>

The reverse may also be true. An object can be stripped of its exchange value when it becomes "priceless" through personal connection. In the case of a family heirloom, emotional or personal value has superseded its economic value. Old photographs tossed in the corner of antique shops have little exchange value when stripped of their family connection. Religious items also tend to lose their original exchange value because they are "priceless," and do not normally enter commercial markets. Paradoxically, this very absence from the market heightens their exchange, until like the Native American religious mask, the economic value could soon supersede its other values again.<sup>24</sup>

Examining a material object in terms of its value thus forces attention to questions of rarity (either in the finished product or its materials or workmanship) and demand (the size and the nature of its market). Value is but a subset of larger cultural concerns. It is but one measure of the distance between the one who desires the good and the object of that desire. This enables the classic definition of a luxury—something that is rare or costly. But it also puts a human element back into the market by simply acknowledging that the sum of labor, materials, transportation, and mark-up do not always equal price.

After we begin to understand the large cultural and economic factors that affect value, we must then look specifically at how much a sacrifice any given product has in comparison to other products. We also need to know how those prices changed through time relative to the cost of living. While economic historians have charted many agricultural commodities, specific price

---

<sup>23</sup>This does not fit Marx's strictest definition of a commodity because it was not created or intended for that exchange. *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup>Mike Featherstone, "Perspectives on Consumer Culture," *Sociology* 24, no. 1 (Feb. 1991): 5-19. For a further discussion of personal values of family photos and other mementoes, see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

series for manufactured goods are extremely rare. Two notable exceptions are Carole Shammas' study of the sharp decline in textile prices in the seventeenth century and George Miller's parallel analysis of the pottery industry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>25</sup>

However, once again, we must narrow our view down to the individual's choice in any given time and place. This approach might ask what an individual manufactured item might cost in comparison to similar items or the initial start-up cost of purchasing an item in comparison to its use-life.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, we might ask if there is anything about this population or individual that makes more able to afford new objects. Gary Nash has demonstrated the boon that came to some urban seaports from the profits of wartime speculation.<sup>27</sup> Other historians have pointed to the small but steady profits of wheat production as an important component in improving lifestyles in the colonial Chesapeake.<sup>28</sup> Such economic situations enable most or at least a good part of the population to gain in material life.

---

<sup>25</sup>Carole Shammas, "Textile Prices, Production, Policy, and Distribution in England and America, 1560-1775," paper presented at the Third Textile History Conference, Museum of American Textile History, North Andover, Mass September, 1990. Further discussion of declining prices of manufactured goods can be found in Shammas, The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America. George L. Miller, "Classification and Economic Scaling of 19th Century Ceramics," Historical Archaeology 14:1-40. This work has been expanded and updated in "A Revised Set of CC Index Values for Classification and Economic Scaling of English Ceramics from 1787 to 1880, Historical Archaeology 25, no. 1 (March 1991):1-25.

<sup>26</sup>For instance, Cynthia Z. and Gregory A. Stiverson compare the cost of books, shoes, and cattle to estimate the real relative cost of books to an average colonial American household. "The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Printing and Society in America, ed. William L. Joyce, et al (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), pp. 132-173. For a discussion of economic value in a short-term and long-term perspective, see, for example, Ann Smart Martin, "The Role of Pewter as Missing Artifact: Consumer Attitudes Toward Tablewares in Late 18th Century Virginia," Historical Archaeology, 23, no 2 (Fall 1989): 1-27.

<sup>27</sup>Gary B. Nash, The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>28</sup>For a skillfully drawn local perspective, see Paul G. E. Clemens, Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore (Ithaca: Cornell 1980).



All of these questions are pragmatic attempts to ask a simple question. Essentially, the goal is to reconstruct Simmel's notion of exchange value—what would one be sacrificing to choose any item over another? This, of course, brings us clearly back to the sticky morass of consumer desire.

In summary, asking questions about affordability turns the study of these goods outward to the economic values that varying cultures place on them as well as the technological and institutional structures that determined price. However, because no exchange value is ever strictly utilitarian, asking questions of affordability moves on to the questions of other culturally-derived values.

#### Are They desirable? Artifacts Are Cultural Constructs

It is nearly impossible to discuss objects in terms of purely economic roles. This could only be because artifacts are so laden with cultural meaning and have so many roles to play in society. However, once we know that an individual has access to and the economic means for any particular product, we can then turn to the final prerequisite: the desire to possess that item. In a cross-cultural study of materialism in modern America and Turkey, Guliz Ger and Russell Belk summarize this notion well:

Some bare minimum of economic means and communication as to available goods and how other people (in the same society or in different societies) live and consume, and a sense of affordability (I can also buy this) seem to be necessary conditions for materialism. But having the means and knowing that other people have things do not necessarily have to lead to the desire for those things or materialism. Why does that desire come about?"<sup>29</sup>

This section will attempt to answer that final question by examining the multiple roles that every artifact plays in society and the many ways that scholars have addressed those issues of

---

<sup>29</sup>Guliz Ger and Russell Belk, "Measuring and Comparing Materialism Cross-Culturally," in Advances in Consumer Research, ed. Marvin E. Goldbert, Gerald Gorn, Richard W. Pollay, vol. 17, (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1990), pp. 186-192.

human desire. Anthropologist Lewis Binford proposes three general functional classes of artifacts. Technomic artifacts are those whose primary function is dealing directly with the environment, for example, those that have technical functions. Sociotechnic artifacts are those groups of objects that mainly function in the social realm. They might, for example, principally reinforce class distinctions or maintain royal authority. A third group may be called ideotechnic artifacts, made up of those objects whose main importance lies in the ideological realm, as signs or symbols of religion or myth.<sup>30</sup> Each of these functions could also be found in a single artifact such as a candle. In its technomic function, a candle provides light. Used in a sociotechnic way, candles might light a romantic meal, whereas candles in a church have taken ideotechnic significance.<sup>31</sup>

Each of these levels of meaning are built into questions of "why desire." Different people use candles in different ways; by the same token, the same candle could serve different purposes for same person. A parallel question to "why desire" is "why acquire?" What does it mean to possess an object? Objects are property. The mere act of possessing encodes power relationships. But even property is socially constituted, involving relationships. Conceived in this way, there is never merely a relation between a person and an object; the object is always a pawn, "an instrument for controlling and defining the relation between two or more people."<sup>32</sup>

The next section will briefly examine the multiple roles of artifacts as props for behavior; badges of class or rank; symbols of cultural meaning; conduits of emotion and elements of art, style, or fashion. It will also look at the cultural contexts in which these roles of goods are most

---

<sup>30</sup>Lewis Binford, "Archaeology as Anthropology," in Man's Imprint from the Past: Readings in the Methods of Archaeology, ed. James Deetz (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co, 1971): 251-253.

<sup>31</sup>James Deetz, In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1977), p. 51.

<sup>32</sup>Isaacs cited in Lita Furby, "Possessions: Toward a Theory of Their Meaning and Function throughout the Life Cycle," in Life-Span Development and Behavior, ed. Paul B. Baltes, vol. 1, (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 317-318.

likely to shift or gain importance. Finally, it will assess the degree to which these roles are mediated or differentiated when examined by varying groups based on ethnic, age, or gender group affiliation.

### Objects and Behavior

One of the most basic definitions of an object is its role in fulfilling a function. In this sense, the introduction of new items is merely the rational movement of the market to fulfill such needs. In a perfectly constructed market, well-designed products that best meet certain functions offered at a competitive price win out and gain popularity. While no economy is theoretically perfect—to the chagrin of economists and their models—the introduction and popularity of certain categories of objects can often stand as proxy for the changing needs themselves.

As one example, Gerald W. R. Ward can explain the increasing use of card tables in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the result of an increase in the popularity of card games. He points out though that the physical act of cardplaying could not in itself explain the particular forms of those popular tables. Card tables were acquired even if other flat surfaces were already available because other functions were also met in their design. For instance, Federal card tables could be folded and pushed out of the way against walls in rooms that served multiple functions in the entertainment of family and friends.<sup>33</sup>

These card tables became important for the performance of a popular new leisure-time activity. They are what Kenneth L. Ames categorizes as props for the drama of life.<sup>34</sup> One does not need a card table to play cards, nor a teacup to drink tea. One could play cards on the

---

<sup>33</sup>Gerald W. R. Ward, "Avarice and Conviviality: Card-Playing in Federal America," in The Work of Many Hands: Card Tables in Federal America, 1790-1820, ed. Benjamin Hewitt, et al (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 15-28

<sup>34</sup>For this approach, see Kenneth L. Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America," in Material Culture Studies in America, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), pp. 206-221.

floor or drink tea from a mug. But to successfully perform the role of teadrinker or cardplayer in their social context, such objects take on essential functions as social and behavioral props.

To understand the role of objects as props, we can turn to recent studies of such disparate issues as how identities are formed and how cognition occurs. Modern theory suggests that goods are not merely passive reflectors of new behaviors, but perform important tasks in their learning and adaptation. Studies have also shown that goods have heightened behavior roles in particular contexts. First, goods take on a particular resonance when the function they fulfill is the enabling of some activity or behavior. Lita Furby, for instance, found that from childhood to middle age, the most important reason cited for acquisition of any particular object was that it made possible some activity or provided some enjoyment.<sup>35</sup> A pair of skates allows a child to skate. A middle-aged man might need a pair of skis and a boat to gain that same pleasurable sense of motion, but the principle remains that those items are active rather than contemplative.

There are other times, however, when the role of object in behavior is not so obvious, particularly when those activities are socially-charged, representing a complex pattern of activity that demonstrates a competence of role. Such a pattern of activity may be thought of as script, defined by Robert P. Adelson as "a coherent sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him either as a participant or as an observer."<sup>36</sup> Set against the backdrop of this expected behavior the concept of role becomes a "set of related meanings that directs the individual's behavior in a social setting."<sup>37</sup> A game of cards demands knowledge of the script; not only of the rules of the game, but the proper form of banter and table talk, of betting and drinking, and knowing how to "lose gracefully." At the same time, different roles can be played

---

<sup>35</sup>Furby, "Possessions" p. 312.

<sup>36</sup>Cited in Sidney J. Levy, "Interpreting Consumer Mythology: A Structural Approach to Consumer Behavior," Journal of Marketing 45 (Summer 1981): 52.

<sup>37</sup>Michael R. Solomon, "The Role of Products as Social Stimuli: A Symbolic Interactionism Perspective," Journal of Consumer Research, 10 (December 1983):319-339.

out: one may be a different kind of player in a game of poker with male friends than in a game of bridge with a married couple. The same might be said of those sociabilities related to tea. Drinking tea demands knowledge; not only how to brew a bitter foreign commodity, but the proper form of address, of pouring and eating, even knowing when to go home. Different roles also apply here: drinking tea could be relaxing by the fireside with family, gossiping with friends as a break from a hurried workday, or participating in elite social conventions. All required different, actions, dress, and speech.

Material objects are important parts of these situations, particularly when the player is uncertain or uncomfortable with the social script or ritual. In these situations, goods actually can serve as stimuli, can help the player fake it through the muffed lines, so to say, or to reveal the imposter. The need for these social stimuli varies with one's comfort with the role one is performing. For example, Michael Solomon points to the importance of colognes and fast cars to adolescent males not yet comfortable with their masculinity. "Looking the part" is part of the mirror view of self; it reinforces one's belief in his ability to play the role. Products play an important role in how others see us, thus they have a heightened role in how we see ourselves.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, merely having the correct props informs the observer that one is informed of the script; there are poker chips (why not use pebbles?), card table and chairs (why not coffee table and sofa?), chips and soda (why not tea and biscuits?). Sugar tongs on a tea table instantly signal that a host knows it is improper to touch food with one's fingers. With the appearance of script knowledge, the stage has been set for the proper action and the observer now expects socially-prescribed behavior.

Paradoxically, the greater the comfort with role and familiarity with script, the less reliance on material objects is necessary. Thus, it is the "nouveau riche" that most conspicuously overspend to obtain the material symbols of wealth or prestige. This helps explain why the truly

---

<sup>38</sup>Solomon, "The Role of Products," 6.

wealthy tend to dress down and those just below tend to dress up in modern society.<sup>39</sup> Reliance on material objects can be a compensatory measure for missing confidence.

One object may perform a function well enough, but another object may fulfill a desired end even better. This better fit occurs when a number of social and cultural criterion about behaviors are met; when an object has become encoded as proper and necessary for that script to be correctly performed. Secondly, goods do not just reflect needs, they can also create them. Finally, the use of goods as behavioral props is necessary to convince not only the audience but often one's self as well.

#### Goods as Badges of Class and Rank

Social strata have existed in every advanced society. What differs most markedly between them is how those strata are organized and what forms the basis for social distinctions. Stratification may be defined in a way that embraces many cultures as the situation when members of the same gender and age groups do not have equal access to material resources. This behavioral definition highlights property relation; those who have direct access to food easily demand labor or other forms of payment from those who do not. At this juncture is born economic exploitation. Even Marx saw the profound importance of those property relationships in larger terms, for above those relations were built a "whole superstructure of various and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and conceptions of life." Out of material foundations, then, come social relationships. Marx also particularly pointed to "economic conditions which separate their way of life, their interests, and their education from those of other classes" as a vital part of class formation.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>Paul Fussell parodies just these class notions in Class: A Guide through the American Status System (New York: Summit Books, 1983).

<sup>40</sup>Rolf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 1-35.

Whether or not a class fits Marx's more stringent definitions of consciousness and struggle is unimportant for our definitions here. What is important is how social hierarchies use material objects to symbolize or signify their social status. Status is always a relative ranking of prestige that can only be judged within a particular culture and may or may not be ranked into hierarchies, and may or may not be equivalent to wealth. In the early modern era, social strata were fully demarcated but the bases for class formation were becoming relatively less tangible. Income, wealth, occupation, family connections, social and political offices or groupings, and standard of living all form part of the criterion of class structure. Yet, however dynamic, multidimensional, and variable, the character of social class was—and still is—built on vague criterion of the way people live.<sup>41</sup>

This vague notion of "lifestyle" rests on the understanding that people in the same social group tend to behave more alike than differently. Thus, any item that is associated with a person of identifiable status is a sign of rank. Only when such a sign becomes uniformly recognized or successfully used, however, can it be called a status symbol.<sup>42</sup> Status symbols develop as a kind of shorthand for the distinctions of privileges and duties that separate social groups. This idea that social class can be summed up in lifestyle is not, of course, absolute. David Shi's study of the history of an American counterculture to materialism demonstrates how the ideal of a simple life unencumbered by objects or the race for monetary gain remains potent after three hundred years.<sup>43</sup> Yet, even those that attempt to remain as ascetics outside of the cultural parameters of society are reacting to and drawing from that culture. Even Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter's three-room log cabin retreat, a "material expression of everything the Carters believe in,"

---

<sup>41</sup>W. Lloyd Warner, Marchia Meeker, and Kenneth Eels, Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure for Social Status (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 31.

<sup>42</sup>Erving Goffman, "Symbols of Class Status," The British Journal of Sociology 2 (December 1951): 295.

<sup>43</sup>David E. Shi, The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

including simplicity, self-restraint, and self-sufficiency had the sure guidance of a professional decorator to make sure the "look" of simplicity was enough.<sup>44</sup>

A persistent, perhaps unremitting, truth remains—appearances count. Three generations ago, F. Stuart Chapin turned to living rooms as a way of measuring social status. Using four measures, including income, material possessions (furniture, furnishings), cultural possessions (musical instruments, books, and the like) and community involvement, Chapin studied middle-class families. He found that a measure of materialism was not only possible by a quick scanning of a living room—awarding points for various objects and decor, and penalizing for poor taste or condition—but that it most accurately expressed class status. What worked in 1926 is less useful today because a researcher would have to be far more attuned to the nuances of fashion, material, cost, and style.<sup>45</sup> Yet, a study of housing and furnishings in the 1970s demonstrated clearly the elasticity of spending on lifestyle—as one's income rose, so did one's furniture expenses or mortgage payment. As Joan Kron points out, so clearly did income and expenditures match that a house is not only a symbol but also an index of income level.<sup>46</sup>

One final study may be cited. When people of all ranks in Kansas City and Boston were asked to rank their neighbors, they had little trouble; Americans apparently constantly survey, judge, and compare social standing. The researchers found that income was the most important component of social standing (although education was the most important cause). Since people

---

<sup>44</sup>Joan Kron, Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1983), pp. 261-263.

<sup>45</sup>F. Stuart Chapin, Contemporary Social Institutions: A Sociological Analysis (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), pp. 373-378.

<sup>46</sup>Kron, Home-Psych, pp. 98-103.



do not carry bags of cash with them, a home was considered a remarkably good test. A suitable house was de rigueur for the good life, down to socially prescribed rooms and functions.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, material objects and appropriate environments carry powerful messages of class and rank. These findings about household possessions and housing are not limited to America nor to the modern world. Michael Smith has summarized a number of studies on the association between wealth and possessions in the different cultural settings of Tahiti, Finland, and Mexico. These studies found that household goods were clearly patterned by wealth, and that they even fit a hierarchical ranking of least owned to most owned items.<sup>48</sup> He also points out that "residential architecture is probably the strongest and most consistent expression of wealth levels in agrarian states."<sup>49</sup>

The vast multiplication of material goods and the splintering of the population in postmodern America means that the ability to measure class and income has grown more subtle, but the message remains somehow unmistakable. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood point out that humans can scan a scene and measure its coded messages almost instantaneously. This ability is how humans make sense of a complex universe. Drawing upon the writings of Henry James, Douglas and Isherwood illustrate the way in which interiors are read and understood—not merely individual pieces, but in their entirety—and how a viewer can sense not only current social status, but a change in status as well.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, these studies point to something that is far from random; appearances count. How do material things—houses, a sofa, a hat—gain such potency in the world of social

---

<sup>47</sup>Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>48</sup>Michael E. Smith, "Household Possessions and Wealth in Agrarian States: Implications for Archaeology," Journal of Anthropological Archaeology 6 (1987):303-306.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid, 301.

<sup>50</sup>Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods: Toward an Anthropology of Consumption, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

relations? Most obviously, the ownership of some objects immediately express the ability to spend more money, and hence are directly reflective of access to resources. As Erving Goffman notes, "We symbolize our wealth by displaying it, our power by using it, and our skill by exercising it." Objects in this case expressly symbolize the very thing that they are meant to represent.<sup>51</sup>

Many of these items are luxuries, featuring costly and rare materials, labor-intensive processes, or exotic and unusual origins. Luxuries have functioned throughout history as a means of identification of elite status. Other items, however, are intended to obscure rather than identify, such as the torn jeans of upper class teenagers. As the Carter retreat illustrates, even overtly anti-status symbols can be symbols of status. Increasingly, however, the ability of particular items to serve as social status markers is tied to information or cultural capital. That is, if everyone with the prerequisite bag of cash could buy a particular object, it can no longer serve as gatekeeper. A way to deny access must be invented. Every class symbol, then, has its own means to restrict misrepresentation of it. Some do indeed have moral implications (choosing the simple life), but a more common means of restricting social symbols is choosing those that represent a significant amount of information or knowledge. Restricting knowledge is the great trick of the elite. Not only do most people flunk the test, but they often did not even know the test had been administered! This restriction of knowledge can be divided into two very different forms: behavioral knowledge (socialization) or cultivation knowledge (cultural capital). Behavioral knowledge can be as simple as knowing the "one of our kind" forms of etiquette, dress, gesture, and speech patterns. These impressions are formed instantly; they are the front-stage performances that are scanned and judged and accorded. The makeover of Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* went little beyond teaching these socializations, and it was enough. They must not be conscious or forced, but habitual and easy.

---

<sup>51</sup>Goffman, "Symbols of Class Status," 298.

The second major category of restrictions are standards of cultivation——canons of taste and style. Anything that has taken time and perseverance to learn can serve as a measure, but certain categories of information seem best suited to elite standards. This is so important that the investment in time to acquire and maintain the competence to make informed judgements is "a useful criterion of class status." Taste——"the knowledge of the principles of classification, hierarchy and appropriateness"——can be demonstrated through fashion or furnishings, knowing which artist or gourmet food or color is in.<sup>52</sup> As Sharon Zukin points out, the design of many simple consumer products today often includes a host of references outside of the object itself; a pitcher in the Art Deco style assumes a knowledge of and appreciation for that style and that era.<sup>53</sup>

The pursuit of taste has become so complex in modern society that a whole host of mediators has evolved; interior designers to pick drapes, private experts to choose art, and a host of self-help books to teach how to "dress for success," select the right wine, or read the correct poets. Today "there is simply such a huge variety of marginally different and even unfamiliar consumer goods" that require discrimination, knowledge, and judgement to properly consume, that now more than ever we need the stamp of the proper architect, magazine, home decorator, or consumer advocate to guide our consumption.<sup>54</sup> A final method of regulating symbols of social rank is to continually change them. This is the heart of fashion——a whirling dervish of changing taste. In this sense, one must not only have the knowledge, one must continually maintain and update it. While the painting, Whistler's Mother, took a century to move from

---

<sup>52</sup>Featherstone, "Perspectives on Consumer Culture," 9-10. Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods, pp. 176-194.

<sup>53</sup>Sharon Zukin, "Socio-spatial Prototypes of a New Organization of Consumption: The Role of Real Cultural Capital," Sociology 24, no. 1 (February 1990): 46.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid, 46.

highbrow to lowbrow, many other objects change yearly, even seasonally.<sup>55</sup> How does cultural capital work? Douglas and Isherwood divide goods into three sets: staples (food), technology (travel and other secondary forms of consumption), and information (information goods, culture and leisure, the arts). As one moves up the social hierarchy, spending on food as a proportion of income decreases. Engel's law predicts this inelasticity of demand for food. The higher groups not only have more income to spend on other things, but they spend a far greater amount of time in gathering information. This information in turn feeds back to employment possibilities in a higher paid sector, and creates a mechanism where the upper classes both use and create more information goods. Once again, the lower rungs in the hierarchy have more time; the upper ranks more knowledge.<sup>56</sup>

Douglas and Isherwood also point out another way in which goods, knowledge, and meaning intersect. Objects can serve as bridges or fences—they create solidarity by their identification with a certain group ("he is one of us"), and at the same time hold off the less worthy. As soon as the undeserving leap over one fence, another is erected. Exclusion and inclusion is the goal; material objects and associated behaviors are the means.

Pierre Bourdieu's masterful study of modern French society demonstrates how taste need not only be a surface distinction, but a whole mode or aesthetic. In his book Distinction, Bourdieu found that one of the most salient distinctions of the dominant class was the refusal of the here-and-now, a postponement of the sensual and direct for the cultivated and abstract, and is best evidenced in one's views toward "cool" and difficult forms of modern art. This preference explains why investment of time in knowledge—or cultural capital—is so important. These distinctions can extend beyond art, however, to other realms. Bourdieu found that working people prefer abundant and simple foods. The middle classes, however, prefer

---

<sup>55</sup>Russell Lynes, The Tastemakers: The Shaping of Popular American Taste (New York: Dover Publications 1980), pp. 326-327.

<sup>56</sup>Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods, pp. 192-94.

cuisine, which often displays knowledge through competence in complex patterns. The top ranks split into a preference for rich sauces and luxurious materials or nouvelle cuisine, which heightens presentation (form) over food (function) to the point that sustenance seems not to be the issue at all. In the same way, children's toys of the middle class are never for enjoyment or pleasure; they promote education or self-improvement—the payoff to be reaped in the future.<sup>57</sup>

This distinction between the knows and the know-nots is as basic in western society as the division of wealth and un-wealth. An economic hierarchy and a knowledge hierarchy—while clearly linked—are uneasy bedfellows. On the one hand, wealth allows the pursuit of information. On the other, knowledge does not always bring wealth. Thus wealth and knowledge are constantly jockeying for position: which status will be the defining one?

Despite his insights into the way that consumption patterns fit deeply into the structuralism of the everyday world—from toys to social relations—Daniel Miller points out that Bourdieu really goes no further than grafting differences between goods onto differences in social groups, which are assumed to be pre-existing.<sup>58</sup> But these distinctions not only reflect social structure; they reinforce it. Social groups self-perpetuate if only because the more one associates with others, the more one is likely to find marriage and business partners. If one is lucky enough to make it past the fences of exclusion, one gains status by association. Such associated status can actually accrue until "who you know" is good enough for inclusion.

Finally, when do goods and behaviors as social markers take on special potency? First, when social hierarchies are in flux, when social classes are challenged, bridges and fences become even more important. Second, as individuals try to move through the social hierarchy, goods as props or signs of social rank become more important. A final and important case in which appearances and material goods take on added potency as social markers occurs when the

---

<sup>57</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>58</sup>Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, p. 158.

social stage is an urban arena. When an individual's status is not known (via family, occupation, etc.), it must be inferred. Sociologists William H. Form and Gregory P. Stone concluded as a result of a 1957 study that all too often the urbanite relied on appearance rather than reputation. The result was that "status may be temporarily appropriated by the correct display and manipulation of symbols."<sup>59</sup>

Form and Stone also studied the responses of various class groups in ranking themselves and other groups. Each social class chose style symbolism as the predominant means of appraising social categories. There were, however, variations between classes in how they recognized and were recognized. The lowest groups were easiest to peg; status disqualification was easier than qualification. Middle classes were hardest to identify, because there was less agreement on what they represented. High society respondents were most likely to judge others on public display goods, lifestyle, and cultivation, through manners, education, conversation, and dress; they knew the code and were the toughest judges.

However, when these same respondents were asked to bestow status rather than to judge it, the rules changed. Judging strangers on the street is not the same as inviting them to your home or marrying them to your daughter. Generally, the more enduring the commitment one must accept, the greater the importance of reputation and the less of style. Yet, even in admitting strangers to kith and kin, these social groups varied in how they would judge social position. If the lower class wanted to know if the stranger had a job, and the elite wanted to know his education and religion, the middle class remained most interested in symptoms of breeding and style.<sup>60</sup> Of course, it is those middling ranks that are the largest and most ambiguous.

All of these studies demonstrate how people somehow "read" material culture to make judgements about social position. This is partially true because the ability to afford certain

---

<sup>59</sup>William H. Form and Gregory P. Stone, "Urbanism, Anonymity, and Status Symbolism," American Journal of Sociology 62 (March 1957):506.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid, 507-510.

objects is a clear index of economic position. In other cases, objects can become status markers because they represent a significant investment in knowledge or cultural capital. But the relationship between particular goods and social hierarchy is not always so clear; we must understand how goods can become symbols.

### Goods and Symbolism

Men and women are seemingly rational consumers. They look at a system of symbols and invest in certain ones that will give maximum return. Is that all there is to it? Material culture carries far more complex information than mere indications of social rank. Goods can symbolize gender, age, home, or any number of values. But how do material objects become endowed with these meanings? Several scholars have wrestled with these complex questions. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann suggest a three-step process that links individuals to culture and endows objects with meanings to create symbols.<sup>61</sup> The first step in the accumulation of knowledge in society is objectification—the process by which human behavior gains a subjective character. Objectification allows the endowment of meanings beyond the here-and-now to be expressed in artifacts or behaviors. Signification extends this personal encoding from an individual to society. The resulting signs are often clustered into groups like gestures, body movements, or, most importantly, language.<sup>62</sup> A symbol is thus any significative theme that moves beyond the here-and-now into regions unavailable in everyday life. In this way, knowledge is built up in society, from the simplest kinds of repetition to carry out simple practical tasks (what Berger and Luckmann call recipe knowledge) to other more specialized forms of knowledge that are shared with only certain subgroups of the population.

---

<sup>61</sup>Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1967).

<sup>62</sup>See, for instance, Dell Hymes, "Studying the Interaction of Language and Social Life," in Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974).

As an example, if one person loves another, that love can be expressed in person in a number of subjective ways both will understand. However, because society has objectified love into certain objects and behaviors, one can also send red roses or paint a giant heart on a highway overpass, expressing love in a universally understood way. Sending a violin player to perform at a loved one's home involves another person who relates a message of love in the socially readable objective sign system of music. Language allows a whole new dimension of expression—one can now send a Hallmark card or read a Shakespeare sonnet. Yet, while most would understand the greeting card, not all would understand the love expressed by Shakespeare. The language and symbolism of the card is part of the common stock of knowledge of modern society. The symbolism of Shakespeare, while part of the common stock of his contemporaries, is shared today by only a certain subgroup, that of higher education, for instance.

While Berger and Luckmann are mainly concerned with the dialectic between man and social structure, material objects stand center stage in how meanings are shared. A flower can "mean" love; a gun—anger; a desk—the power of literacy; a porcelain tea service—wealth and elite culture. In each of these cases, meanings have become embedded in objects. The authors also suggest that behaviors can spiral from daily decisions to habits to rituals. Each step in this process moves further away from the common stock of knowledge, each is a more elaborate and broad-sweeping legitimization that "this is the way things are done."

A more recent scholar who grapples with the question of how meanings are transferred to goods is Grant McCracken. His study Culture and Consumption questions earlier theorists such as Roland Barthes who have theorized that material culture can be analyzed as a linguistic system or language.<sup>63</sup> He found that respondents in a survey about clothing were unable to "read" fashion as if it were a language. In some cases, the group could immediately recognize

---

<sup>63</sup>Grant McCracken, Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988). For the previous linguistic analysis, see Roland Barthes, The Fashion System, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (1967, reprint, London: Johnathan Cape, 1985).



and identify the wearer in a way that suggested Douglas and Isherwood's notion of scanning the scene. The respondents did not look at each part of the clothing as one would take each word of a sentence. Instead, they developed a whole picture, a snapshot.

McCracken found that material culture was not free and open like language; its meaning was more difficult to change and hence conservative. On the other hand, material objects can carry some meanings that language cannot. For instance, McCracken suggests that society entrusts material objects with messages that are too "hot" for language, ideas that would be criticized if spoken aloud. Thus, Americans recognize class via material culture, but it would be far less acceptable to make such claims in language. In the same way, suburban teenagers challenge authority in rather conservative ways, through their dress more often than their language.<sup>64</sup>

If goods do not carry their meaning like a language, what then? McCracken suggests that there are three locations of meaning—the cultural world, consumer goods, and an individual consumer—and distinct processes move it from one to the other. In modern society, advertising and the fashion industry are built around moving meanings into goods from the culture at large. That role may also be played by elites or other trendsetters. As western society is "hot"—in the Levi-Strauss term of welcoming change—culture itself remains in flux, and hence so do the meanings of things.

The second "moment" comes when meaning is carried from good to person. This is mostly carried out through processes of ritual, such as exchange, possession, grooming, and divestment. When we exchange gifts, for instance, we are often selecting an object to represent a symbolic quality that we hope the recipient will assume. Possession rituals are the ways that we personally interact with our "stuff"—we put a tea pot on the mantel, discuss it with our friends, use it for tea. McCracken also describes what he calls "grooming rituals" that renew

---

<sup>64</sup> McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, pp. 68-69.

fading qualities of the thing—we might read a book on teapots or rearrange all the items on the mantel or just run a dustcloth over it—all in an attempt to replicate that symbolic feeling the object evokes in us. Finally, there are divestment rituals. Oddly enough, the transfer of meanings when we get rid of a particular object has been little discussed. Many people still feel strangely odd seeing someone purchase an old and beloved item even after they have chosen to discard it at their yard sale.<sup>65</sup>

But if goods can be encoded so precisely with meaning by consumers, what can explain that seemingly insatiable wish to acquire more? McCracken first suggests that many goods come in groups that fit, which he calls "unities of things." One reason for this might be that messages are most successful when they are redundant; a constellation of goods reinforces the message.<sup>66</sup> The acquisition of one good might make the rest seem outdated or inappropriate.

A more complex answer for the whirling dervish of consumer desire is in the function of goods as bridges to displaced hopes and desires. McCracken suggests that we choose dreams or desires that are just beyond reach so that we do not risk disappointment in the disjunction between real and ideal. Our dreams are thus placed in the future (i.e. when I get a job, have a family, etc.) or in the past (when I was young, when life was simple). They could also take place elsewhere (I want to live in the country). When a housewife furnishes her house in country furniture she may be, in essence, living the dream of an old farm house in the country. Yet, she does not have to live in the drafty spaces and cultural isolation of that life, only a romanticized version.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 83-87.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>67</sup>C. B. Claiborne and Julie L. Ozanne, "The Meaning of Custom-Made Homes: Home as a Metaphor for Living," in *Advances in Consumer Research* 17, ed. Marvin E. Goldbert, Gerald Gorn, Richard W. Pollay, (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1990), p. 368

Much of the dream is spent in coveting objects (the boat or the trip). Hours are spent fantasizing about European vacations that can never, of course, measure up to the pictures. Care must be taken to put longing into things far out of reach, or risk disappointment in their attainment. Hence, when goods are attained they can never supply the dream with which they are endowed, and new longings are created. One strategy to avoid the disappointment of a lack of congruence between reality and ideals is to avoid the test. A living room is created, but never used; set aside as a sanctum, its occupants can never demonstrate poor manners or bad taste.

Objects that are concrete and enduring are thus endowed with dreams that are fleeting and remote. Objects begin to represent that larger whole. Especially useful are objects that are luxuries; because they are expensive, they are quite out of reach. Collecting antiques or other special categories of objects fulfill a similar goal for it is often difficult to obtain that perfect "whatever" that is the goal and ideal.<sup>68</sup> Finding the last object is often a terrible disappointment for the collector; the dream has been attained and the collection itself has lost its passion.<sup>69</sup> Goods can often express the ideal world, not the real one. A chamber pot decorated with flowers is an essential denial of what chamber pots are all about.<sup>70</sup> A white wedding gown still expresses purity, even though brides sometimes do not fit the definition. The most common purchaser of a Corvette is an older businessman, not a young Romeo. Symbolism is part of that process of making sense of the complex universe around us. It makes our lives easier (more routine, more impulsive, less anxiety-provoking) because we do not have to choose from the vast array of things available to us, just look for the symbol which provides the best, most harmonious fit to our lives. That difference between items that fit may not be great, but enough,

---

<sup>68</sup>McCracken, Culture and Consumption, pp. 104-117.

<sup>69</sup>Baudrillard cited in Kron, Home-Psych, p. 199.

<sup>70</sup>Ian Hodder, The Present Past: An Introduction to Anthropology for Archaeologists (New York: Pica Press, 1982), p. 214.

in the words of one concerned with advertising, "to dictate a constant direction of preference in the indulgence of one's point of view."<sup>71</sup>

But questions remain. Who decides these meanings? Or, as Sidney Mintz asks, "where does the locus of meaning reside?"<sup>72</sup> McCracken implies that such symbolism is pre-decided—whether by the culture at large, or added by advertisers or fashion leaders—and consumers neatly plug in their own needs for self-identification into a larger network. According to Berger and Luckmann, most of the meanings we read into behaviors, relationships, and objects are learned—not thought, not given, not bestowed by us. That is why, William Reddy argues, change is so slow to occur; it is not that people are necessarily of a conservative nature. People balk at change because a vacuum is left when thousands of little habits are abolished. This lacuna of learned behaviors and meanings is hard to fill with an abstract new ideology that does not have those built up layers of tiny habits, the "recipe knowledge" of daily life.<sup>73</sup>

So the nature of signification is problematic. Mintz points out that most of us are acting in plays where the lines were written long ago; our job is to recognize and repeat them, not to write them. This does not deny the individual's freedom to transform those meanings (as they certainly do), but merely acknowledge that the kinds of cultural symbolism that individuals transform are relatively minor, even trivial.<sup>74</sup>

This preeminence of symbolism has been taken one step further by poststructuralist or postmodern theorists. Daniel Miller sums up this argument:

---

<sup>71</sup>Sidney J. Levy, "Symbols by Which We Buy" in Dimensions of Consumer Behavior, ed. James U. McNeal (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 101.

<sup>72</sup>Sidney W. Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern Life (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), p. 157.

<sup>73</sup>William M. Reddy, "The Structure of a Cultural Crisis: Thinking about Cloth in France Before and After the Revolution," in The Social Life of Things, ed. Arjun Appadurai, pp. 275-283.

<sup>74</sup>Mintz, Sweetness and Power, pp. 157-158.

"We think we create objects in history which we use to communicate/signify/represent/constitute, but actually there is simply a world of objects in terms of which our nations of self and society are created."<sup>75</sup>

The logical conclusion of such an argument is that symbolism becomes empty symbols, that signs become mere facades, that surface becomes all, that "signs have no reference point other than the commodity." This is the victory of late capitalism where things (commodities) become the medium for human expression in the form of commodity-signs. But the manipulation and overproduction of these signs by the media has led to a postmodern society where advertising has become a swirling pastiche of images that has no stable meanings. Signs (in a literal sense) become more important than buildings; style becomes the essential element of society.<sup>76</sup>

Other scholars disagree sharply with this conclusion. Consumers do not simply decode culturally-derived meanings, they encode their own meanings. For example, C. B. Claiborne and Julie Ozanne found that the process of building one's own home involved extraordinary investment of personal symbols. They argue that the consumer not only can create a product to fulfill symbolic needs, but the product can then shape the individual through the structuring of personal experiences.<sup>77</sup> Goods can be highly personal things; things can be highly personal goods. In one study, when people were asked to describe their most cherished possession, their choice nearly always contained some quite individual connection. The chosen artifact might have been an heirloom or a gift—each carries a meaning that is special to one person. A photograph of a dead relative, a souvenir of a special trip, a painting by a child, a gift from a friend—these

---

<sup>75</sup>Miller, Material Culture and Mass Consumption, p. 167.

<sup>76</sup>Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986). See also, Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1988). Dick Hebdige summarizes well the problem with the term postmodernism; it has now been stretched "in all directions across different debates, different disciplinary and discursive boundaries, as different actions seek to make it their own." He follows with a lengthy "definition" for illustration. Hebdige, Hiding in the Light (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 181-182.

<sup>77</sup>Claiborne and Ozanne, "The Meaning of Custom-Made Homes," p. 373.

items are not culturally-readable symbols. Artifacts were thus highly idiosyncratic to any one person, even as goals of objects were frequently shared. The most common goal was related to family, kin, and interpersonal relationships.<sup>78</sup>

Daniel Miller calls these kinds of personal attachments "recontextualizations." The customer confronts an inalienable good (a product of state or factory that carries no meaning of producers) and immediately sets to work to make it his or her own. In this way, objects move from their economic spheres (price value) to a status as highly personalized object invested with inseparable connotations. Through such "work," an object is "transformed by its intimate association with a particular individual or social group."<sup>79</sup> Miller takes the Marxist view that consumption thus negates all the processes of estrangement and alienation that go into the product itself through capitalism. An individual identity is thus forged through the result of a process that virtually denies individuality.

#### Goods and Meanings: One or Many

The meaning of goods is culturally constituted. But culture is not a monolithic, unified, and synthetic system; if it were, no change could ever occur. Thus, cultural meaning can be adapted, manipulated, or transformed by any subgroup of the population. Sidney Mintz's study of the changes in the consumption of sugar through the early modern era brilliantly demonstrates the changing meaning of an object as it might move down through the social hierarchy. He describes two processes at work when an object moves from an original group to another. The first is "extensification"—as more people use a particular object, its meanings change. Social emulation is not the only explanation. The uses and meanings of tea and sugar, for example,

---

<sup>78</sup>Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self.

<sup>79</sup>Miller, Material Culture and Mass Consumption, pp. 190-191.

moved from an item of genteel display among the elite to a core item of working-class diet.<sup>80</sup> This process might also describe the appropriation of the revolutionary fashions of the 1960s first by wealthy liberals then Madison Avenue itself. The irony, of course, was the degree to which this revolution against materialism was usurped and manipulated by the very institutions that it so vehemently protested.<sup>81</sup> Mintz also describes a parallel process he terms "intensification" where meanings are not transformed but crystallized into the immensely ceremonial. The conspicuous waste of sugar in the form of sculptured decoration so prominent a feature of state, pomp, and wealth is now found mainly in wedding cakes, birthday parties or funerals, ceremonial reminders of knighthoods or coronations.<sup>82</sup>

The disjunctions of meanings of goods are clear evidence of those fractures of subgroups within a population. For instance, Lizabeth Cohen describes the attempts of early twentieth-century reformers to change the victorian-style furnishings of working-class women to the simple, clean, and utilitarian forms of the new mission aesthetic. Their inability to succeed had little to do with the esteem with which they were held by the immigrant women. They failed to realize that the objects they saw as old-fashioned and inefficient carried deep cultural significance to the immigrants themselves that no amount of rational argument could seem to overcome.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup>Mintz, Sweetness and Power, p. 120.

<sup>81</sup>For commentary, see Tom Wolfe, "Funky Chic," reprinted in Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), pp. 197-215. More recent triumph of fashion designers in borrowing and marrying street culture to high fashion is found in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Yves Saint Laurent's Peasant Revolution," Marxist Perspectives, 1, no. 2 (Summer 1978):58-92 and Rick Marin, "Grunge: A Success Story," New York Times, November 15, 1992.

<sup>82</sup>Mintz, Sweetness and Power, pp. 122-123.

<sup>83</sup>Lizabeth Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915," in Thomas J. Schlereth, Material Culture Studies in America, 1876-1976 (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), pp. 289-305.

Dick Hebdidge brilliantly describes how another subgroup of the population appropriated and manipulated material culture. The vespa motor scooter was a postwar development introduced as a woman's form of transportation; this was so marked that the bike was even sold in some trendy women's clothing stores. The complex ways in which the Vespa's design transformed the highly masculine nature of the motorcycle itself reinforced the image-making of advertising. This gender association proved to be one of the most successful Italian design innovations of the post-war period. But this moribund scooter mystique was borrowed and refitted by the English "mods" in the 1960s. "Modernist youth" were predominantly working class, male-dominated, and extremely clothes-conscious. They were also a group mainly defined by commodity selection, that is, their careful attempts to use material items to distinguish themselves from other groups around them. The pace of consuming and fashion change among them was furious. The motor scooter became their identifying symbol, even to the point of customizing or personalizing the bike itself. The motor scooter fit their consumption need (hush puppyed/Continental/stylish images) through its opposition to the consumption patterns of "rockers," (cowboy-booted/American/machismo images). Thus, a core dichotomy was continued and refined between motorcycle/masculine/American and motor scooter/feminine/Continental.<sup>84</sup> Style once again is feminine; power masculine.

What can we learn from this rather arcane study of modern English youth culture? First, meanings can be transformed by different social or cultural groups, even if the object remains the same. Second, that meaning is often drawn from, or at least affected by, the last prior historical meaning. Scooters remained feminine even after they became a symbol of male youth

---

<sup>84</sup>Hebdidge, *Hiding in the Light*, pp. 77-115. Another study of the way that youth culture uses and manipulates the symbols of mass society is Hebdidge's earlier examination of punk culture, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979). In this work, the safety pin is but one example of how common industrial artifacts were transformed by punks to become a powerful symbol of protest against the system that produced it.



culture.<sup>85</sup> Third, design can be a crucial part of the symbolism of any object. Finally, those disjunctions of symbolic meaning are often cast in terms of larger cultural categories—gender and age are two crucial touchstones to changing cultural meanings.

### Goods and Gender

One of the most basic dimensions of symbolism is gender. Even in a modern western society that promotes gender blindness in the home and workplace, such distinctions remain at the heart of our culture. Innumerable studies—asking both adults and children—still point to the home as female, the outside realm as male. Gender distinctions can be seen in male and female reactions to how things look and how things work, or style versus technology. Perhaps this is evidenced in the way that modern men seem to have embraced their high-tech stereos with the same love that their wives have invested in their china patterns.<sup>86</sup> Thus, Henry Ford scorned the new stylistic changes advanced by Chevrolet as mere "millinery," the feminization of "honest" technology. Hebdidge points out that the growth of modern advertising itself is often linked with the rise of women's role as consumers; women were "soft" and could be persuaded to buy much more easily than would males.<sup>87</sup>

Changing gender relations should thus have clear gender markers in material culture. Kenneth L. Ames points to changing notions of the home as "women's sphere" in the new symbolism of domesticity and religious values. The play on these values helps explain the popularity of pump organs in victorian America, as well as the specific form and style that they

---

<sup>85</sup>Ian Hodder also makes this point of historical relativism in The Present Past: An Introduction to Anthropology for Archaeologists (New York: Pica Press, 1982), p. 213. He uses the example of the swastika—an object with a long history as a sign. We do not have to know the details of its long history, but its most recent use will profoundly affect any new meanings it may gain.

<sup>86</sup>Kron, Home-Psych, p. 135.

<sup>87</sup>Hebdidge, Hiding in the Light, pp. 85-87.

took.<sup>88</sup> Barbara Carson also uses gender relations to set the backdrop for understanding changes in genteel dining in federal period Washington.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, evolving notions of the home and gender domains have important implications for who decides the furnishings or, more importantly, whose symbolism or meaning will become the dominant one. One modern survey found that men took pride in their neighborhood, their landscape, and their house in the abstract as a symbol of accomplishment. Their wives, on the other hand, were particularly concerned about style and taste, nuances of decor, environments of socializing, and other aspects of interior life and furnishing.<sup>90</sup> This relationship no doubt reflects both the rhetoric of the new "partnership" of men and women in households, and the lagging behind of actual day-to-day implementation of ideals. Changing ideals and actual behaviors should be evidenced in changing gender symbolism.

#### Goods and the Life Cycle

Just as views toward women have changed in modern western society, so has our understanding of various stages of the lifecycle. For instance, distinct conceptions of children and teenagers are relatively new in our culture, perhaps the result of children being removed from the workforce or of greater chances of surviving into adulthood. At the same time, the elongation of lifespans to nearly double their eighteenth-century equivalents has had enormous impact on our expectations of the life-style of the elderly.

Our understanding of the life cycle is clearly reflected in changing patterns in the meanings of goods. For instance, a survey by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-

---

<sup>88</sup>Kenneth L. Ames, "Material Culture as NonVerbal Communication: A Historical Case Study," Journal of American Culture 3 (1980): 619-641.

<sup>89</sup>Barbara Carson, Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behaviors, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990), pp. 75-103.

<sup>90</sup>Kron, Home-Psych, p. 120.

Halton found not only that highly individual meanings can be crafted, but that these personal and individual preferences changed over the course of one's life. When asked about their favorite possessions, the oldest generation were far more likely to choose something that captured the past, the youngest to choose something that captured the self or promoted enjoyment. These differences are reflective of many factors: cognitive development, interests, needs, self-concepts, views toward time or life and death, and attitudes toward generosity.<sup>91</sup> These connections of things to one's past, particularly by older women, is clearly demonstrated in one eighteenth-century woman's diaries and correspondence: the furnishings and other possessions of Elizabeth Shackleton were valued largely in terms of past memories and personal contextualizations.<sup>92</sup>

Two distinct points can be summarized here. First, age predicts changing meanings and values. This could be related to the historical experiences of an age group. Living through the depression of the 1930s and World War II seems to have given that cohort a unique perspective on economics, materialism, and national defense.<sup>93</sup> Second, different stages in the lifecycle correspond to changing needs for different things. The first traditional step of the household consumption pattern has become an integral part of marriage itself when bridal showers and gifts help the young couple set up a new household. The ritual of the baby shower marks the second major consumption phase of the household. The popularity of these celebrations continues despite changes in the age of marriage or childbearing, because they reaffirm the need for changing consumption over a life course.

---

<sup>91</sup>Czikszenmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things and Russell W. Belk, "Generational Differences in the Meaning of Things, Products, and Activities," in Advertising and Consumer Psychology 3, ed. Jerry Olson and Keith Sentis (New York: Praeger, 1986): 199-214.

<sup>92</sup>Amanda Vickery, "Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and her Possessions, 1751-1781," in John Brewer and Roy Porter, Consumption and the World of Goods (London: Routledge, in press).

<sup>93</sup>Lawrence A. Crosby, James D. Gill, and Robert E. Lee, "Life, Status, and Age as Predictors of Value Orientation," in Personal Values and Consumer Psychology, ed. Robert E. Pitts, Jr. and Arch G. Woodside (Lexington Mass: D.C. Heath/Lexington Books, 1984), p. 203

Lita Furby studied just that problem of the meanings and functions of possessions across the life cycle. She found that toddlers in many societies experience a "that's mine" period right after the age they begin to walk. Thus, possessiveness seems to follow the very period when the child is most restricted by parents (to prevent danger to child or china vase). Indeed, control was the most common factor in relating to material objects throughout the lifecycle. Beginning at high-school age, however, social power and status began to be a major reason why people possessed objects. The same age group also began to see a number of differing ways to express individuality through objects.<sup>94</sup> For the younger generation, photographs may capture a "good time" or reflect an interest in "doing" photography; that same activity and product for the elderly is far more likely to represent nostalgic memories.<sup>95</sup> The meaning of goods is both culturally-constituted and individually varying.

#### Goods and Emotions

Humans are highly rational beings. They can recognize complex patterns and symbols and understand—even if they cannot articulate—what those symbols mean in the form of material objects. At the same time, there is an active personal dialectic between the received message and the given one; the I-it subjective relationship. Humans also can manipulate, even transform, material objects to create their own personalized meanings or those shared by a small group of soulmates. Envisioned in this way, Man the consumer is Man the problem-solver. There is a system of information available which he or she must evaluate on many levels, ultimately choosing the symbolism that fits most harmoniously and the object that best fulfills function or need. This model includes rational steps of information seeking, evaluation,

---

<sup>94</sup>Furby, "Possessions," 317-329.

<sup>95</sup>Belk, "Generational Differences," 210.

judgement, and acting, although a variety of factors affect each step. Rational information processing is the basic principle underlying consumer behavior studies today.<sup>96</sup>

There are occasions, nonetheless, when marginal utility does not fit in trying to describe material objects. Man the problem-solver is often overruled by Man the pleasure-seeker. Hedonism, not rationality, is the cause; pleasure or gratification, not need and satisfaction, the desired effect. The dichotomy continues. We might evaluate an object on its use (how well it serves its intended function) or its fun (the enjoyment it offers and the resulting feeling of pleasure). Thus, consumers do not only seek solutions, they seek sensation, novelty, creativity, religious verification. They do not just think, they daydream or fantasize.<sup>97</sup>

What is the essential difference between these two qualities? Colin Campbell uses the simple example of food and hunger. When one feels a need (hunger) satisfaction is sought out by eating. First, a state of deprivation is realized, then one explores the environment to find whatever can fill this void. Pleasure, on the other hand, is not so much a state of being (I am hungry) as a quality of experience. We gain pleasure from reactions to patterns of sensation. Desire is the term used to describe this state of readiness to seek out and experience pleasure. Eating is not merely the gratification of wants; we cook our foods in ways to give us pleasure. We seek that emotion through multiple choices of foods or juxtapositions of taste sensations (sweet/sour, hot/cold, soft/hard). But our other senses are called upon and a whole environment begins to build up. A bottle of wine, candlelight, soft music—these have nothing to do with

---

<sup>96</sup>While grossly oversimplified here, decision process theory underlies the Nicosia, Howard/Sheth, and Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell models of consumer behavior. For an introduction, see Carl E. Block and Kenneth J. Roering, Essentials of Consumer Behavior (Hinsdale, Ill.: The Dryden Press, 1976), pp. 36-68.

<sup>97</sup>Morris B. Holbrook and Elizabeth C. Hirschman, "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings and Fun," Journal of Consumer Research 9 (September 1982):132-140.

the cessation of hunger, but everything to do with the pleasures associated with eating.<sup>98</sup> The tendency for peasant communities to live on simple fare, but to punctuate it with lavish seasonal feasts gives good testimony to the importance of pleasure.

The state of pleasure seems to derive from the ability of sensations to stimulate us. However, the problem with stimuli is that they cannot excite if they are constant; it is the change in stimulation that provides the pleasure. Again, we could return to the analogy of food. A diet of caviar and raspberries would soon cease to be luxurious; it loses the capacity to excite or arouse us as we grow accustomed to its stimuli. This helps explain our constant need for novelty. Moreover, a lack of stimuli is as problematic as a surfeit; in its extreme case, sensory deprivation leads to severe psychological disorders. As one victim of solitary confinement in a Nazi prison put it: "variety is not the spice of life, it is the very stuff of it."<sup>99</sup> One way that consumer goods can provide pleasure is through stimulation.

Thus, rational notions of consumer choice cannot explain the most obvious characteristic of modern consumerism—"the preference for new wants and, in particular, their rapid and seemingly endless creation."<sup>100</sup> Our level of affluence assures that, for many, basic needs of food and shelter are unquestioned; there is no challenge in their acquisition. Greater affluence should predict a greater level of happiness through our enhanced ability to satisfy our many other conflicting wants. But this hierarchy of wants and needs does not work—with the satisfaction

---

<sup>98</sup>Colin Campbell, The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 60-62.

<sup>99</sup>Tibor Scitovsky, The Joyless Economy: An Enquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 23.

<sup>100</sup>Campbell, Romantic Ethic, p. 41.

of each new want, another seems to be created. This may just be the cost of an affluent society. The gap between wanting and getting never seems to close.<sup>101</sup>

A traditional marginal utility model cannot describe the paradox of insatiable wants. Nor can it explain the fact that new products are eagerly bought and give satisfactions that were unimaginable in advance. Since the fifteenth century, new products have flooded western society and have been eagerly assimilated into everyday life. Can rational problem-solving behavior explain the phenomenal popularity of newly-introduced material objects, from tulips to tobacco to tin-type photos. Novel products are risky products; how could consumers evaluate them?

A second way that material objects convey pleasure is their ability to relate to consumer senses, fantasies, and emotions. As Elizabeth Hirschman and Morris Holbrook have argued, hedonic consumerism has too long been neglected in traditional consumer behavior. They point out that some products, like a perfume, do not just stimulate the sense of smell, but may lead a consumer to reconstruct an actual event (reminding of an event that occurred) or create a fantasy surrounding that product. The success of the Marlboro man advertising campaign has traditionally been explained in the success in convincing men that the product conferred machismo. It may well have been that the men who bought the cigarettes were actually pretending to be the idealized cowboy. The fantasy was part of the product. Grafting such daydreams onto products is an important agenda of the advertising industry. But hedonic consumerism more often involves categories of products that are emotionally involving or contain substantial mental activity. Products of the arts and entertainment world are the most obvious examples.<sup>102</sup> This experiential aspect of these products returns us to the ways that consumers

---

<sup>101</sup>This, of course, is the subject of Galbraith's classic commentary on the abundance of America in the 1950s. John Kenneth Galbraith, The Affluent Society (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958). See especially pages 142-160 for commentary on consumer demand and the spiral of needs and wants. See also Campbell, The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism, pp. 38, 60-65 and Scitovsky, The Joyless Economy, pp. 106-111.

<sup>102</sup>Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Morris B. Holbrook, "Hedonic Consumption: Emerging Concepts, Methods and Propositions," Journal of Marketing, 46, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 91-101.

"work on" the meanings of the goods they acquire. Pleasure comes from the usage of an object, "doing something" with it or adding one's own personal history to an object. Finally, pleasure can be achieved through the very act of acquisition itself. The negotiation of the perfect purchase is exhilarating. Part of this satisfaction or pleasure may come from the culmination of a long hunt for a specific item. Part of this feeling may be related to "smart-shopper" feelings, the sense of competence and efficiency when a "good deal" is achieved. Only such a mighty emotion can explain the frenzy that is documented to occur when the famous blue light goes on at K-Mart and mothers abandon babies, rip merchandise, threaten clerks, and steal discount tagged merchandise from the carts of their more successful rivals.<sup>103</sup> Clearly, the environment in which goods are acquired is equally important. Mike Featherstone points to the popular traditions of fairs, carnivals, and festivals as modes of acquisition. He draws upon Victor Turner's notions of "communitas" and "the world turned upside down" to demonstrate how these events created an air, not only of novelty and pleasure, but excitement, bodily pleasures, and sexual promiscuity. As society moved toward control and civilization, these consumption festivals seemed increasingly chaotic and uncivilized. Yet, traditional market aspects remained in place; this was an ordered—and hence unthreatening—chaos.<sup>104</sup> This linking of pleasure and products continued in the nineteenth century when consumption became more and more centered around manipulation of the senses, novelty, and exotic people and places through department stores and national exhibitions.<sup>105</sup> The exotic decoration of modern shopping malls continues

---

<sup>103</sup>Robert M. Schindler, "The Excitement of Getting a Bargain: Some Hypotheses Concerning the Origins and Effects of Smart-Shopper Feelings," Advances in Consumer Research 16 (1989):447-452.

<sup>104</sup>Featherstone, "Perspectives on Consumer Culture," 15-17.

<sup>105</sup>Rosalind Williams, Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) and Jackson Lears, "Beyond Veblen: Rethinking Consumer Culture in America," in Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880 to 1980 (New York: W. W. Norton for the Winterthur Museum, 1989), pp. 73-97.



that trend; full size carousels and palm tree grottos have little to do with the basic mission of Sears and Roebuck.

In summary, material goods must be understood in terms of the pleasure they provide. This feeling seems to arise from several distinctive phenomena: stimulation or novelty of new products, the multisensory and emotional aspects of a product, and the experience of acquisition.

### Summary

What motivates people to consume certain material things? As this chapter has demonstrated, the answer is tightly bound up in the study of consumer behavior. To tug at one part is to unleash a complicated set of factors, summed up in the notions of affordability, availability, and desirability. Each of these umbrella terms can then be broken down to measures of price, social value, symbolism, emotions, rationality, and individual meaning.

Just as we can look at the "black box" of consumer decision at any point in time, motivations to acquire have particular temporal patterns. When do attitudes toward material things change? This chapter has summarized a number of contexts in which material objects take on heightened roles. These include when an individual is moving up or down in the social hierarchy, leaving a community to become a stranger, at transition points in the lifecycle, or indeed at any time when an individual's role and performance is not in congruence. Goods are also more important in times of structural change; when there is social unrest or upheaval, for instance, or when a symbol system is in chaos from rapid change.

Finally, each of these factors can be recast in terms of any individual's particular cultural relationship with a given object and the meanings that he or she might confer. What the best modern theory tells us is that general cultural and social patterns continually intersect with individual ones. Material culture is not just the product or reflection of culture, it is embedded

in culture; it is symbolic, active, and communicative, and carries its own meaning.<sup>106</sup> Armed with this knowledge of material culture, we can now return to the study of the rise of consumerism in American society.

---

<sup>106</sup>Christopher Tilley, "Interpreting Material Culture," in The Meanings of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression, ed. Ian Hodder, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 185-194.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE CONSUMER WORLD OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A satire appeared in a Virginia newspaper in 1815. It told the sad tale of a country cousin trying desperately to behave correctly at a city tea table. In one hand he held a tea cup "hot as a warming pan" and in the other "a great hunk of bread and butter." The younger folks sat around "twittering like blackbirds," but the country man simply did not know "which way to go to eat the one or drink the other." Sweat pouring down his face in vexation, he spilled his tea, broke his cup, and finally ran home, his wife furious that he had disgraced the family.<sup>1</sup>

A similar traumatic experience was reported by a six-year old boy around the time of the American Revolution. Raised on the frontier, he saw his first cup and saucer while visiting distant relatives. He had no idea what to do with the "little cup [which] stood in a bigger one with some brownish looking stuff in it," and mimicked the actions of the grownups carefully. To his horror, the cups contained a brew of coffee "nauseous beyond anything" he had ever known, and even though tears streamed down his face, his cup was continually refilled. It was not until he finally saw another give the proper "sign," an overturned cup with a spoon across it, that his nightmare was over.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger, June 21, 1815. William Davis, publisher.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Doddridge, Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars (Pittsburgh, Pa: John S. Ritenour and William T. Lindsay, 1912), p. 88.

Both of these scenes are comical. Perhaps they were not uncommon. They are merely encounters between people and unfamiliar things, commodities, and behaviors. They occurred at a time when average people were faced with a remarkable new range of choices in how they filled their domestic environments. But with these new things came new behaviors and meanings, worlds of social and cultural action unknown to "country cousins" and "frontier boys" who were increasingly excluded by their lack of knowledge when removed from their own arena. For it was in the eighteenth century that greater prosperity, improvements in manufacturing and distribution, and a new willingness to spend combined to bring a greater quantity, quality, and variety of objects into the lives of the Anglo-American middling ranks. Still, historians are left with a conceptual knot: a list of variables, but little way to untangle the questions of supply and demand, dropping prices and rising incomes, symbolic power and economic value.

If we are interested in the history of the meaning of things and in the rise of consumer society, we must understand just how that process occurred. We have to begin precisely with the basic preconditions for the movement of things into ordinary households—were such new items affordable, available and desirable, and how did those factors change across time? The story is complex, woven from a host of economic, social, cultural, and intellectual factors, and begins—to a large degree—in England, particularly London. From London came the fashions, the style, the taste; from all over England came the majority of the manufactured goods that formed the heart of the new consumerism. We must first know how it came to be that so many new things—many at a cheaper price—could flow to the colonies. Most of these factors are economic, such as structural changes in the economy and changes in the abilities to consume. But the largest and most protean question concerns changing desires—what made so many who had been formerly happy to live with the old

and utilitarian suddenly want the new and fashionable? The story of colonial consumption is thus in many ways an English one, and must begin there.

### The Rise of Consumer Society

The rise of consumer society must first be understood in broader economic terms. It was the extraordinary expansion of the English economy that created both the goods and the wealth of those to consume them and led to England's rise as the world's greatest industrial power. Did that expansion translate into more affordable objects?

At 1650, England's economic future seemed bleak. The so-called long sixteenth century with its disease, starvation, and dearth had taken a harsh toll on England's population, and not until 1700 would population figures recover to those of mid century levels. Low demand combined with poor transportation and distribution facilities to keep industrial production sluggish. Only agricultural productivity improved as under-utilized land was brought into production, but even this gain came at the expense of the smaller producers. Those pushed off the land joined a sea of impoverished men and women, travelling from village to town in massive subsistence migration patterns.

Between 1650 and 1750, however, the standard of living in Britain seems to have improved.<sup>3</sup> A decline in population led to a remarkable period of economic stability—neither boom nor bust—but far removed from the Malthusian crisis conditions of the earlier era. With fewer people to feed and continued improvements in agricultural efficiency, food prices dropped, albeit with fluctuations throughout the remainder of the century. At the same time, the shortage of labor may have led to higher real wage rates up to the middle of the eighteenth century. Those higher wages had improved buying power as

---

<sup>3</sup>The literature on this subject is vast. Much of the following outline is drawn from D. C. Coleman, The Economy of England, 1450-1750 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). See also Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Penguin Books, 1982).

price indices from 1650 to 1750 show virtually no increase in the price of consumer goods, with even some small decline. Prices for some goods like textiles even plummeted.<sup>4</sup>

One reason those prices could drop was greater industrial output, especially as it outpaced growth in agriculture after 1750. Estimates suggest that at the beginning of the century, industry and commerce made up about a third of the national product with agriculture about forty percent. One hundred years later those numbers would be reversed. One important cause was the essential innovation of English production. While large-scale factory specialization lay ahead, even by the end of the seventeenth century, manufacturers could boast of heightened productivity "from the ingenuity of the manufacturer and the improvements he makes in his ways of working."<sup>5</sup> The cutting of tobacco by machine instead of hand, the weaving of silk stockings rather than knitting, smelting of lead by wind in place of hand bellows—each were small innovations that combined for prodigious results in increased production and dropping prices.<sup>6</sup> Another factor was the increasing ability by manufacturers to produce large quantities of goods in fairly standardized batches.<sup>7</sup> It was this contribution of a variety of small innovations in productivity "concentrated in some sectors more than others" that was crucial to the growth process.<sup>8</sup>

Another cause for economic stabilization was improved distribution. Better transportation systems carried raw materials and products more quickly and cheaply around

---

<sup>4</sup>Carole Shammass, "Textile Prices, Production, Policy, and Distribution in England and America, 1560-1775," Paper presented at the Third Textile History Conference, Museum of American History, North Andover, Mass., September 1990.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Coleman, The Economy of England, 1450-1750, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>John Styles, "Manufacturing, Consumption and Design in Eighteenth-Century England," in Consumption and the World of Goods. eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter, (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup>N. F. R. Crafts, British Economic Growth During the Industrial Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 71-72.

the country and across the Atlantic. At the same time, a sophisticated chain began to link producers and consumers. Ancient personal relationships between seller and buyer—one of the simplest forms of exchange—came under increasing pressure and the number of public markets were streamlined. Many that survived the eighteenth-century shake-out were likely to be little more than local outlets for perishables. The growth of inland trade further led to the proliferation of itinerant dealers who rode established territories to provide goods for an ever-growing public demand. These riders travelled to the "Vilages and Seperate Houses in the country" and were so important in distribution that efforts to outlaw them led to howls of protest from wholesale traders in 1772.<sup>9</sup> This chain of distribution also included a growing number of retail shops, with increasingly specialized wares and more modern "fixed prices." More specialized forms of distribution were but one sign of a new business ethos that signalled the end of the days of controlled selling for the public good or "just price."<sup>10</sup>

Historians continue to argue whether that increase in production was absorbed by the home or the export market. The phenomenal growth of England's export trade was an important factor, as the proportion of the national income made up by exports doubled in the course of the eighteenth century. While England was able to export agricultural products up to the middle of the eighteenth century—enough grain to feed a city the size of London at 1750—the largest expansion in overseas trade took place in the industrial sector. In some

---

<sup>9</sup>For example, see a petition from "Certain Merchants and Traders in the Town of London and the Town of Reading," Public Record Office, T1/493/156. See also Margaret Spufford, The Great Reclathing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984). She found that even by 1700, petty chapmen were carrying £100,000 worth of goods at any one time, representing perhaps a million yards of cloth.

<sup>10</sup>While the old paternalistic forms of price control, such as Assizes of Bread, or the laws against forestalling and engrossing remained on the books in some places until 1772, by 1757 one English writer in the Gentleman's Magazine complained that those legal restraints were "antiquated and the circumstances of living of all ranks of people are so altered," that their enforcement "could rather contribute to famish than feed." Quoted in J. Stevenson, "'The Moral Economy' of the English Crowd," in Order and Disorder in Early Modern England (Cambridge, Eng.; Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 229-230. These and other factors of changing distribution can be found in Chapter Four.

industries, as much as eighty percent of manufactured goods and raw materials may have been exported. If woolens made up almost three-fourths of the exports, other manufactured goods such as pottery, glass, iron, and other kinds of textiles also flowed at a heightened pace by the end of the century.<sup>11</sup> Nearly half of those exports went to the American colonies between 1772 and 1774.<sup>12</sup>

Those exports were reaching a population that was also experiencing economic growth, as imports from England grew nearly twenty five percent from 1700 to 1775. Generalizations about conditions in the mainland colonies alone are nearly impossible; regional variation was so pronounced that sweeping statements are difficult to make, and studies of colonial wealth and well-being continue to be contradictory. But some summary is possible.<sup>13</sup> We do know that, like England, the colonies did experience long-term economic growth throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One recent summary suggests an annual rate of growth of between .3 to .6 percent, matching that of England and France. However, that growth did not occur continuously, but in small spurts. One period of rapid expansion occurred after initial settlement and another perhaps at the middle of the eighteenth century, from the 1740s to 1770s.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>W. A. Cole, "Factors in Demand 1700-1800," in The Economic History of Britain since 1700, vol. 1, 1700-1860, ed. R. Floud and D. McCloskey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 38-45.

<sup>12</sup>Ralph Davis, "The Growth of English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774" in The Growth of English Overseas Trade in the 17th and 18th Centuries, ed. W. E. Minchinton, (London: Methuen, 1969) p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> Several attempts to summarize the vast literature on the economy of early America have been completed. See John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, The Economy of British America, 1607-1789 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); see also James Henretta, "Wealth and Social Structure," in Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era, ed. by Jack P. Green and J. R. Pole (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). In contrast, Alice Jones attempts a summary from probate inventories around the country in Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

<sup>14</sup>McCusker and Menard, The Economy of British America, pp. 268-269.



Not all colonists felt any economic improvement. The richest among the elite were the biggest winners, as more of the wealth of the colonies came to be in their hands. For instance, in the biggest urban places, such as Philadelphia and Boston, it seems the wealthy merchants and the prospering middle ranks—about the top forty percent of the population—were pulling away, leaving the laboring poor in occasional near-destitution.<sup>15</sup> Long-term wage series have not been constructed for the colonies, but as in England, some laborers' real wages remained relatively constant from 1750 to the revolution although fluctuating wildly with wars and other economic dislocations.<sup>16</sup> In the rural Chesapeake, the richest also began to pull away in the eighteenth century, as many poor and middling farmers lost access to land, and wealthy planters were able to diversify their crops and speculate in land.<sup>17</sup>

But increased colonial demand for English imports can also be explained in other ways. First, greater prosperity in the colonies seems to have led to marriage at higher rates and at an earlier age than in England. The natural result was that the population itself grew dramatically, about three percent a year, essentially doubling with every generation to about two million in 1770. Thus, the market was partially extended by a larger body of consumers. Second, the long term rise in prices for agricultural commodities like wheat gave some

---

<sup>15</sup>Gary B. Nash, "Urban Wealth and Poverty in Prerevolutionary America," in Race, Class, and Politics: Essays on American Colonial and Revolutionary Society, ed. Gary B. Nash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 195.

<sup>16</sup>It was after the Revolution that wages markedly declined in Philadelphia, see Billy G. Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750 to 1800," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, 38 (April 1981): 163-202. Wild fluctuation occurred in the war years of the early 1760s, but measuring the differences in prices paid between 1754-1771 demonstrates that a workingman paid about the same for food, a bit more for rent, much more for fuel, but much less for clothes. Smith strikes a more pessimistic tone by pointing out that full labor conditions were rare, and many laboring families teetered on the edge of disaster.

<sup>17</sup>The literature on the Chesapeake economy is vast, but see Paul G. E. Clemens, The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) and Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

farmers increased income, and led to boom times in areas of the mid-Atlantic. Finally, the kinds of English imports received demonstrate that the colonies were an important market for refined as well as coarser consumer goods. Part of this can be explained by mercantilist policy, scarce labor, and high wages, but colonists may have also preferred more highly finished manufactures to their own coarser home or local products, and that preference slowed growth in colonial production.

If exact measures of wealth and well-being may not yet be precisely understood, historians do seem to agree that the colonial market was instrumental in stimulating English output. Similarly, while it is easy to see growth in demand in the English home market, explanations for its growth are more difficult. It seems that wages grew until about 1750, but confusion reigns about the second half of the century. If wages did not continue to rise—and it seems they did not—what can explain the continued gains in economic demand? Perhaps it was, as one historian suggests, the growth of nearly 150,000 new households of "middle class consumers"—neither very rich nor very poor—with £50 to spare that helped lead home demand.<sup>18</sup> These new consumers could have been created by higher incomes or a redistribution of wealth. Second, the addition of women and children to the wage force may have actually added to net family income even if wages did not rise, and these women were important new consumers.<sup>19</sup>

A third factor may have been a changing work ethic. One late seventeenth-century writer described a work force with low expectations for advancement and a high preference for leisure, writing "if it so be they can provide for themselves sufficient to maintain their

---

<sup>18</sup>D. E. C. Eversley, "The Home Market and Economic Growth in England, 1750-80," in Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution: Essays Presented to J. D. Chambers, ed. E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (London: Arnold, 1967), p. 257.

<sup>19</sup>Neil McKendrick, "Home Demand and Economic Growth: A New View of the Role of Women and Children in the Industrial Revolution," in Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in Honor of J.H. Plumb, ed. Neil McKendrick (London: Europa Publications, 1974), pp. 152-210.

manner of living by working only three days in the week, they will never work four days."<sup>20</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, the creation of a more reliable "modern" work force was an important goal of industrial leaders, who discouraged drunkenness, encouraged literacy, and instituted time clocks to ensure punctuality and attendance.<sup>21</sup> Not all such pressure may have come from above. Workers may simply have chosen to work harder to maintain their gains in standard of living when food prices began to rise.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, England achieved a rather phenomenal rate of economic growth in the eighteenth century. In the course of that one hundred years, industrial output quadrupled, home consumption tripled, and exports grew sixfold.<sup>23</sup> Yet, it was the long-term increase in agricultural productivity that made this industrialization possible, as growth occurred without famine or dearth, even as large parts of the population was removed from the agricultural work force.

What were these farmers and laborers doing or where were they going? One historian has estimated that perhaps one out of fifteen young males in the mid seventeenth century went to the colonies, although as economic conditions improved, that number probably decreased to one in forty by 1700. About forty percent were turning to rural and semi-rural industry, as metal-crafting, textile production and the like allowed dual craft and agricultural roles for

---

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Coleman, The Economy of England, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup>See, for instance, John Money, Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800 (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1977) for the efforts of early industrialists to improve their workers by agitating for more enlightening forms of entertainment to replace popular pastimes such as cock-fighting and bull-baiting.

<sup>22</sup> W.A. Coie also points to these behavioral factors in explaining home demand after 1750 in "Factors in demand 1700-1800," p. 58. These are, of course, important redefinitions into a "modern" work ethic and laid the groundwork for large-scale factory production.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 39.

many rural families.<sup>24</sup> But more importantly, those pushed off the land were pouring into England's cities. The urban population—that is, those living in population centers of 2,500 or more—grew from nineteen percent in 1700 to more than thirty percent in 1800. London nearly doubled its size between 1690 and 1800, and with a population of 900,000 became by far the largest city in Europe. Beginning near the end of the seventeenth century, some 8,000 people annually poured into London alone.<sup>25</sup>

Many of these were poor and out of work, but others were the richest rural gentry drawn by a new ethos that prized metropolitan life on fashionable and gracious squares. By the reign of George III, gas lights and great glass windows created a magical glitter of light and luxury goods in the fashionable shopping districts where onlookers "stood stock-still in the middle of the street here and there to admire some ingenious novelty."<sup>26</sup> A veritable explosion of stores filled with fashionable goods was, in many ways, both cause and effect of the population surge.

But that massive urbanization was not confined to London; provincial towns took their place in filling the urban hierarchy. While only two British urban places besides London contained more than 20,000 people in 1700, by 1801, fifteen towns in the provinces had

---

<sup>24</sup>Carole Shammas, The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 43-44. For the textile trade, see Shammas, "Textile Prices, Production, and Policy," and for cutlers, David Hey, "The Origins and Early Growth of the Hallamshire Cutlery and Allied Trades," in English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk, eds. John Chartres and David Hey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 343-367. For the larger story of these early consumer products, see Joan Thirsk, Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>25</sup>E. A. Wrigley, "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy, 1650-1750," Past and Present 37 (July 1967): 44-70.

<sup>26</sup>Carl Phillip Moritz, Journeys of a German in England: A Walking Tour of England in 1782 trans. and ed. Reginald Nettel (London: Eland Books, 1983), p. 190.

grown to that size, with Birmingham, Bristol, and Leeds leading the way.<sup>27</sup> Even as rural gentry flocked to London, others—perhaps with a closer eye on their family fortunes—moved into these provincial towns, which increasingly functioned as centers of luxury and culture in their own right, as newspapers and clubs and theatres were added.

Below London and the provincial towns was a complex ladder and web of specialized towns. Ports like Liverpool, Bristol and Whitehaven channeled the export trade to colonial America and took back tobacco for processing, as well as rice and lumber. By the end of the eighteenth century, important manufacturing towns were also in place. Birmingham and Sheffield churned out forks and planes and razors.<sup>28</sup> Manchester, Leeds, and Norwich produced the crepes and woolens that clothed the empire. From the potteries of Staffordshire came the mugs and jugs and plates that helped revolutionize the eating habits of a generation. At the same time, dockyards like Portsmouth repaired and fitted the ships that carried the knives and pots and cloth, not only to the New World but along the coast to supply the ever growing home demand.

Part of the web of trade extended across the Atlantic, where the largest cities of the British colonies were ports. These places were small by English standards. In 1790, Philadelphia, the largest colonial town, had a population of less than five percent that of London, and five English provincial towns exceeded its size. Yet, these colonial towns carried out service functions similar to those in England and increasingly shared urban

---

<sup>27</sup>Peter Clark, ed., The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600-1800 (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1984), p. 13. The literature on English urbanization is vast. For a summary of the larger picture of urban growth, see P. J. Corfield, The Impact of English Towns, 1700 to 1800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>28</sup>The fourteen specialized makers of files in Birmingham alone are but one example of that production. The Distant Trader's Guide and Residents Local Directory for the Mercantile Town of Birmingham... (Birmingham: T. Chapman for J. Smith and Co, 1788).

lifestyles and urban problems. Below them, a host of smaller urban centers sent out ships, dispensed justice, distributed goods, marketed crops, and performed other urban functions.<sup>29</sup>

This is but an outline of an extraordinarily complex story. Such sketches can only be made with trepidation, for one of the most important lessons of the last several decades of research is that economic and social movement in the early modern era showed remarkable regional and even community variability.<sup>30</sup> At the same time that some parts of the sketch are clear, historians continue to argue about long-range economic patterns, and the supply and demand—chicken and egg—dilemma still continues to plague scholars.<sup>31</sup> But some summary of the reasons for England's extraordinary economic expansion, particularly in output of manufactured goods, is possible. Four traditional explanations have emerged for the growth of industrial demand in the eighteenth century: an extension of the market through a rise in English population and foreign trade, a long-term pattern of stability or increase in wages or income, declining prices of food due to increased agricultural production, and lower prices for manufactured goods due to technological improvement and efficiency. A fifth factor was the rising urban population that placed a higher value on goods and services, especially luxury consumption.

But none of these factors can, in themselves, cause a rise in either demand or supply. Workers can choose to spend a day drinking instead of working if their wages go up. Manufacturers can take excess profits without investing in increased productivity. An

---

<sup>29</sup>A good summary of colonial urban structure is Jacob M. Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," in Perspectives in American History, ed. by Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, vol. 8 (1974): 123-186.

<sup>30</sup>The problems in colonial regional generalization are noted above. The best local English study is Margaret Spufford, Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979).

<sup>31</sup>If anything, the popularity of new demand-led studies has led to a resurgence of the defense of the technology-led explanation of the Industrial Revolution. See Joel Mokyr, "Demand vs. Supply in the Industrial Revolution," in The Economics of the Industrial Revolution, ed. Joel Mokyr (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), pp. 97-118.

increase in numbers of people does not—in itself—naturally increase the number of those willing or able to spend. A decrease in the price of food in the eighteenth century seems to have defied Engel's law that demand for food is inelastic. People did indeed put more and different kinds of food in their stomachs as it became cheaper.<sup>32</sup> Finally, merely changing one's location to a city does not necessarily predict a change in consumer attitudes and behavior, hence demand. What is hinted in each of these economic factors is that behind the dry statistics people were changing their attitudes and values and standards. As the supply versus demand debate continues, economic historians are beginning to explicitly acknowledge that there were simply unmeasurable, intangible changes in behavior. W. A. Cole points out that "supply may create its own demand, but only if there are customers both able and willing to buy; and no amount of demand will generate an increase in supply unless producers are both able and willing to respond."<sup>33</sup>

The story has thus moved from economic prerequisites for an industrial (and consumer) revolution to the search for people to want to make (and buy) more and better things. Much had changed between 1650 and the time of the American Revolution. First, a more prosperous population in England and the colonies could worry less about whether food would be on the table and more about the table to put it on, less about death and more about lifestyle. Second, the remarkable economic growth that led to industrialization was built on the production of consumer things and their movement around the country and across the Atlantic. Third, more of the Anglo-American population experienced urban—even metropolitan—living with all that connotes, and still more placed a cultural premium on that lifestyle. Roy Porter writes, "for those above the poverty line, the Georgian age was a

---

<sup>32</sup>For example, see Carole Shammas, "Food Expenditures and Economic Well-Being in Early Modern England," *Journal of Economic History* 43 (March 1983): 89-100. Much of this increase in food expenditure was related to changing kinds of foods, such as tea, sugar, and potatoes.

<sup>33</sup>Cole, *The Economy of England*, p. 63.

tonic time to be alive."<sup>34</sup> Alice Hanson Jones has determined that the American colonists in 1774 enjoyed the highest standard of living for the greatest bulk of the population of anywhere in the world and in any society up to that time.<sup>35</sup>

The general level of prosperity meant that more were able to have more than just necessities. Willingness of ordinary folk to buy brings us back to the desirability of things; for them to be able to buy, objects must be affordable and available. We have touched on affordability above in the form of dropping prices and rising wages. Availability will be briefly touched on below and expanded in the next chapter. The question of the desirability of certain kinds of goods in the eighteenth century is next on our agenda.

#### The Rise of Metropolitan Culture: The View from the Top

In 1743, the elder Mrs. Purefoy and her son Henry left their home in Shalstone Manor, Buckingham to visit London for two weeks. On the morning of May 31, Mrs. Purefoy visited Mr. Belchier the cabinetmaker, Mrs. Ward's china shop, Mr. Deard's toy shop, and Mr. Stratton's cane shop. She then stopped in the establishments of Mr. Emon (a turner), Mr. Lake (a coachmaker), Dr. Taylor (an oculist) and Mr. Overton the map-seller. These errands were all completed by 1:45 that afternoon.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Purefoy's shopping continued all week. Her visit represents a common occurrence in the lives of the English gentry of the mid eighteenth century—a trip to London to brush off the country dust, take care of business, shop, and be entertained. For these women and men, "gay Signs, well disposed Streets, magnificent publick Structures and Wealthy Shops, adorn'd with contented

---

<sup>34</sup>Porter, English Society, pp. 256-257.

<sup>35</sup>Alice Hanson Jones, "Wealth Estimates for the American Middle Colonies, 1774" Economic Development and Cultural Change 18 (July 1970): 130.

<sup>36</sup>Henry Purefoy, Purefoy Letters: 1735-1753, ed. G. Eland (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd, 1931), vol. 2, p. 359.



Faces" were part of the urban allure.<sup>37</sup> London was the center of it all, to see and be seen, buy and enjoy.

But the Purefoys may have also visited London because many of their friends and peers among the rural gentry had been drawn there to live. The building of public spaces for entertainment and assembly were just part of the wave of urban improvement that included the more efficient use and control of central streets, adding paving and lighting, controlling livestock, and renovating or moving the old markets. These structural changes did much to increase the safety, quality, and desirability of urban living in both London and the provincial capitals.

As more of the gentry and well-to-do moved to town, urban sociabilities proliferated. Some were public. Even early in the eighteenth century, York residents could brag about the race balls. Here richness of dress and politeness in manners combined with the "magnificence of the rooms" to create a scene that one contemporary bragged "cannot be equalled...in any part of Europe."<sup>38</sup> As public sociability in the form of dances and plays grew increasingly popular, so expensive private sociability and fashionable lifestyles became *de rigueur* in the forms of card-playing, tea-drinking, and maintaining visiting days.

Moreover, urban living required a reorientation and reallocation of space, both public and private. The high prices of land—and the high cost of fuel—reduced the scale of many residences. In these smaller spaces, greater attention was given to the melding of architecture, ornament, and furnishings. Thus, the plans of a great architect like Robert Adam in the 1770s not only included design of spaces, but also elaborate painting, plastering,

---

<sup>37</sup>Letter, August 11, 1712, The Spectator, edit. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. 4, p. 101.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in P. Borsay, "'All the Town's a Stage': Urban Ritual and Ceremony," in The Transformation in English Provincial Towns, ed. Peter Clark (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 233.

window hangings, furniture, even the placement of books or vases.<sup>39</sup> Use of space evolved as well, as specific rooms emerged for public reception, sociabilities, and family life. The new sociabilities required new objects and furniture—card tables and tea tables and cellerets, to name a few. New modes of social behavior and the exigencies of urban life thus intertwined to produce a distinctive urban style of life and a new catalog of furnishings in the eighteenth century.

Thus an urban renaissance was both a causal factor and a result of a new emphasis on fashion and elite sociability. While part of the importance of this culture lay in the number of people now living in urban areas, more significant was the heightened emphasis on urban—perhaps we may now say urbane—culture. "The several cities and large towns of this island catch the manners of the metropolis, wrote John Trusler in 1777, for "the notions of splendour that prevail in the Capital are eagerly adopted; the various changes of the fashion exactly copied."<sup>40</sup> American towns were no different. By the early eighteenth century, it was reported that "there is no fashion in London but in three or four months it will be seen in Boston." Indeed, a "Gentleman from London would almost think himself at home . . . when he observes the Numbers of the People, their Houses, their Furniture...their Dress, and Conversation."<sup>41</sup> Even smaller urban places had caught the

---

<sup>39</sup>These trends in ornament were not necessarily new to the 1770s or even to the eighteenth century. By that time, however, a fluorescence in the works of Adams combined with the extraordinary new emphasis on neoclassical ceramic ornament in the works of Wedgwood to provide a perfect example. Damie Stillman, *The Decorative Work of Robert Adam*, (New York: Transatlantic Arts, 1966). For the Adams' work, see Robert and James Adam, *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, ed. Robert Oresko, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), particularly volume two for his work on Kenwood. While not a London townhouse, Kenwood was clearly not considered a rural country seat, but a suburban villa to escape the cares of London life. See Julius Bryant, *The Iveagh Bequest: Kenwood* (London: The London Historic House Museums Trust, 1990).

<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Neil McKendrick, et al, *Birth of Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) p. 38.

<sup>41</sup>Quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 253.

contagion, as "the polished and affluent American" in Annapolis adopted fashion as quickly as "many opulent persons in the great metropolis."<sup>42</sup> Not just dress or style, but the lifestyle of urban England was soon copied, as town dwellers could attend concerts, plays, or balls, patronize reading libraries or join in clubs, and take part in the large repertoire of urban culture and amusements.

But the popularity of metropolitan living was also a larger part of the emergence of "a far more acute urban culture and consciousness, sharply defined from that of rural society" in the eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> If eighteenth-century rational thought encouraged a study of nature (to understand its laws), and eighteenth-century Rococo style embraced the ornament of nature (to endorse its "natural" beauty), eighteenth-century men and women wanted to live in society. That society prized pleasurable human interaction, manners, leisure, self-improvement, and education, and the locus of activity was in the towns. If many of the great seventeenth-century London merchants wanted to live like the landed gentry, a hundred years later, many of the gentry wanted to live like merchants. Put another way, by the middle of the eighteenth century, substantial redefinitions of gentility through leisure meant that merchants and the landed classes shared a lifestyle of elegant urban town homes and country villas.<sup>44</sup>

In the colonies, however, creating and maintaining this polite, metropolitan culture was more difficult. While nearly a third of the English population resided in cities of 2500 or more in 1800, only about seven percent fit that definition in the United States. Thus, being part of that cultural ideal was less a case of residing in large urban areas than maintaining

---

<sup>42</sup>William Eddis, Letters from America, ed. Aubrey Land (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1969), p. 19.

<sup>43</sup>Peter Borsay, "The English Urban Renaissance: the Development of Provincial Urban Culture, c. 1680-1760" Social History, 5 (May 1977): 596.

<sup>44</sup>Nicholas Rogers, "Money, Land, and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London," Social History 4, no. 3 (October 1979):437-454.

elite culture in whatever one's setting. Part of this problem was ameliorated by creating polite societies in the small urban places of the south, like Williamsburg, where social seasons and urban cultural institutions developed to bring together town dwellers and wealthy rural gentry scattered around the countryside. So, too, in Williamsburg they followed the fashion, again measured in terms of London life for "they live in the same neat Manner, dress after the same Modes, and behave themselves exactly as the Gentry in London."<sup>45</sup> Even tiny Hobbe's Hole, no more than a village with several shops and stores, could host a ball at the home of a wealthy merchant.<sup>46</sup> Through these islands of civilization, the great Virginia gentry were able to maintain a sense of belonging to metropolitan life, amidst what they saw as the coarse manners and habits of the common man.

But the wealthy rural gentry actively worked to maintain civilization in isolated areas in other ways. First, they developed and maintained intense ties to England through correspondence. William Byrd described how the arrival of ships brought letters from friends which were torn open "as eagerly as a greedy heir tears open a rich father's will." They also created their own circumscribed social world of polite company by visiting and dining. Finally, they placed an extraordinarily high premium on education, classical learning, and cultivated manners.<sup>47</sup> That those wealthy Virginia gentlemen worked so hard to belong to this cultural ideal is strong evidence of its crucial role in maintaining power relations and social control. Indeed, the very beginning of this ideal had a similar function as medieval aristocracy adopted the courtly manners of the Italian Renaissance to help maintain their

---

<sup>45</sup>Hugh Jones, The Present State of Virginia, ed. Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), pp. 70-71.

<sup>46</sup>Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed. Journal and Letters of Phillip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1957) p. 154.

<sup>47</sup>An excellent study of maintaining this ideal is Richard D. Brown, "William Byrd II and the Challenge of Rusticity Among the Tidewater Gentry," in Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

legitimate position of power as their usefulness as feudal protectors diminished. Education took on new meaning as a measure of one who is suitable to hold power. Similarly, forms of courtesy (literally, court behavior) developed to distinguish between those that were "civilized" and those who were not. Thus, cultural taboos evolved from the courts of Europe against handling foods with the fingers, and wiping one's face on the table or one's nose on hand or clothing. Dropping gnawed bones on the floor was acceptable, dropping them back in the dish was not. These were presented as serious offenses; to do so is "bad." The reasons for this are clearly articulated by Erasmus in 1530; outward behavior is an expression of the whole person.<sup>48</sup>

By the early seventeenth century, however, polite culture was not only a matter of conforming to rules to promote social differentiation, but also being sensitive to the opinions of others, even one's inferiors. There was an increasing sense of the audience watching—that external behavior was the means to measure a man's worth. Tools for social conformity proliferated. Knowing how to behave became increasingly complex, for not only did rules proliferate, but varied by place, time, and the company one kept. Each set of relationships carried its own specifics; how to act with superior, inferior, and equal, all of which could be subdivided into gender and age.<sup>49</sup>

To these manners—tools of social conformity—were added new tools of civilization; forks, napkins, and handkerchiefs were needed to prevent touching the food,

---

<sup>48</sup>Much of this summary—and some of what follows—is drawn from the broad trends outlined in Norbert Elias, The History of Manners: The Civilizing Process, vol. 1 (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

<sup>49</sup>A study of these elaborate forms of etiquette—broken down into social and temporal matrices is discussed in Christina D. Hemphill, "Manners for Americans: Interaction, Ritual and the Social Order, 1620-1860," (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1988).

wiping the face on the tablecloth, or your nose on your hand.<sup>50</sup> One needed not only rules of correct action, but props with which to perform them. By the eighteenth century, rules and tools had begun to spread through the middling ranks. For those not in the know, instructions were slowly becoming available in etiquette books or hints in almanacs or children's books. Young George Washington laboriously copied out 110 "Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation" from a seventeenth-century courtesy manual. These rules ranged from simple acts of good grooming (attention to one's clothing by a daily brushing) to how to act in the presence of one's superiors (be silent until asked, then stand, put on your hat, and answer in a few words.) Others dealt with those same matters of "civilized behavior;" neither spitting, coughing, or blowing one's nose at table, for example. The new tools of civilized behavior were already in hand, for one now had to know not to use napkin, fork, table cloth, or knife to pick one's teeth. At the same time, behaviors continued to be recast: throwing food under the table became unacceptable when expensive carpets came to be there and could easily be ruined.

Yet, other rules in Washington's list demonstrate the complex script of social interaction—a choreographed set of actions that was known and shared by those of good breeding. His thirty-second rule required that one should offer the "chief Place in your lodging" to "one that is your equal, or not much inferior." The recipient of this offer should at first refuse it, but upon second urging, may accept it, "though not without acknowledging his own unworthiness."<sup>51</sup> These kinds of social dictums bespeak a complex language of social relations played out in behaviors and artifacts. If owning a fork became easier,

---

<sup>50</sup>A delightful description of changing eating behaviors within the broader context of consumerism and social class can be found in Barbara Carson, Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behaviors, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990).

<sup>51</sup>George Washington, George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation, ed. by Charles Moore (Algernon Sydney Sullivan Committee, 1931).

knowing what to do with one was another step. But one more aspect of eighteenth-century genteel culture remained—the elaboration of notions of taste and elegance. The pursuit of taste, of course, was the true goal of a gentleman, by developing innate abilities to discern the finest the world had to offer. Such taste was measured in architecture, portraits, furnishings—indeed all manners of design—but its most exaggerated form was in the ideal of elegant human bodies and social interaction.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, "putting one's best foot forward" was literal long before it was figurative. The feet should always turn out, enabling a gentleman to strike the perfect Hogarthian S-curve. Other rules proliferated—how to hold one's hands, head, or shoulders. Clothing assisted, with arms cut to hold the arms slightly away from the body, and corsets to hold the shoulders back and bosoms out. These poses were all the more difficult for they must appear to have a "natural and easy manner of those who have been genteelly educated."<sup>53</sup> These rules of positions or carriage were elaborated into complex movements; partly because fashion made movement so difficult, but partly because a disciplined body was at the heart of eighteenth-century elegance. Thus, movements were slow and graceful, even theatrical, because they were meant to be seen and appreciated in a "complex mutual rhythm of performance/acceptance that was never ignored or rushed, haste being the sign of a servant or rustic."<sup>54</sup>

Movements, conversation, even use of one's fan all combined to create a complicated theater of object, ornament, body, and action. Again, we see the attention to audience. "To

---

<sup>52</sup>For a truly elegant summary of genteel culture, see Richard L. Bushman, "American High-Style and Vernacular Cultures," in Colonial British America, pp. 345-383. This has been expanded and updated in Richard L. Bushman, The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992).

<sup>53</sup>Benjamin Franklin in Writings, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America 1987), p. 218.

<sup>54</sup>Alicia M. Annas, "The Elegant Art of Movement," in An Elegant Art: Fashion and Fantasy in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Edward Maeder (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983), p. 40.

what important accomplishments is the young nobleman instructed to support the dignity of his rank?" asked Adam Smith in 1757. Because his every wish is attended to, he turns his attention to the most minute detail of ordinary behavior. Because he is so conscious of being watched, "his air, his manner, his deportment, all mark that elegant and graceful sense of his own superiority, which those who were born to inferior stations can never arrive at." By the same token, Smith pointed out, the coxcomb who tries to imitate earns only contempt, for "why should the man, whom nobody thinks it worth while to look at, be very anxious about the manner in which he holds up his head, or disposes of his arms?"<sup>55</sup> It is the notion that the movement of hands or head or arms is a natural extension of all that is elegant and tasteful.

Elite culture can thus be broken down into several key components, all of which were in flux in the eighteenth century. First, an elite was an educated man or woman of taste, trained to pursue the best in language, literature, and the arts, and to express that taste in the environment in which he lived through architecture and furnishings. Second, that genteel person had a set of rules and behaviors that created a self-conscious scripted world of action, which, in its most elaborate form, distinguished him or her from the less worthy by even stance and facial composure. Third, those behaviors and environments were to be enjoyed in the company of peers in pleasurable activities or sociabilities. The performer needed an audience. This code or ethos or value system became a lingua franca recognized from London to the colonies. It was a man's calling card and credit, his entrance to marriage and business.

Changes in manners are not trivial. The way English gentry conceived of themselves and their world had important social consequences for the structure of English society. The rich have always been rich, and perhaps, as the saying goes, they have always been different.

---

<sup>55</sup>Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1969), pp. 75-77.



But the choice of national or elite culture meant that rural gentry measured themselves in different terms than did their forefathers. The sixteenth-century gentry certainly engaged in immense social competition in Elizabethan courts, vying for political and economic favors of their queen. Indeed, Elizabeth's requirement of court attendance by the nobility led to the immense draining of family fortunes, and was an efficient method of preventing their political rise.

But if these great men were judged by their fashion in court, they also had an alternative measure of status through liberal and hospitable dispensation of their largesse to the poor and to strangers.<sup>56</sup> A Christian and a gentleman should open his table to those of any rank as a sign of virtue. Household generosity was material evidence of gentility, an outward expression of the worth of the inner man. The master of the house should dress plainly, but support the locality by hiring servants and feeding the poor that came to his gate, yet still giving noble entertainment to his peers. This stereotype of the simple groaning board ran deep in English traditional culture, and if it did not always reflect reality, it did imply a sense of responsibility and reciprocity of rural landowners to the society around them.

Already by the end of the sixteenth century, complaints could be heard of its demise, as rural gentry fled to London, abandoning traditional hospitality. One contemporary blamed the great rebuilding where resources were expended on new houses, not great feasts. But it was not just a change in the allocation of resources. The removal of social inferiors from the host's tables occurred just as the host was beginning to embrace those new manners expressed in the notion of "civility." As Felicity Heal has observed, "once revulsion against such behavior became widely shared, the host was left with cultural justifications for restricting his guests to men of known "civility."<sup>57</sup> At the same time, a man's character was no longer

---

<sup>56</sup>Much of the following argument is drawn from Felicity Heal, "The Idea of Hospitality in Early Modern England," *Past and Present*, no. 102 (February 1984):66-93.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid*, p. 88.

measured by the benevolence of his household to those of all ranks. What mattered now was generosity to those that mattered—men and women like himself, who knew the rules of the table and the rules of the game. Part of this change was indeed due to the gentry's large-scale removal to London, but another part was the introduction of whole new measures of status. The stately pile in the country mattered, but so did the up-to-date townhouse and the season at Bath. When the gentry began to pass through the gates of their estates with less frequency, they no longer saw the poor standing there. With the institution of parish relief, they no longer felt any obligation. With the change in notions of a man's worth, they no longer felt any duty. Within the larger intellectual realm that prized rational action and maximization of economic benefit, the bundle of spoken and unspoken obligations, customs, and traditions seemed of little use.<sup>58</sup>

Consumerism in the form of courtly behavior and metropolitan culture thus had tremendous social impact, as elites began to pull away from traditional social relationships with their old less wealthy rural neighbors. Newly sensitized to "civilized" manners, they were less willing to share the excitement of a bull-baiting or cock-fight with those beneath. One result was an increase in polarization as the gentry and upper middle ranks detached themselves from laborers and small farmers. Moving into the great tradition transmitted by university education and recognizable by ritualized manners, they closed ranks behind newly-constructed doors to seal off popular traditions of oral culture, symbolism, magic, and superstition. While the elite could dip down on occasion to the informally-transmitted, open

---

<sup>58</sup>E. A. Wrigley, "The Process of Modernization and the Industrial Revolution in England," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1972): 230. See also, Bob Bushaway, By Rite: Custom, Ceremony, and Community in England, 1700-1800 (London: Junction Books, 1982), and E. P. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebian Culture," Journal of Social History 7 (Summer 1974): 382-405.

popular culture—to ride in a procession or host a feast—the great traditions were not shared, and formed a serious obstacle to social mobility.<sup>59</sup>

A look at the top is an instructive place to begin to understand this lifestyle, for here can be seen the extraordinary cost in time and money involved in participating in the latest consumption, fashion, and sociability. Turning to the elite, it is also easy to find names and faces to illustrate our tale, such as one of Georgian England's most wealthy and celebrated women, Georgiana Spencer, Duchess of Devonshire.<sup>60</sup>

Georgiana was the daughter of John, 1st Earl Spencer, and while her family was not one of the "supernovas" of wealth, only a few dozen families in the country owned larger acreage.<sup>61</sup> The Spencers entertained in a style befitting their station, and often entertained their peers, hosting 21 visitors and 132 servants at one time in 1761.<sup>62</sup>

Like other English elites, the Spencers travelled widely in the fashionable spots of Europe. It was in Spa that their daughter Georgiana met William Cavendish, the fifth Duke of Devonshire, and there that the marriage was probably arranged in 1773. Her future husband owned ten houses and had an estimated annual income early in his career of £360,000. Georgiana married the Duke of Devonshire on her sixteenth birthday. At the time

---

<sup>59</sup>Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800 (New York: New York University Press, 1978).

<sup>60</sup>Her story is told in several biographies and collections of letters. The latter can be found in Georgiana: Extracts from the Correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, ed. the Earl of Bessborough (London: John Murray, 1955). Written from original sources in a stylized manner is Iris Irma (Leveson-Gower) Palmer, The Face Without a Frown: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (London: Frederick Muller, 1944). Also useful although most concerned with the Duke's infidelity is Arthur Calder-Marshall, The Two Duchesses (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). The most recent biography is Brian Masters, Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981).

<sup>61</sup>E. A. Watson, "A Progressive Landlord: the Third Earl Spencer, 1782-1845," in Town and Countryside: The English Landowner in the National Economy, 1660-1860, ed. C. W. Chalkin (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 84.

<sup>62</sup>Althorpe Papers, Misc. Household Notes, F 186, British Library, London.

of her marriage in 1774, a partial list of her wedding presents included a number of household goods suitable for correct social living—candlesticks, snuff boxes, coffee pots, cream jugs, and the lot—as well as new measures of educated gentility, such as mathematical instruments. Bills in connection with her trousseau totalled almost £1500, with lace alone accounting for almost £600.<sup>63</sup> In January of 1775, the newly wed Duke and Duchess of Devonshire moved to London, and by the spring, Georgiana, at seventeen, had become the popular center of a fashionable elite crowd. Her early fame came from an unlikely source: while she did not begin the fashion, she became the woman best known for the height of bon-ton simply by wearing the largest feathers of any woman in England. Georgiana spoofed this very fashion milestone in her novel, *The Sylph*, published in 1777. She described a bevy of servants around a young heroine preparing her hair, powdering, pulling, frizzing, rubbing with pomade, then finally was able to see the creation in the mirror.

I rose with precaution and looked in the glass. Never shall I find words to express, the astonishment at the figure I saw. What with curls, flowers, ribbands, feathers, lace, jewels, fruit and ten thousand other things, my head was at least an ell wide and from the lowest curl that laid on my shoulder, up to the top, I am sure not less than three-quarters of a yard high, besides six enormous feathers, black, white, and pink."<sup>64</sup>

To the horror of her dressers, the young heroine demands that the whole structure be pulled down as folly. For folly it seemed to be for all those outside that tightest fashion circle. Indeed, one of the most prevailing caricature motifs of the eighteenth century was the absurd height of hair that came to symbolize the absurd height of fashion. In 1771, Sebastien Mercier thought that women had overcome the ridiculous fashions of his mothers' generation

---

<sup>63</sup>The list of wedding presents is included in Misc. Household Notes, see above. The clothing expenses are found in "Abstract of Tradesmen's Bills in Connection with the Trousseau of Lady Georgiana Spencer, daughter of John, 1st Earl Spencer, on her marriage with William, 5th Duke of Devonshire, 1774," Althorpe Papers, F 183, British Library, London.

<sup>64</sup>Quoted in Palmer, *The Face Without a Frown*, p. 35.

with the exception of "the immoderate height of their coiffures; ridicule has not been able to correct the last custom."<sup>65</sup>

The young Duchess of Devonshire never seemed to gather the strength to resist fashion as did her young heroine. She wrote a friend in 1778 "my new French stays...are so intolerably wide across the brest, that my arms are absolutely sore with them; and my sides so pinched—But it is the 'ton'; and pride feels no pain...to be admired, is a sufficient balsalm."<sup>66</sup> To be the height of fashion was to be admired; the attention was worth the pain. She was little able to resist the fashionable life of her social whirl in other ways. Within months of her removal to London, the popular hostess was already hopelessly in debt from playing cards. Her mother urged her to "play at whist, commerce, backgammon, trictrac or chess, but never at quinze, lou, brag, faro, hazard or any games of chance."<sup>67</sup> But that advice was of little use, for Georgiana's gambling debts were so immense within a year that her £2000 annual allowance from the duke was gone and she was too terrified to tell her new husband.

Despite her mother's continued warnings about the pernicious dangers of innocent pastimes, Georgiana did not listen. Writing her mother from Plympton in October 1781, she simply noted, "we lead a bad life." Her husband was saddened at the death of his brother, and the couple spent every day playing cards. Their luck (or skill) was terrible, for Georgiana noted that "we seldom win one" rubber. At the same time, the stakes were high.

---

<sup>65</sup>Quoted in Fernand Braudel, The Structures of Everyday Life, vol. 1 of Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Centuries, (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 323.

<sup>66</sup>Quoted in Annas, "Elegant Art of Movement," p. 37.

<sup>67</sup>Lady Spencer to the Duchess, May 8, 1775 in Bessborough, Georgiana, p. 24. Again in 1776, her mother begged her to "pray take care if you play to carry money in your pocket as much as you care to lose and never go beyond it." Again she warned about playing certain card games for "if you stick to commerce and play carefully I think you will not lose more than you can afford, but I beg you will never play quinze or lou." She was so concerned that she asked her daughter to tell her in each letter "what you have won or lost and at what games every day." Lady Spencer to the Duchess, Nov, 1, 1776.

"It is the dearest whist I ever saw," wrote Georgiana, "near two hundred sometimes, depending on a rubber, and I am over head to Mr. P., but the Duke, who knows of it, will save me from jail, and I generally play fast asleep."<sup>68</sup>

But her husband actually had no idea of her real debts. By early 1787, Georgiana was begging to borrow £3000 from the banker Thomas Coutts. By July of that year she needed £7000. In 1800 Georgiana borrowed £6000 at five percent interest, although she had promised never to do so. She had tumbled so far into debt from reckless spending, gambling, and financial speculation that by the fall of 1804, the Duke had to be told. In December, he agreed to pay £40,000, but her debt was probably two and a half times that amount. She died in 1805.

The story of one so wealthy as the Duchess of Devonshire may seem irrelevant to the study of broad changes in consumerism in the eighteenth century. Yet, her life tangibly illustrates some of the most common themes of our interest. The extraordinary attention to the slightest vagaries of fashion is but one part of the story. Equally important was the immense use of conspicuous leisure, one of the most important aspects of the new consumerism. So, too, can we see the continuing sense among the most elite that they were being watched and admired, and that the gaze of the audience was its own reward. Finally, we can see the inevitable result of such elite behaviors in her seemingly uncontrollable free-fall into debt. As we shall see, the notion that consumerism leads inevitably to debt and downfall is the most pervasive theme in warnings against middle-class consumption.

Expenses of high-style living and sociability seem to ripple on forever, as demonstrated by a few of the tiniest details of the expenditures of those like the Spencers. For example, the cost merely to clean and maintain multiple homes was high. The Spencers' accounts included a charge of almost £9 for "men's time taking down all the Damask

---

<sup>68</sup>The Duchess to Lady Spencer, October 16, 1781, Bessborough, *Georgiana*, p. 52.

hangings and window curtains in general throughout the house, thoroughly cleaning and brushing." Another £6 was spent for "taking down, cleaning, and repairing twenty-six bedsteads and furniture." Other charges included tasks as simple as taking "paper covers off the glasses and chandeliers," or "washing the Servants Hall with Tobacco water" or "cleaning two beds from bugs, laying down carpets and tacks." These are mere acts of maintenance, not acquisition, and were carried out seasonally, although purchasing small touches as simple as a "pea green Balance Tassel and strong silk line for the Hall lantern" could run £6.<sup>69</sup>

To be in fashion was not only costly, it was constant. To stay abreast when styles changed so dramatically meant continual outlay for new furnishings. One repair bill demonstrates that the Spencers were so conscious of changing furniture style that they had "new Frames with straight turn'd legs" added to a set of mahogany dining tables to replace the old ball and claw feet in 1772.<sup>70</sup> The proper environment for sociability was paramount.

Things like straight legs on dining tables mattered. So did the things that went on those tables. A second major expense was entertaining. The Duke of Newcastle hosted a dinner on October 1, 1761, that included three kinds of soup and four fishes for the fish course. Only a partial listing of dishes included turtle, pigeon, veal, mutton, and a "hare pye," and all was washed down with beer, claret, champagne, burgundy, madeira sherry, port, and rum. Eight plates of ice were purchased, china rented, and extra cooks and kitchen help hired. While we do not know the number of guests, that meal alone cost £35, not including the normal costs of servants.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup>Rates, taxes, repairs and furniture for Spencer House, St James, 1772, F-199, Althorpe Papers, British Library.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Registers of Daily Bills of Fare with prices in the household of the Duke of Newcastle, and, after his death, in that of the Duchess of Newcastle, 1761-1774. Additional manuscripts, 33,325, British Library, London.

But a third, less tangible expense, was the cost of keeping informed. For someone like Georgiana, the task was simple, even if the price tag was high. She, her family, and friends often travelled to Paris, her father buying clothes for her there so "that you may know how to dress yourself."<sup>72</sup> Another relative reported from Paris in 1775 just how particular the lines of fashion were drawn. "The heads are not so high nor as many feathers," she warned, but hastened to explain "that is to say many people are dress'd so, but the people the best dress'd are more modest than they were." Thus, like the puffing of balloons, women's hair went up and down, and just as the copycats caught up, the best dressed had moved on. Georgiana shopped in the finest stores in London, and no doubt, saw pattern books and prints and dolls—all new innovations to keep the flow of fashion at its peak.

These few examples demonstrate how the elite continued to raise the cost of membership, as more and more could afford the dues. First, one must be properly educated. As noted in the last chapter, this, of course, was the greatest and most exclusionary form of luxury. To play cards with the Duchess and her peers required not only knowing how to lay the tricks, but to speak Latin and quote verses.<sup>73</sup> As part of that education, one must also know the proper rules for conduct and social intercourse.

A second costly prerequisite for this lifestyle was correct dress. The Spencers spent £250 in only half a year for dress fabrics in 1774, while a working man in Philadelphia could be minimally clothed for under £4. <sup>74</sup>Yet, to keep up fashion in the middling ranks was also

---

<sup>72</sup>Lord Spencer to the Duchess, Paris Oct 7, 1775 in Bessborough, Georgiana, p. 27.

<sup>73</sup>The Duchess to Lady Spencer, October 21, 1778 in Bessborough, Georgiana, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup>"Account for Material for Dresses," Miscellaneous Household Notes, F 186, Althorpe Papers, British Library. Billy G. Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians," p. 179. Weekly expenses of laboring families for clothing in the 1780s in the county of Berks suggested that the whole family could be clothed for that sum. See Pamela Horne, The Rural World, 1780-1850: Social Change in the English Countryside (London: Hutchinson, 1980), Appendix 1, p. 259.



costly. One wealthy middle class woman spent £60 in addition to gifts of money and clothes she received from friends and relatives.<sup>75</sup> Third, one needed the proper environment; house, servants, furnishings, coach—a neglect of any of these could mean betrayal. Finally, one had to have time for leisure, and the greater the time needed for travelling, playing, and entertaining, the less time for "work," either in business or day-to-day supervision of agriculture. The pay-off in leisure for the Spencers, of course, was the very marriage of their daughter Georgiana to one of the wealthiest men in England as a result of their meeting at fashionable watering holes.

The world of the Spencers seems far gone from the stereotypical old English board. To be rich now implied a different kind of obligation, to spend profusely to keep up the pace. And in a world built on the shaky foundations of one's credit, to not spend or live in a certain way could suggest financial shakiness, even bringing down the whole house of cards. It is in the sense that spending and lifestyle was a measure of financial stability that some Virginians welcomed the non-importation agreement of 1770. It enabled them to cut back their consumption without injuring their social prestige or credit.<sup>76</sup>

Two broad themes have been identified in the changing behavior of elites. First, there was a long-term reformulation in measures of how the wealthy should live and behave. This functioned, on the one hand, as social differentiation to keep out those below. It also aided in social inclusion by the creation of a code that must be performed by all elites. Failing to do so was to risk suffering ostracism as eccentric or miserly or old-fashioned. In the long-run from medieval times to the edge of industrial society, this might be thought of as an upping of the ante, as newer kinds of wealth—usually mercantile—rose and asked for

---

<sup>75</sup>Natalie Rothstein, ed. A Lady of Fashion: Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>76</sup>Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 114.

the traditional honor that family wealth usually conferred. Thus arose a standard of good breeding that only came from a combination of wealth, education, information, and social interaction.

The identification by Thorsten Veblen nearly a century ago of a notion of conspicuous waste in the form of leisure, education, or goods was in some ways clearly part of this process. Veblen paid less attention, however, to the role of information and social interaction in this process. Information was critical for correct elite performance, for not only might it lead to increased wealth, but it also conveyed advantage in the competition for being the most up-to-the-minute in dress and style. This, of course, fell under the broad notion of "being in fashion." Fashion was not new to many in this group, but it did expand its influence beyond courtly circles into the rural gentry in this period.

Few in England, and even fewer in the colonies, ever saw that elite circle. Certainly colonial elites did not operate at the same levels of wealth as did the upper realms of the English hierarchy. Perhaps they never even dreamed of its luxury. But many below the elite were curious about their lifestyle, and they were affected in powerful ways. They peered in windows of assembly rooms at the dancing gentry.<sup>77</sup> Sometimes, they were allowed in, and the worlds of Georgiana Spencer and the common folk crossed. On October 9, 1774, we can see a very young Georgiana heading to Derby for a ball in her "demi-saison silk...pink trimm'd with gause and green ribbon." Her dress was much like the one she "brought from abroad and wore at Bath," but her fine attire might have outshone the occasion. She found her uncle drunk, and the musicians so in disarray that she and her dance partner had to wait ten minutes in the middle of the room before "they could wake the musick to play a minuet, and when they did play they all of them play'd different parts." If she expected the musical standards of Bath, she was disappointed. So, too, the exclusivity of Bath was nowhere to be

---

<sup>77</sup>Borsay, "All the Town's a Stage," p. 249.

found here. Elections were in the offing so "nobody was refus'd at the door." Suddenly we see "the ballroom...quite full of the daughters and wives of all the voters, in check'd aprons, etc."<sup>78</sup> If only the elite could dance the minuet, all could join in the rollicking country dances.

Those checked aprons of the middling sort were there and they were watching. They were looking for the latest cut of the shoe or height of the hair, for those tiny changes were the greatest vagaries of fashion. Some were hoping to copy, others only to dream. But what was also new to the eighteenth century is that so many in checked aprons knew a great deal about the latest fashion (and wanted to know more), had access to those articles, and could afford, in many small ways, to indulge in it. What was also new was that so many across the Atlantic were—in their own way—watching too.

In summary, one model of social change in this era presents social competition as a race, as each group picked up the pace, those before them looked anxiously back and had to run faster to keep ahead. The ratchet effect meant that the top was ultimately pushed by those below. The same analogy could apply to fashion; a few runners could first cross the finish line in the wish to be the most correctly up-to-date, but a long line of stragglers—each moving as fast as their abilities allowed—jogged along behind, again spurring the wheel of fashion to move faster and faster.

Of course, the two races overlapped, for fashion was one form of social competition. Again, if the idea of fashion was not new, what was new was the scope of the population that ran the race, and the hectic pace of the runners. The fact that the daughters of country farmers cared about fashion had immense sociological and economic dimensions; it suggests that a new group of customers was released from the sway of tradition and brought into fashion.

---

<sup>78</sup>Georgiana Spencer to her mother, October 9, 1774 in Bessborough, Georgiana, p. 15.

What precisely does that mean? Fashion is not something distinctly different from style or custom, but merely describes something done in a particular way or mode. It is a particular species of custom. But fashion also had multiple meanings. Adam Smith defined fashion at midcentury by its wearers: "those who are of high rank and character."<sup>79</sup> But Smith was already using the term fashion in an old-fashioned way. Its more common usage was to describe a mode of dress or furniture in the latest style, or as Samuel Johnson would have it; "made according to the mode."<sup>80</sup> By the middle of the century, to be up-to-date or concerned with a quickened pace of style was no longer just the province of the elite, but the goal of many of the middling ranks. This increasing interest is but one way the middling group had a relatively new importance as actors in the stage of history. Only by viewing the middling ranks will it be possible to ask whether the notion of a single race of social competition accurately describes the consumer world of the eighteenth century.

#### Rising Consumption: The Middling Ranks Chime In

If polarization was one result of changing gentry behaviors, that chasm was not absolute. Mediation of elite culture was carried out through the increasing middling ranks of society—the upper group of professionals, as well as the lesser artisans and shopkeepers. This middling group "bulged" in the center of the eighteenth-century social pyramid, their ranks growing both more numerous and more important. Their condition was celebrated in the early eighteenth century as "a happy middle ground...the most suited to human happiness...not exposed to the miseries ...and hardships of the mechanic part...not

---

<sup>79</sup>Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, p. 282.

<sup>80</sup>Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers, 6th ed. (London: J. F. and C. Rivington, 1785).

embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition, and envy of the upper part."<sup>81</sup> These themes are echoed in Oliver Goldsmith's tale of The Vicar of Wakefield. Much of the vicar's trouble comes from the wish of his wife and daughter to change their lifestyle to attract a neighboring gentleman as a suitor. The vicar wisely insists that they have pride in his lot; for he belonged to "that order of men which subsists between the very rich and the very rabble." Rich enough to be able to resist "submit[ting] to the neighboring man in power" but too poor to become such tyrants themselves, "in the middle order of mankind are generally to be found all the arts, wisdom, and virtues of society." Only this order can be "the true preserver of freedom, and may be called the People."<sup>82</sup> A century later, the "Middle Classes" of London were still described as "far more virtuous, both in regard to their private and public conduct, than the aristocracy."<sup>83</sup>

This intellectual transformation, the mantle of moral superiority slowly moving from the elite to the middling ranks, indicates just how far old notions of the social order had come under challenge. As P. J. Corfield has brilliantly shown, the term class itself "glided" into the English language in the eighteenth century, first co-existing with old ideas and terminology about superior and inferior rank and order, and then diverging from them into something approximating "upper, middling, and lower" classes by the 1750s and 1760s. This movement from the old bipartite gentry/people, us/them, rich/poor, high/low to the tripartite form indicates the strength of that middling tier, and the fundamental reorganization of the social order that ensued. But that tripartite division—so slow to emerge—would rather quickly be reworked to upper, middling, and laboring or working classes in the half century

---

<sup>81</sup>Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 2.

<sup>82</sup>This commentary formed part of a political discussion. Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield and other Writings, ed. Frederick W. Hilles (1762; reprint, New York: The Modern Library, 1955), p. 382.

<sup>83</sup>James Grant, The Great Metropolis (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837), vol. 1, pp. 274-276.

to follow.<sup>84</sup> Again, the choice of terminology is important; by converting the bottom realm into laborers or working classes, not only are notions of power injected into such a conceptualization, but the middling class became further demarcated. Changing language thus places a demarcation between the middle and the bottom by implying change in kind, not just degree, while retaining the newfound fluidity between the middle and the top.

Who were these "middling ranks" and what were their distinguishing characteristics? First, they were not a class in any Marxian sense, expressed in a political consciousness. Except for those in London, they were not yet independent from the paternalism of the elite, and remained remarkably deferential in political matters until perhaps the 1770s.<sup>85</sup> Nor were they a uniform group in terms of occupation, ranging from near-elite professionals to minor rural gentry to self-employed artisans just above the "working class." Moreover, even within their ranks they were separated by gradations of prestige and differing religious and political identities. Some were lawyers, themselves gaining a newfound respectability. Others belonged to new professions: opticians or dentists, accountants or surveyors. A final important difference among that broad middling tier was form of income, an important distinction between tradesmen or independent farmers.

Their most distinguishing characteristic may thus be the very multiplicity of niches and forms within that broad middle tier. Perhaps we could simply say that this group were the descendants of the rough distinction of "Citizens, Burgesses, and Yeoman" used by

---

<sup>84</sup>P. J. Corfield, "Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *History* 72 (February 1987), pp. 38-61. Blumin is a bit more conservative in his estimation, suggesting that class as a taxonomic category was still rare in 1800. Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 17-20.

<sup>85</sup>E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3 (May 1978): 142-143. For more on Karl Marx's model of class society, see Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 1-35.

Thomas Smith in the 1560s.<sup>86</sup> But one scholar suggests that they could be defined by a basic income of about £40, although that number could jump to £1000 for the lesser gentry.<sup>87</sup>

Another distinction from the elite world was that, except for those at the top of this group, most were not able to participate solely in the life of leisure. As tradesmen, farmers, or professionals, each, in varying degrees, contributed an income of his own making. Even those at the top were more closely tied to their business of farms by management. The most well-off in this group might even use their wives as proxies for conspicuous leisure, working hard themselves so that their spouses might maintain that status for him.

This disparate group began to be coalesced by an emerging middle class lifestyle and cultural ideal, a process that accelerated at the end of the century and may have been completed by about 1830.<sup>88</sup> The first view of such group dynamics comes from urban areas, just those places that the middling ranks may have first grown politically independent. Like the elite, the urban middle ranks patronized theater and music events, subscribed to libraries, and attended lectures on geology or phrenology. Like the elite, they joined a host of voluntary associations with goals to improve individuals and perfect society. While their purposes were diverse, all these associations were similar in their nature. Some were formed as a means of self-improvement; others to improve the towns themselves. Yet whether the stated goal was to inform, improve, or entertain, nearly all associations had some broader social function in their actual workings. Self-improvement societies bettered not only one's mind, but also one's social status. Membership was not just learning, but bringing a man into a wider social circle, while an enlarged social web often meant improved business contacts.

---

<sup>86</sup>Quoted in Peter Laslett, "A One-Class Society," in History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation, ed. R. S. Neale (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 204.

<sup>87</sup>Lorna Wetherill, Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760 (London: Routledge and Paul, 1988), pp. 99-102.

<sup>88</sup>See, for instance, R. S. Neale, "Class and Class Consciousness in Early Nineteenth Century England: Three Classes or Five," in History and Class, p. 163.

Debating societies addressed tough moral issues of the changing times. Societies for the improvement of the working class allowed middling ranks to assert their identity and authority, even if elite sponsors controlled and mediated that power.<sup>89</sup>

Middle-class associations were in one way only copies of the metropolitan culture of the elite. But by grouping together tradesman, artisan, and merchant, a sense of cohesion was slowly forming. In urban places, membership provided an anchor in a chaotic world, and under their umbrella many of the old community functions of control and regulation were subsumed. To be a member of the "Bow Lane Speaking Club," in London "where the differences in the nation is dissected by tailors, shoemakers, barbers, apothecaries, and attorneys" surely gave those men some sense of companionship and common identity.<sup>90</sup> A rising literacy and familiarity with the writings and language of "great culture" was also an entree to the conversation of civilized society.

The middling ranks were thus bound by what they were not—rich or poor—but also what they were coming to be. A sense of respectability—how one should act, what one should know, and how one should dress—became slowly apparent. Visitors marvelled at the cleanliness and order of the homes of tradesmen and others. Others noted their fine dress. For example, Defoe described a recent change in tradesmen's dress for "do we now not see fine wigs, fine Holland shirts . . . and perhaps laced also, all lately brought down

---

<sup>89</sup>R. J. Morris, "Voluntary Associations and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850," The Historical Journal 26 (1983): 95-118. See also Peter Clark, "Visions of the Urban Community: Antiquarianism and the English City before 1800," in The Pursuit of Urban History, ed. D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (London: Edward Arnold, 1983); John Money, Experience and Identity; and Ian Inkster and Jack Morrell, eds. Metropolis and Province. Science in the British Culture, 1780 to 1850 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

<sup>90</sup>Joshua Johnson to Charles Wallace, December 1, 1771, in Joshua Johnson's Letterbook, 1771-1774: Letters from a Merchant in London to his Partners in Maryland, ed. Jacob M. Price (London: London Record Society, 1979), p. 18.



to the level of the apron."<sup>91</sup> Still others were struck by artisans browsing newspapers in coffeehouses, or keeping up with the latest literature.<sup>92</sup>

Slowly, the evidence mounts for a group that is defined by a shared style of life, or more specifically, common interests of a non-economic character. This was partially true because the standard of expenditure necessary for respectability is the most important determinant in what one's life style will be. Thus, we can set a minimum standard of income as a proxy for class membership because it implies the ability to spend at a certain level. To define middling ranks, we could perhaps look for the kinds of things that to do without bore a social cost. This is because one's standard of living is based not only on what appeals to the common sense as what is good and right but also because conformity is necessary as a matter of propriety.

Implicit, however, are dual hierarchies in the social order, one based on economic means or access to wealth, and the other on status, or a system of values. Changing status for middling ranks in Anglo-American urban places complicates the model which describes social competition in terms of a foot race. Contesting social groups also compete over what moral standards should be and what forms of prestige will emerge. The middling ranks were the heir to powerful Protestant standards of respectable moral behavior, most succinctly summed in a sense of calling, the honor of work, and the approval of frugality. The twin pillars of industry and frugality could hardly be more antithetical to gentry ideals of conspicuous leisure and consumption.

We are left with a puzzle. On the one hand, middling ranks of urban society seemed to have their own sense of respectability that defined what was considered "suitable." The Assistant Keeper of the Wardrobe to Queen Charlotte described her dinner service as

---

<sup>91</sup>Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, vol. 1, p. 87.

<sup>92</sup>Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century, p. 239.

"earthenware, to which, for our rank, was nothing superior," for fine porcelain was "only for the wealthy."<sup>93</sup> Drawing from larger cultural and religious values there should have been a code that rejected leisure and consumerism on moral or religious grounds even as they were endorsed on social ones. At the same time, however, there may have been some desire of those below the elite to engage in social competition with elite through consumption.

But what for some seemed evidence of remarkable improvement in English society, for others was the essential flaw of middle class life—the fault of "aspiring at being received into the circles of the upper classes, and a consequent attempt to emulate the habits of the latter."<sup>94</sup> William Byrd fumed from Virginia that English "shopkeepers have left off their bands, their frugality, and their spouses must be maintained in Splendour." Byrd complained that such high-living had pernicious effects, for if luxury was bad enough among "people of Quality, when it gets among that order of men [that stand] behind counters, they must turn Cheats and pickpockets to [get] it."<sup>95</sup>

This refrain came from such a chorus of voices in the eighteenth century that it cannot be ignored. Indeed, E. P. Thompson suggests that these middling groups were content to remain deferential to elites only because they had the opportunity to move out of their client relationship through geographic or social mobility. That is, they tried to socially climb.<sup>96</sup> Rather than fight elite hegemony, they wanted to join.

---

<sup>93</sup>Quoted in G. W. Elliot, "The Technical Characteristics of Creamware and Pearl-Glazed Earthenware," in Creamware and Pearlware, ed. T. A. Lockett and P. Halfpenny, Fifth exhibition from the Northern Ceramic Society, Stoke-on-Trent Museum and Art Gallery, pp. 11-12.

<sup>94</sup>Grant, The Great Metropolis, vol. 1, pp. 274-276.

<sup>95</sup>William Byrd to unknown merchant, June 27, 1729. The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684-1776 ed. Marion Tinling, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), vol. 1, p. 418.

<sup>96</sup>Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English Society" pp. 142-143.

But can we extend this argument across the Atlantic? Were these broader patterns sketched for urban places in England appropriate for colonial cities? Far too little quantified research has searched for distinctions in the middle of the social hierarchy in the eighteenth century, including an examination of work, consumption, residential location, formation of associations, and family organization.<sup>97</sup> Nor has the same intensive debate about the nature of hierarchy and class extended back from the nineteenth century. For instance, colonial historians have focused more attention on the nature of political relations than to social ones.<sup>98</sup>

But some brief suggestions are possible. Daniel Rodgers and Sean Wilentz' study of the language of class in colonial America supports P. J. Corfield's analysis of that lexicon in England. They, too, found that society was conceived in at least a three-part system that included "middling" sorts. Particularly in the larger seaboard towns a grid was also articulated in terms of occupation such as master, merchant, mechanic, and laborer.<sup>99</sup> The Frenchman Rochefoucault thus suggested at the end of the eighteenth century that "fortune and the nature of the professions form different classes." He thought that "the merchants, the lawyers, the land-owners who do not cultivate their land themselves," as well as physicians and the clergy formed the first class. The next group was formed by "inferior merchants, the

---

<sup>97</sup>These categories are loosely drawn from Stuart M. Blumin, "The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and some Proposals," American Historical Review 90 (April 1985):299-338.

<sup>98</sup>See, for example, Gary J. Kornblith, "Class and the Language of Class in Colonial and Revolutionary America." Paper presented at the Institute of Early American History and Culture Comparative Social History Conference, September 5-7, 1985.

<sup>99</sup>Daniel T. Rodgers and Sean Wilentz, "Languages of Power in the United States," Language, History and Class, ed. Penelope J. Corfield (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 242-243.

farmers and the artisans," and at the bottom was a third class made up of laborers, by the day or month.<sup>100</sup>

Contemporaries saw other distinctions in the social hierarchy. Ferdinand Bayard thought that the "inhabitants of Philadelphia, like all the townspeople of the United States," were divided into classes by wealth, and that the ownership of a carriage was the absolute defining feature of the elite. But to find distinctions among those that did not own carriages, Bayard had to turn again to occupation. Only professionals could fit the middle tier, while the bottom group was formed by those who "follow the mechanical arts."<sup>101</sup> But our search for a sense of respectability of the middling orders can also be found. In late eighteenth-century Philadelphia, Jacquelyn Miller found "a set of shared cultural assumptions . . . that accentuated individual initiative, moderation and personal responsibility, and that expressed a lack of sympathy for, and sometimes a blatant antipathy toward, persons they did not feel lived up to those standards."<sup>102</sup> Some of those standards were measured in requisite consumption to achieve an appropriate standard of living. One New Englander estimated in 1728 that the "necessary expenses in a Family of but Middling Figure and no more than Eight Persons" came to £265, and included an all-purpose maid, entertainment, and a number of furnishings.<sup>103</sup> This is partially confirmed in probate studies throughout the colonies which

---

<sup>100</sup>Francois Alexandre Frederick Rochefoucault, Travels through the United States of America in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797, (London: R. Phillips, 1799) vol. 2, p. 672.

<sup>101</sup>Ferdinand Bayard, Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia with a Description of Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1791, trans. and ed. Ben C. McCary (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edward Brothers, 1950), p. 128. His observation may have been accurate. Lee Soltow estimated that only three percent of all families in the United States owned carriages in 1798. Lee Soltow, Distribution of Wealth and Income in the U.S. in 1798 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), p. 72.

<sup>102</sup>Jacquelyn C. Miller, "The Body Politic: Disease and Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution." Paper presented at the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies, December 4, 1992.

<sup>103</sup>Quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, Cities in the Wilderness (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 413.

demonstrate rising consumption of a number of household goods. Lorena S. Walsh suggests that by the middle of the eighteenth century the "composition of these new goods argues for a reorientation of attitudes toward domestic life and an altered life style among the middling as well as among the rich."<sup>104</sup> Stuart Blumin argues, however, not all in this broad middle tier lived well; he thought that the cramped living conditions of urban artisans were closer to that of the poorer sorts than those of the rich.<sup>105</sup> The debate about the nature of the middling ranks in eighteenth-century colonial cities is only just beginning.

If defining the middling ranks in eighteenth-century colonial cities remains speculative, searching for answers in rural areas is almost impossible. Few scholars have focused on distinctions between rural and urban places in the colonial era, and even fewer on that broad middle spectrum. Gloria and Jackson Main's larger regional studies of New England suggest that consumption was led by elites in urban places, and those shifts can be traced along access to principal waterways. Yet they also see more rural neighbors following these trends by the close of the colonial period. Indeed, the Mains felt confident to conclude that "despite their relative poverty and the rustic population, Yankees of the "middle classes" were participating in what became a transatlantic revolution in consumer tastes."<sup>106</sup> Lorena Walsh, however, sees a far more striking divergence between town and country in the colonial era, due to distinctive urban sociabilities and needs to invest in capital producing

---

<sup>104</sup>Lorena S. Walsh, "Living Standards and Consumption Patterns in the United States as Revealed by Probate Inventories, 1640-1830." Paper presented at "Clothes and Consumption in England and America, 1600 to 1820," Victoria and Albert Museum, London, June 26-27, 1992. See also, Gloria L. Main and Jackson T. Main, "Economic Growth and the Standard of Living in Southern New England, 1640-1774," *Journal of Economic History* XLVIII, no. 1 (March 1988): 27-46, especially Tables 4 and 5 and Carole Shammas, "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," *Journal of Social History* 14 (Fall 1980): 1-25.

<sup>105</sup>Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, pp. 38-58.

<sup>106</sup>Main and Main, "Economic Growth and the Standard of Living in Southern New England," p. 44.

goods. She suggests that those urban and rural distinctions did not diminish by the end of the colonial period, but continued to diverge.<sup>107</sup> A large area of study remains.

But clearly there were changes in the social hierarchy of Anglo-America and the broad middle spectrum had a critical role to play in the redefinition of appropriate behavior. Two apocryphal tales and words of advice from two great spokesmen of the age tell the story. Daniel Defoe's The Complete English Tradesmen was published in 1727. Practical advice on the nature and practice of business forms the bulk of the work, but interwoven throughout are warnings about the dangers of tradesmen living beyond their means. "This extravagance," Defoe explained, "had its first rise among those sorts of tradesmen, who, scorning the society of their shops and customers, applied themselves to rambling to courts and plays." Soon this led to spending many hours with those above them, with ensuing great expense.

But, Defoe warned, this cost "could not be confined to the bare keeping of such company abroad, but soon showed itself in a living like them at home, whether the tradesman could afford it or not." The inevitable result of "keeping high company abroad", he continued, was "visits and high treatings at home; and these are attended with costly furniture, rich clothes, and dainty tables." It was not only the outlay of precious funds. Defoe pointed to the fact that this lifestyle took not only money but leisure. Time spent away from business was at the high cost of making money. For too many, he claimed, the excesses of living was the cause of bankruptcy.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup>Lorena S. Walsh, "Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643-1777," Journal of Economic History 33 (1983): 109-117. For a larger colonial summary, see Walsh, "Living Standards and Consumption Patterns in the United States as Revealed by Probate Inventories," pp. 8-9. Strong evidence for a continued and heightened divergence in rural and urban lifestyle is seen in Ann M. Smart, "The Urban/Rural Dichotomy of Status Consumption: Tidewater, Virginia 1815," M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1986. A thoughtful view of how patterns of gentrification were experienced in rural areas is found in Richard L. Bushman, The Refinement of America, pp. 3-29.

<sup>108</sup>Defoe, Complete English Tradesman, vol. 1, pp. 118-120.

Thus, following the fault of neglecting one's business for leisure, the four remaining principle faults were "expensive house-keeping or family extravagance; expensive dressing, or the extravagance of fine clothes; expensive company or keeping company above himself; expensive equipages, making a show and ostentation in the world." The four were inextricably linked, and each led one to the other "like a kind of slow fever."<sup>109</sup>

Defoe tells the story of a young tradesman who was deeply concerned about his debts from high living, but refused to confide in his wife. She, a generous and loving mate, continued to press him about his worries. When he finally admits his fears of financial distress, she offers to "keep less company," and so doing, "lay down all the state of living, as well as the expense of it." First, she would "give up visiting days," then give up a "greatest part of the acquaintance I have." By foregoing "treats and entertainments, and the like needless occasions of expense," she would need fewer maids, and she could give up their lodgings in Hampstead and go live in the country. He, in turn, must also retrench, she wisely argued, for he kept two horses and a groom, rich company, and sat "long at the Fleece in the evening." With these measures, they could "slide gently and voluntarily to the smooth part, rather than to be pushed to the precipice and dashed to pieces."<sup>110</sup>

Some six years later another such tale was published in a letter to the Pennsylvania Gazette under the name of one Anthony Afterwit, but from the pen of Benjamin Franklin. It told the sad tale of a man who worked hard and "with care and industry" might "live tolerably easy, and in Credit with our Neighbours." But his wife "had a strong inclination to be a Gentlewoman" and thus began the march of new household furniture into their home. His "Wife being entertain'd with tea by the Good Women she visited," they could "do no less than the like when they visited us," and a new "Tea-table with all its Appurtenances of China

---

<sup>109</sup>Ibid, pp. 111-112.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid, pp. 99-105.

and Silver" was the next necessity. So on came a maid, a clock, a horse, and all the trappings, and though poor Anthony Afterwit "could see all Along, that this way of Living was utterly inconsistent with my circumstances," he really "had not Resolution enough to help it." Only the dunning of creditors could restore his senses, and off went the maid and the horse; the tea table was traded for a spinning wheel and the clock for an hourglass. If his senses were restored, his courage was not, for Anthony Afterwit only would act when his wife went out of town.<sup>111</sup>

Each of these authors are writing cautionary tales about—and for—the middling sorts, and in them are important themes for our understanding of how measures of respectable living were changing. Each author directly links the horrors of financial ruin with newly important sociable behaviors and their necessary consumer props, and suggests the only way to prevent bankruptcy was forgoing the expense of servants, visiting, horses, and the like. Each story is also placed squarely in the dynamics of family life, where women seem to be partners if not decision-makers about lifestyle choices. Indeed, neither husband seems to have control in the dictation of how household expenses will be made nor nerve to suggest a change.

But several important distinctions can also be made. First, in Defoe's vignette and in his larger text in The Complete English Tradesman, he seems to accept that "respectability" of tradesmen includes some measure of participation in larger trends of entertainment and fashion. He carefully points out that it is not the bad wife that most often leads to a tradesman's downfall but the mere act of an early marriage and the natural ensuing expenses of family respectability; servants, an appropriately furnished household, then dining and visiting, and, through it all, appropriate dress. The question was one of appropriate degree

---

<sup>111</sup>"Anthony Afterwit," The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 10, 1732, in Benjamin Franklin: Writings, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1987), pp. 185-187.



and scale. In a broader way, Defoe is merely urging postponement of marriage for young tradesmen.

Franklin's story is less subtle. If the wife of Defoe's tale is wise and prevents their downfall, Franklin's is silly and nearly provokes it. There is little sense that, within reason, a tradesman's wife ought to drink tea or visit or have a maid. That is merely the wish to live like a gentlewoman. Franklin's symbols are carefully chosen, the path to ruin was paved with the new world of material things coming down to the middling ranks in the eighteenth century. Each was a powerful symbol. A maid was for women who thought they were too good to do for themselves; the time wasted at a tea table was better spent at the spinning wheel. An hourglass gave a good enough measure of time in an old-fashioned world.

The distance between the Duchess of Devonshire and the English tradesman was vast; yet both were caught up in a new social world of fashion and sociability that led to debt and despair. The distance between that English nobility and the colonial Anthony Afterwit was a chasm and it is tempting to think that those same behaviors had not yet become an accepted measure of respectability in Franklin's Philadelphia. Yet Franklin may have protested too much: one contemporary claimed that an all-purpose maid as well as tea, coffee, china, imported sweetmeats, and a "variety of other desirable, tho' expensive comforts of humane Life" were already "common in Families of but a moderate Size and Rank in the World" in New England.<sup>112</sup>

Each of these stories is but one strand of an even larger reshaping of notions of how people should live and what proper moral attitudes toward consumption should be. Each uses the language of disease and inevitable progression. But we must understand and evaluate that criticism. It was not just that particular household goods came into the homes of more and

---

<sup>112</sup>Quoted in Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness*, p. 413.

more of the middling ranks, it was that these things came with immense moral baggage. Those material objects had meanings to contemporaries that a modern perspective finds difficult to grasp. Franklin's writings gives further understanding of those cries about middle-class people living above their stations, a group that Franklin tagged "molatto gentlemen." Like Defoe, Franklin often described how tradesmen should organize their business and live their lives for the "way to wealth." Like Defoe, he continually shows the practical benefits of industry and frugality for the middling sort, especially in his Autobiography, Poor Richard's Almanack, and the pages of the Philadelphia Gazette. Since man only acts in his own self-interest, Franklin gives him motivation: "it is everyone's interest to be virtuous who wished to be happy even in this world."<sup>113</sup> Lest the definition of happiness be confused, it is, of course, manifested in a rising prosperity.

However, it was not for great wealth that men should aspire. Franklin warned that since "Content and Riches seldom meet together," a virtuous man should seek a comfortable middle ground, a "general happy mediocrity." Franklin's own vision of a perfect society was based on "husbandmen with small tracts of land" that "may by industry maintain themselves and families in mediocrity."<sup>114</sup> Franklin, of course, does not suggest mediocrity in a pejorative sense, but in that "happy middle ground" described by Defoe. Thus, affluence must be controlled: many characters that cross the pages of the Autobiography fail because of their own success. Good fortune led inevitably to extravagant spending, dressing like a gentleman, and luxurious living; all corrupting influences, which ultimately resulted in

---

<sup>113</sup>The Autobiography, p. 103. As early as 1729, Franklin was convinced of the utility of self-interest, writing, "Men will always be powerfully influenced in their Opinions and Actions by what appears to be their particular Interest." "A Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of Paper Money," Franklin: Writings, p. 123.

<sup>114</sup>Poor Richard's Almanack 1743, ibid, p.1229. "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," Passy, 1784, ibid, p. 975. "A New Englandman to the Printer of the London Chronicle: A Defense of the Americans." London Chronicle, May 12, 1759, ibid, p. 519.

downfall.<sup>115</sup> But herein, of course, lies the dilemma. If the cultivation of the virtues of industry and frugality produces affluence; it, in turn, increases the desires for an easier and more comfortable style of living. From the wish for ease and comfort sprang emulative spending; the common man's "petty vanity of tricking out himself and his family in the flimsy manufactures of Britain," the "Ambition...to become gentlefolks." Finally, from conspicuous consumption, the way was not far to corrupting luxury.<sup>116</sup> This progression from affluence to artificial wants to emulation and ultimately to luxury was clear. Once wealth was admitted, "the syren luxury, by some called her daughter, intrudes at her heels, and gradually contaminates the whole family from which she is said to be sprung."<sup>117</sup>

Again, we see the contagion—the disease—the inability to control spending once wealth was achieved. Yet what could be more natural than man's wish to prosper? Eighteenth-century writers struggled to understand each stage of this seemingly-inexorable progression. "For what purpose is all the toil and bustle of this world?" asked Adam Smith in 1757. "From whence, then, arises that emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men, and what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition?" It was "to be observed," he concluded "to be attended to, to be taken notice of...It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure which interests us."<sup>118</sup>

Franklin himself demonstrates this ambivalence and anxiety in his own life, warning ominously in the Autobiography, "Mark how luxury will enter families and make a progress,

---

<sup>115</sup>See for instance, the failure of his printer rival, David Harry, Autobiography, p. 79.

<sup>116</sup>Benjamin Franklin to Timothy Folger, London, September 29, 1769, Franklin: Writings, p. 847. "Blackamore, on Molatto Gentleman," Pennsylvania Gazette, August 30, 1733, ibid, p. 219.

<sup>117</sup>"Oration of William Moore Smith of Philadelphia College to Congress, May 23, 1775," Pinckney, Virginia Gazette, June 15, 1775.

<sup>118</sup> [Emphasis mine.] Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, pp. 70-71.

in spite of principle." His wife had purchased a china bowl and silver spoon without his knowledge which "she had no other excuse or apology to make but that she thought her husband deserved a silver spoon and china bowl as well as any of his neighbors." But Franklin does not condemn the action, but rather proudly notes that this was the first appearance of plate and china, "which in a course of years as our wealth increased, augmented gradually to several hundred pounds in value."<sup>119</sup> His condemnation of luxury was matched by a certain off-hand pride at his own ability to live as well—or better—than any of his neighbors.<sup>120</sup>

Fine chinaware carried a certain meaning to Franklin and his neighbors that one "should be taken notice of." To what end was affluence if it could not be observed and attended to? For just that reason, luxuries have traditionally stood as one demarcator of class structure, representing not only "rarity and vanity but also social success [and] fascination."<sup>121</sup> For those badges of success to have meaning, however, they must be socially recognized. Thus, Franklin's neighbors essentially created the desire of his wife to change their style of living, just as did Anthony Afterwit's.

---

<sup>119</sup>The Autobiography, p. 92.

<sup>120</sup>Franklin as "patron saint of industry and frugality" nevertheless certainly marched in the parade of conspicuous display. He kept household servants never mentioned in the Autobiography, as well as a black page for his son, and sent home from abroad numerous gifts of silver and fine clothing for his family, although he was angered by their requests for finery during wartime. He joked with his wife that he had at least twenty pair of "old Breeches." However, his ambivalent attitude as a consumer may be best summed up in a letter home to his wife in 1758, where he noted he was sending her four silver salt ladles of the "newest, but ugliest, fashion." Gladys Meyer, "The Urban Pattern of Success" in Benjamin Franklin and the American Character, ed. Charles L. Sanford, (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1955), p. 50. Franklin to Jane Mecom, London, July 17, 1771, Carl Van Doren, ed. The Letters of Benjamin Franklin and Jane Mecom (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 127. Franklin to Deborah Franklin, April 6, 1766, Franklin: Writings, p. 819. Edger deN. Mayhew and Minor Myers, Jr. A Documentary History of American Interiors from the Colonial Era to 1815 (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1980), p. 49.

<sup>121</sup>Braudel, Structures of Everyday Life, p. 184.

As Adam Smith explained in The Wealth of Nations, man, as a social animal, defines his "necessaries" by that of his neighbor; "whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without."<sup>122</sup> He added that "when we say that a man is worth fifty or a hundred pounds a-year...we mean commonly to ascertain what is or ought to be his way of living, or the quantity and quality of the necessaries and conveniences of life in which he can with propriety indulge himself."<sup>123</sup> Bernard Mandeville, one of the earliest to point to the relationship between social rank and socially-defined standards of living, noted dryly that "some people call it but decency to be served in plate, and reckon a coach-and-six among the necessary comforts of life."<sup>124</sup>

Yet, John Adams was one of the few contemporaries that articulated both the cause and effect of these social measures. He explained carefully that when a man sees another that he considers his equal with a "better coat or hat, a better house or horse, than himself, and sees his neighbors are struck with it, talk of it, and respect him for it...he cannot bear it; he must and will be upon a level with him." It was not the hat that caused the desire. It was the attention which that hat drew, and the respect it endowed upon its wearer. Adams saw this tendency in the microcosm in "every neighborhood, in every family; among artisans, husbandmen, [and] laborers." But such behavior has a ratchet effect, for "those who claim or aspire to the highest ranks of life, will eternally go to a certain degree above those below."

---

<sup>122</sup>Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations, ed. Edwin Cannan, (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 821. The view that man's desires are relative to his social universe is neatly summed by Karl Marx, who wrote, "Our needs and enjoyments spring from society; we measure them, therefore, by society, and not by the objects of their satisfaction." David A. Riesman, Adam Smith's Sociological Economics (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p. 245.

<sup>123</sup>Wealth of Nations, p. 274.

<sup>124</sup>Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits, ed. Douglas Garman, (1721; reprint ed.; London: Wishart and Company, 1934), pp. 191-192.

Thus, dress, furniture, and furnishings all rise in the higher ranks in exact proportion to what it does in the lowest rungs of the social ladder.<sup>125</sup>

The idea that the rich could not be moral, that materialism was a natural result of wealth, that decline was somehow the result of success, was not new. Indeed, the jeremiads of the Puritans were built around these very themes of materialism and decay. There were, however, new elements in these cries. One problem for these mid eighteenth-century writers was not only that the rich indulged in luxury—time-honored symbols of wealth and rank—but that greater prosperity and different kinds of spending brought that luxury into the realm of the middling class. There it seems, agreement diverges. Either the middling sorts did not deserve these luxuries (as such things were the natural province of the rich) or they would lead to their moral decay (as surely as it had the rich).

A second problem was that the very notion of the way men should live was changing. With increasing secularization, the way one lived was no longer God-ordained; with the failure of sumptuary laws, it was no longer state-ordained. The way a man furnished his house or dressed his wife was socially-ordained. A greater intellectual movement toward individuality meant that some broke with traditional measures of "how one should live" and chose new material objects to express their prosperity. Others were not so much keeping up the elite, as their peers.

But a final new strand marked the eighteenth century discussion of materialism. There seems an increasing sense among eighteenth-century writers that wealth was no longer its own reward. To be admired, to be watched, the crowd that waited—all these were the true benefits of wealth. Houses, gardens, furnishings, and the latest dress were not just admired because they were tasteful or fashionable, but because they brought attention and respect. As Adam Smith explained, if a man began life striving to supply necessities and

---

<sup>125</sup>Adams, The Works of John Adams, vol. 6, pp. 94.

conveniences, he soon realized that credit and rank was tied to possessing those advantages.<sup>126</sup> The poor man was ashamed, not so much of his poverty, as the fact that he is overlooked; he "goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of the crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel."<sup>127</sup> Even in the mid seventeenth century, Henry Peacham described a new contempt for poverty, for "now, money is the World's God, and the Card, which the Devil turns up trump ... for it gives Birth, Beauty, Honor, and Credit."<sup>128</sup>

Peacham saw how it was the "contempt of the world" that was the misery of poverty, and he describes how that contempt was seen in social intercourse:

What greater grief can there be to an ingenious and free spirit, sitting at a superior's table (and thought to be necessitous and only to come for a dinner) than to be placed the lowest! to be carved unto of the worst and first cut...And if the Lady...presents unto him, the meat from her trencher, then it is burnt to the body..if he be carved unto out of a pasty of venison, it was some part that was bruised in the carriage, and begin to stink! yet for all this, he must be obsequious! endure any jeer! whisper for his drink! and rise, at the coming in of the basin and ewer...Any generous and true noble spirit had rather...dine with my Lord Mayors' hounds.<sup>129</sup>

Again, it is hard for modern observers to grasp how rank and place were both officially prescribed and less formally constructed. Harvard students were listed, not alphabetically, but by honor of family.<sup>130</sup> Who sits where in church, who proceeds first through the doorway, who talks and who listens, all were social customs accorded to those of rank. Adam Smith scorned the custom of place as "the great object which divides the wives

---

<sup>126</sup>Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, pp. 310-311.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>128</sup>Henry Peacham, The Worth of a Penny: or A Caution to Keep Money (London: 1641) reprinted in Social England Illustrated: A Collection of XVIIth Century Tracts (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc. 1964), p. 382.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid, p. 383.

<sup>130</sup>Hemphill, "Manners for Americans," p. 125.

of aldermen" and "the end of half the labours of human life." But place and rank mattered because of the mighty importance in standing "in that situation which sets them most in the view of general sympathy and attention."<sup>131</sup> Even landscapes were transformed as vista and view increasingly mattered to those at the top—not just to see, but be seen. Thus, a satire on "Modern Taste" in 1787 included the advice to tear down the old family hall, and rebuild it in red brick, with long wings "as nothing looks grander or is seen further." One must then chop down all trees, grub all the hedges, tear down the fences and make "numerous ha-has and sunk fences"—all to keep open the view and allow more to see you.<sup>132</sup>

Those at the top were at center stage, and as the eyes of English and colonial men and women increasingly turned to London, the performance there became the standard for all to judge. Those cries about social emulation seem to come at the same time that those at the top grew increasingly self-conscious of an audience. It may be little surprise that if one's appearance was all that mattered, appearance could become so important; maintaining the impression of living up to standards by which one is judged is more important than the actuality. Thus, just perhaps we are seeing a new emphasis on what Erving Goffman calls "impression management."<sup>133</sup> Consumerism, lifestyle, manners—all colluded to present a social portrait of status that was not always deserved. The progression was clear. "For when you have bought one fine Thing, you must buy ten more, that your Appearance may be all of a piece," scolded Franklin's Poor Richard.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup>Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, p. 80.

<sup>132</sup>Quoted in Michael Brander, The Georgian Gentleman (Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England: Saxon House, 1973), p. 50.

<sup>133</sup>Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor-Doubleday, 1959).

<sup>134</sup>Franklin: Writings, pp.1299-1300.



The rising consumerism in the middle ranks was the subject of immense debate. Contemporaries blamed it on aping the rich or social emulation, a conclusion that Neil McKendrick uses to set the whole fashion wheel in motion. If so, such behavior gives strong testimony to basic reformulations of the social fabric, for it is only in those situations "where status can be challenged, where social classes become strong enough to challenge the traditional pattern of society, that social emulation can occur."<sup>135</sup> That, in some degree, it did occur in eighteenth-century Anglo-America is strong evidence of the rise of the middle class.

But the story is far more complex. McKendrick's notion that social emulation——particularly in the dress of urban servants——can explain a new consumerism simply will not wash. First, as visible sign of their employer's wealth, servants often wore clothing bought for them by their employers, and their visibility in the household was one index of how well-dressed they might be. Second, Beverly Lemire has demonstrated a thriving second-hand market in clothing, which may reflect a far greater interest in lower cost than in last year's fashion.<sup>136</sup> Third, as suggested by Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, the sobriety in dress so emphasized by the middling class was actually adopted upward as extravagant court dress was increasingly confined merely to gala affairs. So, too, the workingman's frock-coat, loose-fitting for greater comfort, by the middle of the eighteenth century had gradually become an accepted alternative to the stiff and constricted coat of gentlemen. That this fashion came from below did not go unnoticed. The symbolic political

---

<sup>135</sup>Quinton Bell, On Human Finery (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p. 113.

<sup>136</sup>McKendrick, et al, Birth of Consumer Society. Beverly Lemire, "Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes," Journal of British Studies 27, (January 1988): 1-24.

implications of what was considered a more democratic form of dress was evidenced by its choice by those sympathetic to the French Revolution.<sup>137</sup>

But, as argued here, the cries of contemporaries about social emulation and their utility to understand the new consumerism is also limited in other intellectual and cultural ways. Interwoven were changing notions of how one should live, how social position was measured by one's appearance, how wealth brought the eyes of the world upon you. But one more large strand remains. For it was the very nature of luxury itself that was being reformulated in the eighteenth century. John Sekora notes that in 1700 "the edifice of laws and attitudes surrounding the concept [of luxury] seems wholly intact. Yet by 1800 it is rubble," no less than a change from the classical world to the modern.<sup>138</sup> Changing consumerism was both cause and result of this fervid debate about the nature of luxury, the nature of man, and the role of the state. For the final precondition of the essential willingness to buy rested on moral approval.

#### Luxury and the New Consumerism

Eighteenth-century economic thought was a complex bundle of ideas about the proper functioning of the economy to produce the greatest wealth for the nation. The traditional measure of the well-being of the state was the balance of trade, the flow of money in and out of the nation. The best imports were raw materials, which could be manufactured to finished products, gaining additional wealth (through labor) by their transformation and exportation. "The Balance, the Balance of both [exports and imports] is the only thing that can

---

<sup>137</sup>Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, "Consumerism and the Industrial Revolution," Social History 15: 151-179. pp. 170-171.

<sup>138</sup>John Sekora, Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977), p. x. One of the first to tie the luxury debate to consumerism was Neil McKendrick in "The Cultural Response to A Consumer Society: Coming to Terms with the Idea of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century England." Paper presented at the Conference on Anglo-American Social History, Williamsburg, Virginia, September 5-7, 1985.

demonstrate our Profit or our Loss," explained Charles King in 1721. Lest anyone miss the message, he added "If we sell more Goods than we buy, the Balance must be coming to us in Money and that is so much Gain." But "if we buy more Goods than we sell, we must pay the Balance in Money, and that is so much Loss to the Nation."<sup>139</sup>

But traditional economic thought was not just based on the movement of goods (and the flow of money) from nation to nation. Implicit was the idea that the common people, inherently self-centered and shiftless, needed to be guided by wise measures to full employment.<sup>140</sup> It was concerned with the manipulation of men to perform their duties for the public good. Just as the proper social organism depended on the wide dispersal of virtue throughout the society, so the well-functioning economic policy directed and nurtured virtuous men. The same virtues that instilled a strong moral base—frugality and industry—promoted the public good. The "Opulency and Grandeur" of the nation depended on "the industry and Prudence of its Inhabitants." A laboring public that curbed spending on foreign goods increased the wealth of the nation, by maximizing her exports and minimizing her imports.<sup>141</sup> As explained by Thomas Mun in 1664, the alternative was "contrary to the law of God, and the use of other Nations" and led to a collapse in the moral fiber of the nation. Luxury spending—"the general leprosie of our piping, potting, feasting, fashions"—had made the English people, "effeminate in our bodies, weak in our

---

<sup>139</sup>Charles King, The British Merchant or Commerce Preserv'd (London, 1721; reprint ed.; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), vol. I, p. 38.

<sup>140</sup>For a lengthy discussion of the concepts of virtue within mercantilist ideas, see Thomas A. Horne, The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth-Century England (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

<sup>141</sup>J. E. Crowley, This Sheba, Self: The Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) pp. 89-90.

knowledge, poor in our treasure, declined in our valour, unfortunate in our enterprises, and condemned by our enemies."<sup>142</sup>

It was in the eighteenth century that these traditional ideas began to be challenged, and it was the self-interest implicit in exploding economic activity that fired the first salvo. The scope and nature of the trade had accelerated so rapidly that in 1727 Defoe claimed that a merchant would have to "serve a new Apprenticeship" to take up trade if he had retired for twenty years.<sup>143</sup> Was it not possible, thinkers in a changing commercial world asked, that individual desires could be raised that broke with traditional morality but still contributed to the public good? One of the first cracks in the armor of traditional mercantilist thinking was thus the tentative suggestion that luxury could be beneficial.

By the end of the seventeenth century, economic writers had begun to acknowledge that home manufacture of luxuries promoted growth in the economy by spreading the wealth from the rich to the poor. The purchases of the one created employment for the other. Consumption of domestically produced luxuries was a tonic to stimulate jobs; access to a higher standard of living encouraged industry among workmen.<sup>144</sup> But most of the luxuries purchased by the English at the turn of the century were foreign-made; and the most injurious trade remained "things of meer Luxury and Pleasure, which are entirely, or for the most part, consumed among us."<sup>145</sup> These writers conceded that luxury purchases of the rich had their benefits—if the objects were manufactured in England, and their use restricted to a few families. The problem with luxury consumerism was the inability to control its corrupting influence.

---

<sup>142</sup>"England's Treasure by Forraign Trade," cited in E. A. J. Johnson, Predecessors of Adam Smith: The Growth of British Mercantile Thought (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1965), p. 290.

<sup>143</sup>Defoe, Compleat English Tradesman, 2, pt. 2, p. 5.

<sup>144</sup>Johnson, Predecessors of Adam Smith, pp. 293-295.

<sup>145</sup>King, The British Merchant or Commerce Preserv'd, p. 4.

For the Custom, or Humour, of Luxury and Expence, cannot stop at certain Bounds: What begins in Native will proceed in Foreign Commodities; And though the Example, arise among idle persons, yet the Imitation will run into all Degrees; even of those Men by whose Industry the Nation subsists.<sup>146</sup>

It was the publication of Bernard Mandeville's saucy little satirical verse The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits, and its expanded and elaborated text over the next twenty years, that shattered whatever consensus there was about a properly functioning social organism. It was Mandeville that rejected the characteristic way of thinking about society in early eighteenth-century England—the categories of virtue and public-spiritness. He questioned the common precept that what is good for the economy of the individual or family was good for the nation. It was the suggestion that luxury, pride, and envy, behavior universally decried by society as immoral, was essentially beneficial for the society as a whole. Mandeville wrote of a buzzing hive of bees, where "Luxury Employ'd a million of the poor/ and odious pride a million more/Envy itself, and vanity/Were ministers of industry/Their darling folly, ficklenes/In diet, furniture and dress/That strange ridic'ous vice, was made/The very Wheel that turn'd the trade." But public cries of immorality broke the hive and economic collapse soon followed: "/But, Oh ye Gods! What consternation/How vast and sudden was th' alteration/In half an hour,the nation round/Meat fell a penny in the pound."<sup>147</sup>

Mandeville argued boldly that publicly-expressed behavioral values or morals did not match the reality of society.

Though everybody allows, that as to apparel and manner of living, we ought to behave ourselves suitable to our conditions, and follow the examples of the most sensible and prudent among our equals in rank and fortune; yet

---

<sup>146</sup>William Temple, "Observations among the United Provinces of the Netherlands" (1673); quoted in Crowley, This Sheba, Self, p. 43.

<sup>147</sup>Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, pp. 34-35.

how few...have this discretion to boast of? We all look above ourselves, and as fast as we can, strive to imitate those, that some way or other are superior to us.<sup>148</sup>

Man was motivated by self-interest, a continual straining to rise in the social order. Thus, pride (social competition) was a "natural faculty," and for man to act differently would be "inconsistent with their nature. Mandeville's acknowledgement of the inherent infallibility of man was not new, but he twisted the view from opprobrium to praise. Instead of the mercantilist notion that it was the state's inherent duty to nurture virtuous men by restraining private vice, Mandeville suggested that in reality the nation benefitted by its encouragement. There was no "other quality so beneficial to society, and so necessary to render it wealthy and flourishing" as private vice. Hence the subtitle of this fable, "Private Vice, Public Benefit."<sup>149</sup>

It was the removal of the stigma of immorality from luxury that was so obnoxious to the eighteenth-century mind, and several thousand howls of protest are reported to have swelled in the press. Contemporaries spoke of 500 pamphlets on the subject in the 1760s alone. One scholar's "short list" of the major figures of the luxury debate in the next half century included "Addison, Steele, Defoe, Pope, Swift, Bolingbroke, Fielding, Chesterfield, Hume, Johnson, Pitt father and son, Walpole father and son, Goldsmith, Gibbons, Ferguson, Steurt, Wesley, and Adam Smith."<sup>150</sup> Mandeville's critics had to find a way to allow for the liberal spending of the wealthy (an economic necessity), but leave the framework for moral rules. The most common solution to the dilemma was to allow "beneficial luxury," but to specifically attack spending above one's means. This allowed the wealthy to continue

---

<sup>148</sup>Ibid, pp. 104-105.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid, pp. 101-109.

<sup>150</sup>Sekora, Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, p. 66, 129, 2.

turning the wheels of the domestic economy, but brought back spending within the bounds of the moral concepts of frugality for the mass of society.<sup>151</sup>

It was David Hume's refutation of Mandeville that carried the discussion of luxury to its highest development before Adam Smith. In his Political Discourses in 1752, Hume emerged as the major voice that synthesized the earlier debates and reconciled medieval and modern views. By creating the distinction between "innocent" and "vicious" luxuries, he solved part of the crucial dilemma of eighteenth-century thinkers about luxury spending. Innocent luxuries were the "ornament and pleasure of life," which generated commerce and the arts. Vicious luxuries, on the other hand, were totally selfish and immoral ones. If the medieval view was that high wages led to idleness and thus invariably to luxury and excess, Hume pointed out that it was the absence of the commerce and arts which produced indolence and sloth. The pursuit of luxuries was the natural antithesis to a far greater immorality.<sup>152</sup>

Hence, the very notions of luxury underwent a thorough transformation. First can be seen the essential Christian concept that all luxuries are immoral, then the thoroughly pragmatic notion that only foreign luxuries are so. When the benefits of luxury consumption to the economy were understood, luxury consumption among the rich became acceptable. Finally, the moral opprobrium against luxury is, in itself, removed.

Changing notions of luxury led to a transformation in the very definition of luxury in the eighteenth century. Alongside the old sense of something choice and costly grew a new meaning, that which merely was inessential, that added to the enjoyment of life, something merely distinctive from the very necessities of living. Increasing consumerism meant that the very way of describing things had to change. Thus, notions of luxury and lifestyle collided

---

<sup>151</sup>Horne, Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville, pp. 83-84.

<sup>152</sup>Johnson, Predecessors of Adam Smith: The Growth of British Mercantile Thought, pp. 295-297.

with changing ideas of how men and women measured and valued themselves in the eighteenth century.

How did this great economic transformation occur in the eighteenth century? Clearly, an immense number of economic and social changes lay the groundwork. But few historians have formulated the process to demonstrate one important fact: things came first. Material objects and dress started the fashion wheel in motion and kept it spinning. They filled the holds of ships across the Atlantic, they balanced the colonial trade, they made possible the whole staple economy of the southern colonies. They linked London and province and colony into a world of shared life experiences, a consumption community of taste. It was the fashionable things that created the excitement, boosted the economies, and made a class of merchants the richest and largest in the world.

While historians have struggled to understand how England achieved her economic greatness, one contemporary asked and answered the very same question in terms that place material objects squarely in the center of economic, social, and moral life. Adam Smith discussed how such wealth was obtained, but also how society could be constructed in both economic and moral terms in his lectures at the University of Glasgow, part of which were published as The Theory of Moral Sentiments, and later The Wealth of Nations.<sup>153</sup>

To Smith, the strongest human motive is to win the affection of society. The omnipresent spectator is a continuous judge of human behavior and merit. This essential vanity of mankind—to be admired, to be respected—leads man to act and behave in ways most likely to gain that approval. The middling and lower sorts did not defer to the rich

---

<sup>153</sup>The outlines of the following argument are drawn from N. Rosenberg, "Adam Smith, Consumer Tastes, and Economic Growth," in Adam Smith: Critical Assessments, ed. John Cunningham Wood, (London: Croom Helm, 1983), vol. 3, p. 222-233. Also useful is Samuel Hollander, "Adam Smith's Approach to Economic Development," in The Varied Pattern: Studies in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Peter Hughes and David Williams (Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), pp. 269-296.



because they expected personal gain, but because they admired their situation, the attention that riches drew.

It was the introduction of luxury goods from abroad that sparked the whole economic transformation of England in the eighteenth century. Up until that time, the essential vanity of the rich to gain approval was fulfilled through traditional hospitality, the keeping of retinues, and other service expenditures. In this more primitive stage of society, there were merely not enough opportunities for expenditures on personal consumption.

But in a more advanced state of the arts and manufactures, new luxury goods enabled the elite to transfer that vanity from hospitality to consumption. It was the introduction of a number of new foreign luxury choices—china, tea, silk, and the like—that enabled a whole new range of methods or forms of display. Consumption of goods rather than services were preferable, because they allow for property ownership and control; "my" diamond was more powerful than my servant, for instance. These new desires led the elite to push for new efficiency in wealth creation which led to agricultural improvement and growth in the economy. This growth meant that more and more were able to afford consumer goods, and hence acquire the things that were associated with those they admired.

But why would those new luxuries be so appealing? Again, Smith's answer lay in another of the most basic elements of man's nature, the search for fascination and novelty. Man cannot live without wonder, surprise, and admiration. The need for wonder was fulfilled in the "new and singular", surprise with the unexpected, and admiration with beauty. Thus man was continually striving for new sensations to enjoy, new products to admire. The fashion wheel is thus kept going by man's continual wish.

Adam Smith saw that the new consumerism was far more than just parroting one's betters. The striving for new sensations of enjoyment, the fascination with the novel and exotic all were released in the new world of consumer goods. The flow of new

things—commodities and material goods—reached a torrent in the eighteenth century. Tea, china, silk, calico, watches, tobacco, and sugar all moved easily into the lives of more and more people open to innovation and newness. Not all of the popular consumer goods of the eighteenth century were new—some were merely cheaper or improved versions of the old—but many were new to the middling ranks. Thus, the system of symbols by which men and women ordered their world was newly chaotic and unstructured.

The eighteenth century was a remarkable new world of choices—one could see a play, drink some tea, buy a chicken or a new ribbon. These choices could be multiplied, however, for not only was there the new consumer choices and lifestyles, but the old to decide upon. One strategy, as Henry Glassie found, is to subsume the new into the old.<sup>154</sup> Investing objects with symbolism also makes choice easier; for instance, status symbols need only be appropriated—someone else had done the choosing and symbolic investment.

The fascination with fashion was not entirely new to the eighteenth century, but it changed with greater frequency, was shared by more, even as it received greater ridicule. But fashion was not just the height of Georgiana Spencer's hair. As fashion is but a sub-set of all style, it eases the process of choice in a changing world. It invests an "in-the-know" correctness to one option out of a vast range, a controlling of chaos. Tradition serves the same function in a stable society by pointing to the way "things have always been done." Modernity or conservatism was played out every day in a thousand choices.

But fashion is not chaotic; changing tastes present something new, but must also take into account what is old. Since custom looks for an interconnection of all parts to be right, innovation must fit within those standards to be accepted.<sup>155</sup> Thus fashion provides an

---

<sup>154</sup>See, for instance, Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts (Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1975)., p. 112.

<sup>155</sup>Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, pp. 281-282.

historical continuity even as it is essentially modern. It is no less than "an orderly march from the immediate past to the proximate future."<sup>156</sup>

So we come back to the essential meanings of those things in everyday life. The rational person could indeed evaluate and buy them for their utility in social display. Having the proper accoutrements for tea-drinking did matter. But he or she also sought pleasure in material things. Many new objects were indeed sensually fulfilling. The eighteenth century design world emphasized surface and ornament. Technological breakthroughs allowed more to enjoy what were once luxuries of the elite in mass-produced items. The solving of problems with clay and glaze by Josiah Wedgwood and the Staffordshire pottery industry coincided fortunately with the perfection of the ability to transfer-print designs by Jonas Sadler. One result was that in many middle-class households, transfer-printed scenes on one's plates were the first and perhaps only decoration. In the same way, the discovery of the addition of cobalt blue to glazes enabled the potters to develop inexpensive copies of porcelain. With the addition of transfer-print chinoiserie designs, the results could hardly be discerned from less expensive hand-painted chinese porcelain, once a suitable gift for royalty itself.

The example of chinese porcelain also demonstrates how many objects carried not only a sense of luxury, but a sense of the exotic. Japanned furniture, chinese porcelain, tea and silks carried a wonderfully foreign world into eighteenth-century households that lived in an age of discovery and conquest. Their interest is clearly seen in the popularity of travel tales and maps, and we might remember Charles Lamb stepping into the Orient through the Mandarin princess of his teacup. Indeed, Robert Southey would write in 1807 that "the plates and tea-saucers have made us better acquainted with the Chinese than we are any other

---

<sup>156</sup>Herbert Blumer, "Fashion," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David Sills, (New York: MacMillan Co. and Free Press, 1968), vol. 5, pp. 341-344.

people."<sup>157</sup> Perhaps some of these objects also carried a sense of pride in the power of the English nation, especially after the consolidation of an empire where the sun never set in 1763. Finally, we can consider the pleasurable act of consumption. The two-week trip to London to browse the glittering shop windows, the visit to the local store to see the latest arrived fashions, the excitement of watching the peddler open his pack, the carnival of the local fair; all these added to the excitement of shopping and the attraction of those new things.

### Conclusion

The newest studies of consumerism in the eighteenth century have produced some puzzling conclusions. While the variety and number of household goods increased markedly in the eighteenth century, the percentage of income made up by those consumer goods did not. Part of an explanation, no doubt, lies in declining prices. But equally important was the fact that they were making new choices, but not necessarily expensive nor constant ones. A new creamware teapot cost but a few shillings and could last many years, but by its very name—Queen's ware—one is sharing style with royalty. The traditional method of demonstrating one's social status through high-cost items is thus inverted. The mere fashionability—not cost—was the salient factor in replacing heavy old-fashioned pewter.<sup>158</sup>

What is clear is that ordinary people in Anglo-America were open to and quickly embraced change—change in the system of things and meanings that were knitted together into an orderly system. The system was so orderly that rank could be judged by the fabric

---

<sup>157</sup>Robert Southey, Letters from England, ed. Jack Simmons, (London 1807; repr. ed. London: Cresset Press, 1961), pp. 191-192.

<sup>158</sup>Martin, "The Role of Pewter as Missing Artifact," and "'Fashionable Sugar Dishes, Latest Fashion Ware': The Creamware Revolution in Colonial Virginia," in Paul Shackel and Barbara Little, The Historic Chesapeake: Archaeological Contributions, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian University Press, 1993).

and cut of a shirt, and three men could gather, judge quality and value, and assign astonishingly similar prices to an increasing variety of possessions of a deceased neighbor.

At the end of the last chapter, several situations and contexts were identified as times when material objects can take on heightened meanings. Our view of eighteenth-century Anglo-American fits several of those broad themes. First, it was a time of intense social unrest, not measured so much in protest or revolution—at least not in England—but in basic changes in how men and women saw the nature of economic, social and cultural life. Second, it was a time of heightened class flux, as the middling ranks grew in number and relative importance. Third, it was a time when urbanization pulled—and economic dislocation pushed—many from their communities, setting them free of inherited family status and able to create their own social position. What may be positive in terms of social mobility, however, may have left many confused and feeling out of control in the wider world they now lived in. Finally, it was a time when the traditional system of symbols was in chaos; so many new things were available that came detached or at least dislocated from traditional meaning. That confusion was one of the major causes of the outcry against luxury in the eighteenth century. But one other major change remained. More people than ever before had the ability to see and touch and experience these objects. For it was the rise of the retail trade that placed a veritable emporium in their towns or villages, that gave people continual fresh information about material objects, and put a man behind the counter to convince them to buy. It is the new availability.

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE RISE OF THE RETAIL TRADE  
IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

"All Commerce ends in the Consumption and with the Consumer," wrote Daniel Defoe in 1727. Through the various retailers, "the general Commerce of this Kingdom is carried on, the home made Manufactures disper'd and circulated, and the foreign Importations handed about to the last consumer."<sup>1</sup> Defoe was well aware of the importance of that final step of the chain between producer and consumer. But while historians have scrutinized finance, manufacturing, and the import/export ledger, most have expressed little interest in retail exchange or its implications in economic or social terms.

Two recent books have grown out of the heightened interest in consumerism in the early modern period. Hoh-cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui have convincingly demonstrated that the rise of the modern retail trade actually preceded the industrialism that traditionally have been used to explain its growth. They found a remarkable rise in retail shops, as the ratio of population to shops dropped dramatically in the eighteenth century. For instance, they found that there was one shop to every forty-two English residents in 1759, while two centuries later that number had fallen to one for every ninety-two.<sup>2</sup> Carole Shammas also devotes a large portion of her book on early modern consumption to the distribution of goods through the retail trade. While her

---

<sup>1</sup>Daniel Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman (London 1727; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 75, 79.

<sup>2</sup>Hoh-cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England (Kingston, Canada: McGill University Press, 1989), p. 45, 297.

numbers are slightly different, her findings support the idea that the number of retail outlets was extraordinarily high in eighteenth-century England and the colonies.

Two of Shammass' other findings are also of importance here. First, she points to the addition of a large group of new consumers making very small purchases in the eighteenth century. Earlier stores were far more likely to sell to elites in large quantity, as law and custom sought to prevent what she calls sovereign consumption. She points out that most common people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries received clothing and household goods through paternal or hierarchical systems that provided goods to family through wills or to servants through contract and obligation. When contractual systems of employment began to break down, more consumers had to acquire their own food and clothing. A second major finding was that the growth of village shops was spurred by a marked change in the kinds of goods for sale. Small stores stocked groceries (such as tobacco, tea, and sugar) and necessary household staples (candles, soap, salt, starch, butter, cheese, and other foodstuff). These items required more regular purchase than most household goods and clothing. Through a combination of more expensive but less frequently purchased items like textiles and rapidly replaced groceries and other staples, these storekeepers were able to fill a new niche for English consumers.<sup>3</sup>

How does the rise of the retail trade fit into our picture of consumerism? First, it is necessary to look at the multiple ways in which consumer goods were distributed in the eighteenth century, such as public markets, fairs, peddlars, all leading to the rise of fixed place retail shops. Second, we will look at particular merchants and their stocks, emphasizing the kinds of goods available, the role of the merchant in distributing both goods and information from cultural core to province, and the nature of purchase patterns. Once such patterns have been delineated in England, we can turn to the Chesapeake to analyze how such patterns may have been changed due to differing economic relations between the tobacco colonies and England.

---

<sup>3</sup>Shammass, The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America, pp. 225-265.

A word about the sources for such a study may be pertinent. Account books and letters of English merchants are rare, so it is only possible to sketch larger trends through snatches of detail from a handful of ledgers. Such documents are plentiful for the Chesapeake, however, and they enable a detailed picture of how goods were distributed to the far fringes of the English empire. The new availability is the story.

### The Rise of the English Retail Trade

The beginnings of a retailing system that we might recognize as clearly modern can be traced to the eighteenth century. While the process was evolutionary, varying in scope and speed in different regions and in the colonies, the result was a transformation from medieval-styled direct commodity exchange to an intricate and complex system of retailing. This system formed a chain of home demand within Britain and reached across oceans to the colonies, tying them all together in a new commercial world. Elements of the old and the new marketing styles coexisted and complemented one another, but the days of controlled selling for the public good or "just price" were increasingly being abandoned for new capitalist ideals.

The ancient system of market exchange, the direct hands-on relationship between producer and consumer came under great pressures in the eighteenth century. Heightened demand for distribution of foods and manufactured goods was one result of a growing, more urban English population increasingly carrying out specialized occupational functions. Coupled with a rising population was a growth in real wages up to mid century, an emerging urban middle class, and a probable rise in the standard of living for part of the population. Once rising income raised the capacity to buy and a new consumer attitude created a willingness, all that remained was adequate facilities from which to purchase. Thus, entrepreneurial opportunity began to expand in London quite early in the eighteenth century, and within those niches scurried a new



host of middle men, inserting themselves between producer and consumer.<sup>4</sup> With the increasing number of towns and cities and more complex demands to supply that population, London would soon no longer be unique.

Consumer goods moved throughout the English population in a myriad of ways, including fairs, public markets, peddling, and shops. One of the simplest and most ancient forms of exchange of goods and commodities was the controlled public market. There were perhaps eight-hundred towns with public markets in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and Wales of which almost half were specialized markets emerging for a specific commodity.<sup>5</sup> By the eighteenth century, economic refinement and complexity streamlined that number to about seven hundred, most no longer viable in more than a local trade. Corn and other bulky commodities were distributed through private sales outside the market, sometimes leaving a certain market altogether for a more accessible city. While many towns survived the shake-out of smaller markets, their function became primarily one of the retail provision of perishables.<sup>6</sup> Also of importance was the continued role of these towns in the retail provision of household goods and clothing, despite the greater number of fixed shops. As late as 1851, thirteen different categories of household goods were sold at the Leicester market, making up twelve percent of the sellers, and another nine percent were purveyors of clothing and footwear.<sup>7</sup>

Fairs were another source of goods that declined and changed in the course of the eighteenth century. The rise of professional marketing agents such as wholesale riders undermined the fair as a source of goods for consumers and country shopkeepers. The trade at the St.

---

<sup>4</sup>David Alexander, Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution (London: University of London, the Athlone Press, 1970) p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Fernand Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism: 15th - 18th Century: The Wheels of Commerce. Volume 2. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>P. J. Corfield, The Impact of English Towns: 1700-1800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 19-20.

<sup>7</sup>Alexander, Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution, pp. 42-43.

Giles Fair in Winchester dropped to a third of its late eighteenth-century value in only a few generations.<sup>8</sup> Yet, vestiges of these fairs remained as social events and markets of small consumer goods. Some may also have continued on in use in the wholesale trade, such as the fair at Bristol where woolen manufacturers gathered.<sup>9</sup>

Those riders that led to the demise of the fairs were just a later generation of an age-old class of traders, the itinerant tradesmen. Their importance has often been underestimated, but Margaret Spufford has demonstrated that there was by the end of the seventeenth century a well-ordered network of peddlers, hawkers, or petty chapmen. By 1700 all these itinerant traders were carrying £100,000 worth of goods around the country at any one time, totalling a million yards of cloth.<sup>10</sup>

Their numbers and importance as distributors continued while several distinct classes of traders emerged in the eighteenth century. Though some had no more than the pack on their backs, other petty chapmen were described as those who have "Shops or Chambers or Warehouses in the adjacent Market-Towns and sell their Goods in the Villages Round."<sup>11</sup> A new kind of salesman were Manchester men, who transported goods from factory to storekeeper and offered a tempting array on a shopkeeper's doorstep. The Scotch Draper specialized in the cheap fabrics pouring forth from the mills. He travelled house to house on a regular basis,

---

<sup>8</sup>Eric L. Jones, "The Fashion Manipulators: Consumer Tastes and British Industries, 1660-1800" in Business Enterprise and Economic Change: Essays in Honor of Harold F. Williamson. Edited by Louis P. Cain and Paul J. Uselding (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1973), p. 215.

<sup>9</sup>Joshua Johnson to the firm, London, September 17, 1771. Transcribed in Jacob L. Price, Joshua Johnson's Letterbook: Letters from a London Merchant to his Partners in Maryland (London: London Record Society, 1979), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup>Margaret Spufford, The Great Reclotting of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century, (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), p. 145.

<sup>11</sup>Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 78.

selling on credit, particularly to the new class of the industrial poor.<sup>12</sup> Complaints of country residents being "grossly defrauded and imposed upon" by cheating or poor quality goods did not reduce the importance of travelling distributors as movers of commodities.<sup>13</sup> When the government suggested that peddling be abolished, manufacturers howled in outrage, for they recognized their function as a vital and inexpensive distributing mechanism. The manufacturers were not alone in their support of the licensed peddling trade. A petition from merchants in Reading and London in 1772 specified that "Great Numbers of Industrious people . . . beginning with a small stock of Goods from Credit with wholesale dealers in different parts of the Kingdom have become very useful members of Society" by travelling to the "Vilages and Seperate Houses in the Country." The petition claimed that these peddlars served both ends of the social spectrum by "supplying Gentleman's Familys who live remote from market Towns," as well as "Farmers and their Servants and Labourers in the Like Situations" who could not spare time away from their labours to go to Market Towns with the "commodities necessary for their convenience and subsistence." Finally, a number of wholesale traders in the country would be ruined by the abolishment of peddlars.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of such distribution aside, it was the introduction of fixed shops that most transformed the way that the English acquired consumer goods in the eighteenth century. The first shopkeepers were producer/retailers such as artisans, but by the late seventeenth century a shopkeeper less frequently made his own wares. Gregory King estimated in 1688 that there were 50,000 merchants and shopkeepers in England, which—with their households—would

---

<sup>12</sup>Dorothy Davis, Fairs, Shops, and Supermarkets: A History of English Shopping, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), pp. 243-244.

<sup>13</sup>K. Tweedale Meaby, Nottinghamshire: Extracts from the County Records in the Eighteenth Century (Nottingham: Thomas Forman and Sons, 1947), p. 157.

<sup>14</sup>"Petition to the Right Honorable the Lords Commissioners of his Majesty's Treasuries from the town of Reading," Public Record Office: T1 493/156, Kew.

constitute one-fourth of the urban population.<sup>15</sup> Most of these were men and women who led precarious economic existences with low-capital businesses and mixed-stock, slow-moving inventories, but there were some beginnings in the specialized retail shop by 1698 "where shops are good and are of distinct trades, not selling many things in one shop".<sup>16</sup>

In 1727, Defoe estimated the number of "Tradesmen" with their "Servants, Prentices and Journeymen" at two million for England and Wales—perhaps as much as a third of the nation's population.<sup>17</sup> A contemporary claimed that nearly a quarter of the houses in London in 1732 were shops or taverns in the food and drink trade alone, and modern scholars can only suggest a total of "scores of thousands" of London shops. Many of these were small and inconsequential, serving local neighborhoods, but large concerns had emerged to cater not only to more wealthy residents and visitors but to the small country shopkeepers coming in to town, purchasing at retail.<sup>18</sup>

What was perhaps most obvious to the London visitor was the changing surface appearances of the commercial districts, "the gay Signs, well disposed Streets, magnificent publick Structures and Wealthy Shops, adorn'd with contented Faces."<sup>19</sup> Those "contented faces" would soon increasingly be wearing sash windows extending out beyond the plane of the facade, evolving from the hinged window board of the old front-room shop. A new architectural form of up-scale shop was more spacious, with bow windows to display goods, and a separate

---

<sup>15</sup>Corfield, The Impact of English Towns, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup>T. S. Willan, The Inland Trade: Studies in English Internal Trade in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), pp. 80-99.

<sup>17</sup>Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup>Davis, Fairs, Shops, and Supermarkets: A History of English Shopping, p. 189.

<sup>19</sup>Letter, August 11, 1712. The Spectator, edit. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. 4, p. 101.

entrance leading to domestic quarters for servants upstairs.<sup>20</sup> By the reign of George III, gas lights and larger glass windows created a magical glitter of light and luxury goods in the fashionable shopping districts that dazzled foreign commentators, the effect being that "there is no lack of onlookers standing stock-still in the middle of the street here and there to admire some ingenious novelty."<sup>21</sup> With their new looks, came a new style of selling—specialized shops dealing in just a few items with some, albeit a few, selling for cash at fixed prices. A commercial guide of 1817 reported 163 shops on Oxford Street alone catering solely to the "whim-whams and fribble-frabble of fashion."<sup>22</sup> Thus, three new features had emerged in the retail trade in the eighteenth century: 1) more shopkeepers sold at cash with fixed prices, 2) more kinds of goods were sold, with some shops becoming highly specialized, and 3) a new architectural form had emerged with a heightened emphasis on display.

The china, glass, and earthenware shop of the London firm Bromley and Wand illustrates the new concern for show among specialized merchants. Their inventory in 1815 included as fixtures a number of dressers, sideboards, drawers, chests, and dozens of shelves, with 220 small brass hooks fixed to them. But the new emphasis on the proper display of goods and the fitting

---

<sup>20</sup>H. Kalman, "The Architecture of Mercantilism: Commercial Buildings by George Dance the Younger" in The Triumph of Culture: Eighteenth Century Perspectives, eds. Paul Fritz and David Williams, (Toronto: A. M. Hakkert Ltd., 1972), pp. 71-72. See also Dan Cruickshank, A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain and Ireland (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: National Trust, 1985), pp. 128-131.

<sup>21</sup>Carl Phillip Moritz. Journeys of A German in England: A Walking Tour of England in 1782 trans. and edit. by Reginald Nettel (London: Eland Books, 1983), p. 190. The largest bow windows of mid-century had already been reduced, however, by the London Building Act of 1774, which ruled that windows could only project ten inches into the street. A new neo-classical taste also favored more restrained architectural elaboration and flattened windows of new larger panes of glass were often divided by columns. The perfection—and subsequent price drop—of the manufacture of plate glass for windows solved the problem of maximum display of wares to the passers-by, becoming the rage between 1825 to 1830. Cruickshank, A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain and Ireland, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup>Alison Adburgham, Shops and Shopping 1800-1914: Where, and in What Manner, the Well-Dressed English-Woman Bought her Clothes (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1964), p. 14.

out of the shop also dictated elaborate display items like the "5 tier Shew Stage on turn'd Columns and reeded edges," and a "Circular range of shelves and uprights." To attract passersby, a "painted deal Shewboard" was in the window as well as a "painted board and support." Outside the window was another circular shelf, and in the passage was found still another to "shew glass at the door." In the yard stood a "china truck" with iron wheels and "a deal Stage" for china stood at the back door. Four "Liverpool lamps with chains and glasses" would have augmented the light from the large window to sparkle on the thousands of pieces of glass, china, and earthenware in stock. Finally, all the profits were easily stowed in two "neat Mahogy Till draws with brass handles, brass locks and keys."<sup>23</sup> Of course, not all London shops were done up with "fine shelves, shutters, boxes, glass-doors, sashes and the like." Indeed as late as 1808 there were complaints of butter and cheese near the edge of the open shop window, and that store goods impeded progress of pedestrians. But the refacing and reorganizing of the shopping districts in London boosted sales and attracted visitors from across England.<sup>24</sup>

Just as changing attitudes toward consumer spending spread down through the London social hierarchy, so did they spread across the smaller English cities and towns where "the various changes of the Fashion" were "exactly copied."<sup>25</sup> The rising provincial newspapers carried details of London fashion, describing the latest tilt of the hat or point of the toe. Shopkeepers were forced to keep aware of these trends to please their customers, inviting the public to inspect the latest London fashion in their shops. Some travelled long distances to personally select goods in the latest style. For example, Elizabeth Towsay kept a small millinery and habdashery in Chester, but regularly made the six-day trip each way to London to be able

---

<sup>23</sup> Forsaith vs. Forsaith, Inventory and catalog of sales, 1815 and 1817. Public Record Office: C 110/163, Chancery Lane.

<sup>24</sup> Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 257 and Davis, Fairs, Shops, and Supermarkets: A History of English Shopping, p. 191.

<sup>25</sup> McKendrick, "Cultural Response to a Consumer Society," p. 38.

to judge and select the latest style. Through instructions to her forewoman making the trip one year can be seen the ultimate importance of that information: her employee was to visit many specific retailers, examining their goods to "look at modes of all sorts" and seeing what others were ordering, before making a single purchase.<sup>26</sup>

An order book of Walthal Fenton from 1773 to 1794 gives some detail of the functions of merchants in the provinces and their close ties to London fashion. Fenton combined the traditional trade of draper with the newer demand for tea in his shop at Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire. To carry out his business, he maintained a ready connection with London tradesmen and fulfilled many miscellaneous orders, mostly for fabrics, clothing, and household textiles like table cloths. He also provided other small services like sending "Miss Barbour's Silke Gown" in his "Box" to "be dyed Green or Maroon" or procuring oysters. Another customer asked Fenton to send for two pair of breeches to the pattern that came by the coach, and assured him that if he ordered six pair that they would "not lay long at hand." He ordered fabrics from George Othey in London. In one letter, Othey apologized profusely for not being able to fulfill a request for a particular color of buttons by the return of the coach, as they had to be specially made. Othey also took the liberty to send out a "few Pattrens, some are the very Best Clothes, and the other very Cheap." He also sent along thirty-five samples of fabrics with prices, ranging from worsted shag up to fourteen shillings per yard and good velverets from three shillings. Finally, Fenton also stayed well in touch with London in his tea business, receiving wholesale price lists for tea, coffee, and chocolate from merchants who attended the "Tea Sale" in London. This part of his business was not simple; eleven varieties of tea were available in as many as five grades of quality in 1781.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup>Adburgham, Shops and Shopping, 1800-1914, pp. 8-9.

<sup>27</sup>Order book of Walthal Fenton, clothier and draper of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire with patterns of cloth, 1773-1794. Additional manuscripts, 36,666, Manuscripts Division, British Library.

Fenton was somehow involved as a partner in business with Thomas Fletcher, whose stock book for 1773 listed over £900 of fabrics and clothing items. This immense inventory included more than eight hundred yards of expensive broadcloth and four hundred yards of Irish linen. But it is not the quantity but the immense variety that most impresses: purple cotton, black velverett, blue pettycoat frieze, "inkle lutestring" and norwich crepe. At the very top end of the scale was rich yellow ducape silk and blue striped lutestring each priced at more than five shillings a yard. More prosaic—and less expensive—checks could be had in blue, green, crimson, all green, and "black Russell." Lancashire sheeting cost but ten and one half pence a yard and "housewife's cloth" a bit more at seventeen pence. Fabrics, however, were but part of Fletcher's stock; his customers could choose from chip hats or figured black satin ones, shag hats or beaver ones. Stays, quilted petticoats, and silk knee garters were stocked, so were the Manchester gowns to cover them. Shrouds were there for sad times and "love ribbons" for happy ones. Finally, even in this vast warehouse of fabrics and trimmings could be found ten varieties of tea, as well as turkey coffee and chocolate, valued at over £40.<sup>28</sup>

The two different account books of Thomas Fletcher and Walthal Fenton allow a remarkably full picture of their business. Fletcher's stock book shows the immense variety of textiles, notions, and clothing accessories available even in the English provinces by the time of the American Revolution. To properly stock many of these fabrics and clothing items required an ongoing knowledge of fashion changes in London and sufficient capital to be able to stock a complete assortment of fabrics—from silks to checks. Stocking the latest fashion was also tricky business; a merchant had to be careful of seasonality and prepared to immediately get rid

---

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Fletcher Stock Book 1773, Fletcher and Fenton papers, D(W) 1788/V/112. Aqualate Papers. Staffordshire County Record Office, Stafford, England. Thomas Fletcher was a banker and mercer in Newcastle-under-Lyme who married into the well-to-do Fenton family. Chip hats are made of straw; shag is a type of worsted and beaver a woolen cloth. For information about eighteenth-century textile terminology, see Florence Montgomery, Textiles in America, 1650-1870 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983) and Natalie Rothstein, A Lady of Fashion: Barbara Johnson's Album of Styles and Fabrics (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987).



of unfashionable goods, just as he would if they were damaged or decayed. One published contemporary guide for merchants was so adamant on this point that if no buyer could be had, a merchant should be prepared to get rid of the whole lot for barter goods or truck.<sup>29</sup>

If Fletcher's account book is a snapshot of stock, and implicitly the business of buying, Fenton's order book is a moving picture of the process of selling. It shows us, for instance, that a provincial merchant was part of a critical chain between consumer and London tradesman, and that a regularized travel and information flow was already in place by the end of the eighteenth century. The range of services he carried out also reminds us how these merchants truly stood in the middle of a symbiotic relationship between customers who needed services in the cultural core and London tradesmen who needed customers in the provinces. Fletcher provided a regularized system for that relationship. Finally, both of these books demonstrate how the sale of tea had become critical to the job of mercer or draper, nicely fitting the model suggested by the Muis and Shammis that the addition of new groceries such as tea was a significant factor in the growth of retail business in the eighteenth century.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, a retail hierarchy was beginning to fill out throughout England. In provincial towns could be found specialized luxury shops attuned to the London scene, such as booksellers, china dealers, and milliners. Birmingham alone had twelve principal dealers in earthenware in 1788.<sup>30</sup> The larger towns in each local urban hierarchy also had a greater number of shops—specialized and general—to serve local residents. For example, there was one shop in Chelmsford, the largest town in Essex, for every seventy

---

<sup>29</sup>Lex Mercatoria Rediviva; Or, the Merchant's Directory being a Complete Guide to All Men in Business, Sixth edition, Dublin. Printed for James Williams, 1773 by Wyndham Beawes, Esq. Institute for Historical Studies, University of London.

<sup>30</sup>The Birmingham Distant Trader...

residents in the 1770s, and one in Chester, the largest in Cheshire, for every forty-four dwellers in the 1780s.<sup>31</sup>

Smaller towns, and even villages, were increasingly well equipped to handle the day-to-day needs of their locale. Throughout the eighteenth century, most smaller villages had at least one general shop; about half of the places in Cheshire that had shopping facilities in the 1780s only had one outlet and almost a quarter more just two.<sup>32</sup> Even a quarter of the smallest villages in Essex, with populations under 150, had a general shop. As the population size of Essex villages rose so did the number of general shops, butchers, and bakers. The result was that the largest villages (800 to 1200 population) had an average of eight shops. However, the number of shops per capita was but a third of that of provincial towns; there was one shop for every 125 residents.<sup>33</sup> Each shop in these villages served many residents with a general stock, for in a "small place...the trader has to keep almost everything."<sup>34</sup> The village shop at Three Mile Cross in Reading was "like other village shops, multifarious as a bazaar, a repository for bread, shoes, tea, cheese, tape, ribans, and bacon."<sup>35</sup> Shopkeeper Abraham Dent in Kirkby Stephen, a small town in Westmoreland in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, sold everything from soap to silk, with the notable exception of salt, eggs, cheese, and butter, the latter dairy products no doubt available at the market.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Ian S. Mitchell, "The Development of Urban Retailing, 1700-1815" in The Transformation of English Provincial Towns ed. Peter Clark, (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 273. A. F. J. Brown, Essex at Work: 1700-1815, Essex Record Office Publications No. 49 (Chelmsford: Tindal Press, 1969) p. 63.

<sup>32</sup>Mitchell, "The Development of Urban Retailing," p. 270.

<sup>33</sup>Brown, Essex at Work, pp. 62-65.

<sup>34</sup>Reuben Spencer, The Home Trade of Manchester, fifth edit. (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1890), p. 74.

<sup>35</sup>Jones, "The Fashion Manipulators" p. 215.

<sup>36</sup>Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism: Fifteenth-Eighteenth Century: The Wheels of Commerce, vol. 2, pp. 64-67.

Another small trader was Stephen Hudson. His shop seems to have been in either Thruscross or Blubberhouses township about fifteen miles north of Bradford in the West Riding of Yorkshire. At a height of 700 or 800 feet above sea level and where open pasture meets the moors, this area was thinly populated and quite distinctive from the woolen areas to the south, as most residents were small landowners not fully integrated into the textile industry. But even in this most desolate area, a shop could be found, selling cloth, groceries, clothing items and household goods. An extant daybook gives some clue to Hudson's activities. Only twelve customers, for instance, are recorded in his cashbook in the week of September 3-9, 1759, averaging about two credit customers a day. Most purchases were small. Margaret Oddey stopped in, for example, for a sixpence of thread and tea, a pair of hose, cloth and ribbon. But Ben Hudson spent significantly more on five pair of hose, fabric, buttons, thread and buckles. One purchase pattern seems to be quite small bits of spices, tea or candles, and larger investments of several yards of cloth and trimmings or a clothing item, such as hose, hats, or handkerchiefs. Yet the stock there was not limited to only the most utilitarian items; Mrs. Sarah Files for one purchased a satin hat that cost a full three shillings and ten pence, more than four times the price of the undesignated hat bought by Susan Hardsley earlier that year.<sup>37</sup>

The merchant Richard Flower also carried out a large variety of functions in the village of Westoning in Bedfordshire late in the eighteenth century. Like Stephen Hudson and Thomas Fenton, Flower carried clothing, fabrics, and grocery items. Like Fenton, he too, received a number of notes, asking for special services related to clothing. A Mr. Jennings asked Flower to measure William Day for a "Round Frock a Waistcoat & a pr. of Breeches," give Randal Boy "a torn Wheather Waistcoat and pr of Breeches" and later a "Common Waistcoat to wear under his Round Frock." William Butcher's account included several such services ("mending a pair

---

<sup>37</sup>Shop Book of Stephen Hudson, 1751 to 1759. West Yorkshire Record Office, Bradford. My thanks to John Styles for use of his microfilm copy of this account book and his geographical notes.

of breeches"). He purchased a few fabrics and accessories but also tea, sugar, cheese, bacon, nuts, fish, plums and pork. Yet, while the range of items stocked in Flower's shop was large, many individual purchases were small, and most common visits were indeed to pick up small quantities of the new groceries. For instance, in the two months between August 11 and October 12, 1794, Thomas Herbert visited the shop thirty-six different days, almost once every other day. Most of the items he purchased were the new foreign luxuries virtually unknown to the common English population a hundred years before; sugar (twenty-eight purchases), tea (seventeen purchases), and snuff (twelve purchases).<sup>38</sup>

A more specialized kind of small trader was George Anderson, only known to us because he entered bankruptcy in 1763 and an inventory was made of his shop goods. Listed was a quite small stock that may represent a traditional shop where craftsmen sold their own wares, in combination with an assortment of other semi-manufactured products. The near absence of tools, however, makes such a conclusion more difficult. In the "forerom" were seven rag mops, thirteen long brushes, four best dusters, twenty covered brushes, and a number of strainers, wash tubs, firkins, and piggins. In the shop were two three-gallon bottles and two pottle flower tubs, and designated in the "glass case" in the shop was a number of tinwares, including lanterns, cups, sauce pans, colanders, a dust pan, five mouse traps and a rat-trap. The chamber seemed to be filled with a quantity of woodenwares; plates, trenchers, trays, bowls, "sample dishes, eard [sic] dishes", water taps, and mole traps. Also included were fifty-five butter prints, eight pudding stirrers, and forty common spoons. Shag matts and children's pads accompanied "basket ware," a bug trap, and two pair of cradle rockers. Tools were only valued at five shillings, although the stock of hoops added up to £3.4.8. out of a total of £44 of stock. A few fittings for display

---

<sup>38</sup>Richard Flowers Account Books, 1785-1800, Ms. 625, University of London Library. My impressionistic survey suggests that the earlier account book featured a greater quantity of clothing, and the later, more of the grocery and food items. My thanks to John Styles for this reference.

were included; the aforementioned glass case, two shelves and one end shelf, and a window board.<sup>39</sup>

In East Hoathley, a village in East Sussex with a population of about 350 in the mid eighteenth century, was the shop of Thomas Turner. According to the editor of his diary, he was a "grocer, draper, haberdasher, hatter, clothier, druggist, ironmonger, station, glover, [and] undertaker" all combined in one. Some goods came to him, some he went and got from their maker, some he bought and processed himself. He also had to prepare local products for market, like wheat, potatoes, cabbage, wool, and hops. Finally, he was the purchasing agent for the community, local barber, tax collector, bank, schoolteacher, and the scribe of wills and other documents of the community.<sup>40</sup>

For all his effort, "trade in all places and more particularly in the country place" was "very precarious." Trade on credit was risky, and Turner was worried in 1756 about rising debts, writing, "Never did I know so bad a time before. To think how much I have due to me and cannot get in!" His trade seemed to be declining as well; "I that used at this time of the year to take 15 or 20 a week and sometimes 25 or 30 now seldom take above 5 or 10. To what can I attribute this loss in trade?"<sup>41</sup>

Turner could not see the broad changes the retail industry was undergoing in the mid eighteenth century that may have led to the decline of his business. He was witnessing the evolutionary progress in shop retailing, difficult to perceive because it was changing within its old inherited shell. The intermingling of shops and households, producers and retailers may have

---

<sup>39</sup>"Inventory of Goods and Stock in trade of George Anderson, 1763." Public Record Office; C 110/184, Chancery Lane. Anderson's household wealth was only valued at £24, although his house included a china room with a number of china and glass items, two hats and wigs, and thirty-two books, including five volumes of the Antiquities of Livy.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas Turner, The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-1765 ed. David Vaisey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. xxi-xxii.

<sup>41</sup>Turner, The Diary of Thomas Turner, p. 61.

become less common. The old notion that the economic market should be shared for the public good was slowly losing ground. The regulation of who could sell any particular commodity was also under fire; in Bedfordshire, for instance, the last prosecutions of those who had illegally entered trade without being freemen probably took place in the 1730s.<sup>42</sup> These changes were all part of the march toward a modern business practice and ethos. Even in a humble shop like Turner's, shopkeepers and consumers were being changed by their access to information. Newspaper advertising and better transportation and communication gave consumers greater independent knowledge, while fixed price lists transformed shopkeepers from hagglers to price takers, often at a fixed percentage above wholesale.<sup>43</sup>

Like so much economic and cultural change, the transformation in English distribution differed in scale and speed between regions and among localities. Markets and fairs remained significant, if declining, sources of foods and goods for the middle-class country dweller. Yet within a century the difference between London and East Hoathley retailing would not be a chasm but a continuum.<sup>44</sup> But for now Thomas Turner—like the other "country shop-keepers in England, whose number is not to be known"—continued bartering and selling, fulfilling an important niche in the distribution of goods through England's home market.<sup>45</sup>

### The Colonial Retail Trade

Travelling across the ocean to the British American colonies, the picture of the retail trade suddenly grows dim. Beyond a few regional studies, the story of the retail trade in colonial

---

<sup>42</sup>Joyce Godber, History of Bedfordshire, 1066-1888 (Luton, Beds: Bedfordshire County Council, 1969), p. 322.

<sup>43</sup>Jones, "The Fashion Manipulators," p. 215.

<sup>44</sup>Alexander, Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution, p. 235.

<sup>45</sup>Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, vol II, part 2, p. 75.

America has yet to be completely told. While American historians have long been interested in merchants, their focus has almost uniformly been on larger issues of imports and exports, the social status of prominent merchants, or general issues of Anglo-American trade.<sup>46</sup>

The emerging picture of the English retail trade make possible a preliminary assessment of the ways in which colonial trade was similar or dissimilar and of the elements mitigating for change in the distribution of goods. It is also possible to piece together evidence reflective of some of the broad patterns of change delineated in English studies, such as the movement toward highly specialized retailing in larger-scale establishments. For instance, Matthew Smith opened a glass and earthenware shop in Baltimore in 1803. He rented a house "laid out in a manner particularly calculated for the business." The building was commodious: 77-by-33 feet on the inside. In the first floor above the cellar, a division was made the whole length of the building. On one side of the division was a space for opening and packing; on the other side was shelving for his wares. Smith calculated that this shelving could hold the contents of 160 to 180 crates of earthenware. A cross partition divided this space into a portion for retail trade. Smith's hopes for success in both the retail and whole sale trade necessitated two additional floors and a cellar of this large building for additional storage of the huge volume of wares that Smith imported.<sup>47</sup>

Smith was only one of a number of other earthenware and glass dealers in Baltimore. That degree of specialization could be multiplied for a vast array of other kinds of goods as perusal of any city directory demonstrates. But if we turn to rural areas, the picture comes a bit

---

<sup>46</sup> A few good exceptions are Virginia D. Harrington, The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935. repr. ed. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1964) and Thomas Doerflinger, "Farmers and Dry Goods in the Philadelphia Market Area, 1750-1800," in The Economy of Early America: The Revolutionary Period, 1763-1790, edited by Ronald Hoffman, John J. McCusker, and Peter Albert, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1982), and Carole Shammas, The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America.

<sup>47</sup>Matthew Smith to Mr. John Weatherburn, Alexandria, Virginia August 11, 1803. Matthew Smith Letterbook, 1803-1812, volume 1, Maryland Historical Society. Research on Matthew Smith was funded by the NEH grant, "English Ceramics in America: Prices, Markets and Availability."

more cloudy. Like rural England, many small stores—"multifarious as a bazaar"—dotted the countryside. There too peddlars crossed the landscape. In rural New England, small shops in small towns proliferated, with stocks averaging just £20, and while the per capita ratio of retailer to population was higher than that for England, there were still more shops for the population size than in the modern United States.<sup>48</sup>

In places like the Chesapeake, the English model of distribution—intense specialization in higher order shopping centers and small general village stores—becomes less clear, and a rather different form of rural retailing continued well into the nineteenth century. The earthenware and glass that Matthew Smith sold in his commodious specialized shop in Baltimore would have been but one kind of good stacked among hundreds of different items for sale in an average Chesapeake store.

The Chesapeake store is probably the best documented form of retail trade in the eighteenth-century English empire. Because of a need to document—usually for multiple partners and employers—a highly complex import/export trade with multiple producers and consumers, bookkeeping was precise and more detailed account books may have been kept than elsewhere. Because even as late as the 1770s, almost three-quarters of Virginia's exports were tobacco, the purchase and movement of that crop to England was of vital importance to colonial business, with little need to innovate for competing systems.<sup>49</sup> Finally, because these documents have often been curated in family papers and local archives, without the stresses of English wartime paper drives and intense competition for space on archive shelves, the story of the retail trade in the Chesapeake becomes unusually vivid and complete.

---

<sup>48</sup>Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America*, pp.273-275.

<sup>49</sup>Anonymous, *American Husbandry*, ed. H. J. Carman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 183.



### The Rise of the Retail Trade in Virginia

Before describing the retail trade in Virginia, it is necessary to examine the context in which it arose as compared to its English parallels. Many factors mitigated against the rise of fixed place retail stores, including geography, type of crop, and ownership of capital. But one of the first goals in establishing the new colony in Virginia was to replicate the old social and economic institutions left behind. Indeed, the instructions that accompanied the first settlers from the London Company included directions for building storehouses, houses for public use, and private dwellings on streets that formed a square around a market place. Throughout the next century, the Assembly would try to impel Virginians to live in towns, particularly by controlling where and how trade could be carried out. For example, the 1655 Assembly determined to set up market towns which forced traders to bring their goods to one central place, an idea which was basically repeated throughout the next half century.<sup>50</sup> This was not only to force town growth, but to collect duties, control prices, and prevent forestalling.

But the wish to replicate the old urban hierarchy of England with villages, towns, and a metropolitan center was offset by the continual pull of available land, and despite legislative fiat, only a few towns were actually created. Ironically, by the early eighteenth century, English politicians began to fear that the towns encouraged manufacture of woolens and discouraged tobacco production, both to the detriment of mercantilist policy. Queen Anne vetoed the 1706 town acts just four years later.<sup>51</sup> The English also attempted unsuccessfully to establish markets

---

<sup>50</sup>Warren Billings, The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1608-1689 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 21. See also Phillip Alexander Bruce, Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century repr. ed. (New York: Peter Smith, 1935), p. 390. For further detail of early Virginia town planning, see John W. Reps, Tidewater Towns: City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1972).

<sup>51</sup>James O'Mara, An Historical Geography of Urban system Development: Tidewater Virginia in the Eighteenth Century. Geographical Monographs, No. 13, Department of Geography, York University/Atkinson College, Downsview, Ontario, Canada. See also, Joseph A. Ernst and H. Roy Merrens, "'Camden's turrets pierce the skies!': The Urban Process in the Southern Colonies during the Eighteenth Century," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series, vol. XXX, No. 4, pp.

in Virginia, beginning at Jamestown in 1649. The Assembly later attempted to establish one or more weekly market-places in each county. Not just for food, all imported articles were to come through these arteries, yet they too were failures, and legislation to encourage public markets continued.<sup>52</sup> As late as 1697, it was reported that a Virginia "Tradesman having no Opportunity of a Market where he can buy Meat, Milk Corn, and all other things, must either make Corn, keep Cows, and raise Stocks himself or must ride about the country" to buy it.<sup>53</sup> By the mid eighteenth century these problems may have been solved, for market places were in use in Virginia towns, such as Williamsburg, Norfolk, Fredericksburg, and Alexandria (Bel-haven). Fairs too were part of the cultural heritage of the American colonies. As the case of market towns, the success of fairs in Virginia must have been limited, for constant encouragements were offered to ensure their attendance. These encouragements included prizes for physical accomplishments like dancing and wrestling, the largest number of hogs brought to market, the prettiest girl, and, at least in Fredericksburg, immunity from arrest.<sup>54</sup> Like their English counterparts, they too seemed to be declining after mid century, despite continued inducements.

The history of the distribution of goods in Virginia differs markedly therefore from that of England or more Northern colonies. Planters spread out along Virginia's many rivers, and ships could travel far inland to deliver goods more cheaply than overland transport. Hugh Jones, a visitor in the 1720s, thought this access to water meant that it was easier for "any thing to be

---

549-574.

<sup>52</sup>Phillip Alexander Bruce, Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century (New York: Macmillan 1895; repr. ed. Peter Smith, 1935), Vol. II, pp. 390-391.

<sup>53</sup>Henry Hartwell, James Blair, and Edward Chilton, The Present State of Virginia, and the College, ed. by Hunter Dickinson Farish, (Charlottesville, Va: University Press of Virginia, 1940), pp. 9-10.

<sup>54</sup>"Markets and Fairs," Research Reports, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1950. Manuscript on file, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Va. Oscar H. Darter, Colonial Fredericksburg and Neighborhood in Perspective (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957), p. 116.

delivered to a gentleman there from London, Bristol, etc. than to one living five miles in the country in England."<sup>55</sup> The first retail trade thus was a kind of water-borne peddling where merchants travelled to countless private landings to buy tobacco and sell goods. Small entrepôts eventually developed on plantations where neighboring planters could bring crops and purchase goods. Secondly, English mercantile policy mandated that agricultural commodities and other raw goods desired by England would be encouraged—and manufacturing discouraged—lessening the need for points of manufacture and distribution. Finally, the major crop itself—tobacco—was not only bulky and difficult to transport, but hard to judge for quality without a seasoned eye. This kept out the untrained who might have a small trade venture, made collection of debts difficult, and, perhaps most important, kept ships in Virginia for months on end, waiting while their captains scurried about the colony trying to get a full return load. Five ports of entry in Virginia were established at the end of the seventeenth century where vessels could enter and clear out after paying the proper revenues and fees.

Other entrepreneurs roamed the country, purchasing tobacco and selling goods, and stores opened and closed, depending on the goods available.<sup>56</sup> A key problem for these merchants, however, was the cost of transport; Governor Gooch estimated it cost a merchant three to six shillings a hogshead to bring tobacco to shipping points. Prominent planters also ordered goods and sold them from their plantations to neighbors, often until the assortment ran out.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup>Hugh Jones, The Present State of Virginia, ed. by Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), p. 73.

<sup>56</sup>One trademan of this kind was the Scotsman William Allason who came to Virginia with parcels of goods for sale known as cargoes. A brief discussion of Allason's early years as a supercargo is found in Edith E. B. Thompson, "A Scottish Merchant in Falmouth in the Eighteenth Century," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 39 (1931): 108-117.

<sup>57</sup>William Gooch to the Board of Trade, April 9, 1730. Public Record Office CO 5/1322, ff. 147-148.

But it was the beginning of permanent stores at specified locations that heralded the beginning of a real solution to the problem of supplying Virginians with manufactured goods.<sup>58</sup> This permanence was possible because of four factors. First, the Tobacco Inspection Act of 1730 in Virginia enabled the issuance of tobacco notes, entitling the bearer to a certain amount of tobacco in a warehouse, and created a system of inspection, removing the onus of judgement of poor quality tobacco from the merchant to the inspector. This solved many of the problems of earlier merchants. Secondly, as settlement became denser, a larger population enabled a merchant to stock a wider variety of goods and offer them at a year-round basis. Without fear of a dearth of goods, consumers could purchase regularly and even impulsively. Third, as the tobacco trade itself became more organized, and permanent merchants and factors began to set up in the colony, greater efficiency meant that ships spent less time sitting idle and goods were sent more frequently. By mid century, that greater efficiency meant that two annual shipments could be made compared to the old one, with spring and summer goods shipped in February and March, and fall and winter goods shipped in late summer and early fall. Finally, a major factor

---

<sup>58</sup>The literature on the tobacco trade is voluminous. No one has written more, however, than Jacob Price. Some of his important titles include Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.) "What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660-1790," Journal of Economic History, 49 (June 1989): 267-284. "The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707-1775," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 11 (1954): 179-199. "Buchanan and Simpson: 1759-1763: A Different Kind of Glasgow Firm Trading to the Chesapeake," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 40 (January 1983): 3-41. "Joshua Johnson in London, 1771-1775: Credit and Commercial Organization in the British Chesapeake Trade," pp. 153-180 in Statesmen, Scholars, and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland, edited by Anne Whitman, J. S. Bromley, and P. G. M. Dickson. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.) See also, Lois Green Carr, "The Metropolis of Maryland: A Comment on Land Development along the Tobacco Coast," Maryland Historical Magazine, 49 (1974) 124-145.

The most important work on the retail side of the tobacco trade is Calvin B. Coulter, "The Import Trade of Colonial Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 2 (1945): 296-314. See also his dissertation, "The Virginia Merchant," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1944. Two unpublished works that are particularly useful for their focus on the side of goods for sale in the retail trade are Harold B. Gill, "The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia." Unpublished manuscript, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and Mary R. W. Goodwin, "The Colonial Store." Unpublished Colonial Williamsburg Research Study, 1966.

in the rise of the retail trade was the re-organization of the trade as British firms established regular merchant houses in Virginia, and sent a person to manage their business in the colony.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the very nature of the retail trade had changed remarkably. Two major forms of distribution took agricultural commodities and supplied goods in the Chesapeake. The consignment system, continuing from the seventeenth century, shipped tobacco on a planter's own risk and cost to an agent in Europe, who sold the crop to the owner's best advantage, served as banker to draw on for bills of exchange, and purchased goods as requested, all in return for a commission.<sup>59</sup> This was the most common form of sale for more wealthy planters who could afford not only the costs and risks of transportation, but could make do without a return for at least a year. This trade tended to center in southern England, mostly London and Bristol, and generally took in the best quality tobacco for domestic use. Occasionally, some merchants also involved themselves in the cargo trade, supplying a quantity of goods on credit for local Chesapeake traders.<sup>60</sup>

The letters of countless planters consigning their tobacco on commission to London houses such as John Norton and Son are filled with orders for household and personal goods "for when they [Virginians] send to London it is to get the best of Goods in their kind not so much

---

<sup>59</sup> For studies of the consignment trade, see Samuel Rosenblatt, "The House of John Norton and Sons: A Study of the Consignment Method of Marketing Tobacco from Virginia to England," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1960. For more on John Norton and Sons, see Jacob Price, "Who was John Norton?: A Note on the Historical Character of Some Eighteenth-Century London Virginia Firms," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 14 (July 1962): 400-407. The published letters of John Norton and Sons are found in Frances Norton Mason, ed. *John Norton and Sons: Merchants of London and Virginia* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1937). See also Jacob Price, "The Last Phase of the Virginia-London Consignment Trade: James Buchanan and Co., 1758-1768," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 43 (January 1986): 64-98.

<sup>60</sup>See, for instance, "a schedule of goods wanted from London" by Hart and Marshall of Hanover Town from John Norton and Sons. John Norton and Sons Papers, Folder # 18, Microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

regarding price as quality."<sup>61</sup> Yet the London agent seldom supervised the goods sent, provoking a constant chorus of complaints of poor quality and out-of-date goods. The concern of these wealthy consumers for correctly-selected goods was shrewdly acknowledged by William Lee of London: nearly every solicitation by him for a new patron was coupled with the soothing promise that "Mrs. Lee will be attentive in the choice of anything."<sup>62</sup> Such merchants and their wives essentially carried out long-distance shopping functions.<sup>63</sup> Because of these and other problems, the consignment system came under increasing pressure in the middle of the eighteenth century and many planters switched to selling their tobacco or other commodities "in the country" and taking goods and partial cash in credit.

The second important system of distribution was the direct purchase or factor trade, where most often a group of partners combined capital to purchase stock, open a retail store or chain of stores with an employee (factor) in charge, and return tobacco in payment. This trade tended to center in northern Britain in Glasgow, Whitehaven, and Liverpool, and purchased the lesser quality tobacco often for re-export to the French monopoly for cash. While several hundred pounds could set up goods for a small retail shop in the Chesapeake, the capital required

---

<sup>61</sup>Peter Lyon to John Norton, September 25, 1771. John Norton Papers, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

<sup>62</sup>William Lee to the Honorable George W. Fairfax, Esq. January 19, 1770. William Lee Letterbook, 1769-1771. Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, Stratford Hall. Microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

<sup>63</sup> Many examples can be found in the letters of Virginia planters to their partners in England. Rebecca Chamberlayne was indebted to Mrs. Norton for the selection of her petticoat. Chamberlayne to John Norton and Sons, July 28, 1770, John Norton and Sons Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Mrs. Downman was anxious that Mrs. Athawes or her daughters choose her "a half-yard Spanish purple poplin shot with yellow" as well as cotton. (Raleigh Downman to Edward and Samuel Athawes, March 31, 1776. Downman Letterbook, original Library of Congress, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Mrs. Campbell helped in the choice of an elaborate brocade gown for Henry Fitzhugh's daughter. Fitzhugh to Jno. Stewart and Campbell, January 28, 1771. Fitzhugh Letterbook, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University. For promise that Mrs. Lee will supervise purchases, William Lee to George W. Fairfax, January 19, 1770. William Lee Letterbook, 1769-1771, Microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

to stock a year-round store and take tobacco in trade was quite substantial. Jacob Price has estimated that £3,000 was a minimum necessary for a true store, although a firm more commonly had a capital stock of £10,000 to £20,000.<sup>64</sup>

While there were many concerns at this size, three giant conglomerates headed by Alexander Spiers, John Glassford, and William Cuninghame dominated the Scottish trade. These three men, each with combined capitalization of over £100,000, overshadowed any comparable commission business in London, and no Scottish business of any kind could rival their size with the exception of the Carron ironworks. These huge syndicates imported over one-half of the tobacco landed at ports on the Clyde. The Cuninghame group, for instance, was made up of three separate firms. Two traded to Maryland; William Cuninghame and Company worked in Virginia and was probably the largest and most powerful merchant group in the Chesapeake. This chain included fourteen stores and a working capital of about £72,000 by the time of the American Revolution.<sup>65</sup> While these individual Scots were extraordinarily successful, Scottish merchants as a group captured the lion's share of the Chesapeake trade; by 1769 more tobacco was imported into Scotland than all the English ports combined, although that Scottish share dropped dramatically by 1775. The Scottish merchants had several key advantages; a shorter route by two or three weeks, greater available credit, fewer expenses because of cheaper labour, and consolidation of purchasing by a few great "tobacco lords." One English merchant wrote in exasperation that the Scottish "Ships are perpetually coming——They never stop buying," and

---

<sup>64</sup>Jacob M. Price, Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harbard University Press, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>65</sup>T. M. Devine, edit. A Scottish Firm in Virginia, 1767-1777, (Edinburgh: Clark Constable, Ltd. for the Scottish History Society, 1982), pp. x-xi. Price, Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade, pp. 28-29.

had exceeded twenty-five shillings in payment per hundred weight several times that year. Their large shipments had "thinn[ed] the Warehouses."<sup>66</sup>

Finally, a third group might be described as entrepreneurial mavericks, businessmen that saw particular opportunities for profit that did not necessarily fit either the commission or the direct trade. A few examples will suffice. Wallace, Davidson, and Johnson opened a partnership in Annapolis in March 1771. With £1,000 capital contributed by each partner, Joshua Johnson was dispatched to London to purchase goods for a new store. Despite increasing competition in the Annapolis trade, Johnson thought that their business would have the advantage, "our goods being better in quality, more fashionable and better chosen...for my having time and seeing them myself." The three also planned to pay cash or borrow at short term for goods they purchased in London thus taking advantage of preferential pricing by manufacturers.<sup>67</sup> An increasingly common strategy was to avoid tobacco altogether, concentrating on the growing grain trade. Hooe, Stone, and Company ran a commission house in prosperous Alexandria, with satellite stores on either side of the Potomac at Dumfries, Virginia and Portobacco, Maryland and had large-scale dealings in grain with Europe, Britain, and the West Indies.<sup>68</sup>

A small coterie of merchants with connections to Whitehaven, the port in northern England, can serve as further example. Roger Atkinson did deal in tobacco, but he mostly purchased the crop from other Virginia merchants and at least by 1769 was employed by twelve different English firms. Thus, he was agent of several firms, not, as more typical, the employee

---

<sup>66</sup>Roger Atkinson to Messrs. Lyonel & Samuel Lyde, July 5, 1769. Transcribed in William Bundy Bynum, "Roger Atkinson: Merchant-Planter in Revolutionary Virginia," (University of Virginia, M.A. thesis, 1981), p. 51

<sup>67</sup>Jacob L. Price, Joshua Johnson's Letterbook: Letters from a Merchant in London to his Partners in Maryland, (London: London Record Society, 1979), pp. xiii, 21. See also Edward C. Papenfuse, In Pursuit of Profit: The Annapolis Merchants in the Era of the American Revolution: 1763-1805, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

<sup>68</sup>For more information, see Thomas M. Preisser, Eighteenth-Century Alexandria, Virginia, before the Revolution, 1749-1776, Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, College of William and Mary, 1977.



of any one.<sup>69</sup> Atkinson recommended to some of his business partners a pair of young Petersburg men; one was the wealthy son of his good merchant friend Thomas Jones and the future husband of his daughter and the other an assistant in his shop. These two young men attempted to set up a business in 1769 importing goods and returning deerskins for payment, thus avoiding the competitive tobacco trade altogether.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, choosing one type of business did not preclude dealing in different ways, combining aspects of many of the above practices, searching for the most profitable enterprise, making a good buy when one presented itself.<sup>71</sup> A consignment merchant might send a bundle of goods; a factor might purchase a small assortment to sell on the side. Indeed, the fact that many contracts for storekeepers forbade such private dealings suggest their common occurrence. Sorting of bundles of goods to be "lumped off" to smaller dealers who had no connections of their own with English suppliers was another strategy, as earlier practiced by William Allason. In a similar vein, one Georgia merchant had suggested sending out "Small Cargoes all together for Plantation Use," probably bundling up necessary slave fabrics, tools, and other necessities, just as country trade would often be presorted by city wholesalers in the nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup>Bynum, "Roger Atkinson: Merchant-Planter in Revolutionary Virginia," pp. 4,10.

<sup>70</sup>Bynum, *Ibid*, p. 24. Roger Atkinson to Messrs. Lyonel and Samuel Lyde, Williamsburg, December 22, 1770 in Bynum, *Ibid*, p. 135. William Bragg to George Beeby, Petersburg, Virginia, January 30 1768. William Bragg Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University.

<sup>71</sup>A parcel of broadcloth that was a good "pennyworth" was sent along to William Allason. Walker and Company, Glasgow to William Allason, September 26, 1759. William Allason Letterbook, Business Records Collection, Virginia State Library, Microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

<sup>72</sup>For small cargoes sent by English or Scottish suppliers on the side of regular shipments, see George Beeby to Bragg and Jones, William Jones Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University. Edward Telfair, Savannah, Georgia to Basil Cowper, March 10, 1770, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University. For eighteenth-century Philadelphia wholesalers, see Doerflinger, "Farmers and Dry Goods in the Philadelphia Market Area, 1750-1800," pp. 166-195. For early nineteenth-century patterns of ceramic wholesaling, see George L. Miller, "George M. Coates, Pottery Merchant of Philadelphia, 1817-1831" *Winterthur Portfolio* vol 19, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 37-50.

### Summary

One more piece of the puzzle of consumerism has been sketched. Methods of distribution changed immensely in the eighteenth century with the rise of retail shops. With more general shops, fewer had to rely on weekly markets or travelling peddlars for their daily needs. At the same time, a retail hierarchy began to fill out in England with more specialized shops in provincial and county towns to provide for new consumer demand for finer goods. Many shops were larger and more lavishly finished to display wares in a more enticing fashion. With greater information and more competition among shopkeepers, consumers could become more choosy, and many merchants competed by claiming to stock the latest and best London fashions.

In Virginia, many of these same trends obtained. From the beginning of colonization, the English government attempted—without major success—to transplant the English institutions of public markets and fairs in urban places. Their failure meant that throughout the seventeenth century, many Virginians were probably supplied with manufactured goods by travelling merchants or local planters importing and selling bundles of goods. The unusual demands of the tobacco crop, the dispersing of the population, and the control of English firms also led to a somewhat different system of retail distribution. Some wealthy planters basically used consignment agents to shop in England. But most Virginians drew credit at some kind of local store, where merchants supplied goods in exchange for agricultural commodities, mainly tobacco. The rise of an efficient form of distribution was critical to any new consumerism of the eighteenth century. But this leads back to the thorny question: did more shops arise because of increasing demand or did greater availability lead to heightened demand? In the next chapter, the kinds of goods for sale in Virginia stores will be more closely examined.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### VIRGINIA STORES AND THE WORLD OF GOODS

The Compleat Tradesman then must be a Man of General Knowledge, as well as of a particular Understanding; he must not only understand his Shop, his Books, and how to sell his Goods, but he must have a general Knowledge of all Trade; he must know the true Original of all the Goods he deals in, the Growth and Fountain of every Product, and the several Variations of Species; the Changes that every Manufacture suffers by Dying, Managing, and all the Operations by which the Face of it is alter'd; how it comes to be what it is; whence every Thing comes, and whether it goes, and (as I may call it) the Beginning and End of every Article in Trade.<sup>1</sup>

Becoming a successful merchant in the Chesapeake was no easy task. If, as Defoe suggested in 1727, the English tradesman had to be knowledgeable about every step of the production of the goods he sold, the Chesapeake merchant needed to know the same and so much more. He also had to understand the complicated structure of trans-Atlantic trade, and be able to judge multiple kinds of goods, the vagaries of tobacco production, and the creditworthiness of planters. The letters of Virginia merchants are filled with advice and observations on how to make it in the highly competitive tobacco trade. Two conditions seemed to be the key: a proper location for a store—and hence good customers and their crops—and an appropriate assortment of quality goods.

This chapter will briefly examine the factors relating to a good store location. It will then carefully trace how goods moved from England to Virginia, the problems with that

---

<sup>1</sup>Daniel Defoe, The Compleat English Tradesman (London: 1727; reprint ed. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), vol. 2, p. 74.

supply, and how merchants competed with quality and pricing strategies. It will examine the environment of shopping by looking at the size of store buildings and how goods were displayed. Finally, it will look at the act of shopping itself, the role of merchants as purveyors of goods and information, and the power relationships that emerged between merchant and consumer.

### How to Make it in Business

Perhaps the first and most important predictor of future business success was the proper place to set up store. By the middle of the eighteenth century, new merchants were encouraged to strike out in areas of expanding population. William Allason was advised to set up store where "there are not too many already settled, where ye people are not much in debt & pretty free birth, near some Warehouse of good Character." His employers did not care which river he chose, although they thought that the James River was already too crowded and Maryland might be a good place to begin. They advised that autumn was the best season to begin a new concern, as planters were then given their credit, which "allure them." They reiterated for good measure, however, that the key to success was "falling on a right birth [sic] to open store at." William Allason chose Falmouth as a likely town in 1759, a choice shared by Neil Jamieson in his survey of where to put up shop. Jamieson was torn between Hobbe's Hole and Falmouth. Because he felt that new customers were easier to get than wooing old ones away from an established merchant, Jamieson chose the town in a less populated new area.<sup>2</sup>

The proper place involved more than just the immediate environs of any one store, however. James O'Mara suggests that there was a general belief in an appropriate store zone;

---

<sup>2</sup>Robert Thomson, "The Merchant in Virginia, 1700-1775," Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1955, p. 4.

a single store in a town, for instance, drew on a market with a radius of ten to twenty miles or between 300 and 1200 square miles.<sup>3</sup> The actual size of that market, however, had many variables. Head factor James Robinson advised that in choosing a store in the backcountry, the quality of the soil, the economic circumstances of the planters, and the density of tobacco production were the primary concern.<sup>4</sup>

But soil and agricultural productivity were not the only variables for choosing a store site. The planters themselves should not be already too much in debt to other merchants and neither too rich (with their own source of goods) or too poor (with no ability to buy).<sup>5</sup> But judging the creditworthiness of customers was not an easy task: John Tabb was quick to advise his cousin in their future store endeavor that "there is little doubt that you may sell whatever you please, the difficulty however is getting paid."<sup>6</sup> The parrying for the proper place to set up store is a strong indicator of the increasing numbers of merchants, a rising population, and heightening competition for the planters' tobacco. James Robinson reported to his employer that a rival had chosen a store site merely to prevent them from establishing there.<sup>7</sup> Richard Blow was discouraged from the drop in his business at Charlotte Court

---

<sup>3</sup>James O'Mara, An Historical Geography of Urban System Development: Tidewater Virginia in the Eighteenth Century, York University Geographical Monographs 13, York University Press, York, Canada, pp. 232-233.

<sup>4</sup>James Robinson to John Turner, October 6, 1771. William Cuninghame and Company Letterbook, A Scottish Firm in Virginia, 1767-1777, ed. T. M. Devine (Edinburgh: Clark Constable, Ltd. for Scottish History Society, 1982), p. 47.

<sup>5</sup>This sense that country stores were most numerous "wherever the middling classes are a considerable proportion of the population" because the wealthy either raised everything they needed or shopped in town was articulated clearly in describing Louisiana on the eve of the Civil War. Lewis Atherton, The Southern Country Store, 1800-1860, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1949), p. 20.

<sup>6</sup>John Tabb to William Patterson Smith, April 15, 1806. William Patterson Smith Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

<sup>7</sup>James Robinson to William Cuninghame, October 8, 1771 in Devine, Scottish Firm, p. 49.

House after competition increased. "Now," he blustered "if you do not exactly suit them in every article they may want they go immediately to some of our Neighbors and there lay our their tobacco." He complained that other merchants were forced to give credit to high-risk customers. He would continue to trust only those he knew to be "Punctual forehanded men" that would pay off what they owed. By 1785, Blow felt that the whole state was overstocked and opened a new store in North Carolina.<sup>8</sup>

One result of this heightened competition was that by the 1770s, prices paid for Virginia tobacco often approximated European prices and remittances went to England at a book-keeping loss. The merchant's profits had to increasingly come from the goods he stocked.<sup>9</sup> John Mair's popular manual Book-keeping Methodiz'd urged a varied and complete stock for a Virginia or Maryland store and "the greater variety...the better; for wherever planters find they can be best suited and served, thither they commonly resort."<sup>10</sup> Jacob Price's intensive study of the tobacco trade indicates that a London commission firm in 1775 needed about £8 stock for every hogshead of tobacco imported.<sup>11</sup>

If a merchant had to continue to offer ever higher prices for tobacco to gain customers, the second key to success was the ever-improving selection of attractive, affordable goods. These stores were true emporiums—selling everything from nails to

---

<sup>8</sup>Robert Rives to Richard Blow, March 9, 1785; Barksdale to Richard Blow, November 6, 1785. Both cited in Frederika J. Teute, The Commercial Endeavors of a Virginia Merchant During the Confederation Period: The Rise and Fall of Richard Blow, 1781-1790, M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1976.

<sup>9</sup>Jacob M. Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," in Perspectives in American History, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 108.

<sup>10</sup>John Mair, Book-keeping Methodiz'd: A Methodological Treatise of Merchant Accompts. According to the Italian Form (Edinburgh: Sands, Donaldson, Murray, and Cochrane, 1757), p. 333.

<sup>11</sup>Jacob Price, Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 39.

novels. Mair suggested fifteen different broad categories for Virginia merchants, merely to help organize the thousands of items they stocked (Table 1). It is the breadth of kinds of objects for sale that is so remarkable. At the same time, textiles, notions, and accessories formed the heart of the store's stock. About forty percent of the cost of setting up shop was in supplying textiles, and this number seems remarkably consistent in the stocks of various Virginia merchants.<sup>12</sup>

Like orders from great planters to their London agents, two levels of quality were important for the properly assorted Virginia store. The stocking of textiles is a good example. First, and most importantly, merchants had to have basic textiles, such as cheap osnaburg, for the less wealthy and slaves. Second, they had to stock a wide variety of more luxurious, colorful, and fashionable items that had a limited market. For instance, the Falmouth merchant William Allason stocked silver and gold lace even though he only managed to sell a tenth of it in two years. Despite such small demand, Allason pointed out that he needed "a good assortment in order to keep my customers to myself without going to my neighbors for trifles."<sup>13</sup>

Problems were endemic at both ends of the market for clothing. Chesapeake merchants complained bitterly about the poor quality of goods shipped by English suppliers. Francis Jerdone fussed to Neil Buchanan that the Tradesmen had "grossly abused" them, with "some of them overcharging in the prices, others Sending very mean and unsaleable goods." The color of one piece of fabric, he complained, was so out of style that he planned to return it, and he accused shopkeepers of packing up goods "that have been shopkept for some

---

<sup>12</sup>For examples from the stock of William Allason, see Ann Smart Martin, "Shopkeepers' Accounts in the Chesapeake: Textiles and Clothing in Eighteenth-Century Virginia Stores," (Paper presented at the Third Textile History Conference, North Andover, Mass., September 1990).

<sup>13</sup>William Allason to ?, June 15, 1761, and William Allason to James Mitchell, Falmouth, August 19, 1760. Allason Letterbook, 1757-1770, Business Records Collection, Virginia State Library.

Table 1. Classification System for Virginia Stores

---

<u>Category</u>	<u>Type of Good</u>
Woolens	Broad cloths, druggets, kerseys, serges, grays
Linens	Scottish linen, Irish linen, osnabrugs, brown hollands, dowlas, &c
Checks	Checks ...striped hollands, bed-ticks, tartans &c.
Hard Ware	Knives, forks, scissars, cork-screws, spurs, seals, thimbles, snuff-boxes, watch-keys, buckles, buttons, ink-pots, &c.
Kitchen Furniture	Pots, frying-pans, pewter dishes, plates, and basons, jugs, spoons, candlesticks, tea-kettles, coffee-pots, &c.
Bed-Furniture	Counterpanes, quilts, blankets, &c
Leathern	Mens gloves, womens gloves, mens shoes, womens shoes, boots, breeches, &c.
Saddlary	Saddles, bridles, whips, girths, saddle-bags, housings, stirrup leathers, &c
Grocery	Sugar, pepper, cinnamon, nutmegs, cloves, saltpetre, raisins, currants, indigo, tea, &c.
Stationary	Bibles, testaments, psalters, spelling books, primers, blank ledgers, pocket books, writing-paper, sealing-wax, wafers, ink powders, &c
China	Tea pots, cups, saucers, bowls, dishes, plates
Loam Ware (Earthen)	Earthen dishes, plates, bowles, butter-crucks, tea pots, saucers, dishes, drinking glasses, &c
Haber-dashery	Mens hats, womens hats, velvetcaps, worsted stockings, thread stockings, &c
West-India Goods	Brown sugar, coffee, chocolate, rum, molasses,
Petty Wares	Needles, pins, combs, fans, thread, tapes, ribands, incles, laces, beads, ferrets, &

---

Source: John Mair, Book-keeping Methodiz'd, fifth edition, (Edinburgh: 1757), pp. 349-350.



years."<sup>14</sup> Falmouth shopkeeper Arthur Morson was livid in October 1773 after unpacking his goods; for he had "never seen such a parcell of Motheaten, rat eaten, Mouse eaten, damag'd trumpery in the whole course of my life." To add insult, they came at such a high price that he could purchase the same osnaburg in the country at a price less than he was charged wholesale!<sup>15</sup>

Such complaints form a common refrain: as soon as English tradesmen found out that a shipment was for Virginia, they tried to pass off poor quality, damaged, and old-fashioned goods. Henry Fleming explained the problem well when writing his friends and partners in Whitehaven. He had a long list of problems with particular fabrics that had been sent including a "quantity of very high-priced printed Cottons, very bad patterns, very much darn'd," and most remarkably, he had received half a piece last year, and had just been sent the other half at a higher price. Fleming blustered that the "people of Whthavn who have not been in Virginia ...hold the doctrine 'that since such an article is going to Virginia & tho it will not sell here it certainly will there.'" He explained that "the people in Virginia are to be full as nice & curious as in England," and the firm's success entirely depended "upon having neat & fresh goods to suit such."<sup>16</sup>

Supply problems, however, did not always lie with the British commission agent, because manufacturers and shopkeepers took advantage when there was not close supervision. When the Maryland merchant John Semple suggested that his partner in Glasgow should send

---

<sup>14</sup>Francis Jerdone to Neil Buchanan, April 16, 1742. Francis Jerdone Account and Letterbook, 1739-1744, Manuscript Collection, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

<sup>15</sup>Arthur Morrison to Neil Jamieson, Neil Jamieson Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). For more complaints about damage from moths and rats, see Francis Jerdone to Samuel Rickards, Israel Mauduit and Company, December 14, 1754, William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, 14 (January 1906): 141-145.

<sup>16</sup>Henry Fleming to Fischer and Bragg, Norfolk July 29, 1774. Henry Fleming Letterbook, 1772-1775, Cumbria County Council Archives Department (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

to London for more fashionable goods, his partner, James Lawson, argued against it. He explained that Mr. Alston in Glasgow travelled to London twice a year to personally select British silks for the home trade and he had the first choice of them. In this way, Alston obtained the "very Newest and Best fashions" from London. If Semple ordered from the London export merchant James Russell, there would be no supervision for "Mr. Russell gives in his orders to a shop that makes them up without his seeing them." Semple must not have been convinced; the next spring Lawson ordered fine textiles like silks and black velvet from James Russell in London, asking politely for him to be "at some trouble in making a neat Choice of all these fine Goods." Lawson remarked that the firm used to get such goods from Glasgow, but he hoped that they could be gotten cheaper and better from London.<sup>17</sup>

Nor was there always goods on hand in Britain to ship to the colonies. German osnaburgs often seemed to be in short supply. Prices for textiles might fluctuate wildly, as in 1759 when the raw material of flesh wool went up twenty percent.<sup>18</sup> Joshua Johnson was disgusted after he travelled to manufacturing towns, the most "capital" being "Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Bromsgrove, Birmingham, Coventry and Woodstock." He had hopes of gaining a better supply at a cheaper price, but was disappointed to find that the system of manufacture precluded any break in the established chain. For instance, he found that an agent usually provided working materials such as iron to poor workers, mostly women and children, who returned finished products in a week. That agent then shipped the goods off to a principal in

---

<sup>17</sup>James Lawson to John Semple, Glasgow, March 18, 1759 and James Lawson to James Russell, January 9, 1760. James Lawson-John Semple Accounts, Scottish Record Office, Currie-Dal Miscellaneous Bundle 20, (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). For a discussion of Semple's various entrepreneurial ventures, see David Curtis Scaggs, "John Semple and the Development of the Potomac Valley, 1750-1773," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, vol. 92, no. 3 (July 1984): 282-308.

<sup>18</sup>George Beeby to Jones and Bragg, July 13, 1759, William Bragg Papers, Special Collections Department, Perkins Library, Duke University; James Lawson to John Semple, August 31, 1759.

London or Birmingham. Well aware of changes in prices and in an established network, these agents had little incentive to deal with independent small buyers like Johnson.<sup>19</sup>

While much can be learned from correspondence about how goods were obtained, it is rare that particular suppliers are named that allow a view of the complex chain of distribution linking English goods and Virginia consumers. The records of John Lawson and James Semple are an important exception, because they list goods shipped to the Chesapeake next to their suppliers, often specific manufacturers rather than the more common middle men.<sup>20</sup> For example, John Lawson sent to the Staffordshire potter John Baddeley at Shelton near Newcastle under Lyne for white salt glazed stoneware "neat and genteel" and as cheap as possible to "encourage future dealings." Baddeley was a partner with the wealthy Thomas Fletcher in "buying, selling, bartering, burning and grinding all sort of flint" in Newcastle-under-Lyne in Staffordshire. Because Baddeley's account books are extant, we can actually place the orders of Semple and Lawson in the context of their supplier's business on the other side of the water. Baddeley's business seemed to have been quite successful, and he sometimes shipped over a hundred crates every few months to Amsterdam from 1753 to 1767. In 1755, he shipped wares more locally to Hanley Green, Scarborough, and Stockton. He even set a crate to Lady Egmont. But he also sold crates to middlemen in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Liverpool, some of which were no doubt for export to the American colonies. By 1771, Baddeley's products were acknowledged, even by rival Josiah Wedgwood, to be "the best ware perhaps of any of the potters." Wedgwood marvelled that he made an

---

<sup>19</sup>Joshua Johnson to "the firm" April 17, 1772, in Joshua Johnson's Letterbook: Letters from a London Merchant to his Partners in Maryland, ed. Jacob L. Price (London: London Record Society, 1979), p. 33.

<sup>20</sup>William Allason gives partial information on suppliers with occasional subheadings under invoice totals in his invoice books. A few shop notes are also scattered throughout his loose papers. Both his books and papers are at the Virginia State Library. Shop notes are also occasionally found in John Hook Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

"ovenfull of it Per Diem" and had led the way in lowering prices. Perhaps this reputation had spread to Glasgow so that Lawson specifically ordered these cheap and well-made tea and tablewares for his Virginia and Maryland customers.<sup>21</sup>

Lawson's order to Baddeley firmly links particular products exported to Virginia to their maker. But there are others whom we can at least see as shadows. Lawson purchased rugs and white cottons from Mary Wakefield and Sons in Kendall, light gowns from Manchester warehouseman Robert and Nathaniel Hyde, and cotton gowns from Kennedy and Bell. Scottish manufacturing firms benefitted greatly from this export: ropes went from the Port Glasgow ropeworks, delft from the Delftfield House of Glasgow, sugar from the King Street Sugar House, woolens from the Kilmarnock Wooling Manufactory, and agricultural tools from the Smithfield Factory. Lawson would also have had to visit dozens of Scottish craftsmen to fill his order; at least three shoemakers supplied different kinds of shoes and pumps. Others callendared (finished) cloth, made stays, and supplied silver vessels. From London came fine goods like glass, china, looking glasses, spices, silks, guns, and furred hats. In a single shipment in December 1757, Lawson dealt with forty different manufacturers, craftsmen, and merchants to supply the £1808 invoice. This assortment included everything from ropes and house brooms to "one dozen dressed babies," fiddle strings, and "silk sun capes laced at 6/6 each."<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>James Lawson to John Baddeley at Shelton near Newcastle under Lyne, Glasgow, January 2, 1759. Semple-Lawson papers. John Baddeley Sales book, 1753-1761, v. 101, Aqualate Papers, Staffordshire Record Office. Baddeley's production is discussed in John Mallot, "John Baddeley of Shelton: an Early Staffordshire Maker of Pottery and Porcelain," English Ceramic Circle Transactions, 6, pt. 2 (1967): 124-166 and pt. 3: 181-247. Oddly enough, Baddeley's partner and financial backer, baronet Thomas Fletcher, was also partner in the mercantile business of William Fenton, discussed above.

<sup>22</sup>All of these items are found in letterbook and daybooks, particularly Bundle 20, Box 2, No. 1/10 "Daybook of Maryland Concern, 1757-June 1760," Scottish Record Office, (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation), M-881.

Occasionally, goods would be shipped that were personal items of the suppliers themselves. George Beeby sent along a small assortment of items for William Bragg to peddle off, such as leather breeches, gloves, and hats. The breeches were especially good "all New Made after the Newest and Neatest Fashion." Beeby revealed that they had been for his own wear but the recent death of his son "heaving his head crushed by the Leather Mill...the Colour did not Suit my Affected Spirits." James Lawson sent off a silver teapot, stand, and milk pot "of the newest fashion" to John Semple in 1759. Lawson's wife had asked a neighbor merchant to purchase it for her on a trip to London, but she did not like his choice.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, the flow of goods and information was not only one way. Virginia merchants not only had to judge what was ordered, but give feedback on what was salable and well-liked. Bragg examined a parcel of "friz'd cloth" that Beeby proposed manufacturing from his grey wool for the Virginia trade and wrote to discourage him. He explained that "from the price you Sold" it was clear that "it will come too dear for Negro Clothes, and is too Coarse for the White People."<sup>24</sup> William Reynolds had to return the white fretted ornamental mirrors that came against his instructions if only because the white frames would be ruined with fly specks and coated with dust from careless servants.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, it was not enough just to have the best quality goods if they were not competitively priced. Virginia merchants were always on the lookout for a good "pennyworth;" a bundle of goods that could be bought cheaply. Yet pricing of goods was a

---

<sup>23</sup>George Beeby, Cockermouth, to Messrs. Fischer and Bragg, Petersburg, December 29, 1770, William Bragg Papers; James Lawson to John Semple, March 3, 1760, Currie-Dal Miscellaneous Bundle 20, (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

<sup>24</sup>George Beeby to Jones and Bragg, Cockermouth, July 13, 1769; Jones and Bragg to George Beeby, Petersburg, April 15, 1770, William Bragg Papers.

<sup>25</sup>William Reynolds to John Norton, March 12, 1774, quoted in Calvin B. Coulter, Jr. "The Import Trade of Colonial Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 2 (1945): 303.

complicated and intricate process from producer to consumer, with commissions added by agreement with varying middlemen and highly variable costs of the goods themselves. First, goods came in at invoice price with an "advance" at the bottom that represented both profit and conversion to sterling in a single calculation. The fluctuation of the exchange rate could occasionally wipe out much of a merchant's gross profit, as happened in 1770-1771. Second, the prices charged on the invoice by suppliers also varied by the method of payment; either cash or length of time given to credit. The long distance and uncertainty of business meant that few Virginia merchants could pay cash or make returns quickly for the lowest wholesale price.<sup>26</sup>

But even if any item came at the same price to the Virginia shopkeeper, the advance not only varied by customer, but by method of payment, length of credit, and for any particular kind of good. For example, the advance might drop as goods became more plentiful and competition for business grew. The advance might also vary by the purchaser. James Robinson reminded his new storekeeper that price was often based on the nature of payment (cash or credit) and the trustworthiness of the buyer. He warned, however, that such actions must be done with a "great deal of art, caution, or judgement." Robinson suggested remembering three points when coming up with price: the quality of the article, the ability of

---

<sup>26</sup>This notion of advance is nicely summed in Price, Capital and Credit, Appendix A, pp. 149-151. It is also discussed by Henry Fleming in a letter to Fisher and Bragg, undated 1772, Henry Fleming Letterbook 1772-1775. Lengthy testimony about long and short prices granted based on credit, drawbacks, and bounties are found in the court case of Heron v. Lenox, U.S. Circuit Court, Richmond, Virginia Record Book. no. 13 [May-December 1818]. Long prices are "internal" prices on taxed or subsidized items; those given when the firm goes to the trouble and expense to get the bounty or drawback from customs. Short prices leave any drawbacks or bounties to the shipper. In some cases, such as linen, paper, and glass, this amount may not have been insubstantial. James and Archibald Freeland's partnership agreement with Nathaniel Heron and Company of London showed that goods were to be charged only with the "usual commission" and shipping charges and were entitled to all bounties, drawbacks, and abatements received by the London house. The agreement also stipulated that fifteen percent of the cost of the sterling goods was charged in lieu of importation charges, to which was added the current exchange. Much of the case revolved around what was considered "usual."

the person who is buying, and the prices neighboring merchants sell at. It seems also that planters were often shown the invoice (wholesale cost) and offered a set price above it.<sup>27</sup> Henry Fleming sold his hardware at "15 percent Sterling and advance upon goods and packages to very particular customers." Others he charged 17 1/2 percent mark-up and most at 50 percent for currency, "allowing as other people do." Moreover he also maintained special relationships with other merchants: to fellow Whitehaven merchant Eilbeck and Ross he traded his goods at a ten percent mark-up for their goods at the same. At the same time, he traded with Hector McAlister at no advance for their goods at no advance, in essence creating a straight exchange.<sup>28</sup>

#### The Environment of Shopping

So far the story has been dry and institutional. But what was shopping like at these stores? What was the environment? Did men and women jostle at the counter—if there was one? Were objects for sale draped seductively about or wrapped tightly in wrappers? How did Virginia stores compare to the highly ornamented and glittering world of London shopping? In this section, the physical environment of shopping will be briefly explored.

What were the physical environs of shopping? Anyone could open up a pack of goods in a house or tavern and carry on the retail trade. Peddlers set up stalls or stands outdoors sometimes on the porches of public buildings. But standing permanent stores would also have formed a quite common part of the eighteenth-century landscape—in towns, at crossroads, or on plantations. Unfortunately, few such structures remain. An architectural

---

<sup>27</sup>For dropping advance, see Francis Jerdone to Messrs. Samuel Rickards, Israel Mauduit and Company, December 14, 1764, Jerdone Account and Letterbook; John Robinson to James Turner, October 4, 1768 and John Robinson to Mr. John Likely, October 6, 1771, printed in Devine, Scottish Firm, pp. 9–45. For showing invoices to planters, see James Robinson to William Henderson, October 10, 1769 in Devine, Scottish Firm, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup>Henry Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, Norfolk, June 19, 1772, Fleming Letterbook.

survey of standing stores by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation located few structures, most probably built in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Architectural measurement of standing structures, and documentary evidence found in merchants' papers, insurance claims, and advertisements in the Virginia Gazette thus form a small, although biased, data base to study the size and plan of these structures.<sup>29</sup> The twenty-nine structures found in Tables 2, 3, and 4, dating from the mid eighteenth to early nineteenth century, are the basis for the brief conclusions here.

First, the size of these establishments varied greatly with the scale, scope, and location of the business. Interior space on the first floor ranged from 300 to over 1,000 square feet, although many stores fell at the upper end of that spectrum, between 600 and 800 feet (Table 2 and 3). Stores in the main retail entrepot of Williamsburg were not all larger than those in other Virginia towns or in the country, but some split the space with other functions. For instance, John Carter's store and his brother James' apothecary shop shared a roof, and James Tarpley resided in half of his store building. On the other hand, others such as the partnership of Blair, Prentis, and Cary, had two store buildings (Table 4). Would these stores have seemed large and impressive to the customer? Camille Wells' study of domestic dwellings advertised in the Virginia Gazette illustrates that half of the dwellings enclosed less than 576 square feet, usually representing one or two discrete spaces or rooms

---

<sup>29</sup>See Appendix 1 for notes and documentation. Colonial Williamsburg's immense architectural research on stores and their interiors can be found in Mary R. M. Goodwin, "The Colonial Store," (Research report, March 1966); Donna Hole, "Williamsburg's Four Original Stores: An Architectural Analysis," (Colonial Williamsburg Report Series, September 1980) and Hole, "The Eighteenth-Century Virginia Store Interior," (Report, October 1980); Harold B. Gill, "The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia," (Unfinished manuscript, January 1984); and Edward Chappell, "Architectural Recording and the Open-Air Museum: A View from the Field," Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture 2, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986): 24-37.



Table 2.  
Dimensions of 18th-Century Virginia Stores:  
Documentary Evidence

Store	Location	Year	Total Size	Store Room	Counting Room	Other Space	Sq. Feet
Pagan	Fairfax County	1751	24x24	12x16	12x16	18x24	576
Jameson	Yorktown	1754	20x20				400
Allason	Falmouth	1761	36x22	22x22	14x22		792
Gordon, Allston	Petersburg	1767	40x40				1600
Parham	Sussex	1769	22x12				
Frazer	West Point	1771	28x16				448
Quarles	West Point	1771	28x12				336
Hook	New London	1771	42x20	20x20	14x20	8x20 stair	840
Hook	Falling River	1772	18x18				324
Peachy	Rocky Ridge	1771	18x18	12x16		stair	324
Trents	Rocky Ridge	1771	44x22				968
Hart	Halifax	1777	20x16				320
Lloyd	Petersburg	1785	32x20				640

See Appendix 1 for documentation and comments.

Table 3.  
Dimensions of Standing Virginia Stores:  
Outside of Williamsburg

Store	Location	Total Size	Store Room	Counting Room	Other	Sq. Feet
Hillsborough	King & Queen Co.	32x18	19x18	13x18		576
Moore's	Cumberland	30x24	18.5x24	11.5x24		720
White	Isle of Wight	26x18	16x18	10x18		468
Deaner	Charlotte	28x14	17x14	11x14		392
Farish Print Shop	Port Royal	20x40	20x20	10x20	10x20 storage	800
Calland's	Pittsylvania	44x24	24x24	20x24	porch?	1056
Wall	Lunenburg	38x20			porch	760
Pitt & Sale	Essex	32x20	20X20	12X12		640
Hook	Franklin	24x16	14x16	10x16		384

See Appendix 1 for documentation and comments.

Table 4.  
Square Footage of Williamsburg Stores

Store	Year	Total Size	Store Room	Counting Room	Other	Sq. Feet
Tarpley	1759	40x34				1360
Holt	1760	18x32				576
Carter	1765	20x38				760
Waters	1767	21x35				748
Blair-Prentis-Cary	1739	24x36				864
same	1740	32x30				960
Hunter Shop	1736	24x36				864
Greenhow		75x30				
Nicholson	1750 ?	34x20	19x19	13x13	13x16 stair	680
Talieferro-Cole	1782 ?	26x34	15x17	16x16		2250

Source: Donna Holt, Williamsburg's Four Original Stores: An Architectural Analysis, Research report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, September 1980.

on the first floor. This is in a sample that probably overrepresents better housing. While tentative, it seems that many Virginia stores were indeed larger than Virginia houses.<sup>30</sup>

Within those walls, two basic rooms, a store and a counting room or office were the norm. A main store room was often square or near square and ranged in size from about 200 square feet (16 x 14 feet, for example) to almost 500 square feet (22 x 22 feet). The larger store rooms themselves would have been larger than many Virginia dwellings. Even less is known of the interiors of these buildings, but advertisements, inventories, building contracts, and standing stores give some clues. At least the counting room was often finished like a domestic interior; walls were most likely lathed and plastered, and carefully finished with chair boards and wash boards. Shelves lined some portion of the walls, often with pigeon holes and drawers for smaller items, as shown in Figure 2 in Wall Store in Lunenburg County. Counters were common, though not required; tables could also serve as a surface for writing, measuring, and displaying goods. Indeed, counters were often missing in lists of store furnishings. Other evidence suggests that these counters may have been considered built-in and hence not mentioned in inventories. While few interior fittings remain for standing stores, ghost lines in the floors of the Calland's Store in Pittsylvania County indicate that a counter probably stood at one end of the room, providing a surface for transactions, but also a bit of added security, by preventing immediate access to valuable goods.

The mercantile firm of Glassford and Henderson in Alexandria, Virginia, began building a new store in 1767, and their account books give extraordinary detail of its interior finishing. While no size was given, it contained a counting room, lodging room, and sales room. A bed was hinged to the wall in the counting room. The interior was plastered, ceilings whitewashed, and walls papered. Cream-colored walls contrasted with chocolate

---

<sup>30</sup>Camille Wells, "The Planter's Prospect: Houses and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," forthcoming in Winterthur Portfolio. My thanks to Wells for permission to cite her manuscript.

Figure 2. Interior of Wall Store, Lunenburg County.  
(Photograph, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)



brown trim and a shingled roof painted red. While the interior fixtures were not specified, 110 feet of shelving lined the walls and there was a show case and cash drawer. Finally, two smoking chairs, a table, six more chairs and a small table were all found in the store.<sup>31</sup>

While Virginia stores were simple compared to many of their London counterparts, Glassford and Henderson's store indicates that there was attention to fine display of goods. Evidence can be teased from other documentary material. For instance, M. Brodie, the Williamsburg milliner, advertised a "large bow window, with bars and shutters, some show glasses, and glass cases" for sale. Similarly, a contract for the building of a store in Petersburg included "two bow windows in the manner as the house [torn] Masterson's Tavern."<sup>32</sup> Portable glass cases protected small, valuable items from eager or clumsy fingers. Security was similarly aided by the control of passage in and out of this room; normally only one door entered into these storerooms from the outside, even if one or more may have opened into the office.

This office or counting room was most often attached, although occasionally housed separately. Here the merchant would tend to his books and entertain customers. If there was a second floor, a set of stairs would lead upward for storage or living space for assistants. These counting rooms were most often heated, and inventories indicate they may have been quite well furnished. For instance, the presence of drinking vessels and tea equipage

---

<sup>31</sup>Glassford and Henderson Alexandria Store Ledger C, 1767-1768 in Gill, "Retail Business," 15.

<sup>32</sup> For general description of store interiors, see "An Account of the Work done by William Bates at the Store House Plantation of Israel Christian," May 15, 1770, Bedford County loose papers, Virginia State Library. "Copy of R. D. Carpentry Bills to Compare with R. C.," 1770, and building plans for shelving in John Hook Papers, Duke University. Petition of Thomas Peachy Griffin for reparation for destruction of his storehouse at Rocky Run, Amelia County. Cited in Goodwin, Colonial Store, 129-130. Evidence of bow windows and other details of finishing in Lloyd v. Curston Protest, Tucker-Coleman Uncatalogued MSS, fldr. 67, January 27, 1785, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Advertisement for Williamsburg bow window, Virginia Gazette, Purdie, October 6, 1775. Advertisement for "glass-press" in James Mills' store in Hanover County, Virginia Gazette, Hunter, January 2, 1756.

demonstrate the entertainment necessary in the wooing of customers. Indeed, James Robinson urged a new storekeeper to give "all good usage and drink in abundance."<sup>33</sup> The counting house of the Alexandria firm of Hooe and Harrison contained desks, tables, chairs, scales, money chests, and a bed. All the equipment for writing was there: quires of paper, ink bottles, lead pencils, Dutch quills, paper cutters, seals, and, of course, the set of books for the firm. The merchant could consult several published treatises on trade and law, reading late at night with the aid of the "compting House Candlesticks" (valued at an extraordinary £75.00) or by the light of the fire. When tired, he could stretch out on his bed, put his head on his pillow, pull up his sheets and blankets, and enjoy a good night's rest.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, not all firms were as large and profitable as Hooe and Harrison. But underlying the use of space in all these commercial establishments was a basic need to store, unpack, and/or display goods (both wet and dry), keep books, conduct business, entertain important clients, and receive slaves or other servants on errands. But some merchants had a need for—and could afford—both extra storage and sleeping for shopkeepers or apprentices, and hence added extra rooms on the first floor or a second floor. Others added stables, free-standing stores, warehouses, sheds, and log houses for the reception of slaves sent up for sale.<sup>35</sup>

While those two basic units were most common, the placement of those rooms on the lot, alignment to street, addition of other rooms, and location of doors and windows may have

---

<sup>33</sup>James Robinson to John Turner, October 4, 1768 in Devine, Scottish Firm, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup>"Inventory of Household and Other Furniture on hand belonging to the Concern of Hooe and Harrison at Alexandria, December 31, 1779," Hooe, Stone, and Company Invoice Book, 1770-1784, New York Public Library (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). For sleeping in the store, see Virginia Gazette (Hunter), September 16, 1737. Mr. Lidderdale's storekeeper and another man were sleeping in the store in Prince George County, when three "rogues" came to the store when Lidderdale was away, demanded entry on the pretense of leaving a letter, "rush'd in, bound the Two Men, and stole about 70 pounds in Cash, a Watch, A pair of Pistols, several Shirts, etc."

<sup>35</sup>James Robinson to Bennett Price, November 30, 1767 in Devine, Scottish Firm, p. 4.

differed. One simple organizing plan predominated. In one version, the gable end of a structure—pierced by a door and windows—faced onto a street. A large room served as the store, with side walls lined with shelving. Behind this room, stood the counting room or office (fig. 3). In a second example, the building's long side faced onto a street and the two rooms stood side by side, often with two separate doors on the street. This allowed access to carry out business in the office, even if the store room remained locked (fig. 4).

Finally, one of the least well-known aspects of these stores is the method by which goods were stored and displayed within those spaces. While London trade cards and prints often show elegant displays, particularly of fabric bolts draped to display them at best advantage, Virginia stores may have kept much of their general goods covered to avoid devastating losses due to insect, rodent, and moisture damage. For example, the inventory of goods in John Bates' store in 1720 included fabrics and clothing items that had been eaten by rats or moths, and some drugget that had suffered from both! Some handkerchiefs were "spoiled and rotten." It is in this context that we can further understand the reluctance of merchants to have too much stock left at the end of the season.<sup>36</sup>

One clue to how goods were stored can be found in another early Virginia probate inventory. The appraisers of Richard Walker's store in rural Middlesex County in 1728 carefully designated the location of store goods. Through their inventory, we can trace their movement through the store. First, they went to the store loft. A chest there contained sixty-three pieces of assorted textiles valued at over £65. Another held seventeen pieces of linen, checks, and rolls, but also four rugs, forty-six felt hats, and fifteen Carolina hats. A box containing pins, fishing lines, combs, toys, and other small metal items sat next to a box with

---

<sup>36</sup>Inventory of the Estate of John Bates, Merchant. Goods in Poplar Spring Storehouse, June 10, 1720. York County Order and Will Book 15, 1716-1720; Johnathan Newell's store inventory from 1672 included coarse men's castor hats with "eaten with the Ratts around the Brims," a dozen women's castors, some "damnified," and 4 dozen and 4 Ratt eaten Cabbage Nets," February 29, 1671-1672, York County Deeds, Orders, and Wills 6, 1677-1684. My thanks to Harold Gill for these and other early Virginia merchants' inventories.



Figure 3. Prentis Store, Williamsburg.  
(Photograph, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)



Figure 4. Hillsborough Store, King and Queen County.  
(Photograph, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)



paper and books. There was a barrel of pewter, locks, and brick trowels, a box of pistols and swords, and a barrel containing over seventy pairs of shoes. Gunpowder and white ginger were each found in a separate box, with another combining cinnamon, mace, cloves, and nutmeg. All told, the loft contained two trunks, three chests, two barrels and seven boxes. "Below stairs" was a chest of habdashery (pins, notions, etc), a parcel (probably paper) of pewter, and more trunks, chests and boxes. On a shelf were hose, hats, and eight pieces of fabric. "Under the shelves on the floor" were numerous books, shoes, ironmongery (tools and small metal goods), and small items like beads and spectacles. In a box on the floor was a jumble of stonewares, glass, marking irons, combs, needles, more pewter, sugar, and books.

Their path then becomes a bit more confusing. A space designated as the lower floor contained items such as hoes, butter pots, crown soap, barrels, and casks of nails—all relatively bulky items. Yet a "middle floor" only contained 250 yards cotton, five dozen pottle bottles, six gross pipes, and nails. It is the "New House" that is most puzzling, for here was found an assortment of tools (axes, scythes, and sheep shears), four casks of nails, other metalwares such as chaffing dishes and engineer rules, a hogshead of biscuits, and other smaller quantities of nails. With these heavy iron objects were found two boxes of pipes, but also twenty-seven earthen chamber pots, thirty-four wine glasses, six punch bowls and other ceramics. These pottery items were not contained or packed in any box. In the prize loft was tackle, blocks, coils of rope, and three pair of andirons in a bundle. Finally, the appraisers entered the dwelling house. There was scattered dozens of pairs of hose and gloves, pins and a dozen primers, in enough quantity to rule out personal use.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Inventory of Richard Walker, March 7, 1728, Middlesex County Will Book B: 1714-1734, pp. 335-343. Walker's total estate (including personal goods) was valued at over £1,300.

It is difficult to read this document. First, it is clear that most items were stored in trunks, casks, boxes or some other closed container from which the merchant would pull out the necessary item. This system would serve the dual purposes of securing items from theft and preventing damage from rodents or moisture. Secondly, there were shelves, although only the contents of one was described. Perhaps some of the smaller boxes were stacked on shelves, and the appraisers found the containers more salient than the location. Third, many of these boxes contained the kind of items usually shipped from one supplier; tinwares together or habdashery, for instance. On the other hand, others seem jumbled in a way that does not correspond to manufacturing or shipping.

Perhaps, however, the early date of this inventory precludes any new emphasis on careful display and storage of goods. James Robinson advised John Turner always to keep his goods in "proper order," adding that it will help them sell. He urged Turner to take them down often and re-tie them, assumedly in papers.<sup>38</sup> Norfolk merchant Henry Fleming also complained about an assortment of poorly-made gloves that he and his assistants are "frequently called upon to shew them & hitherto have had as often the trouble of putting them up again."<sup>39</sup> This notion of taking down items from shelves, returning them, and putting them back in order, forms the heart of a hypothetical scene between a shopping lady and mercer in Daniel Defoe's Compleat English Tradesman where she tests his patience by having him "tumble" several thousand pounds of goods to find her satisfaction.<sup>40</sup>

Because a great deal of information is available about the stores of John Hook through plans, standing buildings, and court documentation, the most complete picture yet of the interiors of Virginia stores may be pieced together. The store that Hook built in the fledgling

---

<sup>38</sup>James Robinson to John Turner, April 22, 1769 in Devine Scottish Firm, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup>Henry Fleming to Fischer and Bragg, July 29, 1774, Fleming Letterbook.

<sup>40</sup>Defoe, Compleat English Tradesman, p. 68.

town of New London was large even by colony-wide standards (see tables 2, 3, and 4). The long end of his 42 x 20 foot building faced onto the street on his two-acre lot. On the ground floor was a storeroom, counting room, and a storage room that Hook may have referred to as the "lumber room" (fig. 5). The store room was 20 x 20 feet with a two-foot-ten-inch-wide counter nearly bisecting the room on its east-west axis. On the street side (to the south), was a door and two windows; the facing wall—behind the counter—was lined with thirteen shelves and forty-nine small pigeon holes, ranging from 4.5 x 13 inches to 13 x 20 inches (fig. 6). A door on the east wall to the storage room was on the public (south) side of the counter; the door on the west wall to the counting room was behind the counter, thus controlling public access. Under the counter were a number of cross-divided drawers, including a cash drawer.

The two end rooms were heated and included staircases. The counting room was 14 x 20 feet with stairs leading up to two large rooms above. A small heated room with two dormer windows above the counting room was partitioned off from the remaining second floor, probably used for storage. This larger room had one dormer and one gable end window. The heated overhead room would have been the living quarters for Hook's bookkeeper, providing inexpensive accommodations and heightened store security. There was a cellar with two exterior entrances on the east and west sides, noted on the plans as "s.hut" meaning cellar shed or, in modern terms, a bulkhead entrance. This structure does not still stand, but its appearance was probably similar to that of the Farish Print Shop on King Street in Port Royal, Caroline County (figs. 7 and 8), which has a quite similar plan and size.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>For a brief description of the Farish Print Shop, see Ralph Emmett Fall, Hidden Village: Port Royal Virginia, 1744-1981 (Verona, Va.: McClure Printing, 1982). The Farish Shop has one less dormer window for lighting the upstairs storage area, and the office and storage area are of slightly different dimensions. The chimney is also placed differently. Overall, however, the 40-by-20 foot size, organization of space, and the fenestration of the first floor street are remarkably similar; Hook even mistakenly wrote the dimensions "40 x 20" on his plan, although the room dimensions added up to 42' x 20'. The structure may have been used as a tavern in the late eighteenth century. Port Royal, like New London, was also a

Figure 5. John Hook Store Plan, New London, Bedford County.  
(Drawing: Kim Wagner. Source: John Hook Papers,  
Perkins Library, Duke University).

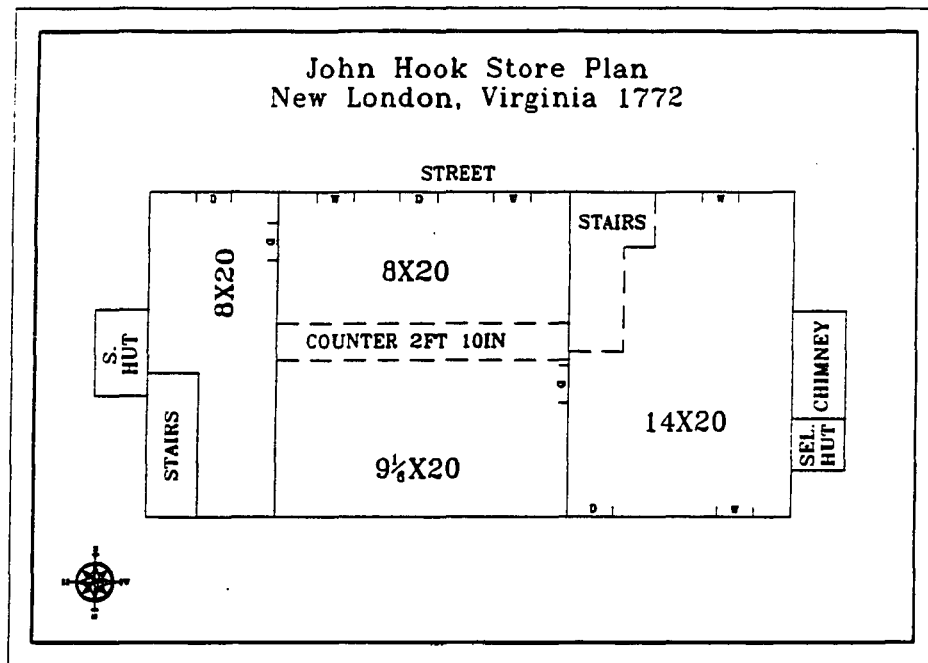
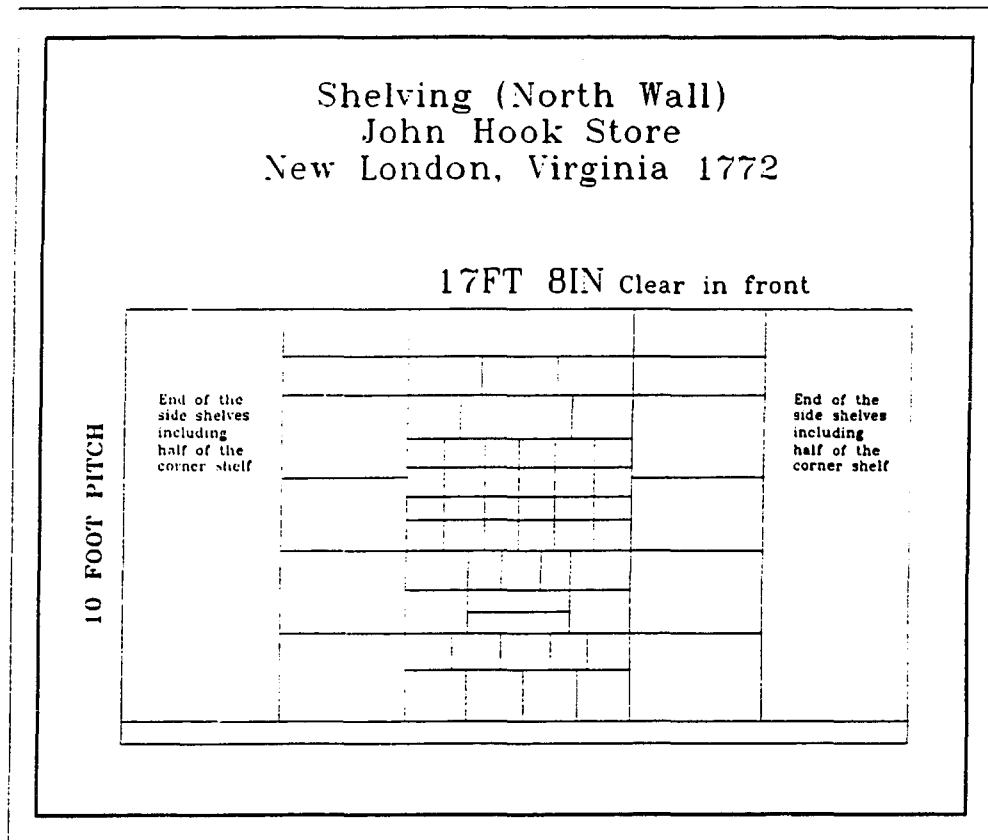


Figure 6. Interior Shelving, John Hook Store, New London.  
(Drawing: Kim Wagner. Source: John Hook Papers,  
Perkins Library, Duke University.)



A second building was built or moved next to the new store. It included a large unheated twenty-by-twenty-six-foot room with stairs leading upward, probably to a storage area (fig. 9). Two sheds were built "shaded down" from the ends of the structure, each twenty by eight feet. The shed to the east (farthest from the store itself) was left open at the end. A window was to be built with a sliding shutter, although Hook's instructions are unclear on where the window was to be placed.

Hook built a second store in Hail's Ford, some fifty miles to the south and east across a major road from his new plantation when he left New London in 1773. This building was moved and reused as a slave dwelling, but still stands on the property of Dr. Warren Moorman. Like many plantation stores, it is a much smaller building than an urban counterpart, only measuring 24 x 16 feet, or 384 square feet (figs. 10 and 11). While the building was small and no longer in town, it still was trimmed with a fashionable set of modillioned eaves (fig. 12). None of the interior fittings of shelves and counters remain, but we know it also contained multiple shelves and pigeon holes from an 1801 inventory.

Indeed, the 1801 inventory taken by court commissioners gives some of our best evidence of how goods were stored in Virginia in the late eighteenth century. Ten pigeon holes were well-filled with different sized buttons; 124 papers of different kinds, to be exact. Two holes contained nine razors and an unknown number contained an extraordinary array of small consumer goods, from knives and forks to ribbons, nearly all wrapped in paper (see Table 5). Elsewhere around the store were barrels of ginger, brimstone, shot, and pepper, casks of brandy and whiskey, even an anvil. Breakable items were nearly all in trunks, such as the forty-one different sizes of looking glasses or the glass goblets, decanters, and vials. Creamware was packed in three crates, window glass in two boxes. But the textiles were all

---

small mercantile town, home to five or six Scottish merchants and about twenty or thirty houses in 1775, although it lay on navigable water. Robert Honeyman, Colonial Panorama 1775: Dr. Robert Honeyman's Journal for March and April, ed. Phillip Padelford (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 1.



Figure 7. Farish Print Shop, Port Royal, Caroline County.  
(Photograph, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)



Figure 8. Farish Print Shop plan, Port Royal.  
(Drawing, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

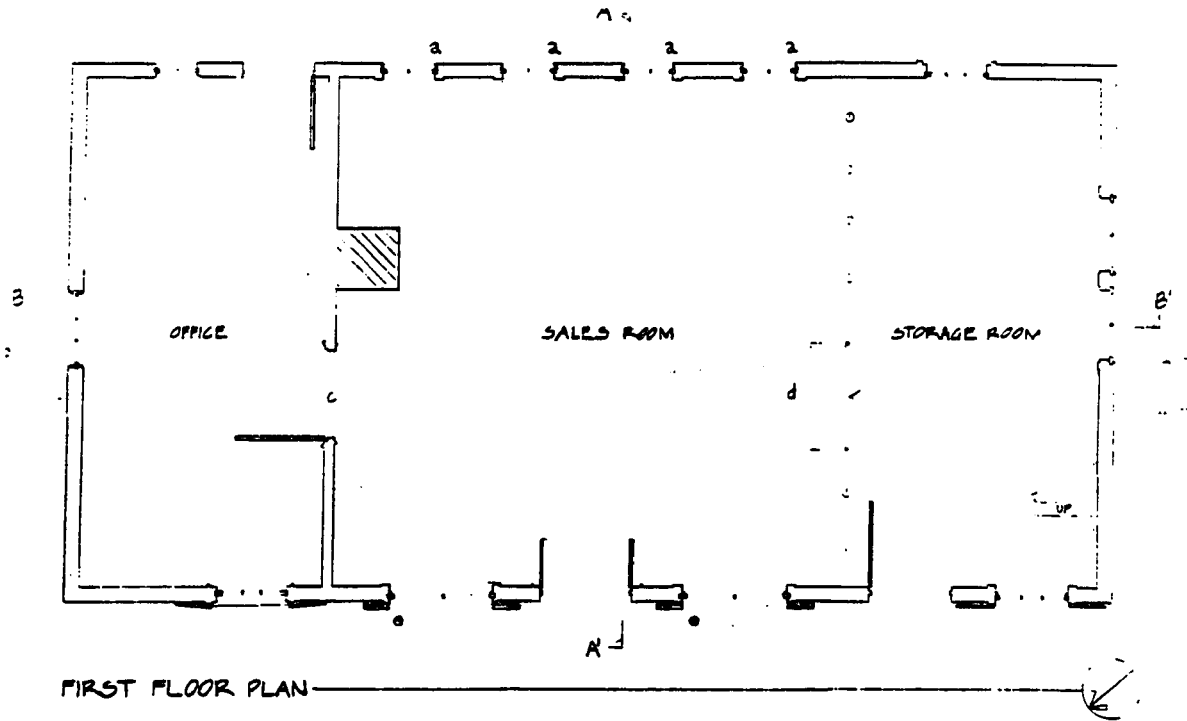


Figure 9. Hook Lumber House, New London.  
(Source: John Hook papers, Perkins Library, Duke University)

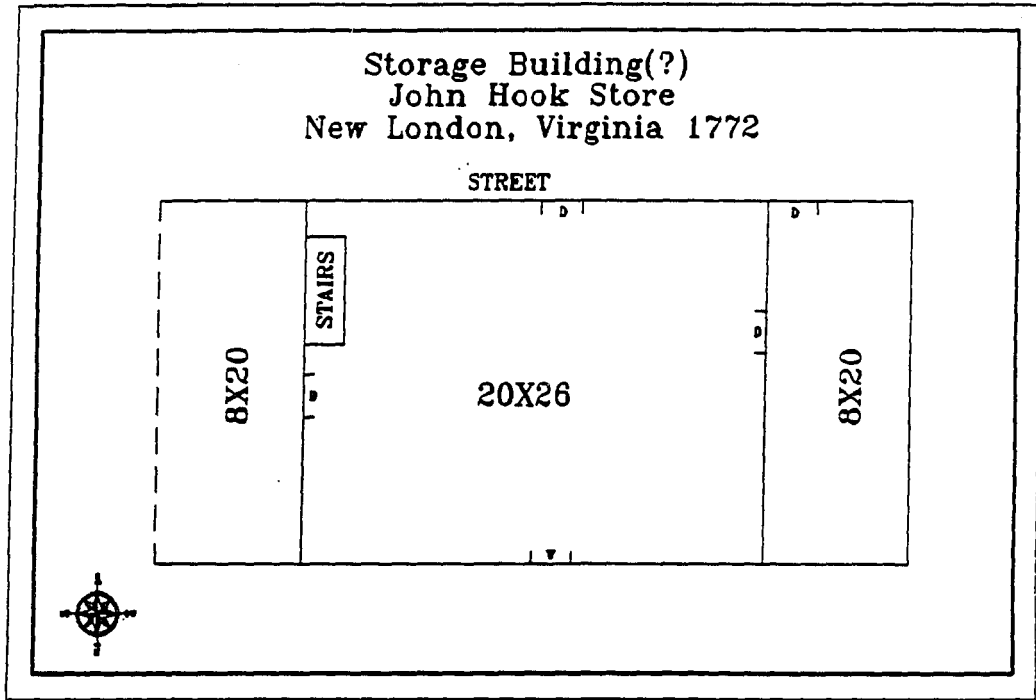
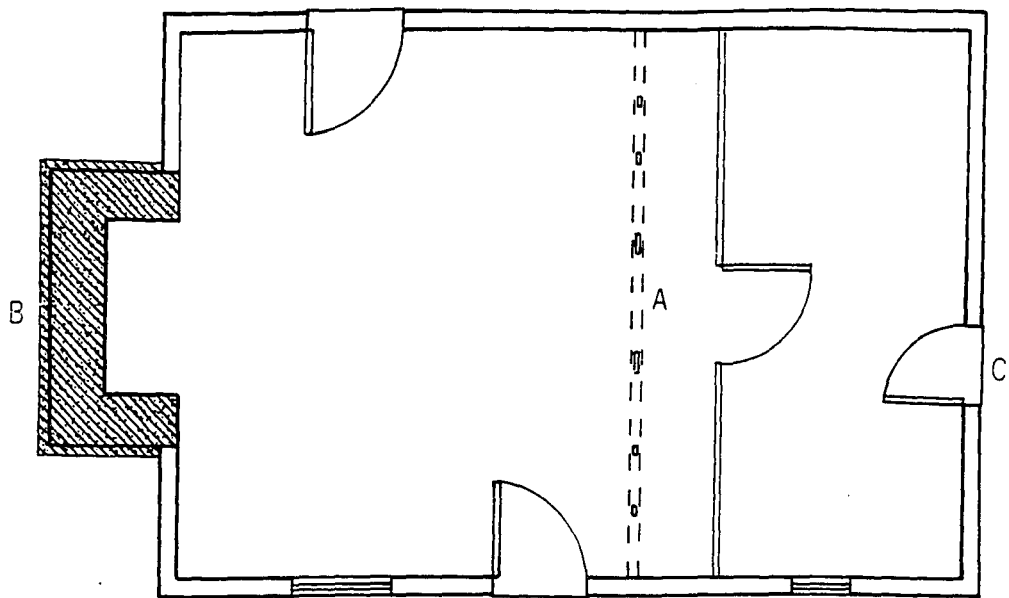
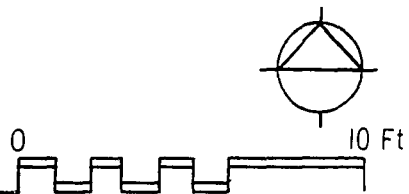


Figure 10. Hook Store plan, Hale's Ford, Franklin County.  
(Drawing, Carl Lounsbury, Colonial  
Williamsburg Foundation)



**HOOK STORE**



- A. Door location in original partition
- B: Chimney 2nd quarter 19th century
- C: Door early 20th century

Figure 11. Hook Store, Hale's Ford, Franklin County.  
(Photograph, Carl Lounsbury, Colonial  
Williamsburg Foundation)



Figure 12. Detail, modillioned cornice, Hook Store.  
(Photograph, Carl Lounsbury, Colonial  
Williamsburg Foundation)



Table 5.  
"Sundry articles contained in Pidgeon Holes"  
in Hook's Store

---

124 papers buttons, different kinds, some broken  
36 papers thread different kinds, silk and twist  
1 paper ribbands different kinds, 6 bunches tape, 1 ditto bobbin  
shirt buttons, 3 parcels thread, hat bands, 38 ps ribband  
1 paper black silk handkfs, 4 papers ink power  
40 papers pins, 2 bunches bent combs, 2 boxes wafers,  
1 paper tobacco boxes, 1 paper spectacles, 1 paper snuff boxes  
1 paper nutmeg graters, 2 papers needles, 3 ditto thimbles  
9 papers razors, 2 papers desk mountains (sic)  
12 bundle pins, 2 boxes wafers, 3 papers ink power  
1 paper sleeve buttons, 6 papers small buttons  
4 papers bridle bitts, 6 papers scissors, 9 papers snuffers  
6 ditto combs, 2 papers cupboard locks  
1 paper sewing silk, 3 boxes wafers, 4 ps ribbands  
1 paper sadle boxes, 4 papers spurs, 7 papers awl blades  
4 papers cutto knives, 2 ditto pen knives, 5 ditto bridle bitts  
11 papers scissars, 1 ditto knee buckles, 1 ditto saddle bosses  
4 ditto screws, 1 bunch knitting needles, 1 ditto compasses  
12 papers knives and forks, 4 ditto shoes knives  
1 ditto nutmeg graters, 1 paper 2 foot rules  
2 bundles gilt buckles, 1 paper of money weights  
5 papers cubboard locks, 1 paper bridle bitts  
2 ditto center bitts, 1 paper butcher knives  
1 gun lock, 2 pr sheep shears, 2 papers wood screws  
1 paper white chappel needles, 1 paper shoe tacks  
1 ditto table butts

---

Source: "Inventory of John Hook's property relieved by the Supersedens issued from the High Court of Chancery, sworn 16 January 1802, Ross vs. Hook, Chancery Court of Virginia."

listed separately, as were individual books and household goods, such as pewter, tin, and iron. This suggests, albeit tentatively, that those items may not have been boxed, but stacked on shelves or hung in relative proximity to each other. On the counter may have been the two pair small brass scales and weights next to a few pounds of tea and indigo. Nearby may have been the barrels of brimstone, pepper, and shot that would have been measured. Boxes of chocolate, bags of ginger and allspice, and bladders of putty may have been on shelves near four and a half barrels of copperas, a barrel of alum, over a thousand pounds of seed cotton in bags, two and a half barrels of brown sugar, thirty-four bushels of salt, one and a half chests of tea, and two tin candle boxes, full of candles.

The picture of the contents of this store is remarkably different from the jumble seen at Richard Walker's store in 1728. While barrels and boxes still probably lined the walls, the picture here is one of relative order. Small consumer goods were stored in pigeon holes, and breakable items were packed together, not tossed near heavy iron objects. It is not clear how the immense array of fabrics were stored or displayed, but they were also listed in a distinctive and organized way. Eighty-eight different kinds of woolens were followed by bedding, hats, and cloaks. Fifteen different kinds of fabrics were organized under the heading of "manchestry," thirty-six fabrics under "stuffs," and fourteen under "muslins." Fourteen pieces of muslin were listed before clothing items like handkerchiefs, cravats, cotton shawls, checked bandannas, and vest patterns. Two "wild boar quilted quilts, lined," preceded thirteen varieties of linen and another seven of coarse linen. The store may have indeed been ordered much along the lines suggested by John Mair in his bookkeeping manuals. Of course, the store goods may have been pulled and reorganized by the commissioners, but they probably did not have the skill to recreate such groupings of textiles.

The combined architectural and documentary evidence for Hook's and Walker's stores, then, provide a detailed analysis of the environment of shopping. The ordinary



consumer confronted a relatively large building, constructed in a conventional plan of several rooms designed to control their access to goods through the use of doors and counters. Light came all from the windows and doors on the wall opposite the counter; thus the store may have been relatively dark, and we might imagine the merchant pulling items from the shelves and pigeon holes behind the counter and carrying them to the better lit side of the room. As the store room was not heated, a customer could have been invited into the counting room that was architecturally finished to a much higher degree, at the standard of a good dwelling. There merchant and consumer could have sat, socialized, or haggled. At the same time, even if a customer did not have complete access, these goods were stacked enticingly around the store. While many remained wrapped in paper or stored in large hogsheads, boxes, or other containers, a large number of items may have been on shelves in plain view.

Combining this evidence suggests that Virginia stores, like Virginia dwellings, represented a broad range of options. Some, especially rural stores, may have been little more than coverings for the valuable stock of goods inside. Increasingly, however, the structure itself came to be a large investment for a merchant; the store and its related buildings ranged in value from £300 to £1,000.<sup>42</sup> The size and interior finishing of these stores reflect permanency and year-round use, but also a need to store and display a vast range of consumer goods in a way that suggests both order and fashion. Important business clients had to be entertained through drinking and treating, and in some cases, storekeepers or other employees had to be housed. In some cases, a number of supporting ancillary structures gave the store a look of a little plantation.

Moreover, the most important point might be that by the third quarter of the eighteenth century, these stores were often only that: a single-function building where goods were stored, displayed, sold, and traded in a standardized setting. Inventory evidence

---

<sup>42</sup>Gill, "Retail Trade," p. 10.

suggests that a recognized set of store fittings had evolved to the point that appraisers could use a short-hand for store equipment such as counters or shelving. That specialization of place means that the act of consumption was something distinctive, defined by action and reinforced by space. If some continued to buy from peddlars or from small cargoes stored at an entrepreneur's house, the store building for many Virginians was as defining a place on the landscape as house, church, tavern, and courthouse. Store buildings came from the same vocabulary of the built environment. On the exterior, they was made of similar materials and had windows and doors much like domestic dwellings. But open that door and a whole new world was inside—a world of color and fashion, hard-nosed bargaining and impulse decisions.

#### Buying into the World of Goods

One question remains. What went on inside those doors? What kind of behaviors and relations were found there? We know little about the act of shopping in eighteenth-century Anglo-America, although Richard Bushman has suggested that shopping was indeed a new and important phenomenon. The change from the purchase of the kind of utilitarian goods more common in the previous century to a new range of more fashionable and inessential goods required judgement and taste. With the explosion of wares available in the retail trade, judgement and taste joined price as key components in consumer choice. This notion was made explicit in the many advertisements of urban shopkeepers, where greatest possible range and cheapest price was a key attracting point for clientele. At the same time, Bushman argues, these advertisements used a particular rhetoric to address their clientele by calling the attention of "gentlemen and ladies." While in many cases that clientele was real—for only the most wealthy could afford some of the new fashionable wares and

services and only the gentrified would want them——Bushman suggests that these invitations also set apart urban shops as places of gentility. The paradox was that one need not be a bona fide gentleman or lady to enter the store and purchase any given item for a merchant's job was to sell to all who came with cash in hand. Bushman suggests that it was the ability to assume that role of gentleman or lady through the act of shopping as well as the resulting fashionable purchase with all the meaning it conferred on its owner that allowed the less wealthy to enter the genteel world.

With the explosion of choice through a broader stock and multiple retail outlets came the actual pleasurable behavior of shopping, time spent in browsing without necessarily buying, experiencing the world of goods through looking and handling.<sup>43</sup> Robert Southey described London during the social season when "the usual morning employment of the ladies is to go a-shopping, as it is called; that is, to see curious exhibitions." He claimed that the reason that shopkeepers in England were men was that they were better able to enter the game of fashionable amusement of women shoppers "from the servant-maid to the peeress." Women shopkeepers had no such patience.<sup>44</sup>

A new person——the shopkeeper——thus entered the colonial scene with many roles and identities. His public role was that of complaisance or service to social superiors, even as he imparted information and taste to his clients. He was, as Bushman suggests, a virtual human invitation to buy. Oliver Goldsmith wrote a description of such a London scene in the satirical literary guise of letters written home by a visiting Chinese merchant and philosopher. In Letter Seventy-seven, Lien Chi Altanga described how he went to a mercer's shop to buy silk for a night cap, and the extraordinary service he received from the mercer

---

<sup>43</sup>Richard L. Bushman, "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America," in Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Cary Carson, forthcoming.

<sup>44</sup>Robert Southey, Letters from England, ed. Jack Simmons, (London 1807; repr. ed. London: The Cresset Press, 1961), pp. 68-69.

and his assistants. "They were certainly the civillest people alive," he averred, for "if I but looked, they flew to the place where I cast my eye; every motion of mine sent them running round the whole shop for my satisfaction," showing him a good forty pieces, "each of which was said to be the prettiest pattern in nature, and the fittest in the world for night-caps." Interwoven was this complaisance was flattery and the conspicuous dropping of names of the elite who had chosen this or that piece, all part of the tricks of salesmanship of the merchant. While the poor customer was waiting for his silk to be cut, the merchant continued to pull down more beautiful silk and convinced him to buy a waistcoat by suggesting that even if he did not want one now, when the time came, it would be more expensive. While his unplanned purchase was being slowly cut by an assistant, the merchant then told him about the new custom of some of the nobility receiving company in their morning gowns. Spreading out the most beautiful piece of silk of all, the merchant swore that "if the nobility were to know that I sold this to any, under a right Honourable, I should lose their custom; you see, my Lord, it is at once rich, tastey, and quite the thing." Despite the protests of the poor customer that he needed no new gown, the end result was the same; a new dressing gown was added to the waist coat and the night cap.

The sanguine Chinese philosopher reflected on the events at the mercer's shop. Despite the merchant's poor education he had succeeded in turning his customer to his every inclination. He marvelled that

"I knew he was only answering to his own purposes, even while he attempted to appear solicitous about mine; yet by a voluntary infatuation, a sort of passion compounded by vanity and good nature, I walked into the snare with my eyes open and put myself to future pain in order to give him immediate pleasure."<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>Oliver Goldsmith, The Citizen of the World or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to his Friends in the East, 1762. First published as a series of letters in The Public Ledger from 1760 to 1761. Reprinted in Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield and Other Writings, ed. Frederick W. Hilles 1762; reprint, New York: Modern Library, 1955), pp. 193-195.

Such popular fictional writing did not, of course, represent any real scene and must be used with care. Yet, Goldsmith was using the ruse of a foreigner's eyes to comment on his own society, and such satire was meant to touch upon—in a larger-than-life way—the reality of English experience. What Goldsmith tell us is that there was an important power relationship between merchant and customer. On the one hand, that complaisance, flattery, and appeal to social emulation were all part of the merchant's purpose of selling goods, and the power of a smooth sales pitch. The merchant also passed on information about changes in behavior among the elite, and gave the customer a means to join in the new social custom by buying appropriate clothing. On the other hand, the customer had a huge range of choice and the ultimate power of the purse. From the shopkeeper's point of view, the real power lay with the shopper, for it was his or her choice to engage in the mere pleasure of looking—and all the trouble that entailed to the merchant—or to become a paying customer.

That dramatic tension between merchant and customer was also constantly played out in pricing. Benjamin Franklin's essay "Lying Shopkeepers" in the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1730 sarcastically records a saying among shopkeepers "That 'tis a pity Lying is a Sin, it is so useful in Trade." Franklin is, of course, playfully condemning the "uneasiness of Hagging" over prices and the claims of merchants about profits on sales. A reply was forthcoming from the shopkeeper "Betty Diligent," who answered that customers were even worse at deception with complaints such as "I am sure 'tis very ordinary at that Price; I have bought much better at such a one's Shop for less money," and even "that they have bought cheaper of me; when I know the Price they mention is less than the Goods cost me."<sup>46</sup> Part of the problem was a profound cultural uneasiness about what the appropriate price or profit should be as caught up in the notion of "just price." This is one explanation for the trouble

---

<sup>46</sup>Benjamin Franklin: Writings, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay, (New York: Library of America, 1987), pp. 158-162.

experienced by Samuel Colton a half-century after Franklin's jesting exchange among shopkeepers. When Colton attempted to raise his prices to what he considered an appropriate rate of profit during the Revolution, those long-simmering tensions between merchants and customers took a strong and unusual form. A crowd in his community took his goods, removed them to a barn, and set limits on the price at which he could sell them. In their view, Colton had exceeded an appropriate profit for his labors; Colton, on the other hand, quite simply was acting under the notion that a price could be set at what the market would bear. The battle of incipient capitalism was daily fought between merchant and customer.<sup>47</sup>

But how do conclusions based on urban stores fit with our view of the Virginia trade? Stores in Virginia towns did advertise in the familiar rhetoric of most fashionable goods of the best quality and at the cheapest price. But extraordinary differences remained. Most Chesapeake stores outside of Williamsburg or Annapolis carried a vast array of goods that mixed the most utilitarian and the more fashionable. Not only the stock but the clientele was thus more varied, and the store itself probably did not carry that sense of genteel environment that Bushman hypothesizes. Because these were credit, not cash, establishments, merchants were forced to judge potential customers not on their cash in hand but their ability to pay. Accounts were often cut off because of lack of payment, and we might imagine merchants refusing to allow the purchase of certain expensive goods.

As will be amplified in Chapter Six, rural stores were far more heterogeneous institutions, whose customers included a broad cross-section of Virginia society. Power relations were thus recast based on each individual's status. While evidence about the merchant-customer relationship is rare, the words of Sarah Kemble, the daughter of a wealthy merchant travelling from Boston to New York in 1704, are remarkable commentary on the demeanor and behavior of the rural poor coming into a store. First, she noted that when a

---

<sup>47</sup>Barbara Clark Smith, *After the Revolution*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 34-40.

customer came to a store the first question was not about the availability of the goods wanted by the customer but a gruff "is Your Pay Ready?" by the merchant. The price was thus set according to credit arrangements or kind of currency. Already a power relationship is set. Her description of a "tall country fellow" coming into a store is cast in terms of derision and must be used with care, but is worth quoting at some length:

"He advanc't to the middle of the Room, makes an Awkward nodd, and spitting a great deal of aromatick Tincture, he gave a scrape with his shovel like shoo, leaving a small shovel full of dirt on the floor, makes a full stop. Hugging his own pretty Body with his hands under his arms, Stood staring rown'd him like a Catt let out of a Basket. At last, . . .he opened his mouth and said, have you any Ribenen for Hatbands to sell I pray. The Questions and Answers about the pay being past, the Ribin is bro't and opened. Bumpkin Simpurs, cryes its confounded Gay I vow; and beckoning to the door, in comes Jone Tawdry, dropping about 50 curtsies, and stands by him: hee shows her the Ribin. Law You, sais shee, its right Gent, do You take it, tis dreadfully pretty. Then she enquires have You any hood silk I pray? wh[ich] being brought and bought. Have you any thred silk to sew it wth says shee, wh[ich] being accomodated with, they departed."

Knight added that these poor country folk generally stood after they come in "a great while speechless and sometimes don't say a word til they are askt what they want." She attributed this to the "Awe they stand in of the merchants." This awe came from a relation of power; they were often indebted, "and must take what they [the merchants] bring without Liberty to choose for themselves." Kemble, the merchant's daughter, had little sympathy for these consumers, however, for they too often made the merchant wait long for his pay.<sup>48</sup>

While Knight is describing New England at a much earlier period, her words starkly amplify the relation between merchant and customer. The absolute discomfort, the gestures

---

<sup>48</sup>Sarah Kemble Knight, "The Private Journal of a Journey from Boston to New York, in the Year 1704," in *American Colonial Prose: John Smith to Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Mary Ann Radzinowicz, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 135-136. While Knight's disdain here is clear—and no doubt colors her perception—the rest of her journal is a precise recording of real events, and there is no reason to suspect that she did not witness such a scene.

of humility, the body language, the wonderment at the beauty of ribbons—few other colonists wrote with such intense observation about the ordinary act of consumption by ordinary people. Here there is no sense of a merchant's complaisance and certainly no pretensions that the customers were temporary gentlemen or ladies. This scene can be contrasted with the experience of the most wealthy, although we can only infer from the few terse words of Landon Carter's diary, recording a shopping trip of his daughter Lucy in 1775. Written in his usual complaining tone, he recorded how on Saturday, October 23, "Lucy as usual is much in want of necessaries." She had planned to go to Blane's store, but when told by another that a better selection was to be had elsewhere, went instead to a different store. Her father gave her seven dollars to spend, and she returned by dinner time with a fan, some ribbons, and "several such prodigious nothings," having spent a full £6, much more than the cash given to her by her father. But Landon Carter's credit was good in any store, and since he was trusted, she could spend freely.<sup>49</sup>

Here, of course, the power relationship is reversed. Lucy Carter was the daughter of one of the most wealthy men in the colony and her business was welcome. Here we can indeed imagine that merchants were indeed complaisant and deferential to their social superior. Lucy Carter and "Jone Tawdry" both purchased ribbons, but the way each was treated by the merchants and their comfort in the world of goods was in stark contrast. Lucy no doubt did not stand stock-still or wide-eyed in the shopping environment; she had far finer things at home. While shopping was an enjoyable activity that got her out of the house and gave her fashionable things, she may not have had the same pleasure as "Jone Tawdry" at their color and visual appeal or any thrill at their ownership. For the poor, consumption was a different experience even within the same walls.

---

<sup>49</sup>Jack P. Greene, ed., The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778, 2 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1765), 2: 950.



Like churches and courthouses, stores were places where hierarchy was played out in innumerable ways.<sup>50</sup> For the best customers, merchants were ready with hospitality and cheap prices. The world of goods around them was a common vocabulary, and the ability to judge through taste and fashion eased the consumption decision process. For the poor, the same goods might have seemed foreign and discomfoting. On the other hand, perhaps these consumer goods were glamorous by their ability to capture dreams of someday owning them. Each individual had their own motivation and each object its own meaning and the two were intertwined in countless daily transactions from London to the edge of the English empire.

Of course, there were other power relationships besides those between merchant and customer played out in stores. We know little about the ways that consumption decisions were made within households. If "Jone Tawdry" could only enter the store after her husband made the financial arrangements, other women shopped freely. A Maryland merchant writing a supplier acknowledged, "You know the influence of the Wives upon their Husbands, and it is but a trifle that wins 'em over." He added that "they must be taken notice of or there will be nothing done with them."<sup>51</sup>

The rise of the retail trade in eighteenth-century Anglo-America represents a chain of distribution that stretched from one end of the empire to the other. It is both cause and effect of any new consumerism, and linked people and objects in new commercialized relationships. But what kinds of goods were available at any given store and who bought them? At the same time, more information is necessary about the movement of commodities from producer to distributor.

---

<sup>50</sup>Dell Upton, Anglican Parish Churches, (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1986). Carl Lounsbury, "The Structure of Justice: The Courthouses of Colonial Virginia," in Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989).

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in Of Consuming Desires: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Cary Carson, forthcoming, p. 33.

One way to push this investigation forward is to go to backcountry Virginia on the geographical edge of the Anglo-American empire. First, we will take an intensive view of the world of the merchant, as told through the story of one man. Then we will take a microscopic view of the material world of the consumer. Only through layering these contexts in one quite specific place and time can we move closer to our quest to understand the world of goods.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A MERCHANT AND THE WORLD OF GOODS: JOHN HOOK AND HIS BUSINESS

Behind the counter spread with goods in Virginia stores stood a businessman. Continuing to shift our focus to match his view, we can gain new insight into the world of goods and the retail trade. Through the life of one merchant, a common trajectory of experience of many who came from Britain to Virginia may be seen: youthful optimism of quick riches, realities of a booming and busting Virginia economy, personal dynamics of intense competition between merchants in any given community, extraordinary social and economic dislocation of the American Revolution, and, ultimately, settling into local society through marriage and the purchase of land. The life of John Hook demonstrates not only how goods motivated people to consume, but——for a few——to succeed.

As Virginia population spread westward in the eighteenth century, many stores quickly followed to supply them with goods and buy their crops.<sup>1</sup> One merchant to follow

---

<sup>1</sup>Backcountry retailing has only recently been studied. Two major works that draw upon stores as important evidence in historical geography are Robert D. Mitchell, Commercialization and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977) and Charles Farmer, "Country Stores and Frontier Exchange Systems in Southside Virginia during the Eighteenth Century," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1984). Farmer's work is particularly important as it delineates the intricate hierarchy that linked the southside to higher order retail places in eastern Virginia and Pennsylvania. This work was formative to my understanding of Hook's business in a larger retail system. Most recent are Daniel B. Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina," William and Mary Quarterly 3d ser., 48 (July 1991): 387-408, and Elizabeth A. Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," Journal of American History 78, (September 1991): 486-510.

the path of new settlement was John Hook in business in New London from 1766 until the county seat moved in 1784. Hook first arrived in Virginia from his native Scotland in 1758 as a thirteen-year-old indentured apprentice clerk and shopkeeper. It seems that his father, Henry, was a small-scale manufacturer—at one time making soap—and had some wealthy distant relations and good friends in the Scottish mercantile world. Yet, he could provide little financial help to his seven sons; two struck out to seek their fortune in Jamaica, another for India, and John, his fourth son, to Virginia.<sup>2</sup> John worked various jobs to learn the mercantile business in Blandford (near Petersburg) for Greenock merchants and shipowners James and Robert Donald, one of the largest Scottish firms in Virginia.<sup>3</sup> At the end of his indenture he was able to move up to become their storekeeper in Warwick, near Richmond on the James River. In January 1764, Robert Donald allowed his distant relation William Donald to hire his young storekeeper to keep books for the latter's store at Pages on the York River.<sup>4</sup> Beginning at an annual salary of £40, John Hook was promised a post as

---

<sup>2</sup>"John Hook, Loyalist," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 34, no. 2 (April 1926) 149–150. See also Hook to Henry Hook, Pages, August 28, 1764. Letterbook, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

John Hook may be one of the best documented—and least known—merchants in eighteenth-century Virginia. His extant papers include 7,289 items and 103 account volumes at Duke. Most, however, relate to a later period than that studied here. Scratch copies of letter books and other miscellaneous items are found in the John Hook Papers, Business Records Collection, Virginia State Library. Parts of these collections are on microfilm at Colonial Williamsburg and the University of Virginia. Five letters are found in the Brock Collection at the Huntington Library. An additional eighteenth-century ledger is on loan to me from Warren Moorman, to whom I am greatly in debt.

Only two studies of Hook have been completed. See Willard Pierson, Jr. "John Hook: A Merchant of Colonial Virginia," (History Honors thesis, Duke University, 1962), and Warren Moorman, "John Hook: New London Merchant," *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 11, (1980): 40–54.

<sup>3</sup>He later commemorated this momentous beginning in his new career by embossing the date and colony on an expensive leather pocketbook that still survives locally. Pocketbook on display in glass case of the Franklin County Public Library, Rocky Mount, Va. My thanks to Anne Carter Lee for this find.

<sup>4</sup>The number of Donalds—often with the same name—engaged in the tobacco trade to Virginia is often confusing. One historian simply calls them the "endless Donald connections," noting that James and Robert Donald and Company were known simply as "the Company" amongst the

storekeeper in an upcountry store after one year with a £10 raise and the opportunity to import several hundred pounds of goods for his own profit on the side. Hook was elated with his new position, but bemoaned to his father that he was "convinced that a young man without a fortune or good friends will be all his lifetime at it before he can make more money than he could just live on." He reported that he only wanted to make enough money in Virginia to carry him "Gently out of it" but was afraid achieving such a goal might take two to three years.<sup>5</sup> By August he may have felt more optimistic about his chances, for he wrote his father that he was blessed with a good constitution to undergo any fatigue and to withstand hot weather. His experience had taught him that no "business can be carried on to Advantage" in the mercantile way without "application and industry" and he had much of both when he saw that it was to be rewarded.<sup>6</sup> Yet, he continued to look homeward—"far from the Noise and confusion of the Troublesome Planters"—and to establish trading relations and information channels with other Scotsmen.<sup>7</sup>

Hook's business schemes were not always realized, however, for he had to put aside his own side ventures to spend most of his time chasing debtors; going from courthouse to courthouse in an attempt to force planters to pay their old debts or issue mortgages.<sup>8</sup> Nor were his hopes realized in other ways; he was most disillusioned that Alexander Donald, brother of William, had not returned home as planned and that the promised position of storekeeper had not opened up for him. He felt he had wasted several years, and once again,

---

Donald clan. Robert Polk Thomson, "Tobacco Exports of the Upper James River Naval District, 1773-1775," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 18 (1961): 396.

<sup>5</sup>Hook to Henry Hook, Pages, March 1764, Letterbook. Unless otherwise noted, hereafter all Hook materials cited are at Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University.

<sup>6</sup>Hook to Henry Hook, Pages, August 28, 1764, Letterbook.

<sup>7</sup>Hook to Crawford and Gammele, Pages, December 12, 1765, Letterbook.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

planned to return home to find a new backer or partner.<sup>9</sup> But Hook's fortunes were again reversed by August 1766 when he formed a joint partnership with William Donald (now in Scotland) and Donald's brother James. While William Donald was to remain in Scotland and receive the normal commissions for managing the business at home, his brother was to set up a store at Warwick on the James River, and Hook was to begin at a store on the "frontier" in Bedford County.<sup>10</sup> Hook even managed to convince his new partners to lend him his £500 share of the necessary capital at simple interest. He advised William Donald that goods valued at £4000 were needed annually for a new firm, amounting to £1000 worth of goods for the Warwick and Bedford store each fall and spring.<sup>11</sup>

So John Hook headed up the country to new lands (figs. 13 and 14). The rural backcountry around New London, Virginia just before the American Revolution was not a new frontier—the true line of settlement has already passed into Kentucky—but it was still a relatively new society. Located in the western piedmont some 150 miles from the fall line of the James River, county elites established for a generation already monopolized power and land. One such local magnate was James Callaway who had moved with his parents in the 1750s to what would become Bedford County. Callaway served as an officer in the French and Indian wars, and at the age of thirty, was a representative to the House of Burgesses. His multiple business enterprises included partnership in a mercantile business and an important iron works. He also managed to sire twenty-two children and acquire over 17,000 acres of land.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>Hook to Andrew Ramsay, Pages, May 25, 1766, Letterbook.

<sup>10</sup>Hook to Andrew Ramsay, August 28, 1766. Letterbook.

<sup>11</sup>Hook to William Donald, New London, Bedford County, December 9, 1766. Letterbook.

<sup>12</sup>While no modern county history has been written, see Lula Jeters Parker, Parker's History of Bedford County, Virginia, ed. Peter Viemeister (Bedford: Hamiltons, 1988), p. 7. Land information is culled from land tax lists and deed books from Bedford, Campbell, and Franklin Counties in the early 1780s.

Figure 13. "A New and Accurate Map of Virginia,"  
John Henry, 1771.  
(Photograph, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

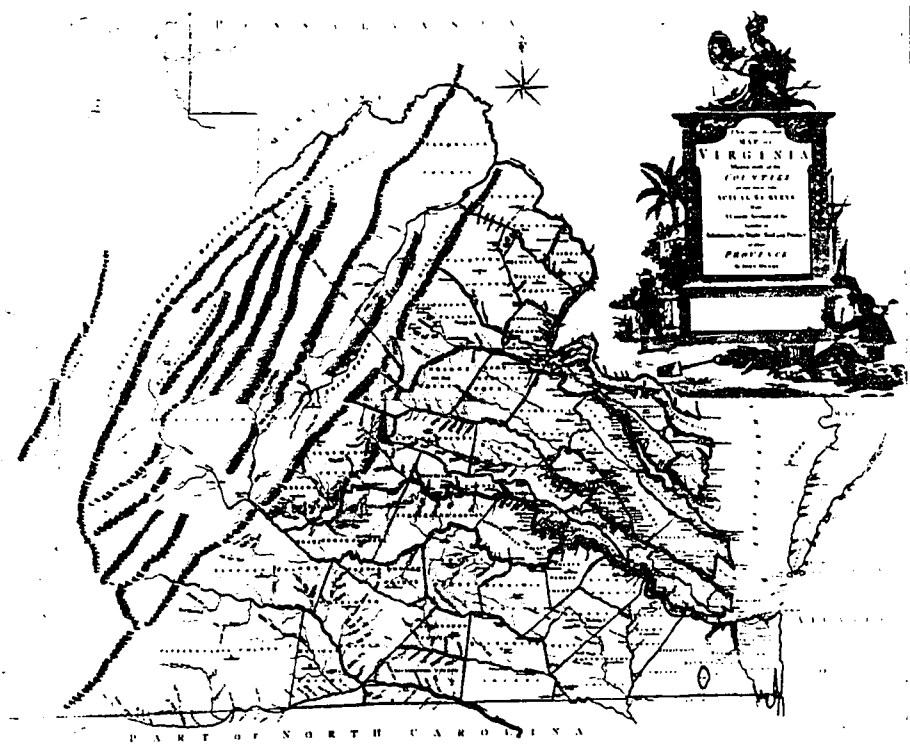
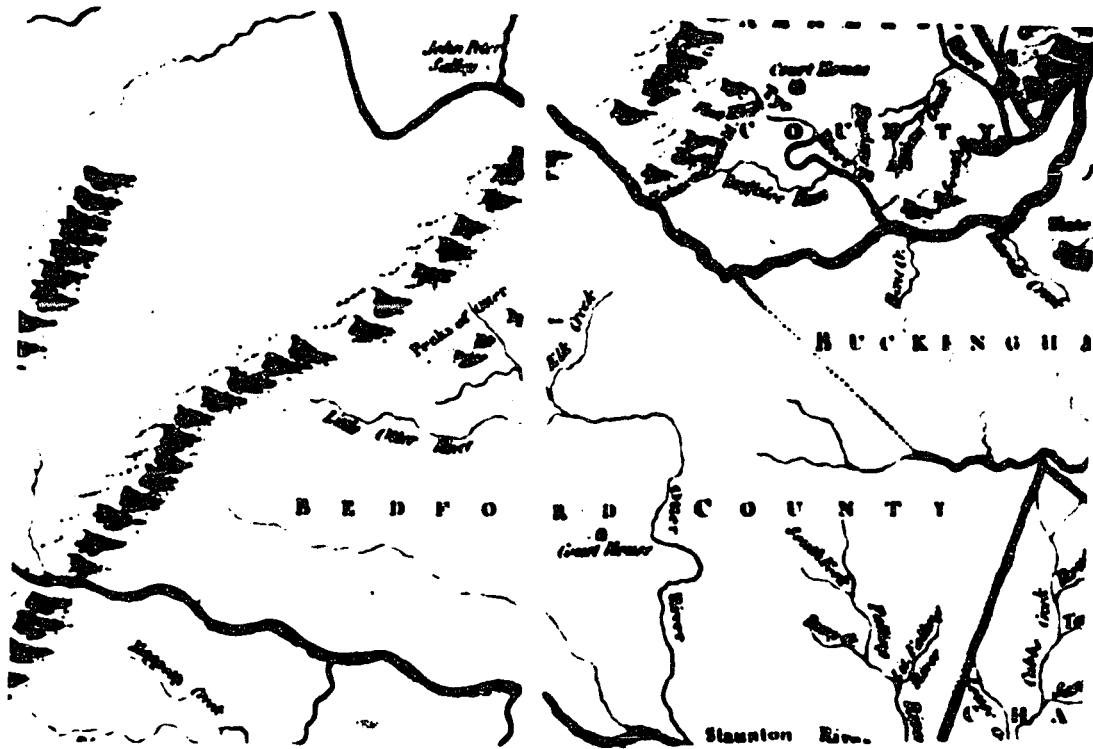


Figure 14. Detail of Bedford County, John Henry map, 1771.  
(Photograph, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)





Few were so fortunately situated as people like the Callaways to profit from the waves of settlers after the French and Indian war quieted frontier violence.<sup>13</sup> The mere choice of the name New London reflected the optimism and vision of early Bedford County residents for the new county seat they laid out in 1761, seven years after the county was formed (fig. 15). The court ordered a plan of half-acre lots and sold them at a cost of £1.1.8 with the stipulation that owners build a sixteen-by-twenty foot frame house within one year of a lot's purchase.<sup>14</sup> At the time of the Revolution, there may have been some three hundred inhabitants, and by the early 1780s, New London was described as a "pretty considerable town, [of] at least 70 or 80 houses."<sup>15</sup> The wagons of at least four merchants channeled tobacco, hemp, ginseng, and skins eastward on good roads to the fall line and returned laden with manufactured goods.

With the Revolution, New London gained importance as a supply center, with its arms magazine, several repair shops, a laboratory for making gun powder, and a prison for captured British soldiers. However, local enthusiasm may not have been great: an American officer sent to recruit there had no success: his superior complained that "the people would not turn around three times for three thousand dollars."<sup>16</sup> When Campbell County was split

---

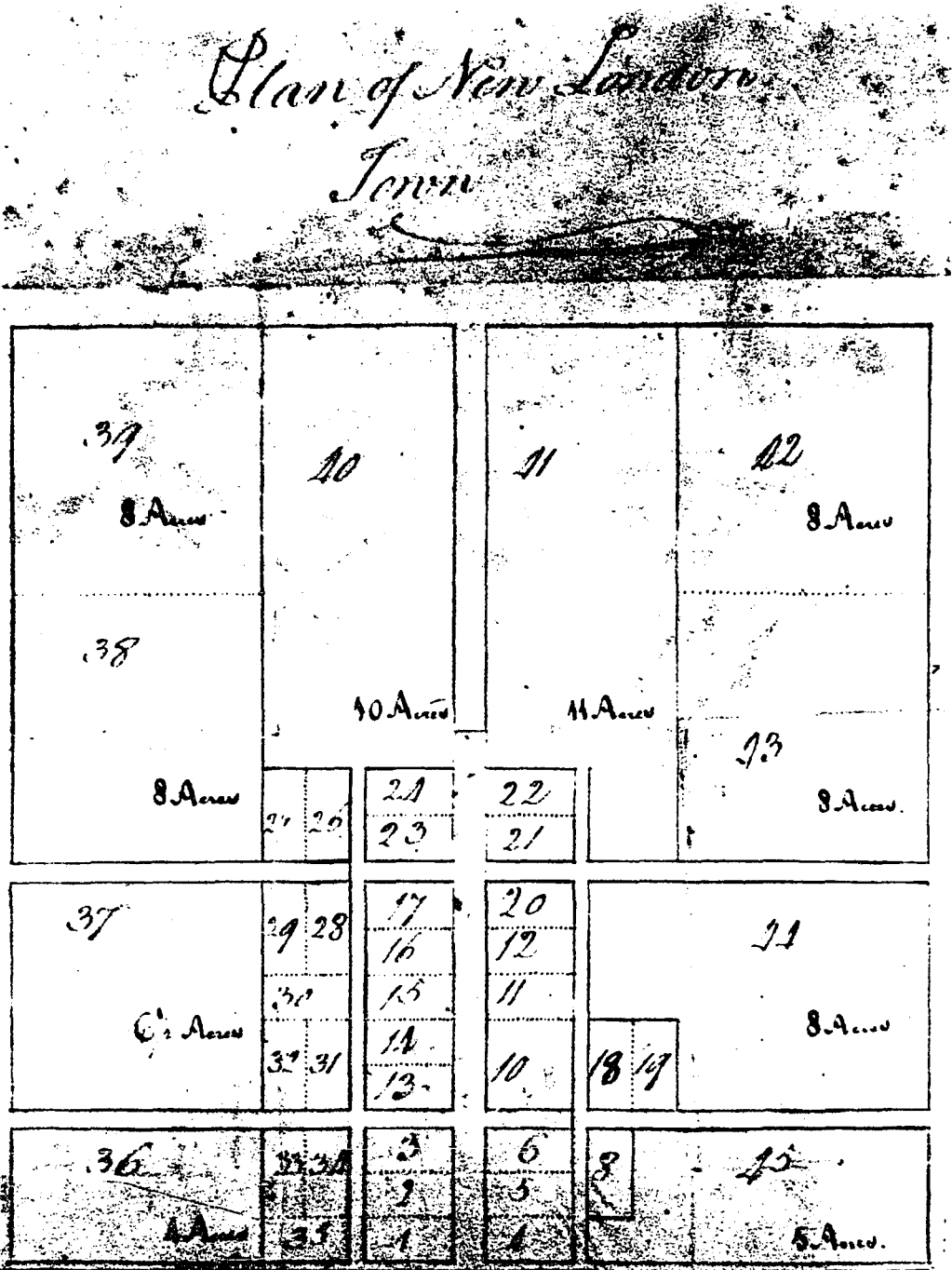
<sup>13</sup>By the 1770s and 1780s, that boom had passed to the south and west; as Allan Kulikoff estimates, half a million acres were patented in nearby Pittsylvania county and the population doubled. Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1986). pp. 53-54.

<sup>14</sup>They further added that a brick chimney must be built within four years. The "Plan of New London Town" is found in Bedford County Deed Book A, p. 434. Microfilm, Virginia State Library. For more discussion of the layout and development of this town, see Christopher Hendricks, "Town Development in the Colonial Backcountry: Virginia and North Carolina," (Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1991).

<sup>15</sup>Francois Jean Marquis do Chastellux, Travels in North-America in Years 1780, 1781, and 1782 2 vols. (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787) 2: 117.

<sup>16</sup>"Facts concerning New London Bedford County, Virginia, prior to 1782 and in Campbell County afterwards," Snow Family Manuscripts, University of Virginia. Excerpts of letter from Capt. F. Read, Virginia Light Dragoons, New London, Bedford County to Col. Davies,

Figure 15. Plan of New London.  
 (Photograph by Christopher Hendricks)



off from Bedford County in 1782, New London was no longer in Bedford. A new court house site named Liberty was chosen in a central location in the now smaller Bedford County. The old court house in New London reverted to Colonel Callaway who had donated its land, and the district court met there. The New London Academy——established in 1795——continued in the fledgling town, but could not survive without court business to sustain business and traffic.<sup>17</sup>

The area continued to be crossed by travellers flowing westward, who often put up at area taverns. In 1804 John Howell Briggs passed through on the way to the Sweet Springs. He found "New London to be in a declining state——a number of handsome and comfortable houses are tenantless, and there seem to be but a few inhabitants." He explained that "it was some years ago a very thriving place——and owes its decline to the removal of the District Court from it." He added, however, "that the whole of the town is the property of Colo. Callaway——and this has also, no doubt, had a tendency to reduce it to its present state."<sup>18</sup> Joseph Martin explained the demise of New London in his 1835 gazetteer. He blamed the leaving of the Scottish merchants at the time of the Revolution, but it was the establishment of Lynchburg so near it on the James River that gave it a final blow "from which it cannot recover."<sup>19</sup> An aerial photograph from the 1930s shows a small town amidst large

---

Richmond, December 13, 1781, cited in Snow manuscript.

<sup>17</sup>Information on the history of New London is drawn from Daisy I. Read, New London Today and Yesterday (Lynchburg: J. P. Bell, 1950); Parker, History of Bedford County; Janet Shaffer, "New London" Lynchburg Magazine (November 1969); Nora A. Carter, "Old New London Town," and "Old Roads of Bedford County," (MSS. WPA projects, 1938, in Bedford and Lynchburg History files, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia).

<sup>18</sup>"Journal of a Trip to the Sweet Springs, commencing July 23 & ending September 29, 1804," (MSS 5:1 B768711, Virginia Historical Society). See also, Joel Watkins Diary Journal, beginning April 28, 1789, for notes on putting up at "Colo. Callaway's farm," at New London on the way to Kentucky, and "at one Stemmon's" on the return trip, (MSS. 2 r7334 a1, Virginia Historical Society).

<sup>19</sup>Joseph Martin, New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of Virginia, (Charlottesville, 1835), p. 141.

agricultural fields. Many structures have since been torn down, and New London today contains but a handful of houses, churches and a large trailer park.

But all this lay ahead, and there was little reason for Hook not to be filled with excitement about the new flourishing town. He was anxious to succeed in his new firm, but was disappointed in the first fall because his £967 of goods came in October, too late for much of the fall business. He wrote to William Donald that had his goods been on hand on the first of September he was convinced "that he could have stopped upwards of half the Bedford people from going down to Warwick or Rocky Ridge for their fall Goods." He urged the shipment of goods by the middle of June for "its hardly creditable to think what a Manifest Advantage a back Store (especially so far back as this) has over those Below" when store goods came on time. He also laid out his strategy for success: hemp, ginseng, skins, and tobacco were the major commodities he expected to send in payment. He hoped that "hemp could not [sic] be encouraged in the Back Parts of Virginia" for he was afraid that "the people in General were probably indifferent Paymasters." On the other hand, if hemp could be encouraged, and the people trained in its proper growth and packing for market, he could much better "answer for the success of this place." If prices remained good at home and exchange did not pass thirty per cent, he felt sure they would succeed. He hoped that William Donald would encourage hemp and keep him constantly informed about current prices.<sup>20</sup>

Even if business conditions remained good, however, a new threat arose. New London was already the home of one store, run by William Callaway and his son James, some of the wealthiest planters in the region.<sup>21</sup> But Bedford County was such an attractive

---

<sup>20</sup>Hook to William Donald, New London, December 9, 1766. Letterbook.

<sup>21</sup>Callaway's store was already in business when Thomas Walker passed through in 1750; Ruth Hairston Early, Campbell Chronicles and Family Sketches Embracing the History of Campbell County, Virginia, 1782-1926, (Lynchburg: J. P. Bell, 1927), p. 31.

position in the backcountry market that Hook's old employers Robert and James Donald planned to open a store there in the spring with Robert Cowan as storekeeper. Hook initially saw the Donalds' entrance to his own advantage. He felt that the strong Scottish presence would break up the Callaway concern, leaving plenty of local trade for both Donald firms. Hook would gain some of Callaway's customers, even if the new Donald firm would regain most of their "Ioland Customers" that traded below that used to "daile (dally)" with him for convenience.<sup>22</sup>

Hook's dreams once again remained unfulfilled. The tobacco crop that year failed miserably. Attempts to raise hemp were unsuccessful because there was neither a good market nor the skill to grow it correctly. Hook still hoped in December to send off £1000 from retail debts, but he was having trouble collecting from planters with failed crops who expected indulgence until the next season. They refused to sell their land, and Hook hesitated to sue them for fear of damaging business. To add to his woes, Robert Cowan was now established with a "well assorted Store and back'd by an able company." Neither had the other Donald concern joined in his wish to break James Callaway's business. Indeed, they continued to supply Callaway with goods, even as they competed with him, and Hook grumbled that it almost seemed as if they wanted to drive Hook himself out of business, even if it was against their own best interest. He hastened to assure his partners, however, that, if need be, he could move his store where they did not have such powerful rivals or break up the trade. He remained optimistic that the latter choice would not be necessary for "this and the adjacent Frontier counties is settleing unaccountable fast from people below and from the Northward."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Hook to William Donald and Company, Bedford Court House, December 2, 1767, and May 29, 1768. Letterbook.

<sup>23</sup>Hook to William Donald, New London, May 29, 1768.

These three merchants jostled for position in the late 1760s. The two Donald firms had the same strategy for tapping backcountry trade. Both positioned one store at the fall line on the James River (James Donald on the one hand, and Robert Donald and Alexander Stewart on the other) and another in the "backcountry" in New London. The latter was managed by John Hook and Robert Cowan respectively. Each had a large amount of capital centered in Scotland and a coterie of bookkeepers, assistants, and slaves.

The third competitor—James Callaway—had a business that fit the older mold of the Virginia mercantile trade. As a wealthy planter who dealt on the side in the tobacco trade, he opened a retail store to gain patronage in lot number one of the infant town of New London in 1761. At first he was supplied by Robert Donald and Company, but by February 1770 he had adopted a partner named Peterfield Trents at Rocky Ridge and entered a correspondence with Dobson, Daltera, and Walker in Scotland. It seems Trents and Callaway also expanded stores in the backcountry, perhaps in Pittsylvania County. When writing their new suppliers, they spoke of fixing a store in "a large extant of Country, the lands fresh and good for Tobo, the planters clear of Debt and no Store to interfere with us." They were confident they could ship a hundred hogsheads of tobacco and five thousand pounds of deerskins for payment because Callaway had been able to collect that many the year before with goods that were "not well sorted or good in quality." Over a thousand pounds of goods were sent out to Rocky Ridge for the fall 1770 trade at Rocky Ridge, New London, and the other back store.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>James Callaway vs. Matthew and Joshua Dobson, administrators of Jn. Dobson, deceased. U.S. Circuit Court, Virginia District 1811. Unrestricted, Oversize file 2, Box 221, 1810-1812, Manuscripts, Virginia State Library. My thanks to John Salmon for this important, and previously undiscussed, reference. Dobson, Daltera and Walker were a Liverpool firm that seems to have functioned as a consignment house supplying goods in lots to a large number of independent Virginia merchants. Callaway and Trents were but one of their many concerns. The result was that they were the largest English firm exporting tobacco from the Upper James River between 1773-1775. Thompson, "Tobacco Exports of the Upper James," pp. 397-398.

All these firms scrambled to capture the rapidly expanding trade of the backcountry, relying on a variety of commodities to pay for the stream of goods wagoning westward. By June 1768, Hook was feeling a bit more relieved. He reported that Cowan was not quite the competition he had feared for "the planters who have any penetration" and the "leading men of the County think him insincere and guilty of flattery which opinin does not at all favour him in his Trade." He predicted that Cowan would soon "play the Girls a Trick by marrying a Widdow with four or five children" and quit the business."<sup>21</sup> Pleasing personality indeed made a difference in attracting and keeping customers. For instance, when James Donald was called back to Scotland in the winter of 1767, Hook had to temporarily go manage the Warwick store. Hook urged Donald to return quickly for, unlike Alexander Stewart or, especially, Robert Donald himself, James Donald was well liked by the local planters.<sup>22</sup>

But business conditions continued to plague the new firm. William Donald and Company decided to break up the Warwick store in 1769, and James Donald was sent out to join Hook in New London. A new Robert Donald, the youngest of the Donald brothers, was also sent out to be trained there. In this way, John Hook's position changed from independent storekeeper and decision-maker to an adjunct in the very business he set up. His dissatisfaction increased daily for by March 1771 he complained that "two manniagers won't do" and he had too much "spirrit to be an underling."<sup>23</sup> With the copartnership about to expire, Hook cast around desperately to find another partner "with a heavier purse than my own." He wrote to a number of established merchants, inquired if they might be interested in

---

<sup>21</sup>Hook to William Donald, Jr. New London, June 14, 1769. Letterbook, Duke.

<sup>22</sup>Hook to William Donald, Warwick, December 8, 1767, Letterbook. When his time was out with the Donalds, Alexander Stewart would be wooed by William Cuninghame and Company for their new store at Rocky Ridge. As an established hand, he would have far greater success than a newcomer and was offered the princely wage of £100. See James Robinson to Andrew Chalmer, Falmouth May 31, 1771, reprinted in *A Scottish Firm in Virginia*, edit. T. M. Devine, pp. 40-41.

<sup>23</sup>Hook to James Nowell, Jr. New London, March 15, 1771. Letterbook.

opening a backcountry store, and stated his terms.<sup>24</sup> Hook's inability to contribute capital was a stumbling block earlier in his career; now he was able to supply—or at least promised to supply—1200 pounds between the fall of 1771 and October 1773.<sup>25</sup> Only the year before he had pled poverty to his father who wanted to borrow money, claiming he only had £70 to his name and that was tied up in trade. Even his salary, he claimed, was spoken for to pay off his original debt to the Donalds for £500 store capital.<sup>26</sup>

Hook succeeded in arranging several tentative agreements in the spring of 1771, one with James Lyle in Petersburg. He planned to open a store in New London in the fall and a second in Falling River under the operation of Gross Scruggs. Scruggs was experienced and "married to a plain planters daughter" who was a "good oconomist" and received "no visitors." Hook was enthusiastic about the area around Falling River; he had already purchased 300 acres of land there and thought it was "the key of the back Country."<sup>27</sup> Other merchants shared his opinion that this was a place ripe for a new store. William Cuninghame and Company, for instance, Virginia's largest Scottish firm, was jockeying to open a new store at Rocky Ridge and had also identified Falling River as a prime spot for expansion.<sup>28</sup> Hook further hoped to expand by opening a store on New River, hiring away the Donald's storekeeper there. He thought the New London and Falling River stores would each need £2500 of goods, and the western store at New River only £800. His salary would be but £50, but he would require another £15 to 25 for managing the whole backcountry setup.

---

<sup>24</sup>For example, see Hook to Mr. Archibald Gowan, Bedford Country House, January 10, 1771, Letterbook.

<sup>25</sup>Hook to N. D., December 6, 1770. Loose Papers, Duke. In further references, all loose papers at Duke will be cited only by their date.

<sup>26</sup>Hook to Henry Hook, New London, May 28, 1769. Letterbook.

<sup>27</sup>Hook to J. Lyle, New London, March 7, 1771. Letterbook.

<sup>28</sup>James Robinson to Mr. John Turner, Falmouth, October 6, 1771, reprinted in Devine, Scottish Firm, p. 45.



Hook's vision was now sweeping. He felt that he had good connections and relations with the local planters. He had identified several potential experienced employees and he had convinced them to stay clear of other engagements pending his own success. He had scouted the area and found what he thought to be the best places for stores, and calculated the capital and servants needed for success. Looking around him, he saw an area of immense growth, and noted that planters to the north and east—"the Augusta and Botetourt men"—preferred the roads on his side of the river.<sup>29</sup> With the addition of a store on the New River, he would have created a network to tap much of the expanding southwestern backcountry.

Hook now moved aggressively to squash future competition by renting Colonel Callaway's unused store house, first privately, then on behalf of his old employer William Donald and Company, with the ability to get out of the lease if the building was not necessary. Alexander Banks was building a store and outbuildings at a local plantation, "Walker's Place," but was toying with the ideal of a trial run in New London. If successful there, he would sell his buildings at Walker's. Hook was sure that his preemptive strike to prevent their trial store in New London combined with the £500 they were sinking in their new buildings would be enough to discourage their removal to New London.<sup>30</sup> He later urged his partner not to allow their Whitehaven supplier to continue selling to a local man who got a small quantity of goods to retail locally. Even the smallest fish were considered competition, and Hook always worked to disadvantage his opponents.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, the months went by and he could not come to agreement with any potential backers. His preferred storekeeper, Gross Scruggs, could no longer wait without

---

<sup>29</sup>Hook to James Lyle, March 7, 1771. Letterbook.

<sup>30</sup>Hook to James Lyle, New London, May 30, 1771. Letterbook.

<sup>31</sup>Hook to Ross, December 31, 1771. Letterbook.

commitment and accepted an offer from Callaway and Trents. Hook soon found another potential candidate in John White Holt, a man who had been sheriff in the lower district, and had a "good character...good education and good sense." Equally beneficial were his many connections in the lower part of Bedford County and the upper part of Charlotte, where he was raised.<sup>32</sup> Disappointed at the loss of Scruggs and impatient to begin, he urged Lyle in June to at least make a pretense of building on Falling River to discourage a competitor from coming in.<sup>33</sup>

Despite all of Hook's preparation, by the end of the summer, Lyle withdrew his backing. Hook was demoralized, and once again thought of returning home. He placed an advertisement in the Virginia Gazette on August 19, 1771 stating his plan to leave for Scotland if he could not find a suitable position, but noting that he would welcome any offer to prevent his flight.<sup>34</sup> On August 18, he had written David Ross about some money coming into Ross's hand for him, explained his current employment situation and said he would come to Petersburg for an interview. He wrote no letters between that day and October 14. By that time he was already connected with David Ross in a new business.

Ross operated a Petersburg warehouse and had an extensive network of stores in the backcountry, land holdings in Bedford, and interest in local iron works. Hook had finally located a partner with immense capital. There is no fear of exaggerating the wealth of David Ross; Jackson Main's study of Virginia tax lists in the late 1780s demonstrated that Ross, the richest planter in the state, owned over one hundred thousand acres spread throughout the piedmont and Shenandoah. He had more horses than any other planter and his 800 cows ranked him second in the ownership of cattle. He also had 400 slaves in seven different

---

<sup>32</sup>Hook to James Lyle, New London, April 21, 1771. Letterbook.

<sup>33</sup>Hook to James Lyle, New London, June 14, 1771. Letterbook.

<sup>34</sup>Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, August 19, 1771, p. 3.

counties.<sup>35</sup> Ross and Hook signed a partnership in September 1771 for Hook to run a store in New London and a smaller one at Falling River in the southeastern part of the county. Their total capital was £4500, although Hook could only contribute £1000 for his one-fourth share of the company.

Between 1765 and 1772, the backcountry retail trade was both chaotic and booming. Opening a new store required the granting of additional credit or offering lower prices or following any number of methods to woo customers away from others. Expansion westward up the James River valley and to its south was brisk and the quality of tobacco on the upper James had an obvious advantage over that of the Rappahannock and Potomac, because it could command both an English and French market, unlike the lesser quality, which could only be exported to the French.<sup>36</sup> Bedford County tobacco may have been especially prized in its quality; the son of William Donald later testified that, according to his father William, Bedford County tobacco brought a higher price than any other shipped from his stores.<sup>37</sup> David Ross was especially anxious to purchase the high quality tobacco from around Hook's second store at Falling River, where the land was particularly fertile.<sup>38</sup> The economic development of the upper piedmont and the western southside is clear from the volume of their shipping: by 1768, the upper James River District was the dominant naval district for the whole colony. In that year, nearly half of the colony's tobacco, one-third of its iron, and two-thirds of its wheat export cleared from that district. By 1773-1775, one-fourth of all

---

<sup>35</sup>Jackson Turner Main, "The One Hundred," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 11 (1954): 354-384.

<sup>36</sup>James Robinson to Thomas Gordon, August 23, 1770. Gordon was opening a store in Halifax County for the Cunninghame chain. Reprinted in Devine, Scottish Firm, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup>Deposition of Andrew Donald, April 12, 1806. Richard Crump testified in November of that year that Andrew Donald came to Virginia to collect debts for his father. Callaway v. Dobson. U.S. Circuit Court papers, Virginia State Library.

<sup>38</sup>Ross to John White Holt, Petersburg, August 17, 1772.

tobacco imported into England, not just from Virginia, was from the Upper James River naval district.<sup>39</sup>

The excitement over the area had already brought the goliath of all Virginia stores into the James River competition. William Cuninghame and Company had a capitalization of £72,000 in 1773, compared to Hook and Ross's mere £4000. Their fourteen stores included regional headquarters at the fall line of the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg and Falmouth, and Petersburg and Shockoe on the James.<sup>40</sup> By 1770, Cuninghame and Company had made a commitment to aggressively expand on the James River to "acquire as large a share in the exportation of tobacco from that river as possible." A new concern was begun in Halifax County under the direction of Thomas Gordon. Head factor James Robinson wrote a lengthy letter to Gordon giving instructions and advice. He urged Gordon to actively pursue the planters at the warehouses, and pay all cash if necessary to increase his "importance and interest amongst them." Always buy from the planters rather than other merchants, Robinson argued, for "by the one you engage an excellent customer for goods in future, by the other according to the old adage you lend a staff to break your head." He promised Gordon as much cash as he might need, for if the price of tobacco is agreeable, "you must not on any account be stinted in money." The company had high anticipations for the new area. "You have a large field before you, on which to raise your name high in the mercantile world," Robinson glowed. "Advance boldly, but let prudence be your guide."<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>Peter Bergstrom, "Markets and Merchants: Economic Diversification in Colonial Virginia, 1700-1775," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1980). Table 5.4, p. 145. Robert Polk Thomson, "Tobacco Exports of the Upper James River Naval District, 1773-1775," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 43 (1961): 394.

<sup>40</sup>Devine, Scottish Firm, pp. x-xiv.

<sup>41</sup>James Robinson to Mr. Thomas Gordon, Falmouth, August 23, 1770, in Devine, Scottish Firm, pp. 34-35.

Robinson wrote a similar letter to John Turner, the new manager of the Cuninghame store in Rocky Ridge in October 6, 1771. Turner had worked at Rocky Ridge in the past before successfully taking charge of Cuninghame's store at Fauquier. The importance of his new position, however, engendered an extraordinarily long and detailed missive of advice. Robinson urged Turner to "use the utmost...vigilance and attention to promote their end by every prudent, legal, and justifiable method in his power." Staying just within the law to obtain one's ends does not have the ring of old-fashioned relations among men of honor, but a far more ruthless tone of predatory capitalism. Robinson noted that the advance of goods on the James ran sixty-five to seventy-five percent, a large amount, but Turner had to conform to his competitors at the moment. However, before any new agreements were to be made to supply goods to any planter at a particular advance over invoice cost, Robinson wanted a written agreement stipulating a method of payment. He urged particular care in the ordering of goods down to the "minutest articles," but care was necessary not to overbuy, especially those goods that could "decay by lying." If Turner should have an overstock, which might be expected in the first year or two, Turner was to get clear of them on good terms to another merchant, even if at less profit than at retail, although he could also exchange them with other Cuninghame stores.

Once Turner was assured of the proper quantity and quality of goods, he could turn his attention to the extension of cash and credit. Getting on "solid footing" was the most important goal, even if that meant short term loss, for "there is no acquiring an extensive influence without sinking a considerable sum in debts." If payment for tobacco is given in part goods and part cash, Turner should follow the custom of the place. But, cash would no doubt be the grease of the first year's operation, and Robinson urged an absolute fixed price with no wrangling over any rise. Since a ship was due to the James River filled with earthenware and salt from Liverpool, Turner must without doubt have at least one hundred

hogsheads of tobacco ready to fill her the first year. Tobacco was the firm's main business, and other commodities, such as corn, hemp, and wheat, should be secondary.

The final key to extending influence, however, was securing customers in the backcountry. Like the Donalds and Callaway before him and "per the custom of James River" Turner must "fix one or more stores in the Back Country," although Robinson suggested waiting another year. The factor at Richmond, probably Andrew Chalmer, had already recommended Falling River in Bedford County, but Turner should check around. Robinson was careful in describing how a place for a back store should be chosen. Turner should carefully judge the local soil and the financial abilities of people within a radius of twelve to fourteen miles, the maximum distance such a store could influence. Neither should a site be chosen where 300 hogsheads could not be annually shipped. Once a store was settled, Turner should keep it regularly supplied and closely supervised. Robinson warned ominously that Turner himself was responsible for its success or failure.

Finally, Robinson turned to personal advice for Turner's relationship with his customers. He urged him to "live on good terms with his neighbors in town," but strongly discouraged "too great an intimacy with any of them." Secrecy was to be recommended in all manners of business. Finally, Turner and the firm's storekeeper in Richmond should consult often to "unitedly adopt such measures as may be for the best."<sup>42</sup>

The addition of large Glasgow houses and their multiple stores led to intense competition for tobacco. In this climate, credit may have been more liberally extended for store goods and planters seem to have taken advantage of high prices and easy credit by shopping at multiple stores. If claims by British firms after the war are any clue, Bedford and Campbell residents owed debts to multiple stores throughout western and piedmont Virginia by the time of the American Revolution. While only one firm listed a Bedford store,

---

<sup>42</sup>James Robinson to John Turner, Falmouth, October 8, 1771, reprinted in Devine, Scottish Firm, pp. 44-48.

eight other firms listed debts owed at stores at the fall line (Manchester, Rocky Ridge, Warwick, Richmond, Osborne, Petersburg) as well as those scattered throughout the backcountry (Amherst, Cumberland, Albemarle, Charlotte, Meherrin, Goochland, and Halifax). The largest number of cases were from Alexander Spiers, Bowman and Company (Bedford, Amherst, Petersburg, Cumberland, and Warwick) and William Cuninghame and Company (Richmond, Rocky Ridge and Amherst). Cuninghame may have ultimately decided against settling in Bedford, as no debts are listed from a store there. This does not mean that the tobacco giant was no competition; several of Hook's customers had debts at Cuninghame's stores at the fall line.<sup>43</sup>

Ironically, John Hook had been assured in May by Archibald Gowan at Williamsburg that he was a leading candidate for a backcountry store in the Cuninghame expansion. According to Gowan, James Robinson had asked that Hook speak to Chalmers, the Richmond storekeeper, when he next came down about future openings.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, an agreement was never reached and Hook cast his lot with David Ross that summer. By the fall, Hook swung into action to begin his new business venture. In August, he had signed an agreement with Samuel Morris to rent a store house on his plantation if needed, and began building his own store and house. He purchased two acres adjoining James Donald's lot on the north side of the street in New London.<sup>45</sup> He was now competing head to head against his old employers, and relations may have become strained. Hook and his new storekeeper John Holt boarded with William Callaway until December when Callaway upped their rent to two-and-a-

---

<sup>43</sup>Based on British Mercantile Claims, T79/81, reports of Christopher Clark, June 24, 1801, reprinted between April 1977 and June 1977 in sequential issues of *The Virginia Genealogist* 21, no. 2: 97-102; 21, no. 3: 199-204; 21, no. 4: 262-268; 22, no. 1: 23-28, 22, no. 2: 105-112.

<sup>44</sup>Archibald Gowan to Hook, Williamsburg, Va., May 12, 1771.

<sup>45</sup>Agreement between Samuel Morris and John Hook, August 3, 1771. Deed, May 16, 1772, from William Callaway to John Hook.

half shillings per day for each man, and Hook moved into one of the firm's unfinished buildings.<sup>46</sup>

A great deal of Hook's time was spent with these new building projects and the domestic responsibilities of bachelor life. He felt uneasy in supervising workmen and was fearful of the high cost of building. At the same time, details of housekeeping took up too much of his time, he complained, and he asked Ross to send a slave girl to help keep house and a "Fellow" to assist in the store business. Finally, he was impatient for his furniture and bedding feathers to help him get settled.<sup>47</sup> His impatience may have been augmented by his pending wedding plans to Elizabeth Smith, daughter of wealthy local planter Colonel John Smith who had purchased one of the original New London lots in 1761. The two were married in Bedford County in late February as acknowledged by a laconic postscript in a letter to Ross: "My wife sends her regards. I was maryed on Sunday."<sup>48</sup>

Hook had earlier travelled to Petersburg to select goods for his new store, and in October he had ordered almost £800 of goods from his partner. Hook should have felt optimistic about his new venture, for in February 1772, James and Robert Donald apparently decided to break up their New London store. Ross was ecstatic: he felt that the New London trade had become ruinously competitive. He derided "the folly and extravagance" of the traders—"their folly in selling the goods for no proffit and giving too much for commodities, advancing cash for the planters and taking their debts upon them." He also

---

<sup>46</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, October 26, 1771. Letterbook.

<sup>47</sup>His solution was to agree to supply the builders with all money necessary for their materials, then have them bring charges. If Hook did not agree with their cost, their charges would be refereed by "Men of good Character, reputed for their skill in Building." Hook to Ross, New London, December 16, 1771.

<sup>48</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, March 2, 1772. Letterbook, On September 28, Ross congratulated Hook on the birth of his daughter and promises to send his wife a maid to help out. Ross to Hook, September 28, 1772.



blamed their "extravagance in their manner of living and carrying on their business."<sup>49</sup> Alexander Stewart, Robert Donald's factor at Rocky Ridge, merely explained that they intended closing this store and opening another where there was less competition.<sup>50</sup> Ross urged Hook to remain cautious and not lend money to planters. Yet, Robert Cowan continued to distress Ross and Hook with his competitive selling tactics. He was employing what modern economists call "price leaders" as a marketing strategy when he sold one of the most common items at below cost; selling Norfolk rum at the Norfolk price, thus swallowing all profit and cost of shipment. Ross was incensed, but urged Hook to stay out of the bidding wars and "by no means advance a shilling for those long-winded chaps...Let every one have the full swing that way," he wrote, "they can't carry off the Land." He thought that Cowan's company would soon be tired of him and "have no great cause to like the Bedford trade."<sup>51</sup>

Intense competition continued to shake up the mercantile community in Bedford County. Robert Cowan (now with Alexander Spiers, Bowman, and Company) gave up his store at Walkers place and moved to town.<sup>52</sup> Robert Donald and Company continued to retrench by closing their Rocky Ridge Store in October of that year, although they retained one at Manchester, which may have taken over many of their customers.<sup>53</sup> In May, Ross wrote again about the "present situation of the dry Goods Trade in general and in your part of the Country in particular." He pleaded with Hook for caution in extending credit to your

---

<sup>49</sup>Ross to Hook, Richmond, February 6, 1772.

<sup>50</sup>Alexander Stewart to John Smith, February 23, 1772. Pocket Plantation Papers.

<sup>51</sup>Ross to Hook, March 11, 1773. John Hook letterbook, Virginia State Library. This may be Hook's personal scratch letterbook.

<sup>52</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, March 2, 1772.

<sup>53</sup>Alexander Stewart to Mr. John Smith, Rocky Ridge, October 20, 1772. Stewart may ultimately have joined William Cuninghame and Company. Smith's important account was taken by Alexander Banks, the firm's factor in Manchester who wrote "nothing in my power shall be wanting to continue you as a customer." Alexander Banks to John Smith, Manchester, November 7, 1772. Pocket Plantation papers.

"doubtful people" who will "be very apt to lurch you at the last." He wrote with scorn of "your Gentlemen that have hitherto made so much noise in the Country with their lending the planters money." With the decline in trade conditions, they "now cut a Shabby appearance...one day swaggering about looking for opportunity to be security for planters and to lend them money and perhaps the next day not able to discharge the demands against themselves."<sup>54</sup>

Ross's disdain was clear. The merchants at the landings on the upper James River had become so intent on gaining customers and filling the holds of ships that they had bid the price of tobacco up to unreasonable levels. The planters in the area had then become spoiled by their indulgence. Such a price level was impossible to sustain and Ross was sure the merchants would be "cured of their madness" in the fall of 1772. Ever the shrewd businessman, Ross was sure that when the fall line merchants rebuffed planters' demands, they would turn to the new store at Falling River.<sup>55</sup>

But it was not only the jockeying for position among the merchants by the overextension of cash and credit that led to financial ruin. After repeal of the Townsend Acts and the breakdown of non importation agreements, the period between 1770 and 1772 was one of general prosperity in the colonies. The boycott had allowed planters to reduce their debt and when the barriers to trade were removed, British goods flooded all the colonies. At the same time, there was a business boom in Great Britain, leading to a rapid expansion of credit and ultimately risky speculation. The bubble burst when a Scottish bank failed, and a panic spread throughout England as a number of banks were forced to suspend payment.

Adding to the problem, the colonists had doubled their imports in 1771 from the average of 1764–1770, while their exports had failed to keep pace, increasing only about

---

<sup>54</sup>Ross to Hook, Richmond, May 23, 1772.

<sup>55</sup>Ross to John White Holt, Petersburg, August 17, 1772.

twenty-five percent. The so-called credit crisis of 1772 hit local Virginia hard, as English and Scottish banks tottered, and bills were no longer honored.<sup>56</sup> David Ross wrote extensively to Hook about the "Melancholy accounts from home" in August of 1772:

A great many of the principal Merchants in London are become Bankrupt it is said that every capital house in Edinburgh but three are stopt payment two houses in Whitehaven are also broke, the Carion Comapany has also stopt, there are as yet no very particular accounts from Glasgow but the most sensible people here expect dismall news from there. The Nobility of England & Scotland have many of them entered into asociations & some of them even mortgaged their Estates to procure Money to support the tottering Banks—When the Ship left London that bro[ught] in our Goods the Capt. could hardly procure Specie Suff[icient] to clear out his Ship—the Banks were shut, no Mercht to be seen in the Exchange everything was in confusion.

Ross was not optimistic about the effects of this crisis on local affairs. "Credit will be vastly curtailed," he warned, and he had little doubt that such a turn of affairs would have an immediate effect upon the prices of Virginia produce. He was sure that the French tobacco monopoly would take advantage of the confusion and drive prices down to a trifle. The merchants in Petersburg were all "in great consternation as we have not heard the Worst of it." He had little hope of escaping trouble: "I know not how it will end, every body largely engaged in Trade stands on a ticklish footing. They are so linkt together."<sup>57</sup>

Within a month, Ross had new information that allowed him to assess the situation. The worst problem was that the price of tobacco must "from very plain & natural causes" be sunk by the failures of the banks. He reported two million pounds of paper currency would be put out of circulation in Scotland alone. Those tight linkages between all those involved in trade could only have a ripple effect, for if the French monopoly and the "Rich manufacturers" in England held out for a low price, "men in a tottering situation can not hold out and must accept of any price." Since most of the tobacco abroad was in the hands of

---

<sup>56</sup>Richard B. Sheridan, "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and the American Colonies," *Journal of Economic History* 20 (June 1960): 161-186.

<sup>57</sup>Ross to Hook, Suffolk, August 25, 1772.

those stricken, he feared the whole importation was doomed even if not all were stricken. His fear of financial ruin was now clear: "I tremble for the Tobo the Co. now has got at Market." Ross also reported to Hook that the Virginia merchants in Petersburg and Blandford were to meet to discuss the situation. These men were clearly worried: Ross was sure that they would unanimously agree to raise the advance on goods to seventy-five percent. This meant that some additional profit could be eked out of the goods for sale to counteract the expected losses on low-priced tobacco. He expected that the merchants at the fall line of the James and the back Stores would soon follow suit.<sup>58</sup>

A month later more dire news was forthcoming. Ross was becoming increasingly frantic. He reported that Alexander and Robert Donald had earlier retired to Scotland, but had both hastened back to Virginia to collect their debts. "If old standing Houses such as those are on the brink of Bankruptcy what prospect do you think is there for beginners," he moaned. He urged Hook to "immediately lop off any unnecessary expense (if any)" and move quickly to make the best collections possible.<sup>59</sup>

The stage was thus set for four merchants to meet in New London in October 1772: John Hook, Robert Cowan, James Callaway, and Robert Donald.<sup>60</sup> The Bedford County merchants had, in many ways, ambivalent relations. They cooperated in supplying each other with goods when necessary, although not perhaps at the most favorable terms. Hook's daybook records numerous goods that he got from Robert Donald, and those that flowed the other way. Letters were carried by each other's hands to partners. They knew each other's prices and suppliers and occasionally shared wagons. John Smith's goods were often sent from Alexander Stewart (of the firm of Robert and James Donald) and left at their competitor

---

<sup>58</sup>Ross to Hook, Petersburg, September 16, 1772.

<sup>59</sup>Ross to Hook, Petersburg, October 12, 1772.

<sup>60</sup>Agreement to fix advances on most common items sold, October 5, 1772, New London.

James Callaway's store. Yet, they also competed head to head for the purchase of tobacco and Hook often complained to Ross that he was at a disadvantage because Ross firmly set the price of tobacco and Hook was outbid. Hook had to engage all his first year's tobacco for cash, knowing that if he had not made such promises, his competitors would have to prevent him from getting customers.<sup>61</sup>

The four "Bedford men" met and agreed that because of the actions of the merchants at the river landings and per their instructions from partners they would also agree to a set rise of seventy-five percent for their retail goods. They also agreed to sell some of their most important articles—sack salt, bar iron, molasses, pot iron, West Indies and Continental rum and peach brandy—at the same price on the same terms. They excluded certain large planters that they had special arrangements with until the following September. Yet, their distrust of one another remained and each signed a solemn pledge. "Whereas doubts are likely to arise of some taking advantage of others by eluding there Engagements hereto in some evasive manner," they swore, "we pledge our Honour and Credit to each other that we will by no means attempt to Inveight or Draw off the Custom of others by promises of selling Goods under the prefixed prices."

While such agreements were in many ways no different than the setting of "just prices" by manufacturers, such as the potters' price fixing lists, the heightened tension of the revolutionary era meant that the Bedford merchants' agreement led to howls of protest. In 1773, the Bedford planters met to protest the "destruction and total combination of the merchants against the people and inhabitants of this colony." They agreed not to sell their tobacco under a set price and suggested a cooperative arrangement under local planter Richard Stith to market their own tobacco, thus bypassing the despised Scottish merchants. They published a letter in the Virginia Gazette calling for other Virginians to join them in not

---

<sup>61</sup>Hook to Ross, January 17, 1772.

dealing with any merchant that doesn't reside here and spend their riches here rather than in Glasgow.<sup>62</sup>

The disaster that lay before these merchants should have caused them to band together, but personal animosity continued to divide them. A suit was brought against Hook in 1773 which, according to Hook, was of no more basis than his claim to one of Cowan's customers that his goods were better bought than his rivals. Suspiciously written and immediately marked out, however, in Hook's scratch letter book was that he was accused of breaking the association's price agreement. Alexander Banks (factor for James and Robert Donald at Manchester) was somehow involved by writing Hook a letter, which Hook answered in fury. (Neither are extant). Hook was outraged about the whole affair. He wrote a letter to have the suit squashed and his copybook letter alternates from threats to "depreciate the goods, credit and trade" of his rivals if he was so forced to soothing platitudes about giving in for the "sake of living in friendship and good society with a number of respectable gentlemen." He could not resist adding, however, that he wanted the suit taken care of not out of any sense of injury to anyone or "to gratify Alexander Banks who I despise for causing me so much trouble." He claimed that any merchant, especially one setting out, could not notice every "Illnatured thing they here is said of them" and claimed that "there is no man [who] meddles less with his neighbors affairs than I do or is at more pains to do every thing in his power to set our Trade on a more respectable footing." If Banks and Cowan were as disposed this way as he was they would "all be better friends and our connections gainers thereby."<sup>63</sup>

Hook's penchant for a grudge against his competitors is clear in one more case. His bookkeeper Bonn Price became engaged to marry a daughter of Colonel Callaway, a wealthy

---

<sup>62</sup>Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, November 25, 1773, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup>Hook to E. Brisbane, New London, March 15, 1773. Letterbook, Virginia State Library.

local planter, before his indenture was up. Hook was worried because the young man had hinted that his new relations might set him up with some goods to retail in New London. He wrote Ross that he would not release the young man from his indenture unless he signed an agreement not to do anything to injure the company until his indenture was up. If Price refused, Hook would order him to the Petersburg store. Knowing that the young man would not go, he could then sue him for breach of contract.<sup>64</sup>

Hook's reaction can only be compared with the compassion of David Ross. The young Price went to Petersburg to visit Ross, his old employer, expressing his remorse and uneasiness at Hook's stubborn position. Price's situation was precarious; his future father-in-law would not give his wife's portion for fear of a lawsuit against Price for breaking his contract. Certainly contrite, Price even promised to help Hook with his writing until new bookkeeping help could be procured. Ross wrote to Hook that although he wished the matter had not occurred, he did not "wish to subject the lad to any inconvenience but wish him to thrive in the world and be happy." He, unlike Hook, trusted the young man's honor not to do the company harm and wrote a personal letter to Colonel Callaway with his assurances.<sup>65</sup>

Based on his correspondence and actions, it seems John Hook was a pessimistic man, driven to succeed, sensitive to perceived slights, and quick to complain. The financial problems of 1772 and 1773 left the two partners wary and Hook's language and tone in his correspondence with Ross began to change markedly. Even though the price of tobacco was back on solid footing in 1773 and they had weathered the financial storm, Hook seemed to take little pleasure. He felt that he had been slighted, ignored, and badly dealt with. He was

---

<sup>64</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, March 10, 1774. Letterbook, Virginia State Library.

<sup>65</sup>Ross to Hook, Albemarle County, April 19, 1774. Ross earlier had shown that same graciousness when Hook had asked him to squeeze out a small local retailer by closing his channel of supplies. Ross apparently replied quite negatively for Hook had to retreat, denying that he ever meant to "prejudice him in any way that you or any one would have cause to be ashamed of." Hook to Ross, March 2, 1772.

indeed at a partial disadvantage because he had to follow Ross' directions about prices and could not freely negotiate on a case-by-case basis. He was particularly incensed at his reliance on Ross to send down his necessary goods from Petersburg, and by his feeling that Ross did injury to their trade by not obliging his requests.

By the spring of 1773, Hook's complaints about his disadvantages in the trade reached a fever pitch. Each of his rivals had a store in Rocky Ridge connected in some way to their business to keep "their customers together." But Hook had no one there to help in carrying out their business, and the informal relationship there with a Mr. Douglas was not satisfactory. According to Hook, Douglas acted as if he was to get no financial gain for his trouble, even telling a wagoner that he found Hook "troublesome." Hook asked Ross to come to some formal arrangement with Douglas to handle Hook's needs at the inspection landings.<sup>66</sup> His biggest complaint, however, was that the quality and quantity of goods left him at a disadvantage.

Throughout his partnership with Ross, Hook carefully rated and discussed the price and quality of his goods for sale. Because of his long years of experience, he knew well how to judge price and cost. He also knew well the prices charged by his competitors, and never failed to question suppliers he thought were overcharging. Finally, while Hook completed spring and fall schemes of goods necessary, he had the additional advantage of being able to draw off Ross' warehouse in Petersburg, which sold for ready money (cash or commodities) or wholesale to the trade. Thus, his letters are filled with details of the goods needed.

---

<sup>66</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, December 28, 1773.



John Hook and the World of Goods

The goods that Hook sold in his store came through the hands of several partners. Walter Chambre in Whitehaven was a partner with David Ross in several ventures, and supplied Ross' wholesale warehouse as well as the Ross and Hook concern. Hook's goods were marked with their company's name but often came with other orders. There were many problems in getting goods quickly and safely from Whitehaven, Bristol, and London to John Hook in backcountry Virginia. For instance, the ship carrying Hook's fall 1772 Bristol shipment "started a plank" in the middle of the ocean, and all goods were lost in the attempt to keep the ship afloat.<sup>67</sup> If a large number of goods were imported for Hook, Ross would unload his portion in Petersburg and send the rest up the James to be unloaded at Warwick. Hook would then send down wagons from New London. Other goods had to come from Ross' warehouse in Petersburg, even further eastward. While the road to New London was better than most, there were still many problems. Some wagoners packed poorly and the shifting of one heavy item could crush the rest.<sup>68</sup> Other necessities for the trade did not ship well in a particular season; Hook's hogshead of porter had to wait in Norfolk because Ross felt it unwise to ship it in the hot season.<sup>69</sup> Sometimes there were even problems engaging the necessary wagons westward. Other items, such as West Indies rum, rope, and leather had to be purchased in Norfolk, and Hook asked Ross to procure a dozen buckskin breeches and a dozen farmers knives in Philadelphia.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup>Ross to Hook, September 16, 1772.

<sup>68</sup>Hook described such a problem in these terms: "The Stills is come to hand in very bad order Mr Douglass put four in one Waggon when two nearly filled up the Body, he should have sent not more than 2 in one wagon and made up the load with Salt, the Sloage [or stoage] in the Wagon should be attended to by the young man that delivers the goods and the load madd up of such that non will take Damage in the Carriage up,...the 2 pr leeding lines chd me to fasten the stills in the wagon the wagoner carryed off with him." Hook to Ross, June 10, 1773.

<sup>69</sup>Ross to Hook, September 16, 1772.

<sup>70</sup>Hook to Ross, January 17, 1772.

Because of this intense local competition, Hook had from the very beginning of their partnership stressed to Ross the importance in having quality goods at attractive prices at the proper time of the year. He pointed out to Ross that the other merchants were well-stocked, finding "difficulties enough to get my best friends to my self," and wished that he could exceed his rivals in "the Qualities of my goods," asking always to be sent the best of their kinds as he had demonstrated when visiting Ross' store. While he had already received £800 of goods that fall, he asked Ross to remember him if he saw any "pice of goods in your Cargo that is Nice and Saleable even if it is not put down" on his orders.<sup>71</sup>

His shopping list for the new store was far from complete, however, and he included a long list of necessary goods when he wrote Ross in November. He suffered ("in the purse") for want of feathers for there was great demand. Pepper and allspice was needed, along with 60 pounds of bohea tea and a hundred pounds of Gloucester cheese. He also requested worsted stockings, a good assortment of ribbons, womens' bonnets, cloaks, colored and spotted rugs, bed blankets, and fully 60 or 100 score women's saddle cloths—colored and purple—books, playing cards, and cotton cards. He similarly needed more white and brown sheeting (this was "material," he insisted, as was duffel and women's leather and calimanco shoes) and more yellow and light blue shalloons and stuff for women's winter gowns.

Hook complained about many of the goods he had received; the copper pans were charged to him at 3/6 although they were marked 3/2. The pewter was also too expensive, and, he asked Ross to check with his rival Peterfield Trents to see at what price his own pewter came in. Although he liked the printed handkerchiefs "blue ground and white" and asked for more, the silk handkerchiefs at 27/ were no better than those at 24/. The powder sent was so much glazed that it would not ignite, and he returned half a barrel in exchange

---

<sup>71</sup>Hook to Ross, November 7, 1771. Hook Papers, Virginia State Library.

for the "ragged" kind. He couldn't find the buttons necessary to match the fabrics sent, and sent back swatches to replace them; the cloth could not be sold without them.<sup>72</sup>

A month later his commentary continued. His greatest criticism was reserved for the sugar sent. Poor quality "prejudices and disgraces the Retailer" and Hook wanted no sugar that was not good. Somehow, despite all his complaints, Hook's business was brisk. He was already out of handkerchiefs, women's bonnets and hats, although he noted that black satten bonnets were more saleable than any other kind. He needed a hogshead of jugs (from two to three gallons), butter pots (two to five gallons), chamber pots, and a few pair of fire dogs. Bottles were needed very much along with a barrel of vinegar.<sup>73</sup>

What kind of goods were stocked there and what did John Hook think of them? The answer to this question is possible because of a lengthy invoice of goods sent out in the spring of 1772 and Hook's detailed letter discussing them. First, the quality, variety and fashionability of the items found at his store hardly fits our preconceived notions of rugged, self-sufficient, backcountry life. For example, Hook's customers could thumb through the Spectator or Johnson's Dictionary, or handle backgammon boards, china tea cups, and feather plumes, all stocked at his stores. But most commonly sold were the necessities of everyday life. Hook stocked all the requisite nails, cross cut saws, gimlets, socket chisels, gouches, mortise firmers, and tenant saws, best Newcastle adzes, hinges, and locks to carve a home out of the wilderness and keep it in repair. Paint—white, spanish brown, prussian blue, and yellow—transformed the natural hues of the built environment. Garden spades, bramble scythes, and hoes for clearing, weeding, and grubbing were all stocked to turn fertile earth into tobacco, corn, hemp, wheat and vegetables. Guns for protection and food procurement were also there; four feet long with 1/2 inch bore or break-off guns, along with flint, powder,

---

<sup>72</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, November 7, 1771. Letterbook.

<sup>73</sup>Hook to Ross, December 30, 1771.

shot and pistol locks. Also available were the vast equipage for transportation——riding horses and hitching wagons——ranging from curry combs to two super-fine lady's hunting saddles, with polished arched mouth bits and green saddle cloths embroidered with gold sprigging costing almost two £ each.

Also for sale were household items; brass candlesticks, hair brooms and scrubbing brushes, pepper boxes and iron pots——from one-and-a-half to forty pounds. Pewter dishes were the sturdy tablewares of country living, although white salt glazed plates were also available. Tin pints, hard metal (high-quality pewter) "bellied" drinking pots and creamware mugs were available for the ever-popular rum that Hook sold daily. One could buy pewter spoons or spoon molds, even silver teaspoons. Knives and forks were available in a wide array of qualities, materials and prices, from about one shilling for "No. 1" to "stag no. 4" at six times the price. Large printed teapots, enamel painted creamware sauce boats, and table cloths all give evidence of a heightened interest in entertaining. For those who wanted to further display their wealth, hospitality, and good manners, fine painted tea pots and chinese porcelain cups and saucers imported especially from London could also be carefully carried home over the jolting roads. Also imported from London from the glassmakers Quinton and Windell of East Smithfield were fine cut and engraved glass maderia decanters, enameled wine glasses, and cut glass cruets.

Most important, however, were the vast range of textiles, sewing notions, and clothing items available to John Hook's customers. Buttons of glass, ivory, and brass, or beads could be sewed on with fine silver thimbles. Twenty-five grades of linen were available, ranging from coarse to fine with a commensurate price range. Undyed sacking and sheeting was also stocked in vast quantities, along with more colorful linen and cotton checks. At the top end was a large array of colorful and fashionable fabrics: durants of purple, pea green, yellow, and drab. Lawns, gingham, broadcloths were there for the asking, as were

purple and china blue calicoes and the more exotic-sounding black alamodes, and pink, black, and blue persians. Two pieces of purple marbled ground chintz and two of marbled black were stocked for fashionable women's sacks. Hook's male customers were not forgotten; all the necessary fabrics, buttons, and garters came packaged for two suits, one of the finest broadcloth, the other of silk. Without even the labor for their sewing they would have put back their purchaser over £5 and £7 respectively.

The clothing items shipped to John Hook in New London further demonstrate John Hook' interest in high quality and fashionable goods. Ladies could choose from bonnets of velvet or satin, black satin hats or colored silk ones. Feather plumes and silk cloaks, fine two-rowed large wax necklaces and fashionable monmouths, stays and green silk purses, and five varieties of fans all paint a picture of the well-dressed female consumer. Of course, for every pair of best single channel pumps were many common strong shoes. Yet, it is that dazzling mixture that catches the modern eye as it defies our notion of what common Virginians on the backcountry should be wearing.

Not all of the choices of these items suited John Hook. He wrote a long missive to David Ross, rating all the goods sent, although the letter has only survived greatly torn and undated. Most of his complaints were about price and he noted when a particular item could be bought cheaper in London or Glasgow than Whitehaven. He also groused about quality and packing. For instance, the pewter was expensive and so poorly packed that half of it arrived damaged. Moreover, Walter Chambre had neglected to even send "such a material item" as pewter plates. The crockery was all packed in a large crate with too much weight, increasing the chance of breakage. The blue and white counterpanes were terrible, the blue ones were no "better than stained with something as [torn] as fig blue," a common bleaching dye. The first time they were wet, he reported, the stain could hardly be seen.

But he also wrote his suppliers about which goods were saleable and which were not in the Virginia market. Gingham checks were not as popular as stripes. The checks were well liked, but expensive, and the large diamond pattern on the home-made checks the best liked.<sup>74</sup> The butter pots were too small, perhaps because so many backcountry customers made large amounts. The glassware from Quinton and Windell in London did not please him at all. The Covered pocket bottles were "useless being too small in the mouth," and he wanted uncovered ones. Instead of the ribbed pocket bottles, he wanted green striped with white across the mouth, and the cruets were far too small. On the other hand, the earthenware and stoneware was the best at the price of any he had ever seen.

He reserved his greatest commentary, however, for the agricultural implements sent. The cross-cut saws could only cut one way and the mill saws were thinner at one end than the other. They needed to be of heavier substance and equivalent thickness from top to bottom. The sickles were of such bad quality he doubted he would sell one of them and drew the shape of what was sent and what was wanted. The scythes were equally complained of being too slender in the blade and back. "Our Farmers opinion" was that they were meant for work in meadows, whereas Hook's customers wanted them for cradling grain. The hoes that came had not enough of a square shoulder for Virginians' taste. Had they come in a better shape, Hook was convinced he could have sold nearly all of them. Finally, the hoes were also poorly shaped and thus unsaleable. They were too broad, too straight, and too small. More weight was needed behind the eye for them to better cut in the ground, and they should be 3 1/2 to 4 inches wide.

John Hook's complaints can be neatly summed in terms of price, quality, and the inability of Chambre to judge local needs from his unfamiliarity with Virginia agriculture and consumption preferences. Ross was not pleased with Hook's criticism. He had been far too

---

<sup>74</sup>Home-made checks are not necessarily made at home, but a manufacturers term for a kind of textile.

hurried with business, and more important matters had "obliged him to pass over" Hook's hints and complaints as to the quality and prices of the Goods. Yet, he took time to lecture Hook on his suggestion that the firm try and buy individual items from different inland manufacturers at first cost and ship them from the most convenient ports. "Any fool in business" knows that might be cheaper, Ross wrote, "but every man of Como. Sense that knows anything of Trade acknowledges it is best to import from one port and to forego the advantage of first cost to have their goods arrive together and in good season." That was established business practice, and for good reason. He then defended their goods, arguing that they had them as well chosen and on as good a terms as anyone and better than most people, as he had heard from common report. They had vastly expanded their trade and it was simply difficult to manage the buying of goods from a distance, especially since the turnaround time between orders and shipment was short. He then harshly defended Chambre's "industry, activity and care. He couldn't resist a subtle jab at Hook by saying "I wish all of us put together could shew as much Judgement in selling & industry in paying as he has in purchasing & shipping."

But Ross softened his tone by acknowledging that he was not unaware of problems. He noticed when "the Manufacturers and Merchants have in some things taken advantage & some articles not properly chosen & this is often the case where there is much business done even with old Companys & may be excused in one in its infancy." Finally, he assured Hook that he would not pass over anything that would injure the business.

But the stress of trying to hold the business together during tough financial times was too much and Hook would not be placated. His earlier letters were only the opening volley in what would be continual haranguing about the availability, quality and price of his goods. In April 1773, Hook began to vent his spleen. "I cannot refrain from complaining of my orders for Goods, both European and West Indian being too much neglected when ever I rite you I

am answered with Complaints, with Appologies and With Instructions," he hissed. The fact that their Whitehaven supplier did not send osnaburgs to him or his Falling River storekeeper the last year "was such capital blunders that there can be no excuse for it." He felt he should not have to pay five percent commission for shipping his goods or tobacco when the service was so poor, especially since Callaway and Trent could receive their goods freight free as long as they used their partners' ship to send their tobacco, and only pay 2 1/2 percent commission on top of that.<sup>75</sup>

Again, in June, he pressed his dissatisfaction with the procurement of goods for business. "So much of our business in trade depends on Mr. Chambre or whoever buys up our goods in Britain adhering strictly to the orders sent for them," he wrote. Chambre had been so neglectful that Hook had been forced to point it out. He was certain that the company "had more unsalable and fewer salable well chose Goods within these 28 mo. past than any Mercht in the Colony that has imported to the same extent." He demanded that he meet with Ross four times a year to adopt such method of solving their problems and wanted their copartnery reconsidered with necessary clauses annexed to their agreement. His final complaint concerned goods that he had special ordered for wealthy local planters. He had ordered prints for Thomas Maddison and hides of black grain leather for chair bottoms for William Mead. None had come to hand and the neglect of these commissions made him look ridiculous.<sup>76</sup>

Ross was not pleased with Hook's complaints. He replied sarcastically "I am at present (as I observe any other Merchant) struggling hard to make Remittances in order to avoid the general ship wreck of Credit [so] what must my apology [be] for not attending so minutely to prints, chair bottoms, and ruffles as you would wish?" But he promised to try to

---

<sup>75</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, April 20, 1773.

<sup>76</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, June 10, 1773.



form a plan to keep Hook's store supplied "whereby the goods do not pass through my hands," essentially agreeing to let Hook arrange for his own goods with Chambre in Whitehaven.<sup>77</sup>

Hook took to his task with relish, advising Chambre that the success of their business in New London was absolutely dependent on the "dispatch, exactness, and judgement in the choise of the goods, respecting the quallity, collours, patterns and fashions." Secondly, sales and collections "depend on the goods." Lest Chambre miss his point, he continued, "cargoes well assorted of good quallity well bought and to have in good season will command the Custom of the best and ablest paymasters." The trade and suffered greatly because his competition was well-supplied and he was so often disappointed in goods. His frustration turned to sarcasm as he warned "for me to make money without Goods is as absurd as to suppose a Taylor to make a Coat without cloth by the needle and Shears alone."<sup>78</sup>

Hook reported that he was absolutely bare of goods and depended on his new schemes sent out to be fully filled and quickly returned. He was particularly anxious for "the Material Articles, the Linens Shoes Duroys and Sagathys with the trimmings," although he then reiterated that "every article is material as we are extremely bare." He also scolded Chambre for not shipping out his commission goods, explaining disappointments on orders of this kind was very prejudicial to the company's interest. These wealthy local planters were the kinds of customers to take pains with for they were ready to make payment when the goods arrived. Not only did the company look bad, but Hook had to personally bear their displeasure.

---

<sup>77</sup>Ross to Hook, Petersburg, June 23, 1773.

<sup>78</sup>Hook to Walter Chambre, December 28, 1773. Letterbook, 1772-1774, Hook Papers, Virginia State Library.

Finally, he asked Chambre always to let him know where and from whom each object was purchased so they could monitor their choice and act accordingly.<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusion

Hook's complaints are difficult to judge. On the one hand, they are the words of a man disappointed in trade. The company had not succeeded as planned. Hook now had a family to support and he felt that his best efforts to provide for them were frustrated by his continued disappointment in the necessary and timely shipment of goods.<sup>80</sup> By 1774, he could hardly swallow his anger for he was "heartily sick" of Chambre and wanted a different correspondent "that would pay some regard for what we write him for."<sup>81</sup> He sensed by the fall that the business was about to end, and wrote offering to buy the company's store and other property. He would go to Scotland and find another partner, but he never again wanted to embark on trade "under the smallest disadvantage or upon a worse footing than any other in the trade." Yet, he was not so disgruntled that he was willing to cut ties entirely, reiterating that he would prefer to stay in connection with Ross than to look for others.<sup>82</sup>

Hook's distress was partially due to the intensely competitive climate that his business hoped to prosper. He had always felt that others were better supplied than him and at a better price. Close inspection of invoices sent to Trent and Callaway in 1772, however, suggest that Hook was comparatively well-supplied. For instance, Hook received sixty different books in his major shipment in 1772, while Callaway only received twenty-three from Dobson, Daltera, and Walker in 1770. Equally important, Hook's copies of Baily's Dictionary, his set

---

<sup>79</sup>Hook to Chambre, New London, December 23, 1773.

<sup>80</sup>Hook to Chambre, New London, December 28, 1773.

<sup>81</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, July 16, 1774.

<sup>82</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, October 26, 1774.

of The Spectator, and his psalters all were supplied at a cheaper invoice price than those from Trents and Callaway's supplier.<sup>83</sup>

Like no other Virginia merchants' papers, the writings of John Hook vociferously champion the role of goods in the successful carrying out of the Virginia retail trade. He was certainly not the only factor to complain to his partner about the quality of goods he was shipped, and perhaps his stridency was truly the result of being sent unsaleable goods. With this argument, if his goods had been acceptable, we would know nothing about them. This is, no doubt, partially true. But Hook provides extraordinary detail in his complaints; he constantly judged his goods, repeatedly stressing the importance of quality and attention to fashion and color. Goods properly bought would bring the preference of customers. Once credit was granted, the commodities for their payment would follow. In some ways, this sets our old view of the tobacco trade on its head; for if Hook is right the rise of the Glasgow trade in the third quarter of the eighteenth century was not just due to an expansion of population and production, but a heightened wish for the goods found on store shelves. He had earlier written William Donald of the importance of stocking fine things for women. He claimed that the men who went down to the fall line to get their tobacco inspected and court business taken care of were often asked to make purchases of fashionable items for their wives and daughters. The world of fashion and the explosion of available goods made this a difficult task. Hook felt sure that if those items were stocked locally in view of women, the trade would stay at the store in New London. He tantalizingly adds in his letter "I could

---

<sup>83</sup>Invoices do not always reflect full stock, but these two are for major shipments of new partnerships. The Johnson's Dictionary in Hook's store came in two volumes and cost more. Spellers and small history books were at the same price; other books were too generic for comparison or were only stocked in one store or the other. For Hook's book selection, see Felix Hargett, "John Hook, Frontier Bookseller," Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society, 11 (1980): 55-59. Compare with shipment of Dobson, Daltera, and Walker to Trents and Callaway, Rocky Ridge, February 16, 1770. Callaway v. Dobson, U.S. Circuit Court papers, Virginia State Library.

mention here more advantages to be raised from haveing free goods in the Store but expect the above will suffice."<sup>84</sup>

We might wish that Hook had expounded on his business philosophy a bit more fully. David Ross' wisdom was in seeing the folly of bidding wars for planters' tobacco that sent the prices to levels at which no one could profit. He also urged against lending too much money to planters on the hopes of gaining their business. Caution was his byword. Hook, however, had a different viewpoint. He believed that being able to supply the everyday necessities and the occasional fashionable impulse linked merchant and consumer in a more stable and ultimately profitable relationship. With increasing competition among merchants, customers could now be more choosy, not only rejecting goods on their inferior quality but their lack of fashion or personal appeal. Such consumer savvy and intense competition might be expected in the cities and small towns of the new colonies. But New London was but a tiny country entrepot in a relatively newly-settled region. Yet while we have constructed a vivid picture of the retail trade in one place and time, when we turn to other evidence from the material world—such as housing or probate inventories—the items stocked in Hook's store seem almost puzzling. Examining other evidence about the culture of Bedford County will lead us closer to questions about consumer choice and priorities. Moreover, while we know not only what was for sale, but in many cases, what John Hook thought of them, we have yet to determine who bought these goods. Someone did, we know, for goods were continually reordered, but were the customers rich or poor? Turning to this question from the world of the consumer will move us one step closer to the choices and priorities of Bedford County consumers, and the process of cultural change.

---

<sup>84</sup>Hook to William Donald, New London, December 9, 1768.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### "ALL THE GOODS AND THINGS:" THE CONSUMER WORLD OF BEDFORD COUNTY

For a merchant like John Hook, commodities were a means to a larger goal, the accumulation of wealth and prestige. Moreover, he repeatedly argued that it was the selection of goods for sale that was the key to his firm's success. But why were these objects so desired by his customers? Who came into his store, what did they buy and why? In this chapter, the view will once again turn to people, objects, behavior, and society, now focusing precisely on a particular place and time. This task is difficult. Hook's account books are a compendium of tightly packed information, cryptically encoded in names and numbers. Outside those volumes, little is known about these customers; they remain shadows on the landscape. County documents that list these more common people were mainly created to assess wealth for purposes of taxation, to pass on that wealth to heirs in a systematic way, and to protect creditors such as Hook. From this documentation, we can only infer their station or prestige in the local social hierarchy. Yet, which is the more important evidence of status, the number of slaves, acres, cows, and pigs owned or John Hook's cryptic note on a list of debtors, that James Cunningham was "a good man"?

Tugging people into the light from two centuries of obscurity is tricky business indeed. This is particularly true in places like Bedford County, where county records are extant but not especially rich before the Revolution. But to push from reconstructing people's wealth—creating a relative index of an ability to buy and a ranking of position via

possessions—to why they might buy is especially fraught with danger. For once again we face the reconstruction of culture. Like ethnographers studying another people, we are perched uneasily in a foreign land, seeking meaning in behavior and relations. Once again, we are pushing for context, and how objects and the material world can explain culture.<sup>1</sup>

If we wanted to know about purchases today we could examine the vast trail of production, marketing, and sales. We could examine cash receipts from a department store, a series of systemized records that capture the behavior of a broad number of consumers. We could repeat the process at grocery stores and 7-11s, discount stores and specialty shops. Modern retailers are anxious to know who is buying and why, and in our new "bar-coded" world, they increasingly have the means to know a great deal about us and our choices. But to know why any object was chosen we would have to look at a range of options, and evaluate price, proximity, and prestige. We would also have to know about malls, Madison Avenue, and MTV. We would want to follow consumers home and see their houses, yards, cars, and living rooms. By continually layering and contrasting both social and individual constructions, juxtaposing and questioning, we might be able to understand deeper meaning. This is one way to search for the webs of significance and the way that people, objects, and behaviors intersect.

To take a consumer's view of Bedford County in 1771, we must attempt to do the same, only with limited and biased sources. Examining evidence of this sort is like looking at the sun shattered into thousands of pieces. Any one part could tell us about light and warmth and each part contains the essence of "sunniness" if we only knew how to read it. Only by patiently patching together the pieces could we see the sun in its entirety and begin to

---

<sup>1</sup>For the complex meanings of the term "context," see Ian Hodder in Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

understand its complex role in cultures from the beginning of time. But we would also have to unlearn everything we know about the solar system, from physics to folklore.

Mythology is replete with tales of woe for those who go too near the sun. But the reconstruction of the material culture context of consumerism here is not nearly so ambitious. There are two major elements to this chapter. First, it is avowedly methodological, demonstrating how scattered bits of evidence can be pieced together to construct a larger whole. To this will be added particular kinds of evidence that can be systematically analyzed through quantification and statistics. This second approach is necessary to seek patterns in thousands of purchases. Combining both these forms of evidence draws from the best methods of newer cultural history and traditional economic and social history.

Using this approach, there are four areas of content to explore. All move us to an understanding of consumers and culture. First, there is an attempt to place Bedford County into the context of larger regional studies, thus briefly assessing its economy and society. Second, the culture of Bedford County is studied through housing and furnishings—the material world. Third, how those furnishings and consumer goods came to be in those houses will be examined through the multiple means of acquisition, such as inheritance, barter, and the commercial economy, especially peddling and the retail trade. Fourth, purchase patterns at John Hook's store are analyzed by looking at how purchases mirror or diverge from traditional measures of wealth, and vary by rank, sex, and race. Finally, this chapter will turn to particular cases to ask what may have motivated such consumer desires.

#### Bedford County: The Place

In April 1821, Thomas Jefferson and his granddaughter Cornelia made the ninety-mile journey from Monticello to Bedford County. Cornelia described the arduous trip in a letter to her sister. She complained that torrential rain had left the roads in terrible order, and they

had been forced to spend one night at "horrid Old Floods" house. She was sure that the sheets had been slept in by Dr. Flood for a month, and finding the counterpane relatively clean, pinned the top sheet down and rolled "hand, foot, and face" in her clothes so that her "skin should not be defiled by touching pitch."<sup>2</sup>

The journey from the refined pleasures of Monticello to Jefferson's backcountry retreat at Poplar Forest in Bedford County illustrates well the difference between those worlds. Jefferson did not begin building his retreat until 1805, although he had owned land in the county for several decades. He saw it as a place of seclusion, to escape the horde of visitors and the round of hospitality that had grown both wearisome and expensive. The place he chose was Bedford County in the western piedmont of Virginia.

Modern scholars have only recently begun to examine western, or backcountry, Virginia in the eighteenth century. A new debate has formed about the nature of this region, especially when compared to established tidewater communities. A large problem of definition remains, however, because little consensus has emerged on what precisely "backcountry" means. Eighteenth-century merchants referring to backcountry parts generally meant any place west of the fall lines of Virginia's navigable rivers. Hook himself noted that he was setting up a "back store" in Bedford County, and wrote his father that he was moving to a frontier area. He even called the area around Falling River, the "key to the backcountry." It seems that "backcountry" Virginia stretched from fertile tobacco lands of the piedmont and southside to rocky mountain passes of the Blue Ridge to lush wheat lands of the Shenandoah. How can this place be characterized?

The overarching question in studies of backcountry Virginia has been: is there something essentially unique about this region or did the well-defined culture of the Tidewater

---

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in S. Allen Chambers, Jr. "Revelations from the Records: The Documentary Research at Poplar Forest," Lynch's Ferry: A Journal of Local History (Spring/Summer 1991): 7-12.



region simply roll westward onto fresh lands and replicate itself there? This question of distinctiveness thus drives the current debate, as historians search for what defined and explained these apparent differences. Some critical distinctions between the Tidewater and much of the backcountry area examined in these studies are clear. In the broadest sense, settlers had to overcome geographical barriers to market, were often of particular minority ethnic and religious groups, and owned few slaves. These characteristics alone contrasted sharply with the culture of the Tidewater where one's self-identity was tightly bound to the production of tobacco, as described by Timothy Breen.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have also focused closely on the ways that political power and social prestige were distributed differently from those in the east. They suggest that backcountry political power cannot be explained in terms defined for the Tidewater region. Instead of deference to a landed aristocracy tightly linked as a colony wide-elite, power was distributed in a purely local context. Another of the key patterns that seems to link the "backcountry" from South Carolina to Massachusetts is the unrest, violence, and even rebellions that periodically rocked particular places at particular times. In one way, it is the accommodation of the needs of backcountry settlers to create a stable and prosperous place and the desire of provincial leaders to control and in some cases exploit that wish that may have set up such conflict.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>T. H. Breen, Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>Any such summary blurs important details found in a rapidly burgeoning literature of the Virginia backcountry. Particular useful in sorting out the major themes and issues is an eloquent essay by Warren Hofstra, "The Virginia Backcountry in the Eighteenth Century: The Question of Origins and the Issue of Outcomes." Paper presented at the conference, "New Directions in Virginia History," Virginia Historical Society, October 1990. Other summaries include Albert H. Tillson, Jr. "The Southern Backcountry: A Survey of Current Research," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 98 (July 1990): 387-421, and Jack P. Greene, "Independence, Improvement, and Authority: Toward a Framework for Understanding the Histories of the Southern Backcountry during the Era of the American Revolution," in Ronald Hoffman, et al, An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry During the American Revolution, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), pp. 3-36.

While not articulated in these terms, backcountry scholars are largely seeking to describe the fringes of the Anglo-American empire. Bernard Bailyn's sweeping overview of colonial American society, The Peopling of North America, ties many of these themes explicitly together when he describes the frontier as a "periphery, a ragged outer margin of a central world, a regressive, backward-looking diminishment of metropolitan accomplishment." Only in this way can be understood the "primitiveness and violence, the bizarre, quite literally outlandish quality of life in this far-distant outback."<sup>5</sup> The question is not yet answered, however. Did part of backcountry distinctiveness lay in the wish to repudiate the larger metropolitan values of the Anglo-American world or was such a difference merely due to formidable barriers against their replication.<sup>6</sup>

Bedford County does not easily mesh with these larger studies. On the far southern and western edge of the piedmont, good land enabled profitable tobacco production, and population increased fourteen fold between 1755 and 1783. From earliest settlement, slaves were part of the population; indeed the percentage of the black population was greater in 1755 than it would be thirty years later.<sup>7</sup> While Quakers, Presbyterians, and Baptists can be

---

<sup>5</sup>Bernard Bailyn, The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), pp. 112-113.

<sup>6</sup>Thus, Richard Beeman has recently argued that it was the relative success of providing a stable place for economic prosperity that prevented large-scale unrest in Virginia as compared to other places and times. He saw the relative ease of obtaining land as a democratizing effect. Richard Beeman, "The Intersection of Society and Politics in the Backcountry: A Comparative View," (Paper presented at the conference, "Re-examining America's Frontier Heritage: The Eighteenth-Century Backcountry," Shenandoah University, October 1991); Turk McClesky's intensive study of Augusta County negates this premise, however, by demonstrating the significant obstacles to acquiring land because "access to real estate, to positions of authority and, through them, to elite social status was monitored as carefully as in any Tidewater county." Turk McClesky, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects: Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 98 (July 1990), p. 485. McClesky's commentary on Beeman's paper at the 1991 conference on the backcountry has also been especially useful in my thinking on this idea.

<sup>7</sup>Total male population in 1755 has been estimated at 500 (357 white and 143 blacks). In 1783, there were 7,150 titheables (5,497 white and 1653 black). Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York: Columbia

found—and indeed were some of the earliest settlers in the region—most who came to the area were probably of English and Anglican descent. If there were religious tensions, they certainly were not seen between the Anglicans and Presbyterians, who shared a church building from the 1750s.<sup>8</sup> Water courses and roads eased transportation to market.<sup>9</sup> The initial list of county officials reads like a who's who of the largest county planters who settled early and were able to acquire vast landholdings.<sup>10</sup> But neither do these characterizations always fit comfortably. Streams flooded, carrying off wagons, drowning horses, and enabling the escape of slaves. Transporting crops and goods over hundreds of miles in varying seasons remained treacherous.<sup>11</sup> The tobacco crop occasionally glutted the market or failed and John Hook desperately tried to diversify local agriculture by encouraging the growing of hemp. He

---

University Press, 1932).

<sup>8</sup>Mrs. Fletcher O. Thomas, "A Brief Sketch of the Presbyterian Churches in Bedford County, Virginia," probably 1938. Bedford County file, Virginia State Library. The Baptists in Bedford County are listed in Morgan Edwards, Materials Towards A History of the Baptists, vol. 2, ed. Eva Weeks and Mary B. Warren, (Danielsville, Ga: Heritage Papers, 1984). p. 51. For evidence of the settlement of Quakers, see Donald Summers Brown, A History of Lynchburg's Pioneer Quakers and their Meeting House, 1754-1936 (Lynchburg: J.P. Bell, 1936). Marlene Lewis' study of the South River Monthly meeting which included parts of Bedford County found that Quakers were from all social strata and were firmly integrated into official county life through the taking of inventories, serving as militia officers, and some, perhaps involuntary, appointments to government. Marlene Lewis, The South River Monthly Meeting of Friends, 1757-1800: A Socio-religious Study, M.A. thesis, Utah State University, 1976.

<sup>9</sup>See petition from "John Hylton, Samuel Hairston and others" that wanted to carry their tobacco down to market by water and asked for order for road from Capt. John Hylton's plantation to the mouth of Beaver Creek. Bedford County Determined Causes, n.d. probably c. 1770. Virginia State Library. Thirty-four local residents signed a petition for a new road to Lynch's ferry as they had "found by experience" that it would be "greatly to their advantage to use Water Carriage for the transportation of their Commodities." Petition to Bedford Court, copy in John Hook Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C. (hereafter cited as Hook Papers, Duke).

<sup>10</sup>Bedford County Order Book 1, VSL.

<sup>11</sup>Diary of Thomas Lewis, recording an April 1771 trip in Botetourt County. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va.

also purchased corn, rye, butter and textiles, all ultimately surrogates for currency in a book credit world.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, neither does Bedford County seem to fit economic patterns of counties immediately to the south or east in the piedmont or in the southside. In its largest sense, the southside region has been characterized by large tobacco plantations and wide-spread slave ownership. According to Allan Kulikoff, as a result of outmigration of the poor and immigration of more wealthy residents by the 1780s, six out of ten households in the region owned slaves, with a mean of five slaves per household.<sup>13</sup> Slave ownership in Bedford County was far more limited. More than two-thirds of county titheables owned no slaves and another twenty percent owned fewer than five. Only four percent of the county's titheables owned more than ten slaves (Table 6). Land ownership was also skewed toward the more middling farmer and the wealthy. The most common size holding was between one hundred and two hundred acres and almost two-thirds were under four hundred acres. Few small holdings (under one hundred acres) may suggest that many of the poor were tenants on larger parcels of land bought early in the county's history for speculation (Table 7).

Already we have run head-on into our first disjunction between how John Hook described his world and how modern scholars would try to pigeonhole it. In economic terms, Bedford quite simply slips through our fingers in attempts to characterize it in larger regional terms. But one nagging bit of evidence remains. For a key cultural trait about backcountry life may indeed have been the prevalence of a particularly brutal form of fighting known as gouging. In these heated contests, maximum disfigurement seemed to be the goal, and the

---

<sup>12</sup>See John Hook's Memorandum Book, Hook Papers, Duke.

<sup>13</sup>Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 153 and Table 16; for more details on regional patterns of slave ownership, see Phillip Morgan and Michael L. Nicholls, "Slaves in Piedmont Virginia, 1720-1790," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 46 (April 1989): 211-251.

**Table 6.**  
**Slave ownership in Bedford County, 1768-1777, 1787.**

---

<u>Ownership of Slaves</u>	<u>% of Probated Estates</u>	<u>% Of Taxable Households</u>
None	62.7	67.1
1-5	28.0	21.8
6-10	6.0	7.0
11 +	2.7	4.1

---

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, 1763-1787, Personal Property Tax List 1787.

**Table 7.**  
**Land ownership in Bedford County, 1782**

---

	Percentage of Acres Owned	
<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Bedford</u> <u>County</u>	<u>York</u> <u>County</u>
1-99	7.7	27.8
100-199	29.1	22.4
200-299	26.7	15.1
300-399	11.9	7.3
400-499	7.6	9.3
50-999	11.6	11.7
1000-1999	4.6	5.4
2000 or more	1.2	1.0

---

Source: Bedford County and York County Land Tax, 1782.

---

liberation of eyes from their sockets the "sine qua non...much like the knock-out punch in modern boxing." While such fighting was common in eighteenth-century society, the most rough-and-tumble eye poking may have been as much of a hallmark of backcountry life as elite horse-racing in the tidewater. The ease with which social slight or insult could escalate to brutal violence—like the gouging of eyes or the biting off of ears—is, at first view, nearly incomprehensible to modern sensibilities. Elliott J. Gorn explains, however, how such slights are measured in terms of local culture; if one's good name was the source of honor, the smallest besmirchment brought shame. At the same time, in a society where a man's physical skills were necessary to tame the wilderness, prowess at fighting conferred rank in a different kind of hierarchy.<sup>14</sup>

A scene from the court records beckons us. Details are incomplete, so we must add our imagination to knowledge of contemporary social custom. In 1787, Thomas Jones, Thomas Prunty, and others gathered for a drink, probably in a tavern. Perhaps they were neighbors, perhaps friends; we can imagine the punch bowl going round and round, each man drinking his own turn. According to Jones, Prunty offered him a drink from the punch bowl in a "gearing (jeering) insulting manner." Rather than receive the insult, Jones smashed the bowl out of his hand.<sup>15</sup>

Passing the punch bowl around was a shared ritual of drinking. It bonded the drinkers with one another not only through the alcohol, but the vessel itself. More refined manners of dining and drinking in a domestic context required individual cups and plates and forks, but the ritual of passing the punch bowl remained an important case when such

---

<sup>14</sup>Elliott J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 18–43. Compare this to T. H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 34 (1977): 239–257.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Jones v. Thomas Prunty, ACC 23707, May 1789, Franklin County Suit Papers. Quoted in John Salmon and Emily Salmon, *A Bicentennial History of Franklin County, Virginia, 1786-1986*, forthcoming. My thanks to John Salmon for permission to cite his manuscript.

"manners" were suspended in the context of alcohol consumption. Drawing upon the theories of Victor Turner, Joseph Gusfield has described a similar middle ground or liminality in modern culture where hierarchy and manners are temporarily suspended in the highly-structured act of drinking.<sup>16</sup>

In Jones' mind, the only proper response he could make when presented the punch bowl in an insulting manner was throwing the punch bowl on the ground. This was an equally insulting act for it encoded a refusal of hospitality through the gift of alcohol, but also a symbolic rejection of a wish to put one's lips where another's had been.<sup>17</sup> This insult could not be borne and Prunty instituted a suit. Jones countered with his own suit. But the jury agreed with Prunty that the refusal of the punch bowl was the greatest social violence. A few words about group interaction has thus told us about bonding and conflict, behavior in an institutional setting, and how a material object was encoded with cultural meaning. It, ever so briefly, opened the door on a tavern, a common point on the landscape about which we know very little.<sup>18</sup>

Another example can be studied. In 1786, a group of men gathered in the countryside near Bedford County to play whist, a popular card game. Suddenly, this pleasant sociable scene is shattered. The words of a witness in the lawsuit tell it all. "There seems to be a fals Deal, that Mr. Wilson got a Kandle to Count the tricks, that upon Sarching, Wilson found a

---

<sup>16</sup>Joseph R. Gusfield, "Passage to Play: Rituals of Drinking Time in American Society," in Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology, ed. Mary Douglas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 73-91.

<sup>17</sup>The lip of the bowl may have been wiped. Philip Vickers Fithian listed some hypothetical causes for a brawl he witnessed in 1774 including, "offered him a dram without wiping the mouth of the bottle." The point remains, however, that the smallest failure to observe drinking rituals could result in violence. Fithian, Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774, ed. Hunter Dickinson Farish, 2d ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 183.

<sup>18</sup>Expenses at Dr. Peter Donald's ordinary totalled over a pound each for eight Bedford County residents in 1771. Account Book of Dr. Peter Donald, Loose Papers, Bedford County Court House, Bedford, Va.



Card between Mr. Inland's feet." A fight erupts and the ensuing melee spread to another guest who began hitting Wilson's wife and son.<sup>19</sup>

Here is a group engaging in a highly-structured form of entertainment, based on intricate rules of play and appropriate behavior. It is, in one sense, like the games of whist endlessly played by Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, one of the richest and most fashionable women in the whole English empire. But knowing how to lay the tricks is but one part of the game. Once again, for Bedford County folk, structured rules of sociability quickly could be shattered with personal insult.

Is there other evidence for this kind of fighting we associate with backcountry life? A peddler visited the area in 1809 and his expectations were disappointed to find a "very poor Court, no fighting or Gouging, very few Drunken people." A local resident remembered fighting as the "prevalent vice in the community" in his early nineteenth-century childhood there, beginning as "furious quarreling," leading to "revolting profanity, [and] ending in a regular game of fisticuffs."<sup>20</sup> Other fights are captured in court cases, such as the suit of Adam Brown against William Callaway Jr. for assault and battery. In 1770, Brown, his apprentice, and slave were hired by George Callaway to work at blacksmithing. Part of the agreement was that if Callaway caught Brown neglecting his work, "he may order him to his business, when he shall go without Being offended at it & not to take it amiss." One wonders if Brown was known for a hot temper, for in 1772, he brought a suit against William

---

<sup>19</sup>Edward Willson v. John England, Franklin County Suit Papers, August 1789. Quoted in Salmon and Salmon, Bicentennial History of Franklin County, forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup>"Trade and Travel in Post-Revolutionary Virginia: A Diary of an Itinerant Peddler, 1807-1808," ed. Richard R. Beeman, Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 84 (April 1976): 174-188. The unknown peddler was visiting Liberty, Bedford County's courthouse after splitting off Campbell County. The remembrances of childhood are found in William Eldridge Hatcher, The Life of J. B. Jeter (Baltimore: H. M. Wharton, 1887).

Callaway, Jr., claiming that Callaway used clubs, swords, and fist to "beat, wound, and ill treat him so of his life it was greatly dispaired."<sup>21</sup>

Just as the county court sorted out fighting among Bedford residents, it also recorded the multiple grievances and slanders of one neighbor against another. James Pate was ordered to appear for slandering Elizabeth Finley who had not reached age twenty-one. George and Robert Baber were sued by John Hale for slandering him with their accusation of "carnal knowledge of a Negro wench" owned by George Baber. Hale protested that their "repeating, proclaiming and publishing of which False, Feigned, Scandalous and Approbrious lying English words" had caused him to fall into "great Infamy and Scandal with several worthy persons (that previously held him in favor)" and put him at risk of court penalties.<sup>22</sup>

These kinds of disputes are common in colonial Virginia society, and, hence a few incidents are difficult to judge. Paradoxically, however, this evidence, encoded in court cases, is a final argument against true backcountry culture. It demonstrates that while fighting, drinking, and scandal may have been common, there were still observed bounds of decent behavior between the sexes and races and, more importantly, that the court continued to function as arbiter of social disarray. That is, county residents turned to courts to settle their disputes in ways that essentially bowed to the larger authority of colony and king.<sup>23</sup> Jones and Prunty did not engage in honorific brawling to settle their punch-drinking slight; they went to court.

---

<sup>21</sup>Indenture between George Callaway and Adam Brown, 1770. Suit, Brown v. Callaway, March 1772. See also, Forquoran v. Buford, 1772; All found in Bedford County Determined Causes, Virginia State Library.

<sup>22</sup>James Finley v. Thomas Pate, November 29, 1766? John Hale v. George and Robert Baber, August, 1766. Bedford County Court Determined Causes, Virginia State Library.

<sup>23</sup>A. G. Roeber, "Authority, Law, and Custom: The Rituals of Court Day in Tidewater Virginia, 1720 to 1750," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 37 (January 1980): 29-53.

This evidence about fighting and violence has carried us deep into Bedford County culture, and once again, has shown how local residents could fit into a larger rough-and-tumble society that characterized backcountry life. Yet, once again we fail in trying to assign Bedford County to our preconceived categories. It is the not-quiteness of the fit that tells the story; an evening of cards at home ending with violence against the host's wife, communal bonding over a punch bowl leading to insult, honorable reputation against sexual assault of a slave, the expectation of—and disappointment in—regular eye gouging at court day.

This sense of confusion is our first compelling evidence. Bedford County had received its first white settlers barely twenty years before and had grown quickly. A bustling commercial town had been established with stores and a courthouse, a local doctor provided medicines and care, a schoolmaster was hired by seven local planters in 1769, even dancing lessons were procured for local wealthy planters' children. But there is something not quite genteel and established here. The doctor runs away to North Carolina and has to be hauled back to pay his debts.<sup>24</sup>

### The Material World

Jacob Hickman's will was presented to the Franklin County Court in the spring of 1789, and in it, he left detailed instructions for the disposing of his estate. His wife was to enjoy his house, land, livestock, and all other effects except his "joiner tools" until his

---

<sup>24</sup>Evidence for the local doctor found in Dr. Peter Donald Account Book, Loose Papers, Bedford County Archives, Bedford. "Medicines for Doctor Donald," invoice in John Hook Papers, Duke. Hiring of schoolmaster; articles of agreement made and concluded upon by John Stritch, Schoolmaster, June 5, 1769. Hook Papers, Duke. Dancing lessons and schooling for John Talbot's son in Guardian's Account of John Talbot, Jr. 181, schooling for daughter Martha. Will Book 2, Bedford County. Schooling and board for Andrew Moorman paid William Ballard, June 18, 1770. Pleasant Moorman estate account; February 27, 1792. Will Book 2, Bedford County.

The doctor's disappearance is recorded in a letter from John Hook to David Ross, ("Dr. Donald made an Alopment lately and was brought back") July 21, 1771?, Letterbook, Virginia State Library. He left owing Ross and Hook a substantial amount of money.

youngest son came of age. She was then to turn over the land to whichever child she desired, who must build her a house. Hickman carefully described a structure "of hued logs, Eighteen feet & fifteen feet and a shingled Ruff and Laid Above with Sawed Plank and two Windows, Eight Lights in Each and a Stone Chimney built in the middle." It was to be built wherever his wife pleased and included should be one acre of good meadow, to be dunged every other year, and one acre of "Good Tendable Ground." Every year she was to be given whatever fruit she pleased, twenty bushels of wheat, fifty pounds of beef, twelve pounds of hackled flax, hemp, and tow, and a pair of good shoes.<sup>25</sup>

Jacob Hickman was unusual in the careful instructions he left for the care of his widow. Of central importance here is the house; at first glance it seems to be a small log structure with two floors, windows and a permanent stone chimney built in the middle of the house. The center stone chimney is not typically Virginian, but betrays a Pennsylvania or Germanic cultural heritage.<sup>26</sup> By providing such precise instructions, Jacob Hickman gave his children no opportunity to cut corners in the care of their mother; his widow would live comfortably, provided with shelter, land to raise crops, and an annual allotment of food. The only manufactured good that he thought necessary, however, was an annual pair of shoes.

The choices Bedford County residents made in the construction of their domestic dwellings is another clue to their cultural world. Once again, though, we have to cull from a myriad of sources to piece together a whole. The first important evidence comes from a list of taxes paid on land and "improvements" for a rural county to the southwest in 1785. This Henry County document indicates that most local residents lived in some form of log

---

<sup>25</sup>Will of Jacob Hickman, March 11, 1789. Franklin County Will Book 1, 1786-1812. Virginia State Library.

<sup>26</sup>Edward A. Chappell, "Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses of the Massanutten Settlement," in Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, pp. 27-57 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

structure, a finding verified in a similar study of Halifax County.<sup>27</sup> The text is not uniform, and thus the evidence needs to be carefully examined. While each district enumerator varied in the detail he reported, most lists include the number of houses, cabins, and types of outbuildings and the number of white inhabitants in each household. Further confusion over taxation is also seen in the inclusion of slaves by name on some lists, although slaves were already listed and taxed under personal property tax provisions.<sup>28</sup>

While it is difficult to recapture the meaning of local tax enumerators, the categories of description—"dwelling house and dwelling cabbin"—indicate that there were some basic local distinctions about dwellings based on relative crudeness or quality of housing stock. In one district, for instance, 418 white persons were listed in 64 households. Twenty-nine structures were listed as somehow meeting a local ideal of what a proper "dwelling house" should be, while 67 were designated dwelling cabins. "Out cabbins," presumably for slaves, were listed separately.<sup>29</sup>

Most of the tax returns only made the distinction between dwelling houses, dwelling cabins, various outbuildings, and out cabins, but Robert Woods' list includes evidence of house construction. In his district lived 460 white persons in 78 households, for an average of 5.9 per household. William Ferguson had the largest household; fourteen people lived in

---

<sup>27</sup>My thanks to Anne Carter Lee for the manuscript copy of these tax lists and other primary materials from Franklin and Henry County. Caution is necessary, as this area is more mountainous than Bedford County and may exaggerate the frontier nature of housing. However, tax information from nearby Halifax County gives a similar view as will be sketched below. Halifax materials discussed in Mick Nichols, "Building the Virginia Southside: A Note on Architecture and Society in the Eighteenth Century, unpublished paper on file, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. My thanks to Julie Richter for this manuscript.

<sup>28</sup>This new tax was imposed to establish each state's burden of "common defence and general welfare" based on land and its improvement under the Articles of Confederation. Hening's Statutes at Large, vol. 11, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, fasc. reprint, 1969), pp. 415-416.

<sup>29</sup>List taken by Henry Jones, Henry County, 1785. Henry County Courthouse, Martinsville, Va.

one log structure with only a chicken house for an outbuilding. Daniel Ross also had a large household of thirteen persons, but he had prospered sufficiently to build a chicken house, barn, and dairy. However, the most common household size was three persons (twenty-two percent of all), and over half had households under five persons. Forty-one percent had added a kitchen, twenty-two percent had a barn, and six percent had dairies. However, put another way, only one in two could cook in an external building to avoid heat and fire, and only one in four had a structure to secure livestock and store food and feed. Only two of these seventy-eight households had smokehouses for meat preservation, and two had stables. The remaining outbuildings were for craft activities and small businesses. Captain Rubel had a blacksmith shop and a linen shop, in addition to his iron works. Benjamin Hize had a mill; both Bailey Carter and Nathaniel Dickson operated smith's shops; and William Griffith had a hatter's shop. In addition, only a few who owned slaves had quarters, suggesting that even some who had the capital to acquire bound labor lived side-by-side with them. Thus, few of these households had built the complement of agricultural and domestic outbuilding structures associated with specialization of task. At the same time, many who had prospered enough to build specialized business and carry out more efficient agricultural activities continued to live in log dwellings. Only Peter Saunders had built a frame house; his slaves and livestock were also well-housed in a quarter, barn, chicken house, and he had only one of two smoke houses in the district.<sup>30</sup>

A few hand-delivered notes contained other more detailed information, such as the names of inhabitants and, in a few cases, building materials. This again demonstrates the local confusion over what level of detail should be included in these tax lists. Henry Lyne had a twenty by sixteen foot dwelling house with log body and shingle roof shared by four

---

<sup>30</sup>"A List of Whit [sic] People & Buildings in the Bounds of Capt. Rubles Company," Henry County Courthouse, Martinsville, Virginia. A brief analysis was compiled by R. Gravely and provided to me by Anne Carter Lee. This report is also cited and discussed in Salmon and Salmon, Bicentennial History of Franklin County, forthcoming.

men—two who may have been unrelated—and eight "cabbing houses," probably for slaves. John Pelprie also had a log dwelling house with shingle roof shared with his wife Betty, ten children and his son William's wife, Anna, along with four out cabins. The large family of William Quarles was similarly housed in one cabin shared by himself, his wife Judah, six children, his mother, and Betsy Burnett. Thus, multiple generations, large families, and unrelated people often lived under one roof.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, tax information indicates that many local residents below the elite resided in small log structures of varying qualities. In some families, five or six members from several generations crowded in one or two rooms. Yet, the most common household size was but three members, suggesting a family life just beginning or ending, or unrelated people living together. A few outbuildings had been constructed to remove agricultural and cooking tasks from the small cabins, but few had constructed the full complement.

In New London, however, small frame houses with brick chimneys were at least mandated, as the court ordered a minimum sixteen by twenty foot frame house on each one-half acre lot.<sup>32</sup> Here the merchant John Hook constructed his frame twenty-eight by thirty foot house and moved in with his new bride in 1772 (fig. 16). Each of the two commodious rooms on the first floor was heated with corner chimneys, and the large back room alone (with dimensions of twenty by eighteen) was larger than many rural cabins. The "footprint" of Hook's house was 840 square feet; more than two-and-a-half times the minimum size of those dictated by law in New London, about the same as the new Presbyterian church on the nearby Otter River, and nearly rivalling the courthouse in footage.<sup>33</sup> Visitors could not step

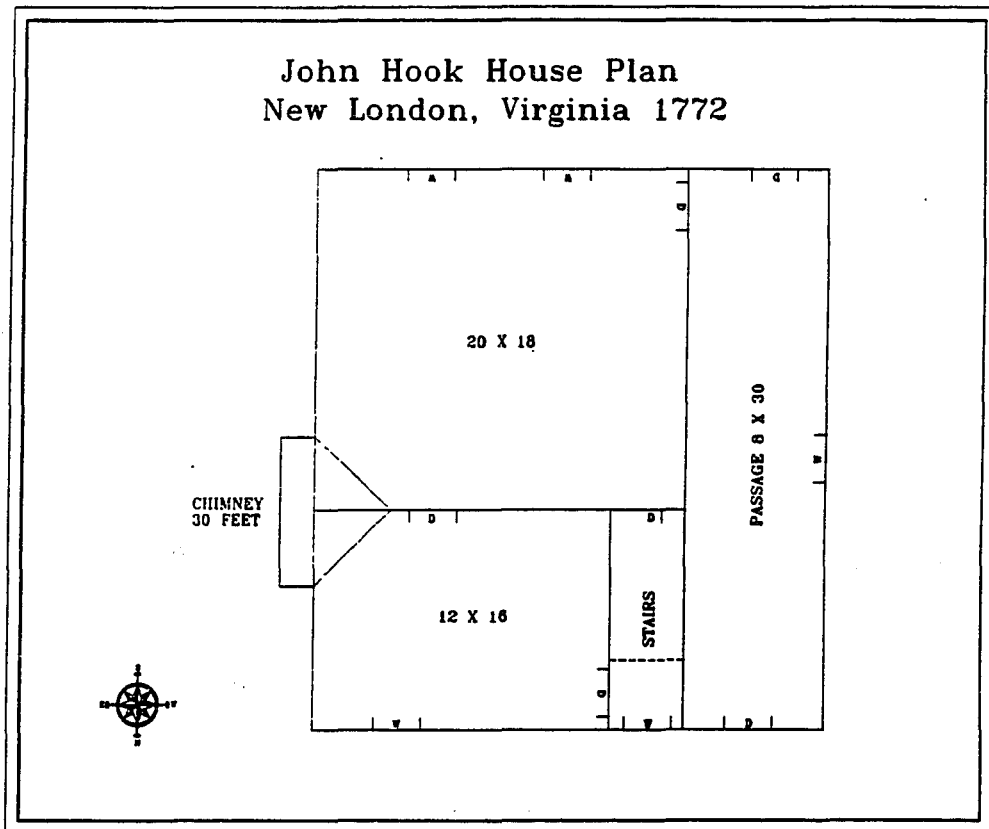
---

<sup>31</sup>"To be added to Captain Salmon's list," Henry County tax lists, 1785.

<sup>32</sup>The "Plan of New London Town" is found in Bedford County Deed Book A, p. 434.

<sup>33</sup>The Presbyterian church measured 40 x 20. Morgan Edwards, Materials Towards a History of the Baptists, ed. Eva Weeks and Mary B. Warren, (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papes, 1984) vol. 2, p. 51.

Figure 16. John Hook House Plan, New London, 1772.  
(Drawing, Kim Wagner. Source: John Hook papers;  
Perkins Library, Duke University)





directly into these heated rooms, entering instead into a large passage that transected the house from back to front. While the passage was a relatively modish addition, Hook's passage was on the side, not a central divider between two cores of rooms, usually a large hall and two smaller rooms used as private chamber and dining room. Perhaps this was due to narrow lot size.<sup>34</sup> Stairs led up to a second floor with dwelling chambers or storage space. A closet underneath the stairs provided secure storage, five windows allowed good lighting, and a cellar may have been built, although not bricked. While further details of interior finishing are unclear (accounts for building materials include both the house and the store), Hook clearly went beyond basics. He acknowledged David Ross' concern about the cost of building his house and store with the assurance that he "would not be more expensive in the guildings than what is necessary, except a little in the Dwelling House," a cost he would bear himself.<sup>35</sup>

How do we pull together all these strands? On the most basic level, it is clear that no one in Bedford County or the surrounding area built the kinds of large mansion houses that dotted the tidewater, even if some were extraordinarily wealthy. The one known standing preRevolutionary structure in Bedford County only reinforces this sense. Joshua Early purchased 450 acres of land in 1757, arrived in 1758, and by 1764 added another 212 acres. He was also one of the original purchasers of a lot in New London. While the exact date of

---

<sup>34</sup>House plan found in Hook Papers, Duke. Photostat in John Hook Papers, Business Records Collection, Virginia State Library. For more on the development of the passage, see Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Spring 1982): 96-119.

<sup>35</sup>Hook to Ross, New London, December 16, 1771. Ross had chastised his new partner that his chosen method of building—"to have work valued when finished"—was the most expensive. Hook replied that he was most uneasy with building the store and house for "the manner of ingaging workmen is what I'm unskill'd in" and wished for "an able advisor to instruct me." He had already agreed to provide the workmen with money to buy all provisions, they were to bring their charges, and if there was disagreements, the matter would be referred to Men of Good Character, reputed for their Skill in Building." Ross to Hook, Goochland Courthouse, October 21, 1771. Brock Papers, Huntington Library. Hook to Ross, New London, October 26, 1771. Letterbook, Virginia State Library.

building is unknown, a new house was ready to receive his seventeen-year old bride Mary Leftwich in 1763. His six rooms and three chimneys, kitchen, smoke, and ice house would have marked Early's great wealth as planter and merchant.<sup>36</sup> That even well-to-do merchants did not build large brick houses seems to support Richard Beeman's argument about the relative difference in elite behavior between the tidewater and nearby Lunenburg County. Beeman attributes this first to a culture that placed an emphasis on investing in slaves and land, rather than the desire—or need—to distinguish wealth via the material world. As the county developed, however, he argued, that since deference was not accorded to elites on the same terms as they were in Tidewater anyway, there was little need or desire to impress through architecture.<sup>37</sup>

Conceptualizing some broad history of building patterns as process is a traditional explanation in frontier society. The argument goes like this: in a society that was relatively new and expanding rapidly, the first job at hand was to gain basic housing—a log cabin or other roof over the head. Two decades before the Revolution, for example, James Patton, one of the first settlers in nearby Botetourt County contracted for two "round log houses roofed with clapboards." He wanted them twenty-one by eighteen feet in dimension, and eight feet high with twenty feet of shade between them. A year later Patton contracted for the building of another house, twenty feet square with a "shingled roof like Mr. Thompson's."<sup>38</sup> With the lessened threat of attack from Native Americans after the Seven Years War, it was no longer necessary to cluster these buildings for security and domestic buildings could spread

---

<sup>36</sup>Bedford County general files, Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks, Richmond, Va.

<sup>37</sup>Richard Beeman, The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746–1832, pp. 160–185.

<sup>38</sup>Contract, Benjamin Harris and James Patton, February 12, 1753, and Fred and Henry Shore with James Patton, January 15, 1754. Both found in William Preston Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

across the landscape. Clearing land and adding supporting outbuildings for storage and agricultural and craft specialization followed.

But some two decades later, few residents had the full complement of agricultural structures for a fully-functioning plantation. Evidence about domestic dwellings indicate a range from 270 to 400 square feet of ground floor interior space in a log structure. This would place most of these homes in the bottom third of house size as advertised in the Virginia Gazette during the eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Some lived in drafty thrown together cabins, others in snug, warm ones; others finished interiors and installed windows. In New London, houses were mandated to be frame but their minimum size was no larger than a common cabin, with 320 feet of living space on the ground level. Still others, like John Hook, began to develop more fashionable house plans in large buildings.

In Bedford, this trend of building larger houses of more permanent materials would begin to gather momentum after the Revolution. A large symmetrical brick residence named Fancy Farm, for instance, was built in the late 1780s by the merchant Andrew Donald (fig. 17). But improvement in housing was undoubtedly slow. Liberty—the Bedford court house after Campbell County was splintered off—was visited by a peddler in 1807. He found about twenty dwelling houses, only ten of which he thought to be "Genteel." Most were frame and only two or three were made of brick.<sup>40</sup>

Explaining houses in some sort of model of stages of development does not ultimately prove satisfactory. To say that local planters were too busy getting ahead to create more

---

<sup>39</sup>Camile Wells, "The Planter's Prospects: Houses and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," forthcoming in Winterthur Portfolio, Table 5. According to Bernard L. Herman, probably at least eighty-five percent of all houses in southern Delaware in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were one-story frame or log structures measuring less than twenty by twenty-five feet. The most common size was eighteen by twenty feet. Bernard L. Herman, The Stolen House (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 183.

<sup>40</sup>He also found two dry goods stores, one grocery, and two taverns. Beeman, "Trade and Travel in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," p. 181.

Figure 17. Fancy Farm, home of Andrew Donald, 1780s.  
(Photograph, Virginia Division of Historic  
Landmarks, Richmond, Va)



comfortable living or an orderly system of outbuildings does not fit the evidence. The wealthy Israel Christian's new two-story "little house" in 1773 was finished with clapboard, lathed and plastered, and finished with chair board and wash boards inside. Three lower windows with shutters and five dormer windows, five six-panel doors and "small Cornish molding" give evidence of multiple rooms and floors, and ample light, and even this "little house"—suggesting that there was a larger one elsewhere—would have demarcated him from most of local society.<sup>41</sup> A brief memorandum of John Hook gives us more such clues. Captain Thomas Madison ordered one hundred panes of window glass, six brass locks and pair of hinges, and enough spanish brown, white lead, and lamp black for a house that was forty-four by twenty feet. This house was large, perhaps even considered "genteel," had multiple windows and rooms that could be locked, and was painted.<sup>42</sup>

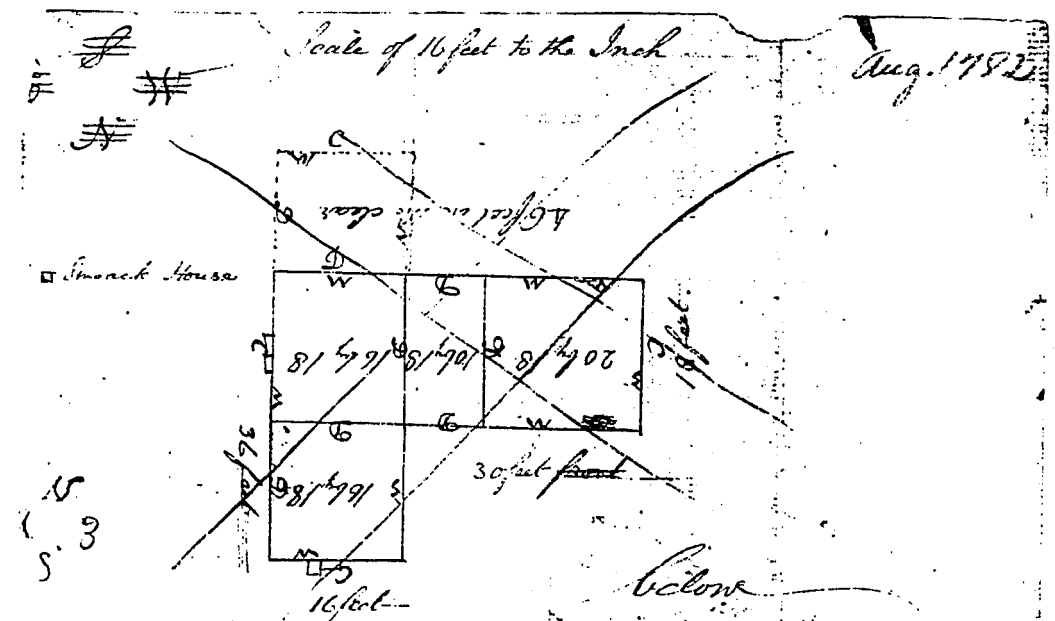
John Hook's remarkable records gives us one final set of extraordinary evidence. The house he built in New London in 1772 was a serious statement that the merchant with a new business in town was a man of influence (fig. 18). When he moved out of New London to a plantation to the south (building his new store on a major north-south route), he once again left detailed instructions through drawings and notes. The house was to be even larger than his house in New London—forty-six by eighteen feet—with two large heated rooms bisected by a hall or passage, one of them the same size as the largest room he had in New London. He sketched an additional eighteen by sixteen foot cell on the back with chimneys. The four spaces were probably a hall, passage, dining room, and chamber, on the back with a second set of stairs. This design is similar to that of another backcountry elite, William

---

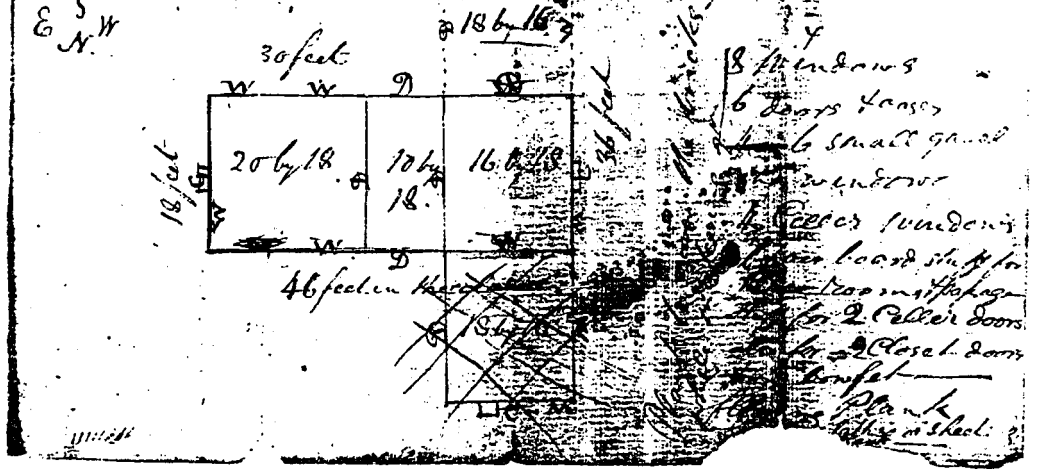
<sup>41</sup>Israel Christian v. William Bates, 1773, Bedford County Determined Causes, Virginia State Library.

<sup>42</sup>Memorandum Book of John Hook, May 1772, p. 13. Hook papers, Duke. Madison also needed a few appropriate implements for living in a way that might be considered proper in such a house; a dressing glass, one-half dozen tea and a half-dozen coffee cups and saucers, a copper coffee pot, a bell metal skillet, and twenty-five pounds of brown sugar.

**Figure 18. John Hook house plan, Hale's Ford.  
(Source: John Hook papers, Perkins Library,  
Duke University.)**



□ Kitchen  
 A cellar under the two rooms 16 by 18 each a fire place in each of them to be <sup>10 ft</sup> and a built foot underground & three feet under pinning to the under side of the sleeper from the front to the lower side of the joints the House to be 10 feet Pitch, only one story, no dormants, small windows in the front end in the ~~back end~~ <sup>back end</sup> a small room to the S West 16 by 18 — a closet in the front joining the chimney in the big room or to add two feet more in length and make an inside chimney and closet on one side; the same joining the chimney facing in the other end with a door and joining the chimney to the roof to the south a top set of ~~the chimney~~ and in the opposite side of the chimney a ~~closet~~ <sup>closet</sup> in the ~~back end~~ <sup>back end</sup> at the ~~end~~ <sup>end</sup> a kitchen 9 feet Pitch a stack of chimneys ~~in the middle~~ 16 feet ~~off~~ <sup>off</sup> in the clear a Smoack House 12 feet square with a con. square roof 10 feet pitch —



Cabell of Nelson County, who had plans for a quite similar dwelling in 1784.<sup>43</sup> Hook's house thus contained 1,116 square feet on the ground floor, with an upstairs room floored at the level of the eaves with no dormers for lighting but windows on the "gavel" [sic] ends. Access to this overhead space was up two sets of stairs with bannisters and rails; one in the hall, and one in the southwest room. To the six small gable end windows, he added eight windows on ground level, and four in the cellar. He needed eight doors and cases, and materials for two cellar doors, two closet doors, a "bowfat," and two closets. Indeed, next to each chimney he wanted a closet or bowfat. Chairboards were to be added to "C." (chamber) rooms and passages.

He was equally explicit about the exterior of the house, asking, for instance, for a bulkhead entrance to the cellar in the back of the house. His kitchen was to be sixteen feet square and include a stack of chimneys at one end; a smokehouse was but nine and half feet square with a common square roof. He was most confident in his instructions for the cellar, to be dug four and a half feet deep, with an eighteen-inch stone wall, and measure twenty by forty feet running north and south down one side of the house and under the back room. Ever attentive to detail, he wanted the dirt thus dug to be thrown out to molter on the hill in preparation for rolling down to the brick yard. Planning ahead, he wanted a twenty by fifty foot shed built to shelter the bricks. The building would later serve as a still house to shelter the "mobby" hogsheads. He even made a note to have three wheel barrows made for rolling the dirt to his brick yard.

Despite his detailed instructions, Hook was no builder. He needed a pair of professional sawyers, "one that understands framing stone" for the cellar. He made a note to

---

<sup>43</sup>Plan of a house to be built for William Cabell of Nelson County, Virginia in 1784. Illustrated in Mark R. Wenger, "The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 2, ed. Camille Wells, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 141. My thanks to Wenger for his insights into this plan and the Cabell similarity.



enquire of the bricklayer Joseph Lewis of Rockbridge, hundreds of miles to the north and west, and to write Mr. Brown in Halifax or Pittsylvania, and to ask his storekeeper Holt the name of the man that built Colonel Cowle's house.

Examining the two plans together also gives some hints to how Hook may have thought out his second house. The facade of the New London house consisted of a side door and two windows to the east. This plan was replicated on the east side of the Franklin County house. He then might have swung his second room from the back and put it beside his passage. Now, however, his facade was unbalanced. The only way for him to solve it was to eliminate one of the windows in the large twenty by eighteen foot room, which he neatly crossed out in his Franklin County plan. Unfortunately, this choice unbalanced the windows in the front and rear. He also made several additional sketches, shifting the extra core room to various places. Despite his care, he nonetheless confessed in his instructions a certain degree of uncertainty about how the closets could be included and suggested that, if necessary, the wall could be moved two feet out to make an inside chimney and closet on one side. Finally, at the very bottom of his memoranda, he acknowledged that the whole plan should be altered (if possible) to make the windows to the north, a problem he had struggled with in his sketches.<sup>44</sup>

Hook built another house, probably in the 1780s at Burke's Fork, and perhaps for an overseer. There is no extant plan, but he requested it to be of "14 feet pitch, 9 feet below and 5 above [torn] the posts" with two doors. He further specified that large logs of particularly hard wood—white oak, locust, or chestnut—be used, and the bark removed inside and out. It would only measure twenty by sixteen feet, the size of one room in Hook's plantation house.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup>"Plans of Building for the Forrest Plantation," August 1782, Hook Papers, Duke.

<sup>45</sup>Undated scrap on microfilm 135-13-1, Hook papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

The evidence for John Hook's buildings have been quoted at length because the structures provide a text of three different buildings built by one man in the space of a decade. The overseer's house was of about average size, but by choosing especially hard woods and stripping the bark, the thrifty Scotsman sought to ensure that even this log structure would last. Each of the houses he built for himself were large, even ostentatious, in local terms. The first house was built at a time when Hook was anxious to affirm his importance as a merchant in a highly competitive business climate, and no doubt provide a dwelling suitable for a new wife from a wealthy local family. It was here that a mob came, threatening to pull down the house if he did not come out and face their threats of a tarring and feathering.<sup>46</sup> The second house was built by a man that had clearly made his fortune, but had suffered from the intense hostility of customers and neighbors who watched foreign merchants prosper. Yet, unlike many local citizens, he built a house meant to last, underpinned with stone, with multiple brick chimneys, and with carefully-placed outbuildings. It was also undoubtedly meant to impress, and, like his portrait of the king and queen, we might see a bit of nose-thumbing at the mob and the local elite that had encouraged them. Indeed, according to the research of Camille Wells, the size of Hook's house placed it in about the top ten percent of Virginia houses advertised for sale in the eighteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Like so many merchants before him, he had made his fortune and retired a wealthy planter, although Hook continued to run his store across the road until his death in 1806.

Many local residents were not so lucky. Some stayed in small, poorly built log houses. Many chose not to—or were not able to—make similar material expressions through the built environment. The widow Hickman's house—if built—was also something entirely different from the kind of ramshackle cabin with mud and stick chimney

---

<sup>46</sup>Complaint of John Hook, New London, January 18, 1777. Hook papers, Duke.

<sup>47</sup>Wells, "The Planter's Prospects," Table 5.

that would be seen scattered around the landscape. It was, on closer examination, quite sturdy and comfortable compared to common local housing of the time. But once again the whole structure could be placed snugly within John Hook's single large room. As a generation of architectural historians has shown, the expectation that the most wealthy would attempt to replicate William Byrd's Westover does not match the actions of even the most elite of the Tidewater.<sup>48</sup> As Thomas Anburey observed in 1779, most Virginia houses were of wood with shingled roofs, and only the houses of the "better sort" were finished on the inside by lathing and plastering, and on the outside by painting and the use of glass windows, rather than shutters. While some chimneys were brick, "the generality of them were wood, coated on the inside with clay."<sup>49</sup> Some of the houses discussed above fit the pattern of the "better sort." Others did not. They formed their own hierarchy, even if in backcountry terms. Drake remembered this hierarchy even in frontier Kentucky for "the best kind of houses then in use" was first a cabin, and afterwards "the hewed log house, with a shingled roof."<sup>50</sup>

How did contemporaries see this material world of the backcountry? When William Eddis travelled to the backcountry of Frederick County, Maryland, he found that houses there were of "rude construction, the timber with which they frame their dwellings seldom undergoing the operation of any tool except the axe." He thought that their two rooms, "an apartment to sleep in and another for domestic purposes," along with a nearby storehouse and barn, presently could "gratify their utmost ambition." He also thought that their "method of living corresponded perfectly with their exterior appearance." The poor man's diet was of

---

<sup>48</sup>See, for instance, Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," pp. 95-119.

<sup>49</sup>Thomas Anburey, Travels through the Interior Parts of America (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1923), vol. 2., p. 187.

<sup>50</sup>Daniel Drake, Pioneer Life in Kentucky, 1785-1800, ed. Emmet Field Horine (New York: Henry Schuman, 1948), p. 115.

corn, beaten then baked or boiled, and with the addition of salt beef, pork, or bacon, Eddis thought that "no complaints are made respecting their fare."<sup>51</sup> At the same time that he described such basic "ambition" in housing, he noted that stores quickly moved into the area "to supply the real and imaginary necessities" of farmers and their wives, for as "wealth and population increased, wants were created, and many considerable demands, in consequence, took place for the elegancies as well as necessaries of life."<sup>52</sup>

Francis Grey had a slightly different experience on his travels to Albemarle County in 1814. Stopping at a tavern, he found a one-room unfinished house, with a door that would not shut. But within that structure "he found no appearance of poverty." The inhabitants were well-dressed, the bed was "very good" and covered with a "very good counterpane." He found a large mahogany desk occupying one side of the room, but marveled there was nothing to drink from but broken glasses.<sup>53</sup>

Both of these men make us wish we could open the doors to these houses and peer inside. One thought that the backcountry "method of living"——in this case, diet——fit precisely with their exterior appearance, but he tells us nothing about those interiors. Another found that such rough exteriors were a shell for a different set of consumer priorities, although even these choices were confusing. That puzzle is our next investigation.

---

<sup>51</sup>William Eddis, Letters from America, ed. Aubrey C. Land, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1969), p. 67.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid, pp. 51-52.

<sup>53</sup>Francis Calley Gray, Thomas Jefferson in 1814: Being an Account of a Visit to Monticello, Virginia (Boston: Club of Odd Volumes, 1924), p. 36.

The Domestic Interiors of Bedford County Residents

Edward Bright died in 1784, survived by his wife Mary Ann, his son Charles, and five married daughters. In his will, he carefully designated his wife to have full use of his 120 acre plantation, until either she chose to leave it or her death when it was to be passed on to his grandson Charles. The rest of his estate was to be divided between his wife and son, with each of his five daughters to be given five shillings. When Reuben Slaughter, Richard Gilliam, and F. Trion came to inventory and appraise his estate, they carefully listed the results of his lifetime of acquisition. One slave Roger was valued at £45 with another £39 added for three horses, a dozen cows, and four hogs. His slave and livestock formed about seventy percent of his whole personal estate of £121. His household possessions were simple; two feather beds valued at £20 were the most expensive household items, but little else had much economic value. There were a couple of trunks, a chest, and eight chairs, but no tables from which to eat. With such a large family to feed, he had a good twenty-five pounds of pewter, as well as earthenware and glass and iron pots. His five daughters may have spent many hours at the two spinning wheels and the loom, weaving coarse hemp for family use or resale, perhaps even at Hook's store where he was a customer.<sup>54</sup>

How do the furnishings of Edward Bright compare to his neighbors, friends, and superiors? The snapshot of county life gained from the Bedford county probate record for 1768-1777 shows a society that did not place a high premium on creating any interior environment for correct elite behavior. This is especially clear when comparing the household equipment of Bedford County to that of selected counties in eastern Virginia, surveyed by Lois Carr and Lorena Walsh.<sup>55</sup> It is for this reason of comparison that this

---

<sup>54</sup>Will of Edward Bright, July 2, 1784, and Inventory returned May 23, 1785, Bedford County Will Book 1.

<sup>55</sup>Will Book 1, Bedford County, Virginia State Library. Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Cary

study uses some of the categories of goods and the levels of wealth defined by Carr and Walsh. First, household items that we might define as consumer goods do not make up a large part of these inventories as bound labor and livestock accounted for three-quarters of personal wealth (Table 8). Households were simply furnished. Only a third of the poorest households (estates valued at less than £49) listed any tables or chairs from which to eat in the new civilized manner. Moving into the lower middling ranks, only about half were so equipped; an average of about one table and four chairs meant that in many households few guests could be seated comfortably. At the same time, comparable households in eastern York County, Virginia, contained almost a dozen chairs for friends and family. Those who were relatively well off—in the upper middling and upper economic ranks—did invest in a few chairs and tables, but again lagged far behind their eastern counterparts. At the top of the Bedford social hierarchy, no inventoried household had the overall package necessary for the correct elite environment. While wealthy York County residents assorted an average of nine tables and thirty chairs for multiple social functions, Bedford elite households contained less than a quarter of these furnishings. Only a handful of the wealthiest residents had a desk to keep accounts or complete correspondence; none had prints on the walls or silver plate on their tables (Tables 9 and 10).

What about less expensive items to grace those tables? Overall, approximately two percent of the personal wealth of all households was invested in objects related to the preparation and serving of food. Factoring out slaves and livestock to just examine consumer wealth, that percentage remained relatively constant even as wealth increased (Table 11). This pattern remained true after separating out these items into categories of cooking, dining, and utilitarian storage. Expenditures were thus relatively inelastic; one did not spend a

---

Carson, forthcoming. However, I have excluded only slaves and livestock from these listings of goods to arrive at consumer goods; my definition does not break out material goods that may have been used for the production of wealth, as my view is of the kinds of commodities and objects that might function in the market, either through selling or buying.

**Table 8.**  
**Total Wealth in Bedford County Inventories,**  
**1768-1777**

	£0-49	£50-94	£95-224	£225-490	£491 +
n	28	18	18	12	4
Slaves	0	11.4	31.6	63.2	75.7
Livestock	44.4	46.6	33.6	20.8	12.1
Furniture	17.7	10.7	12.3	7.0	5.5
Linen: Bed/table	.08	.3	.7	.2	0
Literacy	.4	.9	1.0	.2	.2
Cloth Productn.	2.4	1.5	1.6	.4	.1
Foodways	5.4	3.7	2.8	1.9	1.0
Grocery	.3	.2	.3	.2	.5

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, 1763-1787. Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

Table 9.  
Mean Number of Chairs per Household, 1768-1777

County	N	£0-49	£50-94	£95-224	£225-490	£491 +
Bedford	80	2.8	4.8	3.4	7.7	5.3
York	96	5.1	11.0	18.2	17.1	32.5
Somerset	261	4.3	7.7	9.7	13.9	19.1

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, Carr and Walsh, Table 6, in press.



Table 10.  
 Mean Number of Tables per Household, 1768-1777

County	N	£0-49	£50-94	£95-224	£225-490	£491 +
Bedford	80	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.2
York	96	1.7	2.6	4.1	4.8	8.8
Somerset	261	1.8	1.9	2.7	3.8	5.6

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, Carr and Walsh, Table 6, in press.

Table 11.  
Consumer Wealth in Bedford  
County Inventories, 1768-1777

Wealth Category					
	£0-49	£50-94	£95-224	£225-490	£491 +
n	28	18	18	12	4
Furniture	31.9	25.5	35.2	41.1	44.9
Linens: Bed\table	0.1	0.7	1.9	1.5	0
Literacy	1.6	2.2	1.0	1.1	1.3
Cloth product.	4.2	3.6	4.6	2.4	1.1
Foodways	9.7	8.9	8.0	11.1	8.6
Cooking	3.6	3.2	2.9	3.7	3.2
Dining	5.6	4.3	4.8	6.4	4.6
Teadrinking	.09	0.7	.01	0.5	0.6
Grocery	0.5	3.0	0.8	1.2	4.4
Foodstuffs	0.3	0.5	0.6	1.2	4.0

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, 1763-1787, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

greater proportion of one's wealth on these items as one's wealth increased. Only items related to tea drinking showed a marked increase in households of differing wealth. Those with greater consumer wealth also acquired more furniture and a great deal many more bedding and table linens, but ceramics and related items did not seem to be an important index of wealth. Pewter was overwhelmingly the tableware of choice, with the addition of wooden wares and fine ceramics in some households.

Nonetheless, these backcountry folk did compare favorably to their eastern cousins in other ways. For instance, high incidence of owning knives and forks suggests—albeit tentatively—that new manners of eating had gained a foothold. Even if old-fashioned pewter had not been replaced by ceramic items, and even if not all could gather around a table, old methods of scooping, pushing, fingering and spooning one's food were passing away (Table 12).<sup>56</sup> These households also contained quantities of books comparable to their peers in eastern society, suggesting an emphasis on literacy and religion. Even half of the poorest households and as many as three-fourths of those of other wealth levels owned at least one book, often a Bible (Table 13).

But one more surprise remains. Compared to many other Chesapeake counties, teawares were hardly to be found in these probate inventories. Several tea kettles suggest that tea was being consumed, and a few teawares were listed in the inventories of the wealthy, but a comparison with other more eastern counties demonstrates a shocking rejection of tea (Table 14). Even in Bourbon County, Kentucky, some twenty years later—the first years of the population moving out of stations for defense—tea and coffee utensils were found in over

---

<sup>56</sup>The high incidence of knives and forks in Bedford County may be measured in another way. Just over half of the Bedford probates did not contain knives and forks in the approximate decade before the American revolution. Yet, Barbara Carson's study of probate inventories in Washington, D.C., a half-century later found that about forty percent of the decedents still did not own knives and forks. Barbara Carson, Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behaviors, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990), p. 31.

Table 12.  
Ownership of Knives and Forks in Virginia,  
1768-1777

Percentage of Households by Wealth Group						
County	N	£0-49	£50-94	£95-224	£225-491	£491+
Bedford	80	33	38	56	75	33
York-Rural	73	25	30	20	70	93
Anne Arundel	181	21	56	63	76	82
Somerset	261	51	69	77	80	89
York-Urban	44	10	20	40	80	64
Anne Arundel-Urban	30	56	0	75	100	100

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, Carr and Walsh, Table 1, in press.

Table 13.  
Ownership of Books in Virginia, 1768-1777

Percentage of Households by Wealth Group						
County	N	£0-49	£50-94	£95-224	£225-491	£491 +
Bedford	80	53	76	76	60	67
York-Rural	73	33	30	53	90	79
Anne Arundel	181	22	48	63	66	82
Somerset	261	56	82	84	90	96
York-Urban	44	30	80	30	100	79
Anne Arundel Urban	30	67	68	75	100	83

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, Carr and Walsh, Table 1, in press. This table combines religious and secular books.

Table 14.  
Ownership of Teawares in Virginia, 1768-1777

Percentage of Households with At Least One Object: By Wealth Grouping						
County	N=	£0-49	£50-94	£95-224	£225-491	£491 +
Bedford	80	3.0	19	7.0	17	33
York-Rural	73	25	30	60	50	86
Anne Arundel	181	28	40	57	83	85
Somerset	261	32	43	57	76	89
York-Urban	44	60	100	90	100	86
Anne Arundel Urban	30	67	80	63	100	100

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, Carr and Walsh, Table 1, in press.

half of all household inventories. Indeed in a popular series of letters published in 1793 to promote settling in Kentucky, Gilbert Imlay remarked that "there are certain luxuries which the progress of society has taught us to consider as necessary." He noted that "sugar, coffee, and tea, belong to this class."<sup>57</sup> If the "progress of society" had taught Bedford County residents to consider tea essential, it is not seen in their probate inventories.

The picture of the domestic interiors of Bedford County residents seems to indicate a society that had a different view of what was necessary and proper. Of course, the inventories may be capturing the behavior of an older generation, but, even so, they had not added a number of furniture and furnishings that their peers dying in eastern Virginia and Maryland had chosen. Not having many storage pieces may mean there was little to store; not having chairs suggests a group that squatted, leaned, or sat on chests that may have been pulled from the wall. But Bedford County residents did indeed seem to select some new social patterns, like the inpropriety of eating with the hands, even as they rejected others, like the drinking of tea.

But the picture thus drawn is static and even terse. Consumer behavior is a life-long process, even if there were stages in the life cycle such as marriage or the birth of children that were periods of increased activity. Before moving on to the records of acquisition in store records, we must first look at the multiple ways such "goods and things" could move into Bedford households.

#### The Acquisition of "Goods and Things"

In 1775, the estate of Edward Goldman was sold in Campbell County. Twelve slaves, livestock, and barrels of pork and corn were included in the £418 sale, along with an impressive list of household furnishings. Some of the wealthiest men of the region were

---

<sup>57</sup>Quoted in Ellen Eslinger, "The Great Revival in Bourbon County, Kentucky," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1988), chap. 5, p. 23.

included as purchasers. James Buford took home two desks—one cost him £3, the other only five shillings—and a chest. Richard Melear's purchases were less dramatic: tin pans, pewter plates, a few pails, some wheat, and chairs. William Howard carried home a churn; Thomas Fuqua bought a tub. Elias Hammond left with butter pots and a tea pot. There is not enough description of these items to know if a "second-hand" purchase was significantly cheaper than such items new from the local store, but obviously such sales provided an alternative, if only occasional, venue for the purchase of goods.<sup>58</sup>

A large cross-section of Bedford society turned out to bid on the household goods of Edward Goldman; the goods of one man went home to the households of some three dozen others. Such a scene raises numerous questions. Was the bidding frantic or laconic? Were there unspoken rules that allowed Thomas and Richard Goldman, perhaps Edward's sons, to purchase all but one of the slaves? The diary of Colonel Francis Taylor, living on the Northern Neck of Virginia, indicates that more went on at these sales than is recorded in court documents. On December 6, 1786, Taylor attended the "sale of Chews attachment on J. P. Adams effects." He found a good many people there, although the day was cold and cloudy. He bought a half barrel of ochre for a relative, and seven pair of leather breeches for himself, on the relatively ungenerous terms of two months credit with interest. The next day he returned to the sale, buying two dozen pewter plates, and some thread and scissors. Then the wheeling-and-dealing began, as the purchasers broke down what seemed to be larger lots and sold them among themselves and to others. Taylor bought a bridle and three tin basters from James Gaines, sold thread and a pair of scissors to several others, and exchanged one pair scissors with Johnathan Waugh for a pair of thread stockings. The sale continued the next day although little was left. He left security for £5.4.0; "36/ for Breeches & 45/ for

---

<sup>58</sup>Account of sale of the estate of Edward Goldman, January 3, 1775, returned November 29, 1787. Bedford County Will Book 1. That this sale took place when local merchants were desperately trying to collect debts and, in many cases, had stopped importing goods should not be overlooked.



plates etc bot by me & 23/ for Oker bought for G. T. F. Madison paid me £6.0.0."

Straightaway the next morning he went to Lee's store and traded six of the pair of leather breeches (valued at £2.0.0) for three stamped and one silk handkerchief, two yards of green plains, five and a half yards of linen, a hat and two pounds of sugar, a group of goods that miraculously totalled exactly two pounds. The next day he sold a relative a final pair of leather breeches, and came out with a small profit.<sup>59</sup>

Both these scenes cast in sharp relief the bringing together of the community in the act of consumption and the many ways goods may have changed hands. First, and most obviously, household goods came through inheritance. Local wills seldom enumerated specific household goods, more commonly bequeathing land, slaves, and livestock. However, on occasion, widows and children were given specific legacies. Jacob Hickman's directions for building a house for his widow and supplying her with foodstuffs—fruit, wheat, and beef—but also hemp, flax, toe, and wool for clothing and household use, and a good pair of shoes a year has already been cited. But even if she remarried and had to leave the farm, she was to be given two cows, her chest and her "spinned [sic] wheel," a bed and bedstead and "housin fresh such as Basons" equally divided among her and the children. The rest of the farm animals—horses, cows, sheep and dogs—and household furnishings were to be sold and divided equally among the widow and an unnamed number of children.<sup>60</sup> The wealthy planter and owner of the Washington Iron Works Jeremiah Early also carefully provided for his widow during her natural lifetime with use of the plantation, eight slaves,

---

<sup>59</sup>Col. Francis Taylor Diary, 1786-1799. Virginia State Library (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). It is not clear whose sale it was, but the large lots suggest it may have been a merchant. Other auctions, or vendues, were sponsored by merchants, particularly if a particular market was glutted with goods. Little is known of this source, but Matthew Read and Hugh Johnson's ledger in nearby Staunton in Botetourt County is filled with customer charges for goods bought at vendue in the late 1760s. Matthew Read and Hugh Johnson Ledger, 1761-1770. Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

<sup>60</sup>Will, March 11, 1787, and Inventory, June 6, 1789, of Jacob Hickman, Franklin County Will Book 1, 1786-1812. Virginia State Library.

numerous livestock, and the riding chair and two horses, but also all the plate, pewter, and "every other kind of household and kitchen furniture necessary for her maintenance."<sup>61</sup>

Daughters also benefitted from legacies of household goods. Robert Ewing's daughter Patty received a bequest of the best family bed, and full half of her father's "Table Furniture," along with her own chest, saddle and horse, her apprentice Sukey, and 400 acres of land in Kentucky.<sup>62</sup> A common household good specifically designated for daughters seemed to be a bed (most often the most expensive piece of furniture in the house), although slaves, livestock, cash, and even land were more frequent bequests. Sons were more likely to receive land, but special household items that may have been considered male possessions also were passed down through the male line, such as Guy Smith's writing desk to his son Bird B. Smith. Smith also designated all his books to be divided between his two sons, carefully noting that they not break a set. His daughters received hunting saddles, part of his slave holdings, and when each married, a horse. Moreover, his extensive household estate valued at over £1000 (and including prints, teawares, arm chairs, and silver spoons) was to be divided after his wife's death to his seven daughters and two sons.<sup>63</sup>

Other, perhaps unrelated people, received bequests of household furniture and consumer goods. John Adams left Elizabeth Hunt "for diverse good causes" a feather bedstead, bolster, and two blankets; a chest, small trunk and cotton wheel; a pewter dish,

---

<sup>61</sup>Will of Jeremiah Early, September 1779, Bedford County Will Book 1, Virginia State Library.

<sup>62</sup>Will of Robert Ewing, March 2, 1786. Bedford County Will Book 1, Virginia State Library.

<sup>63</sup>Will of Guy Smith, September 24, 1781. Bedford County Will Book 1, Virginia State Library.

basin, quart pot and two plates; a half dozen spoons and candlestick; two chairs, a pot and a coffee pot. This constellation of goods was enough to maintain a basic household.<sup>64</sup>

These specific bequests vastly over-represent the wealthy and most came after the Revolution. The majority of Bedford wills merely called to divide the estate equally between the children or passed most of it to an older son, after the death of his mother. Women often received small sums of cash, while men more often received livestock or land. Peter Funk's whole estate was valued at £52 in 1792. His only furniture was two beds, three chairs, a chest and a small table, yet he carefully designated its disposition, first to his wife and then to be divided equally among his children.<sup>65</sup>

Local craftsmen obviously also produced goods for sale. Much furniture was locally produced, including refined goods like desks.<sup>66</sup> An account of a local estate carried through the 1780s shows payment of twelve shillings for making four chairs and seven and a half shillings for casting pewter, both to unknown people. Elizabeth Cook was paid for weaving and Josiah Hundley and Peter Daniel both supplied shoes in the mid 1780s. Sarah Wood earned money by making five suits of clothes and "waiting on one negro woman" (probably midwifery), and Peter Daniel once again provided shoes in 1788. James Stepp was paid for a powder tub and other coopering services, W. (perhaps Williston) Talbot did smith's work. Finally a local slave provided cotton and was paid two shillings.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup>Another woman was left his land, providing she pay off his son William Adams the sum of £50. Will of John Adams, Will Book 2, August 3, 1796. Virginia State Library.

<sup>65</sup>Will of Peter Funk, July 7, 1796. Campbell County Will Book 1, 1782-1800, Virginia State Library.

<sup>66</sup>Suit for payment for desk and planking, February 2, 1763, Bedford County Order Book 3, 1763-1777.

<sup>67</sup>Account of the estate of William Jones, March 3, 1785, October 6, 1785, April 1, 1790. Campbell County Will Book 1, 1782-1800. Virginia State Library.

The slave's sale of cotton illustrates how household goods could be obtained through exchange outside of traditional craft definitions. Most of these activities remain unseen to the historian, but recent studies by Laurel Ulrich and Joanne Bowen Gaynor have demonstrated how such transactions were not always ad hoc, but involved precise reciprocity of services, commodities, and cash.<sup>68</sup> Others more closely approximate an exchange of household skills. Daniel Drake remembered "weaving shot-pouch straps, belts, and garters" at a very young age in Kentucky and exchanging those items for "a day's work, or making a hundred nails." With pride, Drake pointed out that even as a boy, he could exchange his labor with a full-grown man for an equal length of time.<sup>69</sup>

Other exchange systems developed within and through regular market institutions, particularly stores, as will be shown below. Other unexpected systems emerged. The advertisement sent to the substantial planter John Smith at the Pocket Plantation from David Ross in July of 1780 announced that the Oxford Iron Works had tobacco, bacon, beef, coarse linen, alum, salt, brown sugar or coffee, as well as bar iron and castings for sale. Payment was to be in cash, but Ross would also buy all of the above mentioned provisions for resale. Implicit of course, is the potential for trading one kind of commodity for another, even though any transaction was recorded in cash terms. The kinds of things for sale at the Iron Works may, of course, be related to wartime shortages, but the point remains that there was a market for coarse linen, perhaps even made in the home.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup>See, for instance, Joanne Bowen, "A Study of Seasonality and Subsistence: Eighteenth-Century Suffield, Connecticut," (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Brown University), and Laurel Ulrich, A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

<sup>69</sup>Daniel Drake, Pioneer Life in Kentucky, 1785-1800 ed. Emmet Field Horine (New York: Henry Schuman, 1948), p. 115.

<sup>70</sup>Advertisement found in Maude Carter Clemons Collection, Box 2, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

Rotating into this local system of the distribution of household goods was the peddler—"one of the Honourable Fraternity of Moving Merchants."<sup>71</sup> Scholars know little about these shadowy figures, but the early nineteenth-century diary of one peddler travelling the backcountry of Virginia gives invaluable evidence of their trade and travel. These entrepreneurs carried trunks or packs throughout the backcountry, stopping at court houses, inns and private residences. Especially popular were court days when more of the local population came to town. "In Hopes of doing a very good Business," they occasionally "put the Best foot foremost" and hung "their Rags to the Public Eye, in order to induce a Sale."<sup>72</sup> In some places, particular peddlers had built stands which the first peddlers on the scene were quick to appropriate. Porches at courthouses were also fair game, for bad weather could force packing all their goods back up.<sup>73</sup> These peddlers sold a vast array of goods, ranging from textiles to guns, hats, and saddles. The "Rags" these peddlars carried may also have been used clothing or textiles, if the English precedent is any guide.<sup>74</sup> But we would be remiss to think that peddlars' only customers were the poor or that their stock was made up of only marginal items. The wealthy planter and Kentucky commissioner Colonel William Fleming's daughter Priscilla spent over £10 in 1798 in textiles, clothing items,

---

<sup>71</sup>For peddling in rural New England, see David Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860," Journal of American History 78 (September 1991): 511-535.

<sup>72</sup>Beeman, "Trade and Travel in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," p. 177.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 179, 177. For peddlars and the second-hand trade in England, see Beverly Lemire, Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 115-160.

accessories—even "morocco slippers." Her sister Anne made a more modest purchase the following year for "gloves, needles, and pins."<sup>75</sup>

For the most wealthy, then, options for the acquisition of goods exploded. They could call upon the vast formal and informal local systems used by ordinary Virginians. At the same time, they were far more likely to be linked with business relations in eastern Virginia or travel to higher order towns where there was greater selection. Thus, the same William Preston left Botetourt County for Williamsburg in July 1771 with a lengthy memorandum. He needed to take care of some business ("see Treasurer for overpayment," stop by the securities office, get some papers signed, check his bill at Mr. Prentice to see if a balance was due, and "remember Hargrave's affair.") He took care of business for others by searching the auditor's office to see if Tom Moor's thousand-acre tract had been paid for, and pay any balance. But he also had shopping to do; buying a blank book, two ivory books, and six pencils, asking the masters of the College of William and Mary for several education books, picking up three silver thimbles for "Betsy and her Mammy" and getting "Betsy (unknown) to buy Gauze and make some caps for Betsy Preston." But most of the errands were to buy for other people; a saddle for T. Smith, a set of "genteel Buckles for Mrs. Buchanan," a London lancet ("not too spear-pointed") for Captain Fleming, and an ounce cochiniell for Mrs. Armstrong. Colonel Breckinridge wanted a slave, and if Fleming should pass by Rocky Ridge on the way home, he needed to pick up a good saddle for Captain Smith, a piece of good linen and two pair shoes for Mrs. Smith. Finally, he was to pick up two full "compleat Setts of Queen's China." The first known Virginia reference to Queen's ware—also known as cream colored ware—came in 1768; by the summer of 1771, a wealthy tidewater planter had reported that Queen's ware was much in use among his peers.

---

<sup>75</sup>"Price Lists and Diary of Col. Fleming," *Virginia Historical Magazine* 5 (1897–1898): 263–4. See also Account Book of Sir Peyton Skipwith for payment of £1.4.0 to buy a hat of "the peddlar" on September 14, 1795. Skipwith Papers, Account Book 2, 1775–1781 (scattered notes to 1795), Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

Preston's purchase of "Queen's ware" in that summer tells us not only that he was well attuned to colonial fashion, but also that such large sets were not available locally.<sup>76</sup>

If one way to broaden consumer options was to go to other places, another was to have goods sent to you. Mrs. John Smith of Pocket Plantation—only twelve miles from New London—had a constant stream of items sent to her from the family merchant partner at Rocky Ridge.<sup>77</sup> Others, of course, ordered direct from England. While it is not likely that any Bedford planters maintained a direct tie with a commission merchant in London, such a choice would have widened the circle of choice immensely. Consider that Henry Fitzhugh of Stafford County ordered from England in 1770 a man's "Neat, Fashionable Gold Watch to run upon a diamond, the works to be cased and Enameled," a "neat light post Chariot" and a "Woman's suite of Rich Brocade ready made up" with measure and suitable fabric sample enclosed.<sup>78</sup> In this way, almost unmediated access to all the shops in England was possible, held back only by the diligence of one's merchant factor or friend. John Mercer sent a lengthy shopping list to his son George in London, even naming specific shops and street locations, such as the Bible and Sun in St. Paul's churchyard, advising that it was the best and cheapest place for books for the instruction and amusement of children "from two to six feet

---

<sup>76</sup>William Preston's Memorandum for Williamsburg, July 1771, Box 3, 688, William Preston Papers, Virginia Historical Society. For the spread of creamware, see Ann Smart Martin, "Fashionable Sugar Dishes, Latest Fashion Ware: The Creamware Revolution in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake," forthcoming in The Historic Chesapeake: Archaeological Contributions, ed. Paul Shackel and Barbara J. Little (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1993).

<sup>77</sup>David Richard to John Smith, July 20, 1769. Pocket Plantation Papers, Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia (microfilmed in "Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations: From the Revolution to the Civil War," Series E: Part 1, Reels 11, 12, 13).

<sup>78</sup>Orders for 1770, Henry Fitzhugh Accounts, Special Collections, Duke University.

high." He also asked his son to arrange annual shipments of articles from London merchants, ranging from slave clothing to the Gentleman's Magazine.<sup>79</sup>

Wealthy planters went to some remarkable lengths in their personal trade with England; Richard Morriss of Hanover County shipped back old hard metal plates to cast into new ones, a service almost certainly locally available. Perhaps getting the latest mode or design outweighed any inconvenience. Yet, not all goods requested from England were merely fine items that were not locally available. Dealing directly with merchants or friends meant skipping the profit mark-up of local merchants as middle-men. Even the wealthy were looking for a bargain: Richard Morris wrote in glee to James Maury about the second-hand clothes that Thomas Lewis had shown him. He was pleased to find that even with the cost of transportation from London to Liverpool, such a method of purchase meant that his rapidly growing family (i.e., labor force) could be clothed "much better as well as much cheaper than heretofore."<sup>80</sup>

Through all of these records can be seen an outline of domestic goods and the precise value placed on even the most basic household furnishings as male heads of household attempted to provide, usually in some equitable, or conventionally unequal, fashion for their widows and children. The value of items traded and services provided can also be traced, with greater variety available in ever widening circles from locality, region, colony, and England. Overall, however, they give us little detail about clothing for the majority of residents nor do they give a clear picture of consumer behavior. Unsystematic documentation means that it is difficult to precisely reconstruct the material lives of Bedford residents.

---

<sup>79</sup>John Mercer to George Mercer, letter begun December 22, 1767, and ended January 28, 1768, when the river thawed enough for its posting. George Mercer Papers, ed. Lois Mulkearn, pp. 211-220.

<sup>80</sup>Richard Morriss, Hanover County, Green Springs to James Maury, Liverpool, February 11, 1788. Morriss Family Papers, #38-79, Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia Library.



We have had to tease and tug at a number of different sources to create a sense of what the consumer's world was like. Slowly, what has emerged is a series of images; brawling whist players, small log houses, eating on laps, peddlers with packs, planters wheeling-and-dealing with leather breeches or scissors and thread. But how can we square this with the world of fashion and color seen in the invoices of John Hook's store? The evidence of the goods stocked at John Hook's store gives us a different picture of everyday life. Many items were available there for the proper functioning and furnishing of the household. Through them can also be seen evidence of the interior environment of the homes of Hook's customers, or at least Hook's idea of what his backcountry consumers needed or wanted for their domestic interiors. Candles and candlesticks demonstrate lighting; furniture locks indicate cupboards and other pieces for storage, and upholstery checks could cover chair bottoms or make bed hangings. A customer could choose between red and white or blue and white counterpanes for bedding or dutch blankets. Scrubbing brushes and hair brooms banished dirt, and the stocking of brushes for painted cloths demonstrated that at least some did not have bare floors. In the same way, table cloths are evidence of a heightened sensitivity to dining.

To find out how these kinds of goods moved into Bedford society, we once again must head to our methodological tool box and take out ways to deal with thousands of tiny details, in this case the account books of Hook's store. Using statistical analysis, John Hook's Daybook, 1771-1772, Petty Ledger, 1773-1775, and Mercantile Ledger, 1773-1775 will be briefly analyzed to study the distribution of consumer goods by wealth, gender, and servitude.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup>John Hook's Daybook, 1771-1772, Petty Ledger, 1773-1775, and Mercantile Ledger, 1773-1775. All found in John Hook Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

### Analysis of Store Account Books

To capture a broad sample of Bedford County consumers, all 2965 credits and debits in John Hook's daybook between September and December 1771 were considered. Economic activity was brisk generally before the credit crisis of 1772, and these were normally the busiest of the year for any rural merchant. Indeed, of all the customers recorded in Hook's daybook running from September to April, two-thirds made at least one purchase in those four months.<sup>82</sup> Three hundred and seventy six customers made transactions during this time, ranging from paying a pence for a bit of thread to £5 for a mortar and pestle. Eighty-seven percent were purchases of goods on credit; the borrowing of small amounts of cash, often to pay taxes or third parties, made up another six percent. Seven percent of these transactions were forms of payment.

Who were these customers? Store account books provide a glimpse of parts of the colonial population missing or blurred from conventional documentary records. Not surprisingly, white males were the majority of customers, and nearly all were from the middling to poorer part of society in Bedford and surrounding counties.<sup>83</sup> Intensive study of local tax lists, court records, and deed books indicate that about one-third owned slaves, mirroring the overall county population (Tables 15). Half owned land, but only about a quarter owned both land and slaves. While a few wealthy planters did make purchases, two-

---

<sup>82</sup> For example, Charles Farmer found that forty-eight percent of total annual sales were made between November and January at James Murdoch's store in nearby Halifax County. December volume was the greatest for any month and was six times that of August. Other southside merchants had similar patterns. Charles Farmer, "Country Stores and Frontier Exchange Systems in Southside Virginia during the Eighteenth Century," (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Geography, 1984). A more recent study of frontier stores for a later period is Elizabeth Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky" *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510.

<sup>83</sup> Eighty percent of Hook's customers at the New London store were from Bedford County, with another eleven percent residing in Botetourt and Fincastle, located to the north and west. Analysis based on a 1775 memorandum book listing customers, locations, and debts. Hook Papers, Duke.

Table 15.  
Slave ownership of Hook's Daybook Customers

---

Group	# of Slaves	% of Customers	% of Money Spent
One	0	59.3	62.2
Two	1-5	22.1	22.4
Three	6-10	10.1	10.6
Four	More than 10	10.2	4.8

---

thirds of all landowners who purchased were planters with less than 200 acres. Just over one in twenty customers in Hook's daybook were women holding their own accounts, but the behaviors of other women are documented by their notation of a purchase next to a male account holder's name. Additional purchases by a number of women and slaves were recorded in two small ledgers which will be discussed below. Finally, fully one in eight men could not be located in any official document from Bedford or surrounding counties and may represent the poorer out migrants of eastern society that poured through the backcountry. High geographic mobility and wartime dislocation may account for part of these missing men, but it is clear that women and slaves are not the only common people missing from our documentary view.

As described in previous chapters, unlike contemporary English shops, Virginia stores carried a vast range of items. Broken into broad categories, most debt was incurred at Hook's store for textiles, clothing accessories, alcohol, bedding, and grocery items, with almost half spent on textiles and clothing items such as shoes, hats, and handkerchiefs (Table 16).<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, while textiles and clothing items formed the most important expenditure for these consumers, clothing made up only three percent of consumer wealth in contemporary inventories.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup>A sample of customers at William Allason's store at the fall line at Falmouth between 1769 and 1772 also demonstrated that textiles, notions, and sewing items made up just under half of all purchases. This fits the pattern in other studies of stores throughout Virginia in the eighteenth century. Allason's study based on a sample of thirty-three customers making 1,238 purchases between 1769 and 1772. Ledger 1, Allason Papers, Virginia State Library (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation). Other studies can be found in Farmer, "Country Stores and Exchange Systems," and Harold B. Gill, "The Retail Trade in Colonial Virginia," (unfinished manuscript, January 1984, on file, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

<sup>85</sup>Disappearance of clothing onto the backs of others is one factor for the underrepresentation of clothing in probate inventories. That problem aside, it is the immense replacement cost of these items that is not captured in inventories. For further detail on the Bedford probate study, see Ann Smart Martin, "Fine Feathers Make Fine Birds: Clothing and Consumerism in the Eighteenth-Century Virginia Store Trade," (Paper presented at "Clothing and Consumerism in Early Modern England and America," Victoria and Albert Museum, June 26-27, 1992).

Table 16.  
Purchases in John Hook's store,  
September-December, 1771.

	% of All Purchase Value	% of Purchases
Textile	35.3	21.8
Clothing	10.7	14.4
Alcohol	11.1	7.1
Bedding	7.3	2.5
Grocery	6.7	9.1
Saddlary	5.8	3.2
Foodways objects	4.1	5.2
Hunt/fish	3.5	6.5
Sewing	3.5	14.8
Craft	1.4	1.5
Building	1.3	1.8
Household	1.3	1.0
Tools	1.0	1.5
Literacy	.2	1.6
Miscellaneous	6.6	8.0

Within each of those larger functional categories was immense variety for approximately 250 different kinds of items were sold. The most common purchase was rum (6.5 percent of all purchases), followed by osnaburg, a coarse linen fabric favored for slave clothing. Other clothing items and fabrics were also the most frequent choice (Table 17). Two salient points must first be made. First, these were common items necessary for basic dressing, eating, and socializing. None of these most common items, in themselves, could be considered markers of elite activities or demonstrate any concern with fashion. The high frequency of sugar purchases, however, shows how quickly this exotic foreign substance had replaced molasses and honey to become a staple for baking and beverages, such as tea, coffee, and punch.

Secondly, these items were not expensive in terms of larger investments. The average slave in contemporary Bedford County inventories was valued at almost fifty pounds, but the average store purchase was only six shillings. This is not to say that these prices were insignificant. A quart of rum, the most common purchase, cost one and a half shillings. Hook gave two shillings credit for a day's work in his garden, two raccoon skins, a yard of Virginia cloth, or eight chickens. Hanover county planter Richard Morris paid two and half shillings for having his hair cut in November of 1771.<sup>86</sup> Still, these prices are small compared to many other inessential expenses of the elite. It cost Thomas Jefferson seven and a half shillings to attend a play in Williamsburg in 1771, and William Ennals spent five shillings to see the fireworks in Annapolis a year later. His new wig the year before set him back a full forty-five shillings.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup>Account of barbering (shaving and hair cuts), Richard Morris with Joseph Brand, 1771-1772. Morris Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>87</sup>For slave value, see Appendix. Hook's prices from his mercantile and petty ledger. Thomas Jefferson Memorandum Book, 1767 to 1770, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 4, Library of Congress (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation); William Ennals Memorandum Book, 1771 to 1774, Library of Congress.

Table 17.  
Most Common Items Sold and  
Their Average Price

Item	% of All Goods Sold	Average Price Per Purchase (Shilling/Pence)
Rum	6.5	2/8
Osnaburg	4.7	7/2
Hats	3.8	5/7
Handkerchiefs	3.8	3/2
Buttons	3.5	1/3
Powder	3.3	1/5
Sugar	3.2	3/10
Thread	3.0	10 pence
Linen	2.6	12/10
Hose	2.5	3/5
Cotton	2.3	13/0
Kersey (woolen)	2.0	8/8

How can we bridge the gap between such large capital expenditures and small consumer ones? One of the most important goals of this study was to test the ways in which purchases at the local store mirrored or diverged from investment in traditional measures of wealth such as land and slaves. As suggested from probate analysis, the first premise was that money spent at the store would be in some way linked to a customer's wealth. Immediately, however, problems arise because some of Hook's customers were the wealthiest local planters who had a broad range of long-distance consumption strategies unavailable to poorer consumers. First, wealthy planters could directly sell their commodities and purchase their goods from agents in London. Due to the more mixed nature of agricultural production in the backcountry, however, this was not as common a strategy as among wealthy tobacco planters in the tidewater. Yet those elite did have far larger networks of credit, travelled more frequently to other towns, and could have goods shipped to their doors by attentive merchants. This group was thus more likely to use the local store as a source for emergency or impulse purchases or patronize different stores that may have eagerly granted them credit to gain their patronage. Since their purchase patterns may be anomalous, care was essential in analysis.

A series of statistical measures were devised to test the hypothesis that the total amount spent at the store by any individual was related to his or her traditional measures of wealth. First, there was no meaningful correlation (Pearson's  $r$ ) between taxable wealth and total purchase cost. This held true even if the top group was removed from the sample. Nor was there a strong correlation between total purchases and particular measures of wealth, such as land or slaves (see Appendix for discussion of statistical analysis). Wealth——albeit measured in these crude terms——was a poor predictor of how much one spent at the store.

To better enable later comparative analysis, a more traditional set of wealth categories was devised based on the number of slaves owned. How did each group's expenditures vary?



Taking all the purchases for any group as the total universe of their choices, relative priorities might be determined. As an example, while two-thirds of all purchases of the upper middling group were for properly covering body, head, and feet of family and slaves, less than half of the wealthiest group's expenditures were for similar items. This is another indication that the wealthiest planters were purchasing some clothing items elsewhere, as the larger number of slaves should have predicted a higher expenditure. Indeed, the frequency of purchase of clothing showed little change across wealth groupings, although quality and cost of items did vary. Objects used in the preparation, storage and serving of food in combination with grocery items and foodstuffs was a lower expenditure priority for the lower middling group than any other. Only about 6 percent of their purchases went to the constellation of foodways, as compared to nearly 18 percent for the top group. As in the case of clothing, the other two groups fell in between. Finally, alcohol was a higher expenditure priority for the lowest group, where 5 percent of their debts were consumed away, mostly in the form of rum. Yet, less than 1 percent of the top group's purchases were alcohol. They chose to put a greater percentage of their resources onto the backs of horses: saddlery constituted 13 percent of their consumer purchases, a category that made up less than 5 percent of the lowest group's choices.

Can we say that these are true distinctions? The answer is qualified by the fact that they are relative proportions. Only microscopic analysis of the thousands of individual choices made by any group begin to reveal absolute patterns. For example, adding the number of purchases made by any one wealth group and dividing that sum by the number of individuals yields a frequency of purchase by that group (Tables 18 and 19). That frequency did increase as wealth increased for certain categories, such as spices, stockings, and shoe buckles. Yet, similar measures of frequency only increased up to—and stopped before—the wealthiest planters for most items. Again, those wealthy customers seemed to

**Table 18.**  
**Purchase Frequencies of Selected Functional**  
**Groupings in Hook's Daybook**

Object	Wealth Category			
	One	Two	Three	Four
Textile	1.45	1.64	1.95	.75
Grocery	.60	.53	.60	1.00
Saddlary	.16	.29	.24	.44
Literacy	.10	.12	.16	.06
Alcohol	.50	.63	.37	.16
Hunting/Fishing	.54	.41	.18	.16
Clothing	.93	1.10	1.05	.97

Table 19.  
Purchase Frequencies of Selected Items  
(Food, Clothing, and Textiles)  
By Wealth Group

Type	One	Two	Three	Four
Hot Beverages	.09	.10	.16	.16
Spices	.21	.22	.21	.50
Sweeteners	.29	.22	.18	.34
Hats	.25	.30	.16	.34
Stockings	.16	.17	.32	.25
Shoes	.09	.17	.10	.03
Broadcloth	.10	.10	.08	.06
Osnaburg	.32	.35	.40	.16
Cotton	.12	.18	.42	.13
Linen	.16	.23	.29	0

Source: Bedford County Will Book 1, 1763-1787, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

be using the store differently from the rest of the customers. But the wealthiest group did far exceed other customers in the purchase of grocery items, like tea, spices, and sweeteners. These new luxuries were just the kind of items that Carole Shammas has suggested fueled the biggest changes in the retail trade and heralded a real transformation in consumerism.<sup>88</sup>

But what of Hook's less wealthy customers? Those who owned less than ten slaves had more limited access to an extensive network of credit and many entered into contracts with Hook for the sale of their crops in exchange for store credit. Certain patterns of purchase frequency emerge here as well. The purchase of textiles as a functional category increased across the three wealth levels, as well as particular varieties such as cotton, linen, shalloon, and osnaburg. So did bedding items like blankets and rugs, and objects related to literacy, such as almanacs and paper. Yet, the frequency of purchase of other items progressed in the opposite direction. Alcohol and hunting and fishing supplies were more frequently purchased by the lowest group, and generally decreased as one's wealth increased. More surprising, the purchase of the most expensive textiles also decreased between groups one and three.

There were also divisions within these middling and poorer sorts. The upper middling group (owning between five and ten slaves) were more like the most wealthy category in their purchase of hot beverages like tea, coffee, and chocolate. At the same time, the purchase of alcohol broke sharply between those who owned five or more slaves and those below. Nor can this be explained by the amount of alcohol purchased. This suggests one kind of threshold: between elite sociabilities and more common alcoholic consumption. On the other hand, the purchase of ribbons—relatively inexpensive items to decorate or update one's dress—also dropped sharply at that midpoint. At the same time,

---

<sup>88</sup>Carole Shammas, *The Preindustrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). See also Hoh-cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (Kingston, Canada: McGill University Press, 1989).

this group did choose fashionable printed handkerchiefs, a more expensive and decorative version than more common checked ones. Over half of their money spent was on textiles, as compared to about thirty percent for other groups. This included higher rates of the purchase of cotton—more than double that of the lower middling group—and other expensive textiles, such as fine broadcloth. Part of that overall rise was also due to the increased purchase of osnaburg, probably for slave clothing. They also splurged on boxes for snuff and silk bonnets. Finally, this group purchased tools—from axes to carpentry squares—at a rate four times that of the whole population.

The consumer choices of the lower middling group (those owning between one and five slaves) diverged in many ways from Hook's other customers. The purchase of tea and sweeteners, both sugar and molasses, plummeted in this group, even below the levels of those customers owning no slaves. At the same time, alcoholic consumption surged. Little was spent on items related to the cooking and serving of food. Few purchases were made of household items, such as candlesticks or looking glasses. Craft items, like shoe thread, were also purchased less frequently. But saddles and related items were a high priority, and the large number of handkerchiefs, fine linens, and more expensive hats indicate a premium on small items of smart dress, and it was in this group that a few expensive clothing items, such as cloaks and breeches, began to be purchased, but only by a few individuals.

Those who did not own slaves formed the bottom category. Three-quarters of this group also owned no land. Their purchases were mixed. What is more important, however, is that even those that possessed few traditional measures of wealth, such as land or slaves, purchased small items that have often been considered luxuries or associated with elite behaviors and appearances: chocolate, spices, tea, a ruff, fine men's pumps, chintz, and broadcloth. The inexpensive manufactured items that formed the heart of industrialization were also included, such as jew's harps, watch seals, and pen knives. While as a group the

rate of such purchases was low, some were motivated to make choices for style and show. Only this bottom group purchased a significant number of pewter plates, cutlery, and other items related to dining, perhaps suggesting that some were just setting up household. Finally, as this group was by far the largest, a much wider variety of purchases is represented for this group than any other. This is because a much larger group was at risk to capture infrequently purchased items.

Have we captured true consumer patterns? One potential problem remains, for analysis of purchase frequency does not take into account the amount purchased at any one time. For instance, one might expect that wealthier customers were able to make larger purchases and take advantage if there were any price break on unit cost. If these were cash transactions, the poor might only have smaller amounts of available cash on hand to make a purchase. But the evidence is not entirely clear on these issues. The example of rum is a good case. The average gallon of rum was cheaper to buy than four quarts, but there was no similar price incentive between buying quarts and pints, and only twelve percent of all purchases were at this gallon-price savings. Nor is there a clear pattern to suggest that poorer customers bought smaller quantities at any given occasion. For both of the bottom wealth groups, only about ten percent of purchases were for a gallon; that percentage did increase in the upper middling group, but the number of purchases was so small that it is difficult to be conclusive. No rum at all was purchased by the top group. At the same time, the average purchase price of rum—suggesting a larger quantity—for the poorest group was three times that of any group. There was no discrimination based on wealth; the price of rum was flat across all wealth groups.

Analysis by Gender and Race

Focusing on economic groups allows a clearer view of how those with varying levels of wealth chose to expend their resources. What is clear is even the poorer sorts of Bedford society were market participants. But what about the distaff side of those households? A major question remains in consumer studies about the role of women. Carole Shammas has suggested that there was little room for women in consumption decisions because legal restrictions and inheritance patterns disfranchised women. Only 6 percent of the customers were women in her study of a retail store in Tidewater Virginia. Allan Kulikoff's study of a similar store in Prince George's County Maryland found that more women—about 10 percent—held accounts in their own names. Yet, he also argues that stores were bastions of male presence; even women account holders sent sons or other men to pick up items at the store. Jan de Vries, however, has recently suggested that one key to new consumerism may be focusing on consumer dynamics within the household.<sup>89</sup>

John Hook recognized the special consumer desires of women and their potential to improve business in a letter to one of his suppliers. He observed that the men that travelled to have their tobacco inspected or their court business settled were often asked to make purchases for their wives and daughters that they did not feel confident making. Rather than make the wrong choice, Hook claimed that these men willingly forgot their errand and returned home empty-handed. Ever the good businessman, John Hook saw that he could capture a ready market of female customers if he could stock these items locally.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup>Shammas, The Preindustrial Consumer in England and America, p. 269. Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 225. Jan de Vries, "Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe," forthcoming in Consumption and the World of Goods, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge 1993).

<sup>90</sup>John Hook to William Donald, New London, December 9, 1766. Hook Letterbook, 1763-1772. Virginia State Library.

**Table 20.**  
**Women and Slave Customers in Hook's Three Account Books**

Account Type	% Account Holders	% of Purchases	Spending Per Capita
			£
Daybook			
All Women	9.8	8.5	1.09.0
Own Accounts	4.3	3.0	4.16.0
Men	85.9	88.4	2.01.4
Small ledgers			
All Women	11.8	9.7	1.04.0
Slaves	10.2	8.2	0.12.0
White Men	78.0	71.9	0.18.8

Source: John Hook Daybook, 1771-1772. Mercantile Ledger, 1773-1775.  
 Petty Ledger, 1773-1775.



Table 21.  
 Frequency of Purchases of Selected Objects by Women  
 in John Hook's Daybook

Object	% of all Expenditures	Frequency of purchase
Grocery:	8.49	.23
Hot Beverages (tea, etc)		.11
Spices		.16
Sweeteners		.35
Clothing:	17.10	1.00
Hats		.10
Stockings		.19
Shoes		.08
Ribbons		.08
Looking glass		.03
Textiles:	46.88	1.27
Broadcloth		.05
Osnaburg		.16
Sewing:	4.50	.06

About one in twenty of Hook's daybook customers were women maintaining their own accounts. When women making purchases under a male name's account were included, that number rose to about one in ten (Table 20).<sup>91</sup> Per capita expenditures of women accountholders was double that of men. Further research is necessary to examine closely the marital status and wealth of these women. In any case, the relative priorities of women were indeed those items of fashion choice; fabrics, sewing items and clothing which made up 68 percent of women's purchases. Fully 70 percent of the purchases of women account holders were for those items. On the other hand, those items made up only half of the purchase of men, in part reflecting a far greater range of items purchased. At the same time, the textiles purchased by these women were not cheap fabrics like osnaburg or plains. While women made up only 8.5 percent of all purchasers, they took home 40 percent of fine lawns (often used for shirts, aprons, and handkerchiefs), chintzs (fine printed cottons), and duroys (lightweight worsteds.) Fabrics for use in the home were also chosen more by women; 40 percent of all purchases of ticking, a multi-purpose coarse linen often used as its name implies, and check, used for furniture covering and bed hangings as well as clothing (Table 21).

Finally, while caution is prudent for such a small population, women had higher frequencies of purchase of ribbons, looking glasses, cutlery, and sugar than any wealth group of men. There is also a sense of pleasure shopping trips, such as the visit to the store on December 25, by the Misses Elizabeth and Esther Thompson. One returned home with a silk bonnet, the other a piece of silk gauze. Yet, not all women's purchases were items of fashion. Mrs. Anne Butler needed common salt, boys hats, drop shot and a gun lock. But was her purchase of a small looking glass an impulse consumer action? The answer is, of course, speculative. It is tempting, however, to look closely at such clusters and ask about

---

<sup>91</sup>This included all 218 purchases listed "per" spouse, daughter, and other women's names for a total of £54.29. Female account holders alone made 77 purchases totalling £19.45.

the ways these small consumer items of fashion interrelated with trips to the local store for the common necessities of everyday life and the generous granting of credit.

Further evidence of distinctions in spending of different groups of consumers is drawn from two other small account books, Hook's petty and mercantile ledgers which record 674 purchases of 127 customers between 1771 and 1775. Hook's petty ledger recorded small debts that were occasionally posted to a larger ledger, no longer extant. His mercantile ledger records purchases made through exchange for a vast range of goods, services, and foodstuffs that afforded entry to the new consumer world for groups traditionally thought to be outside the cash economy of eighteenth-century Virginia.

The fifteen women in these two account books (12 percent of all customers) made 66 purchases and had quite similar purchase patterns to the larger daybook group. About 70 percent of their purchases were also textiles, sewing items and clothing. Here, too, looking glasses, ribbons, and other small consumer goods were also chosen in disproportionate numbers, and each woman spent on average of £1/4. The only difference between this sample of women and the daybook group is their choice of ceramic items (at twice the rate of all ledger customers) and pewter tablewares (at six times that of overall customers). It is unclear without further study why this group should differ from the daybook, but they may well represent some function of the kind of document—the long-term purchases of a few customers, rather than a snapshot of many customers. These kinds of household items are purchased relatively infrequently—often at household formation—and pewter, at least, could represent a significant investment.

Perhaps part of the answer to these differing purchase patterns lies in how these women paid for the consumer desires. Lucy Bailey's four grown hens and a dozen chickens were the means for her purchase of a pewter dish in August 1772. Sarah Tisdale chose ribbon, a wax necklace, and expensive fabrics like muslin, silk gauze and chintz, totalling

over £4. She paid for most of her balance with 30 and 1/2 yards of Virginia cotton cloth at two shillings a yard. Yet, we could add one more kind of female consumer to our list: Richard Stith's slave Sukey purchased a mirror and a yard of ribbon and was given credit for four pence for each pound "cotton in ye seed." This seemed to be a common payment strategies for slaves. Five of seven slaves recorded in Hook's ledger were credited with raw cotton in exchange for fabric, rum, sugar, and other items. The onerous task of picking seeds from cotton raised the value of a pound of cotton four times, enabling George Caldwell's slave London to purchase clothing, rum, sugar, even a necklace.

Ten percent of the customers in Hook's two ledgers were slaves, and, as a group, their consumer behavior also differed from the overall customer population of those account books. Rum was their overwhelming choice; an escape from the gruelling workday world, a means of socializing, a medicine, and a caloric supplement. Sweeteners may have provided a bit of flavor to an otherwise repetitious and mediocre diet, and at least molasses supplied some nutritional value. Inexpensive mirrors were also extremely popular. Finally, ribbons, hats, and textiles may have provided a means of differentiating "self" from other in a world of identical uniforms issued by masters. As a matter of fact, better quality textiles made up a larger percentage of their purchases than any other subgroup.<sup>92</sup>

This analysis demonstrates that merchant's account books yield valuable insight into eighteenth-century consumerism. First, investment in traditional forms of wealth was not a good predictor of spending at this local store. This is no doubt partially due to the inefficiency of capturing wealth in scanty colonial records and the inability to control for stage in the life cycle and size of household, two absolutely critical determinants of spending. This

---

<sup>92</sup>The ways that slaves were integrated into a larger market economy is a burgeoning area of scholarship. An initial summary is found in John T. Schlotterbeck, "The Internal Economy of Slavery in Rural Piedmont Virginia," *Slavery and Abolition* 12 (May 1991): 171-181. Slaves as consumers are discussed in Lorena S. Walsh, "Unfettered Consumers: Slaves and the Anglo-American 'Consumer Revolution.'" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Economic History Association, Boston, September 1992.

type of analysis is also complicated by the vast difference in scale between these two kinds of expenditures. It also indicates, however, that spending strategies varied immensely at the individual level between long-term capital investment and consumerism, particularly important in a generation just emerging from true frontier conditions.

But there were other distinctions in spending patterns. The wealthiest group used the store most often to pick up grocery items, and probably used alternative strategies to make major purchases. Many in the upper middling group also participated in new genteel behaviors such as tea drinking, even as many of their less wealthy neighbors continued to frame social bonding in an alcoholic consumption that was a hallmark of backcountry life. The middling ranks also made choices based on quality and price that may have held deep symbolic meaning to those buying—and those watching. Those small items of smart dress like printed handkerchiefs were a visible sign of an ability and desire to spend on a more decorative and expensive version of a utilitarian accessory worn firmly round one's neck.

But, most importantly, many more consumers were able to participate in small ways in new consumer desires than those who had accumulated wealth. Even those impeded by legal restrictions and custom wove fabric and raised chickens—all strategies to be able to participate in a world which increasingly treasured pocket mirrors and bits of ribbon. The cumulative effect of these small expenditures was a reshaping of production and consumption in the eighteenth century. But much work remains. In any model of consumer behavior, a product must not only be affordable and available, but also desirable. We must begin to piece together the meanings these kinds of objects might have to those backcountry consumers.

The words of one contemporary gives a clue. Daniel Drake recalled his poor childhood on the Kentucky frontier at the end of the eighteenth century, and the joy of obtaining even the smallest new item. "The philosophy of dressing is not much better

understood than many other philosophies," he wrote, but "to understand it well, a man must have been a poor boy, and known the happiness conferred by an occasional new wool hat or a new pair of brass "slee buttons."<sup>93</sup> Pigeon holes behind Hook's counter were bursting with papers of ribbons and scissors, black silk handkerchiefs and combs, and, of course, young Drake's sleeve buttons.<sup>94</sup> The retail trade put these kinds of items tantalizingly before a broad cross-section of Virginia society—and a man behind the counter who might convince them to buy.

### Conclusion

What kinds of consumers have we captured in Hook's account books? A few examples will suffice. Henry Fuqua owned 217 acres of land in Bedford County, but no slaves. In November of 1771 he made three visits to the store, on each occasion buying at least two quarts of rum. In the week after November 19 alone, he bought four quarts of rum, two pounds of sugar and borrowed seven shillings. He did not return until the first day of the January, when he needed to replenish his stock of shot, gun powder, and sugar, and perhaps replace a broken axe. He may have celebrated the new year with two quarts of brandy and paid Abram Fleming—through John Hook—for a raccoon hat. Three weeks later he returned for more brandy, rum, and sugar, but also a few manufactured goods of the kind that needed regular replacement, namely a razor, some bed ticking and brown sheeting. Using John Hook as a banker, he also borrowed another shilling and eight pence. In March he again appears twice; he purchased no alcohol on this trip but eighteen hundred nails, a half-

---

<sup>93</sup>Drake, Pioneer Life in Kentucky, p. 222.

<sup>94</sup>The location of these items are recorded in an 1802 inventory of Hook's store built in 1784. However, John Hook's plans for the interiors of his 1772 store also included dozens of pigeonholes for storing small items. Misc. legal papers, 1772-1808, and "Shelving North Wall," John Hook Store, New London, Virginia, 1772, (microfilm, Special Collections, Duke University).

yard of checked fabric, and a pair of traces. A month later he returned to pay a debt to Captain Francis Thorp (again through John Hook's book credit system) and while he was there picked up several pound of sugar. Four days later he carried home a new pair of shoes and buckles, more brandy and sugar. Once again, he disappears for two months, returning for a Bible that cost him the equivalent of three quarts of brandy and paying off a large debt of over £1 to James Robinson. In the hot days of summer, he only bought rum, brandy, and bottles.

Henry Fuqua came to Hook's store fifteen times in the year after he opened an account at John Hook's new store in November of 1771. Most of his purchases were alcohol, but interspersed with them were other kinds of goods that needed frequent replacement, like powder, shot, and sugar (consumables) and the occasional infrequent purchase of manufactured goods like shoes and textiles (semi-durables). The only item purchased in that year that had a long use-life was a Bible (durable). He also took advantage of Hook to borrow cash or pay off debts to third parties (Table 22).

Indeed, we can look over his account for the next three years and see the same pattern, mostly purchases of alcohol interspersed with textiles, and occasional household goods related to cooking like a jug and a pepper box. He may have been a carpenter, or at least he built himself a cupboard, buying cupboard hinges and locks and two hundred nails. Clothing items included shoes and buckles, and three handkerchiefs—one each of cotton, printed, and checked—in an eight-month period. He also purchased textiles; three yards of coarse osnaburg, perhaps for a shirt, three yards of linsey, as well as indigo and six pounds of raw wool. Yet, no thread, needles, or other sewing implements were bought. What did he do with these textiles and raw materials? One clue is found in his account; where he "paid Mrs. Pullen" ten shillings, perhaps for making those clothes. Thus, like the payment to Abram Fleming for a raccoon hat, we have perhaps captured another way that the market and

Table 22.  
Purchases of Henry Fuqua, 1771-1774

	% of All Purchase Value	
	All Hook Customers Fall 1771	Henry Fuqua
Textile	35.3	16.6
Clothing	10.7	7.5
Alcohol	11.1	39.4
Grocery	6.7	12.9
Saddlary	5.8	.6
Foodways objects	4.1	8.9
Hunt/fish	3.5	1.0
Craft	1.4	3.3
Building	1.3	.6
Household	1.3	2.4
Tools	1.0	3.4
Literacy	.2	1.4
Miscellaneous	6.6	2.0
Bedding	7.3	0.0
Sewing		0.0

Source: John Hook Daybook, 1771-1772. Ross and Hook vs. Henry Fuqua, April 23, 1783. Loose papers, Bedford County Court House.



local economies intertwined. Henry Fuqua regularly used Hook as a banker, borrowing small amounts of cash, but he also paid off debts to others. Thus, Captain Francis Thorp, James Robinson, (John) Bates, and John Fuqua were paid over £4. But others were paid with store goods; John Adams received a tin quart and William Todd two pounds sugar and sundries costing over a pound. Finally, we can see relationships encoded through a £4 credit to Fuqua from Alexander Gibbs, and the bond of James Phillips for £10. At the end of the three years, Fuqua had run up debts of over £22. Except for the credit from Gibbs, Fuqua never paid a penny toward his account.<sup>95</sup>

The local store enabled many more people to satisfy whatever consumer desires they might have. Lucy Bailly could trade chickens for pewter plates, Sarah Tisdale could buy expensive imported cloth with home-produced textiles. One traveller in the Shenandoah Valley in the early nineteenth century was surprised to find a home with a German woman, her three daughters, and a hired girl working three spinning wheels. The woman explained to him that this production enabled her to obtain sugar, coffee, salt——indeed, "anything she wants"——in the store.<sup>96</sup> Thus, our notions of home production is put on its head; not self-sufficiency, but consumerism drove those wheels.

George Caldwell also was a customer at John Hook's store, owing £42 in 1775. Hook made a cryptic note next to his name on a list of debtors——"too hard to be punctual"——implying difficulty in paying bills.<sup>97</sup> Caldwell also owed £167 to William Cunninghame at their Rocky Ridge store, a debt unpaid when Christopher Clarke filed a

---

<sup>95</sup>John Hook Daybook 1771-1772. Account of Henry Fuqua in Ross and Hook v. Henry Fuqua, August 23, 1783. Loose papers, Bedford County Courthouse. Personal property and land tax lists, Bedford County.

<sup>96</sup>Quoted in Kenneth W. Keller, "From the Rhineland to the Virginia Frontier: Flax Production as a Commercial Enterprise," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (July 1990), p. 501.

<sup>97</sup>Hook Memorandum Book, Falling River, 1775. Hook Papers, Duke.

report in 1801 for British mercantile claims. According to Clarke, Caldwell had left Bedford around the time of the American Revolution, moving to Kentucky. Although no one knew for sure, it was said he was very rich for he "was in the habit of making money..and had opportunities which it was probable that he did not neglect, to make great additions to his estate."<sup>98</sup> The backcountry was a place of both hardship and opportunity, and once again, this man's life is captured——albeit obliquely——through his consumption. It also reminds us that fresh lands always beckoned for a new fortune.

While Caldwell's migration to fresh lands and his resulting financial success may have been common, other documents from Bedford County show a world that just doesn't fit our expectations. The store was a remarkably democratizing institution. James Smith (the butcher) and Joseph Stewart ("the mulattoe") stood at the same counter as Mrs. George Callaway, one of the wealthier widows in the county. In the same way, George Caldwell was a customer, but so were his slaves. London and Bristol traded cotton for just the kind of goods that Henry Fuqua bought. But there are other surprises. Like Anderson's slave Jack and Harry Terrell's George, London bought knives and rum. Selling rum to slaves was against the law, selling knives was dangerous; both are surprising considering the tensions between a white and an enslaved population. The purchase of necklaces and mirrors by slaves also surprises us, but these are just the kinds of material objects that had begun to flow into common households throughout Anglo-America.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup>Claim of William Cunninghame and Company, Report of Christopher Clarke, June 24, 1801, T79/81. Reprinted in Virginia Genealogist 21 (April–June 1977), p. 98.

<sup>99</sup>Daniel Fisher's journal notes that he was accused of "selling Rum to Negroes contrary to law," in Williamsburg in the 1750s, but defending himself that he never sold it without permission of a master and never in a quantity less than a pint. He also suggested, however, that such dictates were commonly flaunted by fellow merchants John Holt (then the mayor) and John Greenhow. Excerpts of journal found in Louise Pecquest du Bellet, Some Prominent Virginia Families (Lynchburg: J.P. Bell, 1907), vol. 2, pp. 752–812. John Schlotterback refers to regulation of slave marketing in the 1792 slave code in Schlotterback, "The Internal Economy of Slavery in Rural Piedmont Virginia," p. 171. My thanks to Patricia Gibbs for the Fisher reference.

A broad cross-section of Bedford society passed through the portals of Hook's store. This is not to say that all were treated the same; credit was extended more or less liberally, goods were sold at differing prices. In the same way, John Hook recognized rank by providing goods and services to a few large planters. His memorandum book is thus filled with notes for special requests, and when David Ross did not promptly fulfill all his orders, Hook was particularly outraged and embarrassed. One such customer was Colonel William Mead, who ordered a few items from John Hook in 1772. He wanted a carpet sixteen by twelve feet, and a clock with "Moon Age to Shew the Days of the Month with Mahogany Case" to be ordered from John Barr at Port Glasgow at a cost of eight pounds. He also needed two dozen chair bottoms of black horse hair or leather, and a dozen silver table spoons, monogrammed with his initials. Moreover, because the face of the clock was apt to fall off, he asked for special care in its packing. He explained that the clocks ordered from other merchants by Reverend James Craig of Lunenburg and Cumberland Parish and Reverend James Gordeon had both received considerable damage in transit.<sup>100</sup>

William Mead was one of the richest men in the county. While it is difficult to sort out among the several men by that name (one a Quaker) living in the county, Colonel (or Esquire) Mead owned at least 29 slaves, and probably 4000 acres of land. He was not listed in the first list of county officials in 1754, but was a magistrate by 1777, when he came to Hook's home at the head of mob to accuse him of Tory sentiments. Mead produced two papers for Hook's signing, one that was an association of about twenty of the county's principal men agreeing to suppress the Tory party, the other (in Mead's own hand) accusing Hook of treasonable charges. After posting bond from jail, Hook recorded that he was "charged by Mead on behalf of the Mob at my Perell not to carry on any kind of Trade in thie County till after Court." In closing, Hook claimed that William Mead had said "Law or

---

<sup>100</sup>Memorandum of Goods for Mead, September 9, 1772. Hook Papers, Duke.

no Law, we (meaning the Mob Associators) are determined to proceed against me and they did."<sup>101</sup>

The mob of twelve men—ten of whom were Hook's customers—answered to, and were joined with, William Mead that day. By the purchase of his clock, Mead had linked himself to an Anglo-American elite, further legitimizing himself as a man to follow. This gave credence to his ability to serve as local official. But serving as the head of an angry mob was something all together different, for he linked himself with the twelve angry men before him. Perhaps he even goaded them. Hook certainly thought so. None of these men could have purchased such a clock at Hook's store, although they, like Mead, could have ordered it with cash in their pocket. Yet, none of the households that were recorded in probate between 1768 and 1777 included any clock, even those well-to-do. Indeed, glancing through the inventories of any of Hook's customers that died locally in the next quarter-century, none had a clock of that magnificence, and not even Hook himself.

It is relatively easy to see how these kinds of goods marked wealth, power, or, in the case of the clergy, perhaps culture or learning. But although the number of clocks among the middling ranks certainly continued to rise, there were still few players at that level. There would be little evidence of a rise in consumerism in eighteenth-century Anglo-America if we limited our view to just those elite objects. It is the increase in small, less expensive manufactured and processed goods that tell the story; a bit of tea, a printed handkerchief, a mirror or a creamware plate that were the driving wedge moving new objects into people's lives in the backcountry.

Bedford County residents were grappling with cultural ideals flowing from the core of metropolitan Anglo-America. Like William Mead, some seemed to easily adopt them, yet even Mead could disregard law and threaten extra-legal violence. Other county residents fit

---

<sup>101</sup>Complaint of John Hook, New London, January 18, 1777. Hook Papers, Duke.

card games and dancing lessons in amongst older behaviors. John Hook's house plans were part of a struggle to incorporate new ideals about the surface appearance of houses.

Fashionable consumer goods may have been carried to homes that were small, poorly lit, and drafty.

It is these small changes taking place within the older shell of appropriate housing and furnishings that we have teased out. At the same time, in a highly mobile society, these items were transportable and there may have even been a premium on items that did not break, as the high sale of tinwares for drinking seems to attest. Indeed, a peddler visiting the area found a noisy crew gathering for quarter races at Henry County, all in "a state of intoxication drinking out of tin Cups as there was not a single glass upon the premises."<sup>102</sup> We can also remember the traveller that found a ramshackle house, a mahogany desk, well-dressed children and broken drinking glasses. It is that contrast that again confronts us.

We are not alone in our confusion. Ferdinand Bayard's travels through Virginia took him into the backcountry where he slept in a private home that took in travellers. The exterior of the home "presented a picture of poverty, it was falling into ruins. Old hats and old clothes took the place of window panes." Bayard was stunned, however, to find "well brought up and elegantly dressed young ladies." China cups were carefully displayed in a parlor full of cracks in the walls, and the elegant muslin skirts dragged over floors full of holes. "Yet, the sugar bowl, the pitcher, and everything was tastefully arranged on a round, and especially clean, mahogany table." Bayard admitted that when the "glazier and the carpenter lived six miles away" using rags temporarily to stop the cold was acceptable. But

---

<sup>102</sup>Beeman, "Trade and Travel in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," p. 183.

the scene to him of "a mixture of wealth and poverty, of studied elegance and negligence" was not only puzzling, but "ridiculous" and he implied some deep cultural flaw.<sup>103</sup>

It is that "mixture of wealth and poverty, studied elegance and negligence" that is the scene we can add to our list of backcountry puzzles. Like brawling whist-players, perhaps we have caught Bedford County consumption at just the point past frontier conditions where life was muddled, where slaves bought rum, knives, and necklaces, and where chickens were transformed into pewter plates with the stroke of a pen. Not quite backcountry, not quite Piedmont; not quite rampant consumerism, not quite chosen self-sufficiency, Bedford County culture was a hybrid that it is difficult to read.

---

<sup>103</sup>Ferdinand Bayard, Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia with a Description of Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1791, trans. and ed. Ben C. McCary. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edward Brothers, 1950), p. 35.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TEADRINKING IN A NEW CONSUMER WORLD: A CASE STUDY OF CULTURAL MEANING

To understand the rise of consumerism is ultimately to ask about people's motives to acquire material goods. Seeking explanation requires the linking of broad social and economic trends to the choices made by social groups in the hopes of recreating the very personal choices of any given person. Such evidence is nearly irretrievable, because few people in the past told us why they bought or what feelings might have been evoked by new consumer goods. But some progress is possible by turning from choices made from within the range of available goods—hoes or books or hats—to focus precisely on the consumption of a particular kind and the evidence available about it.

This chapter will examine tea as a case study of consumerism. Tea is an excellent vehicle for understanding such broad trends because it was one of the first new important consumer goods of the eighteenth century. The sale of the leaf itself was an important catalyst in recasting the nature of the retail trade in England. Available in even basic country stores—from provincial England to Virginia—it is possible to track its sale. A set of equipment was required for its proper brewing and drinking; those objects can help serve as a proxy for its drinking—or social display—in households through the evidence of probate inventories and archaeological collections. Perhaps most importantly, the drinking of tea was invested with extraordinary social and cultural meaning in the eighteenth century and thus carries with it a method to investigate the way those meanings may have been adopted or

recast. Examining tea will thus bring back together the three themes of consumerism, the retail trade, and material culture.

This chapter is thus a microcosm of the larger study. It will move from broad patterns radiating from London in the late seventeenth century, and trace the outlines of tea drinking as it progressed into the lives of more and more people in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world. It will ask how its meanings grew and changed in that transmission. It will focus on the shape that tea-drinking would take in the households of those of varying social ranks, and the unwritten, but rigorous codes of behavior that were formed in that process. It will assess tea's role in the debate about eighteenth-century luxury and outline tea's powerful role in political sentiments of the colonial era. It will then once again take the Bedford County consumer's view and seek to understand why, as a group, they did not seem to embrace this particular form of the new consumerism, by asking questions about local affordability and desirability. In this way, we can move more closely to careful conjecture about individual motivation.

Moreover, this study is also an attempt to disprove the traditional view of tea-drinking as a static scene, a status affair reserved to the rich and genteel, and merely imitated as it slipped down the social scale.<sup>1</sup> While the vision from the top may have remained remarkably constant as the eighteenth-century progressed—and here, of course, are the bulk of the literary sources—that picture shaded and blurred as different social and cultural meanings

---

<sup>1</sup>The standard source for tea-drinking in eighteenth-century America remains a museum-oriented study: Rodris Roth, Tea Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage, Bulletin 225: Paper 14, Contributions from the Museum of History and Technology, 1961. Roth's research is remarkably modern in her concern with the social context as well as the objects, drawing together a creative compendium of literary and print materials, but she ultimately remains trapped in just those elite sources. As social historians turn their attention to the dramas of eighteenth-century class relations, the role of tea is also beginning to be acknowledged. Rhys Isaac, for example, gives us the early eighteenth-century elite portrait of tea drinking, but he neglects to show "the transformation" by the end of his period of study. Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 46.



were added by new groups of users.<sup>2</sup> What exempted tea from the classic process of luxury consumption was its ability to remain a "piece of luxury" for the rich, even as it was for the poor, by a transformation and elaboration of meanings.

### The History of Tea Drinking in Anglo-America

In 1657 a broadside appeared in London claiming that the first tea to be publicly sold was available at Garroway's Coffee House. Previously purchased abroad at £6 to £10 per pound and only used "in regalia in high treatments and entertainments and presents made thereof to princes and grandees," it now could be had by the public for home use at 16 to 60 shillings a pound. The broadside included a long list of the curative powers of tea demonstrated by its "high esteem and use . . . (especially in late years) among the Physitians and knowing men in France, Italy, Holland and other parts of Christendom."<sup>3</sup>

The novelty of the new drink and the claims of its many virtues brought quick converts among those that could afford its high price, and Samuel Pepys, for one, recorded in 1660 that "I did send for a cup of tee (a China drink) of which I never had drank before."<sup>4</sup> Tea-drinking was made fashionable by Charles II's queen, Catharine de Braganza, who substituted her favorite temperance drink for the alcoholic excesses of the lords and ladies of court society. Somehow, by the end of the century, its drinking had begun to spill "to both

---

<sup>2</sup>This concept is drawn from Sidney W. Mintz's powerful study of the "intensification" and "extensification" of the uses and meanings of sugar in the eighteenth century in Sweetness and Power.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in William H. Ukers, All About Tea, (New York: Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Company, 1935) vol. 1, pp. 38-50.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

the Scholar and the Tradesman, to become both a private Regale at Court, and to be made use of in places of publick entertainment."<sup>5</sup>

Thus tea—like sugar, window glass, and forks before it—tumbled down the social scale. Once reserved as the prerogative of court and kings by its limited availability and high price, the uninterrupted direct shipments of tea that began in 1717 via the East India Company produced a generous supply that allowed prices to drop with profits intact. By 1710 demand had already grown high enough that smuggling had begun from Holland, despite the legislated East India Company monopoly. One scholar estimates that the second decade of the eighteenth century was probably the critical take-off point of both supply and demand for the East India Company, as over two million pounds were exported between 1713 and 1720. Yet that quantity would quadruple in the next decade to almost nine million pounds, and continue to spiral upward until 37 million pounds were imported between 1751 and 1760. At the same time, average wholesale prices fell by half. As the market for tea expanded, the kind of tea imported changed as well, for it became clear that the bulk of the trade was in the ordinary, and therefore the cheaper, kinds of tea.<sup>6</sup>

Through its monopoly—controlling price, quantity and quality—the East India Company turned England into a nation of tea drinkers in only a few decades. The five million English souls that made up the home market in 1706 absorbed 54,600 pounds of tea (at the retail price of 20 shillings a pound). But with a population increase of only 14 percent, home demand in only fifty years would consume forty times that amount (at a quarter of the price).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Bevis Hillier, Pottery and Porcelain 1700-1914: England, Europe and North America (New York: Meredith Press, 1968), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup>K. N. Chaudhuri, The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 388-389, 397.

<sup>7</sup>E. F. Carritt, A Calendar of British Taste (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1949), p. 282.

How could such an unusual novelty such a tea win such quick acceptance in western society? First, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch has so carefully described in Tastes of Paradise, tea could be adopted easily because the way had already been cleared by spices and coffee. The oriental luxury of spices had entered medieval cuisine by the fifteenth century. Coffee was a rarity until the mid seventeenth century, when tea, coffee, chocolate, and tobacco began to become fashionable. The transformation from a culture built around alcohol—beer soup, for instance, being an important breakfast food—to the drinking of a hot, bitter substance was a remarkable transformation in European culture. Schivelbusch points to the early fashionability of coffee in court society, but suggests that the most important reason for its acceptance was its claim to have significant health benefits. After initial confusion, this new substance was fit into prevalent ideas about the four humors of the body, and coffee became accepted as a drying or desiccating substance, which removed bodily fluids known as phlegm. The problem was still not entirely solved, however, because one view valued the phlegmatic, more portly body type produced by medieval food. This view Schivelbusch suggests is a conservative one. A more modern view equated dryness with masculinity and anti-sensuality. Dryness was also equated with sobriety; hence, a drug that produced mental alacrity and longer working hours was the perfect protestant choice.

Schivelbusch is describing coffee, and significant cultural differences emerged between coffee and tea. There were, however, important similarities. The conundrum is why a coffee-drinking society so quickly turned to tea. Schivelbusch briefly suggests that it was the state-run monopoly of the East India company that was able to overcome the private coffee brokers to transform British habits.<sup>8</sup>

From its inception in western society, the drinking of tea and coffee was in opposition to the consumption of alcohol. By the 1830s, polite sociability required that coffee was

---

<sup>8</sup>Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants (New York: Pantheon, 1992), pp. 79-84.

served to men after an evening of drinking, for "it puts the company into a proper condition for finding their way home." The serving of coffee was also the signal that the evening was over.<sup>9</sup> Coffee was thought to be able to counteract the effects of alcohol, a myth which remains prevalent today. The locus of coffee drinking was also in direct opposition to alehouses or taverns, as coffee houses emerged as centers of information and commerce, not places for ritualized drinking competition. Thus, coffee began in a public sphere before moving to a private one. Schivelbusch further argues that this transformation was a typical one for major innovations; moving from public and grand contexts to private and diminished ones. Morning coffee maintained a connection to the coffeehouse; of shaking off sleep and starting the day's business. Afternoon coffee, however, was a woman's affair, perhaps because they were disenfranchised from coffee houses themselves.<sup>10</sup>

The implications for this discussion of coffee for the study of tea are manifold. Like coffee, tea was a bitter foreign substance, consumed hot, and with complicated equipment. Like coffee, a large part of its appeal was its capacity as stimulant. Thomas Short wrote in the mid eighteenth century that tea was an excellent means to "take off, or prevent Drowsiness and Dullness, Damps and Clouds on the Brain." It did not merely prevent sluggishness; "it Raises lively Ideas, excites and sharpeneth the Thoughts, gives fresh Vigor and Force to Invention, Awakens the Senses, and Clears the Mind," qualities in tea that he attributed to "thinning the Blood, cleansing and clearing the Glands of the Brain," and increasing the "secretion and Diffusion of animal Juices." But he also warned against the

---

<sup>9</sup>The Laws of Etiquette or, Short Rules and Reflections for Conduct in Society (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1836), p. 136.

<sup>10</sup>This move from large scale to private can be seen in other cultural forms. Railroads, for instance, began a transportation revolution (public and large-scale) and automobiles finished it (private and small). The same, he argues, was the case with cinema and television. Schivelbusch, Tastes of Paradise, pp. 62-63.

dangers of drinking the wrong kind of tea; for green tea was "diuretick and cleansing," while the more common bohea was "more softening, smoothing, healing and balsamick."<sup>11</sup>

It was not just the qualities of tea and coffee but the form of their consumption that captures our interest. Like coffee, tea became part of an idealized feminine afternoon and evening ritual, even as it was consumed in the morning by all sexes. But important distinctions emerge as well. While tea and chocolate was served in coffeehouses, neither was immensely popular there. Pots of tea or coffee were also available in taverns at the end of the eighteenth century, tea was mostly consumed in a somewhat different, private way—served in the home. Thus, the drinking of tea had greater possibilities as an expression of individual status or worth. As a private act, there were greater barriers to its learning; if one had never been in a home where tea was served, it was difficult to learn its brewing, serving, and drinking. The story of tea-drinking quickly becomes tangled in complex changes in domestic sociability.

### The Triumph of Tea

The ships loaded with teas and porcelains thus wound back to England with ever-increasing regularity, and their cargoes entered the homes of the English elite. The Spectator smugly advised in March 1711 that "all well-regulated households served tea in the morning and that all intelligent households took care that a copy of the Spectator should invariably be part of the Tea Equipage."<sup>12</sup> The smart publication even presented a few rules for the correct consumption of tea for uneasy new initiates, in the guise, for example, of a mother warning her daughter that if she used too much sugar and cream, "people will certainly take

---

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Short, Discourses on Tea, Sugar, Milk, Made-wines, Spirits, Punch, Tobacco &c: With Plain and Useful Rules for Gentry People (London: 1750), pp. 58–59, 50.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Agnes Repplier, To Think of Tea! (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1932), p. 33.

you for the daughter of a dairymaid."<sup>13</sup> The increasing demand for tea produced new retail outlets for its purchase, as well as specialist shops for the appropriate teawares. Daniel Defoe lamented in The Review in 1713 the growth of shops that dealt in the "baubles and trifles" like teawares instead of the useful and respectable woolen trades. He explained with a note mixing resignation, irritation, and sarcasm that "it is impossible that coffee, tea, and chocolate can be so advanced in their consumption without an eminent increase in those trades that attend them; whence we see the most noble shops in the city taken up with the valuable utensils of the tea table."<sup>14</sup> Modern historians also point to the growth of the sale of tea as a critical component in the rise of small retail shops in England.

But just as tea had progressed from gentility to upper-crust urban tradesmen by the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, contemporaries complained by mid-century that it was making a progress among the lesser sorts——with only dire consequences ahead. In January 1743 Duncan Forbes complained that "tea . . . is now become so common, that the meanest familys, even of labouring people . . . make their morning's meal of it, and thereby wholly disuse the ale, which heretofore was their accustomed drink." The horrified Mr. Forbes pointed out that "the same Drug supplies all the labouring women with their afternoon's entertainments." The result was that "there were few Coblers in . . . this Country who do not sit down gravely with their Wives and familys to Tea."<sup>15</sup> Even more ludicrous to contemporaries than the scene of cobblers "gravely" drinking tea with their wives was the picture vividly painted by John Galt, describing his parish in 1761. The new custom of tea-drinking had only recently become "very rife" there. He described how the "commoner sort did not like it to be known that they were taking to the new luxury, especially the elderly

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Dorothy Davis, Fairs, Shops, and Supermarkets: A History of English Shopping, p. 194.

<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Hillier, Pottery and Porcelain, p. 68, 77.

women" who snuck off to "out-houses and by-places" where they drank tea in "cups and luggies for there were but few that had cups and saucers." Thus they gathered in hedges, "cackling like pea-hens" only to be scattered by passers-by.<sup>16</sup>

Thus arose the tempest that tea-drinking was not fit for the laboring classes. Arthur Young, for instance, was greatly disturbed because the custom was growing "of men making tea an article of their food, almost as much as women, labourers losing their time to come and go to the tea-table, farmer's servants even demanding tea for their breakfast!"<sup>17</sup> One of the most vocal critics was the social reformer Jonas Hanway, who scoffed in 1757:

To what a height of folly must a nation be arrived, when the common people are not satisfied with wholesome food at home, but must go to the remotest regions to please a vicious palate! There is a certain lane near Richmond where beggars are often seen, in the summer season, drinking their tea. You may see labourers, who are mending the roads drinking their tea; it is even drank in cinder-carts; and what is no less absurd, sold out of cups to Hay-makers.<sup>18</sup>

An anonymous tract (undoubtedly by Hanway) in 1767 perhaps articulates more clearly an underlying reason for all the particular dismay over tea-drinking among the laboring poor. Not only was the substance—and its component sugar—expensive and unhealthy, but its drinking required a certain amount of leisure that should be best spent in work. He urged the reader to consider all the necessary parts of tea-drinking and "compute the expence, the loss of time taken in breaking and washing the dishes, sweetening the tea, spreading the bread and butter; the necessary pause which defamation and malicious tea-table chat afford, and they will largely account for half a day in winter, spent in doing that which is

---

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted in Ukers, *All About Tea*, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup>Jonas Hanway, *A Journal of Eight Days Journey from Portsmouth to Kingston Upon Thames...To Which Is Added An Essay on Tea* (London: H. Woodfall and C. Henderson, 1757), p. 272.

worse, very much worse, than doing nothing."<sup>19</sup> Even Dr. Samuel Johnson, who often sat up half the night drinking cup after cup of tea with friends, could only rest his published reply to Hanway on the utility of tea for the upper ranks, and would "readily admit, that tea is a liquor not proper for the lower classes of the people, as it supplies no strength to labour, or relief to disease, but gratifies the taste without nourishing the body."<sup>20</sup>

But some were more perceptive about the drinking of tea among the poor. Rather than railing against the inappropriate behavior, some, like the cleric, David Davies, attempted to explain the role of tea and sugar in the diets of the impoverished as one of necessity, not luxury. Because it was too expensive to keep a cow, and malt was heavily taxed, "the only thing remaining to them to moisten their bread with, was tea. This was their last resource." Tea and bread "furnished one meal for a whole family every day, at no greater expense than about one shilling a week, at an average." To those who called tea a luxury, he admitted it be true; "if you mean fine hyson tea, sweetened with refined sugar, and softened with cream . . . But this is not the tea of the poor. Spring-water just coloured with a few leaves of the lowest-priced tea, and sweetened with the brownest sugar, is the luxury for which you reproach them." If tea was removed from their diets, they would be reduced to bread and water. He concluded that "tea-drinking is not the cause, but the consequence of the distresses of the poor."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Mintz, Sweetness and Power, pp. 248-249.

<sup>20</sup>Boswell suggested that Johnson's able defense against Hanway "should have obtained him a magnificent reward from the East India Company." It seems, perhaps, that no defense was available for tea-drinking among the poor. Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (New York: Literary Guild, Inc., 1936), pp. 12-13. The quoted passage from Johnson is from Hillier, p. 77.

<sup>21</sup>D. Davies 1795, quoted in Mintz, Sweetness and Power, pp. 115-116.



It is in this context that we can place the comment of Adam Smith in The Wealth of Nations that tea and sugar were a "luxury of the poor as well as of the rich."<sup>22</sup> It is in this same light that we can better understand one more mid-eighteenth century scene where a contemporary described a "ragged and greasy creature" who came into the local grocer with two children in tow "in as dismal a plight as their mother." This poor woman asked for a penny's worth of tea and a halfpenny worth of sugar, telling the shopkeeper, "Mr. N., I do not know how it is with me, but I assure you I would not desire to live if I was to be disbarred from drinking every day a little tea."<sup>23</sup> The little bit of tea and sugar provided her family with subsistence and transformed a cold supper into a hot meal. Unfortunately, a deceptive feeling of warmth with hot tea could not balance the nutritional loss of even a cold glass of beer.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the ease in fixing such meals was an important component in a newly-industrializing—or at least increasingly wage-based—society where food-preparation time was at a premium. If a "sense of luxury" remained, it was a small warm spot in a cold and dreary existence.

It was the insightful Reverend Davies who saw the complaints as more histrionics than reality, pointing out at the end of the eighteenth century that "though the use of tea is more common than could be wished, it is not yet general among the laboring poor."<sup>25</sup> The social critics were complaining more about the common fear that luxuries inevitably progressed to the poorest sort, and that measures must be taken to stop the cancerous growth, rather than

---

<sup>22</sup>An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, ed. Edwin Cannan, (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 823.

<sup>23</sup>Davis, Fairs, Shops, and Supermarkets, p. 202.

<sup>24</sup>Mintz, Sweetness and Power, pp. 117, 122.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

the actuality of its accomplished journey.<sup>26</sup> Joseph Hanway's diatribe was not limited to tea-drinking among the poor. He thought that it was "the curse of this nation, that the laborer and mechanic will open the lock" and only the powerful force of example could abolish the use of tea. He asked, "Is this not sipping fashion become a vice?" and answered that "granting that it is not vicious in its own nature, if the example reaches the poor, and it is vicious to them, it becomes vicious to the rich also." Unnecessary expenditures—like tea and sugar—were "an epidemical disease; if any seeds of it remain it will engender an universal infection."<sup>27</sup> Yet like many of his contemporaries that chastised the lower sorts for the pursuit of fashion or idle luxury, he admits that perhaps it was admissible for "those choice spirits who soar above common mortals," adding "a cup or two does no harm, confined to higher orders."<sup>28</sup>

Hanway's essay thus fits neatly into a broader social and moral debate. The furor over Bernard Mandeville's spunky little satirical verse, The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits, and its expanded and elaborated text over the next twenty years, had shattered whatever consensus there was about a properly functioning social organism for a

---

<sup>26</sup>The hags in the hedges teach us that teawares are not necessary for the drinking of tea. But a rough estimate of the transmission of tea-drinking can be wrestled from the probate inventories published from four parishes within the coal districts of North Telford, England (approximately one third of those extant.) While no items distinguished as teawares were listed before 1730, in the next twenty years such items were still limited to the parlors of only those with estates over £200. Yeoman and Colliers in Telford: Probate Inventories for Dawley, Lilleshall, Wellington and Wrockwardine, 1660-1750, ed. Barrie Trinder and Jeff Cox, (London: Phillimore and Co., 1980).

<sup>27</sup>Hanway, Journal of Eight Days Journey, pp. 74, 271, 272. Compare Hanway's argument and imagery to William Temple's in 1673, who wrote "For the custom, or Humour, of Luxury and Expencc, cannot stop at certain Bounds; ...And though the Example, arise among idle persons, yet the Imitation will run into all Degrees; even of those Men by whose Industry the nation subsists." Temple was writing a classic mercantilist argument for nonconsumption of foreign luxuries. William Temple, "Observations among the United Provinces of the Netherlands," quoted in J. E. Crowley, This Sheba, Self: The Conceptualization of Economic life in Eighteenth-Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974), p. 43.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, pp. 74, 271, 272.

rapidly changing England. Thus, the 1750s and 1760s were a high-water mark in a swelling tide of complaints about English luxury in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Through heated debates in such forums as the London Magazine and the Gentleman's Magazine, the rural gentry were searching for explanations for the growing social unrest of an increasingly commercialized society, as manifested in such events as the food riots of 1757. Cries of luxury were a natural response.<sup>29</sup> These writers complained that "amongst the many reigning vices of the present age none have risen to a greater height than that fashionable one of luxury." Immediate suppression was necessary for luxury "not only enervates the people, and debauches their morals, but also destroys their substance." Particularly galling was the rise of fashion among the lower sorts; "the present age of imitating manners of high life" that had spread so far among "the gentlefolks of lower life, that in a few years we shall probably have no common folk at all." They perceived a "perpetual restless ambition in each of the inferior ranks to raise themselves to the level of those immediately above them," and in that striving, "fashion must have uncontrolled sway."<sup>30</sup>

The drinking of tea was one example of the ways in which the lower sorts——most likely the prospering rank of shopkeepers and artisans in the mid-eighteenth century——were aping their betters and engaging in an incessant round of conspicuous consumption.<sup>37</sup> But

---

<sup>29</sup>John Sekora, Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974), pp. 64-65. E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?," pp. 133-165, describes that kind of sporadic local unrest as "rebellious traditional culture," a series of "confrontations between an innovative market economy and the customary moral economy of the plebs."

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. Also Neil McKendrick, "The Cultural Response to a Consumer Society: Coming to Terms with the Idea of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century England," (paper presented at the Conference on Anglo-American Social History, Williamsburg, Virginia, September 5-7, 1985), pp. 22-23.

<sup>37</sup>A phenomenon described by P. J. Corfield in "Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century Britain," pp. 38-61.

those of the poorer sorts that drank a bit of tea were not engaging in the "raging passion for amusements and visits" that Hanway claimed were "introduced into the polite British world." They probably had little time for so "vulgar an entertainment" that was all too often coupled with "playing at cards." They certainly were not the women "of sense and breeding . . . spend[ing] whole evenings in rumbling over a vile pavement, to knock at doors" that Hanway had so roundly chastised in his essay.<sup>38</sup> If tea-drinking among the poorer sorts involved the kind of sociability that elite patterns of tea-drinking dictated, they may have been old women gathering in the hedges. More likely still is the simple sociability of village life remembered by Susanna Blamire where the evening hours were filled when

the good neighbour walks her friend to see,  
 And knit an hour, and drink a dish of tea,  
 . . . Cup after cup, sends steaming circles round,  
 And oft the weak tea's in the full pot drowned,  
 It matters not, for while their news they tell,  
 The mind's content, and all things move on well.<sup>39</sup>

The traditional explanation of tea-drinking is based on that simple replication down the social scale. Of course, with a growing middle-class of professionals, and heightened prosperity among tradesmen and artisans by the end of the eighteenth century, part of that transmission was indeed based on the desire to live like one's social betters. When the young Comte de la Rochefoucault visited England in 1784, he noted that "throughout the whole of England the drinking of tea is general. You have it twice a day and, though the expense is

---

<sup>38</sup>Hanway, *Journal of Eight Days Journey*, pp. 279, 281. He did kindly allow that "if you must drink tea in the afternoon, read the scripture for half an hour first," p. 280.

<sup>39</sup>Susanna Blamire, from "Stoklewath; or, The Cumbrian Village," c. 1776, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 645.

considerable, the humblest peasant has his tea twice a day just like the rich man." But how could the humblest peasant be "just like the rich man" when Rochefoucault himself saw that the drinking of tea provided "the rich with an opportunity to display their magnificence in the matter of tea-pots, cups, and so on" a social one-upmanship in which the poor were hardly players.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the increasing popularity of tea did not discourage the cult among the fashionable. They merely continued to raise the barriers to polite group entry with an increasingly complex and expensive set of objects and highly-structured "genteel" behaviors.

Thus developed the proliferation of tea things; a properly set tea table included a teapot, cups and saucers, slop bowl (for tea dregs), a milk pot or cream jug, and a sugar bowl. The elite often purchased these items in sets, which could include a dozen tea cups and saucers, as well as a dozen coffee cups and saucers. Utensils included spoons and a set of sugar tongs, often of silver and a tea caddy of fine wood. Not all of the equipage came in sets: silver teapots and porcelain wares were a common combination for the elite. Whether or not all teawares matched, however, tea equipage was a grouping of things summed neatly in the 1731 inventory of Thomas Newell of Telford by "a Tea Table and all belonging to it."<sup>41</sup>

#### Tea in the Colonies

Turning to the colonies, many of the same patterns obtain. There, too, can be found the ideal that tea-drinking should be reserved to the elite. The Virginian Devereux Jarrett was precise about the social station of those who drank tea before the middle of the eighteenth century. Remembering his childhood in a poor family, he recalled that "we made no use of tea or coffee for breakfast, or at any other time; nor did I know a single family that made any

---

<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Hillier, Pottery and Porcelain, p. 78.

<sup>41</sup>For more on tea-table equipment, see Roth, Tea-drinking; Newell's inventory in Trinder and Cox, Yeoman and Colliers in Telford, pp. 243-244.

use of them." He "supposed" that "the richer sort might make use of those and other luxuries, but to such people I had no access." What he called "Gentle folks" moved in a different world. In this case, the ideal of prerogative was properly inculcated by the poor themselves.<sup>42</sup> The material culture record contains ample proof of Jarrett's perspective; a large comparative study of Chesapeake sites finds the only seventeenth century teaware at the home of a governor, and the slow, but steady, addition of teawares to assemblages of the less wealthy.<sup>43</sup>

Still there were signs that even as the elite anxiously tried to pull away from the lesser sorts into their own distinct world, the middling ranks nipped at their heels. Upward mobility in mid-century Williamsburg for the tailor Robert Nicholson meant not only moving his shop to the town core and nearly doubling his house size. Archaeological investigation revealed that he also upgraded his teawares to new, more fashionable porcelain ones.<sup>44</sup> Remember the little tale that appeared in the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1732 written by one "Anthony Afterwit." His story of woe began with his new wife's "strong inclination to be a Gentlewoman." The march of the trappings of middling respectability began when his beloved was "entertain'd with Tea by the Good Woman she visited," and to maintain their standing, they could "do not less than the like when they visited us."<sup>45</sup> Anthony Afterwit was, of course, none other than a guise for the young Benjamin Franklin. He was satirizing just that kind of social emulation, the desire to move quickly to the ranks where money and time were wasted

---

<sup>42</sup>"The Autobiography of the Reverend Devereux Jarrett, 1732-1763," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Ser. (1952): 346-352.

<sup>43</sup>Anne E. Yentsch, "Minimum Vessel Lists as Evidence of Change in Folk and Courtly Traditions of Food Use," Historical Archaeology 24 (Fall 1990): 24-53.

<sup>44</sup>Patricia Samford, The Nicholson House: Report on the 1942 Archaeological Investigations, Department of Archaeological Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

<sup>45</sup>"Anthony Afterwit," The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 10, 1732, in Benjamin Franklin: Writings, edited by J.A. Leo Lemay (New York: The Library of America, 1987), pp. 185-187.

on useless tea table sociability. When searching for a wedding present for his sister five years earlier, Franklin had first decided on just such a tea table. But he had changed his mind and bought her a spinning wheel, informing her that the gracious serving of tea may have been appropriate for a "pretty gentlewoman," but he had wanted young Jane to have the symbol of a "good housewife."<sup>46</sup> This symbolic opposition—tea tables (bad wives) and spinning wheels (good wives)—was an important construct to Franklin. After all, Anthony Afterwit's problem was solved when the tea table was traded for the spinning wheel. The contrast between time spent usefully and foolishly is cast around tea things by another contemporary author. To Alexander Hamilton, the appearance of "a set of stone tea dishes and a tea pot" in a poor man's cottage were "superfluous things which showed an inclination to finery." The teawares there should be sold for useful goods like wool to make yarn, for "tea equipage was quite unnecessary."<sup>47</sup>

For these men, the drinking of tea—or the presence of teawares—was indicative of genteel behavior, welcome among the privileged but an ominous luxury as it crept among those who were not of the proper rank. Franklin, this time posing as "Blackamore," warned again in the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1733 against "Molatto Gentleman," those who "find themselves in circumstances a little more easy," where an "Ambition seizes many of them immediately to become Gentlefolks." With just a fleeting observation, he was able to judge their performance with ease "for 'tis no easy Thing for a Clown or Laborer to hit in all respects" and "tis the curse of Imitation that it almost always either under-does or over-does."<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup>Benjamin Franklin to Jane Mecom, January 6, 1726–1727, The Letters of Benjamin Franklin and Jane Mecom, ed. Van Doren, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup>Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton in 1744 (University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 13–14, 55.

<sup>48</sup>Franklin, "Blackamore, on Molatto Gentlemen," Pennsylvania Gazette, August 30, 1733, Benjamin Franklin: Writings, p. 219.

As the drinking of tea spread throughout society, rigid patterns of correct behavior developed, ranging from the proper name for the invitation to tea to the correct hand-signal that no more tea was desired. Instructions for servants were published by the butler of the governor of Massachusetts that codified proper procedures from the correct placement of the tea items on the tray to the order of serving based on sex, age, and rank.<sup>49</sup> Each of these behaviors can be seen as fences to keep out those that did not properly belong—tricks for the unwary "Clown or Labourer." This elaboration and rigidity intensified in the early nineteenth century until a Philadelphia "Gentleman" could solemnly advise in his etiquette book "that a gentleman would lose his reputation, if he were to take up a piece of sugar with his fingers and not with the sugar tongs."<sup>50</sup>

Precise rules and exacting sociability of tea parties did not, of course, necessarily accompany tea down the social scale. Just as in England, colonial laborers were accused of dawdling over breakfast for an hour with tea, a meal that used to take only ten minutes with milk and porridge.<sup>51</sup> So too was tea considered part of the diet of the urban impoverished.<sup>52</sup> Tea for the "lower, and many of the middling classes" in Virginia remained primarily a breakfast item in 1774, and the travelling observer added that "women very seldom drink tea in the afternoon, the men never."<sup>53</sup> But only with the inexorable progress

---

<sup>49</sup>Robert Roberts, The House Servant's Directory (Boston 1809, 1827; fasc. repr. Waltham, Mass.: Gore Place Society, 1977), n.p. See also The Laws of Etiquette, p. 169.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Carol Shammass, "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," Journal of Social History 14 (Fall 1980): 14.

<sup>52</sup>Billy G. Smith found that milk was the core beverage of the laboring poor of Philadelphia, although he estimated that small amounts of tea were included in their diet. "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750 to 1800," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 38 (April 1981): 163-202.

<sup>53</sup>J. F. D. Smyth, A Tour in the United States of America (London 1784; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1968), vol. 1, p. 93.



of tea into the lives of more and more Americans could an indentured servant sit down to tea with a tailor's wife and daughters.<sup>54</sup> By the 1780s it was remarked that "the use of tea and coffee is universal in America. The people who live in the country, tilling the ground and driving their oxen, take it as well as the inhabitants of the cities."<sup>55</sup> The busy traveller, the Duke de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt, reported in 1797 that "there is not a family, even in the most miserable hut in the midst of woods, who does not eat meat twice a day and drink tea and coffee," proof indeed that "the proverbial wish of 'having a chicken in every pot,' is more than accomplished in America."<sup>56</sup>

Whether it was the warm conversation of a few close friends and family, the formal and ceremonial show for a crowd, or the hasty gulping to wash down bread, it seems that by the final quarter of the eighteenth century the drinking of tea was one of the most ubiquitous customs in America. Entries such as "Drank Tea with Mrs. Buchanan this Afternoon" fill the diaries of upper-class men and women.<sup>57</sup> These brief notations indicate the degree to which the very activity itself was taken for granted, just another part of the day, notable for the company or conversation.

Tea drinking was reported to be so common that neither slaves nor Indians could be excluded. A visiting Polish statesman found a tea kettle and cups in a slave cabin at Mount Vernon in 1797, and excavations at slave quarters at Monticello unearthed cups and saucers as

---

<sup>54</sup>The Journal of John Harrower; An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia, ed. Edward Miles Riley, (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1963), p. 5.

<sup>55</sup>The Journal of Claude Blanchard, 1780-1783 (Albany: J. Munsell, 1873), p. 78.

<sup>56</sup>Duke de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt, Travels through the United States of America...in the Years 1795, 1796, 1797 (London: 1799), vol. 2, pp. 671-672.

<sup>57</sup>See, for instance, "The Diary of M. Ambler, 1770," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 45 (April 1937): 158.

well.<sup>58</sup> Thomas Hancock reminisced that before the war tea was "the most portable, as well as the most easily prepared of beverages . . . the very Indians, in default of something stronger, drank it twice a day."<sup>59</sup>

While the words of travellers and critics are sometimes exaggerated or imprecise, the rising chorus of commentary suggests that the drinking of tea was an established social custom. Intensive research in the evidence from probate inventories—the records of the household possessions of the deceased—only reinforce this literary evidence. Lois Carr and Lorena Walsh found that in the small urban places in the south—like the colonial capitals of Annapolis and Williamsburg—at least two-thirds of even those probate households in the lowest economic tiers owned some means of drinking tea by the time of the American Revolution. While the progress down the social scale was limited in more rural places in Virginia and Maryland, about a third of the poor were similarly equipped.<sup>60</sup> Garry Wheeler Stone demonstrated that twenty percent of the landless were participating in tea-drinking in rural St. Mary's County Maryland in the early 1760s.<sup>61</sup> Carol Shammass found that four out of ten of the poor in Massachusetts were similarly tea-drinkers in 1774.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup>That these quarters may have been for "special" slaves is a distinct possibility. Lukwik Krzyzanowski, *Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz' American Diary* (New York: Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in America, 1961), p. 26. William Kelso, "Monticello Black History/Craft Life Archaeological Project, 1984–1985 Progress Report." Manuscript on file, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>59</sup>Quoted in Replier, *To Think of Tea!*, pp. 99–100.

<sup>60</sup>Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in *Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Cary Carson, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, forthcoming 1993), Table 1 A-F.

<sup>61</sup>Garry Wheeler Stone, "Artifacts are Not Enough," *The Conference on Historic Sites Archaeology Papers 1976* 11: 43–63.

<sup>62</sup>Carole Shammass, "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," *Journal of Social History* 14 (Fall 1980): 14.

Evidence can be culled from other sources as well. The equipment to brew and serve tea, as well as differing varieties of the tea itself, were commonly stocked at retail stores in the second half of the eighteenth-century. No "well-sorted" store in Virginia or Maryland, for example, would have been complete without a varied selection of tea cups and saucers, ranging from expensive porcelain to affordable white salt glazed stoneware. As the majority of the wealthy elite purchased their goods from their own agents in England, the presence of these objects suggests a strong consumer demand among the middling ranks of society.<sup>63</sup>

The drinking of tea was thought to be so important to colonists that a loyal Philadelphia merchant could write the East India Company in 1773 and estimate a large colonial market. Although few of "the common people" in North Briton or Ireland drank tea, he claimed, this was not the case in America, where the majority's prosperous ownership of their own land enabled them "to come at this piece of luxury," even if only on occasion. He guessed that a million people in the colonies regularly drank tea twice a day—a full one third of the population.<sup>64</sup> Samuel Wharton, another merchant, was less conservative. He estimated that year that "at least two Millions of the Americans drink Tea Daily, and they yearly consume, not less, than five Million pounds of that Article."<sup>65</sup> Using his estimates, nearly every person in the colonies would have had to purchase two and a half pounds of tea

---

<sup>63</sup>Based on invoices and inventories of over two dozen Virginia and Maryland stores. For a further description of the role of tea and teawares in Virginia and Maryland retail stores, see Ann Smart Martin, "To Supply the Real and Imaginary Necessities: The Retail Trade in Table and Teawares, Virginia and Maryland c. 1750-1800," (Report submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities, April 30, 1988; manuscript on file, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

<sup>64</sup>Letter from Gilbert Barkly to the...Court of Directors of the East India Company, May 26, 1773. Tea Leaves: Being a Collection of Letters and Documents Relating to the Shipment of Tea..., ed. Francis Drake, (Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1970), p. 200.

<sup>65</sup>Samuel Wharton, "Observations Upon the Consumption of Teas in North America, 1773," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 25 (1901): 140.

annually. While it would be impossible to quantify their estimates, it is possible to say that the median purchase in a Williamsburg store just after the war was over two pounds of tea.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, no discussion of the meaning of tea in the eighteenth-century colonies is complete without its political context. Nineteen-year-old Jemima Condict, daughter of a small farmer in New Jersey, looked out with fear in 1774. She saw "troublesome times a Coming for there is great Disturbance a Broad in the earth," and was puzzled at the political uproar for "they say it is tea that caused it." It was a worrisome thought for "if they will Quarrel about such a trifling thing as that What must we expect But war." She added tentatively, "I think or at least fear it will be so."<sup>67</sup>

The fear and confusion that Jemima confided in her diary is obvious. How could war be caused by "such a trifling thing" as tea? Perhaps many like her reduced the larger issues of the relationship between Parliament and the colonies to the singularly tangible dispute over a three-penny tax on tea. A Scottish indentured servant had written to his wife from Virginia just a few months earlier, noting "that as for tea there is none drunk by any in this Government since 1st June last nor will they buy a 2d. worth of any kind of east Indian goods, which is owing the difference at present betwixt the Parliment of great Brittan and the North Americans about laying a tax on the tea." He too feared that "if the Parliment do not give it over it will cause a total revolt as all North Americans are determined to stand by one another, and resolute on it that they will not submit."<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup>This would of course represent the consumption of a sample of households, not individuals. Jeanne Ellen Whitney, "Clues to a Community: Transactions at the Anderson-Low Store, 1784-1785," (M.A. thesis, Department of History, College of William and Mary, 1983), p. 46.

<sup>67</sup>June Sprigg, Domestic Beings (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 91.

<sup>68</sup>Edward Miles Riley, ed., The Journal of John Harrower: An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, 1963), p. 56.

The actions of Parliament and the ensuing reactions of the colonists in the decade leading to the Revolution can be found in any history textbook.<sup>69</sup> The English had excluded all other teas from the empire but that of her own East India Company, as well as charging substantial duties since the 1660s. This trade control was, of course, but part of a larger mercantilist policy which measured the nation's economic health by the size of the king's coffers. The Indemnity Act of 1767 had launched a five year experiment to cut the inland duty on tea and allow a full drawback on the substantial import duties into the North American colonies. This revenue change was an attempt to shore up the flagging profits of the East India Company by allowing their teas to compete with the cheaper smuggled tea pouring in from Holland. The Townsend Duties were merely one way to recoup some of the revenue lost from the drawbacks, and to replace the duty collected in England with a smaller one collected in the colonies. When numerous pressures—including the colonial boycott on British goods—forced the repeal of the Townsend duties in 1770, only a tax on tea remained, which some colonists, like the New York Sons of Liberty, understood "as a test of the parliamentary right to tax us."<sup>70</sup> Once the Association was broken, however, many who had taken care to observe its strictures quickly resumed buying tea.

It was the Tea Act of 1773, however, that was the catalyst of the furor in Boston Harbor. Seventeen million pounds of tea lay in British warehouses and Lord North devised a clever plan to aid the financially-strapped company. The Indemnity Act had expired and the old British duties were again payable. Under the Tea Act of 1773 the government would

---

<sup>69</sup>See, for instance, George Brown Tindall, America: A Narrative History 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1988), pp. 190–206.

<sup>70</sup>"The Association and Resolves of the New York Sons of Liberty, December 15, 1773," printed in Colonies to Nation, 1763–1789: A Documentary History of the American Revolution, ed. Jack P. Greene, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975), pp. 198–199. While the literature is, of course, immense, for a larger background of the pertinent legislation, see John W. Tyler, Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986).

refund the British duty of twelve pence a pound and collect just the standing three pence tax in the colonies. The East India Company, in return, was granted a monopoly on the colonial trade, bypassing traditional private wholesalers. While the essential result was cheaper tea, to the inflamed patriots this was naught but bribery, trickery, and an attempt to usurp traditional trade channels. Public associations were formed to prevent the tea's landing, for if the British "succeed in the sale of that tea, we shall have no property that we can call our own, and then we may bid adieu to American liberty."<sup>71</sup> In this way, the ceremonial symbolism of the dumping of tea from the East India Company by the charading Indians fired the imagination of many colonists chafing with both perceived and real English restrictions. While the Boston Tea Party was the most famous incident, tea was destined to the bottom of other harbors in the following year. For instance, the inflamed public of Annapolis had little difficulty in turning to mob action when tea was imported by a local merchant and the duties paid by the ship owner. The ship Peggy Stewart and its cargo of tea was burned and destined to the bottom of the Chesapeake in October of 1774.<sup>72</sup> Only a month later a Williamsburg merchant was called to wrath for his claimed failure in "countermanding the Order" for tea, and his two half-chests were relegated to the murky waters of the York River.<sup>73</sup> Some would later say—as did Huxley—that Great Britain "lost an Empire to oblige the East India Company."<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup>"The Association and Resolves of the New York Sons of Liberty," pp. 198-199.

<sup>72</sup>The English Customs Officer describes the burning of the Peggy Stewart and defends the actions of the ship owners in William Eddis, Letters from America (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1969), pp. 90-98. The Annapolis merchant Joshua Johnson in London was suspicious of the shipment and wrote warning of its contents and "urging a proper punishment." Jacob Price, ed. Joshua Johnson's Letterbook, 1771-1774: Letters from a Merchant in London to his Partners in Maryland (London: London Record Society, 1979), p. 154.

<sup>73</sup>Goodwin, The Colonial Store, pp. 258-262.

<sup>74</sup>Quoted in Hillier, Pottery and Porcelain, 1700-1914, p. 79.

The American Revolution can only be understood as the result of long-term political, social, and economic changes leading to a quickening pace of grievances. So, too, must the assimilation of tea in American society be assessed as a century-long process with a rapid take-off point before reaching its resting places in the bottom of colonial waters. That progression is all the more dramatic because the colonists were willing to risk war for a product that was barely known to the western world only a century before.

How could a simple dried leaf carry such a complex and ever-changing bundle of meanings? By the end of the eighteenth century, tea could be subsistence or luxury, civilization or degeneration, health or dissipation, patriotism or rebellion—all depending on the timing, participant, and observer. It could be the rationale for large social gatherings among the elite and well-bred, leisurely sipped with dainty confections before dancing or card-playing. It could also be the backbone of a hot meal for the poor, hastily gulped with bread and butter before rushing back to work in the fields. The formal code of behavior in its drinking and serving could separate out the untutored—or bond together strangers—with only a moment's observation. Tea carried the exotic world of the eighteenth-century Far East into the homes of the western world, for through their painted tea-cups they could travel to the Orient gazing at "courtly Mandarins" or a delicate Chinese woman "stepping into a little fairy boat, moored on this side of a calm garden river."<sup>75</sup> It bound the far-flung edges of the British Empire and would tear them apart. Somehow tea could soar to so many levels of meaning, but be contained in a canister on a shelf. What is most impressive about the drinking of tea then was its very flexibility and mutability depending on time, place, and company.

---

<sup>75</sup>The fascination of Charles Lamb (1775-1834) with the Chinese figures and landscapes is the theme of his delightful essay, "Old China," in *A Book of English Essays*, ed. W.E. Williams (New York: Penguin English Library, 1980), pp. 92-100. For a theoretical foundation to observations that economic transactions and the resulting consumer goods created cultural links, see Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Toward an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

### Tea and Bedford County

We would expect from our understanding of tea's multiple pleasures and uses that Bedford County residents would be no different than the rest of Anglo-America in its enjoyment. Their probate records, however, demonstrate how few who died just before the American revolution had appropriate equipment for its serving. Nor did local residents seem anxious to purchase tea and its equipment for drinking. Surprisingly few of Hook's customers did so, even though the ceramic items needed for the serving of tea were relatively inexpensive. For example, the wealthy widow Mrs. George Callaway purchased a teapot in 1772. Her choice cost less than a pewter dish or Hook's best quality shoe buckles. But it was far cheaper than the four yards of fabric necessary for a fine linen shirt, or a similar amount of osnaburg for a slave shirt, excluding the cost of thread, buttons, or labor. It would seem that teawares would be a good value among manufactured goods in terms of a power investment. Still, why so few takers among the customers at Hook's store?

One key is to consider these elite behaviors in both "start-up" and long-term cost. The relative expense of teawares was only a fraction of the true cost of drinking tea. Despite the fact that its price dropped sharply in the eighteenth century, a pound of tea still cost more than four times the same amount of refined sugar or coffee, both luxuries in their own right. A customer at Hook's store would have had to trade fifteen pounds of butter or forty-seven pounds of fresh beef to obtain a pound of the cheapest (bohea) tea. Adding in a full equipage of teawares, including silver tea spoons, and a tea table, as well as servants, food, and the leisure for such hospitality raises the cost quite high. Put another way, Mrs. Callaway could replace her printed teapot twice or buy a dozen porcelain cups and saucers for the cost of her pound of the cheapest tea.

From another perspective, there was a wide range of teas available of which bohea was by far the cheapest. In a British wholesalers list of 1791, the cost of a pound of tea



could range from ten pence to ten shillings.<sup>76</sup> A pound of tea sold at John Hook's store in the fall of 1771 varied slightly in price for different customers, but overall bohea tea was sold at about six shillings a pound and green tea at twelve shillings a pound.<sup>77</sup> A pound of coffee, on the other hand, could be had for much less: the most common cost was one shilling and eight pence. Even chocolate was most commonly sold by the pound at two and a half shillings.

At first view, then, coffee seems a much cheaper alternative and could account for its popularity among Bedford consumers. But more coffee is used to make a cup of the brew than tea; in modern terms, tea could be made with about a third or a fourth of the infusion required for coffee.<sup>78</sup> Thus, once again, tea cost more initially, but less in the long run. Twelve pounds of tea were purchased by fifteen customers in the fall of 1771 at John Hook's store, with an average purchase of about three-quarters of a pound. Coffee was chosen more frequently and in larger quantities; twenty-one customers bought 38.5 pounds, averaging 1.8 pounds. Chocolate was also bought, but with less frequency; only five purchases were made, each in one-pound units. While these groceries were purchased by all economic groups, the wealthy and upper middling groups were more likely to purchase tea than any other group. Indeed, as discussed in the last chapter, the purchase of these kinds of groceries seemed to be

---

<sup>76</sup>Waltham Fenton Account Book, Additional manuscripts, 36,666. British Library.

<sup>77</sup>Major William Mead's tea was probably sold on a first cost arrangement as he only paid three shillings and nine pence per pound.

<sup>78</sup>Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*, p. 83. Such an assumption may not be valid and it is not possible to create a contemporary estimate. A few clues are available. An early nineteenth-century cookery manual included instructions for making coffee and chocolate but none for tea under a chapter of cooking for the sick. The anonymous author recommended putting two ounces of coffee in the pot for every eight ounces of water or "if for foreigners, or those who like it extremely strong" use three ounces of coffee for similar water levels. *American Domestic Cookery, formed on Principles of Economy, for the Use of Private Families* (Baltimore: Fielding Lewis, 1819), p. 303. One Frenchman agreed that American coffee was extremely weak, and suggested that four American cups were not as strong as one French one. On the other hand, he thought that tea was very strong. *The Journal of Claude Blanchard, 1780-1783*, p. 78.

one breakpoint in the expenditure patterns between the upper middling and lower rungs of society.

How often was tea purchased? Taking a longer view, twenty-two different customers purchased tea between the end of September 1771 and the middle of April 1772. Only Major William Mead, the wealthy planter, made multiple purchases, suggesting that, for many customers, either a pound or half pound of tea lasted eight months or they used multiple suppliers. Some purchased both kinds at once, suggesting either a hierarchy of usage (breakfast/evening, family/social) or perhaps blending the varieties as many contemporary English shops would have done. If the wealthy are the most well-represented in this group, a broad economic cross-section seemed to have participated.

But no one in this eight months purchased teawares for its drinking, although tea kettles were purchased, suggesting its preparation. Hook certainly had teawares for sale; three sizes of transfer-printed tea pots, ten sets of painted creamware cups and saucers, and matching cream jugs and sugar dishes. He even had porcelain bowls, cups and saucers direct from the chinamen Akerman and Scrivener in London and silver tea spoons. However, he carried a much smaller quantity and range than many of his peers to the east. William Allason at the fall line at Falmouth, for one, stocked three grades of tea, adding the more expensive hyson tea, almost doubling again the price of Hook's most expensive variety. Allason carried 106 dozen creamware cups and saucers compared to Hook's initial shipment of ten sets, and added glass milk pots, round china plates to match his china cups and saucers, even "tea or chamber bells." While those were more upscale items, Allason's shop inventory in the fall of 1771 also included inexpensive white stoneware milk pots. This wide range of prices was seen in Allason's stock of cups and saucers, as well, he carried five grades of porcelain in 1763, costing two to four times that of the least expensive tin-glazed ones.

Other urban or eastern Chesapeake stores stocked an even greater range of tea items. Wallace, Davidson, and Johnson of Annapolis, for instance, ordered eight different kinds of tea and coffee cups in their first shipment for their new store in 1771, and thirteen more varieties a year later. Their prices ranged from five pence for a dozen small white stoneware cups to eight shillings for the same number of enameled and colored porcelain ones; the top was priced at nineteen times that of the least expensive. Each shipment was also to include complete tea sets, one a "very genteel purple sprigged and penciled Tea Table Sett" with twelve coffee cups to the set, to be bought at a price not to exceed three pounds and ten pence.

The study of the sale of teawares at a number of different stores gives a broader overview for the demand for teawares. First, while some merchants were eager to follow the boycott on tea, there seemed to be no flagging of interest in tea wares; if anything, the volume of sales increased in the early 1770s. William Allason would only sell six dozen delftware cups and saucers in 1764, but his customers purchased nearly a hundred dozen creamware ones when they were put on sale in 1770. Second, teawares were offered in a wide range of prices; a few quite inexpensive cups and saucers, a large number of varying costs at a middling range, and a few that might cost a week's wages of a common laborer or the equivalent of the eight-volume History of England.<sup>79</sup> Finally, while porcelain teawares were for sale in most Virginia stores by the 1770s, William Allason's customers seemed to balk at their purchase, while the patrons at other stores bought a broad range at a variety of prices.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup>"Invoice of Books bought by James Knox, Bookseller, Glasgow, May 31, 1771." William Allason Invoice and Inventory Book, Allason papers, Virginia State Library.

<sup>80</sup>This discussion and detailed information found in Ann Smart Martin, "To Supply the Real and Imaginary Necessities."

Perhaps then one part of that reluctance to buy teawares on the part of Bedford County consumers might lie just the availability of goods for sale at Hook's store. In the spring of 1772, Hook received enamel-painted creamware and blue-and-white porcelain breakfast cups and saucers, but he did not stock the most inexpensive makes of cups and saucers, either plain creamware or the more old-fashioned white salt glazed stoneware or tin-glazed earthenware ones. Even his porcelain cups and saucers were high cost wares within the range of porcelain items available at other Virginia and Maryland stores. The two choices available at John Hook's store were relatively more expensive than those stocked elsewhere. That is, Hook did not provide an easy step-up for poorer consumers to buy cheap teawares. Was this a result of his partner's oversight or did Hook see something in his market to pitch his wares at a middling rung? Here is the conundrum; did Hook stock fewer teawares because he knew no one would buy them, or did the fact that there was less choice disenfranchise potential consumers?

This, of course, brings us back to the sticky subject of consumer desire. It is nearly impossible to discuss objects in their purely economic roles because values are so transient and culturally-variable. This could only be because artifacts are so laden with meaning and have so many roles to play in society. Once we know, however, that an individual has access to and the economic means for any particular product, this leads to our third and final question: Is it desirable?

Much of this chapter has been spent in attempting to delineate the many ways that tea was used in eighteenth-century Anglo-America and the multiple meanings it possessed. Thus, tea functioned as both class delineator and group solidifier. It had highly ritualized behavioral contexts and less formal, perhaps even consciously suspended ones. On the one hand, its meaning and uses were imitated by varying groups in the social hierarchy. On the other, its meaning was transformed by those below as a new item of diet knit into changing foodways.

It could be a morning stimulant to spur increased work among men, even as it could symbolize female slothfulness and bad housewifery. In December of 1773, its drinking became an explosive litmus test of political solidarity, at least in the Boston hotbed. All of these meanings affected the transmission of tea into the lives of average Virginians by the early 1770s.

We cannot sort out the exact reason that many Bedford residents seemed to reject tea. After all, some Bedford residents of varying economic means linked themselves to a broader cultural enjoyment of a new beverage. For some, like Colonel William Mead, Captain Thomas Madison, or Mrs. George Callaway, tea-drinking may indeed have been an attempt to replicate elite behaviors of Anglo-America. In contrast, some, like the ignorant Marylanders described by Daniel Drake in late eighteenth-century Kentucky, brewed tea in Dutch ovens; still others were rumored to have boiled it with their ham.<sup>81</sup> For some residents, tea and coffee may have been a morning stimulant, as suggested in Hook's order for larger size porcelain breakfast cups. For others, tea may have had intensive political connotations. But it is extraordinarily difficult to track such issues into the lives of ordinary Virginians. After all, it seems that Virginia merchants in the early 1770s continued to sell tea in quantity, and if a political hothead like William Mead purchased tea in 1771, the sentiment may not have been strong in Bedford County.

But another backcountry resident remembered his own ignorance in the use of tea, describing his first encounter with coffee and cups and saucers on a visit to relatives further east. He carefully explained his ignorance. True backwoods men thought tea only for people of quality, those who do not labor, or the sick. Tea cups were fine for women and children, he declared, but too delicate for men. Tea drinking was rejected as the symbol of the very

---

<sup>81</sup>Daniel Drake, *Pioneer Life in Kentucky, 1785-1800*, edit. Emmet Field Horine (New York: Henry Schuman, 1948), p. 206.

eastern society they chose to leave behind.<sup>82</sup> Just like the use of fighting—rather than gentility—to assert their own version of social prominence, Bedford County residents were not always passive receptors of cultural symbolism. They cast their own meanings, particular to their own needs and desires. Rejecting tea was a conscious choice, and but one way they reinforced their own cultural choice to move westward at all.

Returning to Hook's store, we can capture one example of how tea and teawares moved into people's lives in Bedford County. We cannot, of course, know the motivations of any one person, but can carefully build from historical evidence, inferences from contemporaries for whom motivations are more explicit, and careful historical imagination.<sup>83</sup>

#### A Teaware Transaction

On a crisp Thursday morning in early November 1773, Henry Brown stepped into John Hook's store. He was pleased; his crop was large and had brought a good price that year. The hundred acres of land he had bought on the south branch of Molly's Creek for £30 some seven years before had been a wise investment. He had no slaves, but a large family to help him; his son Henry did not own land, but did well enough helping out neighbors to have his own account at Hook's store, and his oldest daughter often accompanied him there to help him with his purchases. When he stepped into the dim light, his eyes blinked until the shelves and barrels came into focus. Paulsie Smelser was there; he had brought down two quarter-casks of wine in his wagon from Rocky Ridge, and had just bought a new felt hat for

---

<sup>82</sup>Joseph Doddridge, Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars (Pittsburgh, Pa: John S. Ritenour and William T. Lindsay, 1912), p. 88.

<sup>83</sup>The outlines of this scene are drawn from John Hook Daybook 1773, John Hook Papers. Captain Madison's order in John Hook Memorandum book. Information on Henry Brown from county public records. Deed, James French to Henry Brown, Deed Book 1, November 1766; Personal property list, Bedford County, Will of Henry Brown, January 9, 1796, Will Book 2, Bedford County.

himself. Brown teased Smelser about the hat, and waited while Hook examined the eight pounds of butter Lewis Franklin had brought in. Franklin was busy looking through a few necklaces on the counter before purchasing twelve strands of beads. Patrick Lockhart's hired man Jacob Price was there too; shifting back and forth in the corner, waiting for Hook to write up Lockhart's credit for six bushels corn.

Finally, Hook was free to hand down packages and dig in chests. Brown bought eighteen yards of bed ticking; his wife and daughters had been saving feathers for a new mattress for a year now. He went quickly down his list; he needed hats and checked handkerchiefs for each of his three boys, Henry, Daniel and Samuel. A silk bonnet was for his oldest daughter, Elizabeth. He also needed a new brass lock to replace the one that had broken at his house, and pins, thread, two dozen metal buttons, a shining new pair of buckles, and about a yard-and-a-half of duffle. The garter for his stockings was broken and he bought another. Household supplies were getting low; Hook measured out a bushel of salt and a pound of sugar. He needed more powder and shot for the hunting he would do this winter. He asked about knives and forks and Hook pulled out a selection, some with bone or stag handles.

Sunlight flashed across the counter as Hook's wife Betsy entered the store to buy a yard of lawn for an apron. They exchanged pleasantries and Mrs. Hook crossed to admire the knives and forks spread before them on the counter. She preferred the bone-handled ones, adding that they seemed most genteel. Henry felt uncomfortable with her suggestions; she was the daughter of a wealthy planter and lived in a fine house in town. Finally, he turned his eyes to the shelf piled high with crockery. With his new financial gain, he had promised his wife some new tea things so she could visit with his brother's new wife on dark winter afternoons. Blue-and-white porcelain gleamed next to yellow earthenware; each seemed so fragile compared to the sturdy pewter plates he used at home. Hook handed down

three different sized teapots—each of cream-colored "Queen's ware" that Hook told him was all the mode and printed with a black engraving. Henry sat the largest one on the counter. The merchant then placed a china teacup in his rough hands. It seemed so delicate and small, it made him feel awkward, and he handed it back quickly. Hook assured him that they were just like the ones he had sent up the country to Captain Thomas Madison. Mrs. Hook agreed that they were most handsome and that his wife would be pleased. Hook held his breath. The porcelain cups were expensive slow-sellers and he hoped to pass a few off.

Brown uneasily asked the price of the cups and saucers, and the shopkeeper studied the man gravely. Brown was a good customer and a good crop-master, one who should be encouraged with a low price to keep him away from competing stores. The customer was grave, too. He had promised a new teapot and cups and saucers, but he had not counted on the expense of china. He felt strangely torn: on the one hand, he felt guilty at the luxury of these purchases, yet on the other, he would be strangely proud that he could afford to buy his wife such fine things and others could see his prosperity. But he thought of the slave that he had been saving for; china cups were too expensive for him even on this day of good cheer, and he bought a dozen creamware ones. Hook, busily packing the purchases into some old straw, turned to him and asked if he needed any tea. He had no qualms about selling it, despite new taxation from England. These events were too far away to concern him. Henry Brown shook his head; they had a bit left over from a purchase many months ago. Packing his new purchases in the wagon, he sat off for home. He had spent over £6 in one afternoon.

We know so little about the life of Henry Brown and why he took home teawares that day. Only with the little flashes of light given us by documents can we conjecture the scene above. We know who came into the store that day and what they bought. We know the range of options that were available that day and what they cost. We know too that few Bedford County residents made similar choices. Of course, we can only conjecture the



motivations for Brown's purchase that day based on careful assessment of the words of others, describing social competition, pleasurable sociability, the stimulation of caffeine for vitality, cultural ideals about health, or even negative connotations about effimacy or luxury.

But one more scene beckons us because it captures the sense of motivations we are seeking. The merchant James Reid received a letter from Eliza Brent in 1790. She had a favor to ask. She had a "very poor and unfortunate friend," whom she had "many obligations to." Her friend's husband Thomas Burroughs was a tenant farmer in Facquier County who sold his wheat crop to Reid. If Burroughs should come into the store, the merchant should give him five pounds credit to buy "such things as shall most be necessary for his wife who is very infirm, such as Coffee, or tea and sugar etc. etc. as he may wish." Brent did not want to send money as she feared that it might not reach her friend. She wanted to keep this matter strictly secret and, to provide extra security, Reid was to quiz the man on his wife's maiden name. The correct answer was Mildred Dunford.<sup>84</sup>

Eliza Brent was reaching out across the miles to cement a bond of friendship and obligation by providing a gift of coffee, tea, and sugar to a poor and sick friend. Was the gift for health reasons, to provide a sense of luxury in the deprivations of poverty, or to re-evoked old shared feminine pleasures? We cannot be sure. We can say, however, that Eliza Brent carefully sought a safe mechanism for an exchange among women, even if two men—the husband and a merchant—were necessary for its completion. The gift was not of money, but of these particular commodities that carried immense symbolic meaning in the eighteenth century.

Knowledge of the meaning of that particular commodity was but one way that the colonies and England were linked into an Anglo-American empire. James Callaway's store in

---

<sup>84</sup>Eliza J. Brent, Richmond, to J. Reid, June 14, 1790. Correspondence of James Reid, Huie, Reid, and Company, Dumfries, Prince William County, 1790–1781. Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

New London carried an inexpensive book of songs, called Allan Ramsay's Tea-table Miscellany. The author in his preface to the twelfth edition in 1763 proudly claimed how popular his book had become, writing, "the general demand for the book by persons of all ranks, wherever our language is understood, is sure evidence of its being acceptable." He "kept out all smut and ribaldry" to make his collection palatable to a more respectable middling population and so that "the modest voice and ear of the fair figure meet with no affront." Further evidence of his book's popularity came from his "worthy friend Mr. Banneman" in America who wrote a bit of verse attesting to its popularity throughout the empire. "Not only do your lays [sic] o'er Britain flow/ Round all the globe your happy sonnets go/ Here thy soft verse made to a Scottish air/ And often sung by our Virginian fair." Popular ballads like Mary Gray and Mary Scot linked Virginian, Scotsman, and Englishmen into a common vocabulary, just as the title of a Tea-Table Miscellany was a shorthand that these are common little "luxuries" to be enjoyed by all.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup>Allan Ramsay, Tea-table Miscellany: or, a Collection of Choice Songs, Scots and English, (London: A. Miller, 1763).

## CONCLUSION

The business of John Hook has been carefully reconstructed. This is one part of the context of consumerism; a number of manufactured or processed goods moved from producer to consumer via a number of middle men—and sometimes women—in England and the colonies. Through the well-documented business life of one man, it is possible to draw a careful portrait of a single merchant, casting his business circumstances against those of his local competitors, partners, and all those linked in an empire of goods.

John Hook does not "represent" any typical merchant. Through the copious records he left behind, we see a contentious man that pursued his debts with zeal and bore grudges against those he perceived had done him wrong. His quarrelsome personality would ultimately cast him before a committee of his former customers and friends in the emotional heat of Revolutionary sentiments. This experience did not change his ways; he fought David Ross for decades over bookkeeping disagreements, stubbornly refusing to submit to court orders to produce company books even after his property was seized for contempt of court. He even specifically instructed in his will that the suit not be stopped after his death. He was stubborn even from the grave.

Hook came to Virginia from Scotland as a thirteen-year-old indentured clerk. He died a half-century later a successful man, owning at least four working plantations, thousands of acres in four counties and Kentucky, as well as seventy-nine slaves. He had married into a wealthy county family, and further linked himself to local society by the marriage of his

daughters. The size of his house alone placed him in the upper echelon of Virginia wealth. Yet, portraits of "George the Third and his Queen" continued to hang in his home, surely a symbolic tweak of the nose for all to see.<sup>1</sup>

For Hook, commodities were only a means to a larger goal: the accumulation of a personal fortune. He understood the power of goods to attract and to keep customers. Yet like his customers, he filled his home with furnishings that marked his wealth and provided his comfort, including mirrors, china, tea boards, and curtains. By the time of Hook's death in 1808, these were common items in the lives of many Virginians of far less economic means. Yet a century before those objects would have been remarkable in any Virginia house. That change is the story of the world of goods in eighteenth-century Virginia.

The eighteenth century was a time of remarkable social and economic change as more and more ordinary people were able to achieve greater material well-being through better housing and more household goods for comfort, convenience, even luxury. This has been dubbed the "consumer revolution" of the eighteenth century by Neil McKendrick, J. H. Plumb and John Brewer, who argue that the urge to advance socially was manipulated by a new breed of marketers leading to an explosion in consumer demand.<sup>2</sup> But a loud argument continues among historians and economists about how and when such changes occurred, and who they might have affected. Critical assessment of the work of McKendrick and his co-authors have discredited social emulation as the sole explanatory tool and revealed how little

---

<sup>1</sup>For Hook's problems with county committee, see his notes of June 1775, November 1776, and January 18, 1777? found in John Hook Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C. Will of John Hook, March 29, 1808. Inventory, January 2, 1809. Franklin County Will Book 1, 1786-1812. Land inventory in Ross v. Hook, Circuit Court of Virginia, Loose Hook Papers.

<sup>2</sup>Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, The Birth of Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

proof was actually offered that such consumerism may have actually spread down the social scale.

How do we explain increasing consumerism? In the century between about 1650 and 1750, there was at least moderate prosperity in England and America. Many were able to spend more money as wages rose slightly and prices for many foods and goods dropped significantly. The story is not all optimistic. Some in rural England were pushed off the land to face erratic day labor wages; in Virginia, many were denied access to land by speculation and rising prices. Economic gains may have disappeared after mid-century as wages did not keep up with prices.

The latest studies have also shown, however, that despite the increasing number of consumer goods in many households, the percentage of income spent on those items did not rise.<sup>3</sup> What changed was the kind of things chosen to consume. The new question must then be, why did so many want the new and fashionable? The answer must come from a broad study of Anglo-American culture. Changing values were an important catalyst in any new consumerism. In an increasingly urban—even urbane—English society, new relations emerged among the elite that valued precise modes of behavior centering around control of body, temperament, and social association. These new rules of conduct had their genesis in courtly society, and were the results of long-term changes in how a man was to be measured. For instance, if seventeenth-century society valued the ancient family hall as a symbol of long-standing family prestige, eighteenth-century society lionized the smart London home with the most up-to-date furnishings and fittings. Cultural capital became to be more and more important, for being in fashion meant being in an information—and hence power—position, and having taste meant developing skills of connoisseurship in art, furnishings, and architecture. When a man's worth was measured in his manners, fashion,

---

<sup>3</sup>For instance, see Carole Shammas, "Explaining Past Changes in Consumption and Consumer Behavior," *Historical Methods* 22 (Spring 1989).

and taste, the sense grew that the world was a stage and the audience was watching. Fashion and gentility gained power because they were one part of carefully managing the impressions of others.

The increasingly comfortable and confident middling ranks were another important force for change. Neither given to the sins of luxury of the rich nor the desperation of poverty among the poor, the mantle of morality was slowly moving to the large middle ground. Not yet coalesced into any cohesive group of occupations and drawing from a broad range of wealth, they were increasingly bound by a simple sense of how one should live and behave. It was not just a wish to live like the rich that was the engine behind changing lifestyles of the middling ranks; these households were not engaged in a foot-race with the elite, but with each other. Indeed, we might envision multiple races, with a few able to catch up to the slowest in the race above them, but most intently looked at the runners around them.

It is that new concern for an appropriate standard of living that attracts our attention. There were two fears. First, was the anxiety over demonstrating one's ignorance of new roles—if they were understood at all—for eighteenth-century literature and prints were quick to satirize the upstart climbers who didn't quite know how to act. The second dread was of luxury's corrupting power. The warnings were ominous, also played out in contemporary novels, plays, and advice literature. Once living above one's station began, there was an inevitable progression to financial ruin. Both rose from a Protestant tradition which endorsed the inherent honor of work and calling, that valued frugality and industry, and decried materialism.

If new desires arose from changing social relations, other important structural changes had to be in place for those wishes to be fulfilled. A regular system of distribution was necessary to link producer and consumer, and into those niches scurried a host of middle men

to provide goods from one end of the empire to the other. But we cannot say that stores arose because of heightened demand, for increased demand may also have come from better access to goods. Better access was the result of more efficient manufacturing, transportation, and the decline in ideals of controlled selling for the public good or a set "just price." But more efficient manufacturing may have come from heightened demand. We are back to our original knot.

The result of the increased number of retail outlets is clear: more and more people could see and touch new things and, equally important, imagine their ownership. The merchant stood ready with fashion information and a smooth salesman's tongue. Other knowledge about the latest mode or current trends was also increasingly available through provincial and colonial newspapers, and the tighter distribution network meant that the latest goods could quickly move to the edges of the empire. As a common vocabulary of goods began to unite the empire, the role of objects as symbols became an important denominator for group solidarity and differentiation. Symbols of status, for instance, only work when they are recognized. As John Adams explained, it was not the object itself that caused the desire, but the respect it brought to its owner. It was the attention, the talk of the neighbors, and the sense that one deserved things as good as one's equal that drove consumption. It was the fusion of man's basic wish to be admired with new objects of admiration.<sup>4</sup>

The role of the retail trade in providing these material objects is absolutely crucial to changes in consumerism. What is most remarkable is how effectively this system worked, even moving goods to far-away places like Virginia. Still, to succeed as a Chesapeake merchant was not an easy task. An appropriate place of business was required with a concentrated circle of planters of at least middling means. A store had to be "well-sorted" to survive, and "well-sorted" meant having on hand at all times the necessities for Virginia

---

<sup>4</sup>John Adams, The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, vol. 6. (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), p. 74.

life—such as cheap linen, nails, rum, and other common commodities—as well as more fashionable and expensive goods to keep their customers from going to another store. The goods must be appropriately priced, and that price varied by method of payment, length of credit, the perceived demand for the good itself or even the worthiness of the customer. The merchant's judgment in the extension of credit was also paramount. The problem was a need to extend liberal credit to gain the tobacco necessary to fill the company's ships, but not to those who might not pay.

Turning to the end of that long chain of distribution to consumers on the edge of the colonial empire, it is possible to examine precisely how goods functioned in the tobacco trade. A close examination of one merchant, John Hook on the western piedmont or backcountry of Virginia, has shown how intensely competitive the store trade had become by the time of the American Revolution. Hook not only had to jostle with other local merchants to attract and keep customers, but to compete with larger stores or parts of chains in towns at the fall line to the east. For the richest local residents, options for consumption exploded. They could order from England, were likely to travel to larger retail entrepôts like Williamsburg, even to have goods delivered to their plantations by merchants ever anxious to sell their tobacco. But the less wealthy were more constrained; most had to enter into relationships with a single merchant to gain credit to buy goods in exchange for their commodities like tobacco, hemp, and corn.

John Hook's records demonstrate how absolutely central a store was in integrating a local economy into the larger market, as butter, poultry, chairs, raccoon hats, home-made textiles, even cotton served as payment for manufactured and processed goods. Hook also served as local banker by lending cash and as bill collector when customers reimbursed one another through store credits or even objects themselves. Even numerous personal services were exchanged, seldom seen in the documentary record but captured as payments for day



labor and sewing. Indeed, these records demonstrate how anxious Virginia residents were to exchange locally produced goods for manufactured ones, such as Virginia linen for more colorful, better quality, printed fabrics.

While the most common items sold were necessities, it was the quality, variety and fashionability of the items stocked at Hook's store that brought him those customers. Indeed, John Hook was convinced that the success of his business in Bedford County was absolutely dependent on the rapid and exacting fulfillment of his orders and good judgment in the choice of goods—colors, patterns and fashions were essential even to his backcountry customers. In his store was thus found a world of color and novelty; teacups and feathers, silk bonnets and broadcloth suits, novels and backgammon boards.

Who bought these goods? Most of Hook's customers were indeed from the middling and poorer rungs of Virginia society. Most of their purchases were implements necessary for the activities of daily life, such as agriculture, hunting, and building. Probably the most frequent purchase was rum. The wealthiest group of customers used the store to pick up groceries and other items that needed frequent replacement and probably used other strategies to make major purchases. Some in the upper middling group participated in the more gentrified pleasure of tea-drinking, even as their less wealthy neighbors continued to frame their consumption around the social bonding of alcohol. Those in the upper middling group also purchased small items of smart dress, and more expensive decorative versions of utilitarian items like handkerchiefs. Most importantly, even those who historians have traditionally thought disfranchised from the market economy—the poor, slaves, and women—participated in this new consumerism by weaving fabric or raising chickens to exchange for small items of fashion.

The kinds of goods for sale at Hook's store are all the more amazing when the material world of his customers is considered. These small consumer goods moved into

poorly-furnished log houses——many no more than four hundred square feet——and into a society that still valued rough-and-tumble fighting as a mark of backwoods skill. Thus a number of paradoxes emerge as we try to understand that local culture. Bedford County customers were grappling with a number of sweeping new changes emerging from London; they had to make numerous consumer choices to integrate themselves into the new value system encoded in behavior and in the world of goods. What emerges from this study is a world that is perhaps captured on the cusp of change from frontier conditions to well-ordered society. In a society that was still extraordinarily mobile, many of the new consumer goods were easily transportable. Durability was also valued. Many consumers chose less fragile goods, such as tinware or pewter, over ceramic or glass. There were other choices. The Bedford population made the first steps toward more refined dining by purchasing appropriate utensils and vessels. Yet their probate record shows a group that lagged behind eastern society in the consumption of tea. This time the locals overcame general Anglo-American trends; Bedford County residents may have rejected tea as the symbol of the very eastern society they chose to leave behind.

One more paradox remains. If we define a world of goods that tightly bound the colonies to Britain in 1771, how can we explain the absolute rejection of that empire only five years later? Part of the answer lies in those very goods themselves. Traditional explanations argue that the consumer urges of Virginia planters led to exorbitant debts to merchants in Virginia and Britain. We know too that the non-importation movement emerged in an attempt to forcefully demonstrate the importance of that export trade to the British economy. But it was the inversion of symbolism of the goods themselves that provided an important mechanism for such resistance by a reworking of notions of what were "better" goods.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>These ideas are more fully explored in T. H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988): 93-104.

The transformation of lowly home-spun cloth from a coarse product to a cherished one is nowhere clearer than the report that Robert Wormely Carter's suit of slave-made homespun clothes was the envy of Williamsburg and that another associator even offered to trade a suit of silk for the Virginia product.<sup>6</sup> It is in this way we can understand the call to women in the Virginia Gazette in 1774 from Anne Terrell of Bedford County to "lay aside our visits and fashions, and earnestly attend our carding, spinning, and weaving, and brown our fair arms in the bleach yards, and instead of the fine gegaws of Great Britain wear linen of our own making." Thus, they could prove that "Virginia women could dress with gentility without any of the British manufactories."<sup>7</sup> It is the same way we can understand a new rejection of tea as a very symbol of the empire they wished to leave behind.

But it was ultimately the joining of two larger intellectual themes about the corrupting power of luxury that helped lend a political legitimacy to that struggle. Luxury spending had reached its natural conclusion in England for the lavish spending of the people had led to corruption on a national scale and there could now be seen the terrible lessons from antiquity; "empires...proceed from virtuous industry and valour, to wealth and conquest, next to luxury, then to foul corruption and bloated morals; and, last of all to sloth, anarchy, slavery and political death."<sup>8</sup>

Alerted to the decay of Britain, Virginians examined their own moral fiber and found it frayed and tattered. Overweening pride and luxury had compelled them "to seek after and

---

<sup>6</sup>Cited in Bruce Allan Ragsdale, "Nonimportation and the Search for Economic Independence in Virginia, 1765-1775," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1985), p. 137.

<sup>7</sup>Virginia Gazette, Purdie, March 31, 1775.

<sup>8</sup>"Oration of William Moore Smith of Philadelphia College to Congress, May 23, 1775," Virginia Gazette, Pinckney, June 15, 1775. For the broad context of the notion of England's decline, see Gordon S. Wood, Creation of the American Republic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), and Drew McCoy The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

desire many articles which we do not really stand in Need of, and which we cannot afford."<sup>9</sup> But how could it be otherwise? Britain was a "Mad Shopkeeper, who should attempt, by beating those who pass by the Door, to make them come in and be her Customers."<sup>10</sup> But as Franklin warned the House of Commons, these consumer goods were "mere articles of fashion, purchased and consumed because the fashion in a respected country." When the country was no longer respected, fashions could be easily rejected and shackles thrown off."<sup>11</sup>

Once again it the notion that material objects were powerful symbols of respect and admiration. Objects matter because they are complex bundles of meaning fused into something that can be seen, touched, and owned. In the Revolutionary era, the rejection of British manufactures took on special significance; to be able to eschew one's government through consumer choice is a potent example of the meaning of things. It is the same symbolic power, fractured into multiple cultural, local and individual meanings, that had once led colonial Virginians to buy. That very protean quality is the reason that values can so quickly penetrate into and evaporate out of common objects and one reason that the empire of goods could so quickly be broken. Material culture does not just reflect culture, it is culture.

---

<sup>9</sup>Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, November 23, 1773.

<sup>10</sup>McCoy, Elusive Republic, p. 59.

<sup>11</sup>"The Examination of Doctor Benjamin Franklin, before an August Assembly, relating to the Repeal of the STAMP-ACT, &c" February 13, 1766, in The Papers of Benjamin Franklin 13, eds. Leonard W. Labaree, et al (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 143.

## Appendix A.

### Methods of Architectural Analysis of Stores

Table 1 was constructed of documentary references to eighteenth-century Virginia stores. The year listed in the table was the date of the store's building (if known) or its documentation. Interior dimensions are given if known.

Pagan store, Virginia Gazette, Hunter, October 11, 1751; Jameson; York County Deed Book 5, 1741-1754 and Allason, William Allason Ledger B, 1761-1762, both cited in Harold B. Gill, "The Retail Trade in Colonial Virginia," Manuscript on file, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Gordon & Allson, Virginia Gazette, Purdie & Dixon, January 1, 1767; Sussex, Virginia Gazette, Rind, March 23, 1769; Frazer, Virginia Gazette, Purdie & Dixon, February 14, 1771; Quarles, Virginia Gazette, Dixon & Hunter, December 26, 1777; Hook stores, Loose John Hook papers on microfilm, Perkins library, Duke University. Photostat at Virginia State Library; Peachy, Testimony of reparation of British burning, Journal of House of Delegates 1797 (Richmond: Augustine Davis, 1797), pp. 29-30; Trents, Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, December 5, 1771. Lloyd, in Lloyd vs Curston Protest. Tucker-Coleman Papers, Folder #67, Chancery Suits (St. George Tucker), January 27, 1785; Hart, "main road from Halifax to Petersburg," Virginia Gazette, Purdie, September 12, 1777.

Table 2 is drawn from Mary Goodwin, The Colonial Store. Research report on file, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, March 1966.

Table 3 comes from fieldwork conducted by the Department of Architectural Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Those that appeared to be

built after 1840 were not included in this sample. Drawings on file at the Department of Architectural Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. The John Hook store was measured by Carl Lounsbury, Meredith Moody, and the author in December of 1991 with the kind permission of its owner, Warren Moorman. My thanks to Carl Lounsbury and Vanessa Patrick for their assistance with department files.

## Appendix B.

### Statistical Methods for Store Purchase Analysis

The information from John Hook's ledger, September through December 1771, was recorded as 2965 transactions in which an individual consumer purchased one of 280 items, belonging to one of 22 categories of goods. Summing the amounts thus spent by 357 customers yielded totals spent on both particular items and categories of goods for any given individual. Adding the categorical expenditures yielded totals spent on all goods. Similar additions yielded the frequencies with which individuals purchased items and categories of items.

To this information was added the number of slaves and the value of land owned by any individual, drawn from contemporary documents (see below for sources). The number of slaves was derived from tax lists, and average slave value was drawn from contemporary deflated Bedford County inventories between 1765 to 1777. Adult male slaves averaged £61, adult women £65, boys £41 and girls £32. The overall average was £48. A land value variable was the land value recorded on tax lists multiplied by the number of acres. These two values, now representing wealth in comparable units of value, were added to create an overall measure for wealth.

Ultimately, the ledger information was reduced to 357 observations of individual purchasers, the total amounts they spent at Hook's store during the period analyzed, the total amounts expended on 280 individual items and 22 categories of goods, the frequencies of purchases of the same items and categories, plus the three wealth measures. Both the amounts expended on individual items and categorical expenditures, as well as the frequencies of purchases

of item and categorical purchases, were tested for linear association with each of the three wealth measures. The resulting 1,812 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficients ranged from -.10 to 0.75. Only 4.3% of the coefficients were calculated to be .20 or higher. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficients between the three wealth variables and total amounts expended at the Hook store during the months under study ranged from 0.03 to 0.04. Pending further analysis, then, the traditional measures of eighteenth-century wealth in the rural south--land and slaves--proved to be poor predictors of consumer behavior at the Hook store.

Documentary records used to reconstruct wealth included inventories in Bedford County Will book 1, 1763-1787, Deed Book 3, 1766-1771, land tax 1782 and personal property tax 1787, loose papers, Bedford County Court House, and a sample of determined causes, Virginia State Library. Other county records searched in depth included Campbell and Franklin Counties, which were split off from Bedford County in the 1780s. Personal property records throughout the state were also checked in published documents.

Finally, the number of slaves forming a cohesive unit of measure for wealth analysis was based on comparable units found in Table VII in Phillip Morgan and Michael L. Nicholls, "Slaves in Piedmont Virginia, 1720-1790," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, vol. 45 (April 1989): 211-251. The top two groups were collapsed due to the small number of customers.



## Bibliography

### Manuscript Sources

Allason, William. Papers, Business Records Collection, Virginia State Library, Richmond [hereafter cited as VSL].

Althorpe Papers, Misc. Household Notes, F 183, 186, British Library, London.

Baddeley, John. Sales book, 1753-1761. vol. 101. Aqualate Papers, Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford, England.

Bedford and Lynchburg History files, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia [hereafter cited as UVL].

Bedford County Court Determined Causes, VSL.

Bedford County Deed Book A, VSL.

Bedford County file, VSL.

Bedford County General Files, Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks, Richmond, Va.

Bedford County Loose papers. Bedford County Courthouse.

Bedford County Loose papers, VSL.

Bedford County Order Book 1, 1754-1761 and 3, 1763-1777, VSL.

Bedford County personal property and land tax lists, 1782-1787, VSL.

Bedford County Will Book 1, 1762-1787 and 2, 1787-1803. VSL.

Bragg, William. Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C. [hereafter cited as DU].

British Mercantile Claims, T79/81. Public Record Office, Microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation [hereafter cited as CWF].

Campbell County Will Book 1, 1782-1800, VSL.

- Campbell County personal property and land tax lists, 1782-1800, VSL.
- Donald, Dr. Peter. Account Book. Loose Papers, Bedford County Court House, Bedford, Va.
- Ennals, William. Memorandum Book, 1771-1774, Library of Congress.
- Fenton, Walthal. Order book 1773-1794. Additional manuscripts, 36,666. Manuscripts Division, British Library.
- Fitzhugh, Henry. Accounts and letterbook, DU.
- Fleming, Henry. Letterbook, 1772-1775, Cumbria County Council Archives Department. Microfilm, CWF.
- Flowers, Richard. Account Books, Ms. 625, University of London Library.
- Franklin County Will Book 1, 1786-1812. VSL.
- Franklin County Suit Papers, May, August 1789. VSL.
- Franklin County Personal Property and Land tax, 1782-1787. VSL.
- Gooch, William, to the Board of Trade, April 9, 1730. PRO CO 5/1322, ff. 147-148. Public Record Office, London.
- Henry County tax lists, 1785. Henry County Courthouse, Martinsville, VA.
- Hoe, Stone, and Company Invoice Book, 1770-1784. New York Public Library. Microfilm, CWF.
- Hook, John. Papers. DU.
- Hook, John. Letters. Brock Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.
- Hook, John. Letterbook, Business Records Collection, VSL.
- Hudson, Stephen. Shop Book, 1751 to 1759. West Yorkshire Record Office, Bradford, England.
- Jamieson, Neil. Papers, Library of Congress. Microfilm, CWF.
- Jefferson, Thomas. Papers, Series 4, Library of Congress. Microfilm, CWF.
- Jerdone, Francis. Account and Letterbook, 1739-1744, Manuscript Collection, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA [hereafter cited as WM].
- Jones, William. Papers, DU.

- Lawson, James-John Semple Accounts, Scottish Record Office, Currie-Dal Miscellaneous Bundle 20, Microfilm, CWF.
- Lee, William. Letterbook, 1769-1771. Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, Stratford Hall. Microfilm, CWF.
- Lewis, Thomas. Diary. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va. [hereafter cited as ViHS].
- Maude Carter Ciemons Collection, Box 2, Alderman Library, University of Virginia [hereafter cited as UVA].
- Middlesex County Will Book B: 1714-1734. VSL.
- "Minutes of the China Club, 1785-1788." Manuscript Department, Guildhall Library, London.
- Morriss Family Papers, #38-79, UVA.
- Morris Family Papers, ViHS.
- Norton, John. Papers, Research Library, CWF.
- "Petition to the Right Honorable the Lords Commissioners of his Majesty's Treasurer from the town of Reading," PRO T1 493/156. Public Record Office, Kew.
- Pocket Plantation Papers, UVA. Microfilmed in "Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations: From the Revolution to the Civil War," Series E: Part 1, Reels 11-13.
- Preston, William. Papers. ViHS.
- Read, Matthew and Hugh Johnson Ledger, 1761-1770. WM.
- Skipwith Papers, Account Book 2, 1775-1781. WM.
- Smith, Matthew. Letterbook, 1803-1812, vol. 1, Maryland Historical Society.
- Smith, William Patterson. Papers, DU.
- Snow Family Manuscripts, UVA.
- Taylor, Col. Francis. Diary, 1786-1799. VSL. Microfilm, CWF.
- Tucker-Coleman Collection. Uncatalogued MSS, fldr. 67, January 27, 1785, CWF.
- Watkins, Joel. Diary Journal, ViHS.
- York County Deeds, Orders, and Wills 6, 1677-1684, Microfilm, CWF.
- York County Order and Will Book 15, 1716-1720, Microfilm, CWF.

Published Primary Sources

- Adams, John. The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, vol. 6. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851.
- Adam, Robert and James Adam. The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam. Edited by Robert Oresko. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975.
- American Domestic Cookery, formed on Principles of Economy, for the Use of Private Families. Baltimore: Fielding Lewis, 1819.
- American Husbandry. Edited by H. J. Carman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939.
- Anburey, Thomas. Travels through the Interior Parts of America, vol. 2. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1923.
- "The Association and Resolves of the New York Sons of Liberty, December 15, 1773." Printed in Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789: A Documentary History of the American Revolution. Edited by Jack P. Greene, pp. 198-199. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975.
- "The Autobiography of the Reverend Devereux Jarrett, 1732-1763." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser. (1952): 346-352.
- Bayard, Ferdinand. Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia with a Description of Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1791. Translated and edited by Ben C. McCary. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edward Brothers, 1950.
- Beeman, Richard R., ed. "Trade and Travel in Post-Revolutionary Virginia: A Diary of an Itinerant Peddler, 1807-1808." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 84 (April 1976): 174-188.
- Billings, Warren. The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1608-1689. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
- Blamire, Susanna. "Stoklewath; or, The Cumbrian Village." In The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse. Edited by Roger Lonsdale, p. 645. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Boswell, James. Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D. New York: Literary Guild, Inc., 1936.
- Bridenbaugh, Carl, ed. Gentleman's Progress: the Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton in 1744. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948.
- Chevalier, Michael J. Society, Manners and Politics in the United States. Edited by John William Ward. 1836. Reprint. New York: Burt Franklin, 1969.

- Report of Christopher Clarke, June 24, 1801. T79/81. Reprinted in sequential issues of The Virginia Genealogist, beginning in 21 (April-June 1977) (2):97-102; (3):199-204; (4):262-268; 22 (1):23-28, (2):105-112.
- The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684-1776, vol. 1. Edited by Marion Tinling. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977.
- Defoe, Daniel. The Complete English Tradesman, London, 1727. Reprint. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969.
- Defoe, Daniel. Robinson Crusoe. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.
- de Chastellux, Francois Jean Marquis. Travels in North-America in Years 1780, 1781, and 1782. 2 vols. London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787.
- de Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, vol. 2. New York: Vintage Books, 1945.
- Devine, T. M., ed. A Scottish Firm in Virginia, 1767-1777. Edinburgh: Clark Constable, Ltd. for the Scottish History Society, 1982.
- "The Diary of M. Ambler, 1770." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 45 (April 1937): 158.
- The Distant Trader's Guide and Residents Local Directory for the Mercantile Town of Birmingham... Birmingham: T. Chapman for J. Smith, 1788.
- Doddridge, Joseph. Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars. Pittsburgh, Pa: John S. Ritenour and William T. Lindsay, 1912.
- Drake, Daniel. Pioneer Life in Kentucky, 1785-1800. Edited by Emmet Field Horine. New York: Henry Schuman, 1948.
- Eddis, William. Letters from America. Edited by Aubrey Land. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1969.
- Edwards, Morgan. Materials Towards A History of the Baptists, vol. 2. Edited by Eva Weeks and Mary B. Warren. Danielsville, Ga.: Heritage Papers, 1984.
- Fithian, Philip Vickers. Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774 2d ed. Edited by Hunter Dickinson Farish. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968.
- Franklin, Benjamin. "Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One." In J. A. Leo Lemay, Benjamin Franklin: Writings. New York: Library of America, 1987, pp. 320-322.
- . "Anthony Afterwit." The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 10, 1732. Reprinted in Benjamin Franklin: Writings. Edited by J. A. Leo Lemay, pp. 185-187. New York: Library of America, 1987.

- \_\_\_\_\_. The Autobiography and Other Writings. Edited by L. Jesse Lemisch. New York: New American Library, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Blackamore, on Molatto Gentlemen." Pennsylvania Gazette, August 30, 1733. Reprinted in Benjamin Franklin: Writings. Edited by J. A. Leo Lemay, pp. 218-220. New York: Library of America, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of Paper Money." In Benjamin Franklin: Writings. Edited by J. A. Leo Lemay, pp. 119-135. New York: Library of America, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Lying Shopkeepers." Pennsylvania Gazette, 1730. Reprinted in Benjamin Franklin: Writings. Edited by J. A. Leo Lemay, pp. 158-162. New York: Library of America, 1987.
- George Mercer Papers: Relating to the Ohio Company of Virginia. Edited by Lois Mulkearn, pp. 211-220. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1954.
- Goldsmith, Oliver. The Citizen of the World or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to his Friends in the East, 1762. Reprinted in Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield and Other Writings. Edited by Frederick W. Hilles, pp. 193-195. New York: Modern Library, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Vicar of Wakefield and Other Writings. Edited by Frederick W. Hilles. 1762. Reprint. New York: Modern Library, 1955.
- Grant, James. The Great Metropolis, vol. 1. London: Saunders and Otley, 1837.
- Greene, Evarts B., and Virginia D. Harrington. American Population before the Federal Census of 1790. New York: Columbia University Press, 1932.
- Greene, Jack P., ed. The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1773, 2 vols. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1765.
- Grey, Francis Calley. Thomas Jefferson in 1814: Being an Account of a Visit to Monticello, Virginia. Boston: Club of Odd Volumes, 1924.
- Hamilton, Thomas. Men and Manners in America. 1833. Reprint. New York: Augustus R. Kelley, 1968.
- Hanway, Jonas. A Journal of Eight Days Journey from Portsmouth to Kingston Upon Thames...To Which Is Added An Essay on Tea. London: H. Woodfall and C. Henderson, 1757.
- Hartwell, Henry, James Blair, and Edward Chilton. The Present State of Virginia, and the College. Edited by Hunter Dickinson Farish. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1940.
- Hatcher, William Eldridge. The Life of J. B. Jeter. Baltimore: H. M. Wharton, 1887.

- Hening, William Walter. The Statutes at Large: Being A Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session in the Legislature to 1823. Richmond: 1823.
- Hening's Statutes at Large, vol. 11. Facsimile reprint. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969.
- Honeyman, Robert. Colonial Panorama 1775: Dr. Robert Honeyman's Journal for March and April. Edited by Phillip Padelford. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.
- Jerdone, Francis, to Samuel Rickards, Israel Mauduit and Company, December 14, 1754, William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine 14 (January 1906): 141-145.
- Johnson, Samuel. A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words are Deduced from Their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers. 6th ed. London: J. F. and C. Rivington, 1785.
- Jones, Hugh. The Present State of Virginia. Edited by Richard L. Morton. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956.
- The Journal of John Harrower; An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia. Edited by Edward Miles Riley. Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1963.
- The Journal of Claude Blanchard, 1780-1783. Albany: J. Munsell, 1873.
- King, Charles. The British Merchant or Commerce Preserv'd, vol. 1. London, 1721. Reprint. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968.
- Knight, Sarah Kemble. "The Private Journal of a Journey from Boston to New York, in the Year 1704." In American Colonial Prose: John Smith to Thomas Jefferson. Edited by Mary Ann Radzinowicz, pp. 135-136. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Krzyzanowski, Lukwik. Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz' American Diary. New York: Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in America, 1961.
- Lamb, Charles. "Old China." In A Book of English Essays. Edited by W. E. Williams, pp. 92-100. New York: Penguin English Library, 1980.
- The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 13. Edited by Leonard W. Labaree, et al.. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959.
- The Laws of Etiquette or, Short Rules and Reflections for Conduct in Society. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1836.
- Lex Mercatoria Rediviva; Or, the Merchant's Directory being a Complete Guide to All Men in Business, Sixth edition, Dublin. Printed for James Williams, 1773 by Wyndham Beawes, Esq. Institute for Historical Studies, University of London.

- Mair, John. Book-keeping Methodiz'd: A Methodological Treatise of Merchant Accompts, According to the Italian Form. Edinburgh: Sands, Donaldson, Murray, and Cochrane, 1757.
- Mason, Frances Norton, ed. John Norton and Sons: Merchants of London and Virginia. Richmond: Dietz Press, 1937.
- Mandeville, Bernard. The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits. Edited by Douglas Garman. 1721. Reprint. London: Wishart and Company, 1934.
- Marryat, Captain Frederick. A Diary in America. Quoted in Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1969.
- Martin, Joseph. New and Comprehensive Gazeetter of Virginia. Charlottesville, Va., 1835.
- Moritz, Carl Phillip. Journeys of a German in England: A Walking Tour of England in 1782. Translated and edited by Reginald Nettel. London: Eland Books, 1983.
- Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger.
- Peacham, Henry. The Worth of a Penny: or A Caution to Keep Money. London, 1641. Reprint. In Social England Illustrated: A Collection of Seventeenth Century Tracts. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc. 1964.
- Pennsylvania Gazette.
- Price, Jacob M., ed. Joshua Johnson's Letterbook: Letters from a London Merchant to his Partners in Maryland. London: London Record Society, 1979.
- "Price Lists and Diary of Col. Fleming." Virginia Historical Magazine 5 (1897-1898): 263-4.
- Purefoy, Henry. Purefoy Letters: 1735-1753, vol. 2. Edited by G. Eland. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1931.
- Ramsay, Allan. Tea-table Miscellany: or, a Collection of Choice Songs, Scots and English. London: A. Miller, 1763.
- Riley, Edward Miles, ed. The Journal of John Harrower: An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia. Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg, 1963.
- Roberts, Robert. The House Servant's Directory. Boston, 1809. 1827. Fascimile reprint. Waltham, Mass.: Gore Place Society, 1977.
- Rochefoucault, Francois Alexandre Frederick. Travels through the United States of America in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797, vol. 2. London: R. Phillips, 1799.
- Rothstein, Natalie, ed. A Lady of Fashion: Barbara Johnson's Album of Styles and Fabrics. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987.



- Short, Thomas. Discourses on Tea, Sugar, Milk, Made-wines, Spirits, Punch, Tobacco &c: With Plain and Useful Rules for Gentry People. London: 1750.
- Smith, Adam. An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations. Edited by Edwin Cannan. New York: Random House, 1937.
- . The Theory of Moral Sentiments. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969.
- Smyth, J. F. D. A Tour in the United States of America, vol. 1. London, 1784. Reprint. New York: Arno Press, 1968.
- Southey, Robert. Letters from England. Edited by Jack Simmons. London, 1807. Reprint. London: Cresset Press, 1961.
- Turner, Thomas. The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754–1765. Edited by David Vaisey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Vallete, Elie. The Deputy Comissary's Guide within the Province of Maryland Together with Plain and Sufficient Directions for Testators to Form and Executors to Perform their Wills and Testaments; for Administrators to Compleat their Administrations and for every Person any way Concerned in Deceased Person's Estates, to Proceed therein with Safety to Themselves and Others. Annapolis: Ann Catherine Green and Son, 1774.
- Virginia Gazette.
- [Washington, George]. George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation. Edited by Charles Moore. Algernon Sydney Sullivan Committee, 1931.
- Wharton, Samuel. "Observations Upon the Consumption of Teas in North America, 1773." Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 25 (1901): 138-141.
- Yeoman and Colliers in Telford: Probate Inventories for Dawley, Lilleshall, Wellington and Wrockwardine, 1660–1750. Edited by Barrie Trinder and Jeff Cox. London: Phillimore, 1980.

Secondary Sources

- "Accounting for Taste: The Modest American." Economist, February 11, 1989.
- Adburgham, Alison. Shops and Shopping 1800-1914: Where, and in What Manner, the Well-Dressed English-Woman Bought her Clothes. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1964.
- Alexander, David. Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution. London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1970.
- Ames, Kenneth L. "Material Culture as NonVerbal Communication: A Historical Case Study." Journal of American Culture 3 (1980): 619-641.
- . "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America." In Material Culture Studies in America. Edited by Thomas J. Schlereth, pp. 206-221. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982.
- Annas, Alicia M. "The Elegant Art of Movement." In An Elegant Art: Fashion and Fantasy in the Eighteenth Century. Edited by Edward Maeder, pp. 35-60. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value." In The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective. Edited by Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Appleby, Joyce. "Value and Society." In Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era. Edited by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, pp. 290-316. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Atherton, Lewis. The Southern Country Store, 1800-1860. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1949.
- Bailyn, Bernard. The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.
- Barthes, Roland. The Fashion System. Translated by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard. 1967. Reprint. London: Johnathan Cape, 1985.
- Beeman, Richard R. The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry, a Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.
- . "The Intersection of Society and Politics in the Backcountry: A Comparative View." Paper presented at the conference, "Re-examining America's Frontier Heritage: The Eighteenth-Century Backcountry." Shenandoah University, October 1991.

- Belk, Russell W. "Generational Differences in the Meaning of Things, Products, and Activities." In Advertising and Consumer Psychology, vol. 3. Edited by Jerry Olson and Keith Sentis, pp. 199-214. New York: Praeger, 1986.
- . "Three Scales to Measure Constructs Related to Materialism: Reliability, Validity, and Relationships to Measures of Happiness." In Advances in Consumer Research, vol. 11. Edited by T. Kinnear, pp. 291-297. Provo, Utah: Association for Consumer Research, 1984.
- Bell, Quinton. On Human Finery. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1967.
- Bergstrom, Peter. "Markets and Merchants: Economic Diversification in Colonial Virginia, 1700-1775." Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1980.
- Binford, Lewis. "Archaeology as Anthropology." In Man's Imprint from the Past: Readings in the Methods of Archaeology. Edited by James Deetz, pp. 248-261. Boston: Little, Brown, 1971.
- Block, Carl E. and Kenneth J. Roering. Essentials of Consumer Behavior. Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1976.
- Blumer, Herbert. "Fashion." In International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 5. Edited by David Sills, pp. 341-344. New York: MacMillan Co. and Free Press, 1968.
- Blumin, Stuart. The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- . "The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals," American Historical Review 90 (April 1985): 299-338.
- Boorstin, Daniel J. The Americans: The Democratic Experience. New York: Viking Books, 1973.
- Borsay, Peter. "'All the Town's a Stage': Urban Ritual and Ceremony." In The Transformation in English Provincial Towns. Edited by Peter Clark, pp. 228-259. London: Hutchinson, 1984.
- . "The English Urban Renaissance: the Development of Provincial Urban Culture, c. 1680-1760." Social History 5 (May 1977): 581-603.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

- Bowen, Joanne. "A Study of Seasonality and Subsistence: Eighteenth-Century Suffield, Connecticut." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Brown University, 1990.
- Boynton, L. O. J. "The Bed-Bug and the 'Age of Elegance'." Journal of the Furniture History Society 1 (1965): 15-31.
- Brander, Michael. The Georgian Gentleman. Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England: Saxon House, 1973.
- Braudel, Fernand. The Structures of Everyday Life. Vol. 1 of Civilization and Capitalism: Fifteenth-Eighteenth Century. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.
- . The Wheels of Commerce. Vol. 2 of Civilization and Capitalism: Fifteenth-Eighteenth Century. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.
- Breen, T. H. "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century." Past and Present 119 (May 1988): 93-104.
- . "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicanization of Colonial America, 1690-1776." Journal of British Studies 25 (October 1986): 467-499.
- . "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 34 (1977): 239-257.
- . Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Bridenbaugh, Carl. Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Brown, A. F. J. Essex at Work: 1700-1815. Essex Record Office Publications No. 49. Chelmsford: Tirdal Press, 1969.
- Brown, Donald Summers. A History of Lynchburg's Pioneer Quakers and their Meeting House, 1754-1936. Lynchburg: J.P. Bell, 1936.
- Brown, Richard D. "William Byrd II and the Challenge of Rusticity Among the Tidewater Gentry." In Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Bruce, Phillip Alexander. Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, vol. 2. 1895. Reprint. New York: Peter Smith, 1935.
- Bryant, Julius. The Iveagh Bequest: Kenwood. London: London Historic House Museums Trust, 1990.
- Bucknum, Maryann. "When the Urge to Spend Strikes, McCall's, July 1989, 39-41.

- Burke, Peter. Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800. New York: New York University Press, 1978.
- Bushman, Richard L. "American High-Style and Vernacular Cultures." In Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era. Edited by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, pp. 345-383. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- . The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992.
- . "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America." In Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century. Edited by Ronald Hoffman and Cary Carson. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. Forthcoming, 1993.
- Bushman, Richard and Claudia L. Bushman. "The Early History of Cleanliness in America." Journal of American History 74. (March 1988): 1213-1238.
- Bushaway, Bob. By Rite: Custom, Ceremony, and Community in England, 1700-1800. London: Junction Books, 1982.
- Byington, Margaret. Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town. Russell Sage Foundation, 1910. Reprint. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974.
- Bynum, William Bundy. "Roger Atkinson: Merchant-Planter in Revolutionary Virginia." M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1981.
- Calder-Marshall, Arthur. The Two Duchesses. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.
- Campbell, Colin. The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism. London: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Carr, Lois Green. "'The Metropolis of Maryland': Town Development Along the Tobacco Coast," Maryland Historical Magazine, LXIX (1974): 124-145.
- Carr, Lois Green and Lorena Walsh. "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake." In Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century. Edited by Ronald Hoffman and Cary Carson. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. Forthcoming, 1993.
- . "Inventories and the Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1658-1777." In The Newberry Papers in Family and Community History, Paper 77-4C.
- Carson, Barbara. Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behaviors, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington. Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990.
- Carson, Cary. "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America: Why Demand?" In Of Consuming Interest: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century. Edited by Ronald

- Hoffman and Cary Carson. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. Forthcoming, 1993.
- Carritt, E. F. A Calendar of British Taste. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1949.
- Chambers, S. Allen, Jr. "Revelations from the Records: The Documentary Research at Poplar Forest." Lynch's Ferry: A Journal of Local History (Spring/Summer 1991): 7-12.
- Chapin, F. Stuart. Contemporary Social Institutions: A Sociological Analysis. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935.
- Chappell, Edward. "Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses of the Massanutten Settlement," in Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Domestic Architecture. Edited by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, pp. 27-57. University of Georgia Press, 1986).
- . "Architectural Recording and the Open-Air Museum: A View from the Field." In Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, vol. 2. Edited by Camille Wells, pp. 24-37. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986.
- Chaudhuri, K. N. The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Claiborne, C. B., and Julie L. Ozanne. "The Meaning of Custom-Made Homes: Home as a Metaphor for Living." In Advances in Consumer Research 17. Edited by Marvin E. Goldbert, Gerald Gorn, and Richard W. Pollay, pp. 367-373. Provo, Utah: Association for Consumer Research, 1990.
- Clark, Grahame. Symbols of Excellence: Precious Materials as Expressions of Status. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Clark, Peter. "Visions of the Urban Community: Antiquarianism and the English City before 1800." In The Pursuit of Urban History. Edited by D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe, pp. 106-124. London: Edward Arnold, 1983.
- Clark, Peter, ed. The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600-1800. London: Hutchinson and Company, 1984.
- Clemens, Paul G. E. The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Cohen, Elizabeth. "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915." In Material Culture Studies in America, 1876-1976. Edited by Thomas J. Schlereth, pp. 289-305. Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1982.
- Cole, W. A. "Factors in Demand 1700-1800." In The Economic History of Britain since 1700, vol. 1, 1700-1860. Edited by R. Floud and D. McCloskey, pp. 36-65. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

- Coleman, D. C. The Economy of England, 1450-1750. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Corfield, P. J. "Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century Britain." History 72 (February 1987): 38-61.
- . The Impact of English Towns, 1700 to 1800. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Coulter, Calvin B. "The Import Trade of Colonial Virginia." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 2 (1945): 296-314.
- . "The Virginia Merchant." Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1944.
- Crafts, N. F. R. British Economic Growth During the Industrial Revolution. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- Crosby, Lawrence A., James D. Gill, and Robert E. Lee. "Life, Status, and Age as Predictors of Value Orientation." In Personal Values and Consumer Psychology. Edited by Robert E. Pitts, Jr., and Arch G. Woodside. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath/Lexington Books, 1984.
- Crowley, J. E. This Sheba, Self: The Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Cruikshank, Dan. A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain and Ireland. Weidenfeld and Nicolson: National Trust, 1985.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self. London: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Dahrendorf, Rolf. Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959.
- Damon, Janet. "The Curse of Consumer Spending," Cosmopolitan, September 1988, 142-147.
- Darter, Oscar H. Colonial Fredericksburg and Neighborhood in Perspective. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957.
- Davis, Dorothy. Fairs, Shops and Supermarkets: A History of English Shopping. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.
- Davis, Ralph. "The Growth of English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774." In The Growth of English Overseas Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Edited by W. E. Minchinton, pp. 78-98. London: Methuen, 1969.
- Deetz, James. In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1977.

- de Vries, Jan. "Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe." In Consumption and the World of Goods. Edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter. London: Routledge. Forthcoming, 1993.
- Doerflinger, Thomas. "Farmers and Dry Goods in the Philadelphia Market Area, 1750-1800." In The Economy of Early America: The Revolutionary Period, 1763-1790. Edited by Ronald Hoffman, John J. McCusker, and Peter Albert, pp. 166-195. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1982.
- Douglas, Mary, and Baron Isherwood. The World of Goods: Toward an Anthropology of Consumption. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979.
- du Bellet, Louise Pecquest. Some Prominent Virginia Families, vol. 2. Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell, 1907.
- Early, Ruth Hairston. Campbell Chronicles and Family Sketches Embracing the History of Campbell County, Virginia, 1782-1926. Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell, 1927.
- Elias, Norbert. The History of Manners: The Civilizing Process, vol. 1. New York: Urizen Books, 1978.
- Elliot, G. W. "The Technical Characteristics of Creamware and Pearl-Glazed Earthenware." In Creamware and Pearlware. Edited by T. A. Lockett and P. Halfpenny, pp. 11-12. Staffordshire, Eng.: Stoke-on-Trent Museum, 1986. Fifth exhibition from the Northern Ceramic Society, Stoke-on-Trent Museum and Art Gallery.
- Ernst, Joseph A. and H. Roy Merrens. "'Camden's turrets pierce the skies!': The Urban Process in the Southern Colonies during the Eighteenth Century." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 30 (October 1973): 549-574.
- Eslinger, Ellen. "The Great Revival in Bourbon County, Kentucky." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1988.
- Eversley, D. E. C. "The Home Market and Economic Growth in England, 1750-80." In Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution: Essays Presented to J. D. Chambers. Edited by E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay, pp. 206-259. London: Arnold, 1967.
- Exter, Thomas. "Feathering the Empty Nest." American Demographics 8 (June 1990): 8.
- Fall, Ralph Emmett. Hidden Village: Port Royal Virginia, 1744-1981. Verona, Va.: McClure Printing, 1982.
- Farmer, Charles. "Country Stores and Frontier Exchange Systems in Southside Virginia during the Eighteenth Century." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1984.
- Featherstone, Mike. "Perspectives on Consumer Culture." Sociology 24 (February 1991): 5-19.



- Fine, Ben, and Ellen Leopold. "Consumerism and the Industrial Revolution." Social History 15 (May 1990): 151-179.
- Form, William H., and Gregory P. Stone. "Urbanism, Anonymity, and Status Symbolism." American Journal of Sociology 62 (March 1957): 504-514.
- Forman, Benno M. "Delaware Valley 'Crookt Foot' and 'Slat-Back' Chairs: The Fussell-Savery Connection." Winterthur Portfolio 15 (Spring 1980): 42-64.
- Forty, Adrian. Objects of Desire: Design and Society from Wedgwood to IBM. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. "Yves Saint Laurent's Peasant Revolution." Marxist Perspectives 1 (Summer 1978): 58-92.
- Furby, Lita. "Possessions: Toward a Theory of Their Meaning and Function throughout the Life Cycle." In Life-Span Development and Behavior, vol. 1. Edited by Paul B. Baltes, pp. 297-336. New York: Academic Press, 1978.
- Fussell, Paul. Class: A Guide through the American Status System. New York: Summit Books, 1983.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. The Affluent Society. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958.
- Gardner, Carl. "Spend, Spend, Spend." New Statesman and Society, December 16, 1988, 40-41.
- Garrison, J. Ritchie. Landscape and Material Life in Franklin County, Massachusetts 1770-1860. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In The Interpretation of Culture. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Georgiana: Extracts from the Correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Earl of Bessborough. London: John Murray, 1955.
- Ger, Guliz, and Russell Belk. "Measuring and Comparing Materialism Cross-Culturally." In Advances in Consumer Research, vol. 17. Edited by Marvin E. Goldberg, Gerald Gorn, and Richard W. Pollay, pp. 186-192. Provo, Utah: Association for Consumer Research, 1990.
- Gilboy, Elizabeth. "Demand as a Factor in the Industrial Revolution." 1932. Reprint. In The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England. Edited by R. M. Hartwell, pp. 121-138. London: Methuen, 1967.
- Gill, Harold B. "The Retail Business in Colonial Virginia." Unpublished manuscript, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1984.

- Gill, Harold B. Jr., and George M. Curtis III. "Virginia's Colonial Probate Policies and the Preconditions for Economic History." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 87 (January 1979): 1-73.
- Glassie, Henry. Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975.
- Godber, Joyce. History of Bedfordshire, 1066-1888. Luton: Bedfordshire County Council, 1969.
- Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Garden City, N.J.: Anchor-Doubleday, 1959.
- . "Symbols of Class Status." British Journal of Sociology 2 (December 1951): 294-304.
- Goodwin, Mary R. W. "The Colonial Store." Unpublished Colonial Williamsburg Research Study, 1966.
- Gordon, John Steele. "The Problem of Money and Time." American Heritage (May/June 1989): 57-65.
- Gorn, Elliot J. "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry." American Historical Review 90 (1985): 18-43.
- Greene, Jack P. "Independence, Improvement, and Authority: Toward a Framework for Understanding the Histories of the Southern Backcountry during the Era of the American Revolution." In An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry During the American Revolution. Edited by Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, Peter J. Albert, pp. 3-36. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985.
- . Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Gusfield, Joseph R. "Passage to Play: Rituals of Drinking Time in American Society." In Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology. Edited by Mary Douglas, pp. 73-91. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Hargett, Felix. "John Hook, Frontier Bookseller." Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society 11 (1980): 55-59.
- Harrigan, Judy. "Redefining Consumer Goals," Advertising Age, February 27, 1989.
- Harrington, Virginia D. The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution. New York: Columbia University Press. 1935. Reprint. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964.

- Harte, N. B. "State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England." In Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays Presented to F. J. Fisher. Edited by D. C. Coleman and A. H. John, pp. 133-165. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976.
- Heal, Felicity. "The Idea of Hospitality in Early Modern England." Past and Present 102 (February 1984): 66-93.
- Hebdidge, Dick. Hiding in the Light. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- . Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London: Methuen, 1979.
- Hemphill, Christina D. "Manners for Americans: Interaction, Ritual and the Social Order, 1620-1860." Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1988.
- Hendricks, Christopher. "Town Development in the Colonial Backcountry: Virginia and North Carolina." Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1991.
- Henretta, James. "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-industrial America." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 35 (January 1978): 1-31.
- . "Wealth and Social Structure." In Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era. Edited by Jack P. Green and J. R. Pole, pp. 262-289. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Herman, Bernard L. The Stolen House (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).
- Hey, David. "The Origins and Early Growth of the Hallamshire Cutlery and Allied Trades." In English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk. Edited by John Chartres and David Hey, pp. 343-367. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hillier, Bevis. Pottery and Porcelain 1700-1914: England, Europe and North America. New York: Meredith Press, 1968.
- Hirschman, Elizabeth C., and Morris B. Holbrook. "Hedonic Consumption: Emerging Concepts, Methods and Propositions." Journal of Marketing 46 (Summer 1982): 91-101.
- Hodder, Ian. The Present Past: An Introduction to Anthropology for Archaeologists. New York: Pica Press, 1982.
- . Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Hoffman, Ronald, and Cary Carson, eds. Of Consuming Desire: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. Forthcoming, 1993.

- Hofstra, Warren. "The Virginia Backcountry in the Eighteenth Century: The Question of Origins and the Issue of Outcomes." Paper presented at the conference, "New Directions in Virginia History." Virginia Historical Society, October 1990.
- Holbrook, Morris B., and Elizabeth C. Hirschman. "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings and Fun." Journal of Consumer Research 9 (September 1982): 132-140.
- Hole, Donna. "The Eighteenth-Century Virginia Store Interior." Report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, October 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Williamsburg's Four Original Stores: An Architectural Analysis." Colonial Williamsburg Report Series, September 1980.
- Hollander, Samuel. "Adam Smith's Approach to Economic Development." In The Varied Pattern: Studies in the Eighteenth Century. Edited by Peter Hughes and David Williams, pp. 269-296. Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1971.
- Horne, Catherine. Crossroads of Clay: The Southern Alkaline-Glazed Tradition. Columbia, S.C.: McKissick Museum and University of South Carolina Press, 1989.
- Horne, Pamela. The Rural World, 1780-1850: Social Change in the English Countryside. London: Hutchinson, 1980.
- Horne, Thomas A. The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth-Century England. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
- Horowitz, Daniel. The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society, 1875-1940. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985.
- Hymes, Dell. "Studying the Interaction of Language and Social Life," in Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974.
- Impey, Oliver. Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977.
- Inkster, Ian, and Jack Morrell, eds. Metropolis and Province, Science in the British Culture, 1780 to 1850. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.
- Isaac, Rhys. The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Jaffee, David. "Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860." Journal of American History 78 (September 1991): 511-535.
- "John Hook, Loyalist," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 34 (April 1926): 149-150.

- Johnson, E. A. J. Predecessors of Adam Smith: The Growth of British Mercantile Thought. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937. Reprint. New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1965.
- Jones, Alice Hanson. Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- . "Wealth Estimates for the American Middle Colonies, 1774." Economic Development and Cultural Change 18 (July 1970): 130.
- Jones, Eric L. "The Fashion Manipulators: Consumer Tastes and British Industries, 1660-1800." In Business Enterprise and Economic Change: Essays in Honor of Harold F. Williamson. Edited by Louis P. Cain and Paul J. Uselding, pp.198-226. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1973.
- Josephson, Matthew. The Robber Barons. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934.
- Kalman, H. "The Architecture of Mercantilism: Commercial Buildings by George Dance the Younger." In The Triumph of Culture: Eighteenth Century Perspectives. Edited by Paul Fritz and David Williams, pp. 69-96. Toronto: A. M. Hakkert Ltd., 1972.
- Kane, Patricia E. "Design Books and Price Books for American Federal-Period Card Tables." In The Work of Many Hands: Card Tables in Federal America, 1790-1820. Edited by Benjamin Hewitt, et al., pp. 39-54. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982.
- Keller, Kenneth W. "From the Rhineland to the Virginia Frontier: Flax Production as a Commercial Enterprise." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 98 (July 1990): 501.
- Kelso, William. "Monticello Black History/Craft Life Archaeological Project, 1984-1985 Progress Report." Manuscript on file, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Charlottesville, Va., 1982.
- Kniffen, Fred B. "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion." In Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture. Edited by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, pp. 3-26. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986.
- Kornblith, Gary J. "Class and the Language of Class in Colonial and Revolutionary America." Paper presented at the Institute of Early American History and Culture Comparative Social History Conference, September 5-7, 1985.
- Kron, Joan. Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1983.
- Kulikoff, Allan. Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1986.
- . "The Transition to Capitalism in Early America." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 46 (January 1989): 120-144.

- Larkin, Jack. The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Laslett, Peter. "A One-Class Society." In History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation. Edited by R. S. Neale, pp. 196-221. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
- Leach, William R. "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925." Journal of American History 71 (Spring 1984): 319-342.
- Lears, Jackson. "Beyond Veblen: Rethinking Consumer Culture in America." In Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880 to 1980. Edited by Simon J. Bronner, pp. 73-97. New York: W. W. Norton for Winterthur Museum, 1989.
- Lemire, Beverly. "Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes." Journal of British Studies 27 (January 1988): 1-24.
- . Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Lemon, James T. The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972.
- Levy, Sidney J. "Interpreting Consumer Mythology: A Structural Approach to Consumer Behavior." Journal of Marketing 45 (Summer 1981): 52.
- . "Symbols by Which We Buy." In Dimensions of Consumer Behavior. Edited by James U. McNeal, p. 101. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969.
- Lewis, Marlene. The South River Monthly Meeting of Friends, 1757-1800: A Socio-religious Study. M.A. thesis, Utah State University, 1976.
- Lounsbury, Carl. "The Structure of Justice: The Courthouses of Colonial Virginia," in Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III. Edited by Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989).
- Lynes, Russell. The Tastemakers: The Shaping of Popular American Taste. New York: Dover Publications, 1980.
- Main, Gloria L. "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 32 (January 1975): 89-99.
- . Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650-1720. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Main, Jackson Turner. "The One Hundred." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 11 (1954): 354-384.

- Main, Gloria L. and Jackson T. Main, "Economic Growth and the Standard of Living in Southern New England, 1640-1774," Journal of Economic History XLVIII, no. 1 (March 1988): 27-46.
- Mallot, John. "John Baddeley of Shelton: an Early Staffordshire Maker of Pottery and Porcelain." English Ceramic Circle Transactions 6, pt. 2 (1967): 124-166; 6, pt. 3 (1967): 181-247.
- Marin, Rick. "Grunge: A Success Story." New York Times, November 15, 1992.
- Martin, Ann Smart. "'Fashionable Sugar Dishes, Latest Fashion Ware': The Creamware Revolution in Colonial Virginia." In The Historic Chesapeake: Archaeological Contributions. Edited by Paul Shackel and Barbara Little. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian University Press. Forthcoming, 1993.
- . "'Fine Feathers Make Fine Birds:' Clothing and Consumerism in the Eighteenth-Century Virginia Store Trade." Paper presented at "Clothing and Consumerism in Early Modern England and America." Victoria and Albert Museum, June 26-27, 1992.
- . "The Role of Pewter as Missing Artifact: Consumer Attitudes Toward Tablewares in Late Eighteenth Century Virginia." Historical Archaeology 23 (Fall 1989): 1-27.
- . "Shopkeepers' Accounts in the Chesapeake: Textiles and Clothing in Eighteenth-Century Virginia Stores." Paper presented at the Third Textile History Conference, North Andover, Mass., September 1990.
- Masters, Brian. Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981.
- Mayhew, Edger deN. and Minor Myers, Jr. A Documentary History of American Interiors from the Colonial Era to 1815. New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1980.
- McClesky, Turk. "Rich Land, Poor Prospects: Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 98 (July 1990): 449-486.
- McCoy, Drew. The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- McCracken, Grant. Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- McCusker John J., and Russell R. Menard. The Economy of British America, 1607-1789. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.
- McKendrick, Neil. "The Cultural Response to A Consumer Society: Coming to Terms with the Idea of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century England." Paper presented at the Conference on Anglo-American Social History, Williamsburg, Virginia, September 5-7, 1985.

- . "Home Demand and Economic Growth: A New View of the Role of Women and Children in the Industrial Revolution." In Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in Honor of J.H. Plumb. Edited by Neil McKendrick, pp. 152-210. London: Europa Publications, 1974.
- McKendrick, Neil, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb. The Birth of Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Meaby, K. Tweedale. Nottinghamshire: Extracts from the County Records in the Eighteenth Century. Nottingham: Thomas Forman and Sons, 1947.
- Merrill, Michael. "Cash is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States." Radical History Review 4 (Winter 1977): 42-70.
- Meyer, Gladys. "The Urban Pattern of Success." In Benjamin Franklin and the American Character. Edited by Charles L. Sanford. Boston: D. C. Heath, 1955.
- Miller, Daniel. Material Culture and Mass Consumption. London: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Miller, George L. "Classification and Economic Scaling of Nineteenth Century Ceramics." Historical Archaeology 14 (1980): 1-40.
- . "George M. Coates, Pottery Merchant of Philadelphia, 1817-1831." Winterthur Portfolio 19 (Spring 1984): 37-50.
- . "A Revised Set of CC Index Values for Classification and Economic Scaling of English Ceramics from 1787 to 1880." Historical Archaeology 25 (March 1991): 1-25.
- Miller, Jacquelyn C. "The Body Politic: Disease and Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution." Paper presented at the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies, December 4, 1992.
- Mintz, Sidney W. Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern Life. New York: Viking Penguin, 1985.
- Mitchell, Ian S. "The Development of Urban Retailing, 1700-1815." In The Transformation of English Provincial Towns. Edited by Peter Clark, pp. 259-283. London: Hutchinson, 1984.
- Mitchell, Robert D. Commercialization and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977.
- Mokyr, Joel. "Demand vs. Supply in the Industrial Revolution." In The Economics of the Industrial Revolution. Edited by Joel Mokyr, pp. 97-118. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985.
- Money, John. Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1977.



- Montgomery, Florence. Textiles in America, 1650-1870. New York: W. W. Norton, 1983.
- Moorman, Warren. "John Hook: New London Merchant." Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society 11 (1980): 40-54.
- Morgan, Phillip, and Michael L. Nicholls. "Slaves in Piedmont Virginia, 1720-1790." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 46 (April 1989): 211-251.
- Morris, R. J. "Voluntary Associations and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850." Historical Journal 26 (1983): 95-118.
- Mui, Hoh-cheung and Lorna H. Mui. Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England. Kingston, Canada: McGill University Press, 1989.
- Naisbett, John. Megatrends: Ten Important Transformations That Are Affecting Your Life. New York: Warner Books, 1982.
- Nash, Gary B. The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Urban Wealth and Poverty in Prerevolutionary America." In Race, Class, and Politics: Essays on American Colonial and Revolutionary Society. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Neale, R. S. "Class and Class Consciousness in Early Nineteenth Century England: Three Classes or Five." In History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation. Edited by R. S. Neale, pp. 143-164. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
- Newcomb, Peter. "Hey, Dude, Let's Consume." Forbes, June 11, 1990, 126-131.
- Nichols, Michael. "Building the Virginia Southside: A Note on Architecture and Society in the Eighteenth Century." Unpublished paper on file at Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
- O'Mara, James. An Historical Geography of Urban System Development: Tidewater Virginia in the Eighteenth Century. York University Geographical Monographs 13. York, Canada: York University Press for Atkinson College, Downsview, Ontario, Canada, 1983.
- O'Shaughnessy, John. Why People Buy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Olney, Martha L. "Demand for Consumer Durable Goods in Twentieth Century America." Explorations in Economic History 27 (1990): 322-349.
- Palmer, Iris Irma (Leveson-Gower). The Face Without a Frown: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. London: Frederick Muller, 1944.
- Papenfuse, Edward C. In Pursuit of Profit: The Annapolis Merchants in the Era of the American Revolution: 1763-1805. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

- Parker, Lula Jeters. Parker's History of Bedford County, Virginia. Edited by Peter Viemeister. Bedford: Hamiltons, 1988.
- Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky." Journal of American History 78 (September 1991): 486-510.
- Phillips, Kevin. The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath. New York: Random House, 1990.
- Pierson, Willard, Jr. "John Hook: A Merchant of Colonial Virginia." History Honors thesis, Duke University, 1962.
- Pitts, Jr., Robert E., and Arch G. Woodside, Personal Values and Consumer Psychology, (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1984).
- "A Plea for Responsible Consumption." Advertisement in The Utne Reader, July/August 1990.
- Porter, Roy. English Society in the Eighteenth Century. London: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Preisser, Thomas M. Eighteenth-Century Alexandria, Virginia, before the Revolution, 1749-1776. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, College of William and Mary, 1977.
- Price, Jacob M. "Buchanan & Simpson: 1759-1763: A Different Kind of Glasgow Firm Trading to the Chesapeake." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 40 (January 1983): 3-41.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century." In Perspectives in American History, vol. 8. Edited by Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, pp. 123-186. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Joshua Johnson in London, 1771-1775: Credit and Commercial Organization in the British Chesapeake Trade." In Statesmen, Scholars, and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland. Edited by Anne Whitman, J. S. Bromley, and P. G. M. Dickson, pp. 153-180. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Last Phase of the Virginia-London Consignment Trade: James Buchanan and Co., 1758-1768." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 43 (January 1986): 64-98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707-1775." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 11 (1954): 179-199.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660-1790." Journal of Economic History 49, (June 1989): 267-284.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Who was John Norton?: A Note on the Historical Character of Some Eighteenth-Century London Virginia Firms." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 14 (July 1962): 400-407.
- Pruitt, Bettsye Hobbs. "Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Merchants." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 41 (July 1984): 333-364.
- Ragsdale, Bruce Allan. "Nonimportation and the Search for Economic Independence in Virginia, 1765-1775." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1985.
- Read, Daisy I. New London Today and Yesterday. Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell, 1950.
- Reddy, William M. "The Structure of a Cultural Crisis: Thinking about Cloth in France Before and After the Revolution." In The Social Life of Things. Edited by Arjun Appadurai, pp. 275-283. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Repplier, Agnes. To Think of Tea! Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1932.
- Reps, John W. Tidewater Towns: City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland. Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1972.
- Richins, Marsha L., and Scott Dawson. "Measuring Material Values: A Preliminary Report on Scale Development." In Advances in Consumer Research, vol. 17. Edited by Marvin E. Goldbert, Gerald Gorn, and Richard W. Pollay, pp. 169-175. Provo, Utah: Association for Consumer Research, 1990.
- Rice, Berkeley. "The Selling of Lifestyles." Psychology Today, March 1988, 46-50.
- Riesman, David A. Adam Smith's Sociological Economics. London: Croom Helm, 1976.
- Robertson, H. M., and W. L. Taylor. "Adam Smith's Approach to the Theory of Value." In Adam Smith: Critical Assessments, vol. 3. Edited by John Cunningham Wood, London: Croom Helm, 1983.
- Roeber, A. G. "Authority, Law, and Custom: The Rituals of Court Day in Tidewater Virginia, 1720 to 1750." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 37 (January 1980): 29-53.
- Rodgers, Daniel T. and Sean Wilentz, "Languages of Power in the United States," Language, History, and Class. Edited by Penelope J. Corfield, pp. 240-263. (New York: Basil Blackwell).
- Rogers, Nicholas. "Money, Land, and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London." Social History 4 (October 1979): 437-454.

- Rosenblatt, Samuel. "The House of John Norton and Sons: A Study of the Consignment Method of Marketing Tobacco from Virginia to England." Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1960.
- Rosenburg, N. "Adam Smith, Consumer Tastes, and Economic Growth." In Adam Smith: Critical Assessments, vol. 3. Edited by John Cunningham Wood, pp. 222-233. London: Croom Helm, 1983.
- Rosenfeld, Anne H. "The All-Consuming Passion." Psychology Today, May 1988, 1.
- Roth, Rodris. Tea Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage. Bulletin 225: Paper 14. Contributions from the Museum of History and Technology, 1961.
- Rothenburg, Winifred B. "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1855." Journal of Economic History 41 (June 1981): 283-314.
- Salmon, John, and Emily Salmon. A Bicentennial History of Franklin County, Virginia, 1786-1986. Forthcoming.
- Samford, Patricia. The Nicholson House: Report on the 1982 Archaeological Investigations. Department of Archaeological Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
- Sawhill, Isabel V. "Reaganomics in Perspective." In Perspectives on the Reagan Years. Edited by John L. Stockman, pp. 91-116. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1986.
- Scaggs, David Curtis. "John Semple and the Development of the Potomac Valley, 1750-1773." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 92 (July 1984): 282-308.
- Schindler, Robert M. "The Excitement of Getting a Bargain: Some Hypotheses Concerning the Origins and Effects of Smart-Shopper Feelings." Advances in Consumer Research 16 (1989): 447-452.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants. New York: Pantheon, 1992.
- Schlereth, Thomas J. "Country Stores, Country Fairs, and Mail-Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America." In Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920. Edited by Simon J. Bronner, pp.339-375. New York: W. W. Norton for Winterthur Museum, 1989.
- . "Material Culture Studies in America, 1876-1976." In Material Culture Studies in America. Edited by Thomas J. Schlereth, pp. 1-78. Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1982.
- Schlotterbeck, John T. "The Internal Economy of Slavery in Rural Piedmont Virginia." Slavery and Abolition 12 (May 1991): 171-181.

- Schudson, Michael. Advertising. The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society. New York: Basic Books, 1984.
- Scitovsky, Tivov. The Joyless Economy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Sekora, John. Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollet. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977.
- Shaffer, Janet. "New London." Lynchburg Magazine, November 1969.
- Shammas, Carole. "Consumer Behavior in Colonial America." Social Science History 6 (Winter 1982): 67-86.
- . "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America." Journal of Social History 14 (Fall 1980): 1-25.
- . "Explaining Past Changes in Consumption and Consumer Behavior." Historical Methods 22 (Spring 1989): 61-67.
- . "Food Expenditures and Economic Well-Being in Early Modern England." Journal of Economic History 43 (March 1983): 89-100.
- . The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- . "Textile Prices, Production, Policy, and Distribution in England and America, 1560-1775." Paper presented at the Third Textile History Conference, Museum of American History, North Andover, Mass., September 1990.
- Sheridan, Richard B. "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and the American Colonies." Journal of Economic History 20 (June 1960): 161-186.
- Shi, David E. The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Silverman, Debora. Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America. New York: Pantheon, 1986.
- Smart, Ann Morgan. "The Urban/Rural Dichotomy of Status Consumption: Tidewater, Virginia, 1815." M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1986.
- Smith, Barbara Clark. After the Revolution. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Smith, Billy G. "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750 to 1800." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 38 (April 1981): 163-202.
- Smith, Daniel S. "Underregistration and the Bias in Probate Records: An Analysis of Data from Eighteenth-Century Hingham, Massachusetts." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 32 (January 1975): 100-110.

- Smith, Michael E. "Household Possessions and Wealth in Agrarian States: Implications for Archaeology." Journal of Anthropological Archaeology 6 (1987): 297-335.
- Solomon, Michael R. "The Role of Products as Social Stimuli: A Symbolic Interactionism Perspective." Journal of Consumer Research 10 (December 1983): 319-339.
- Soltow, Lee. Distribution of Wealth and Income in the U.S. in 1798. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989.
- Spencer, Reuben. The Home Trade of Manchester. Fifth edition. London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1890.
- Sprigg, June. Domestic Beings. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.
- Spufford, Margaret. Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University, 1979.
- . The Great Reclotting of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century. London: Hambledon Press, 1984.
- . "The Limitations of the Probate Inventory." In English Rural Society, 1500-1800. Edited by John Chartres and David Hey, pp. 139-174. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Stevenson, J. "'The Moral Economy' of the English Crowd," In Order and Disorder in Early Modern England. Edited by Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, pp. 218-238. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Stillman, Damie. The Decorative Work of Robert Adam (New York: Transatlantic Arts, 1966).
- Stiverson, Cynthia Z., and Gregory A. Stiverson. "The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia." In Printing and Society in America. Edited by William L. Joyce, et al., pp. 132-173. Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983.
- Stone, Garry Wheeler. "Artifacts are Not Enough." The Conference on Historic Sites Archaeology Papers 1976 11: 43-63.
- Styles, John. "Manufacturing, Consumption and Design in Eighteenth-Century England," In Consumption and the World of Goods. Edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter. London: Routledge. Forthcoming, 1993.
- Tea Leaves: Being a Collection of Letters and Documents Relating to the Shipment of Tea...  
Edited by Francis Drake. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1970.
- Thirsk, Joan. Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

- Thompson, E. P. "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" Social History 3 (May 1978): 133-165.
- . "Patrician Society, Plebian Culture." Journal of Social History 7 (Summer 1974): 382-405.
- Thompson, Edith E. B. "A Scottish Merchant in Falmouth in the Eighteenth Century." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 39 (1931): 108-117.
- Thomson, Robert Polk. "The Merchant in Virginia, 1700-1775." Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1955.
- . "Tobacco Exports of the Upper James River Naval District, 1773-1775." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 18 (1961): 396.
- Thorp, Daniel B. "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 48 (July 1991): 387-408
- Tilley, Christopher. "Interpreting Material Culture." In The Meanings of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression. Edited by Ian Hodder, pp. 185-194. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Tillson, Albert H., Jr. "The Southern Backcountry: A Survey of Current Research." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 98 (July 1990): 387-421.
- Tindall, George Brown. America: A Narrative History. Second edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 1988.
- Tyler, John W. Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986.
- Ukers, William H. All About Tea, vol. 1. New York: Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Company, 1935.
- Ulrich, Laurel. A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Upton, Dell. Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia. New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1986.
- . "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia." Winterthur Portfolio 17 (Spring 1982): 96-119.
- Vance, James E., Jr. The Merchant's World: The Geography of Wholesaling. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970.
- Van Doren, Carl, ed. The Letters of Benjamin Franklin and Jane Mecom. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950.

- Veblen, Thorstein. The Theory of the Leisure Class. New York: New American Library, 1953.
- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986.
- Vickery, Amanda. "Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and her Possessions, 1751-1781," Consumption and the World of Goods. Edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter. London: Routledge, in press.
- Walsh, Lorena L. "Fettered Consumers: Slaves and the Anglo-American 'Consumer Revolution.'" Paper presented at the Economic History Association, September 1992, Boston.
- . "Living Standards and Consumption Patterns in the United States as Revealed by Probate Inventories, 1640-1830." Paper presented at "Clothes and Consumption in England and America, 1600-1820," Victoria and Albert Museum, London, June 26-27, 1992.
- . "Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643-1777," Journal of Economic History 33 (1983): 109-117.
- Ward, Gerald W. R. "Avarice and Conviviality: Card-Playing in Federal America." In The Work of Many Hands: Card Tables in Federal America, 1790-1820. Edited by Benjamin Hewitt, et al., pp. 15-28. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.
- Warner, W. Lloyd, Marchia Meeker, and Kenneth Eels. Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure for Social Status. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.
- Watkins, C. Malcom. The Cultural History of Marlborough, Virginia: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation of the Port Town for Stafford County and the Plantation of John Mercer. Bulletin 253. Washington: Smithsonian University Press, 1968.
- Watson, E. A. "A Progressive Landlord: the Third Earl Spencer, 1782-1845." In Town and Countryside: The English Landowner in the National Economy, 1660-1860. Edited by C. W. Chalkin, pp. 83-101. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Wells, Camille. "The Planter's Prospect: Houses and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia." Winterthur Portfolio. Forthcoming.
- Wenger, Mark R. "The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space." In Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, vol. 2. Edited by Camille Wells, pp. 137-149. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986.
- Wetherill, Lorna. Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760. New York: Routledge and Paul, 1988.



- Whitney, Jeanne Ellen. "Clues to a Community: Transactions at the Anderson-Low Store, 1784-1785." M.A. thesis, Department of History, College of William and Mary, 1983.
- Whittenburg, James. "Planters, Merchants, and Lawyers: Social Change and the Origins of the North Carolina Regulation." William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 34 (April 1977): 215-237.
- Wilcoxon, Charlotte. Dutch Trade and Ceramics in America in the Seventeenth Century. Albany, N.Y.: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1987.
- Willan, T. S. The Inland Trade: Studies in English Internal Trade in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976.
- Williams, Rosalind. Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Williamson, Judith. Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture. London: Marion Boyars, 1986.
- Witkin, Georgia. "The Shopping Fix." Health, May 1988, 73-78.
- Wolfe, Tom. "Funky Chic." In Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.
- Wood, Gordon S. The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787. New York: W. W. Norton, 1969.
- Wrigley, E. A. "The Process of Modernization and the Industrial Revolution in England." Journal of Interdisciplinary History 3 (Autumn 1972): 225-259.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy, 1650-1750." Past and Present 37 (July 1967): 44-70.
- Yentsch, Anne E. "Minimum Vessel Lists as Evidence of Change in Folk and Courtly Traditions of Food Use." Historical Archaeology 24 (Fall 1990): 24-53.
- Zelinsky, Wilbur. The Cultural Geography of the United States. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973.
- Zimmerman, Philip D. "Workmanship as Evidence: A Model for Object Study." Winterthur Portfolio 16 (Winter 1981): 283-307.
- Zukin, Sharon. "Socio-spatial Prototypes of a New Organization of Consumption: The Role of Real Cultural Capital." Sociology 24 (February 1991): 37-56.

## VITA

### Ann Smart Martin

Born in Richmond, Virginia, on June 1, 1960. Graduated from John Handley High School in Winchester, Virginia, June 1978. B.A. Duke University, Durham, N.C. 1982. M.A. Program in American Studies, College of William and Mary, May 1986. Entered the Department of History, College of William and Mary in September 1987. Currently an assistant professor in the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture.