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The honorable fraternity of moving merchants: Yankee peddlers in the Old South, 1800–1860

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THE HONORABLE FRATERNITY OF MOVING MERCHANTS:
YANKEE PEDDLERS IN THE OLD SOUTH, 1800-1860

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the American Studies Program

The College of William and Mary

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Joseph T. Rainer

2000

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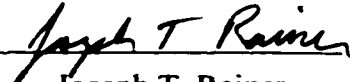
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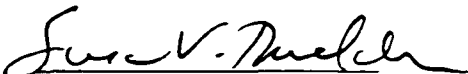
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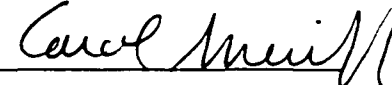

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Approved, April 2000


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With love and affection I dedicate my dissertation to my parents,
Angela Hunt Rainer and William Charles Rainer, MD.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his thankfulness to Professor Fredrika J. Teute for her patient direction and thoughtful criticism of this project. The writer is also indebted to Professors Susan V. Donaldson, Robert A. Gross, Carol Sheriff, and David Jaffee for their careful reading and critique of the manuscript. Any faults in the text are the responsibility of the author, who declares that, for now, he likes "a speckled Ax best."

Several organizations provided assistance for the completion of this project: a dissertation fellowship and various research fellowships and assistantships from the College of William and Mary; a Kate B. and Hall J. Peterson Fellowship from the American Antiquarian Society; a Betty S. Christian Fellowship in Business and Economic History from the Virginia Historical Society; and an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship from the Center for the Study of New England History, Massachusetts Historical Society.

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ABSTRACT

Yankee peddlers were ubiquitous in the countryside and in the imagination of the Old South. Social and economic forces pushed young men off the farms of rural New England and pulled them into an expanding, national market. The shortage of land for a burgeoning population spurred the exodus from the countryside, while the lure of profits from a vocation with low entry costs attracted many young men who preferred seeking the main chance in the commercial marketplace to a state of protracted dependency as a farm hand, a factory operative, or an outwork producer. Hired by firms to peddle clocks, tinware, and other “notions,” their experiences in the marketplace transmogrified these deracinated New England farm boys into sharp, itinerant traders. In the course of this transformation, these migrant workers from New England were indelibly marked by the culture in which they were raised, even as they moved away from familiar values to embrace an emerging market creed.

The thousands of young men from New England who peddled in the South between 1800 and 1860 provided rural southern households direct access to consumer goods. They joined native southern petty merchandisers – hucksters, cake bakers, watermen and groggery keepers – in an interracial, face-to-face economy whose actions threatened the fixed ranks and organic hierarchy of slave society. The Yankee peddler gradually became a more threatening figure to southern planters. Antebellum southern sensibilities towards northern society and market institutions evolved from Southerners’ real and fictionalized encounters with Yankee peddlers. Virginia planters hated debt, even as they continued to consume goods they could not afford, and rather than fault themselves for high living, they blamed the agents of consumer desire –Yankee peddlers – for conspiring with women and enslaved dependents to undermine their authority and worsen their economic plight. Southern caricatures of the Yankee peddler put a face on the impersonal forces of the national marketplace that intruded into traditional exchange networks. The fictive Yankee peddler’s violation of the southern home elucidates the apprehensions antebellum southern society experienced as it was integrated into the national market and edged towards secession.

YANKEE PEDDLERS IN THE OLD SOUTH, 1800-1860

INTRODUCTION

This is a story about how the nation was knit together economically even as sectional politics and cultural sensibilities drifted apart. Yankee peddlers were ubiquitous in the countryside and in the imagination of antebellum America. The thousands of young men from New England who peddled in the South between 1800 and 1860 provided rural southern households direct access to consumer goods. Beyond anecdote and romantic myth,¹ however, very little has been written about the social world of Yankee peddlers.² Through the study of their interactions with southern society, my dissertation illustrates the Market Revolution's impact on rural Americans' social and material lives, and how this contributed to the rise of sectionalism. Antebellum southern sensibilities towards northern society and market institutions were shaped, in part, through southerners' real and fictionalized encounters with Yankee peddlers. These itinerant hawkers spread innovative

¹ Richardson Wright's impressionistic work is still frequently cited as an authority on peddlers (including this author). Richardson Wright, *Hawkers & Walkers in Early America: Strolling Peddlers, Preachers, Lawyers, Doctors, Players, and Others, from the Beginning to the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1927). J. R. Dolan, *The Yankee Peddlers of Early America* (New York: Bramhall House, 1964), borrows heavily from Wright.

² Lewis E. Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising in the Ante-Bellum South," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19 (April 1945):35-58. Paul J. Uselding, "Peddling in the Antebellum Economy: Precursor of Mass-Marketing or a Start in Life?" *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 34 (Jan 1975):55-66. David Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860" *JAH* 78 (Sept 1991):511-35. Theodore B. Hodges, *Erastus Hodges, 1781-1847: Connecticut Manufacturer, Merchant & Entrepreneur* (West Kennebunk, ME: Phoenix Publishing, 1994).

economic goods and values across the nation. The face-to-face meetings of Yankee peddlers and southern consumers made real on the personal level the sectional issues of the imbalance of interstate commerce, tariffs, and northern commercial dominance of the southern staples trade. Yankee peddlers helped shape their world in ways far beyond the immediate effects of their petty commerce.

The numbers of Yankee peddlers traveling the nation's roads boomed after the War of 1812 and continued to rise until the late 1830s. When the news of peace arrived in Connecticut in 1815, Chester Phelps wrote that many in the tinware industry were "in hopes of better times for Tinnners and Pedlers."³ By 1810 the tinware industry of Hartford County, Connecticut, had saturated the local markets of southern New England, so increasing numbers of tin peddlers headed to the west and south.⁴ Every New England town and village sent its contingent of peddlers on the road each year; for the region as a whole the annual exodus numbered in the low thousands in the 1810s.⁵ For instance, twenty to forty young men left Meriden, Connecticut, each year to peddle, fifteen departed from Weare, New Hampshire, and ten peddlers issued out from Wolcott, Connecticut, each year.⁶ Figure 1 illustrates the upward trend in peddler licensing in

³ Chester Phelps (Johnstown) to Oliver Filley, 3/14/1815. Filley Family Papers, CHS.

⁴ Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*. Edited by Barbara Miller Solomon and Patricia M. King. 4 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1969. Originally published in 1821), vol 1, p. 223. Shirley Spaulding DeVoe, *The Tinsmiths of Connecticut* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), pp. 6, 16, 31. Augustus Filley (Lansingburgh, NY) to Oliver Filley, 7/21/1816. Filley Family Papers, CHS.

⁵ William Andrus Alcott, *Recollection of Rambles at the South* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1851), p. 14.

⁶ C. Bancroft Gillespie and George Manson Curtis, *A Century of Meriden* (Meriden, CT: Journal Publishing Co., 1906), p. 358. Wright, *Hawkers & Walkers*, p. 27.

Virginia from 1815 to 1835.⁷

Figure 1. Peddler Licensing in Virginia, 1799-1850

<u>1799- 1805</u>	<u>1806- 1810</u>	<u>1811- 1815</u>	<u>1816- 1820</u>	<u>1821- 1825</u>	<u>1826- 1830</u>	<u>1831- 1835</u>	<u>1836- 1840</u>	<u>1841- 1845</u>	<u>1846- 1850</u>	<u>1799- 1850</u>
8	177	270	614	768	851	824	490	312	462	4,776

Similar trends in peddler licensing occurred in other parts of the nation. Vermont issued only 15 statewide peddler licenses in 1807, but between 1820 and 1830 Vermont issued 25 to 35 licenses per year, and in 1833 it was estimated that 50 peddlers roamed the state.⁸ With an economic panic in full swing and the Missouri crisis building in the late 1810s and early 1820s, Southerners and Westerners began to take notice of the rising tide of Yankee peddlers. A South Carolina editor noted in 1820 that the number of Yankee peddlers had grown to an “*alarming degree*.”⁹ A Kentucky legislator specifically targeted Yankee peddlers in his bill to raise license fees in 1819.¹⁰ Bronson Alcott assumed that the Virginia legislature raised the license fee on peddlers like himself in 1820 because Yankee peddlers had grown so numerous.¹¹ By 1821 Yankee peddlers had expanded the market for New England products across the United States and its territories. Timothy Dwight described the market reach of Yankee peddlers:

⁷ License Returns, Auditor of Public Accounts, Library of Virginia. Hereafter cited as LRLV. Part of the increase in the number of licenses after 1823 is attributable to a new statute requiring peddlers to obtain a license from each county in which they peddled, rather than a single license valid statewide. The sharp drop in license numbers after 1835 is due in part to missing records; 1840 is missing entirely, and no subsequent years are complete.

⁸ Jaffee, “Peddlers of Progress,” p. 522.

⁹ *Niles Weekly Register* 19 (12/16/1820):243.

¹⁰ Charles S. Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism 1819-1848* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), p. 118.

¹¹ Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to William A. Alcott, 3/19/1820, in Frederick Wagner, “Eighty-Six Letters (1814-1882) of A. Bronson Alcott (Part One),” in Joel Myerson, ed., *Studies in the American Renaissance* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979),

I have seen them on the peninsula of Cape Cod and in the neighborhood of Lake Erie, distant from each other more than six hundred miles. They make their way to Detroit, four hundred miles farther, to Canada, to Kentucky, and, if I mistake not, to New Orleans and St. Louis.¹²

In order to sell clocks, tinware and other merchandise, they braved “aligator swamps,”¹³ muddy roads, and disease environments to which they were unseasoned. Yankee peddlers aggressively sought ever more distant markets. Two enterprising young men from Chester, Massachusetts, embarked for Cuba in 1834 on a clock peddling venture.¹⁴ With the capture of General Santa Anna in 1836, a Yankee clock peddler calculated that Texas would become a suitable “field for speculation.”¹⁵ The material and cultural impact of Yankee peddlers’ business was far reaching. G. W. Featherstonhaugh noted in 1844: “In Kentucky, in Indiana, in Illinois, in Missouri, and here in every dell in Arkansas, and in cabins where there is not a chair to sit on, there was sure to be a Connecticut clock.”¹⁶

The first chapter explores the social construction of Yankee peddlers in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New England. The age-old profession of peddling¹⁷ attracted many young men whose parents could not provide them with land or

p. 248.

¹² Dwight, *Travels*, vol. 2, p. 34.

¹³ Julius Clapp (Ouchita, LA) to Carlos Bates (Opelousas, LA), 2/13/1837. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

¹⁴ Washington Stevens (Chester, MA) to Samuel Terry, 3/24/1834. Samuel Terry Collection, ACWM.

¹⁵ John Case (Canton) to Hiram Barber (Case & Barber, Natchez), 6/1/1836. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

¹⁶ G. W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier, of Mexico: with Sketches of Population, Manners, and Geological Notes* (2 vols., London, 1844), II:27.

¹⁷ For antecedents to the Yankee peddler in Great Britain and Continental Europe, see the following works: Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclotting of Rural England*, Petty

a trade; for many propertyless young men, peddling goods appeared to be the “main chance” to establish their independence. Despite the disrepute of peddling, many men chose this vocation over hiring themselves out or apprenticing in a trade, because peddling seemed to offer quick profits and an independent lifestyle. However, many Yankee peddlers were not independent entrepreneurs but landless young men hired by manufacturers to hawk tinware, wooden-wheeled clocks, and other “notions” for wages and commissions. Breaking away from parental control and traditional authority to try their luck in the marketplace, many peddlers ended up trading old masters for new ones. Yankee peddlers were both agents and objects of the Market Revolution.

The development of the interregional peddling business is the theme of the second chapter. It was a transitional system that flourished within the irregular and inefficient interregional system of freight transportation and financing. Despite its shortcomings, the Yankee peddling system linked southern consumers directly to New England manufacturers through a distribution network of depots crewed by itinerant hawkers. Several case histories based upon business correspondence and account books show how specialized peddling firms distributed dry goods, tinware, clocks, and other notions, and helped build a national marketplace in the process.

The third chapter investigates the activity of enslaved, poor, and middling Southerners in a face-to-face, underground economy, and the anxieties that their petty commerce provoked in the southern elite. Petty trade fostered a convivial market culture

Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984). Laurence Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, translated by Vicki Whittaker (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). David Brown, ed., “The Autobiography of a Pedlar: John Lomas of Hollinsclough, Staffordshire (1747-1823),” *Midland History* 21

between enslaved people, free blacks, poor and middling whites. The informal economy that operated on the margins and interstices of southern society disrupted the regular relationships of exchange by supplanting the privileged positions of the merchant and the slaveholder. The enslaved, free blacks, and poor whites seized upon all opportunities for exchange that presented themselves. Wagoners, rivermen, cart-men, and others involved in moving commodities engaged in small speculations, while stationary hucksters and roving “market-men” made a profession of petty commerce. Historians have stressed how small farmers pushed away the marketplace by choosing to limit their production of market commodities. However, small producers also vehemently defended their right to retail their surpluses as they saw fit, without governmental regulation or taxation. The rowdy, masculine culture which surrounded petty trade in the Old South stressed values of independence, conviviality, and competition. This interracial fraternization undermined the social order of the slave South.

The fourth chapter explores the sense of a loss of mastery among southern white males in the face of pressures from the capitalist marketplace and consumer culture. The increasingly divergent economic paths taken by the North and the South led to sectional conflict over the tariff and abolitionism, and to a growing impression that the agricultural South was becoming an economic satellite of the industrial, commercial, and financial centers of the Northeast. The southern political strategy of combating northern free labor and industrial interests through boycotts of “bogus” northern goods, and by promoting home manufactures caused strife in the southern household. “Feminine refinement” was placed in opposition to a “male” culture of retrenchment and frugality in political rhetoric

(1996):156-66.

and tales of Yankee peddlers' cheating gullible southern housewives. Yankee peddler stories reflected real anxieties among southern masters over the ways in which the market was altering power relationships. Stories of Yankee peddlers beguiling women into consuming genteel goods masked southern patriarchs' apprehensions over women's increasing moral authority and economic power in the household.

* * *

From 1800 to 1840 the Yankee peddler ruled the roadways of antebellum America. I have gathered a database of 4,776 peddler licenses issued in Virginia between 1799 and 1850. The records are in the county license returns in the papers of the Auditor of Public Accounts in the archives section of the Library of Virginia. A conservative, educated guess of the proportion of Yankees among these 4,776 peddlers would be three-quarters. Common New England surnames, such as Beckwith, Brooks, Frisby, Goodrich, Holcomb, Hubbard, Peck, and Phelps, appear frequently in the database. The peculiar naming patterns of New England make some licensees stand out as Yankees. It seems that the more syllables in a biblical name, the more popular it was among New Englanders: Abadiah, Elijah, and Phineas Chapin; Amaziah Dolbeer; Cyrus and Elias Parkhurst; Eliphatet Easton; Eliakim Hall; Hezekiah Harlbut; Jeheberd Woods; Jehiel Warner; Moses and Aaron Gilbert; Selah Cogswell and Selah Elsworth. Names from classical antiquity were also popular: Augustus, Orville, and Titus C. Rice; Cato Goodrich; Pliny Patton; and Socrates Nelson.¹⁸ Iberian first names were also popular in southern New England, perhaps as a result of Portuguese settlement in southeastern New England: Annunciate Clarke, Alonzo Larkin, Carlos Bates (from the Carlos Bates Papers, CSL), Lorenzo Hickox, and

¹⁸ Classical names were popular with southerners as well, but Titus C. Rice was definitely

Salvador Slocum. Some of the peddlers' names sound like characters from almanac humor or stage parodies of Yankee appellations: Eleazer F. Flagg, Shadrack T. Ames, Obediah J. Martin, and my favorite –Ichabod Tuttle.¹⁹ Many other ethnic groups engaged in peddling in antebellum America – Irish, Scots, Scotch-Irish and German Jews²⁰ – but Yankee peddlers dominated the business until the 1840s. Commentators often compared Yankees to the Scots and the Jews. In the Yankees' proverbial frugality, coldness, wanderlust, and forbearance, some saw a resemblance to the Scottish character. Scottish peddlers, too, were very common in England and Europe in the early modern era.²¹ Comparisons to the Jews were usually derogatory to both Jews and Yankees. A German general in America in 1780 noted that in business the Yankees "were trusted with being just as much honest as the Jews."²² Elijah Fletcher claimed in 1810 that the Virginians actually referred to

a Connecticut Yankee. Manuscript Census, City of Richmond, Virginia, 1850.

¹⁹ For a fictional account of how a Yankee derived classical names for his children through books traded by peddlers, see Catherine Maria Sedgwick, *A New England Tale* (New York: E. Bliss & E. White, 1822), pp. 43-44. For stage names of Yankee characters, see Richard M. Dorson, "The Yankee on the Stage – A Folk Hero of American Drama," *New England Quarterly* 13 (Sept 1940):478.

²⁰ The large number of German Jews who began to appear among the Virginia licensees in 1839 are more readily identified by name. I conservatively counted 260 Jewish peddlers in the database; these men accounted for 356 of the 4,776 licenses issued, mostly in the 1840s. For Jewish peddlers in America, see: Harry Golden, *Forgotten Pioneer* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1963). Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration*. Askenazi Elliot, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa: The University Press of Alabama, 1988).

²¹ John Bernard, *Retrospections of America 1797-1811* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830; reprint NY: Benjamin Blom, 1963), p. 37. C. H., "Character of the Real Yankees; What They Are Supposed to Be, and What They Are." *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 17 (7/1/1826):252-53. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* Richard Mullen, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 327-28. "Yankee Peddlers, and Peddling in America," *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* 6 (7/15/1837):269-70.

²² Johann Jacob Moser, *Nord-Amerika nach den Friedensschluessen vom Jahr 1783*

Yankee tin peddlers as Jews.²³ A common joke was that there were no Jews in New England because they could not compete with the Yankees.²⁴

The origin of the appellation “Yankee” for a person or thing from New England was a matter of contention in the first three decades of the nineteenth century between critics and vindicators of New England character.²⁵ Dictionaries suggest a variety of etymologies for Yankee from many of the languages spoken in colonial America. Yankee might derive from Janke, the Dutch diminutive of Jan, or it could have derived from a derisive Dutch term for a bumpkin, Jan Kees, or John Cheese. Yankee might be related to the Gaelic word yankie, which signifies a shrewd, clever woman, a term which Scottish colonists might have applied to the sharp traders of New England.²⁶ John Heckewelder popularized the theory that Yankee was merely the mispronunciation of the

(Leipzig, 1784) vol. 1:751.

²³ Martha von Briesen, ed., *The Letters of Elijah Fletcher* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965), p. 21.

²⁴ Bernard, *Retrospections*, p. 45. Robert J. Parker, “A Chapter in the Early Life of Thomas Oliver Larkin,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 16 (June 1937):157. Oliver P. Baldwin, *Southern and South-Western Sketches* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph, 1855), pp. 180-185.

²⁵ For examples of explorations into the contested meaning of Yankee see the following articles and others cited below. “Origin of Names, Phrases, and Customs,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, Philadelphia, vol. 4 no. 25 (6/18/1825). Henry Tudor, *Narrative of a Tour in North America* (London: James Duncan, 1834), 2:540. “Origin of the Name, Yankee,” *American Pioneer*, (Chillicothe, OH: Logan Historical Society), vol. 1 (June 1842): 230.

²⁶ “Yankee,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), vol. 20, p. 692. *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1992), p. 1653. “Yankee,” Western Connecticut was well known for its cheese, and the bumpkin character, Brother Jonathan, might have been familiar to the inhabitants of New Netherlands, later New York. For a discussion of the long-lasting cultural strains between Yankee New England and Dutch New York, see Dixon Ryan Fox, *Yankees and Yorkers* (New York: New York University Press, 1940).

word English by New England Native Americans.²⁷ Several sources claimed that Yankee was a New England colloquialism expressing excellence: "A Yankee good horse, or Yankee cider, and the like, were an excellent good horse, and excellent cider." One authority attributed the coinage of Yankee to Jonathan Hastings, who lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, around 1713. Hastings used Yankee (to denote excellence) so often in his speech that he became known to the students of Harvard as "Yankee Jon." Students who dealt with Yankee Jon frequently outwitted him, so Yankee came to signify a "weak, simple, awkward person."²⁸ The Yankee Jon story suggests a source for the Brother Jonathan figure of New England folklore, a naive, simple, and honest bumpkin.²⁹ The tune "Yankee Doodle" was reputedly composed in 1755 by Dr. Schuckburgh, a surgeon in Lord Amherst's army, to mock the provincial manners and dress of the colonial American militiamen. Sources from the mid-eighteenth century give Yankee a southern origin. *Oppression, a Poem by an American*, published in 1765, claims that southern colonists coined "Yankey" as a "name of derision" for the people of New England.

²⁷ John Heckewelder, *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States* (Philadelphia: Publication Fund of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1876. Originally published in 1818-1819), pp. 142-143.

²⁸ William Gordon, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America*. (3 vols, New York: Samuel Campbell, 1801. 3d American edition), vol. 1, pp. 312-313. "Selected Extracts, From the Manuscripts of a Citizen of Boston. No. 22 - YANKEE," credited Ann Hastings of Salem, Massachusetts, with coining Yankee. *Boston Weekly Magazine* 1 (1/29/1803): 58, (reprinted in the *Philadelphia Repository and Weekly Register* 3 (2/12/1803): 53). [Noah Webster], *Connecticut Herald* (2 March 1810), cited in "Yankee," *The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review*, (April 1810): 244.

²⁹ For the Brother Jonathan figure, see Mary Lou Hinman, "The Yankee Peddler: His Role in American Folklore and Fiction" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1975), pp. 32-34. For the durable popularity of the Yankee character in American theater, see Dorson, "The Yankee on the Stage."

Thomas Anburey, a British officer who served under Burgoyne during the American Revolution, credits the Virginians with inventing Yankee during the Seven Years' War. According to Anburey, Yankee derived from "eankke," the Cherokee word for coward and slave, which Virginians labeled New Englanders for not assisting them in their conflict with the Cherokee.³⁰ New Englanders offered nobler meanings for Yankee to counter the aspersions of cowardice. Various correspondents claimed that Yankee derived from native American words, such as "Yankan" and "Oonkooe," which signified conqueror, and "Yankoo," which was reputedly the name of a tribe never conquered by the English. New England revisionists of Yankee tried to predate the derisive southern definitions of Yankee. William Gordon, writing in 1801, cited two "aged ministers" as his source, and an 1835 Massachusetts newspaper cited an article from a 1775 newspaper. Noah Webster went so far as to claim that Yankee came from the Persian root "Janghe," which signified "a warlike man," and was the same stem for "Jenghis Khan."³¹ Oonkooe or eankke – the debate over the character of the people of New England resounded through the early national period of the United States.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, New England traders gained a reputation for sharp dealing. William Byrd II of Virginia referred sarcastically to these proto-Yankees in 1739 as the "Saints of New England." Byrd kept a "watchfull eye" on

³⁰ "Yankee," *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 20, p. 692. Thomas Anburey, *Travels through the Interior Parts of America* (New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1969. Originally published in London: William Lane, 1789), vol. 2: 50-51.

³¹ "Selected Extracts," p. 58. Webster "YANKEE," p. 244. *Robinson's Magazine, A Weekly Repository of Original Papers* (Baltimore) 1/2/1819. *Ladies' Literary Cabinet* (New York) 6 (9/7/1822): 142. *Niles Register* 48 (7/25/1835):363, cites the correspondent to the *New Bedford Gazette*, who claims to quote from the *New England Chronicle and Essex Gazette* of 6/8/1775. *Charleston Courier*,

the “foul traders” of New England who often traded “Pennyworths” illegally with his fieldhands. New England traders, claimed Byrd, were skilled at “palliating a perjury so... as to leave no taste of it in the mouth.” Nor could any other “people like them slip through a penal statute.” Byrd suggested that New England should hang all its felons at home instead of sending them “abroad to discredit their country.”³² Byrd’s rhetoric likely had a role in Virginia’s first peddler licensing statute enacted in 1738 to curb the “great frauds and abuses” committed by peddlers.³³ William Pollard, a Philadelphia merchant, wrote in 1773 that his opinion of the “integrity of the New England People in general” was too indifferent to trust any New Englander without capital security. Stephen Girard, another late eighteenth-century Philadelphia merchant, observed in an undated letter that bills of exchange on New England did not enjoy very good credit in Philadelphia because he regarded New Englanders as disposed to “sharp practices.”³⁴ By 1780 New Englanders had an established reputation for being “deceitful folk” in all the states, claimed German officer Johann Jacob Moser.³⁵

A steep rise in the number of Yankee peddlers in the 1810s permanently linked “Yankee” with Yankee peddlers and “Yankee trickery,” to the degradation of New England character.³⁶ The image of the sharp-dealing Yankee peddler followed a long line

10/17/1838.

³² “Colonel William Byrd on Slavery and Indented Servants, 1736, 1739,” *AHR* 1 (1895):88-89. “William Byrd to Benjamin Lynde (Salem, MA), 2/20/1736,” *VMHB* 9 (Jan 1902):243.

³³ November, 1738 Session. *Hening*, Vol 5: 54-55.

³⁴ Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 340.

³⁵ Moser, *Nord-Amerika*, vol. 1:751.

³⁶ As late as 1808 a Virginia newspaper referred to a “New England Tin Pedlar.”

of trickster trader figures dating back to antiquity.³⁷ In the 1810s, '20s, and '30s commentators repeatedly noted how Yankee peddlers harmed the southern estimation of New England. Mathew Carey attributed the source of Yankee tricks to the lower-class migrants who were fleeing overcrowding and a poor soil. Carey added it was not fair to judge all of New England by the moral turpitude of a few.³⁸ The *Georgia Journal* asserted that nothing damaged Southerners' impressions of northern character more than "the petty cheating, the low lived imposition, and two penny trickery of the Connecticut peddlers."³⁹ A Virginian who traveled through New England in 1834 noted that "Yankee tricks, and Yankee knavery, are ideas inseparable from the word Yankee."⁴⁰ Virginians were taught from their infancy, claimed Philip A. Bolling in 1832, "to chime the stale

Farmers Repository (Charlestown, VA), 6/10/1808. Perhaps the only positive associations to Yankee were patriotic references to "Yankee Doodle" and "Yankee Tars," *Niles Register* 48 (7/25/1835):363.

³⁷ Hermes, the patron god of trade, was a marginal figure notorious for his skill at manipulating literal meanings in the language of trade. Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 20. Frances Trollope claimed that when a Yankee described his own character, "you might fancy him a god – though a tricky one: Mercury turned righteous and notable." Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, pp. 327-28.

³⁸ Mathew Carey, "Yankee Tricks" *Port Folio* 2 (December 1809): 533-34. William Alexander Caruthers also attributed Yankee trickery to overpopulation and keen economic competition within New England. William Alexander Caruthers, *The Kentuckian in New-York. Or, The Adventures of Three Southerns* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834; reprint Ridgewood, NJ: The Gregg Press, 1968), pp. 71-72.

³⁹ James Kirk Paulding, *The Diverting History of John Bull and Brother Jonathan* (New York: Inskeep & Bradford, 1813), pp. 93, 102. Sidney Walter Martin, ed. "A New Englander's Impressions of Georgia in 1817-1818: Extracts from the Diary of Ebenezer Kellogg," *Journal of Southern History* 12 (May 1946), p. 255. Isaac Candler, *A Summary View of America* (London: T. Cadell, 1824), pp. 451-452. *Georgia Journal*, 3/30/1830. From the *Camden (SC) Journal*.

⁴⁰ A Virginian, "Letters from New England, No. 3," *Southern Literary Messenger* vol 1, no. 5, p. 219. The traveler felt that the association of Yankee and trickery was unfounded, for he had not been the subject of a single "yankee trick" during his trip.

tune of ‘Yankee tricks.’”⁴¹ Usage of “Yankee trickery” and “Yankee trick” became so common that it was applied to any fraud, whether or not the perpetrator was a Yankee.⁴² “Yankee” found use in the antebellum South as a verb meaning to cheat,⁴³ and as a term of reproach, “a word of evil augury, a signal for strife, [and] a name to scare children with.”⁴⁴ Profaning the “damn Yankees” became a cliché of southern speech. Perhaps the first instance in print of a Southerner “damning” the Yankees, albeit modestly, is in the 1821 play, *The Pedlar*. Old Prarie [sic], a Virginia pioneer, exclaims, “Dod dern the yankees!” when the Connecticut peddler, Nutmeg, cheats him.⁴⁵ An article on Daniel Boone published in 1823 claimed that the famed backwoodsman felt the need to relocate

⁴¹ Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832*. Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society (Durham: Duke University Press, 1941), pp. 64-65.

⁴² William Bolling of Goochland County, Virginia, wrote in his diary that the contractor of a bridge near his plantation had played a “Yankee trick” by concealing “sap pieces” within the good timber. Bolling gives no clue to the identity or origins of the contractor. William Bolling Diary, 9/8/1836, VHS. Anthony M. Duprey of Henry County, Virginia, wrote to the state legislature in 1847 that he had detected “a system of Yankee Trickery” which defrauded the commonwealth of ten to fifteen thousand dollars per year in revenue on whiskey sales. Petition of Anthony M. Duprey, Henry County, 12/9/1847, LPLV. Even African Americans could be labeled with the pejorative Yankee. A South Carolina slave trader accused another slave trader who had transported a coffle of slaves from Maryland, among whom was Charles Ball, of trying to impose “Yankee tricks” and “Yankee niggers” upon him. Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man* (reprint, 1837. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 74.

⁴³ *Annals of Congress*, 16th Congress, 2nd Session, 1206-07. Baldwin, *Southern and South-Western Sketches*, pp. 180-185.

⁴⁴ Richard N. Current, *Northernizing the South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), p. 30. Daniel R. Hundley, *Social Relations in our Southern States*, William J. Cooper, Jr., ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 130. Quote: C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” pp. 255-56.

⁴⁵ Alphonso Wetmore, *The Pedlar* (St. Louis, John A. Paxton, 1821; reprinted in *Three Centuries of Drama: American, 1741-1830*, Readex Microprint, New York, 1956).

when a “d--d yankee” settled within a hundred miles of him.⁴⁶ “Damn Yankee” was such a hackneyed phrase in the South by 1829 that the editors of the *National Intelligencer* could claim to have heard it uttered “a thousand times.”⁴⁷ The Yankee-damning Southerner, however, was just as great a stereotype as the Yankee trickster.⁴⁸

Economic and political rivalries between the sections distorted mutual perceptions of character in the North and the South. Yankee peddlers functioned prominently in interregional trade networks and the establishment of a national marketplace. Yankee peddlers literally and figuratively personified the South’s commercial contacts with northern manufacturers; they acted as both agents and figures of northern incursions into the South. The economic forces peddlers represented, indeed, changed the South. Their role in maintaining northern commercial dominance over the South led to the hyperbole over Yankee tricks. The larger economic and political rivalries over tariffs, southern commercial dependence, and abolitionism underlay the rhetoric against the Yankee peddler.

⁴⁶ *Niles Register* 24 (5/17/1823), p. 166.

⁴⁷ “The Damned Yankees,” *National Intelligencer*, 6/18/1829.

⁴⁸ In the story “Yankees Abroad; or, The Vermont Schoolmaster,” a Yankee tries to pass as a Southerner by tirading against the Yankees. Baldwin, *Southern and South-Western Sketches*, p. 189.

CHAPTER 1
“SOME OF THEM APPEARED TO BE GETTING RICH”:
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF YANKEE PEDDLERS

At the turn of the nineteenth century nearly all the arable land in southern New England was occupied. Maintaining an independent household from the land and passing on a secure legacy to the next generation became increasingly unattainable. Even in middling landowning families there was often only enough land to set up one son independently on a farm; other sons and daughters had to take their portions in cash. Over the first few decades of the nineteenth century the number of landless inhabitants increased. The inequalities in property ownership created a class of people – predominantly young and single, both male and female – who had to find a means of support other than freehold farming. Owners of marginal land, too, sought alternatives to a life tied to the land. Growing numbers of propertyless laborers sought a competency in occupations that supplemented the traditional farm economy. Migration to open lands in the west and employment in the merchant marine relieved some of the pressure, but many poor young people remained in New England as hired farm hands, as outwork producers of brooms, palm leaf hats and other commodities, as factory operatives, or as artisans.¹

¹ Daniel Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 262-320. John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western*

Petty trade was another means of maintaining household independence and ensuring a competency for the next generation. Since the early eighteenth century peddling and petty trade had been important strategies in the agrarian subsistence economy.² The emergence of a commercial economy in New England in the mid- to late-eighteenth century³ brought both risk and opportunity to semi-subsistence farm families. In the nineteenth century, writes Christopher Clark, many families risked their small surplus produce on the market, not in a spirit of entrepreneurship but in a grim pursuit of survival. Daniel Vickers, on the other hand, does not read the participation of small farmers in the marketplace as an act of desperation but as an attractive choice for farmers with surplus production. But, Vickers adds, those who sold their labor in the marketplace chafed at their loss of independence. The responsibility for selling the family's surplus produce in increasingly distant markets often fell to a son.⁴ Speculation through peddling

Massachusetts, 1780-1860 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). Robert A. Gross, "Culture and Cultivation: Agriculture and Society in Thoreau's Concord," *JAH* 69 (June 1982):44. Douglas Lamar Jones, "The Strolling Poor: Transiency in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts," *JSH* 8 (Spring 1975):34. Robert Doherty, *Society and Power: Five New England Towns 1800-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), pp. 40-41. Gregory H. Nobles, "Commerce and Community: A Case Study of the Rural Broommaking Business in Antebellum Massachusetts," *JER* 4 (Fall 1984):305-06. Thomas Low Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life 1821-1861* (New York: Stackpole Sons, Publishers, 1937), p. 19.

² Bruce H. Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers: Law and Community in Early Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 32. Philip Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 158-60, 243, 246, 251-253. Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), p. 109.

³ Winifred Barr Rothenberg, *From Market-Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴ Christopher Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860," *JSH* 13 (Winter 1979):170, 176-77. Daniel

goods was also a job reserved for sons. Peddling presented both the risks and opportunities of the marketplace. Traveling the roads free from parental and communal control, peddlers seemed to live an independent lifestyle. Most peddlers, however, were chained by some form of dependency. Many young men peddled for wages and commission, selling their labor to operate in the marketplace. Even “independent” peddlers had to embed themselves in a debt relationship to the storekeepers and manufacturers who sold to them on credit. Gradually, however, poor and middling New Englanders adapted trade from a way of sustaining a decent competency to the sole means of support. Peddling offered opportunities for profit that stretched way beyond the modest desires of competency. Commerce became the means for average New Englanders to accumulate wealth and capital and advance in social position.

For young men in early national New England, peddling offered a possible passage out of rural poverty. The only patrimony many poor New England men received when they came of age was a small load of marketable goods or cash. When James Guild was released from his indenture to his uncle in 1818 at age twenty-one, all James Guild was worth was a note for \$70. As a poor young man, Guild could not demand cash for his freedom dues, so he exchanged the note for goods to peddle.⁵ Some fathers resorted to peddling speculations in order to provide for their sons. Daniel Wooster of Derby, Connecticut, had enough cash or credit to order one hundred clocks at about \$10 apiece from Eli Terry’s factory in 1821. Wooster’s son Treat, who was then fifteen or sixteen

Vickers, “Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America,” *WMQ* 47 (Jan. 1990):3-7.

⁵ James Guild, “From Tunbridge, Vermont, to London, England – The Journal of James Guild, Peddler, Tinker, Schoolmaster, Portrait Painter, from 1818 to 1824,” *Proceedings*

year old, accompanied his father to the factory. About the time Treat came of age, perhaps sooner, his father outfitted him with clocks, which Treat peddled in Virginia.⁶ Popular stories about Yankee peddlers reflected the exigencies of maintaining family competency in rural New England. The tales focused on the desperation of families that had insufficient property to pass on to younger sons. For instance, Joshua Peabody was depicted as one of five sons of a Connecticut farmer “who had just enough land to support one family and no more,” so Joshua gained his father’s permission to embark on a peddling career at age nineteen.⁷ Likewise, the fictional Ichabod Coffin came from a poor Massachusetts family with five sons and two daughters. Coffin’s parents, unable to provide Ichabod with an independent landholding, instead bestowed a load of tinware upon their “*infant*” Ichabod “as a kind of outfit in life.”⁸ Exposed at a tender age to the marketplace, both Joshua and Ichabod develop into commercial sharpers. The younger sons of hardscrabble farmers who were turned loose in the marketplace as peddlers created consternation. The decline of agricultural stability and the erosion of “steady habits” of New England farming folk were connected through the Yankee peddler.

Very few women became peddlers. Women participated in the stationary retail trade, but gender conventions of the era frowned upon women’s engaging in itinerant

of the Vermont Historical Society 5 (1937):250.

⁶ Depositions of Selden Welton, 8/9/1824, and Horace Terry, 1/18/1825, in Daniel Wooster v. Eli Terry. Bela B. Satterlee Collection, CHS. Peddler License of Treat Wooster, Buckingham County, Virginia, 10/13/1828, LRLV.

⁷ “The Yankee Pedler,” *Georgia Journal*, 4/5/1832. Also published in the *Daily National Intelligencer*, 12/10/1831, which reprinted it from the Sandy Hill, NY, *Temperance Advertiser*.

⁸ George Watterston, *Wanderer in Washington* (Washington, DC: Washington Press [Jonathan Elliot, Jr.], 1827), pp. 93, 97.

trade or traveling unescorted by a male relative.⁹ Female itinerant preachers resembled peddlers in many ways. They were mobile, used the peddlers' techniques of self-promotion, and occasionally sold religious literature.¹⁰ Female peddlers, however, were so uncommon that two New York women who peddled books in the Mid-Atlantic states and the Upper South in the 1850s considered themselves "pioneers in a new sphere of labor for our sex."¹¹ Women were, however, entering the industrial labor force and were prominent workers in the industries whose products were distributed primarily by peddlers.¹² Young women ornamented clock faces and "japanned" (enameled and painted) tinware as piecework in their homes, and in some cases even traveled south to cities such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Petersburg to decorate wares at the tin shops that supplied Yankee peddlers.¹³ Women could not engage in long-distance peddling, but under the proper supervision they could travel long distances to work at a factory or shop.

⁹ Patricia Cleary, "'She Will Be In The Shop': Women's Sphere Of Trade In Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia And New York." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 1995 119(3):181-202. Only six women appear among the 4,776 peddler licenses issued in Virginia between 1799 and 1850. I make a distinction (also made by contemporary legislators) between peddlers, who traveled long distances to sell household, shop, and factory output, and hucksters, who sold in local markets goods and produce which they often manufactured or raised themselves. Many hucksters were women, perhaps even a majority of hucksters. See Chapter Three.

¹⁰ Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), chap. 6.

¹¹ Misses Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life* (New York: Published for the Authors, 1854), pp. 5-6.

¹² For women in industry, see Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1820-1860* (New York, 1979); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1787-1860* (New York: 1986); and Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1789-1910* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

¹³ DeVoe, *Tinsmiths*, p. 24, appendix 1, pp. 157-59, "A List of Women Painters and Japanners." See the typescript of the diary of Candace Roberts (1785-1806), who

Benjamin Wilcox wrote his wife that the two young Connecticut women, Roxy and Marilla, whom he employed at his tin shop in Petersburg, Virginia, appeared hearty and content with their work japanning tinware. Wilcox also assured his wife that Roxy and Marilla attended church.¹⁴

The men displaced from the agricultural economy in New England in the first half of the nineteenth century were marked by their youth.¹⁵ Young men under thirty composed about half of the emigrants who left five New England towns between 1800 and 1860, and many unattached young men followed the family groups that migrated west.¹⁶ Single young men dominated broommaking, another trade to which poor New Englanders resorted. Among the 110 Massachusetts broommakers listed in the 1850 census, 95 were under thirty-five years of age, and the average age was 26.9.¹⁷ Peddling drew heavily from this growing pool of young, propertyless, and underemployed young men. The typical Yankee peddler was also in his mid-twenties. The average age of 50 New Englanders when they received their first license to peddle in Virginia was 27.6.¹⁸ The average age of 171 peddlers licensed by the state of Georgia between 1826 and 1831

japanned tin and painted clock faces, in the Gideon Roberts Papers, Bristol Public Library, Bristol, CT.

¹⁴ Benjamin Wilcox (Richmond) to Betsy Wilcox (Berlin), 12/10/1818. Wilcox Papers, BHS. *Niles Register*, 47 (1/10/1835): 317.

¹⁵ Daniel Vickers has found that the earliest workers in the industrial alternatives to farming were formerly dependents in the traditional household economy – women, children, and young men, Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen*, pp. 301, 310.

¹⁶ Doherty, *Society and Powe*, pp. 40-41. Susan E. Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 13.

¹⁷ Nobles, "Commerce and Community," p. 301.

¹⁸ The ages of the fifty Virginia peddlers are derived from a cross-listing of the 1850 Virginia census with peddler licenses culled from my 1798 to 1850 database. The first licenses for the fifty men date from 1815 to 1848.

was 26.5. Yankee peddlers were overwhelmingly young men (Figure 2).¹⁹ A young man was most likely to engage in peddling for the four or five years after he reached the legal age of adulthood.²⁰ The largest cohort of peddlers were twenty-one to twenty-five years old: 50 percent of the Georgia peddlers, 42 percent of the Virginia peddlers, and 41 percent of 126 peddlers listed in the 1850 census for Worcester County, Massachusetts, fell into this age range.²¹ The vast majority of the peddlers were thirty years old or younger. Only 20 to 30 percent were over thirty. Burrage Yale, a tinware manufacturer of South Reading, Massachusetts, drew directly from this youthful labor pool for his sales force. Yale specifically advertised for “young men of lawful age,” who were between twenty-one and thirty years old.²² Few minors became peddlers because fathers were reluctant to relinquish their rights to the labor of their minor sons, and young men under the age of twenty-one could not enter into legal contracts. For instance, Truman Alderman advised his brother Manna that he was not obligated to repay Elisha Dunham for the tinware Manna was hired to peddle. The contract was invalid because Manna was

¹⁹ Lists of statewide peddler licenses were posted in Georgia newspapers such as the *Georgia Journal* every year from 1826 to 1831. The rosters identified the peddlers by name, age, height, complexion, hair and eye color. This identification system for peddlers more closely resembled notices for white fugitives from the law than runaway slave advertisements, which often used clothing as a distinguishing marker. My educated guess is that at least 90% of the Georgia peddlers were New Englanders.

²⁰ Approximately 700 individuals received more than one license in Virginia between 1798 and 1850. The average length of time between the dates of issue of their first and last license was about three years. Licenses were normally valid for one year, unless prorated.

²¹ Worcester County, Massachusetts, data are from Jaffee, “Peddlers of Progress,” p. 522. Jaffee states that the Worcester peddlers were mostly New Englanders; 5 percent were Irish.

²² Burrage Yale’s advertisements began in 1823. *New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette*, Concord: 1/19/1829, 1/28/1833, 1/26/1835, 1/15/1838, 12/24/1838, 1/20/1840, 1/22/1841, 2/2/1843, 2/1/1844.

underage at the time he engaged to peddle for Dunham, and Dunham did not fulfill his end of their contract. Perhaps the reason Manna could enter the peddling contract was because his father died when he was eighteen.²³

There was generally more sympathy for the few superannuated or crippled men who peddled to support a family than for the young men barely out of their teens who peddled to get ahead.²⁴ Men debilitated by illness or injury who could not work at hard labor often chose peddling as a means of support.²⁵ Peddling was considered honest work for invalids, which kept them off the poor rolls. For instance, the lame innkeeper in Catherine Maria Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* boasts that the income from turning wooden bowls and dishes and peddling them allowed him to maintain a level of independence at which he was able to pay his minister's tax and school tax regularly.²⁶ State legislatures occasionally granted dispensations from peddler license fees to individuals for specific hardship cases. This allowed the peddler's household

²³ Manna and Truman's father died in 1814 when Manna was eighteen. Truman Alderman (Burlington, CT) to Manna Alderman, 6/7/1818. Manna Alderman, *Letters from a Burlington Peddler who Traveled to North Carolina to Sell his Wares* (Burlington, CT: L. Alderman, 1992), p. 7.

²⁴ For a compassionate look at an old peddler see "Morning Prayer of a Poor Old Pedlar in a Barn," *The New-Haven Gazette, and the Connecticut Magazine* 1 (June 1, 1786):127. Also in *Worcester Magazine* (June 1786):103.

²⁵ James Patton, *Letter of James Patton one of the First Residents of Asheville, North Carolina, to His Children* (Racine, WI: William Patton, 1845), p. 7. Thomas Douglas, *Autobiography of Thomas Douglas, Late Judge of the Supreme Court of Florida* (New York: Calkin & Stiles, 1856), p. 25. Gideon Lincecum, "Autobiography of Gideon Lincecum," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* 8 (1904):486. Many memoirists from this era claimed that they gave up farm life because they felt they were too weak in constitution or frail in build. See Joyce Appleby, "New Cultural Heroes in the Early National Period," in Thomas L Haskell and Richard F. Teichgraeber III, editors, *The Culture of the Market: Historical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 182, n. 44.

²⁶ Sedgwick, *A New England Tale*, pp. 44-45.

(dispensations were always granted to upstanding family men) to maintain its independence. William Browning of Rhode Island peddled in Southside Virginia for five years starting when he was twenty-five. Browning married a Virginia woman, settled down on a farm to raise a family, and perhaps thought his peddling days were over. But in his late forties Browning lost one of his legs, and in order to support his nine children Browning began peddling again. Browning successfully petitioned the Virginia legislature for permission to peddle without a license.²⁷

If young men believed that peddling was only an interim vocation to a more stable life, some were mistaken; by choice or by necessity, peddling sometimes ended up as a prolonged career. Most peddlers began their careers at a young age, but some matured into middle-aged and old peddlers. Moses Gilbert got his start in Virginia in 1816 peddling tinware on the western side of the Allegheny mountains. Gilbert peddled in Virginia regularly through the 1820s and 1830s. Twenty-six years after his start, Gilbert was still vending dry goods and clocks in the Shenandoah Valley. Amos Langworthy started peddling dry goods in Southside Virginia in 1818, and continued for at least seventeen years. Ichabod Tuttle and Pliny Patton sold dry goods and clocks in the Piedmont just north of the James for the entire decade of the 1820s. Harlow Cadwell of

²⁷ Dispensation for William Browning, Virginia Statutes, 4/3/1848. Other individuals who petitioned to peddle without a license in Virginia included: Archibald Bigbie, 1/2/1850, Appomattox County; George Boid, 1/14/1851, Augusta County; George M. B. Duncan, 2/28/1848, Buckingham County; David R. Lee, 1/8/1856, Buckingham County; Fenton G. North, 2/10/1849, Charlotte County; William Ball, 12/14/1825, Lee County; Fielding Seals, 12/16/1828, Lee County. Petitions for the students at the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind School in Staunton to peddle books without a license: Augusta County, 1/7/1857; Caroline County, 12/17/1857; Louisa County, 1/13/1858; Petersburg, 1/8/1858. Legislative Petitions, Library of Virginia. For other states, see: Dispensation for Carter Cannon, Yallobusha County, Mississippi Statutes, 2/22/1840, pp. 288-289; Tennessee

Connecticut began peddling in Southside Virginia at age nineteen, and continued peddling in the region for nine years. Many of these newcomers to the labor market probably viewed their situation optimistically as an interim step to property ownership. The gradual accumulation of cash through peddling or by working odd jobs could enable a landless young man to purchase property.²⁸ Freehold independence was an elusive goal for some landless New Englanders, whose condition as wage laborers or petty traders evolved into permanent working-class status and transiency. Others might have changed their goals when they found how lucrative peddling could be.

Peddling was attuned to rhythms in the New England agrarian labor market and seasonal spending sprees of southern farmers. Peddling was predominantly a winter and spring activity partly because the demand for agricultural labor in New England was highest in summer and early fall.²⁹ Young men departed New England in the fall after crops had been harvested, peddled through the winter in the South or West, and returned in the summer to assist in farm work.³⁰ Most peddlers who traded in Georgia between 1825 and 1831 received their licenses in October and November. Peddler licensing in Virginia in the first half of the nineteenth century had two peaks during the year: in October and November, and in May (Figure 3). The fall peak reflected the annual arrival of Yankee peddlers to Georgia and the Old Dominion. In late fall and winter farm households marketed their crops and increased their spending. Winter tasks such as

Acts 1815, pp. 24, 48. *Tennessee Acts* 1817, p. 31.

²⁸ Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen*, p. 310.

²⁹ Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen*, pp. 303-05. Compare Vickers's chart of seasonal wages on p. 305 with Figure 1.3.

³⁰ Dwight, *Travels*, vol. 2, p. 33. Alcott, *Recollection*, pp. 14-15. Douglas, *Autobiography*, p. 25.

clothing repair, and curing meat required supplies such as thread, cloth, and salt. There was a secondary rural consumer peak in May, as farmers prepared their lands for planting.³¹ In Virginia, May was traditionally the month in which merchants and tavern keepers obtained their annual licenses, so the peddlers who sought licenses in May might have been mimicking the practice of established merchants with whom they competed.³²

Many wage laborers in this era remained rooted in their local communities, but some young men who strove to accumulate capital through nonagricultural enterprises led unsettled lives. The economic opportunities they sought after were fleeting, so these young speculators had to keep adrift in order to get ahead. Peddling was but one strategy among multiple trades that some mobile young men pursued. These Yankee jacks-of-all-trades were on the move and on the make. Frontier settlements offered the most opportunities, consequently many of these unattached young, petty speculators followed emigrant family groups westward.³³ This drifting labor force brought anonymity and the cash medium into the local exchange of labor and surplus home production. They competed for jobs which otherwise might have been filled through the reciprocal exchange of labor between farm households or through the custom work of established artisans.³⁴ Moving from field to field and never settling on a vocation, the jack-of-all-

³¹ Charles J. Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns: Settlement and Country Trade in Southside Virginia, 1730-1800* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 161.

³² *Georgia Journal*, 1825-1831. LRLV.

³³ Gray, *The Yankee West*, p. 13.

³⁴ For the traditional patterns of production and exchange affected by itinerant laborers, see Michael Merrill, "Cash is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review* 4 (Sept 1976):42-71, and Gary J. Kornblith, "Self-Made Men: The Development of Middling-Class Consciousness in New England," *Massachusetts Review* 26 (1985):467-68.

trades disturbed social and economic structures. They were at a life stage of quasi-independence, which they underscored by changing jobs and employers frequently. Itinerant Yankee peddlers, pedagogues, and jacks-of-all-trades epitomized the social and economic flux of early nineteenth-century America.

Leading a life of semi-subsistence in the heavily forested hills and thin, rocky topsoil of New England compelled farmers to become thrifty, resourceful, and to develop multiple talents – to become jacks-of-all-trades. Remoteness from markets forced New England communities to be self-sufficient in meeting many of their material and labor needs. Farms were not specialized nor was labor subdivided, so that every household always had something to trade with its neighbors, whether surplus produce or labor.³⁵ New England natives, noted a farmer of St. Lawrence County, New York, were “obliged from childhood to practice twenty different employments, with equal dexterity.”³⁶ A poor youth hired out as a servant was known as a “Boy of All Work” from the many duties he was expected to perform.³⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1841 that the “sturdy lad” from New Hampshire or Vermont “who in turn tries all the professions, who *teams it, farms it, peddles*, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth...” was the embodiment of “Self Reliance.”³⁸ The ability

³⁵ Percy Wells Bidwell and John I. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States 1620-1860* (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1925), p. 198. Christopher Clark, “Household Economy,” p. 174. Alan Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), pp. 92-93.

³⁶ *NY Board of Agriculture Memoirs* 2 (1823):87, quoted in Bidwell and Falconer, *History of Agriculture*, p. 205.

³⁷ Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America: 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), pp. 17-18.

³⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self Reliance,” in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*,

of the Yankee jack-of-all-trades to apply his broad knowledge of mundane tasks to problem-solving made him a keen competitor in the marketplace as well as an agent of market development in frontier communities.³⁹

Popular humor associated the itinerant jack-of-all-trades with the Yankee peddler and the Yankee schoolmaster. Equipped with a primer, patent medicines, and a halter, an itinerant Yankee allegedly was prepared to teach school, peddle, or steal a horse.⁴⁰ The humor was based on real examples of the Yankee jack-of-all-trades such as Manna Alderman of Burlington, Connecticut. Alderman peddled tinware in North Carolina for a few years before he bought a small shop building and tried his hand at many trades: school teacher, brandy and cider peddler, harness maker, pipe maker, wheelwright, wagon maker, millwright, and farmer.⁴¹ Many young men from New England, such as Alderman, James Guild, Bronson Alcott, and William Andrus Alcott, did indeed alternate between teaching school and peddling. Most peddler-pedagogues preferred education over trade, but frequently resorted to peddling when they could not find a teaching position.⁴² Young men who were more concerned with earnings than respectability gravitated towards peddling, because the wages of schoolmasters were far lower than the

edited by Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 194-195.

³⁹ Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *AHR* 90 (April 1985):356-57; "Part 2," *AHR* 90 (June 1985):558.

⁴⁰ Caroline Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1838), p. 35. [H. Hodges], "A Pedagogue in Georgia," *Putnam's Magazine* 5 (Feb 1855):187-92. Reprinted in Eugene L. Schwaab, ed., *Travels in the Old South* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), II:543. A. De Puy Van Buren, *Jottings of a Year's Sojourn in the South* (Battle Creek, MI: 1859), pp. 23, 75. Freeman Hunt, *American Anecdotes: Original and Select* (Boston: Putnam & Hunt, 1830), vol. 2:224-25.

⁴¹ Alderman, *Letters*.

⁴² Guild, "Journal," pp. 249-313. A. Bronson Alcott, *New Connecticut. An Autobiographical Poem* (Boston: Privately Printed, 1881). Alcott, *Recollection*.

potential profits in peddling.⁴³ In an 1839 illustration (Figure 4), a boisterous crowd of Yankee immigrants stands, appropriately, beyond the pale of a substantial western homestead. The young men's stylish beaver hats are offset by their backpacks – an emblem of their transiency – and poorly fitting pantaloons, which expose their calves and ankles – a marker of their lower-class status. The young man at the front of the throng tells the farmer: “We’ll chop Wood for \$10 a month, dress Flax for 9, and teach School for 8.” In the background a Yankee tin peddler on his cart declares: “I kept school awhile but its not respectable enough.” The cartoon mocked itinerant schoolmasters as, ironically, more desperate than transients who pursued less respectable work. All itinerants, the cartoon charged, measured their respectability in dollars and cents.

* * *

There was a strong egalitarian streak in New England culture that manifested itself, sometimes violently, in an aversion to dependence and deference.⁴⁴ From about the age of ten till his twenty-first birthday a boy was obligated to work for his father. In the colonial period, young adult men often continued to work on their fathers' farms into their late twenties in anticipation of eventually inheriting land and independence from

⁴³ The wages of male school teachers in early nineteenth-century Connecticut, \$8 to \$18 per month, were comparable to rates for farm labor. Women earned only \$4 to \$6 per month for teaching school. Solomon Wales, *Connecticut Towns No. 24, Union in 1803* (Hartford: The Acorn Club of Connecticut, 1954), p. 10. Samuel Goodrich, *Connecticut Towns No. 25, Ridgefield in 1800* (Hartford: The Acorn Club of Connecticut, 1954), p. 17. George Washington Stanley, *Connecticut Towns No. 26, Wallingford 1811-1812* (Hartford: The Acorn Club of Connecticut, 1961), p. 16. Eliphaz Alvord, *Connecticut Towns No. 27, Winchester-Winsted in 1813* (Hartford: The Acorn Club of Connecticut, 1961), pp. 9, 15.

⁴⁴ Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, pp. 76, 94, 189, 379.

their fathers. After the Revolution, however, complaints of insubordinate children and servants became more common.⁴⁵ More and more young adult men left their fathers' farms to live out their early adulthood in a state of semi-independence in the marketplace. Many achieved their premature independence by "buying their labor from their fathers."⁴⁶ James Guild, who was bound out to his aunt and uncle at the tender age of nine, spent many hours "in secret wishing" for his twenty-first birthday, when he would be freed from his "long confined situation." Upon his much anticipated release, Guild precipitously left his uncle's household and hit the road as a peddler. Out of pride Guild rejected the prospect of hiring himself out to his uncle or any other man as a wage laborer. Guild "dreaded the word farmer boy," and had the ambition to make something of himself other than a mere "plowboy."⁴⁷ The expectation of earning only eight or nine dollars per month in Burlington, Connecticut, convinced Manna Alderman to remain in North Carolina, where he made much more money peddling, teaching school, and doing odd jobs. Furthermore, wrote Alderman, in Connecticut he would have had to "work hard & have one or more Masters."⁴⁸ By 1820 increasing numbers of young men were

⁴⁵ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals & Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁴⁶ Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 110. Gray, *The Yankee West*, p. 13. Nichols, *Forty Years*, p. 20. As late as the 1830s and 1840s prescriptive literature asserted that sons owed strict obedience to their fathers at age 20 as much as at age 10. Some pushed the age of filial compliance to age 40 and beyond. Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity 1830-1860* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1982), p. 23.

⁴⁷ Guild, "Journal," pp. 250-51, 253, 258, 265, 284, 290.

⁴⁸ Manna Alderman (Chatham County, NC) to Alderman Family (Burlington, CT), 2/14/1819. Alderman, *Letters*, p. 17.

setting out on their own in their late teens and early twenties.⁴⁹ Adult sons no longer labored for their fathers out of a sense of love, duty, or in expectation of an inheritance but for wages from their fathers. By the mid-1820s in several Massachusetts communities, hired laborers were taking the place of emigrating sons' labor.⁵⁰ The departure of a son to peddle in the South was not always an overt act of rebellion against parents, but the annual exodus of hundreds of young men from New England in the early nineteenth century evinces a critical alteration of the power relationship between the generations.

The compromise worked out in the Alcott family was perhaps typical for many New England families, which had to balance the father's demands for his sons' labor and the young men's aspirations for independence. Bronson and Chatfield Alcott began peddling and teaching school in Virginia and North Carolina about the age of eighteen, journeying south each winter from 1818 to 1823. Joseph Alcott preserved his right to his minor sons' labor during the summer months when he needed it most, but his sons persuaded him to release them in the winter to peddle. Bronson and Chatfield left Wolcott, Connecticut, in October or November of each year, and returned the following May or June to help their father with plowing, basket-making, and other farm chores during the months of July, August and September. As an underage peddler Bronson showed deference to his parents' wishes in correspondence from Virginia. Bronson begged his mother and father in an 1818 letter from Norfolk, Virginia, to excuse his

⁴⁹ Kett, *Rites of Passage*, pp. 22, 29, 30-31.

⁵⁰ Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen*, pp. 300-01. Gross, "Culture and Cultivation," p. 51. Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism*, p. 129. By the 1830s in Yankee settlements in

“youthful impetuosity” and “roving disposition.” He opened the letter “Honored & Dear Parents,” perhaps to assert that he was obeying the fifth commandment. The eighteen-year-old Bronson portrayed himself as the opposite of the prodigal son; in his letter he solicited his parents’ advice on peddling and asked when they wanted him to return home. By age twenty, Bronson was more self-confident but still professed unselfish motives. Bronson reminded his father, who was \$200 in debt in 1820, that the cultivation of the Alcott family farm, which encompassed only eighty acres, was unlikely to pull the family through the dull times. Bronson and Chatfield could earn their father “very little during the winter season,” but by “running a little risk” at peddling in the South for eight or nine months, Bronson was confident he could reduce the family’s burden of debt. This, boasted Bronson, he would accomplish before he became his “own man.”⁵¹ When Chatfield Alcott reached adulthood, his relationship with his father took on a market cast. In the back of the journal that he kept while peddling in Virginia in 1821-1822, Chatfield recorded an agreement to work on his father’s farm in Wolcott, Connecticut, for five months at \$10 per month, commencing on May 24, 1823, and ending the day after

Michigan. underage young men asserted their right to their own labor, Gray, *The Yankee West*, pp. 109-11, 115-17.

⁵¹ Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, Norfolk, 11/30/1818. Wagner, “Letters,” pp. 245-248. *Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 1/24/1820*. Richard L. Herrnstadt, ed., *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott* (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1969), pp. 1-2. *Autobiographical Collections, Volumes 1 and 2, 1799-1823*, p. 23. *Amos Bronson Alcott Papers*, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Alcott, *New Connecticut*, pp. 209-12. Thomas Douglas made a similar justification for starting at peddling at age eighteen: to aid his father in paying his debts and relieving his embarrassments. Douglas, *Autobiography*, p. 25.

Chatfield's twenty-second birthday.⁵² Bronson and Chatfield Alcott's experience epitomized the attenuated transition to independent adulthood in New England.

As a result of the loneliness and unsettlement peddlers experienced in the course of their embrace of an itinerant lifestyle, peddlers came to idealize the homes from which they sprang. This nostalgia for the homes and communities they left behind was integral to young peddlers' embrace of commercialism and break with the past. A young peddler's departure from his parents' home epitomized the tensions many households felt between market involvement and the maintenance of the sentimentalized family. The dramatic departure of a young man from his family was a popular vignette in nineteenth-century literature and lithographs.⁵³ For instance, the fictive Yankee peddler Ichabod Coffin, Jr., "blubbered like a child" when he took "an affectionate leave of his family."⁵⁴ John Hovey Robinson created a very maudlin scene when William Harvard Stinchfield left his mother and father to seek his fortune peddling. Stinchfield nobly declines his "hard-earned paternal heritage" and instructs his father to: "divide it among my brethren, and fear not for me; I am young and sanguine and go forth upon my worldly struggle, with a stout heart and firm step."⁵⁵ Sentimental print culture rarely depicts a young man's departure from home for what it often was – a calculated decision to seek the main chance in the marketplace.⁵⁶ This was a deliberate choice that young men made more

⁵² Chatfield Alcott, "Journal to the South, 1821-22." Alcott Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁵³ Ryan, *The Empire of the Mothe*, pp. 59-70.

⁵⁴ Watterston, *Wanderer in Washington*, pp. 93, 97.

⁵⁵ John Hovey Robinson, *The Life and Adventures of Wm. Harvard Stinchfield* (Portland, ME: For the Author, Printed by Thurston & Co, 1851), pp. 13-15.

⁵⁶ Johnson Jones Hooper parodies sentimental scenes of boys departing home. The southern trickster Simon Suggs substitutes a paroxysm of laughter for tears when he

than once. The single, irreversible break between son and parents in sentimental print culture was an over-dramatization that masks how attenuated the process of leaving home was. In reality, many young men left home only to return and depart again several times, particularly the young men who engaged in seasonal peddling.⁵⁷ Young men were conflicted by cultural impulses which pulled them in opposite directions – filial attachments to an idealized home versus worldly ambitions.⁵⁸ Sentimentalization of the home expressed the young peddlers' ambivalence over breaking away from it. The break ended the young men's dependence, but independence in the marketplace entailed great risks and provoked many anxieties.

A malady which afflicted Anglo-American families facing dissolution through market forces or emigration was homesickness.⁵⁹ This sentimental disease struck peddlers who expressed a longing for the company of family, friends, and the comfort of familiar customs and surroundings. Expressions of homesickness, however, also had financial underpinnings. In peddlers' correspondence home, the sense of loss between mothers and sons is often palpable. For instance, Manna Alderman tried to comfort his

leaves his mother and father, because the departing Suggs had loaded his mother's tobacco pipe with gunpowder. Johnson Jones Hooper, *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1858; reprint, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), pp. 30-32.

⁵⁷ Kett, *Rites of Passage*, p. 17. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 267.

⁵⁸ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 57-58. Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, pp. 113, 116. Susan E. Gray argues that *emigrant* Yankee culture was able to embrace both communal and market values and to accumulate capital and preserve the family at the same time. Gray, *The Yankee West*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁹ Homesickness suddenly became a commonplace topic in correspondence in the early nineteenth century. The word did not enter the English language until the late eighteenth

mother in Connecticut over his extended separation from her on his peddling trips to North Carolina.⁶⁰ J. U. Leonard reported in late June of 1827 that Stearns & Boyden, two peddlers who replenished their stock of goods in his store in Lincolnton, North Carolina, were doing well “selling [Je]ws Harps and Barlow knives ... among the Dutch.” Leonard added, perhaps in a mock tone, that the two men “wish[ed] they had gone on to the North to see there mama’s.”⁶¹ Alfred Bates’ mother expressed concern about his decision to peddle clocks for twenty-one months in Mississippi in 1836. Afraid for Alfred’s health and welfare, and perhaps worried about who would take care of her in her old age, she tried hard to dissuade Alfred – her youngest son – from following his older brothers into such a long and hazardous venture.⁶² Fathers were less compassionate about sons’ departures, and perhaps more disturbed by the loss of young men’s labor.⁶³ When James Guild departed from his aunt and uncle’s household to engage in peddling in 1818, Guild’s uncle appeared indifferent to his nephew’s welfare. Guild was determined to behave stoically at his departure, but the reaction of his aunt and female cousins “caused many a tear to flow from [Guild’s] eyes.” Passing by farmsteads where “young people

century. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Manna Alderman (Fayetteville, NC) to Alderman Family (Burlington, CT), 3/2/1817. Alderman, *Letters*, p. 4.

⁶¹ J. U. Leonard (Lincolnton, NC) to Russell Upson Peck (Berlin, CT), 6/20/1827. Russell Upson Peck Correspondence, CHS. Dennis F. Boyden and Lewis Stearns peddled dry goods in western Southside Virginia from 1824 to 1829 in counties on or near the North Carolina border: Patrick, Henry, Pittsylvania, Franklin, and Bedford. LRLV.

⁶² Anson Bates (East Granby, CT) to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS), 9/1/1836. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

⁶³ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, p. 73. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood*, p. 111. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, p. 232. Joyce Appleby notes that in recollections of their young adulthood in this era, memoirists frequently mention their fathers’ hostility towards ambitions that took them away from the family, but mothers figured more

were enjoying each others society” caused James Guild to regret his decision to become a peddler. Guild looked back fondly on the social life on his uncle’s farm, where he had to work hard and “with a discontented mind,” but could still enjoy the “sweets of society.” “O I could enjoy more happiness when I was bound out to Mr. Hutchinson in one day,” lamented Guild. “than I could here [peddling] in a week.”⁶⁴ Poor business compounded longings for home, as in the case of Mr. Tubbs, a tin peddler who grew depressed because he owed his employers “about Eighty Dollars, and he was home sick.”⁶⁵ Long absences from home were particularly hard on peddlers with wives and children back in New England. Luther Darling was “anxious that his family should not suffer in his absence” while he peddled tinware in Virginia, and appealed to his employer Benjamin Wilcox “to see to his family a little.”⁶⁶ Responsibilities to home and family often precluded a peddling trip altogether. David Kelsey’s scheme to peddle tinware in the South in the fall of 1822 was dashed by the sudden death of his young daughter and the illness of his other children. Kelsey’s peddling venture went “verry contrary to the wishes” of his wife, and Kelsey’s thoughts too were turned more towards “domestic concerns, and less of foren prospects.”⁶⁷

Peddlers frequently opened their letters to home with a report on their health.

When discussing the prospects of a peddling venture, peddlers would qualify their

positively as moral teachers. Appleby, “New Cultural Heroes,” pp. 177-78.

⁶⁴ Guild, “Journal,” pp. 250-51, 255, 257-60.

⁶⁵ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/19/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

⁶⁶ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 1/20/1823. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

⁶⁷ David Kelsey (Winfield, CT) to R & B Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 10/7/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

projections of success with statements such as: "if health and life is spared," "if favored with the blessings of health," or as Bronson Alcott put it, "should I be prospered & have my health." As Alcott experienced himself in 1822, medical treatment could consume all the profits from an entire season of peddling.⁶⁸ Disease exacted a high toll from Yankee peddlers who traveled to the South in pursuit of profits. It was a commonly held belief that emigrants from the northern states were unseasoned to the warm climate and diseases of the South. Experience bolstered this folk wisdom. Truman Alderman warned his brother Manna that people from Connecticut were not apt to survive over two years in the South. Manna did indeed eventually succumb to typhoid fever.⁶⁹ While peddling tinware and pewter spoons in Louisiana, George Holcombe of Granby, Connecticut, was stricken by a "Fever and ague" that lasted thirty-three days. When the ailing Holcombe arrived at the port of New York, the authorities quarantined him for four or five days.⁷⁰ Every peddler who left Poquanock, Connecticut, reported Cyrus Phelps in the fall of 1836, "is either dead or hard sick & have been taken within a short time after they arrived."⁷¹ Connecticut clock peddler Carlos Bates admitted to his cousin Susan L.

⁶⁸ Samuel Clark and Jabez W. Gilbert (Bamanes? Creek, VA) to Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA), 9/25/1819. David Kelsey (Winfield, CT) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/15/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS. Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 11/30/1818, in Wagner, "Letters," p. 245. William A. Alcox (Norfolk, VA) to Joseph C. Alcox & family (Wolcott, CT), 3/1/1821. Autobiographical Collections, Vols. 1 and 2, 1799-1823, p. 114. Alcott Papers, HLHU.

⁶⁹ Samuel Bass Letterbook, 5/31/1822, VHS. Truman Alderman (Burlington, CT) to Manna Alderman, 6/7/1818. Alderman, *Letters*, pp. 7, 35.

⁷⁰ George Holcombe (Quarantine Ground, New York City) to Oliver Filley, 6/27/1822. Filley Family Papers, CHS.

⁷¹ Phelps received correspondence from Virginia that informed him of the deaths of several peddlers. Cyrus Phelps (Poquanock, CT) to Carlos Bates (Natchez), 11/15/1836. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. For the death of William Sherman, see James H. Steele and Luther Boyden (Natchez, MS Terr) to Caleb Sherman (Conway, MA), 3/12/1819.

Pinney that many of the young northern men who traveled south “in search of gain, find a premature & untimely grave,” while the survivors paid “a dear tribute to the climate.” Many young men risked their lives in order to maximize their profits peddling in the South. To family members this was foolhardiness at best, a crass disregard for their own lives. Pinney admonished her cousin not to endanger his life “for the sake of accumulating wealth,” but to return home “to the north where the climate’s more healthy and more salubrious.” When a report that it had been “sickly on to the south” circulated in East Granby, Connecticut, in March, 1831, Albert Bates assumed the news to be “only a story to prevent people from going” to the South.⁷² Bates did not suggest where the rumor had arisen, but it likely could have been spread by people who were opposed to peddling. Employers in New England probably saw the annual migration of peddlers as a drain on the labor pool, which increased the wages of those who remained behind. Those opposed to market culture were convinced that peddling in the South not only struck young men with diseases of the body, but also wasted away their characters.

Some peddlers delayed marriage and setting up their own households to seek success in the marketplace instead. For instance, Stutley B. Medbery and several other former clock peddlers opened a retail store in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1841. Medbery wrote to their former employer, Rensseleaer Upson, that “[w]e are all of us Atwood, Mr

Sherman, Tabor Family Papers, MHS. For the death of Levi Barnes, see George W. Bartholomew (Athens, AL) to Rensseleaer Upson (Bristol, CT) 9/4/1826. Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL.

⁷² Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS) to Susan L Pinney (Brockport, NY), 7/16/1836. Susan L. Pinney, (Brockport, NY) to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS), 5/15/1837. Albert Bates (East Granby) to Carlos Bates (Wilmington, Fluvanna County, VA), 3/15/1831. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

Billings and my self Old Batchelders as yet.”⁷³ Clock peddler Carlos Bates’ bachelorhood was a frequent topic in letters from relatives in Connecticut. Susan L. Pinney asked her cousin if his “Bachelor resolutions” were as “permanent as the hills.” Apparently so, for Bates did not marry until 1860 when he was fifty-two years old.⁷⁴ The peddling lifestyle corroded contentment in family life, its detractors claimed. Samuel Hopkins Peck warned his younger brother Russell against peddling: “when you find yourself getting old – you have lived such a roving life that you can never content yourself to settle down on a farm and Enjoy your (I wont say ill begotten) means.”⁷⁵ Clock peddler Milo Holcomb was conscious of the decision he faced between home and market. Milo waxed nostalgic about an idealized notion of his brother Nahum’s household back in Connecticut. Milo imagined Nahum to be “passing the winter in the happy farmer fashion” in the company of his wife and young child with a “cheerful fire, cider and apples with other good things to sweeten” and make life happy. Peddling made Milo a stranger to “the endearments of home with all its comforts and pleasures,” but Milo was also certain that his clock peddling was more lucrative than his brother Nahum’s farming. For all his sentimental musings on farm life, Holcomb did not seem to regret his decision to pursue wealth in the marketplace instead of stability on a farm.⁷⁶

⁷³ Stutley B. Medbery (Paducah, KY) to Rensseleaer Upson (Bristol, CT), 12/26/1841. George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL.

⁷⁴ Susan L. Pinney to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS) 10/23/1834. Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS) to Susan L. Pinney (Brockport, NY), 7/16/1836. Susan L. Pinney, (cousin, Brockport, NY) to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS), 5/15/1837. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. For a discussion of Yankee peddlers as seducers, see chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Samuel Hopkins Peck (Augusta, GA) to Russell Upson Peck (Berlin, CT), 8/6/1826. Russell Upson Peck Correspondence, CHS.

⁷⁶ Milo Holcomb (Uniontown, PA) to Nahum Holcomb and Nahum Holcomb, Jr. (West Granby, CT), 1/29/1831. Holcomb Family Papers, CSL.

Many peddlers like Milo Holcomb chose to forgo the stability of family life for the pursuit of wealth. Like many young men in the emerging marketplace, these peddlers shifted their loyalties from home and tradition to self and progress. A willingness to cut emotional bonds to the family seems to have been a necessary step towards the pursuit of individualistic goals. The diaries and memoirs of businessmen from this era display a lack of satisfaction in settling down.⁷⁷ One manifestation of the emotional distance peddlers placed between themselves and their families was a deliberate break in correspondence. Some peddlers might have found it necessary to suppress or reject their desires for home (or its claims on them) in order to make the transition to independence in the marketplace. Manna Alderman did not write back to his family in Connecticut for fourteen months while he engaged in various enterprises in North Carolina. Truman Alderman berated his brother Manna for neglecting to write to his family, concluding that Manna “care[d] but little about [his] relations & friends.” Manna crassly assumed that his family was concerned about what would happen to his property if he should die, and informed his brother that he had prepared documents which directed the disposal of his belongings.⁷⁸ Peddler Samuel J. Lewis coldly calculated the amount of time it would cost him to communicate with his cousin Eliza Beecher. If he wrote to Beecher, he would have to write to all of his cousins, which would have taken away too much time from “selling goods and getting the pay,” which was his “principal studdy.”⁷⁹ The demands of business also postponed trips home to New England. Truman Alderman wondered if

⁷⁷ Appleby, “New Cultural Heroes,” pp. 171, 182.

⁷⁸ Truman Alderman (Burlington, CT) to Manna Alderman, 6/7/1818. Manna Alderman (NC) to Alderman Family (Burlington, CT), 7/12/1818. Alderman, *Letters*, pp. 5, 7, 8.

⁷⁹ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Naugatuck,

Manna did not return to Connecticut because of his outstanding debts to Elisha Dunham, who had advanced Manna some tinware.⁸⁰ William Sherman did not want to return home to Massachusetts until his father had secured an agreement with a clock manufacturer to discount Sherman's outstanding debts. William Sherman never made it home. He died of a fever in Natchez.⁸¹

Many young men risked all in peddling rather than remain in New England eking out an existence as laborers or farmers of marginal land. As early as the first half of the eighteenth century, writes Richard L. Bushman, Connecticut farmers of marginal lands mortgaged their property, which earned small profits, in order to engage in trade, which promised much larger profits.⁸² In the early nineteenth century, younger generations cast away traditional attitudes towards debt and restraints on speculative enterprise. Increasing numbers of people were willing to mortgage the farm to raise capital for investment in new enterprises.⁸³ But becoming a peddler was not a clear-cut decision for many men, because the volatility of the marketplace made peddling a risky venture. For young men "seeking the main chance," peddling could offer a path to quick riches or to onerous debt. John Burnham, who supported his family on a farm in Windsor, Vermont, vacillated about whether to peddle tinware in the South during the winter. Burnham's brother-in-law Joel Hale advised Burnham that he could do better to peddle than to work

CT), 3/6/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

⁸⁰ Truman Alderman (Burlington, CT) to Manna Alderman, 6/7/1818. Manna Alderman (NC) to Alderman Family (Burlington, CT), 7/12/1818. Alderman, *Letters*, p. 5.

⁸¹ William Sherman (Natchez, MS Terr) to Caleb Sherman (Conway, MA), 6/30/1818. James H. Steele and Luther Boyden (Natchez, MS Terr) to Caleb Sherman (Conway, MA), 3/12/1819. Sherman, Tabor Family Papers, MHS.

⁸² Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, pp. 117-18.

⁸³ Clark, "Household Economy," p. 182.

his farm, but Burnham worried about the risks. Burnham wanted to buy \$250 or \$300 worth of tinware from Benjamin Wilcox, a tinware manufacturer of Berlin, Connecticut, which he intended to pay for out of his small farm's surplus of cheese, flax, tow cloth, and dried apples. Burnham had worked hard for what little he had, and he did not want to put himself in a worse financial situation. He asked Wilcox for assurances that he could earn good wages from Wilcox and that markets in the South were better than they were in Vermont.⁸⁴

Some men indeed lost the farm through peddling. As a consequence of unsuccessful peddling in the South, Giles and Samuel Griswold lost their farm in Burlington, Connecticut, in 1821 to compensate their creditors.⁸⁵ Clock peddler John O. Camp surrendered two pieces of land in Plymouth, Connecticut, to clock manufacturer Chauncey Jerome to satisfy a debt of sixty-eight dollars, and Calvin Perkins' meager estate was attached to satisfy a debt of fifty dollars to Jerome.⁸⁶ All but \$25 of the \$1,725 from the sale of Milo Holcomb's farm in Hartland, Connecticut, went to pay off Holcomb's old peddling debts. Putting the best light on the loss of his farm, Milo confided to his brother Nahum: "I value not the sacrifice if any has been made. The farm in Hartland I would have sold for half its value rather than have kept it[.] for to tell you the undisguised truth I am too lazy for a Hartland farmer. It is hard enough to work

⁸⁴ John Burnham (Windsor, VT) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin), 3/13/1820, 9/11/1820. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

⁸⁵ Truman Alderman (Burlington, CT) to Manna Alderman, 1/22/1820, 3/4/1821. Alderman, *Letters*, pp. 23, 26-27. For the severity of bankruptcy laws in early Connecticut, see Peter J. Coleman, *Debtors and Creditors in America: Insolvency, Imprisonment for Debt, and Bankruptcy, 1607-1900* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1974).

good land but from land that has more rock than Soil I hope to be delivered.”⁸⁷ Samuel Hopkins Peck, who had experienced the volatility of the marketplace as a banker in Georgia, urged his younger brother Russell Upson Peck to reconsider farming over peddling. Farming in Connecticut did not bring in returns of twenty-five or thirty percent like peddling could, Samuel admitted, but farming was safer than speculating in the marketplace: “Banks fail! ships founder! stocks depreciate – But midst the storm of accidents and misfortunes – the old farm stands like the House built upon a Rock unshaken.”⁸⁸ The admonitions of Samuel Hopkins Peck and perhaps of many other concerned family members fell upon deaf ears. Many young men rejected the limitations of dependent subsistence in New England for a risky independence as peddlers in the national marketplace.

* * *

Peddling fever struck young men in New England in the 1810s in a manner that William Andrus Alcott compared in retrospect to the California gold rush. The young peddlers who returned to New England in the summer from their western and southern peddling expeditions “appeared to be getting rich.”⁸⁹ The story of the triumphant return

⁸⁶ [Chauncey] Jerome & Barrow v. John O. Camp, 4/29/1830; Chauncey Jerome v. Calvin Perkins, 4/5/1838. Bela B. Satterlee Collection, CHS.

⁸⁷ Power of Attorney made by Milo Holcomb of Hartland, CT, appointing his brother, Nahum Holcomb, Jr, of Granby, CT, to sell his property in Hartland, CT, to pay his debts and satisfy his creditors. Dated at Lexington, VA, 12/16/1834. Milo Holcomb (Warren Court House, IL) to Nahum Holcomb (West Granby, CT), 7/27/1835. Holcomb Family Papers, CSL. For similar expressions of despair of farming in New England from this period, see Appleby, “New Cultural Heroes,” pp. 174-76.

⁸⁸ Samuel Hopkins Peck (Augusta, GA) to Russell Upson Peck (Berlin, CT), 8/6/1826. Russell Upson Peck Correspondence, CHS.

⁸⁹ William Andrus Alcott, *The Young Man's Guide* (Boston: 1834), pp. 136-137. Alcott, *Recollection*, pp. 14-15.

of the formerly penniless peddler to his New England home became the counterpoint to the maudlin scenes of the youth's departure.⁹⁰ The four to six peddlers who returned to Bristol, Connecticut, in 1823 looked slicked up and gratified, or as Asa Upson described their appearance, "as Clean as the Cat Come out of the Cream."⁹¹ Orren Fuller "made out well" on his 1818 peddling venture to the South, and returned to Burlington, Connecticut, with \$300. Another Burlington peddler, Samuel Beckwith did even better, clearing about \$650 in one year. Truman Alderman urged his brother Manna to follow the examples of peddlers like Fuller and Beckwith, to "pluck up courage & go to georgia or some other place" to peddle, where Manna would "make a Good Deal of money."⁹² The success of a sibling at peddling inspired many younger brothers to take up the peddler's pack. Milton Bates was "wide awake to goin on to the south" after hearing of the success of his brother Carlos in peddling clocks in Virginia.⁹³ William Sherman and his three partners who peddled in the Mississippi Territory cleared \$3,000 each in 1818. What would be called a "pretty little fortune" in Massachusetts Sherman and his peddling partners considered "only as a tolerable good business for young men just embarking in business with a small capital & no credit and all strangers in the country & to the business we have been in."⁹⁴ A year's profits of \$300 or \$3,000 was unheard of in the small farming communities from

⁹⁰ "AN INTERESTING INCIDENT," *Georgia Journal*, 8/4/1835.

⁹¹ Asa Upson (Bristol, CT) to Rensseleae Upson (Huntsville, Madison Co, AL), 4/6/1823. George Rensseleae Upson Papers, CSL.

⁹² Truman Alderman (Burlington, CT) to Manna Alderman, 6/7/1818, 8/22/1818. Alderman, *Letters*, pp. 7, 11. Beckwith's profits were stolen from his trunk which he left in his employer's household in the Summer of 1818.

⁹³ Albert Bates (East Granby, CT) to Carlos Bates (Wilmington PO, Fluvanna Co, VA), 3/15/1831. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

⁹⁴ William Sherman (Natchez, MS Terr.) to Caleb Sherman (Conway, MA), 11/21/1818. Sherman, Tabor Family Papers, MHS.

which the peddlers came, especially among the peddlers of middling and lower-class origins.⁹⁵

Rumors of astronomical profits and the promise of high wages lured many young New England men into peddling. It was commonly estimated that peddlers realized profits of 33 percent on the sale of their merchandize, a figure which amazed and scandalized contemporaries.⁹⁶ Interest rates on loans generally were constrained to the biblically mandated allowance of 6 percent. For instance, the charter of the Second Bank of the United States prohibited it from charging more than 6 percent interest. The rate of return on a farmstead, particularly in New England, although steady, was even lower. Whitmarsh Seabrook and John O'Neill of South Carolina estimated that interest on capital invested in southern agriculture was only about 4 percent, but interest on grain agriculture in the North was even less, only 3 percent.⁹⁷ John Birkbeck estimated in 1818 that land speculation in the Northwest brought in returns of 15 percent, albeit on much more capital than peddling.⁹⁸ The prevailing rate for farm labor in New England in the

⁹⁵ There was a similar fear that boys who worked on the Erie Canal were luring other young men into that line of work by flaunting the cash they earned during the summer on the canal. Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), p. 154.

⁹⁶ Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 1/24/1820. Herrnstadt, *Letters*, pp. 1-2. Samuel Hopkins Peck (Augusta, GA) to Russell Upson Peck (Berlin, CT) 8/6/1826. Russell Upson Peck Correspondence, CHS. Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Naugatuck, CT), 1/17/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

⁹⁷ Clarence H. Danhof, *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 112-13. Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 36.

⁹⁸ Morris Birkbeck, *Letters from Illinois* (London, 1818), p. 85. For the career of a young Yankee land speculator in Michigan, see Susan E. Gray, "Local Speculator as

first three decades of the nineteenth century – \$7 to \$10 per month – was not enough to keep some young men at home. Even in summer months, when agricultural laborers received \$8 to \$15 per month, farm wages could not compete with the pay offered by the employers of peddlers.⁹⁹ Tin peddlers earned from \$25 to \$50 per month in wages and often split the net profits the peddlers brought in above their salaries, while clock peddlers earned up to \$75 per month. Wages paid to clock factory operatives and to clock peddlers in the 1820s, reminisced former peddler William Andrus Alcott in the 1870s, tended to push up wages on the farms surrounding the clock manufacturing region of central Connecticut.¹⁰⁰ Like the prodigal son, the Yankee peddlers returned each summer to their home towns, but the peddlers were not penitent. Rather than submitting to patriarchal authority, returning peddlers infected others with the speculative fever of peddling.

The emerging liberal market ethos, which encouraged the pursuit of self-interest, had an offshoot which condoned sharp trading. In early nineteenth-century New England this radically competitive and egoistic behavior was epitomized by the expression “by hook or by crook.”¹⁰¹ This is an old expression dating back to the fourteenth century

Confidence Man: Munford Eldred Jr. and the Michigan Land Rush,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 10 (Fall 1990):383-406.

⁹⁹ David McClure, *Connecticut Towns No. 19, East Windsor in 1806* (Hartford: The Acorn Club of Connecticut, 1949), p. 12. Stanley, *Wallingford*, p. 21. Dwight, *Travels*, vol. 2, p. 33. Anson Bates (E. Granby) to Carlos Bates (Jefferson, Ashtabula Co, OH), 5/6/1830. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. Bidwell and Falconer, *History of Agriculture*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁰ Alcott quoted in John Joseph Murphy, “The Establishment of the American Clock Industry: A Study in Entrepreneurial History” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1961), pp. 119-120.

¹⁰¹ Even a Virginia Whig, Henry Wise, could describe approvingly the lobbying of New Englanders for naval appropriations as prosecuted “by hook or by crook.” “*A compliment to*

which means to attain a goal by any means, whether fair or foul, just or unjust, legal or illegal.¹⁰² This sort of behavior was not new to the marketplace, but toleration – even celebration – of astute business practices was growing within parts of the mercantile community in the 1810s and 1820s.¹⁰³ “By hook or by crook” was used especially to describe the shifty manner in which lower-class Yankees pursued a livelihood through odd jobs and petty trade.¹⁰⁴ As was shown in the introduction, sharp trading was attributed broadly to rural New England society, not just Yankee peddlers. Shrewd bargaining had a long pedigree in New England; it was not a precursor of a capitalist mindset, but a traditional “commercial athleticism that put wit, honor, and manliness periodically to the test.”¹⁰⁵ Puritan society tried to repress personal ambition, but always found it difficult to distinguish virtuous striving from covetousness. By 1765, writes Richard L. Bushman, the Puritan had given way to the Yankee, and the exercise of self-interest through trade became socially acceptable in southern New England.¹⁰⁶ As the

New England by a Virginian,” Georgia Journal, 2/12/1839.

¹⁰² *Oxford English Dictionary.*

¹⁰³ Periods of speculative mania, such as 1815-1819, probably encouraged sharp trading, while times of economic depression might have brought greater opprobrium on dealing “by hook or by crook.” Yankee peddlers’ cunning was celebrated in almanac humor in particular. Hinman, “The Yankee Peddler,” p. 66. For the related mania in popular entertainment for “humbugs”, see Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 67-84.

¹⁰⁴ For example, the “ingenious way” in which Ichabod Crane subsisted was “commonly denominated” in New England as “by hook and by crook.” Washington Irving, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” in *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (New York: New American Library, 1981). (Originally published, 1819-1820), p. 334. See also the story of Bob Lee in Samuel Kettell, *Yankee Notions: A Medley, By Timothy Titterwell, Esq.* (Boston: Otis Broaders and Company, 1838), p. 200.

¹⁰⁵ Agnew, *Worlds Apart*, p. 37. On the coexistence of communalism and market exchange in the village economy of the late middle ages, see Vickers, “Competency and Competition,” pp. 14-15.

population and economy of Connecticut expanded in the mid-eighteenth century, lawsuits grew in number and in formality.¹⁰⁷ Seeking a competency in the harsh environment of New England engendered competition as well as cooperation between households in the exploitation of scarce resources. Notions of mutuality and cooperation regulated the exchange of labor and useful goods between semi-subsistence households in New England, but the scarcity of open land and the difficulty of wresting a living from the New England landscape tempered local exchange with tension and shrewdness. As Daniel Vickers writes of Essex County, Massachusetts, gestures of cooperation were infrequent and contrived. Households competed with each other through “careful, frequently hard-headed, and even conniving dealings with their neighbors.”¹⁰⁸

Editors, humorists, novelists, and genre painters speculated on what kind of society could have spawned the Yankee peddler. New Englanders loved exchange for its own sake, mused John Bernard. These Yankee “swappers” viewed all their possessions as fungible, “even coat, hat, and boots.” The Yankee swapper’s very identity rested upon

¹⁰⁶ Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, pp. 24, 267, 278-79, 286-87. Examples of sharp trading date back to the first half of the eighteenth century, Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, pp. 112-13, 117-18, 126 n. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers*, pp. 12-45. Bushman points out that between 1700 and 1730, the population of Connecticut increased by 3.5 times, but debt cases rose nineteenfold, Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, p. 136. Christopher Clark notes a proliferation in lawsuits in early nineteenth-century New England, Clark, “Household Economy,” p. 175.

¹⁰⁸ Recent scholarship has moved away from an emphasis on mutuality, and gives fuller attention to the contradictory impulses of cooperation and competition in colonial and early national society: Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen*, pp. 262-320; idem, “Competency and Competition,” pp. 17, 25, 27; Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers*, p. 19; Deborah A. Rosen, *Courts and Commerce: Gender, Law, and the Market Economy in Colonial New York* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), pp. 1-3; Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*, pp. 92-93.

trade.¹⁰⁹ Some called into doubt the putative artlessness of rural folk in New England. Phineas T. Barnum claimed to have learned while working in a country store in early nineteenth-century Connecticut that “sharp trades, tricks, dishonesty, and deception are by no means confined to the city.” Petty frauds like trading bundles of rags which had been weighted with stones or overstating the number of bushels in a load of grain occurred frequently enough to make Barnum “watchful of [his] customers.”¹¹⁰ It was considered a mark of great acumen to be able to outsmart a Yankee in trade, but only a fool would attempt it.¹¹¹ Walt Whitman argued that isolated country life in eastern Long Island and in the rest of New England bred avarice.¹¹² Some blamed the physical environment of New England for the competitiveness of its society. Mathew Carey pointed to the struggle of an overcrowded population to make a living from the poor soil of New England as the source of “Yankee Tricks.”¹¹³ Excessive frugality and close dealing were the only ways a man could maintain a family in the “harsh climate and penurious soil” of New England.¹¹⁴ The presence of so many sharp traders tended to hone the bargaining skills of all New Englanders, and popular stories depicting the

¹⁰⁹ Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 37-40.

¹¹⁰ Phineas T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs or, Forty Years' Recollections of P. T. Barnum* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 7. Frances Trollope wished to avoid any business transactions with Yankees “lest, to use their own phrase, ‘they should be too smart for me.’” Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, pp. 327-28.

¹¹¹ Asa Sheldon, *Yankee Drover: Being the Unpretending Life of Asa Sheldon, Farmer, Trader, and Working Man 1788-1870* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), p. 65.

¹¹² Walt Whitman, “Letters from a Travelling Bachelor, Number 3: Some Poetical Comparisons between Country and City,” 10/28/1849, in Joseph Jay Rubin, ed., *The Historic Whitman* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973), pp. 318-23.

¹¹³ Carey, “Yankee Tricks,” pp. 533-34.

¹¹⁴ “Misconceptions of the New England Character,” p. 248.

contest between two Yankee wits were often entitled “Diamond Cut Diamond.” Jared Bunce, the Yankee peddler created by William Gilmore Simms, developed his cleverness growing up in a community where it was “sharp edge agin sharp edge.” As a result of getting his education among those “who was ‘cute themselves” and in an environment of scarcity, Bunce claimed he could “always fish up some notion that will sell in the market,” no matter how little the surroundings had to offer.¹¹⁵ There is probably a kernel of truth to these caricatures of the commercial spirit of early nineteenth-century New England. Whatever acumen Yankee peddlers actually did exhibit in their business dealings most likely sprang from the practices of local exchange in New England.

* * *

In their dress, their dialect, their “steady habits,” and perhaps their market behavior, the Yankee peddlers were unmistakable products of the region they left behind. There were many conflicting images of the Yankee peddler current in early nineteenth-century America. Whether depicted as a New England exotic or tinged with markers of lower-class status, these images almost always portray the Yankee peddler as an outsider. Contemporaries cast the behavior of Yankee peddlers as so idiosyncratic that they were made to appear a separate branch of humanity altogether. Descriptions of the behavior of Yankee peddlers used nearly every term in the taxonomy of humankind: class, tribe, species, race, or nation.¹¹⁶ In general, Yankees were often described as the “universal

¹¹⁵ William Gilmore Simms, *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia* (Originally published in 1834; reprint, New York: Lovell, Coryell & Company, nd), pp. 315-16.

¹¹⁶ [George Tucker,] *Letters from Virginia, Translated from the French* (Baltimore: Fielding Lucas, Jr., 1816), pp. 36-40. Bernard, *Retrospections*, p. 41. C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” pp. 247-56. Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 317. Thomas Yoseloff, ed., *Voyage to America: The Journals of Thomas Cather* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), pp. 75,

nation.” perhaps because of their high mobility and the tenacity with which New England emigrants clung to their peculiar customs.¹¹⁷ Or perhaps contemporaries viewed the whole Yankee population as committed “universally” to avarice and other stereotypical traits.¹¹⁸ Was there a unique Yankee peddler subculture, or were they merely displaced New Englanders whose “steady habits” and trading vocation lent themselves to stereotyping and exaggeration? In the course of their travels and far-flung business dealings many Yankee peddlers did cling to their New England cultural traits. But the new opportunities which drew these young New Englanders into the marketplace also prompted them to alter or violate their inherited cultural code.

Wherever young men gathered in early nineteenth-century America, they formed subcultures that expressed their particular needs and tried to satisfy them. Such young men’s subcultures practiced ritualistic behavior that brought social cohesion to these deracinated youths through the effacement of religious values and emotional ties associated with women and feminine influence.¹¹⁹ Perhaps Yankee peddlers created a subculture or self-conscious community. Aside from the Kentucky boatmen who plied the Mississippi and its tributaries,¹²⁰ no other vocational group came to be seen as emblematic of an entire region. Other itinerant workers associated with commerce also

84. *Georgia Journal*, 3/30/1830. *The Western Carolinian*, 12/20/1834. race. A Virginian, “Letters from New England,” p. 219. *Niles Register* 49:116.

¹¹⁷ Gray, *Yankee West*, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ Robert J. Brugger suggests that Beverly Tucker referred to Yankees as a “universal race” because they lacked the kinds of ties to the land and to tradition that structured Tucker’s ideal community. Robert J. Brugger *Beverly Tucker: Heart over Head in the Old South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 78.

¹¹⁹ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, pp. 62-63. Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, pp. 114-15.

¹²⁰ Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen, 1763-1861 : Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen and the Myth of the Alligator Horse* (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

appeared to observers to form separate subcultures. Timothy Flint thought that the wagoners on the National Road exhibited in their manners and lifestyle “a new species, perfectly unique in their appearance, language, and habits.” Wagoners also displayed vocational solidarity, claimed Flint, taking “a kind of oath to stand by, and befriend each other.”¹²¹ Workers on another major artery of commerce, the Erie Canal, also displayed a peculiar comportment suggestive of an independent subculture. Canalers wore “gaily-ribboned hats” and showed a propensity for oaths, swearing, and fighting.¹²² Antebellum black seamen also had a distinctive subculture and identifiable dress – a red shirt, tarpaulin hat, and black cravat tied in a particular “sailor fashion.”¹²³ The characterizations of worker subcultures tended to lump all laborers together into a monolithic working class; their most salient attribute was their lack of middle-class respectability.¹²⁴

Contemporary fiction offers two contrasting views of the Yankee peddler – as an uncouth bumpkin or a Yankee dandy. More research is needed to determine whether Yankee peddlers actually had distinctive forms of dress. When a young man made his

¹²¹ Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Valley of the Mississippi* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968. Reprint of Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826), pp. 9-10.

¹²² Sheriff, *Artificial River*, pp. 145, 149.

¹²³ W. Jeffrey Bolster, “‘To Feel Like a Man:’ Black Seamen in the Northern States, 1800-1860,” *JAH* (March 1990):1173, 1178-79, 1187, 1199.

¹²⁴ For other human taxonomies based more upon disparaging perceptions of character than physiological traits, see: William Atson, *Heart Whispers; or, A Peep behind the Family Curtain, interspersed with Sketches of a Tour through Nine Southern States* (Memphis, 1859), p. 163. Hundley, *Social Relations*. A more romantic view of lower-class vendors was expressed in illustrated albums of the street criers, vendors, and hucksters of various cities. For a sample of images from this common genre, see Karen F. Beall, *Kaufleute und Strassenhaendler: Cries and Itinerant Trades* (Hamburg: Dr. Ernst Hauswedell & Co., 1975).

first foray into the world as a peddler he was probably dressed in the vernacular style peculiar to his rural New England background. Fictive descriptions of Yankee peddlers are filled with markers of lower-class status, such as in the 1839 illustration of Yankee emigrants in Figure 4. The provinciality of New England dress had been the subject of derision since the Seven Years War, when it was immortalized in the song *Yankee Doodle*. Yankee peddlers were often depicted in poorly fitting clothes, their arms and legs dangling from their sleeves and pant cuffs.¹²⁵ Despondent about his hard luck at peddling, James Guild attempted to lift his spirits by exaggerating his lower-class status in self-deprecation. Aware that roaming New England as a tinker would set him “below the common class of people,” Guild endeavored to dress according to the cultural expectations of the role. He donned an old leather apron, poor clothes, a “rather mean” hat, and combed his hair down over his eyes. The image of the Yankee peddler as a “Brother Jonathan” boor was used to close doors of opportunity on actual young men. The Yankee dandy was perhaps a more threatening figure.

Some young men consciously dressed well to counter the image of the Yankee peddler bumpkin. Their attempts at dressing respectably might have been the source for the image of the Yankee peddler dandy.¹²⁶ James Guild was mindful of the importance

¹²⁵ The description of Joshua Peabody in “The Yankee Pedler,” *Georgia Journal*, 4/5/1832, consciously contradicts the stereotype of the boorish Yankee peddler: “Joshua’s dress had nothing of antique mode. – His hat had a brim that was no broader than usual, and his hair was not tied with an Elk [Eel sic] skin.” Peabody was no dandy either: “clothed in the substantial, comfortable, fearnaught style of an independent, unassuming farmer.” Peabody showed flash in his wagon, however: “equipped in first rate style – not with a crazy cart and half starved horse, as was the custom fifty years ago, but with an elegant substantial, well made and well fed horse, and a covered wagon with all the colors of the rainbow, ornamented with curtains and trimmed with many a yard of red cotton fringe.”

¹²⁶ It was common to portray the Yankee peddler as a dandy, especially when the peddler

of a respectable appearance in early nineteenth-century America, and transformed himself again a few months later. He swapped his worn-out coat and a dollar for another young man's coat, and traded his watch for new pantaloons. Having gotten "slicked up," Guild entered Albany, New York, with his head up and in a self-assured manner in order "to make folks think I was something I was not."¹²⁷ While peddling in Virginia in January, 1820 Bronson Alcott wrote home to reassure his parents that he and his brother Chatfield did not appear like "Awkward, poor, unpolished, dissipated, Homespun, begging, tugging, Yankee pedlars," but as respectable young businessmen. Alcott scandalized his father, his cousin William, and his townsfolk of Wolcott, Connecticut, when he returned in the summer of 1821 from a peddling trip in Virginia in a "costly suit of clothes" that he had purchased in the fashionable shopping district on Broadway in New York City. What inspired Alcott to dress like a Broadway dandy? Perhaps the example set by Yankee peddlers who returned to New England with plenty of money and stylish clothing – "as Clean as the Cat Come out of the Cream" – influenced Alcott. Alcott might have been making exaggerated claims of respectability, since his status had been challenged by certain wealthy Virginians who snubbed him. Alcott had barely survived a bout with typhus fever that winter, and was \$270 in debt to a Norfolk dry

was contraposed to the plain backwoodsman. The costume directions for Nutmeg, the Connecticut peddler in Alphonso Wetmore's play "The Pedlar," include fair-top boots, a striped vest and a white hat. In contrast, the other characters, who represent frontier and rivermen stereotypes, wear apparel made of homespun, red flannel, or buckskin. Joseph Doddridge popularized the contrast in "A Dialogue between a Dandy and a Back-Woods-Man" (Wellsburgh, Brooke County, VA, 1823). *Three Centuries of Drama. American.*

¹²⁷ Guild, "Journal," pp. 258, 260-61, 279, 308.

goods merchant. Alcott was not a successful peddler, but he could dress the role.¹²⁸ With the extensive wardrobe he brought to Virginia in 1831, Carlos Bates could have resembled a dandy like the character Nutmeg. Among the articles of clothing the twenty-four year-old clock peddler could attire himself in were calfskin boots and shoes, five vests, a white fur hat, fifteen shirts, six false shirt collars, three pairs of “mix colored” short stockings, and eleven handkerchiefs. Bates eschewed the plain black color of modest garments for blue and brown pantaloons and vests, a blue frock coat, and a white overcoat.¹²⁹

Some saw in the Yankee peddler dandy an ambitious young man who threatened the social and sexual order. In his memoirs, James Patton recalled how he berated a fellow peddler in North Carolina around 1790 for his extravagant clothes. Patton did not believe that showiness would make money, and suggested that the people in the backcountry probably mistook the overly dressed peddler for a student “going to College with a load of books.”¹³⁰ Hezekiah Niles criticized the lower-class peddlers who “dashed” about Baltimore in “great stile” because they lacked wealth to back up their showy display.¹³¹ The close attention New England men reputedly paid to their queues, or ponytails, also elicited imputations of foppery. A practice attributed to early nineteenth-century New England men was to wrap the queue in an eel skin, or a thin fabric, for protection.¹³² For

¹²⁸ Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 1/24/1820, Hermstadt, *Letters*, 1-2. Alcott, *New Connecticut*, pp. 210-11, 238-39.

¹²⁹ “Memorandum of cloathes taken with me,” 10/2/1831, Carlos Bates Papers. Colors other than black in clothing were considered more ostentatious. The many handkerchiefs Bates carried could also be construed as dandy-like. Personal communication from Colleen Calahan, 11/30/1997, curator of costumes, Valentine Museum, Richmond, VA.

¹³⁰ Patton, *Letter*, p. 9.

¹³¹ *Niles Register* 19 (9/16/1820):40.

¹³² Washington Irving claimed that the eel skin was esteemed in New England “as a potent nourisher and strengthener of the hair.” “Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” p. 347. George

example, Ichabod Coffin, Jr., a fictive peddler, was “exceedingly partial to his cue, which he took care to have well tied up with a fresh eel skin.”¹³³ Eelskin became an expression for a Yankee peddler dandy,¹³⁴ such as in an almanac story which pitted a plain backwoodsman with a peddler coxcomb – “A Corn Cracker’s Account of his Encounter with an Eelskin.” The illustration (Figure 6) which accompanies this story reinforces the foppish image of the Yankee peddler by showing the peddler dressed in stereotypical dandy accoutrements: form-fitting clothing (especially at the waist) and a watch and fob dangling from a chain.¹³⁵ The narcissism of the Yankee peddler dandy was epitomized by a “very handsome” Yankee tin peddler who reputedly traveled the country in the early 1830s, “calling himself the Boston Beauty, and wearing his own miniature round his neck.”¹³⁶ This narcissistic behavior was a sexual analogue to the economic threat posed by the peddlers’ self-interest.

One particular expression of moral conduct that many Yankee peddlers strove to keep was Sabbatarianism. Yankee peddlers who observed the Sabbath tried to maintain the rhythms of rural life back in New England even while immersed in the world of business. It could also have helped dislocated New Englanders maintain a sense of regional identity in their new homes, particularly in the South.¹³⁷ To set aside Sundays as

Tucker opined that niggardly Yankees wore eel skins “to save the expense of barbers.” Tucker, *Letters*, p. 36. The eelskin was also seen as a rustic style, see note 170.

¹³³ Watterston, *Wanderer*, p. 95.

¹³⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹³⁵ “A Corn Cracker’s Account of his Encounter with an Eelskin,” *Davy Crockett’s 1837 Almanack of Wild Sports in the West, Life in the Backwoods, & Sketches of Texas* (Nashville: Published by the heirs of Col. Crockett, 1837), pp. 16-17.

¹³⁶ Eliza Leslie, *Pencil Sketches; or Outlines of Character and Manners* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1833), p. 160.

¹³⁷ New England Societies were founded in many parts of the country by emigrating Yankees wishing to preserve their identity in a new home. The Pilgrim Fathers became the objects of a self-conscious cult. Though they admitted anyone of New England birth,

a sacred time for rest and reflection was a way of resisting market culture, whose unremitting pace of work secularized time and interpersonal relationships.¹³⁸ “Keeping the Sabbath” was also connected to the most valued form of domestic education, religious instruction.¹³⁹ Betsy Wilcox worried that too much of her husband Benjamin’s time “was taken up in the cares of this world,” while he wholesaled tinware to Yankee peddlers in Virginia. Benjamin reassured Betsy that he and his brother Richard intended “to pay due reverence to the Sabbath.” Benjamin and Richard attended church meetings in Virginia, although not as frequently “as we probabl[y] should if we were at home.”¹⁴⁰ Bronson Alcott claimed to go to meeting every Sunday and two or three evenings during the week. It satisfied Alcott’s inquiring nature to be able to attend the services of “whatever denomination” he pleased. Alcott was in the minority, however, among his fellow Yankee peddlers. Only one other employee at the Norfolk tin shop where Alcott worked went to church regularly, and the proprietor, B. B. Tisdale, never went himself. The Sabbath was “devoted to drinking & walking about the City & as much by the People

they were dominated by prosperous businessmen. Vartanian, “The Puritan as a Symbol.” For the invention of a Puritan past in antebellum New England, see Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture from Revolution through Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 214-238.

¹³⁸ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millenium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), pp. 84-88. Richard John, “Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously: The Postal System, the Sabbath, and the Transformation of American Political Culture,” *JER* 10 (Winter 1990):530-531. Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 111-16.

¹³⁹ Every prescriptive manual on family management devoted a chapter to “keeping the Sabbath.” Ryan, *Empire of the Mother*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁰ Benjamin Wilcox (Richmond, VA) to Betsy Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 1/31/1817. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

who come from Connecticut as by the Virginians,” claimed Alcott.¹⁴¹ Conscientious Yankee peddlers spent their Sundays quietly if they could not attend church. Bronson’s brother Chatfield Alcott usually rested on Sundays, spending the day in reading and conversing with his hosts.¹⁴² Thomas Douglas “endeavored to spend [his] nights and Sundays with the most respectable and intelligent people of the neighborhoods through which [he] was passing.”¹⁴³ Likewise, Samuel J. Lewis spent all his Sundays in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, with Colonel Daily, “a strong anti Jackson man and [as] fine [a] gentleman as the country afford[ed].”¹⁴⁴

Keeping the Sabbath holy meant more than church attendance; it also obliged peddlers to refrain from conducting business on Sundays. Figure 5 graphs the frequency peddlers arrived and departed from the Baltimore tin shop of Clark & Haskell in 1820-1821. Clark & Haskell noted the arrival of twenty-four peddlers on Sundays, but these men did not necessarily violate the Sabbath. In fact, by ending their travel on a Sunday, they upheld its sanctity. Only six peddlers departed on a Sunday, making it the least popular day of departure.¹⁴⁵ Filling out bills of lading, loading the wagon with tinware, and traveling in search of customers on a Sunday was not proper conduct for a Sabbatarian peddler. Richard Wilcox traded a horse, wagon harness, and five dollars’ worth of tinware to a Virginian, and “although it was Sunday,” Wilcox lifted his moral

¹⁴¹ Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 11/30/1818. Wagner, “Letters,” p. 245.

¹⁴² Chatfield Alcott, “Journal to the South,” Alcott Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, entries for 12/16/1821, 2/17/1822, 3/3/1822, 3/24/1822, 4/28/1822, 6/2/1822.

¹⁴³ Douglas, *Autobiography*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Naugatuck, CT), 4/17/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

¹⁴⁵ Wadsworth Tavern Record Book [Clark & Haskell Daybook], 1820. CHS, Hartford.

compulsion and did “not refuse the money.”¹⁴⁶ Chatfield Alcott once sold tinware on a Sunday in Richmond County, Virginia, but confessed to his diary: “Selling goods on a Sunday this not my rule.”¹⁴⁷ The behavior of Bronson Alcott scandalized his cousin William Andrus Alcott. After a Sunday dinner at a Virginia inn, the young people present asked Bronson to display his goods. Bronson consented, wrote William, “only saying he could not sell them on the Sabbath.” “But I think it would have been far nobler and better had he refused even to exhibit them,” admonished William, “for they inquired the prices, and the whole affair was of such a worldly character as to remind one of what is sometimes called a ‘shopping scene,’ in New-York or Boston.”¹⁴⁸ Through their New England upbringing, Yankee peddlers had internalized the vestiges of colonial Blue Laws, but market pressures eroded strict compliance to ethical behavior.

When a young man left his native community to peddle far from New England, many of the moral restraints he had grown up under no longer found reinforcement.¹⁴⁹ The fluid society on the road and in the marketplace was far different from the New England towns in which Yankee peddlers were raised. Licenses and statutes could regulate a peddler’s market behavior to a limited extent, but a peddler’s leisure activities were subject to little control or surveillance from a moral authority. Young peddlers faced the same dangers and had similar opportunities to indulge in “urban” vices as the

¹⁴⁶ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 4/22/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

¹⁴⁷ Chatfield Alcott, “Journal to the South,” 2/24/1822, Alcott Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹⁴⁸ Alcott, *Recollection*, pp. 151-152. Alcott, *New Connecticut*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁹ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, pp. 60-61.

emerging white-collar class of mercantile clerks did in New York City.¹⁵⁰ Only moral precepts that peddlers had internalized could have controlled their behavior. For instance, Vermont peddler James Guild followed the standard moral admonition to despise “those who haunt the grog shop or the gambling table.”¹⁵¹ Southern cities and towns had many such temptations to offer to young men, such as gambling dens, billiard rooms, nine pin allies, brothels, taverns, barrooms, and other “places of dissipation.”¹⁵² As Bronson Alcott wrote, peddling could be “a hard place for one to serve his God.”¹⁵³ It was a commonly held opinion that the morals of New England emigrants lapsed when they moved south or west.¹⁵⁴ The honesty of Connecticut clock peddler Asaph Hall might have been “pure & white” as snow while Hall lived in the North, but Hall’s scandalous behavior in Georgia showed that his morals quickly “dissolved on exposure to

¹⁵⁰ For the anxiety over the character of youths who moved to cities in the early nineteenth century, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. xv, 2-4, 12-13, 21, 23, 25. Allan Stanley Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men in New York* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975), pp. 14-15, 148-49, 168-70. Stories of Yankee peddlers’ encounters with confidence men in New York City can be found in: Watterston, *Wanderer*, pp. 98-100, and Robinson, *Life*, pp. 28-31.

¹⁵¹ Guild, “Journal,” p. 279. The dangers of the “gaming table and the bowl” figure large in Harvard Stinchfield’s tale as well. See previous footnote.

¹⁵² Guild, “Journal,” entries from Norfolk and Wilmington, pp. 301, 305. Samuel Whitcomb Diary, Huntsville, AL, 9/27/1818, p. 57. MHS. A. Wetherby (New Orleans, LA) to Levi Conant (Boston, MA), 9/16/1839. Wilson Family Papers, MHS.

¹⁵³ Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to William A. Alcott, 3/30/1823. Wagner, “Letters,” p. 253.

¹⁵⁴ Parker, “A Chapter in the Early Life of Thomas Oliver Larkin,” p. 19. Carlos Bates (Alexandria, Rapides Parish, LA) to Mrs. Amelia Bates (mother, East Granby), 3/12/1835. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. J.S., “Slavery,” *The Southern Planter* 1 (August 1841):137-39. Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes*, p. 173. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 211-14. Dwight, *Travels*, vol. 1, pp. xxxii-xxxiii. Pershing Vartanian, “The

a southern sun.”¹⁵⁵ Immersion in southern society, New England moralists charged, led migrant Yankees to pick up the “wretched habits” of dissipation practiced by southerners.

William Andrus Alcott made an example of Mr. Brown, a Yankee tin peddler who relocated to Norfolk, Virginia:

He acquired a habit of spending money three or four times as readily as before, and also of spending a great deal of time in idleness and amusement. At home at the North he had been accustomed to go twice or three times a year to ‘trainings’ – militia musters; once to ‘Independence,’ and once or twice ‘a fishing,’ or ‘a squirreling;’ and these were his only holidays. But now he had some forty or fifty holidays, or rather play-days, every year. There was the ‘horse-race,’ or the ‘cock-fight,’ or ‘a treat;’ or some great personage was coming along, like ‘the President,’ or ‘Lafayette;’ or there was to be a party for sailing, riding, or hunting, or for card-playing or gambling, or something still worse.

Brown “was a kind old man, but not very respectable,” and his moral decline reduced him to the indecent career of keeping a grocery and boarding house, serving a clientele “of low reputation,” and “a few of the meanest citizens, who were half ashamed to show their head anywhere else.”¹⁵⁶ The lifestyle on the road and in the marketplace, where the rigid moral principles of New England were absent, was a trap for many “easy young Northerners.”

Alcott wanted to warn the youth of the early 1850s away from the temptations he faced thirty years earlier. What were the underlying fears which prompted so many moralists to warn New England’s youth away from the marketplace? There was a

Puritan as a Symbol in American Thought: A Study of the New England Societies, 1820-1920” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1971), p. 12.

¹⁵⁵ Hery Ball (Appling, Columbia County, GA) to George C. Woodruff (Litchfield), 7/6/1833. Woodruff Collection, Litchfield Historical Society.

¹⁵⁶ Alcott, *Recollection*, pp. 95-98. Jeremy Belknap estimated in 1790 that residents of New Hampshire took about ten or fifteen “holidays” from work annually. W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford

perceived loss of control over the younger generation and a loss of labor force. The emigration of so many young men had an impact on the people who remained in New England. Their labor was missed by fathers, commercial farmers, and manufacturers. Young women lost potential marriage partners, which would have exacerbated the loss of family and community stability. New England culture lost another increment of national influence whenever a young man was converted to “southern” ways or market values. New England character itself was under threat from the growing numbers of Yankee peddlers.

The humble social origins of the preponderance of New England chapmen put peddling in disrepute as lower-class conduct. In a society which warned out its wandering poor, it is no wonder that peddling was put on a footing with vagabondage.¹⁵⁷ The widespread contempt for peddling made it a less attractive career to young men of middling backgrounds. While growing up in Vermont, James Guild learned that peddlers were social outcasts, a knowledge that tormented him when he decided to take up peddling. Guild feared that his middle-class family and friends would no longer welcome his company when he returned home, but despise him as a “poor tinker.”¹⁵⁸ N. Collins of Goshen, Connecticut, declined an offer from Elijah Kellogg to peddle tinware because Collins’ friends did not “speak very flattering of” peddling. Collins took advantage of family connections to secure a more reputable position as a clerk in a store instead.¹⁵⁹

University Press, 1979), p. 150.

¹⁵⁷ For warning out legislation and enforcement, see Josiah Henry Benton, *Warning Out in New England* (Boston: W. B. Clarke Company, 1911).

¹⁵⁸ Guild, “Journal,” p. 279.

¹⁵⁹ N. Collins (Goshen, CT) to Elihu Harrison (Litchfield, CT), 3/16/1822. Elihu Harrison Business Papers, Litchfield Historical Society. A young man had to have family

When a young man from a respectable family took up peddling, family members tried to prevail on their wayward brother the error of his ways. Samuel Hopkins Peck warned his brother Russell Upson Peck that peddling would harm his social standing:

look at the whole Race of Pedlars – who are they? do you see a rich one in the whole tribe? then what is his character and standing in society? the more property he has the more successfull in cheating & swindling he has been – the less he is esteemed by the community of the good people.¹⁶⁰

Augustin Holcomb worried what the effects of associating with other clock peddlers would have on his brother Milo's character:

If I were to form an opinion of all the *pedlers* from the appearance of these that I occasionally see, it would not be a very exalted one. But perhaps I am deceived. I hope I am, and that they are better men than they appear to be. But I should think you must necessarily associate a great deal with those whose *manners & morals* would have no *good* influence upon your own. But doubtless there are some exceptions to the generality of them, and there may be some *honest Pedlers*.¹⁶¹

Augustin Holcomb, James Guild and other New Englanders of middling or upper-class background learned to recognize the lower-class markers placed on Yankee peddlers. Whether their dress suggested success or an impoverished background, a Yankee peddler was immediately assumed to lack respectability.

* * *

Most young men or their parents could not afford to finance an independent peddling business. Instead of starting out as an autonomous entrepreneur, most peddlers

connections in order to get a clerkship with a merchant. Parents often had to pay a premium to get their sons hired. Margaret E. Martin, "Merchants and Trade of the Connecticut River Valley 1750-1820" *Smith College Studies in History* 24 (Oct, 1938), p. 102. Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Prince*, pp. 73-74.

¹⁶⁰Samuel Hopkins Peck (Augusta, GA) to Russell Upson Peck (Berlin, CT), 8/6/1826. Russell Upson Peck Correspondence, CHS.

¹⁶¹Augustin Holcomb (Sterling, MA) to Milo Holcomb (Buffalo, NY), 12/1830.

began their mercantile careers as hired salesmen who peddled goods for wages and commission. The process of hiring a peddler was rooted in customary forms of apprenticeship, deference, and trust, but the relationship which evolved between peddlers and their employers reflected the influence of the marketplace. The pressures the market placed on young men to break with family and community also created tensions between peddlers and their employers. These tensions reflected the transformation of society from corporate to individual values, from hierarchy to egalitarianism, from dependency to entrepreneurship. The relationship forged between a peddler and his employer entailed opportunity and risk for both parties. The relationship was not quite deferential nor truly equal. Employers' expectations of loyalty and subordination were often met by expressions of independence from peddlers. Manufacturers and entrepreneurs covered their risks by requiring their peddler-employees to provide sterling recommendations of their character and to sign stringent contracts. Peddlers who performed well in the marketplace selling goods were rewarded with higher wages, commissions, and increased credit. Yankee peddlers gained their employers' and creditors' trust through a traditional demonstration of character, but they advanced through sharp trading in the marketplace.

After a few years of peddling for hire, a peddler might have enough capital to go into business for himself. New Englanders had an idiomatic expression for an independent peddler; such a peddler was said to act "on his own hook."¹⁶² More broadly,

Holcomb Family Papers, CSL.

¹⁶² It appears that "on one's own hooks" is an original Yankee peddler idiom, or perhaps a Yankee maritime expression. The Oxford English Dictionary states that the earliest appearance of this phrase was in the *Boston Gazette* on 11/23/1812. The context was the "wild-geese cruise" of Commodore Rodgers in the fall of 1812 to protect American shipping. Rodgers was reputed to have said that he did not sail under presidential orders,

“on one’s own hooks” meant to act in dependence on oneself, or one’s own affairs; in other words, to be a self-made man. The allusion to “hook” recalls the business maxim of Yankee peddlers, “by hook or by crook.” Hooks in the context of the independent peddler might have been derogatory slang for grasping fingers or hands. This phrase was used in the business correspondence of Yankee peddlers and their employers to describe peddlers who struck out on their own. For instance, Richard Wilcox informed his brother Benjamin Wilcox in 1822 that he had settled his accounts with tin peddler Mr. Tubbs “about four weeks since & he is now peddling on his own hook.”¹⁶³ Similarly, P. Swiggart informed his former employer Seth Wheeler in 1837: “I commenced doing a small business on my own hook (*as we say*) have kept three waggons running all the time on wood clocks principally.”¹⁶⁴ Anson Bates wrote to his brother Carlos Bates that two of Carlos’ former peddling companions had been hired to peddle clocks for Chandler Lewis, but William Latham and Lothrop Robinson were planning to head to North Carolina to peddle clocks and dry goods “on their own hooks.”¹⁶⁵ An employer might also use this phrase to clear himself of responsibility for a peddler’s actions. A clock peddler named Wilcox sat in a Georgia jail in 1833 because he could not pay the fine for peddling without a license. Wilcox’s ostensible employer, Asaph Hall, refused to pay the

but that “he went upon his own hook.” William Gilmore Simms put “on his own hook” into the mouth of his Yankee peddler character, Jared Bunce. Simms wrote that this Yankee expression was equivalent to the southern “phraseology – ‘must paddle his own canoe.’” Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 415.

¹⁶³ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/19/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

¹⁶⁴ P. & J. Swiggart (New Lexington, IN; postmarked Frankfort, KY) to Seth Wheeler (Paris, KY), 6/4/1837. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL. Italics are my emphasis.

¹⁶⁵ Anson Bates (East Granby, CT) to Carlos Bates (Opelousas, LA), 9/2/1835. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

hefty fine because “Wilcox was upon his own hook &c, was to bear his own expences & have all he made over a certain sum for each clock &c.”¹⁶⁶ Wilcox’s experience shows why there were so few independent peddlers. There were many unforeseeable pitfalls in the marketplace which made peddling, like any mercantile venture, a risky business to enter alone.

The shift from dependency in the home to autonomy in the marketplace disoriented many young men and made them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Antebellum youth had no rites of passage into adulthood; the unstructured transition from boyhood to manhood was not eased by ritual.¹⁶⁷ Fathers whose experience was limited to farming or handicrafts for local markets could provide their sons with little practical guidance for surviving in the marketplace.¹⁶⁸ At this critical juncture, many memoirists recalled, an older man came into the young man’s life, offering schooling, credit or opportunity. It was not the young man’s father who provided direction, but a “less entangling male figure,” perhaps a brother, an uncle, or a family friend.¹⁶⁹ Phineas T. Barnum went through the “uneasy, transitory state between boyhood and manhood” in the mid 1820s. His father died in 1825 when Barnum was only sixteen years old, so Barnum needed a “discreet counselor, adviser and friend.” Barnum had a desire to speculate on the marketplace, and although he had no capital or opportunities, “several

¹⁶⁶ Hervy Ball (Appling, Columbia County, GA) to George C. Woodruff (Litchfield, CT), 7/6/1833. Woodruff Collection, LHS.

¹⁶⁷ Kett, *Rites of Passage*.

¹⁶⁸ Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, p. 111.

¹⁶⁹ Appleby, “New Cultural Heroes,” p. 178. A young man had to have family connections in order to get a clerkship with a merchant. Clerkships often came at a premium, so lower-class boys were excluded from such jobs unless if a patron took them on. Martin, “Merchants and Trade,” p. 102. Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant*

men of means” offered to furnish him money and join him in business.¹⁷⁰ Yankee entrepreneurs tapped into this reserve of youthful energy and ambition. William Andrus Alcott observed that in New England there was “generally in the neighborhood some hawk-eyed money dealer, who knows that he cannot better invest funds than in the hands of active young men.”¹⁷¹ Such offers of credit and opportunity resemble the cautionary aphorisms about the confidence man, who sapped a young man’s wealth and character by enticing him with the allures of the urban world.¹⁷² Reverend George Putnam warned young men to beware of the “most seductive snare” of easy credit, because it was a financial and moral danger. In good economic times a young man of character could obtain more credit than he ought to accept. Young men had to exercise self-control and self-limitation with credit, not unlike temperance towards alcohol.¹⁷³ Samuel Hopkins Peck to warn his brother, peddler Russell Upson Peck, against accepting too much credit. Credit, wrote Peck, was “like spirits – a little is good – But a great deal will surely bring destruction.”¹⁷⁴ Like intemperance, easy credit threatened the character of middle-class youth.

Young men who were new to the peddling business often needed guidance on how to behave, how to price goods, and how to haggle. James Guild admitted that it was hard for “a farmer boy who had been confined to the hoe or ax to put on a pedlers face,” but he claimed to have an aptitude for the business and quickly got his “things in rotation

Princes, pp. 73-74.

¹⁷⁰ Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Alcott, *Young Man’s Guide*, p. 90.

¹⁷² Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, p. 27.

¹⁷³ Putnam, “Lecture,” pp. 310, 312.

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Hopkins Peck (Augusta, GA) to Russell Upson Peck (Berlin, CT), 8/6/1826.

pedler form.”¹⁷⁵ Selling almanacs in Norfolk, Virginia, “required more confidence” than Bronson Alcott could readily summon at first “to accost a person and offer my trifle.” “Habit, however,” wrote Alcott, “soon gave facility, even something of dignity, to my attitude, and won respect.” On his peddling expedition in Virginia in 1823 Bronson Alcott obtained advice from Norfolk merchant Joseph T. Allyn how much he should charge for goods he bought from Allyn. Allyn even provided Alcott with “Directions for selling certain Articles” which Alcott purchased elsewhere, such as violin strings, beads, watch chains, pins and needles. Bronson in turn instructed his younger brother Chatfield in peddling.¹⁷⁶ Albert and Milton Bates questioned their brother Carlos thoroughly on the clock peddling business. They wanted to know how much capital they needed to invest, where the best markets were, which clocks and watches were “the best for profit,” where they should ship their merchandise to, whether they should travel in an open or a covered wagon, and what season of the year to depart. Lastly, Albert and Milton requested Carlos to accompany them on their journey in the coming fall so that they might benefit directly from his experience.¹⁷⁷ Employers of tinware and clock peddlers often had to instruct their new hands in the art and mystery of peddling. Hezekiah Griswold asked tinware manufacturer Oliver Filley to give his son, who was “young and unacquainted with business . . . all the instructions and informations” that Filley thought

Russell Upson Peck Correspondence, CHS.

¹⁷⁵ Guild, “Journal,” pp. 251-52.

¹⁷⁶ Alcott, *New Connecticut*, p. 180. Alcott, Biographical Volumes, 1823, p. 107. A. Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 1/24/1820. Herrnstadt, *Letters*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁷ Anson Bates (East Granby, CT) to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS), 9/1/1836. Albert Bates (East Granby, CT) to Carlos Bates (Wilmington P.O., Fluvanna County, VA), 3/15/1831. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. Unfortunately, I have not found a reply from

necessary for selling tinware and notions.¹⁷⁸ Chapin G. Deming was a “new hand” at clock peddling, who was hired by C. & C. Ives to peddle clocks under the management of Seth Wheeler. The Iveses asked Wheeler to give Deming a “general course in selling clocks.” The Iveses suggested that in order for Deming to become acquainted with the clock peddling business, Wheeler or an experienced peddler should accompany Deming on his first foray into the countryside.¹⁷⁹ What an employer neglected to tell his peddlers could lead to trouble. William Andrus Alcott was totally “ignorant with regard to the law of [peddler] licenses” in Virginia, because his employer had neglected to inform him. Consequently, Alcott was nearly arrested for peddling without a license when he visited the home of a custom-house official in Tidewater Virginia.¹⁸⁰

The relationship between a peddler and his employer often sprang from an anonymous, long-distance connection.¹⁸¹ Some peddlers who lived in the same town as their new employers might have been introduced through face-to-face contact. However, many peddlers had to pass through the impersonal formalities of the system of mercantile confidence in order to gain employment.¹⁸² To be considered for employment, a peddler had to produce “recommend[ation]s” from their fathers or from men of public trust. A

Carlos Bates to these queries.

¹⁷⁸ Hezekiah Griswold (Granby, CT) to Oliver Filley, 4/14/1824. Filley Family Papers, CHS.

¹⁷⁹ C. & C. Ives (Bristol, CT) to Seth Wheeler (Paris, KY), 2/1/1839, 2/12/1839. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

¹⁸⁰ Alcott, *Recollections*, p. 116.

¹⁸¹ Sometimes this anonymity was lasting. Richard Wilcox referred to one of his peddlers simply as “the Irish man.” On another occasion he could not recollect the name of a newly hired peddler. Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 4/17/1819, 12/25/1819. Wilcox Family Papers, BHS.

¹⁸² For the intrusion of market relations in customary commercial contacts as evinced by the transition from book debt to formal credit instruments in mid-eighteenth-century

young man might introduce himself to an employer in a letter. For example, Benjamin S. Fenn, who wanted to peddle clocks for Samuel Terry, wrote: "I flatter myself & trust that I shall be able to produce such recommends as will be satisfactory as it regards my moral Character."¹⁸³ Burrage Yale, a tinware manufacturer of South Reading, Massachusetts, placed advertisements in the *New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette* in order to solicit young men to work as peddlers. Yale sought young men who had "steady habits," and "undoubted moral character," and who were "trust-worthy," "industrious," and "well qualified to make good traders." As proof of these qualifications, Yale required young men to produce recommendations from the selectmen of their home town which were countersigned by a minister of the same place.¹⁸⁴ The language of trust in peddling contracts stressed the employers' expectation for deference and fidelity from peddlers.¹⁸⁵ For example, in Andrew Hays' 1820 contract to peddle tinware for Oliver Filley, Hays agreed to "be Industrious prudent faithfull and true" to his employer. Contracts stipulated that peddlers were to devote all their time, skill, and best judgment to promote their employers' interests. By no means would employers tolerate the misappropriation of their property. Andrew Hays promised "not to waist, squander nor gamble away" Oliver Filley's merchandise.¹⁸⁶ These persistent demands for the peddler to put his employer's

Connecticut, see Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁸³ Benjamin S. Fenn (Canaan) to Samuel Terry, 9/2/1831. Samuel Terry Collection, ACWM.

¹⁸⁴ Yale's advertisement in the (Concord) *New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette*, 7/7/1823 - 2/1/1844.

¹⁸⁵ Middle-class moralists enjoined young store clerks not to rush into going into business for themselves, but to patiently await the ripe moment while working with fidelity for another man. Alcott, *Young Man's Guide*, pp. 88-90. Putnam, "Lecture," p. 307.

¹⁸⁶ Manna Alderman's contract to Peddle for Elisha Dunham, 1816, in Alderman, *Letters*, 20. *Contracts and Agreements 1811-1838*, Filley Family Papers. Samuel Horton's

interests above his own suggest that many peddlers made their own interests paramount. The formality of the language and cold specificity of the terms of peddling contracts reveal the nature of peddler-employer relations to be more antagonistic than paternalistic.

The wages paid to tin peddlers ranged from \$25 to \$50 per month. Payment was sometimes delayed until the expiration of the contracted period of six to nine months, but often peddlers had to ask for cash advances for expenses. Wages were paid in cash, or, as in the case of Chauncey Buck, two-thirds in cash and “the residue in Truck.” Usually, the peddler could keep a portion of what he was able to clear above his wages and the wholesale value of the tinware.¹⁸⁷ Thus, if a peddler with a \$25 monthly salary made \$50 profit in a month of sales, he would receive his \$25 in wages, and an additional \$12.50, half the net profits. Contracts often included harsh stipulations concerning the wages of inefficient or profligate salesmen. In his 1818 contract to peddle for Oliver Filley, Andrew Hays promised “not to sink ... Filley anything more than his wages.” Hays’s 1820 contract stipulated that Filley “shall not loose anything by me more than my wages and should there be any further loss I will make it up.” Thomas Frazier contracted to sell tin for Filley for \$50 a month for six months. Frazier’s contract stated that if he failed to

agreement with David Pritchard, Jr., 11/27/1821. Pritchard Collection, Mattatuck Historical Society. Russell Upson Peck, Contract to Peddle for James Brooks, 1826, Russell Upson Peck Papers, CHS. Article of Agreement between C. & C. Lewis & Co and Carlos Bates, 9/23/1834. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. Deforest Wolcott contract with Seth Wheeler & Co, 7/20/1836; Timothy Colvin contract with Seth Wheeler & Co, 8/17/1836. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL. R. Malcolm Keir, “The Tin Peddler,” *Journal of Political Economy* 21 (1913):256.

¹⁸⁷ See the 1816 contract made between Meriden, Connecticut, tinware manufacturers William and Samuel Yale, and peddler Amos Francis, reprinted in Gillespie and Curtis, *A Century of Meriden*, p. 347.

clear his wages in sales, he would have to make up half his salary – \$150 – to Filley. If Frazier cleared more than his salary in his sales, Frazier would receive half the profits.¹⁸⁸

Clock peddlers were generally better paid than tinware peddlers, because the merchandise afforded greater profits and it required greater salesmanship to sell a luxury item like a clock than utilitarian tinware. Seth Wheeler's employees earned from \$50 to \$75 per month peddling clocks in Kentucky. Employers goaded their peddlers' sales performances, even by setting peddlers against each other. If a peddler proved himself capable in making extensive sales, Wheeler increased his salary. Deforest Wolcott's contract of 1836 promised him a salary of \$55 per month. However, if Wolcott could perform as well as Ebenezer Plumb, another peddler in Wheeler's employ, Wolcott would receive a bonus of \$5 per month. Wolcott had to conduct "a first rate business," making "as many sales and on as good terms as to prices and length of credits and as safe debts" as Plumb. Wolcott must have performed to Wheeler's satisfaction, for in the following year his contract promised him a salary of \$62.50 per month. As they gained experience and skill at making sales, clock peddlers could demand better wages. Timothy Colvin began peddling clocks for Wheeler in 1836 at \$55 per month. The following year Wheeler increased Colvin's compensation to \$60 per month, and in 1839 Colvin earned \$67.50 per month.¹⁸⁹ Asaph Hall paid his peddlers in the late 1830s to sell clocks in Georgia for \$25 to \$50 per month, but allowed the peddlers to keep the profits above a set price on the sale of each clock. However, Hall paid his peddlers in Georgia

¹⁸⁸ Contracts and Agreements 1811-1838, Filley Family Papers.

¹⁸⁹ Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

bank notes, which were heavily discounted outside of Georgia.¹⁹⁰ Peddlers' wages and the conditions attached to their payment show how deeply the relations between peddler and employer were enmeshed in the marketplace.

In order to safeguard the large amounts of merchandise they trusted to peddlers, employers demanded that their peddlers provide security for the goods they received.¹⁹¹ In a respectful letter of introduction, Hezekiah Griswold asked Filley to hire his son as a tin peddler. This letter also served as a promissory note, for Griswold also bound himself responsible to see Filley paid.¹⁹² Some peddlers wrote in a flippant air of their creditworthiness. In a smart-alecky tone, which fittingly expressed the uncertainty of commercial confidence in antebellum culture, a peddler seeking tinware on credit from his former employers stated: "I can only inform you on that subject that my name is David Kelsey and that I am as honest and as dishonest as when you formerly dealt with me."¹⁹³ George W. Bartholomew was so confident of success in the coming fall consumer season in Georgia, that he pledged he would pawn his "old breeches for security."¹⁹⁴ Less than a month after New York banks suspended specie payments in 1837, P. Swiggart cajoled his old employer, Seth Wheeler, that Wheeler could safely sell

¹⁹⁰ Asaph Hall Account Book, ACWM. Hervy Ball (Appling, Columbia County, GA) to George C. Woodruff (Litchfield, CT), 7/6/1833. Woodruff Collection, LHS.

¹⁹¹ For a discussion of collateral, mortgages, and cosigners for backing mercantile debts, see Edward J. Balleisen, "Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy in Antebellum America" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1995), p. 55.

¹⁹² Hezekiah Griswold (Granby, CT) to Oliver Filley, 4/14/1824. Filley Family Papers, CHS. Robert H. Wiebe writes that any writing with "a recognizable stamp of personal reliability" would serve for a credit document: personal notes, ledger accounts, local bills of exchange, or notes of hand. Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, pp. 150-151.

¹⁹³ David Kelsey (Winfield, CT) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/18/1823. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

him clocks on credit, but that in responsibility he was no “equal to Nick Biddle.”¹⁹⁵

Trusting peddlers with valuable goods pushed the limits of mercantile confidence.

Perhaps employers found assurance in the taunts of these peddlers; the peddlers displayed a nerve which would help them survive in the marketplace.

Employers also required peddlers to keep accurate records of all their sales and reimbursable expenses.¹⁹⁶ Each time a peddler loaded his wagon at his employer’s tin shop, stockpile of clocks, or dry goods establishment, some sort of instrument recorded the value of the peddler’s cargo – either a ledger or daybook entry, a bill of goods, or the least reputable instrument in the chain of credit, a peddler’s note of hand. Clark & Haskell, tinware manufacturers in Baltimore, kept a “Pedlars & Yankeys Log Book” in 1820-1821 which recorded the arrival, departure, and expected date of return of peddlers who bought tinware on credit.¹⁹⁷ Occasionally, peddlers who fell behind in sales had to sign personal notes promising payment in a short amount of time. When a peddler named Mr. Tubbs, returned to his employer’s tin shop in 1822 \$40 behind, he asked Richard Wilcox to “trust him” while he made another trip to try to make up the difference. Tubbs gave Wilcox a note of hand for what he owed and went out again. Mr. King’s note to

¹⁹⁴ George W. Bartholomew (Athens, GA) to Rensseleaer Upson (Bristol, CT), 7/3/1826. George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL.

¹⁹⁵ P & J Swiggart, (New Lexington, IN) to Seth Wheeler, (Paris, KY), 6/4/1837. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

¹⁹⁶ See the contract between Thomas Frazier, Jr., and Oliver Filley, 1818, Contracts and Agreements 1811-1838, Filley Family Papers, CHS; Russell Upson Peck, Contract to Peddle for James Brooks, 1826, Russell Upson Peck Papers, CHS; Article of Agreement between C. & C. Lewis & Co and Carlos Bates, 9/23/1834. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL; and the clock peddlers’ account books in the Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

¹⁹⁷ Wadsworth Tavern Record Book [Clark & Haskell Daybook], 1820. CHS, Hartford. Clark & Haskell’s distrust of the peddlers is evident in a graffito on the cover – “Blacklegs.”

Richard and Benjamin Wilcox bound King and his heirs to pay the Wilcoxes for \$303 worth of tinware with interest until paid. The document was witnessed by two other peddlers. Lawrence Hubbard's credit with the Wilcoxes must have been slim, because he had to give a note for \$20, to be paid in old pewter at 15¢ per pound. If Hubbard did not come up with 133 pounds of pewter within sixty days, he had to pay the debt in cash. Thirty to sixty days was the standard length of a short-term bank loan; Hubbard's debt was treated like a loan in the national marketplace, not a traditional debt which could be paid in a year's time.¹⁹⁸ Bronson Alcott was an independent peddler, but heavily indebted to Norfolk, Virginia, dry goods dealer, Joseph T. Allyn. In the spring of 1822 Allyn requested a bill of sale of Alcott's peddling merchandise, and took outright possession of Alcott's goods in partial payment for Alcott's debts to him. Alcott's forfeiture did not cover any of the \$270 in debts to Allyn Alcott had accumulated from previous peddling ventures.¹⁹⁹ When an employer or creditor made his periodic reckoning, peddlers who could not compete in the marketplace faced dire consequences.

A hired peddler's bottom line was to earn his wages in sales, or at least to recoup the value of his load of goods. Expectations of new peddlers' sales were relaxed. The foreman of an Elizabethtown, New Jersey, tin shop reported to Oliver Filley in 1810 that "Joab has not done bad but very well for a new pedler." Initially the amount of money L. Burr brought into Harvey Filley's tinware shop gave Filley concern. On his first trip, Burr was out two months, and "did not fetch in anything." On a subsequent trip Burr

¹⁹⁸ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/19/1822; Mr Kings Note, 1/18/1819; Lawrence Hubbard's Promissory Note to R & B Wilcox, 1/19/1821; Wilcox Papers, BHS.

regained the confidence of Filley by making \$100 in a “middling good trip” of three weeks. Harvey Filley was confident that Burr would “gain the point after a while.”²⁰⁰ Richard Wilcox’s correspondence to his brother Benjamin frequently reported which peddlers cleared their wages in sales and which peddlers “sank” the Wilcoxes with poor sales. Peddlers like “Holmes” earned particular praise from their employers. Holmes left the Wilcox’s Petersburg tin shop with a load of tinware worth \$80 and returned with \$190, including \$82 in “Spanish Mills.” David Kelsey, on the other hand, did not earn “money quite to the chalk.” Though Wilcox supposed Kelsey was competent and trustworthy, he kept an eye on Kelsey’s debts to prevent them from running too high. Thomas T. Hubbard fell short of Wilcox’s expectations. Not only did Hubbard bring in an inadequate amount of cash for a load of tinware, but some of the money was counterfeit. Wilcox threatened to discharge Hubbard if his next trip were not better.²⁰¹ Peddlers’ sharp trading might have been a result of the pressures their employers placed on them to clear their wages in sales.

While many peddlers might have been satisfied with their wages, many probably chafed at their quasi-dependent status to their employers. The terms of some tin peddlers’ contracts tried to restrict the peddlers to the tin shops of their employers. Russell Upson Peck was compelled “to receive all [his] loading” at Union Court House,

¹⁹⁹ Amos Bronson Alcott (Warrenton, NC) to Chatfield Alcox, 4/13/1822. Wagner, “Letters,” p. 252.

²⁰⁰ Anonymous (Elizabethtown, NJ) to Oliver Filley, 12/23/1810. Harvey Filley (Philadelphia, PA) to Oliver Filley, 10/26/1818, 1/31/1819. Filley Family Papers, CHS.

²⁰¹ Daniel Stocking to Capt. B. Wilcox, 11/1817. Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 4/17/1819, 12/15/1819, 12/25/1819, 2/19/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

South Carolina, because that was where Peck was to receive his pay and his discharge.²⁰²

Peddlers often patronized the businesses of their employers' rivals. "[Y]ou may think it strange but it is true," wrote Harvey Filley to Oliver Filley, "[but] Elixander & Leister Holcomb have agreed to take property of me." The Holcombs' patronage of the Filleys' Philadelphia tin depot struck Filley as odd, because the Holcombs usually peddled for the Filleys' Baltimore rivals, Clark & Haskell. The Holcombs reassured Harvey Filley that "C & Haskell hant got any writing to hold them & they swore they shant go neer them this winter." Tinware manufacturers had to respect their end of the peddling agreement to maintain the peddlers' loyalty. Selden Peck and another peddler named Norris waited over a week for Richard Wilcox to open his Petersburg, Virginia, tin depot in the fall of 1823. As a result of Wilcox's late arrival, Peck and Norris, who were contracted to sell tin from Wilcox's tin depot, went instead to a rival tin depot run by Charles D. Yale in Richmond. A clerk by the name of Mr. Moore who worked for the clock peddling firm of Case & Barber deserted their Natchez shop abruptly in 1836 for another firm. Moore "assigned no other reason but that he was to have higher wages & s[ai]d he was under no obligation to stay any longer than he chose." When Hiram Barber heard of Moore's behavior, he told Carlos Bates that if Moore remained with Case & Barber to "keep a tight rein on him," because "the young man is a getting along quite too fast." Barber also told Bates to let Moore know that "he is not Boss of that shop."²⁰³ Rather than

²⁰² Russell Upson Peck, Contract to Peddle for James Brooks, 1826, Russell Upson Peck Papers, CHS.

²⁰³ Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS) to Case & Barber (New Hartford, CT), 7/13/1836. Hiram Barber (New York, NY) to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS), 7/27/1836. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

demonstrating fidelity to their employers' interests, peddlers often expressed resentment of their wage-earner dependency and insubordination.

Once in a while employers recounted how they had been "bit" by a peddler who absconded with property or without paying his debts. In business correspondence dishonest peddlers are described as rogues, blacklegs, "damd theafs," and "damd raskal[s]."²⁰⁴ Harvey Filley planned to take a trip in the Spring of 1821 into western Virginia to find his "stray" and "runaway" peddlers, who had not returned to his Philadelphia tin depot. Filley figured these "doubtful debt[or]s" would not return to Philadelphia to pay him, so he resolved "to go after them."²⁰⁵ Richard Wilcox fired a peddler named Mr. Bartlett who cheated him while in his employ in 1820. The following year, Wilcox heard that Bartlett had "bit" his new employers "as well as he did us & I think he will bite any one that hires him"²⁰⁶ A court decision published in *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* shows how another peddler manipulated the mercantile credit system to his advantage. Jonathan S. Fitts, a peddler from Braintree, Vermont, faced charges in 1839 of obtaining \$1,000 worth of goods from Milton & Slocum, merchant tailors, of Boston, in October 1835, under false pretences. Fitts showed evidence to Milton & Slocum that he had unencumbered property worth \$2,000, but the property actually had a mortgage on it. Two of Fitts's neighbors, Colonel Hutchinson and Mr.

²⁰⁴ Starr Holcomb (Hartland, CT) to Milo Holcomb (Morgantown, Monongalia Co, VA), 12/5/1831. Holcomb Family Papers, CSL. Julius Clapp (Ouchita) to Carlos Bates (Opelousas), 2/13/1837. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. William Sherman (Lexington, KY) to Caleb Sherman (Conway, MA), 12/1/1816. Sherman, Tabor Papers, MHS.

²⁰⁵ Harvey Filley (Philadelphia, PA) to Oliver Filley, 10/26/1818, 1/31/1819, 2/14/1821, Filley Family Papers, CHS.

²⁰⁶ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 11/19/1821. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

Kidder, who were unaware of his true financial standing, gave Milton & Slocum positive recommendations of Fitts's "character for truth and honesty." Fitts failed at peddling and fled to Canada. He eventually moved back to New York, and when he was arrested, he owed about \$2,000 in Boston, and between \$2,000 and \$3,000 in New York, and other debts in Braintree, none of which had been paid. Fitts was charged under a Massachusetts law against cheating by false pretences. Although it was apparent that Fitts had fraudulently misrepresented his worth to Milton & Slocum, the defense argued that the goods were sold wholly or principally on the recommendation of Hutchinson and Kidder. The jury agreed with the defense and acquitted Fitts of the charge.²⁰⁷

If the peddling profession was indeed an "Honorable Fraternity of moving Merchants," then the peddlers who preyed upon their fellow itinerants brought dishonor upon the rest.²⁰⁸ Peddlers seemed to behave like rival gangs, robbing those who peddled for competing tinware shops.²⁰⁹ Mr. Pardy, a tin peddler for Richard Wilcox's tin depot in Petersburg, suspected "Baltimore Peddlers," perhaps the employees of Clark & Haskell, of breaking into his wagon in Fredericksburg and stealing 225 "prime Muskratt" skins worth 37¢ apiece. Another peddler working for Wilcox, named Hubbard, claimed he was robbed by Peter Sherman, a peddler from Woodbury, Connecticut, who was outfitted by Charles D. Yale's tin depot in Richmond. After sharing a bed one night in a Virginia tavern, Hubbard accused Sherman of stealing \$95 from the pocketbook that

²⁰⁷ "Mercantile Law Cases – Cheating by False Pretences," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 1 (Dec. 1839):522-23.

²⁰⁸ The phrase was used, with irony perhaps, by an Irish peddler in Southside Virginia in 1807. Richard R. Beeman, ed., "Trade and Travel in Post-Revolutionary Virginia: A Diary of an Itinerant Peddler, 1807-1808," *VMHB* 84 (April 1976):176.

²⁰⁹ The competitive nature of the tinware peddling trade is discussed in chapter two.

Hubbard had stowed under his pillow.²¹⁰ Bronson Alcott always placed his trunk of “costly trinkets” by his tavern bedside, and was never robbed of “its treasures.” William Andrus Alcott shared a room with several teamsters in a North Carolina log tavern. Masking his fears of being robbed, Alcott nonchalantly threw his clothes over his trunk, which he stowed near the head of his bed, and “tumbled into bed.” Chatfield Alcott was not so fortunate. While camped on the bank of the Potomac one night two dozen hare skins were stolen from him. Another night, a thief removed the loosely hinged lid from his wagon and stole his furs. Two combs were stolen from him on other occasions.²¹¹ Travelling with valuable cargo, barter, or cash, peddlers were tempting targets for criminals. A man who collected \$1,500 in Virginia due to clock peddlers came across another class of transient sharpers, professional gamblers, who “very soon managed to win every dollar” from the unfortunate note collector.²¹²

The nature and extent of the trust between Yankee peddlers and their employers reflected the changing meaning of confidence in early nineteenth-century America. With the rise of distant trade, mercantile trust between strangers, in the formalized language of the contract, gained precedence over the customs of local, face-to-face trade.²¹³ The new mercantile ethics seemed to countenance any competitive behavior that did not violate a contract. So long as both parties maintained fidelity to a contract once it was drawn, they

²¹⁰ Richard Wilcox (Richmond) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin), 4/17/1819. Wilcox Papers, BHS. James Guild’s pocketbook was stolen at a tavern in Troy, New York. Guild, “Journal,” p. 257.

²¹¹ Alcott, *New Connecticut*, p. 186. Alcott, *Recollections*, pp. 90, 102. Chatfield Alcott, “Journal to the South,” 12/10/1821, 3/23/1822, 6/5/1822. Alcott Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

²¹² George Merriman (Bristol, CT) to Rensseleer Upson (Louisville, KY), 11/6/1837. George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

were free to drive hard bargains and shrewd deals with each other. Paradoxically, this competitive business climate seemed to foster an egalitarian, masculine, commercial community, rather than an atomistic marketplace.²¹⁴ A variety of other factors made Yankee peddlers a cohesive social group. Their youth and their shared New England heritage might have made them band together or assert their group-identity through their behavior, especially in the South, where hostility to Yankees was commonly expressed. In other words, Yankee peddlers behaved according to their own rules, not the strictures of the northern middle class, the explicit contractual terms of their contracts, or in the vernacular traditions of exchange in the South.

How was this community of Yankee peddlers created? The Market Revolution, the congeries of forces which remade the United States into an industrial and commercial nation, also transmogrified New England farm boys into sharp, itinerant traders. Market forces pushed and pulled thousands of young New England men out of their communities. Exigencies of the New England economy drove young men away from farming. The lure of profits from peddling attracted many young men who preferred seeking the main chance in the commercial marketplace to a state of protracted dependency as a farm hand, a factory operative, or an outwork producer. The socioeconomic conditions of early nineteenth-century New England unleashed a host of young men on the nation – ambitious, conspicuously Yankee, and, as the next chapter will show, well-organized.

²¹³ Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers*, pp. 12-45. Haskell, "Capitalism, Part 1," pp. 553-56.

²¹⁴ Wallace, *Rockdale*, pp. 18-21.

Figure 2. Ages of Peddlers in Georgia and Virginia

	<u>18-21</u>	<u>21-25</u>	<u>26-30</u>	<u>31-35</u>	<u>36+</u>	<u>Total</u>
Georgia	9	85	45	22	10	171
Virginia	6	21	8	7	8	50

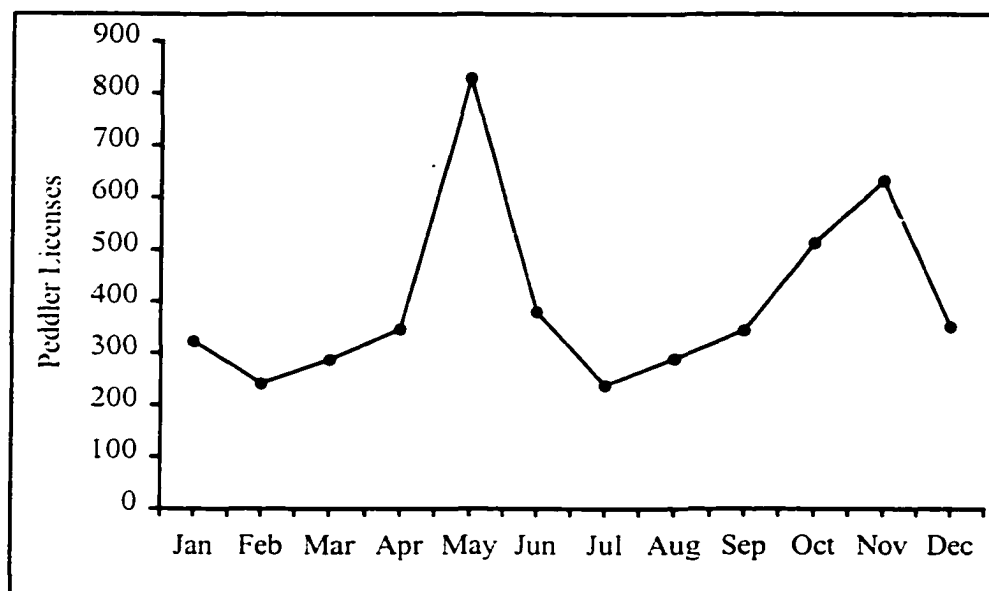
Figure 3. Monthly Licensing Patterns in Virginia, 1799-1850

Figure 4. "Eastern Emigrants"

John Orville Taylor, *Satirical Hits on the People's Education* (New York: American Common School Union, 1839).



Figure 5. Arrivals and Departures from Clark & Haskell's Tin Depot, 1820-1821

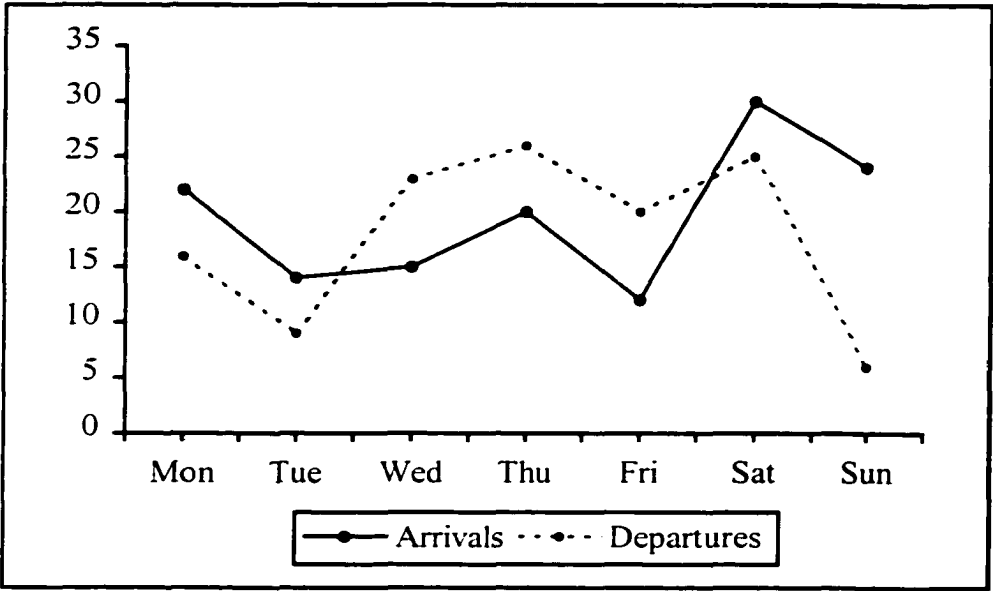
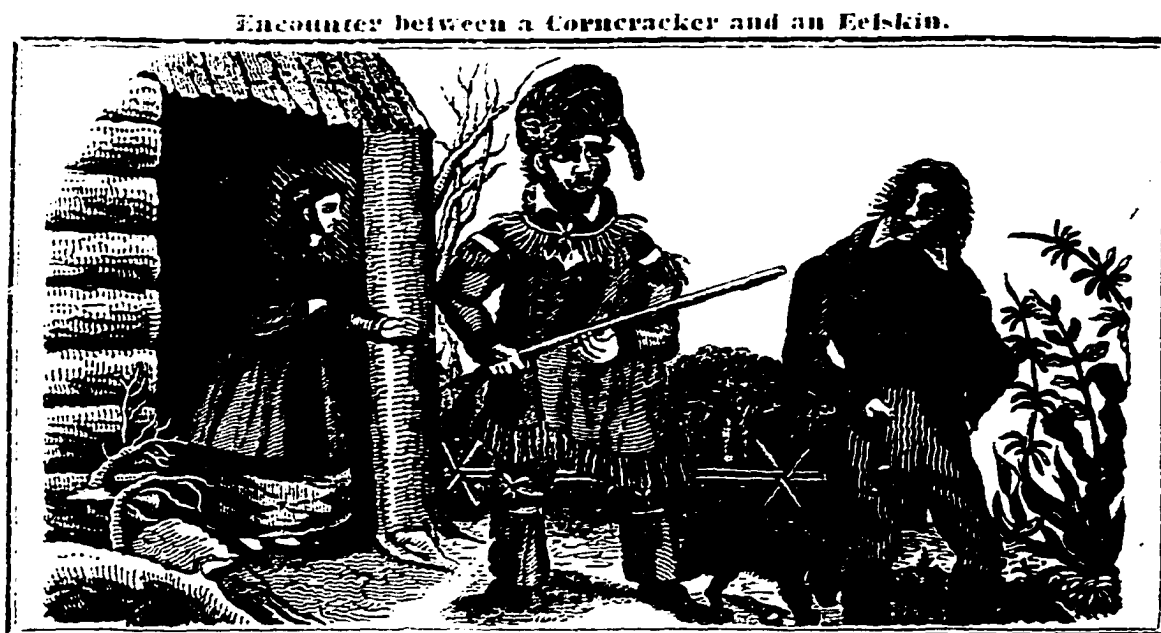


Figure 6. "Encounter between a Corncracker and an Eelskin"
"A Corn Cracker's Account of his Encounter with an Eelskin," *Davy Crockett's 1837 Almanack of Wild Sports in the West, Life in the Backwoods, & Sketches of Texas* (Nashville: Published by the heirs of Col. Crockett, 1837), pp. 16-17.



CHAPTER 2 A BUSINESS HISTORY OF THE YANKEE PEDDLING SYSTEM

Through its cadre of peddlers, the tinware shop in Petersburg, Virginia, managed by Richard Wilcox served an enormous hinterland that extended into North Carolina and the Valley of Virginia.¹ Richard wrote to his brother Benjamin Wilcox in Berlin, Connecticut, in November of 1821 that the demands of filling out and copying bills of lading and promissory notes for the peddlers made his head “pretty well frazzeld,” and left him very little time for other business or leisure. Richard complained to his brother two months later:

I have been so drove in business that I have not had time to go up town for ten days past, for on friday I sent out five Peddlers and on Saturday I had four more come in, got them out on Wednesday, they had been out but half hour and another come in & he now ready to go out – and they allmost wore me out.²

From Richard Wilcox’s correspondence it sounds like he was not running a tinware peddling business, but that the business was running him. The exertions necessary to meet the intensification of trade in volume and distance in this period³ drove Wilcox to mental exhaustion. The Yankee peddling companies uncovered markets in the South and West that strained their relatively primitive business organizations

¹ See Figure 32.

² Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 1/12/1820, 11/19/1821, 1/3/1822. Wilcox Family Papers, BHS, Berlin.

³ Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States 1790-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 101-21. George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), pp.

to the limit. New England entrepreneurs adapted the ancient business of peddling into a system suited to the particular needs of expanding industry and interregional trade. This Yankee peddling system was the product of market and social forces and actuated by the self-interest of its participants. It was spawned by the Market Revolution, but also helped shape the revolution's path.

This chapter brings a fresh perspective to familiar features of the antebellum economy and the Market Revolution through a study of the Yankee peddling system.⁴ The long distance trade of peddlers introduced anonymity, mobility, and impersonal market mechanisms into relationships of exchange. All Yankee peddling companies relied on the expanding financial, commercial, and transportation networks to distribute New England manufactures across the nation. To send a load of clocks from Connecticut to a central distribution point in western Virginia, for instance, a clock peddling company utilized the services of banks and other lenders, brokers, insurance companies, shipping lines, forwarding merchants and warehouses. The exchanges made between peddlers and their customers heeded traditional agrarian credit practices, but also linked backcountry consumers to the wider national market. Through an examination of peddler license records, business correspondence, and several clock peddlers' account books, this chapter locates the Yankee peddling system within changing trends in long distance, interregional trade. I examine the varieties of peddling businesses

169-75.

⁴ For the Market Revolution, see: *ibid*; Sellers, *Market Revolution*. Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*. Allan Kulikoff, "Transition to Capitalism," *WMQ* 46 (Jan 1989):120-44. Vickers, "Competency and Competition. Rothenberg, *From Market Places to a Market*

that sprang up to deal with the challenge of distributing goods in a primitive market infrastructure, particularly dry goods peddlers, tinware peddlers, and clock peddlers. Finally, I suggest some of the reasons why many manufacturers abandoned the Yankee peddling system by the mid-1840s for specialized wholesalers and jobbers.

The increasing industrial production of New England and the Mid-Atlantic states rapidly outgrew demand in local markets, so eastern manufacturers looked to the burgeoning population of the West and South. In 1810 less than 15 percent of the nation's population lived west of the Appalachian Mountains. By 1860, however, over 40 percent of Americans lived in the Trans-Appalachian West.⁵ Marketing goods across half a continent challenged traditional forms of commercial organization. The financial system was barely adequate to the task of supporting trade over increasingly larger distances. Banknotes and credit instruments were severely discounted as they traveled further along the channels of trade.⁶ The flow of market information was severely hampered by an exceedingly slow, expensive, and unreliable postal service. Until business newspapers arose in the 1820s, merchants had to operate on guesses and imperfect or untimely intelligence.⁷ Around 1815

Economy. Appleby, "New Cultural Heroes."

⁵ Erik F. Haites, James Mak, and Gary M. Walton, *Western River Transportation: The Era of Early Internal Development, 1810-1860* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 111.

⁶ Peter Temin, *The Jacksonian Economy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969), pp. 29-36. Gary L. Browne, "Eastern Merchants and Their Southwestern Collections during the Panic and Deflation, 1837-1843," *Southern Studies* 29 (Winter 1980):319. Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, pp. 150-51.

⁷ Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Lewis E. Atherton, *The Southern Country Store* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1949), p. 156-57. Stuart Bruchey, "The Business Economy of Marketing Change, 1790-1840: A Study of Sources of

domestic trade shifted from general merchandizing to specialized wholesale merchandizing, which remained the dominant marketing mechanism until the end of the nineteenth century. The diffuse nature of markets made it economically unfeasible for manufacturers to undertake the marketing of their own goods, so a variety of middlemen and service industries – peddling companies, forwarding and commission houses, jobbers, and commercial drummers – arose to undertake the distribution of manufactures.⁸ Forwarding and commission houses handled the transfer of goods, freight, insurance, and warehousing. These commission merchants operated independently of each other as separate links in the chain of commerce. Manufacturers had to rely on several firms to handle the marketing of their goods, because there was no integration of shipping on the national level until the railroad network matured in the late antebellum era.⁹ Peddlers or local storekeepers were the last link in the attenuated chain of distribution from import merchants and manufacturers to the ultimate consumer. As communication and transportation improved in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, manufacturers' links to rural consumers grew more direct. Express companies, jobbers and commercial drummers replaced peddlers and commission merchants in the evolving

Efficiency" *Agricultural History* 46 (January 1972):213-20. David P. Forsyth, *The Business Press in America, 1750-1865* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1964), p. 56.

⁸ Glenn Porter and Harold C. Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers: Studies in the Changing Structure of Nineteenth-Century Marketing* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), pp. 4-5, 7, 17.

⁹ Glenn Porter and Harold C. Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers: Studies in the Changing Structure of Nineteenth-Century Marketing* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 20. Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 147. Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, p. 150. Thomas C. Cochran, *Frontiers of Change: Early Industrialism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 22. Bruchey, "Business Economy," pp. 212-13. Lewis E. Atherton, *The Pioneer Merchant*

distribution system. Eventually, all of these middlemen would be eliminated by manufacturers in the late nineteenth century, when they integrated company sales forces into their corporate hierarchies.¹⁰ With peddlers in the van, a national market slowly developed over the course of the nineteenth century.

The heyday of the Yankee peddling system of distribution began around the end of the War of 1812 and lasted into the mid-1840s.¹¹ Peddlers have been narrowly classified as frontier traders who disappeared once the population of a backcountry region grew concentrated enough to support an established store.¹² In fact, they linked the manufacturing centers of the Northeast to consumers in towns and cities, urban hinterlands, long-settled agricultural districts, as well as the backcountry. By providing an outlet for durable and consumer goods, peddlers helped make enlarged shops and mass-production economically feasible for early American industry. Sales in distant markets by Yankee peddlers earned returns on industry's investments in machinery and the physical plants of the factory system.¹³ The brooms, palm leaf hats, shoes, cigars, and

in *Mid-America* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), pp. 100-102.

¹⁰ Porter and Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers*, pp. 27-29, 34-35. Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, p. 139. Lee M. Friedman, "The Drummer in Early American Merchandise Distribution," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 21 (April 1947):42-43. Lewis E. Atherton, "Predecessors of the Commercial Drummer in the Old South" *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 21 (Feb. 1947):22. idem, *Southern Country Store*, p. 165, 168, 176.

¹¹ For an overview of the American economy from 1815 to 1860, see North, *Economic Growth*, pp. 66-74. Diane Lindstrom, "American Economic Growth before 1840: New Evidence and New Directions," *Journal of Economic History* 39 (Mar 1979):289-301.

¹² Atherton, *Southern Country Store*, p. 88. idem, *Pioneer Merchant*, pp. 35-37.

¹³ Cochran, *Frontiers of Change*, p. 42. Uselding, "Peddling in the Antebellum Economy," p. 58. For mechanization in early industries, see David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States*. Otto Mayr and Robert C. Post, eds. *Yankee Enterprise: The Rise of the American System of Manufactures*.

other small goods that were churned out by the putting-out system of manufactures were carried far and wide by peddlers.¹⁴ A small portion of the import trade in British goods reached rural consumers through Yankee peddlers.¹⁵ Yankee peddlers were the industrializing and commercializing Northeast's ambassadors to the rest of the nation.

The organization of the Yankee peddling business evolved over the first half of the nineteenth century. Peddling businesses grew larger and more complex, but older models of peddling coexisted with newer forms throughout this era. The simplest peddling organization was the independent entrepreneur, who peddled "on his own hooks" by buying goods directly from wholesalers. Independent peddlers also included artisans who sold their own manufactures in their local market. Itinerant shoemakers, tinkers, silversmiths, painters, and other artisans could be found in all parts of the nation throughout the antebellum era.¹⁶ Companies who hired peddlers had broader and deeper distribution ranges than independent entrepreneurs. Peddling firms could be as small as one "master peddler" and the two or three peddlers he hired.¹⁷ Other peddling companies had two or more partners who hired several peddlers to sell goods. They could base their operations in a general store and carry on a retail trade in generic dry goods alongside their peddling

¹⁴ Nobles, "Commerce and Community," p. 287. Clark, "Household Economy," p. 170. Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, pp. 216-17. Bidwell and Falconer, *History of Agriculture*, p. 246.

¹⁵ For the surge in British imports after the War of 1812 see: Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, pp. 334-38; Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 161-67.

¹⁶ Uselding, "Peddling in the Antebellum Economy," p. 60. Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising," p. 37. Guild, "Journal."

¹⁷ David Kelsey climbed the peddling business hierarchy. He worked as a hired tin peddler for Benjamin and Richard Wilcox, was briefly in business with his father, and then hired two or three men to peddle tinware for him as a master peddler. David Kelsey

venture (Figures 7 and 8). Or they might specialize in a particular line of goods, such as books,¹⁸ tinware or shelf clocks, and peddle these items out of strategically placed warehouses. These depot-based companies reflected the growth of industry from single proprietor shops to large shops and factories. Tinware peddling companies were enlarged artisan shops that hired peddlers to sell their increased output. Clock peddling companies, however, were middlemen who bought their merchandise from clock manufacturers. Clock manufacturers did not make exclusive agreements with peddling companies to act as the sole manufacturing agents in a particular territory, but sold their clocks to many different peddling concerns.¹⁹

The Yankee peddling system of distribution was particularly suited to the needs of certain industries of southern New England. Most products of the incipient manufacturing sector were generic; they could be put to a variety of different uses and were of simple

(Winfield) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/15/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

¹⁸ The expansion of Philadelphia publishers' trade in books was made possible in part by peddlers who traveled out of branch stores set up in western Pennsylvania. As in the clock industry, book peddlers and other middlemen were replaced eventually by wholesale trade to jobbers. Tract societies also had a distribution system similar to the Yankee peddling system. While tract societies spread metaphysical notions of bourgeois piety, peddlers spread Yankee notions of tin and brass. Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, pp. 3-4, 130-39, 147. Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 3, "The Book Peddler and Literary Dissemination." Creighton Lacy, *The Word-Carrying Giant: The Growth of the American Bible Society (1816-1966)* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977). Lawrence Thompson, "The Printing and Publishing Activities of the American Tract Society from 1825 to 1850," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 35 (1941):81-144. Edwin Bronner, "Distributing the Printed Word: The Association of Friends, 1816-1966" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 91 (1967):342-354. David Paul Nord, "The Evangelical Origins of Mass Media in America, 1815-1835," *Journalism Monographs* 88 (1984).

¹⁹ A few clock manufacturers tried hiring their own peddlers. Late in the era, one clock manufacturer, C. & C. Ives, contracted with Seth Wheeler as a manufacturing agent. Wheeler's peddling company was a direct descendant of the jobbers who would take over

design and construction. Brand names were wholly unknown, except among patent medicines, which were often carried by specialized peddlers. But a few manufacturers created products that were technologically complex or had a very specific use.

Mechanicians in southern New England filed more manufacturing patents per capita than any other region in the nation, roughly twenty times the rate of the rest of the country.²⁰

Complex products –clocks, patent washing machines, patent chain pumps, winnowing machines, corn shellers, and assorted contraptions of tinware²¹ – presented marketing problems. The operation and care of the device had to be demonstrated to the consumer.

Manufacturers or their agents had to make repair facilities and replacement parts available to the consumer.²² The advantages and tastefulness of newfangled wares – such as tin sausage stuffers or patented tin bake ovens²³ – had to be translated to the consumer.

In other words, a complex commodity would not sell itself from a general store's shelf.

The purchase of durable goods was discretionary and deferrable, and without national brand names or advertising, products had to be brought to consumers' households.

the distribution of clocks in the 1840s. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

²⁰ The Hudson River Valley also had a high rate of inventive activity. Kenneth L. Sokoloff, "Inventive Activity in Early Industrial America: Evidence from Patent Records, 1790-1846," *Journal of Economic History* 48 (Dec 1988):824-25.

²¹ For the revolution in tinware "gadgetry," see Robert Friedel, "Piecing Together a Material Culture: Tinsplate in Nineteenth-Century America," presented at the Center for the History of Business, Technology, and Society, Hagley Museum and Library, October 12, 1995, pp. 2-3, 8.

²² Porter and Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers*, pp. 2-4, 11.

²³ Newspapers could convey this information to consumers within its reach. See, for instance, the advertisement for Joseph B. Gilbert's tin foot stove, that, despite its simple boxlike construction, combined "all the necessary properties of a foot-stove, tea boiler, chafing dish, plate warmer, and butter or liquor cooler, as the season may be." *Connecticut Courant*, 11/30/1812. The advertisement of Philip Willcox's "Patent Economical Baker and Roaster" in the *Springfield Republican* (Massachusetts), 12/31/1831, included a diagram of the contraption.

Manufacturers enlisted the renowned eloquence of the Yankee peddler to overcome the parochial tastes of rural consumers and to demonstrate the usefulness of a new product.²⁴

The workings of a wooden-wheeled shelf clock were a mystery to the average antebellum consumer. Clocks generally had instructions pasted inside the case on how to set up and start the clock running, but these instructions were useless for illiterate consumers. Peddlers received “instructions in relation to putting up clocks” from their employers, which they passed on to their customers.²⁵ Clock peddlers also provided maintenance service for their customers’ clocks. Peddlers ordered spare parts from the manufacturers, or had them fashioned by a local artisan when the mails were too “dillatory.”²⁶ The *United States Literary Gazette* humorously outlined the specialization of clock trade services in an 1825 article about a Connecticut clock in a South Carolina farmer’s home:

Mr. B., a farmer, informed me that these clocks were introduced by pedlars from Connecticut, and in succeeding years they brought fresh supplies accompanied by cases, stating that the clocks would be injured by the dust and moisture of the atmosphere; another would pass along who ‘cleaned clocks,’ and get a job of every man who owned one; and, lastly, one would go the rounds bushing the pivot-holes with brass, after which the machine was thought to be complete.²⁷

Clock peddlers Henry Merriman and Scott Billings forestalled many note protests among

²⁴ Uselding, “Peddling in the Antebellum Economy,” pp. 59-60. Atherton, *Southern Country Store*, p. 160.

²⁵ C. & C. Ives (Bristol, CT) to Seth Wheeler (Paris, KY), 2/1/1839, 2/12/1839. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

²⁶ Benj. W. Miller (Spartanburg, SC) to Lemuel Harrison & Company (Waterbury, CT), 1/20/1815, in Chris H. Bailey, *Two Hundred Years of American Clocks & Watches* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 116.

²⁷ “Journal of a Tour in the Interior of South Carolina,” *United States Literary Gazette* 3 (I, 15 November 1825):104-8, 140-43. Reprinted in Eugene L. Schwaab, ed., *Travels in the Old South* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), I:184-5.

their Kentucky and Tennessee customers in 1838. They visited every customer who held a note, whether due or not, repairing clocks day and night until they had satisfied all their clients. They collected \$500 on outstanding notes from gratified customers.²⁸ Peddlers like Merriman and Billings provided an essential service to the remote consumers of Connecticut-manufactured clocks. Simultaneously, the peddlers promoted commercial comity; they earned the trust of their customers and maintained the reputation of distant manufacturers.

It was very important for Yankee shelf clocks to run well in order to make good sales and to collect money from customers who purchased on credit. Some peddlers reported prejudice against wooden-wheeled clocks, which injured the sale of their merchandise.²⁹ One of the most popular Yankee peddler stories in the South was of the clock peddler who always carried one spare clock when he made his collections. At the first house he called upon, the clock had stopped, so the peddler offered to swap the clock he had with him for the faulty timepiece. When he reached his next customer, his clock had stopped as well. So the peddler swapped the stopped clock he had received from the previous customer for the other broken clock, and he continued this exchange of broken clocks for broken clocks through his entire route.³⁰ Some clocks were poorly manufactured or damaged in shipment and broke down before the peddler had a chance to collect on the clock notes. For instance, in the spring and early summer of 1814 four customers of the clock manufacturing and peddling firm of Roberts, Dutton & Company

²⁸ St Put [Henry Merriman] (Clay Village, KY, 12/25/1837; Shelbyville, Shelby County, KY, 1/16/1838) to Rensseleer Upson. George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

²⁹ Thomas Wilcox [Wilcox Adams & Co] (Rocky Spring, east TN) to Samuel Terry, 1/4/1826. Samuel Terry Collection, ACWM.

posted notices in the *Lynchburg Press* that they would not honor their clock notes because the clocks had failed to run as warranted.³¹ Similarly, a North Carolina customer of clock peddler Allen Case posted a notice in the *Salisbury Western Carolinian* in 1821 that he would not honor his \$50 note to Case, because his clock stopped running after six months.³²

The financing for peddling companies came from a variety of sources: parents and other relatives, the manufacturers of the goods, merchant wholesalers, and banks. The first banks established on the eastern seaboard in the 1780s and 1790s were dominated by conservative elites, who confined loans to ninety days to merchants of established credit who had goods in transit. Small manufacturers and unestablished entrepreneurs, who needed longer-term loans to establish their businesses, clamored for state legislatures to charter banks that would cater to their needs.³³ The Connecticut legislature chartered the Phoenix bank in 1814 in Hartford with a capital of one million dollars to meet the needs of businessmen who were turned away from the Hartford bank, a bastion of Congregationalism, Federalism, and the wealthy conservative merchants of Hartford.³⁴ The Phoenix bank helped finance at least two peddling companies. Richard and Benjamin Wilcox of Berlin, Connecticut, received loans from the Phoenix bank around 1818 to finance the operations of their tinware peddling business in Petersburg, Virginia.³⁵ The Wilcoxes bought soldering wire, tinplate, tools and other supplies

³⁰ Hinman, "The Yankee Peddler," pp. 37-38, 55-56.

³¹ *Lynchburg Press*, May 5; June 16, 30; 1814.

³² Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising," p. 54.

³³ Sellers, *Market Revolution*, p. 46.

³⁴ Martin, "Merchants and Trade," p. 191.

³⁵ The "Middletown Bank" and the "Richmond Branch bank" of the United States also

necessary to manufacture tinware on credit from Connecticut merchant Daniel Hinsdale and from the New York City metals firm of Phelps and Peck.³⁶ The Phoenix bank also provided capital to Upson Merriman and Company in 1823 while they were peddling clocks in Alabama.³⁷ The early clock factories relied upon mercantile capital and perhaps banks to establish their businesses.³⁸

The credit side of a peddler's account book listed a variety of payments in specie, paper currency, personal notes, and barter. Payment to peddlers in "truck," or barter, remained common well into the 1820s, and not just in backcountry regions. During the Panic of 1819, for instance, peddlers refused to accept the "mere rags"³⁹ of insolvent southern and western banks; bartered commodities were preferable to depreciated bank notes.⁴⁰ Salvador Slocum did little cash business in the Great Valley of Virginia in the 1810s, but readily traded his tinware and other trinkets for country produce, such as butter, rakes, hoes, feathers, maple sugar, beeswax, wool, and bear skins.⁴¹ The proportion of sales in cash and credit to trade in barter depended on the kind of

loaned money to the Wilcoxes. Benjamin Wilcox (Richmond, VA) to Betsy Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 1/2/1819. Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 12/25/1819. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

³⁶ The firm of Phelps and Peck (predecessors of Phelps, Dodge & Co) had a near monopoly on the trade of sheet metals in antebellum America. See Tooker, *Nathan Trotter*, pp. 16-17, 86; Robert G. Cleland, *A History of Phelps Dodge, 1834-1950* (New York, 1950); Phelps, Dodge & Co Papers, New York Public Library.

³⁷ Asa Upson (Bristol, CT) to Rensseleae Upson (Huntsville, Madison Co, AL), 2/3/1823, 4/6/1823. George Rensseleae Upson Papers, CSL.

³⁸ John Joseph Murphy, "Entrepreneurship in the Establishment of the American Clock Industry," *The Journal of Economic History* 26 (June 1966): 169-186.

³⁹ Thomas B. Wait (Boston) to Samuel Whitcomb, Jr. (Cincinnati), 9/9/1819. Whitcomb Papers, MHS.

⁴⁰ Harvey Filley (Philadelphia) to Oliver Filley, 1/31/1819. Filley Family Papers, CHS

⁴¹ "Tin & Goods brot in by Salvador Slocum June 25, 1816," Accounts, Filley Family Papers, Connecticut Historical Society. Salvador Slocum tin & pewter peddling license,

merchandise the peddler sold, as well as the economic conditions of the current markets. Peddlers who sold generic, low priced items, such as dry goods and most tinware, tended to receive more barter and specie at the point of transaction than peddlers who vended expensive, durable goods, such as clocks. Yankee peddlers were renowned for ferreting out large amounts of hard cash. Epaphroditus Peck cleared \$100 “all in Silver” in one trip from a tinware shop in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1810.⁴² A tin peddler named Holmes raked in \$82 in silver “Spanish Mills” while peddling tinware in the hinterland of Petersburg, Virginia, in 1819.⁴³

To garner these large amounts of specie and cash, peddlers had to engage in many small exchanges. As a Yankee peddler allegedly told Thomas Cather, his success was due to “low prices and quick sales.”⁴⁴ Peddlers’ profits came through the accretion of very large returns on low-cost items. James Patton made 13¢ to 14¢ profit on each silver locket he sold and about 13¢ profit on each handkerchief.⁴⁵ A Connecticut peddler bought women’s bonnets for 28¢ apiece and retailed them for 50¢ to \$1. This represents a markup or profit of 175 to over 300 percent.⁴⁶ A small item closely associated with peddlers in folklore and sold in large quantities by actual peddlers were combs. Combs

June 17, 1818, Hampshire County, LRLV.

⁴² Epaphroditus Peck (Columbia, SC) to Samuel Peck (Bristol, CT) 12/5/1810. Peck Family Papers, BPL.

⁴³ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 4/17/1819. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

⁴⁴ For bookpeddlers Mason Locke Weem’s (1801) and James F. McCarty’s chase for the “nimble ninepence,” see Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, pp. 128-29. Yoseloff, *Voyage to America*, p. 111.

⁴⁵ Patton, *Letter*, p. 8. Patton did not indicate the price he paid for the lockets or handkerchiefs.

⁴⁶ Anson Bates (East Granby, CT) to Carlos Bates (Jefferson, Ashtabula County, OH), 5/6/1830. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

were an immensely popular fashion item among women, which made combs almost as good as cash for the peddlers. Bought by the gross, peddlers realized large profits on combs. Manufacturers in Bristol, Connecticut, wholesaled their “best article” at \$12 a gross, or about 8.3¢ per comb. Seth Wheeler bought brass combs in bulk for about 6.25¢ per comb, and paid less than 15¢ each for silver combs. His clock peddlers in turn sold these combs for about \$1 apiece, or swapped them outright for a tavern bill, which might amount to as much as \$1.50, a markup of to 1,000 to 2,400 percent.⁴⁷ A box of notions was often the source of a peddler’s ready cash, which was needed for tavern bills, horse feed, licenses, ferriage, wagon repairs, and other incidental expenses. Peddlers reputedly assured their customers that they sold their goods at cost, but then took 200 percent profit.⁴⁸ A fictive clock peddler anticipated what he termed a profit of 10 percent; that is, he expected to sell clocks for ten times their wholesale price.⁴⁹ The humor and the vitriol against petty trade ignored the fact that the profits earned by peddlers came through the assiduous accretion of small profits from many transactions. Peddling was painstaking work which entailed many risks.

A large proportion of the business of Yankee peddlers relied, ironically, upon the confidence the peddlers placed in their customers. Even petty transactions of dry goods were oftentimes made on credit. George W. Bartholomew trusted \$1,500 worth of goods to customers in Alabama and Mississippi in the winter of 1825-1826, all in small notes.

⁴⁷ Eli Terry, Jr. & Co (Terryville, CT) to James Brice (Washington, PA), 11/29/1840. Letter Books of Eli Terry, Jr. ACWM. Receipt, 7/24/1837, Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL. For a description of the horn-combmaking industry in Massachusetts, see Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen*, pp. 316-17.

⁴⁸ Robinson, *Life and Adventures*, pp. 29, 44.

⁴⁹ “The Yankee Pedler,” *Georgia Journal*, 4/5/1832.

By July 1826 he had collected all but \$40 of the outstanding debts. Bartholomew expected to lose no more than \$10 of the entire \$1,500, which he justifiably boasted was “very good collecting in any country.”⁵⁰ (Figures 7 and 8 list some of the wares Bartholomew carried.) In like manner, Samuel J. Lewis sold \$1,600 worth of goods in Southside Virginia between November 1835 and March 1836; at least \$800 of Lewis’ sales were on credit, which he expected to collect by June 1836.⁵¹ Of all the peddling fraternity, clock peddling businesses relied the most on the credit system. Aside from jewelry, there was no other line of merchandise carried by peddlers that demanded such high prices. Although new mass production techniques had dropped the price of wooden mantel clocks, they were still a hefty investment for the average household.

All peddlers extended credit to their customers on the liberal terms of the traditional agrarian economy. Accounts in all early nineteenth-century American mercantile credit webs were settled when the farmers’ surplus crops, the ultimate balance of these long chains of credit, had been marketed. Agrarian consumers made most of their purchases at two times in the year: in the winter and in the spring. Winter purchases were spurred by the change in activities in farming households. Crops were harvested and marketed, which sometimes left the farm household with cash for necessities and perhaps a few luxuries. Supplies were needed to repair tools and clothing during winter months. There was a secondary purchasing peak in the spring as farmer

⁵⁰ George W. Bartholomew (Athens, GA) to Rensseleer Upson (Bristol, CT) 11/20/1825, 7/3/1826. George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

⁵¹ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Naugatuck, CT), 1/17/1836, 3/6/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

prepared to plant their fields.⁵² Peddling trips were timed to begin in the late fall and end the following spring to accommodate both of these peaks in consumer activity.

Customers' payments fed the entire network of trade, thus the peddlers' performance with the customer – how much he sold, how well he satisfied the customer, how well he judged the creditworthiness of a customer, and how well he collected outstanding debts – determined the success or failure of the entire peddling venture. Traditional exchange relations between farmers and storekeepers allowed farmers twelve months credit for purchases. Clock peddlers noted consistently that rural southern and western consumers expected twelve months credit. Farmers traditionally contracted to pay their debts on Christmas or on the first day of January, so by early January many farmers had run out of ready cash, and had to be extended credits for another year. By March when spring purchases were made, farmers were buying almost entirely on credit. To compete effectively with storekeepers for rural farmers' discretionary spending, peddlers had to honor the practice of giving twelve months credit to customers who needed it.⁵³

In the first three or four decades of the nineteenth century, a peddler's wagon was often the best – albeit slow and costly – option for widely distributing goods. Merchants

⁵² Wiebe, *Opening of American Society*, p. 150. Marilyn Anne Lavin, *William Bostwick: Connecticut Yankee in Antebellum Georgia* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), p. 131. Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns*, p. 161.

⁵³ George W. Bartholomew (Athens, GA) to Rensseleae Upson (Bristol, CT), 4/23/1826, 9/4/1826. George W. Bartholomew (Columbus, Monroe Co., MS) to Rensseleae Upson (Bristol, CT) 1/16/1827. George W. Bartholomew (Mount Zion, Monroe Co, MS) to Rensseleae Upson (Bristol, CT) 2/18/1827. St Put [Henry Merriman] (Clay Village, KY) to Rensseleae Upson (Paducah, KY), 12/25/1837. George Rensseleae Upson Papers, CSL. Thomas Wilcox [Wilcox Adams & Co] (Abingdon, VA) to Samuel Terry, 11/23/1825. Samuel Terry Papers, ACWM. A. L. Brown (Centerville, LA) to Milo Lewis (Salem Bridge, Waterbury, CT), 5/12/1834. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

and manufacturers clamored for internal improvements to the transportation infrastructure in this time period. Turnpikes aided local markets, but for long freight hauls the value of turnpikes was sharply limited. Loaded wagons moved slowly, averaging twenty miles a day, or two miles per hour. The high cost of hauling goods by wagon made it unprofitable to transport commodities with a high weight to value ratio further than thirty miles. Canals greatly reduced the cost of shipping, but heavily laden canal boats moved at the same speed as wagons, and not at all if the canal was frozen. Southern transportation was especially slow, expensive, and unreliable. Turnpike and canal building in the South lagged behind other regions of the country between 1815 and 1830. After 1834 railroads helped expand the markets of northeastern manufacturers, but before 1840 the amount of traffic carried on railroads was negligible compared to inland waterway traffic.⁵⁴

Although peddlers' stock in trade was often shipped to storage points in advance of the peddler by ship or canalboat, the movement of goods in the peddling distribution network relied most heavily upon the slow traffic of horsepower and the peddlers' own footpower. Foot peddlers carried their stock either in a backpack or in hand trunks. Figure 9 is a daguerreotype of a trunk peddler from about 1840-1860. This young man used a harness to support the weight of his trunks, which probably contained his personal effects as well as merchandise. The outlines of what could be a pocketbook and an account book are visible on the right side of the peddler's coat. Yankee peddlers also traveled the countryside in a variety of vehicles: two-wheeled carts; "go-carts;" light, four-wheeled wagons called

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, pp. 23-24, 26-27, 132-34, 138, 164-65. Cochran, *Frontiers of Change*, p. 103. Atherton, *Southern Country Store*, pp. 155-59.

carry-alls; and heavy four-wheeled wagons drawn by two horses.⁵⁵ William Gilmore Simms was disappointed that the American lexicon did not have a moniker for the “compact, boxy, buggy, buttoned-up vehicle” of a Yankee peddler.⁵⁶ Peddler wagons were often specially constructed to display goods as well as transport them. Some peddlers decorated their wagons in order to draw attention, as the fictive Yankee peddler Joshua Peabody did. Peabody’s covered wagon was decorated “with all the colors of the rainbow, ornamented with curtains and trimmed with many a yard of red cotton fringe.”⁵⁷ Peddlers proclaimed in large letters on their wagons the wares they carried, their business name, or even a nickname. For instance, Carlos Bates, a clock peddler from Connecticut, put his appellation “mountain Boy” on the wagon he drove through Louisiana.⁵⁸ Diamond Jim Fisk, who had his start as a peddler in Vermont, emblazoned the sides of his wagons in gold letters with: “James Fisk, Jr. / Jobber in Silks, Shawls, Dress Goods, Jewelry / Silver Ware and Yankee Notions.”⁵⁹

A tin peddler’s wagon was crammed full of as much tinware, sundries, and bartered commodities as the horse or horses could conveniently pull; the net weight of the wagon’s load was often over a ton. The wholesale price of the goods in a peddler’s

⁵⁵ “Sketches of South-Carolina, Number Three: ‘Merry Christmas’; Number Four: ‘Slaves and Slavery,’” *Knickerbocker Magazine* 21 (March, May 1843):222-29, 333-48; 22 (July 1843):1-6. Reprinted in Eugene L. Schwaab, ed., *Travels in the Old South* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), II:330.

⁵⁶ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 492.

⁵⁷ “The Yankee Pedler,” *Georgia Journal*, 4/5/1832.

⁵⁸ A. Bates (East Granby, CT) to Carlos Bates (Opelousas, LA), 5/10/1835. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

⁵⁹ James Fisk, Jr., *The Life of a Green Mountain Boy* (Philadelphia: William Flint & Co., 1872), p. 16. Robert H. Fuller, *Jubilee Jim: The Life of Colonel James Fisk, Jr.* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1928), p. 37.

wagon could range from \$100 or \$200 to \$2,000.⁶⁰ The arrival of a tin peddler might have been announced by the “prodigious clatter” of the tinware, or by a note blasted from a tin trumpet.⁶¹ A visit from a noisy tinware wagon to a rural home heralded the arrival of the new consumer culture. Clock peddlers carried five or ten clocks in their wagons on each trip from a depot where a supply of clocks was kept. Figure 10 shows a clock peddler wagon which belonged to the Hale family of Bradford, New Hampshire.⁶² Amos Clark requested clock manufacturer Samuel Terry to construct for him a “show box” furnished with a lock and key which would hold six clocks. Presumably, Clark could simply lift the lid of the show box to display various styles of clocks to his customers.⁶³ In the assortment and amount of goods they carried, peddlers were indeed “moving Merchants,” and their wagons “travelling Store[s].”⁶⁴

A large expense shouldered by many peddlers was the upkeep of a wagon and a horse. Rarely did a tinware manufacturer supply horses and wagons to all his peddlers, and peddlers who could not supply their own horse and cart received lower wages. Burrage Yale recommended that his peddlers procure a good, sound, kind, and very strong work horse, seven to ten years old, capable of drawing “a ton weight, exclusive of

⁶⁰ Alderman, *Letters*, pp. 2, 20. Dwight, *Travels*, vol. 2:34. *New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette*, Jan. 22, 1844.

⁶¹ [Algernon Sydney Johnston] *A Native of the South, Memoirs of a Nullifier; written by himself* (Columbia, SC: The Telescope Office, 1832), p. 36. Leslie, *Pencil Sketches*, p. 145.

⁶² At the time of the photograph the wagon belonged to Lewis N. Wiggins, Northampton Hotel, Northampton, Massachusetts. The photograph is in the collection of the American Clock and Watch Museum, Bristol, Connecticut.

⁶³ Amos Clark, Jr. (Hartford, CT) to Samuel Terry, 7/24/1827. Samuel Terry Collection, ACWM.

⁶⁴ For “moving Merchants,” see Beeman, “Trade and Travel,” pp. 178, 180; for “travelling Store,” see Daniel Simmons peddling license, Southampton County, VA, 1798.

the carriage.”⁶⁵ Wagons were an expensive investment, but could be sold off at the end of the peddling season. For a good wagon and harness a peddler could demand from \$65 to \$110; such a sale often meant the difference between a profitable and a losing season at peddling. The \$147 cost of Manna Alderman’s horse (\$50), harness (\$16), and wagon (\$81) exceeded the value of his starting load of tinware, which was \$143. Selling off wagons saved the expense of shipping or driving them back to New England. In 1822, however, Richard Wilcox planned to leave his peddling company wagons on the property he rented in Petersburg, because the grounds had “plenty of sheds” in which to store the wagons.⁶⁶ Horses could be troublesome creatures, but some peddlers developed sentimental attachments to their mounts. Chatfield Alcott was put into “vary low spirits” to see the “Old mare” he had ridden “so many times hardly able to go.” He decided to leave the “faithful old beast” to take care of itself in the pasture of a Richmond County, Virginia, tavernkeeper.⁶⁷ Some peddler’s mounts displayed a more balky disposition than Alcott’s “faithful old beast.” Peddler Edward Downing’s horse often “laid down to prayers” in the middle of the road, and only an application of “oil of hickory” would prompt the horse to stand up. In a sense, the horse had its revenge for the beatings it took, because it could outshine its master in flatulence!⁶⁸ Occasionally horses took fright and caused accidents. Jabez H. Gilbert’s horse “took affright and ran, upsett[ing] his waggon” of

⁶⁵ Contracts and Agreements, Filley Family Papers, CHS. Russell Upson Peck Correspondence, CHS.

⁶⁶ Manna Alderman’s contract to Peddle for Elisha Dunham, 1816, in Alderman, *Letters*, 20. Richard Wilcox (Petersburg) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin), 4/17/1819, 2/19/1822, 4/22/1822, 3/11/1823. George Hubbard (Richmond, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 5/4/1824. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

⁶⁷ Chatfield Alcott, *Journal to the South*, 2/2/1822, 2/3/1822. Alcott Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

tinware in 1822. Another tin peddler's horse "ran with his waggon & broke the top of it all to pieces." Sometimes the peddler was to blame for a wagon upset. To use Asa Upson's expression, Abraham Woodruff "Shit in the flax" when Woodruff caused his wagon full of clocks to overturn, which broke the wagon "all to peaces and hurt his horse Bad." Ultimately, most peddlers considered their horses as commodities that could be sold or traded, as collateral for peddling debts, or as capital investments.⁶⁹

The Social Geography of Peddling in Virginia

What proportion of interregional trade did peddling companies capture? It is virtually impossible to calculate the relative size of the antebellum peddling business, because economic historians have been unable to reconstruct a quantitative picture of the total domestic trade in goods and services between 1815 and 1860.⁷⁰ However, it is possible to illuminate the dimensions of the peddling business in the state of Virginia from 1799 to 1850 by examining peddler licensing records. Licenses are an imperfect measure of the business, because undoubtedly many peddlers avoided paying the licensing fee. Petitioners from Frederick County, Virginia, who were hostile to Yankee peddlers' competition, estimated that only one in ten peddlers took out a license.⁷¹ This caveat aside, the database I have assembled of 4,776 peddler licenses is a useful measure

⁶⁸ Beeman, "Trade and Travel," p. 185.

⁶⁹ Asa Upson (Bristol, CT) to Rensseleer Upson (Huntsville, AL), 3/6/1824. George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL. Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/19/1822, 3/22/1822, 12/14/1822. George Hubbard (Richmond, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 5/4/1824. Wilcox Papers, BHS. For the upset of a Virginia farmer's wagon which was loaded with store goods, and the "left-handed" assistance of his fellow teamsters, see Asa Moore Janney, Werner L. Janney, eds., *John Jay Janney's Virginia: An American Farm Lad's Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, VA: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 33.

⁷⁰ North, *Economic Growth*, p. 101.

of peddling activity in Virginia.⁷² From this database I have constructed a social geography of the peddling business in early national and antebellum Virginia.

The general pattern of peddler licensing in Virginia from 1799 to 1850 is shown in Figure 11. The surge in licenses in 1806-1807 was probably related to the early growth of domestic industry in the United States from 1793 to 1808. The licenses dropped sharply in 1808 because Jefferson's embargo of foreign trade also hampered domestic exchange.⁷³ Licenses rose sharply again after the War of 1812. The reopening of international markets to American farmers and merchants led the economy into a boom cycle. British goods flooded American ports, and peddlers probably took advantage of the availability of cheap goods.⁷⁴ In 1818 the number of licenses issued hit a high mark. Although the flush times increased the numbers of peddlers in general, a more immediate cause for this sudden inundation of peddlers was a rise in the tin peddling license fee in Pennsylvania. Tin peddler licenses were \$10 cheaper in Virginia in the fall of 1818, so Yankee tin peddlers swarmed across the Potomac.⁷⁵ When the Panic of 1819 struck, credit was tightened for peddlers and other retailers. The rising cost of a peddler license in Virginia is behind the continued drop in peddler licenses in 1820, 1821, and 1822. Perhaps to stem the tide of peddlers, in 1820 Virginia doubled the fees for statewide licenses for dry goods peddlers and tin peddlers from \$40 and \$20 to

⁷¹ Legislative Petitions, Frederick County, 12/6/1822.

⁷² The records are in the county license returns in the papers of the Auditor of Public Accounts in the archives section of the Library of Virginia.

⁷³ North, *Economic Growth*, pp. 53-58. For an Irish peddler's perspective on the negative effects of the embargo on Virginia trade, see Beeman, "Trade and Travel."

⁷⁴ Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, pp. 334-38. Wade, *Urban Frontier*, pp. 161-67.

⁷⁵ *Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: 1818), 302-03.

\$80 and \$40 respectively. A restructuring of the license fee system led to the enormous increase in peddler licenses in 1823. Peddlers were now required to take out a license in every locality – a county or incorporated town – they visited, not just one statewide license. Prior to 1823, one license in the database represented one peddler, but from 1823 onwards, individual peddlers obtained licenses from several localities, so many licenses represented only one peddler.⁷⁶ The climb in licenses in 1831 might have been due to outside influences. After the discovery of David Walker's *Appeal* and the Nat Turner rebellion, Deep South states such as Georgia and South Carolina tried to make the cost of peddling so prohibitive that it would drive the Yankee peddlers out of the region. Public attitudes in Virginia towards suspected abolitionists probably contributed to the slow decline in the 1830s.⁷⁷ Most regions of Virginia lost population to western migration in this decade, and peddlers might have found that emigrants made poor customers (Figure 14). The steep drop in licenses from 1840 to 1850 is due mainly to missing records in the Auditor of Public Accounts.⁷⁸ In sum, Figure 11 shows that the numbers of peddlers seeking licenses in Virginia was contingent upon the economic and social climate as well as the relative expense of a license.

⁷⁶ The license fee for a dry goods peddler dropped to \$16 per county and for a tin peddler to \$10 per county. *Session Laws of Virginia* (Richmond, 1819, 1820, 1823).

⁷⁷ In December 1831, Georgia raised the license fee for foot peddlers to \$1,000 per year, and to \$2,000 per year for cart or wagon peddlers. South Carolina raised the peddler license fee to \$100 per year in 1831, and to \$1,000 per year in 1835. Virginia targeted clock peddlers in 1833, raising the clock license fee to \$100 per year. Oliver H. Prince, *A Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia* (Athens: Oliver H. Prince, 1837), p. 613. *Acts and Resolutions of South Carolina* (Columbia: A. Landrum, 1832, 1835). *Session Laws of Virginia* (Richmond: 1833).

⁷⁸ Records are very complete from 1799 to 1839, with folders for every county. In the 1820s and 1830s from 60 to as many as 73 counties would report peddler licenses issued. There are entire folders of returns missing for most of the 1840s, however. For instance,

Throughout the early national and antebellum period peddler activity varied in the particular regions of Virginia. Figure 12 divides the state into five regions: Middle Virginia,⁷⁹ Mountains,⁸⁰ Southside,⁸¹ Tidewater,⁸² and the Valley.⁸³ Consistently, the Southside was the most popular destination for licensed peddlers, and the Tidewater issued the fewest licenses to peddlers (Figure 13). Figure 14 lists the occurrence of counties' issuing peddler licenses – none, one or multiple licenses in one year. In any given year, many Virginia counties issued only one license or none at all.⁸⁴ The average number of licenses issued by a locality from 1799 to 1850 was only 2.27 per year. Nearly all of the ten counties which issued eleven or more licenses in one year were located in the Southside.⁸⁵ Counties in the Southside were far more likely to license five or more peddlers in a single year than any other region (Figure 15),⁸⁶ while many years would pass in some Tidewater counties before a peddler came to the courthouse to get a

only 20 counties' license returns could be found for 1840.

⁷⁹ 19 localities in 1850 lying on the Fall Line or west of it, east of the Blue Ridge, and north of the James River.

⁸⁰ 33 localities west of the Alleghenies.

⁸¹ 24 localities south of the James River, east of the Blue Ridge, and west of the southern Tidewater.

⁸² 30 localities along Chesapeake Bay and the navigable portions of its tributaries.

⁸³ 26 localities lying between the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies.

⁸⁴ In 30 percent of county returns to the Auditor of Public Accounts, the county clerk reported 1 or no peddler licenses for the year.

⁸⁵ The largest number of peddler licenses granted by a local government in a single year was 40 in Jefferson County in 1818. Jefferson County's location at the bottom of the Valley of Virginia made it a convenient entry point into Virginia for peddlers who were traveling southwest through Pennsylvania on the Great Wagon Road. However, these peddlers took out state licenses, which were valid for doing business anywhere in Virginia, not necessarily in Jefferson County. Perhaps the Jefferson County Sheriff stationed himself at the Virginia landing of Harper's Ferry and directed the stream of peddlers to the county courthouse.

⁸⁶ 1,445 licenses – 26.5 percent of all county clerks' reports to the Auditor of Public Accounts, or approximately 30 percent of all licenses – were issued in a locality which

license (Figure 16).

When viewed from a regional perspective, peddling activity appears very sparse (Figure 17). It is more proper to view peddler activity on the county level, where peddlers chose their specific markets. In five counties which lay at the median for licensing activity for their respective regions, the ratio of county residents to peddlers in 1823-1824 ranged from about 2,000:1 to 9,700:1 (Figure 18).⁸⁷ In counties which issued large numbers of licenses, the ratio of county residents to peddlers was much lower, from about 1,000:1 to 2,500:1 (Figure 19).⁸⁸ By comparison, in 1840 the ratio of county residents to established stores in the selected counties ranged from about 300:1 to 800:1 (Figures 20 and 21).⁸⁹ Concentrations of stores or population at a particular moment in time do not adequately explain why peddlers sought licenses in certain regional markets over others. A wide variety of local factors contributed to the suitability of a regional market to the peddler trade: the transportation infrastructure, the soundness of the local economy, and cultural practices. For instance, it is possible that some localities were

issued five or more licenses in a given year.

⁸⁷ Each county lies at the median of its region for total licenses issued, 1799-1850. Orange County issued 45 licenses, the average for Middle Virginia was 56.5; Cabell 13, average 35.7; Cumberland 63, average 88; Mathews 17, average 30.8; Wythe 35, average 45.7.

⁸⁸ Post-1822 years were selected since Virginia statutes required peddlers to take out a license in every county or city they visited from 1823 onward. When Jefferson County was inundated with 40 peddlers in 1818, the ratio of county residents to peddlers was 327:1.

⁸⁹ There are problems with using the 1840 census for quantifying stores and store capital. The deflation and contraction of credit following the Panic of 1837/1839 probably put many stores out of business. Many storekeepers and inhabitants were reluctant to give information to census takers, believing that the information would be used to tax their property. Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Atherton, *Southern Country Store*, p. 40.

more vigilant against outsiders than others, particularly the Southside, with its large enslaved population (Figure 23). Although peddlers linked Virginians to the emerging national economy, the state was still a patchwork of local markets with distinct regional patterns of trade and market behavior.

While the plantation economy of Tidewater Virginia was in decline in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the economy and population of Southside Virginia expanded with tobacco culture (Figures 22 and 23). In the lower James River Valley, where almost two hundred years of tobacco cultivation had depleted the soils, peddlers found a moribund market for their trade. The greatest number of peddler licenses were issued in the flourishing Piedmont counties in the Southside and just north of the James River (Figure 24). The large amount of capital invested in stores and the high ratio of population to stores, suggests that consumer demand in Southside Virginia was strong but not met. Mercantile establishments in Southside Virginia were decentralized in a network of retail stores at courthouses, plantations, and ferry-crossings. A hierarchy of market towns and cities did not develop in the Southside because the monoculture of tobacco that dominated the economy required little processing and did not create a need for an infrastructure to process and market cash crops. Until the Dismal Swamp Canal opened around 1819 much of the region was virtually landlocked, which hindered connections to external markets.⁹⁰ No local towns dominated the tobacco trade; most of the tobacco crop still moved from plantations and farms directly to Petersburg, Richmond, and Norfolk. Goods from these Fall Line entrepôts made their way in turn

⁹⁰ Counties south of the Staunton and Nottoway Rivers, which flow into Albemarle Sound, make up a large portion of the heaviest peddled areas of the Southside. See figure

directly to local retail stores that were dispersed across the landscape.⁹¹ The decentralized matrix of retail stores left a large niche for peddlers to sell goods to the dispersed population.

Although the Valley of Virginia and the Southside are roughly equal in area⁹² and comprised about the same number of counties in 1850,⁹³ the Valley issued a little under half as many peddler licenses as the Southside between 1800 and 1850 (Figure 13). The Southside was more densely settled than the Valley, but Valley residents had better links to outside markets and a network of local towns. An economy based on mixed farming with wheat as the dominant crop necessitated an intricate economic infrastructure in the Valley. The commercial intercourse between farms, gristmills, villages and market towns was more regular in the Valley of Virginia than in any other region of the state. Valley towns had concentrations of retail stores, supported local craftsmen, and provided various services for processing commercial crops such as wheat and hemp. Peddlers faced increased competition for the business of Valley consumers from a concentration of retail stores, artisans, and other service providers. Valley farmers had many more local, intermediate contacts with outside markets than other Virginians, making peddlers' retail and bulking services somewhat redundant within the Valley's economy.⁹⁴ The well-developed urban hierarchy of the Valley was more useful for peddlers in reaching

24.

⁹¹ Farmer, In the Absence of Towns, pp. 186-190. Frederick F. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness: Tobacco and Society in Danville, Virginia, 1780- 1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 23.

⁹² The Valley counties cover about 12,000 square miles, and the Southside encompasses about 13,000 square miles.

⁹³ 26 Valley counties and 24 Southside counties.

⁹⁴ Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early*

consumers across the Alleghenies than in selling to residents of the Valley.⁹⁵

In order to find customers in the eighteenth-century backcountry of Virginia, peddlers relied almost entirely on door-to-door visits of households, and on civic and social gatherings. Adam O'Brien, an old settler of northwestern Virginia recalled in 1838 that peddlers came to remote settlements with rum, ammunition, pins and needles, and "a heap o' little matters that would suit the likes of" backcountry consumers. The settlers had very little money, but the peddlers came explicitly for the furs which the settlers had in abundance.⁹⁶ Colonial peddler licensing laws of Virginia seemed more concerned about collecting the duty on the fur trade than regulating peddlers themselves.⁹⁷ James Patton, an Irish peddler who traded in the Valley of Virginia in the 1780s and 1790s, did a brisk trade bartering merchandise which he purchased in Philadelphia for backcountry produce such as beeswax, ginseng, snake root, furs, deer skins, bear skins, and even cattle on the hoof. Patton prearranged rendezvous with potential customers by "send[ing] out word beforehand, that [he] would be at such places at the time appointed," and stopped for six to twelve days at each gathering place. Patton and other peddlers publicized their routes by word of mouth or by posting broadsides.⁹⁸ To restock his load of merchandise,

Shenandoah Valley (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), pp. 199, 218-21.

⁹⁵ See the discussion below of Harvey Filley's tinware depot at Winchester and Latham & Robinson's clock stand at Covington.

⁹⁶ "Adam O'Brien, the Pioneer of North-western Va.," *SLM* 4 (May, 1838):294.

⁹⁷ See for example the peddler licensing law of 1738. William Waller Hening, *Statutes* 5:54-55.

⁹⁸ For a story of a Yankee peddler drumming up business by posting broadsides in Tidewater Virginia, see Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 45-46. It is unlikely that peddlers used newspapers to advertise their whereabouts, because peddlers traveled faster than the mails to specific locations. The time it would take for a peddler's advertisement to reach a newspaper publisher (perhaps in a distant town), get published, and then circulate among the peddler's clientele could have taken weeks.

however, Patton trekked all the way back to Philadelphia, where he had established lines of credit with wholesale merchants.⁹⁹ Patton's backcountry peddling enterprise was extensive, but ultimately constrained by the necessity of traveling back and forth through most of the length of the Great Valley from western North Carolina to his source of goods in Philadelphia.

The trends in peddler licensing in the Trans-Allegheny backcountry of Virginia contradict the common conception that peddlers were more active in frontier regions. Most peddlers sought out areas of greater population density with developed markets where people were likely to have more discretionary income to spend on refinements. Underdeveloped backcountry regions, which had more tenuous ties to outside markets, placed a greater emphasis on subsistence rather than market production and consumption. The mountainous terrain of western Virginia was sparsely settled at the turn of the nineteenth century, and relatively few peddlers – who were pioneers of their trade – did business there. Important turnpike routes through western Virginia did not reach the Ohio River until the 1840s, which stymied trade with outside markets.¹⁰⁰ Peddler licensing increased in western Virginia as the population grew and transportation links to the East steadily improved. In the 1830s, when the rest of the state lost population to western migration, the Mountains region grew by 30 percent, and surpassed all but the Southside in issuing peddler licenses (Figures 13 and 22). However, the underdeveloped transportation infrastructure was such an inhibitor of trade that the state government tried to encourage peddling in the region. Perhaps due to popular demand, the legislature reduced cost of a

⁹⁹ Patton, *Letter*, pp. 7-8, 12-13.

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, p. 23.

license to peddle on the Ohio River from \$100 to \$30 in 1844, and cut the cost of a dry goods peddling license in half to \$25 in counties west of the Alleghenies in 1845.¹⁰¹

Within the Mountains region of Virginia, the most populous counties attracted the most peddlers. One of most rapidly growing counties of the Trans-Allegheny region was Kanawha, which grew from 3,239 inhabitants in 1800 to 15,353 in 1850. Kanawha was an island of market activity – as measured by peddler licensing – in a still sea devoid of market exchange.¹⁰² Kanawha County was quick to develop commercial links to outside markets because of its extractive salt works industry located near Charleston. Kanawha also straddled an important East-West trade route, which connected the Chesapeake and the Ohio River via the James River, the New River, and the Kanawha River.¹⁰³ While the proportion of the population of the entire region that was enslaved was never over 5 percent in the first half of the nineteenth century, Kanawha had a relatively large enslaved population. From 1820 to 1850 the enslaved community grew from 17 to 20 percent of the total population of Kanawha County. Kanawha's accessibility, its production of an export commodity (salt), and its burgeoning free and enslaved population made it an attractive market for peddlers like Frederick Brooks. Around age twenty-five Brooks left his father's farm in Burlington, Connecticut, to peddle tinware in the Middle Virginia region in 1816. For eight years he peddled in Loudoun, Fauquier, Stafford, Madison, Orange, Louisa, Goochland and Albemarle counties. Perhaps in his travels other peddlers had told him of the great demand

¹⁰¹ *1845 Statutes of Virginia* (Richmond, 1846), 2/13/1845. East of the Alleghenies a dry goods license cost \$50 per county per year.

¹⁰² Kanawha County issued 101 peddler licenses between 1799 and 1850, ranking it among counties in the Southside, rather than its neighboring Mountains counties.

¹⁰³ The James River – Kanawha Canal, which reached only a little further than Buchanan, was intended to strengthen this trade route and the cities along it. Taylor, *Transportation*

and high prices for dry goods in Kanawha County, for in 1824 he left the northern Piedmont for the Alleghenies. Or perhaps Brooks was seeking a place to invest his peddling profits, for he eventually bought an old salt works in Kanawha, settled down, and grew rich.¹⁰⁴ Brooks's career typifies the general movements of peddlers. Most peddlers were not frontiersmen, but gravitated to backcountry regions only after their markets had grown in size, maturity, and accessibility.

Peddlers of newfangled, specialized merchandise sought out the most accessible markets first. As settled regions were glutted with the innovative products, the peddlers then traveled to more remote markets. This tendency is reflected in Figure 25, which compares the distribution of licenses for specialized peddlers of clocks with generic peddlers of dry goods in Virginia from 1830 to 1850. Clock peddlers had been present in Virginia as early as 1812, but they were not distinguished from dry goods peddlers in Virginia licensing laws until 1830.¹⁰⁵ By 1830 the eastern Virginia market for clocks had been filled, and clock peddling companies focused their attention further west. Consequently, in the 1830s and 1840s the Southside still garnered the most business from peddlers of generic goods, but the Mountains region led in clock peddler licenses. The clock peddling business was very competitive, and firms were always seeking markets which were not filled up with their competitors' clocks. Milo Holcomb noted that clock peddlers were "very thick" in

Revolution, p. 42.

¹⁰⁴ LRLV. Jehiel Chester Hart, *A Burlington History: "The Hart Manuscript"* (Burlington, CT: Leonard Alderman, comp., 1989), p. 12. Wadsworth Tavern Record Book [Clark & Haskell Day Book]. CHS. Kanawha County Manuscript Census Return, 1850.

¹⁰⁵ Early clock peddling ventures in Virginia are discussed below. See the Gideon Roberts Papers, Bristol Public Library. Lamson, Sperry & Co Papers. Mattatuck Museum. *1830 Statutes of Virginia* (Richmond, 1831). 2/13/1830.

southwestern Pennsylvania and western Virginia in 1831, but he had confidence in overcoming the competition: “we have some champions in our company and we can do our part of the business.” One of Holcomb’s competitors, perhaps, was Frederick Kellogg. He also complained that western Pennsylvania was “over run with pedlars” who were “selling their clocks for whatever they can get.”¹⁰⁶ For similar reasons, Wilcox Adams & Co planned to sell clocks in eastern Tennessee in the mid-1820s, because it was “a section of country where [there had] not been any Patent clocks sold.”¹⁰⁷ Backcountry markets were difficult to reach and had less cash in circulation. Political and military issues also slowed the integration of frontiers into the peddlers’ orbit. It was not until Mexican General Santa Anna was captured in 1836 that a clock peddler deemed Texas would become a fit “field for speculation.”¹⁰⁸ In the nineteenth century, the frontier was a market of last resort for specialized peddlers.

The Organization of the Dry Goods Peddling Trade

A common form of organization for a peddling enterprise was the establishment of a store to supply peddlers with merchandise. For some dry goods establishments, the peddling trade was an extension of the stores’ regular retail trade. Interior southern

¹⁰⁶ Milo Holcomb (Uniontown, PA) to Nahum Holcomb and Nahum, Jr. (West Granby, CT), 1/29/1831. Holcomb Family Papers, CSL. Frederick Kellogg (Reading, PA) to Elihu Harrison, 11/11/1831. Elihu Harrison Business Papers, LHS. For a planned clock peddling expedition to Cuba, see Eli White (Nashville, TN) to Samuel Terry, 12/31/1830. Eliot G. Plunkett (Chester, MA) to Samuel Terry, 9/19/1831. Silas Miller (Hartford) to Samuel Terry, 11/12/1831. Harvey Alderman (Granby) to Samuel Terry, 9/17/1831. Washington Stevens (Chester, MA) to Samuel Terry, 3/24/1834. Samuel Terry Collection. ACWM.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Wilcox (Abingdon, VA) to Samuel Terry, 11/23/1825. Thomas Wilcox (Rocky Spring, east TN) to Samuel Terry, 1/4/1826. Elizur D. Adams to Samuel Terry, Pittsburgh, PA, 1/25/1826. Samuel Terry Collection, ACWM.

¹⁰⁸ John Case (Canton, CT) to Hiram Barber (Case & Barber, Natchez, MS), 6/1/1836.

storekeepers from general-farming areas often disposed of the produce they accumulated from their retail customers by peddling it in plantation districts they passed through as they traveled towards Fall Line and Tidewater entrepôts to replenish their stock of merchandise. From city wholesalers country storekeepers bought goods for their regular retail trade as well as wares for a sideline in peddling.¹⁰⁹ In other cases peddling companies established dry goods stores to serve as headquarters and depots where hired peddlers could replenish their specialized stock in trade.¹¹⁰ Southside Virginia provides several examples of store-based peddling.

Joseph T. Allyn, a young man from Massachusetts, opened a dry goods store, a comb manufactory, and possibly a tinware manufactory in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1815. To induce peddlers to come to him for their wholesale supply, Allyn accepted many forms of barter – pewter, brass, copper, and feathers, as well as ivory, tortoise shell, and horn – materials which he could process in his comb manufactory. Allyn accepted small bills from Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York at par, but this would not have been much service to peddlers, who accepted a great deal of North Carolina paper money

Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

¹⁰⁹ Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising," pp. 96-97.

¹¹⁰ For instance, Carlos Bates ran a dry goods store in Natchez, Mississippi, which served as the headquarters of a clock peddling company. John Case (Natchez, MS) to Carlos Bates, 4/18/1836. Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS) to Susan L Pinney (Brockport, NY), 7/16/1836. Hiram Barber (New York, NY) to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS), 7/31/1836. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. Philip Barnes ran a dry goods store in Athens, Georgia, where Barnes oversaw the clock peddlers under the employ of Upson, Merriam and Company from about 1826 to 1831. George Rensseleae Upson Papers, CSL. William Franklin Hodges ran a store in Selma, Alabama, from 1824 till about 1836 where the peddlers hired by his brother, Erastus Hodges, rendezvoused for goods. Hodges, *Erastus Hodges*, p. 241.

in circulation in Virginia.¹¹¹ Allyn outfitted Bronson, Chatfield, and William Andrus Alcott with peddling goods at liberal credit. A bill of sale lists the generic notions Alcott purchased from Allyn in 1821: shell and horn combs, spectacles, thimbles, silk and cotton thread, pencils, nutmeg, essences, oils, needles, bodkins, pins, scissors, brushes, soap, buttons, clasps, beads, rings, garnets, razors, strops, almanacs, violin string, watch chains, knives, purses, pomatum, and conversation cards. Bronson had the privilege of returning any goods to Allyn he was unable to sell. Such liberal credit, however, could be a trap for failed peddlers like Bronson Alcott. Bronson ended up heavily indebted to Allyn, and felt like “the gudgeon” of this “shrewd dealer in fancy goods.”¹¹²

Andrew Bailey, a native of Virginia, ran a general store at Union Hall, in eastern Franklin County in the early 1830s. In addition to his regular line of business, Bailey outfitted peddlers to sell goods in the hinterland of his store. While on a stock purchasing trip to Richmond in 1833, Bailey bought “a pedlar’s carryall and filled about 3 trunks with about \$300 worth of such goods as [Bailey] thought a pedlar ought to carry.” On the return trip to Union Hall, Bailey realized that he himself was not cut out to be a peddler, so he entered an agreement with John S. Brown to peddle goods Bailey would furnish.

¹¹¹ *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald* 13 September 1815; 11 March 1816. *American Beacon and Commercial Diary* (Norfolk, VA) 21 August, 21 November 1816; 21, 24 October 1817. *American Beacon and Norfolk & Portsmouth Daily Advertiser* 28 September 1818; 2 January 1824. The manuscript return of the 1850 census for Norfolk County, Virginia, lists a Joseph T. Allyn, 55 years old, from Massachusetts, occupation blank, who was worth \$32,000.

¹¹² For Bronson Alcott’s dealings with Allyn, see A. Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to William A. Alcott, 3/19/1820, A. Bronson Alcott (Warrenton, NC) to Chatfield Alcox, 4/13/1822. Wagner, “Eighty-Six Letters,” pp. 248-249, 252. A. Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 1/24/1820, Herrnstadt, “Letters,” pp. 1-2. “Prices of Property Recd. of J. T. Allyn,” in *Autobiographical Collections*, vols. 1 and 2 (1799-1823), p. 107, Houghton Library. Alcott, *New Connecticut*, pp. 181, 209-

After his agreement with Brown expired, Bailey negotiated with William G. Heptinstall to peddle goods from Bailey's store. Bailey personally experienced strong competition from Yankee peddlers. When Bailey first opened his store at Union Hall in 1831 he was mortified to learn that Christopher Babcock, "a thorough bred Yankee," had opened a store within five miles of his establishment. Christopher G. Babcock peddled in Virginia from 1825 to 1830, before he opened a store at Gills Creek. Babcock's peddling territory had included Franklin County as well as the surrounding counties of Bedford, Pittsylvania, Henry, and Patrick. In 1828 Babcock had peddled in the Northern Neck of Virginia as well.¹¹³ Bailey felt "Babcock at [his] heels" until smallpox claimed Babcock's life in 1835.¹¹⁴

Henry H. Woodruff, William R. Woodruff, and George W. Woodruff, were young men, perhaps brothers, from Connecticut, who ran a peddling business in Southside Virginia from 1825 to 1841. The Woodruffs bought their goods in New York, and peddled them in the Meherrin and Nottoway River valleys, a very wealthy region, according to one of their peddlers. The Woodruffs concentrated their business in the four contiguous counties of Sussex, Brunswick, Lunenburg, and Mecklenburg.¹¹⁵ Henry, apparently the oldest Woodruff, headed the business, and hired at least one other young

212, 238-239.

¹¹³ LRLV.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Bailey, *Andrew Bailey, Jr. Chronicles: Life in Virginia during the 17-1800's* (Eunilee Leath and Frank T. Bailey, Jr., compilers and publishers for the Virginia State Library, 1989), pp. 36-38, 46, 55, 58-59. William G. Hipinstall & Co was licensed in Franklin County in 1835 and in Patrick County in 1839. LRLV.

¹¹⁵ The Woodruffs took out nineteen licenses in Brunswick county, nine licenses in Mecklenburg, six licenses in Lunenburg, and one license in Sussex between 1825 and 1841. Samuel J. Lewis took out an additional license in Mecklenburg county in 1835. LRLV.

man, Samuel J. Lewis of Naugatuck, Connecticut, to peddle in Southside Virginia. The Woodruffs' Southside peddling business was probably based in a dry goods store, but they still led a very itinerant business. Henry Woodruff peddled in Georgia in 1830 and 1831, and William Woodruff was licensed to peddle in Georgia in 1831.¹¹⁶ In 1836 Henry H. Woodruff offered to take Lewis in partnership in a proposed dry goods store in Alabama.¹¹⁷ The territory in southeastern Virginia claimed by the Woodruffs lay adjacent to the grounds of another family peddling business. Choral P. Warner, Edmund Warner, and Ira Warner peddled in the same time period in the counties of Brunswick, Charlotte, Franklin, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, and Southampton, mostly to the north and west of the Woodruffs' territory, but with some overlap (Figure 26).¹¹⁸ Ira Warner – also a native of Connecticut – was perhaps the “Mr Warner” who planned to call on Samuel J. Lewis's father on his way home in 1836.¹¹⁹ It appears that the Woodruffs and the Warners might have respected each other's territory. The proximity of the two family businesses suggests that competition between store-based peddling firms could be ameliorated by mutual agreement – and perhaps cooperation –

¹¹⁶ William Woodruff was licensed in Georgia 11/25/1831, and Henry Woodruff on 9/25/1830 and 11/5/1831. There was also a Frederick H. Woodruff licensed in Georgia on 9/25/1830. The Georgia licenses indicate that all three Woodruffs were close in age; in 1831 William was 23, Frederick was 25, and Henry was 26. William was only 17 when he began peddling in Virginia in 1825.

¹¹⁷ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Naugatuck, CT), 3/6/1836, 4/17/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

¹¹⁸ Between 1825 and 1841 the Warners obtained fifteen licenses in Lunenburg County, seven in Charlotte, four in Brunswick, three in Southampton, two in Halifax, and one each in Nottoway, Franklin, and Mecklenburg. LRLV.

¹¹⁹ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Naugatuck, CT), 1/17/1836, 3/6/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University. Ira Warner settled down as a farmer in Lunenburg County, and was worth \$1,309 in 1850 at age 48. Manuscript return for Lunenburg County, 1850 census.

between the two potential rivals.

Peddlers like the Woodruffs and the Warners traveled their territories in circuits, taking advantage of the periodic gatherings of crowds at monthly meetings of the county courts and militia musters. Virginia horse races allegedly attracted a “motley multitude of negroes, Dutchmen, Yankee pedlers, and backwoodsmen.”¹²⁰ Yankee peddlers reputedly even worked the crowds gathered to witness public executions.¹²¹ County court sessions were accompanied by market fairs, where farmers, local hucksters, and peddlers traded goods and foodstuffs.¹²² Along with the legal proceedings of the courts, Virginians transacted business, socialized, gambled, and fought over politics in a carnivalesque atmosphere.¹²³ An Irishman who peddled in Southside Virginia in the winter of 1807-1808 followed the schedule of the county court circuit, which was arranged so that contiguous counties held their monthly courts at staggered times. The Irishman and his fellow peddlers “Shewed their Raggs” in stalls they set up on the porches of the court houses.¹²⁴ The piazza railing of a tavern at Charlotte court house also doubled as the display rack for a hat peddler.¹²⁵ This was quite likely the tavern of William Smith, who

¹²⁰ Bernard, *Retrospections*, p. 155.

¹²¹ *Lexington Gazette*, 3/25/1836, reprinted from the *Green Mountain Democrat*. For the description of carnival-like spectacle and fair at the lynching of several blacks, see Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 375, 377-378. This episode is explored further in chapter 4.

¹²² Virginians had a tradition of conducting personal business at court days and at church services which stretched back into the colonial era. Rhyss Isaacs, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740–1790*.

¹²³ See the beginning of chapter 4 for a description of a court day fair in Southside Virginia.

¹²⁴ Beeman, “Trade and Travel.”

¹²⁵ Charlotte County Order Book #22, p. 6, 4/11/1818. Timothy S. Ailsworth, Ann P. Keller, Lura B. Nichols, Barbara R. Walker, compilers, *Charlotte County: Rich Indeed. A History from Prehistoric Times through the Civil War* (Charlotte, VA: The Charlotte County Board of Supervisors, 1979), pp. 214-15.

did a brisk business with peddlers when the county court met. For instance, throughout 1827 Smith provided food, drink, lodging, smithy work and stable facilities to at least nine peddlers. The peddlers spent two to three days each court session at the tavern. Peddlers might have been attracted to Smith's tavern because it was a stage line stop, and Smith sometimes accepted payment in goods from the peddlers, such as cambric and cassinette (fabrics), or a Latin Grammar.¹²⁶ Richard S. Eggleston, a tavernkeeper at Cumberland County courthouse (also within the circuit of many Southside peddlers), discriminated between the accounts of peddlers and local residents. Perhaps because they were cash-paying customers, Eggleston recorded all of the peddlers' accounts in dollars and cents, but for local residents, such as Judge William Daniel, Eggleston kept accounts in shillings and pence.¹²⁷ Peddlers were a fixture at court-day fairs throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but some locals, like Eggleston, kept peddlers at arms length in their dealings with them.

Throughout the era, some peddlers attracted crowds with entertainment in order to drum up business. The celebrated medicine show – the mountebanks who attracted crowds with entertainment in order to peddle their patent medicines – was present in Virginia as early as the 1810s.¹²⁸ For example, Loudoun County issued both apothecary and showman licenses to John Shaw in 1813, 1814, and 1815. Similarly, Thomas Scott

¹²⁶ William Smith Account Books, Alderman Library Special Collections, UVA. 1833 Account Book, William Smith Papers. VHS, Richmond.

¹²⁷ Richard S. Eggleston 1819-1821 Cumberland County Tavern Daybook. Account book of Richard S. Eggleston & Samuel N. Cardozo, 1820-1822. VHS, Richmond.

¹²⁸ For medicine shows and traveling showmen in nineteenth-century America, see: Peter Benes, "Itinerant Entertainers in New England and New York, 1607-1830," in Benes, ed., *Itinerancy in New England and New York* (Boston: 1986), p. 119; Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books,

took out both peddling and showman licenses in 1813 and 1814 in Botetourt and Bedford counties.¹²⁹ Victor Warhop (or Warhoop) had a variegated career as an itinerant huckster in Southside Virginia. Victor and James Warhop peddled in Halifax and Pittsylvania counties in 1807 and 1809. The base of their peddling operations was a store in Meadsville, Halifax county, a village close to the border of Pittsylvania. Victor Warhop appears in the peddling license records again in 1810 in Henry and Louisa counties. In 1813 Victor Warhop toured Southside Virginia displaying wax figures in a traveling show. The following year Warhop took out a doctor's license in Bedford county, on the same day that Sylvanus Sykes's traveling show appeared at the court house for a license. On the margins of Southside society, Warhop slipped readily between careers as storekeeper, peddler, showman, and doctor.¹³⁰ A few decades later, Henry Smith developed a reputation in the Valley of Virginia as the "celebrated 'Razor Strop man,'" who amused the crowds in Harrisonburg, Virginia, with his sales banter. Smith also gave temperance lectures in the evenings. Levi Pitman, who attended one of Smith's lectures in Harrisonburg, thought Smith's discourse on temperance was "the most amusing and interesting one [he had] ever heard."¹³¹ Peddlers constructed a flashy self-presentation in

1994), pp. 40-42.

¹²⁹ LRLV.

¹³⁰ East to West, the counties in which Warhop exhibited his wax figures in 1813 were: Southampton, Greensville, Brunswick, Nottoway, Lunenburg, Bedford, Montgomery, Wythe, and Washington. The doctor's license is for Victor Woughhop, 1/23/1814, Bedford county. Sylvanus Sykes & Co. also made their way to Nottoway, Charlotte, Henry, Shenandoah and King George counties in 1814. LRLV. Evidence of the "Warhoop's" store business is in Beeman, "Trade and Travel," p. 184.

¹³¹ Smith also passed through Strasbourg, Shenandoah county, Virginia, at the same time an animal show was exhibited. Smith might have been preying upon the showmen's crowds. Papers of Levi Pitman, diary entries 2/15-2/17, 4/23 1846, Alderman Library, UVA.

order to attract attention to their business. E. C. Allen, who peddled razor strops and toothache drops in Frederick, Maryland, in 1853, dressed himself “in the Real old Washington Style of 1776 – the old Cocked Hat. Gilt Star in front. Fair-top Boots & Buckskin (Black) Breeches & Vest with Gilt buttons on vest & at Knees.”¹³² Appealing to patriotism, nostalgia and spectacle to enhance sales was a lasting strategy of peddlers in antebellum Virginia.

Some Yankee peddlers had floating stores. Yankee traders also traveled by sloops to reach customers along southern coasts, rivers and streams. On the coast of Georgia these Yankee sloops were called “droghers,” after the West Indian freight barges which were rigged as sloops. The Yankee droghers transported produce from coastal Georgia to the port of Savannah. They were “close dealers,” reported Ebenezer Kellogg and performed the same economic functions as peddlers did in the interior of Georgia.¹³³ Yankee sloops on the southern littoral carried a wide variety of New England produce: cheese, butter, potatoes, cranberries, onions, beets, dried fish, salted beef, apples, potatoes, hay and cider. They also traded manufactures, such as coarse linen tow cloth for enslaved fieldhands, straw hats, wooden ware, and shoes.¹³⁴ The Yankee sloops anchored in little harbors for the winter and opened store on board. In exchange for their wares and produce these aquatic peddlers accepted plank, shingles, and agricultural staples.¹³⁵ Only twenty-nine licenses

¹³² William R. Quynn, ed., *The Diary of Jacob Engelbrecht 1818-1878*. 3 vols. (Frederick, MD: The Historical Society of Frederick County, Inc., 1976), vol. 2, 3/2/1853.

¹³³ Martin, “A New Englander’s Impressions,” p. 255.

¹³⁴ Percy W. Bidwell, “Rural Economy in New England at the Beginning of the 19th Century” *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 20 (April 1916):241-399, (Reprint, Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelly, Publishers, 1972), p. 296, 299-300, 304.

¹³⁵ Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, p. 36. See also George Tucker, *The Valley of*

returned from county clerks to Virginia's Auditor of Public Accounts between 1798 and 1850 were issued to boat peddlers.¹³⁶ Doubtless, many more waterborne peddlers never bothered to obtain a license. Nathan Hoomes sailed up the York River and into the Mattaponi River to trade in King and Queen County in 1821, 1822, 1824, and 1826. Edmund and John Hawes sailed their schooner the *Spencer* into the Mattaponi in 1821, 1826, and 1827. Joseph Churchill was the "Capt[ain] of a Yankee trading Vessel" that plied the waters around Middlesex County in 1831. Other locales visited by "River Hawkers" were Mathews County at the tip of the Middle Peninsula, Northumberland County at the mouth of the Potomac, and the Nansemond River, a tributary of the James River in Nansemond County.¹³⁷

The Tinware Peddling System

New England's tinware peddling business dates back to the 1740s, when an Irish immigrant, William Pattison, opened a tinware workshop in Berlin, Connecticut. Pattison made more tinware than the households of Berlin demanded, so he hired peddlers to hawk his merchandise in neighboring towns. The tinware trade grew from artisan workshops with a master and a few apprentices to larger shops with many employees. These larger shops clustered together in particular towns, such as Westbrook, Maine, and Meriden and Berlin, Connecticut. Intense competition in central Connecticut

Shenandoah: Or the Memoirs of the Graysons (1824; Reprint, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1970), p. 300. Francis Mallory's Report on Commerce, Richmond Commercial Convention. *Richmond Enquirer*, 6/26/1838.

¹³⁶ Seven licenses for Ohio River peddlers were found among the incomplete license records of the 1840s. LRLV. For a description of a floating store on the Ohio river, outfitted with a counter, shelves, and drawers, see Robert Sutcliff, *Travels in some parts of North America, In the Years 1804, 1805, & 1806* (York, England, 1816), pp. 90-91.

¹³⁷ LRLV.

contributed to the expansion of Connecticut tinware manufacturers to other parts of the country. In 1813, twelve tanners of Berlin, Connecticut, signed an agreement not to undersell one another by abiding to a minimum price list for particular articles of plain and japanned tinware.¹³⁸ In the first two decades of the nineteenth century Connecticut tinware manufacturers expanded their operations beyond southern New England by setting up temporary shops in southern and western towns and cities. All the large-scale manufacturers of tinware in the Mid-Atlantic and Upper South whom Nathan Trotter supplied with tinplate were from Connecticut.¹³⁹ The entrepreneurs who headed these firms engaged artisans to make tinware on site in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg, Winchester, New Bern, Columbia, Charleston, Savannah, and many other locations. Hired peddlers vended the stockpiled tinware in the countryside surrounding the shop. Once a peddler had sold out a load of tinware, he returned to the tin depot to replenish his wagon. By reducing the time and distance it took a peddler to refurbish his stock, the Yankee tinware peddling system dramatically increased the geographic market for New England manufactures.¹⁴⁰ Tinware is large in volume but low in value, so transporting it over large distances was not cost effective. Tinware objects, such as sugar boxes and trunks, were often constructed so that one piece could fit snugly inside another. Such nested articles maximized the packing volume of a crate, hogshead, or wagon.¹⁴¹ However, expansion only led to competition between firms in the

¹³⁸ Gillespie and Curtis, *Century of Meriden*, p. 349.

¹³⁹ Elva Tooker, *Nathan Trotter Philadelphia Merchant 1787-1853* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1955).

¹⁴⁰ Keir, "The Tin Peddler," p. 256. DeVoe, *Tinsmiths of Connecticut*, pp. 13, 24. Friedel, "Piecing Together a Material Culture," p. 11.

¹⁴¹ Richard Wilcox (Richmond, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 4/17/1819,

new markets.¹⁴² For instance, several firms which originated in Connecticut competed for the tinware market in Virginia: Harvey Filley in Philadelphia, Clark & Haskell in Baltimore, Charles Yale in Richmond, B. B. Tisdale and Joseph T. Allyn in Norfolk, and Benjamin and Richard Wilcox in Petersburg.¹⁴³

In a commercial world where communications and banking facilities were primitive, reliance on a few trusted individuals was necessary for expansion-minded entrepreneurs. With increased volume and distance of trade, merchants and manufacturers either had to expand their business circle to unknown individuals of doubtful confidence, or specialize and keep the firm tightly run by family members.¹⁴⁴ The Filley family of Windsor, Connecticut, ran a loose network of tinware shops in several states. The head of the family, Oliver Filley, ran the “central” shop in Windsor. Filley established his sons and relatives at tin depots in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Lansingburgh, New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, Missouri. Oliver’s brother Harvey Filley ran the tin shop on the corner of 13th and High Streets in Philadelphia.¹⁴⁵ Harvey Filley’s shop supplied a large hinterland which included the Valley of Virginia. From the records of peddler licenses issued by the Hustings Court of Winchester, and from the

1/12/1820. Wilcox Family Papers, BHS. George Tucker was infuriated by an enterprising Yankee who sold coffins in nests in Norfolk during a Yellow Fever outbreak in the early nineteenth century. Tucker,] *Letters from Virginia*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁴² Similarly, Philadelphia book publishers who expanded their business to the West through branch store and peddlers found that they only recreated the competition they were trying to escape in the East. Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, p. 140.

¹⁴³ Filley Family Papers, Russell Upson Peck Papers, CHS, Hartford. Wilcox Family Papers, BHS, Berlin. Alderman, *Letters*, p. 20. Peck Family Papers, Bristol Public Library, Bristol, Connecticut. Benjamin Wilcox signed the 1813 agreement between Berlin tanners.

¹⁴⁴ Porter and Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans, MESDA Research Center.

correspondence of Harvey Filley,¹⁴⁶ it is possible to reconstruct the workings of a tin depot in this Valley town that Filley likely founded. As Figure 27 shows, during the peddling seasons of 1820-21, 1821-22, and 1823-24,¹⁴⁷ large groups of peddlers were licensed together on days when the Winchester Hustings Court was in session.¹⁴⁸ All of the peddlers obtained prorated licenses for five months, suggesting that they devoted the entire peddling season to the hinterland surrounding the Winchester tin depot. Figure 28 plots the other counties in which the Winchester peddlers obtained licenses. It appears that the Winchester tin depot served the lower Shenandoah Valley as well as a large backcountry region across the Allegheny mountains. The tin peddlers were the last link of a commercial chain that connected Virginia consumers to Winchester, to Philadelphia, and ultimately to Windsor, Connecticut.

To reach markets across the Allegheny mountains, tinware manufacturers needed

¹⁴⁶ The surnames Griswold and "Veits" appear frequently in Filley's correspondence. At least two of Filley's peddlers, Salvador Slocum and Augustus Griswold, obtained licenses to peddle in counties surrounding Winchester.

¹⁴⁷ No licenses were issued in Winchester during the 1822-23 season, perhaps because there was growing hostility to tin peddlers in Frederick County, as evidenced by a petition signed by 160 people on Dec. 6, 1822. The detailed description of how the petitioners believed the "system of Tin Pedling" operated suggests that they had observed closely the business of a tin depot.

¹⁴⁸ The pattern of licensing by the Winchester court is conspicuous for several reasons. Although peddlers were almost always present at the market fairs associated with monthly county court days, peddlers obtained licenses from local courts at their earliest convenience, and usually did not wait until the court was in session. All of the licenses issued in Winchester fell on the date of the local Hustings Court. On fewer than 100 occasions between 1800 and 1850 (out of 4,776 recorded licenses) did three or more peddlers apply for licenses in Virginia from the same county court on the same day. There were only a dozen instances when five or more peddlers obtain licenses together on the same day. Winchester did not issue any other licenses between 1800 and 1850. Undoubtedly, more peddlers, who received state-wide peddling licenses from other county courts or who did not bother to take out licenses at all, could have been associated with the Winchester tin depot. The Winchester Hustings Court convened on the Friday

distribution centers in proximity to the eastern slope of the mountain chain. By establishing a tin depot in Winchester in 1820, Harvey Filley extended the reach of his Philadelphia tinware shop to Trans-Allegheny Virginia. Filley had advised his Philadelphia-based peddlers in 1818 not to cross the Allegheny mountains because the expenses of traveling and the discount on western notes would outweigh the profits of such a trip. Similarly, Richard Wilcox discouraged his Petersburg-based tinware peddlers from crossing the Alleghenies. Wilcox's peddler Mr. Hubbard went "over the Mountain" in 1819 and was gone so long that Wilcox expected the trip "would take all his load for expenses." The Panic of 1819 exacerbated the problems of trading over the mountains. Tin peddlers Samuel Clark and Jabez W. Gilbert reported in the fall of 1819 to Richard Wilcox that "the times are hard damd hard at present in this plase and all other plases in this western country." Money was scarce because fourteen banks in the Trans-Allegheny region had failed the previous summer.¹⁴⁹ By establishing a tinware depot in Winchester, Filley reduced the peddlers' expenses of traveling on the western side of the Alleghenies. Filley was familiar with Winchester, which he described as "the best Market" in the vicinity of his property in Randolph County, eighty miles west of Winchester.¹⁵⁰ Market towns like Winchester had warehouses for stockpiling tinware which was imported from New England or Philadelphia, and buildings where a temporary tinware shop could be established. Winchester was a commercial hub where

before the first Monday of every month.

¹⁴⁹ Harvey Filley (Philadelphia) to Oliver Filley, Oct. 26, 1818, Jan. 31, 1819, Filley Family Papers. Richard Wilcox (Richmond, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT) April 17, 1819. Samuel Clark and Jabez W. Gilbert (Bamanes Creek, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), Sept. 25, 1819. Wilcox Papers.

¹⁵⁰ Harvey Filley (Philadelphia) to Oliver Filley, May 19, 1822. Filley Family Papers.

several major roadways intersected. The Northwestern Turnpike, which reached Clarksburg in this era, gave the tin peddlers from Winchester entrée into Randolph, Preston, Harrison, and Lewis Counties, as shown in Figure 28.¹⁵¹ Had the Northwestern turnpike reached beyond Clarksburg in the early 1820s, the range of the Winchester depot could have been extended even farther.¹⁵²

Intensive planning and investment went into the establishment of a temporary tin depot. In the fall the proprietors of a tinware firm would ship everything but the walls of a New England tin shop, including “themselves, their tools, tin plate, and every article of life that they may want during their absence from home.” Suitable buildings had to be rented for a shop and living quarters. Benjamin and Richard Wilcox of Berlin, Connecticut, ran a tinware shop and depot in Petersburg, Virginia, from 1817 to 1823. The property the Wilcoxes rented in Petersburg included “a good shop & a good yard with five sheds to it & a convenient house to live in.” The Wilcoxes and their workers kept house in a “verry eligant,” two-story dwelling with dormer windows, and hired a “black girl for a Cook.” A single tin depot employed from twenty to over thirty persons, including peddlers, tinsmiths, and, in some cases, young women who “japanned,” or painted, toleware. One estimate suggests that a tin shop with five workers produced enough wares to keep twenty-five peddlers employed.¹⁵³ A tin depot’s sales force of peddlers ranged in size from the eight peddlers hired by Massachusetts tin manufacturer

¹⁵¹ Winchester integrated these western counties into its hinterland in the late eighteenth century, see Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 220-21.

¹⁵² The Northwestern Turnpike would not reach Parkersburg, where the Little Kanawha feeds into the Ohio River, until the mid 1840s. Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, p. 23.

¹⁵³ Marilyn Arbor, *Tools & Trades of America's Past: The Mercer Collection* (Doylestown, PA: The Bucks County Historical Society, 1981), p. 31.

Burrage Yale, to an estimated thirty peddler wagons per tin shop. Richard Wilcox outfitted twenty-four peddlers from his Petersburg tin depot in 1823. Independent peddlers placed with manufacturers special orders which were sent by boat to remote locations. For instance, Baltimore tinware manufacturer Clark & Haskell shipped orders of tinware by the hoghead for William Sherman to Northumberland County, Virginia, in 1812, and to Natchez, Mississippi Territory, in 1816.¹⁵⁴ Most shops were seasonal in operation, supplied with sufficient tinplate to employ the tinsmiths for only a few months. In the late spring the shop suspended operations, and the peddlers, the tinsmiths, and the proprietors returned to New England where their labor was needed on family farms.¹⁵⁵ After the fall harvest in New England, the peddlers and tinsmiths returned to the South to reap their own profits from the marketing of the wheat, tobacco, and cotton crops in the South.

Tin depots were also clearinghouses for the barter and paper money the peddlers brought in from their sales of tinware. Country produce and commodities such as furs were sorted and bulked for export to the entrepots of New York City or Hartford, Connecticut. Paper money was the bane of these long-distance traders. Peddlers circulated large quantities of “shinplasters” back into the local economy rather than remit the money to New England, where it was heavily discounted. Reading the conditions of the money market in early 1819, Harvey Filley concluded: “I dont take but a Little Cash

¹⁵⁴ John Haskell (Baltimore, MD) to William Sherman (Northumberland Court House, VA), 3/7/1812. William Sherman (Lexington, KY) to Caleb Sherman (Conway, MA), 12/1/1816. Sherman, Tabor Family Papers, MHS.

¹⁵⁵ Frederick County Petition, Dec. 6, 1822, Legislative Petitions, Archives, Library of Virginia. Dwight, *Travels*, 2:33-34. Burrage Yale, *New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette*, July 7, 1823 – Feb. 1, 1844. Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin,

when I can get truck for it is better these times than cash.”¹⁵⁶ Many of the customers of the Wilcoxes’ peddlers paid in North Carolina paper money, which vexed Richard Wilcox, because New York and Connecticut banks discounted North Carolina currency heavily in the early 1820s. Wilcox had several recourses in dealing with North Carolina paper money. Occasionally, Wilcox exchanged the money for Bank of the United States notes with Mr. Booth, a Petersburg broker, but Booth charged 5½ percent on the transaction. Exchanging paper money for a marketable commodity was a more common strategy. Wilcox invested all the North Carolina paper money that came in into furs, flour “or something that we can save the discount, for to pay seven or eight or ten per cent it will take all the proffits from our business.” Scrap copper was a commodity particularly prized by tin and coppersmiths. Scrap copper was often accepted as readily as cash in Baltimore by creditors of tin and coppersmiths.¹⁵⁷ While peddling in Richmond County, Virginia, Chatfield Alcott “heard of an old [copper] Still & went & made a bargan for it.” Alcott paid \$11.50 for the still, half in cash and half in trade, and resold it two days later at a profit.¹⁵⁸ Richard Wilcox speculated successfully in scrap copper that was bulked in lots as large as three thousand pounds. Wilcox cleared \$60 on a shipment of copper he sent to New York City.¹⁵⁹

Peddling companies had to perform a juggling act between short-term bank and

CT), Dec. 15, 1819, Dec. 14, 1822, Feb. 18, 1823. Wilcox Papers.

¹⁵⁶ Harvey Filley (Philadelphia, PA) to Oliver Filley, Jan. 31, 1819, Filley Family Papers.

¹⁵⁷ Elva Tooker, *Nathan Trotter Philadelphia Merchant 1787-1853* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 148, 248, n. 41.

¹⁵⁸ Chatfield Alcott, *Journal to the South*, 2/14, 2/16 1822. Alcott Papers, Houghton Library.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin), 11/19/1821, 1/3/1822, 2/19/1822, 4/22/1822, 1/10/1823. Wilcox Papers.

commercial loans and the slow, fitful collection of money from customers. Benjamin and Richard Wilcox's tin peddling venture seemed to operate from hand to mouth, with debt payments for various creditors coming due every month. Benjamin's letters from Berlin, Connecticut, contained an incessant "cry of more money," which Richard found difficult to meet. The performance of the peddlers in Virginia dictated how much money Richard could send at a time. Between April 1819 and March 1823 Richard remitted at least \$2,839 to Benjamin in various denominations.¹⁶⁰

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the demands placed upon the management of a tinware depot by the increased volume of trade and long-distance connections of the business could frazzle the mind of the proprietor.¹⁶¹ Independent peddlers who sold tinware "on their own hooks" strained the supply of tinware at the Wilcox depot. Occasionally the tin shop workers fell behind this constant demand, or supplies of tinplate ran low. Wilcox "had peddlers wait a week, for loads, but none of those [contracted peddlers] that engaged" to sell for the Wilcoxes.¹⁶² It could take several days for a peddler to select the goods he deemed would sell best. Chatfield Alcott had to wait several days for Charles Yale to return to his Richmond, Virginia, tinware shop with dry goods from New York City. He spent two days at Yale's shop "assorting" and "picking" goods. Out of 115 visits by peddlers to Clark & Haskell's tinware depot in

¹⁶⁰ Wilcox Papers.

¹⁶¹ Bronson Alcott was offered \$10 a month to keep the accounts of B. B. Tisdale's tinware shop in Norfolk, which seems like a low wage considering the volume of work. Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, Norfolk, 11/30/1818. Wagner, "Letters," p. 245.

¹⁶² Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 12/15/1819, 1/12/1820, 11/19/1821, 1/3/1822, 1/10/1823, 2/18/1823. Lawrence Hubbard's Promissory Note to R. & B. Wilcox, 1/19/1821. Wilcox Papers.

Baltimore in 1820-1821, eleven days passed on average between the peddlers' arrival at the depot on the corner of North and Union streets, and their departure with a load of goods.¹⁶³ Figure 29 shows where the Clark & Haskell peddlers sold some of this tinware in Virginia. All of the tinware and dry goods a peddler selected to take on the road had to be recorded in a credit instrument. A load of tinware bought by Chatfield Alcott from B. B. Tisdale in Norfolk, Virginia, might be typical in size. Alcott bought 92 pieces of tinware between December 31, 1821 and January 2, 1822, each piece accounted for in the bill of sale (Figure 30). Similarly, William Judd itemized the pieces and the prices of tinware he removed from a shipment that arrived at the Wilcoxes' Petersburg shop in casks in 1820 (Figure 31). On at least one occasion Richard Wilcox sold \$40 worth of tinware to Petersburg merchants, but there is no evidence of customers buying tinware directly from the shop. The peddlers who were supplied by the Petersburg shop covered a broad hinterland in their wagons. Figure 32 shows where the Wilcox peddlers took out licenses in Virginia. The licensing records suggest that the Petersburg tin depot served a core area with a radius of about seventy-five miles, with an extended hinterland that stretched at least two hundred miles west to Botetourt County. The correspondence of the Wilcox brothers shows that the peddlers traveled into North Carolina as well.

By early 1823 Richard Wilcox was fed up with the tin peddling business in Virginia. To meet the managerial demands brought by trade at longer distances and greater volume,

¹⁶³ Wadsworth Tavern Record Book [Clark & Haskell Daybook], 1820. CHS, Hartford. Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans, MESDA Research Center. Some of this time might have been spent in socializing or sightseeing, not just in conducting business. For instance, while in Norfolk for two weeks, Chatfield Alcott visited the Navy shipyard. Chatfield Alcott, *Journal to the South*, 3/14/1822 – 3/18/1822. Alcott Papers, Houghton Library.

most merchants in this time period specialized in a line of goods or a particular service. Richard Wilcox, however, took on too many roles for himself in the tinware business. He coordinated the flow of raw materials to the shop and payments to creditors in Connecticut and New York, oversaw the tin workers, and managed the wholesale trade to the shop's peddling force. When a drought in the summer of 1822 worsened economic conditions in Virginia and exacerbated the difficulties of the tinware trade, Wilcox "put [his] foot down" and declared that he would "never come here no more to Carry on business." Richard Wilcox dreamed of a less complicated line of business based in his house in Berlin, Connecticut, where he would open a store and "keep a small assortment of Yankee notions Such as pins, Needles, Necklaces, thimbles & perhaps a few pieces of Calicos, Handkerchiefs, Domesticks, &c."¹⁶⁴ He would not be troubled by the difficulties facing manufacturers or by the distribution of products over a vast market. Perhaps many other tinware entrepreneurs in the region felt the same way. For tinware peddling in Virginia declined sharply in the early 1820s and did not recover until the 1840s (Figure 33). Part of the decline might have been due to the Panic of 1819, but changes in the organization of tinware production was also a factor. Tinware manufacturing became more dispersed in the 1820s and 1830s, because of the development and distribution of small tinworking machines by Jedidiah North of Middletown, Connecticut. Equipped with North's machines, local tanners became more productive and could supply their immediate market with a custom-made and more consistent product than tin peddlers. Country stores became more

¹⁶⁴ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 1/10/1823. Wilcox Family Papers, BHS, Berlin.

economical for distribution of tinware than peddlers or long distance trade.¹⁶⁵ In Middle Virginia many of these new, local tinware manufacturers were former Yankee peddlers. Massachusetts native Daniel Weller peddled clocks and dry goods in the vicinity of Richmond and in Tidewater from 1825 to 1832, and then established a tinware shop in Richmond which did “consid[erable] bus[iness] with the country.”¹⁶⁶ Titus C. Rice, a Connecticut Yankee, peddled in the Southside from 1825 to 1831, and then opened a tinner shop in Richmond.¹⁶⁷ In the late 1840s many German-Jewish peddlers drove the growing numbers of tinware carts, perhaps filled with cargo manufactured by these former Yankee peddlers.

The Clock Peddling System

The mass production of wooden-wheeled clocks began in Plymouth, Connecticut, in 1808 when Eli Terry invented machinery which cut teeth into several blank, wooden clock wheels at once. Soon Terry’s shop of ten men and two women was able to produce 1,100 clocks annually. In 1816 Terry patented his Pillar and Scroll Shelf Clock, a revolutionary design for an eight-day clock movement, which fit into a case about eighteen inches tall. This compact clock was easily transported, set up, and inexpensive, making it well suited for mass marketing. By 1820 several imitators of the Terry movements were producing 15,000 clocks per year in western Connecticut clock shops. After a rocky period

¹⁶⁵ Friedel, “Piecing Together a Material Culture,” p. 12. Richmond, Virginia, tinsmiths’ orders for tools can be found in the North Family Correspondence, CSL, Hartford.

¹⁶⁶ Daniel Weller (Richmond, VA) to Samuel Terry, 6/23/1829. Samuel Terry Collection, ACWM. Manuscript Return for Henrico County, Virginia, 1850 census. Entry for Charles R. and Daniel Weller, Richmond, Virginia, vol. 1, pp. 84, 356. R. G. Dun & Co Collection, Historical Collections, Baker Library, Harvard University.

¹⁶⁷ Manuscript Return for Henrico County, Virginia, 1850 census. Entry for Titus C. Rice, Richmond, Virginia, vol. 43, p. 76. R. G. Dun & Co Collection, Historical

in the mid 1820s, when plunging cotton prices put several manufacturers out of business,¹⁶⁸ the clock industry boomed from 1827 to 1837. Sales peaked in 1836 when 80,000 Terry-style clocks were sold.¹⁶⁹ The predominant outlet for these clocks was through peddlers. Like tinware manufacturers, New England clockmakers utilized peddlers to distribute their products from strategically located depots. Clock manufacturers, however, could not relocate their factories to temporary shops in the South and West as tinware manufacturers did. The parts of a clock were produced under a variety of work environments. Often only the wooden clock movements were made in the clock factory: clock plates were rough hewn by farmers in a putting out system; cases were made by cabinetmakers; bells and other metal parts were made to order by metal workers; and faces, dials, and cases were decorated by female pieceworkers at home. The machinery developed to mass produce the wheels and pinions of shelf clocks was expensive, cumbersome, and required a power source, most often falling water.¹⁷⁰

One of the first solutions for selling clocks in distant markets was to ship uncased and unassembled clock movements to southern and western markets. For example, in

Collections, Baker Library, Harvard University.

¹⁶⁸ See the discussion of the Alabama clock trade below.

¹⁶⁹ Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p.32.

¹⁷⁰ For the origins and development of the clock industry, see: Bailey, *Two Hundred Years*; Chauncey Jerome, *History of the American Clock Business for the Past Sixty Years* (New Haven: F. C. Dayton, Jr., 1860), pp. 39, 52-53; Kenneth D. Roberts, *Eli Terry and the Connecticut Shelf Clock* (Bristol, CT: Ken Roberts Publishing Co., 1973); Donald R. Hoke, *Ingenious Yankees: The Rise of the American System of Manufactures in the Private Sector* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 47-70; Murphy, "American Clock Industry;" idem, "Entrepreneurship in the Establishment of the American Clock Industry," *Journal of Economic History* 24 (June 1966):169-86; Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977), pp. 55-56.

1812 clockmakers Lamson, Sperry & Company of Waterbury, Connecticut, shipped clock works to Z. Bronson, a Connecticut cabinetmaker who had relocated to Mecklenburg County courthouse, Virginia. Bronson cased the works and sold them in the surrounding countryside.¹⁷¹ Some clock manufacturers assembled finished clocks in southern shops from parts made in New England. In the 1810s Roberts, Dutton and Company manufactured all the components of their clocks in Bristol, Connecticut, shipped the parts to Richmond, Virginia, where they assembled completed clocks and peddled them across the region.¹⁷² Chauncy and Nobel Jerome established a clock assembly plant in Richmond in 1835. The clocks assembled in the Jeromes' "factory" were sold as Virginia manufactures in an attempt to circumvent the \$100 license per county for peddlers of "foreign" clocks. This "Yankee trick" succeeded for only a year, for the following year the state legislature decreed that it would be up to the local commissioner of the revenue to decide whether a peddler's clocks "were bona fide of the manufacture of this state."¹⁷³

By the early 1820s the Yankee peddling system was well established, and clockmakers relied heavily upon the wholesale trade to individual peddlers and small peddling partnerships.¹⁷⁴ Most clocks produced in this period were distributed by peddlers who were independent of the manufacturers. In fact, many peddling companies bought their clocks from several different manufacturers. By the 1820s and 1830s, large

¹⁷¹ Z. Bronson (Mecklenburg, VA) to William K. Lamson (Waterbury, CT), 11/2/1812. Lamson, Sperry & Co Papers, Mattatuck Museum.

¹⁷² Gideon Roberts Papers, Bristol Public Library, Bristol, Connecticut.

¹⁷³ Jerome declared it a "humbug" that Virginia tried to keep Yankee peddlers out of the state. Jerome, *History*, p. 54. Statutes of Virginia, March 22, 1836.

¹⁷⁴ Many individuals bought small lots of clocks from Mark Leavenworth in the 1810s and

clock peddling companies were selling finished clocks in increasingly extended markets. Clocks destined for the old Southwest reportedly made up a large amount of the freight of the packet boats which sailed to New Orleans.¹⁷⁵ The largest clock peddling companies sold thousands of dollars worth of clocks in a year and depended upon networks of “stands,” as they referred to their stockpiles, to supply their peddlers across vast territories – what they often termed “the ground.” These businesses were not fixed in places like a crossroads store or even a temporary tinware shop. Retail stores served areas within a seven to ten mile radius; tin depots had an extended range of over one hundred miles; but clock peddling companies covered territories of thousands of square miles. The advice of Philip Barnes to his business partner Rensseleer Upson in 1835 illustrates the extensive reach of clock peddling companies. Barnes recommended that the company’s clock stand in Frederick, Maryland, be broken up and the business sent to the stand in Baltimore, because: “only 45 miles is I think too near for two stands.”¹⁷⁶ Clock stands were often located at a tavern or a merchant’s store, or places where at least one hundred shelf clocks could be securely warehoused.¹⁷⁷ Some clock peddlers in Virginia tried to pass as retail merchants by stockpiling their clocks at stores, thereby saving a large sum in license fees. A law of 1842 defeated this practice. Merchants who took clocks on deposit from a clock peddler had to pay the \$100 license fee imposed

1820s. Mark Leavenworth Account books, Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury

¹⁷⁵ *Georgia Journal*, 11/20/1833.

¹⁷⁶ P. Barnes (Baltimore, MD) to Rensseleer Upson (Woodstock, Shenandoah Co, VA), 3/2/1835. George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

¹⁷⁷ Seth Wheeler based his clock peddling company at the tavern of Richard Brent, near Paris, Kentucky. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

upon clock peddlers.¹⁷⁸ Three examples of clock peddling firms in Virginia in the 1830s illustrate the aggressiveness of the business. The vision of markets held by clock peddling companies extended far beyond the parochial perspective of local exchange networks.

The business correspondence of the clock peddling firm of Latham & Robinson reveals a hierarchy of distribution points. In 1830 and 1831 the far-flung partners of this peddling business kept track of one another's affairs and supplies of clocks through the mails. Like the clock peddling companies discussed above, Latham & Robinson had central points to which clocks from Connecticut were shipped. The main landing points for Latham & Robinson's clocks were on the James River at Lynchburg, and on the Rivanna River at Palmyra, Fluvanna County. From Palmyra and Lynchburg, the clocks were shipped to secondary storage places such as Wilmington in Fluvanna County, Lovingson in Nelson County, and Fincastle and Salem, which both lay in Botetourt County at the time. Peddlers in the field wrote to Carlos Bates, who managed the company's clock inventory, suggesting tertiary storage facilities. For instance, Joseph Robinson described Covington in Alleghany County as "the most sentrel place" in a good country for selling clocks. From secondary storage places such as Salem, Bates shipped clocks to peddlers in more distant locales. In an urgent letter, William Latham wrote to

¹⁷⁸ *1842 Statutes of Virginia* (Richmond, 1843), March 24, 1842. John Joseph Murphy attributes too much authority to the "exterior merchants" who stored clocks for peddling companies. Most local merchants involved in clock peddling were merely forwarding agents or providers of warehousing. Murphy also claims that local merchants were a source of intermediate financing between clock peddlers and their customers. My research contradicts this contention. Furthermore, Murphy misidentifies Philip Barnes as a native Georgia storekeeper. Barnes was from Massachusetts. Murphy, "American Clock Industry," pp. 122, 150.

Bates to “hurry on two boxes more” to Seven Miles Ford, in the upper Valley.¹⁷⁹ Figure 34 shows where Latham & Robinson’s peddlers obtained licenses to peddle clocks. Undoubtedly, the peddlers who were furnished by the hierarchy of Latham & Robinson depots visited many counties not mentioned in the license records or company correspondence.

Orville and Augustus Rice began their careers peddling tinware in Frederick and Jefferson Counties in 1813 and 1814. Their experience in tin peddling probably financed and prepared them for the business of peddling clocks, for two decades later the firm of Orville Rice & Company blanketed an enormous section of Virginia with clocks. From 1833 to 1835, the firm covered a region stretching from Lee County in the southwestern panhandle of the state down the Great Wagon Road in the Valley to Augusta County, and into the Southside counties of Buckingham, Charlotte, and Henry, as shown in Figure 35.¹⁸⁰

Gunn, Mattoon, Gilbert & Company sold clocks in central Virginia from 1836 to 1841 which were manufactured by Eli Terry, Jr. and Company of Terryville, Connecticut. The clocks destined for Virginia consumers left Terry’s factory by wagon to the port of New Haven, Connecticut. A forwarding agent in New Haven insured the clocks and shipped them by boat to New York City. A schooner carried the clocks from New York

¹⁷⁹ Joseph Robinson (Covington, VA) to Carlos Bates (Lovingston, VA) March 30, 1831. Carlos Bates (Lovingston, VA) to William Latham, April 18, 1831. Bernard Peyton (Richmond, VA) to Latham & Robinson, care of Carlos Bates (Lynchburg, VA), Feb. 13, 1832. William Latham (Seven Mile Ford, Smyth Co.) to Carlos Bates (Salem, VA), April 15, 1832. Carlos Bates Papers, Connecticut State Library. License Returns, Fluvanna, Nelson, Botetourt, Alleghany, Russell, and Scott Counties, Library of Virginia.

¹⁸⁰ After 1835 Orville Rice & Company did not appear in the license records. They might have gone out of business, moved on to another state, or changed the name of their

to a forwarding agent in Richmond, Virginia. Simon W. Gunn received the clocks in Lexington, where they were deposited until the company's peddlers were ready to carry them into the countryside.¹⁸¹ From their stand in Lexington, Gunn, Mattoon, Gilbert & Company sold clocks in the central Valley as well as in counties just across the Blue Ridge and over the Alleghenies, as shown in Figure 36.

From manufacturer to consumer, many costs were added onto the price of a Yankee mantel clock. The mass production techniques for manufacturing shelf clocks with wooden works reduced the cost of manufacturing to about \$5 per clock by the second decade of the nineteenth century. Clock manufacturers wholesaled their clocks to peddling companies for about \$6.75 in cash or \$8 to \$9 on credit.¹⁸² Clock peddling companies were responsible for the cost of shipping and insuring clocks to their distribution points, which added a few cents onto the price of the clock. More significant overhead costs came from the peddlers' wages and expenses. Peddling companies set a base value on the clocks they furnished to their peddlers. For instance, Philip Barnes & Co. debited their peddlers' accounts \$20 for every clock they removed from the company's stand in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1822-1823. The average prices the peddlers William Hindman, Abraham Woodruff, and Fordyse W. Atkins, received were \$42, \$43, and \$44 respectively. In comparison, Carlos Bates charged on average \$26 for clocks in central Virginia in 1831. Isaac Hotchkiss sold brass-wheeled clocks in the Lexington,

firm.

¹⁸¹ Eli Terry, Jr. and Co to Allen Case, Dec. 12, 1837, Jan. 4, 1838; Eli Terry, Jr. and Co to Simon W. Gunn, Feb. 14, 1838; Letter Books of Eli Terry, Jr. Vol. 1: May 1836 to March 1838. ACWM.

¹⁸² Wholesale prices of clocks can be found in the account books of Mark Leavenworth (Mattatuck Museum), and the letter books of Eli Terry, Jr., and Samuel Terry (ACWM).

Kentucky, area in 1837 and 1838 for about \$41 apiece. The fair market price for a wooden-wheeled clock varied by time and location. There was no national market price for wooden clocks. Prices varied in the several large, interacting regional markets. Still, the prevailing market price for a Yankee clock was about \$25 to \$35. Brass clocks, which were mass produced from the mid 1830s onward, commanded a higher price, about \$40 to \$60.¹⁸³ In regions which were glutted with clock peddlers, such as central Tennessee in the mid 1820s and early 1830s, or the Erie Canal corridor in the early 1830s, the market price of a wooden clock dropped as low as \$10 or \$15.¹⁸⁴ Occasionally, Yankee peddlers grossly overcharged naive consumers for their clocks. Carlos Bates traded a wooden clock to a buyer near Richmond, Virginia, for a gold watch and “\$78 50 cts to boot.” Julius Clapp sold several brass clocks in Louisiana in the mid 1830s for over \$100 apiece.¹⁸⁵ The *Knickerbocker Magazine* printed a story that lampooned southern naivete. A South Carolina planter was outraged to learn that the fair market price of the wooden clock, which he had paid \$144 for, was only \$25: “It’s a powerful clock, but I reckon I gave a heap of money for it!”¹⁸⁶ The final price hike was a function of the buyer’s knowledge of the market value of a clock and the peddler’s cupidity.

An analysis of the account books of five clock peddlers from 1822-1823, 1831, and

¹⁸³ The brass clock business eventually sank the wooden clock business entirely. Murphy, “American Clock Industry,” pp. 176, 183. Henry Gordon Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Clocks* (Buchanan, NY: Emerson Books, Inc., 1981), p. 86.

¹⁸⁴ Hodges, *Erastus Hodges*, pp. 195-96, 208-09. Some of the reports by peddling companies of low prices for clocks might have been an attempt to obtain lower prices from clock manufacturers.

¹⁸⁵ “Memorandum Book Oct the 30th 1829 C Bates.” Julius Clapp (Natchitoches) to Carlos Bates (Opelousas), 6/25/1835. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

1837-1838 shows that 218 of their 273 clock sales, or 80%, were made partially or wholly on credit.¹⁸⁷ Cash made up only 10% of the peddlers' revenues at the point of sale. Most of this cash probably came from the sale of other Yankee notions which the peddlers carried: combs, shoes, and pumps. The remaining 10% was value received in bartered goods, such as old clocks, watches, other goods, services, and agricultural products. The credit arrangements made by clock peddlers heeded traditional agrarian credit practices, but these transactions linked peddlers' backcountry patrons to the wider national market. The Yankee clock peddler was a mediator between New England manufacturers and rural consumers.

All of the clock peddlers took old clocks and watches in trade. By the late 1830s, when Isaac Hotchkiss was peddling clocks, many people already owned a Yankee shelf clock with wooden works. Hotchkiss offered these customers an upgrade, for his merchandise had brass clockworks. Hotchkiss's records are detailed, and the account book shows what happened to the old clocks. Over fifty percent of his customers who bought new brass clocks swapped a watch or an old clock in partial payment.¹⁸⁸ Hotchkiss appraised the value of some of the old clocks. Nine were valued at \$20, and one at \$28. In a typical transaction, Hotchkiss sold a new brass clock to John Elledge on Cow Creek, Estill County, for a \$40 note and an old clock in swap. The following day Hotchkiss sold Elledge's old clock to Thomas Smithson on Millers Creek, in Estill

¹⁸⁶ "Sketches of South-Carolina," vol. 2:330.

¹⁸⁷ The account books were kept by: Fordyse W. Atkins, William Hindman, and Abraham Woodruff in northern Alabama, 1822-23, George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL; Carlos Bates in Middle Virginia, 1831, Carlos Bates Papers, CSL; and Isaac Hotchkiss in central Kentucky, 1837-38, Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

¹⁸⁸ 33 out of 63 total customers.

County for a \$15 note. In all, Hotchkiss sold fifteen old clocks at an average price of \$19 apiece. Hotchkiss could not find buyers for some of the old clocks, so he sold them back to the original owner, for \$4.50 to \$6 in cash.

Peddling clocks in the hinterland of Lexington, Kentucky, in the winter and spring of 1837-1838, Isaac Hotchkiss heeded the rhythms of the rural debt cycle. The average length of notes issued to Hotchkiss was eleven months, slightly short of a year because almost all of the notes fell due on either December 25, 1838, or January 1, 1839. Carlos Bates gave most of his Virginia customers in 1831 six months to pay for their clocks, but the terms varied from two to eighteen months; on average the notes were seven months long. The terms of an agreement between Connecticut clock peddler Milo Holcomb (a colleague of Carlos Bates) and Carter Harmon of Nelson County, Virginia, are preserved in a letter Holcomb sent to Harmon in 1831. Holcomb agreed to accept \$10 cash down on the clock, \$10 in six months, and \$10 in one year, or \$30 total. Holcomb wrote out these terms in a letter he sent along with the clock by another peddler. If Harmon wanted to change the terms of their agreement, Holcomb instructed him to “bargain with the bearer” of the letter.¹⁸⁹

Holcomb and Bates were probably under instructions from their employers to keep the terms of credit as short as local markets would allow. Clock manufacturer Eli Terry, Jr., had much experience with the “long credit system” dealing with clock peddling companies. Terry urged clock peddlers to avoid selling clocks on a longer credit than one year:

¹⁸⁹Milo Holcomb (Lovington, VA) to Carter Harmon (Jonesborough, Nelson Co, VA), 4/4/1831. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

The best time to collect a debt of a man who buys a clock is in six months or at farthest one year before the clock wants repairing or the novelty is gone. You give a man two years credit & he may get sick of his clock, or he may run away or become insolvent, when if he had been required to pay in six months it might have been collected.¹⁹⁰

Most clock notes probably resembled an ordinary promissory note. In a surviving clock note (Figure 37), James P. Cocke, of Amelia County, Virginia, promised to pay Chauncy Jerome & Company \$30 in six months, in the standard verbiage of a promissory note. In order to facilitate collection of the debt, the peddler wrote brief directions to Cocke's home on the reverse of the bill.¹⁹¹ As national credit markets tightened after the Panic of 1837, Henry Merriman entreated his peddlers on the length of the credits they extended to customers more than any other aspect of the business. The peddlers often replied that it was not possible to shorten their credit any further, but Merriman prevailed upon them, and very few notes over a year in length were issued after Merriman's lectures.¹⁹² The negotiations clock peddlers and their customers engaged in were strongly influenced by both traditional credit practices and the calculus of the marketplace.

The clock peddler account books offer a comparison of the marketing of a commodity in two differing economies: the mixed agriculture of the upper South, and the plantation monoculture of the cotton frontier. The most conspicuous difference is that consumers in Kentucky and Virginia had more to barter and in greater variety than clock purchasers in Alabama. Carlos Bates traded new clocks to farmers in central Virginia for commodities such as: twelve barrels of corn, twenty-eight bushels of wheat, three

¹⁹⁰ Eli Terry, Jr., & Co (Terryville, CT) to G. Brawley & Co (Athens, OH), 12/2/1837, 3/27/1838. Letter Books of Eli Terry, Jr. ACWM.

¹⁹¹ Cocke Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁹² St Put [Henry Merriman] (Clay Village, KY) to Rensseleaer Upson (Paducah, KY),

hundred pounds of bacon, \$10 worth of store goods at cash price, an \$18 gun, and \$10 in shoe-work. From a couple of patrons in Fayette and Madison counties, Kentucky, Isaac Hotchkiss accepted fifteen yards and four yards of jeans cloth in partial payment for new clocks. These were not barter transactions, but exchanges of goods at market prices. Carlos Bates had no need for three hundred pounds of bacon, except for its price value. Bates exchanged the bacon along with a clock and \$5 cash for a patent lever watch. As a result of the Upper South's shift in the antebellum era away from a plantation economy dependent upon tobacco, clock peddlers found a variety of commodities in the mixed agricultural economies that were as good as cash.

The sale of clocks in the Old Southwest juxtaposed two commodities which epitomized two widely divergent, yet interconnected, forms of speculation in the early national economy: plantation-raised cotton and mass-produced clocks. Cotton was the lifeblood of the early nineteenth-century market, and many merchants began to specialize in the purchase of this commodity, even peddling companies.¹⁹³ Abraham Woodruff, Fordyse W. Atkins, and William Hindman peddled clocks for the firm of Philip Barnes & Company – based in Huntsville, Alabama – in the winter and spring of 1822 to 1823. Huntsville was at the epicenter of the cotton craze of the mid to late 1810s, but was emerging from a painful depression when Philip Barnes & Company set up their clock stand in the erstwhile boomtown.¹⁹⁴ The hinterland of Huntsville was still strongly committed to cotton monoculture, a fact which is reflected in the company's account

12/25/1837. George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL.

¹⁹³ Porter and Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers*, pp. 17-19.

¹⁹⁴ For a history of the region in the boom and bust environment of the 1810s and 1820s, see Daniel S. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama*

book. It took a lot of cotton to pay for a clock: 500 to 600 pounds of bale cotton or 2,000 pounds of seed cotton. Fordyce W. Atkins hauled 4,000 pounds of seed cotton and 6,150 pounds of bale cotton to Huntsville, and William Hindman brought in 17,000 pounds of seed cotton, and 2,350 pounds of bale cotton. The total value of this cotton was \$1,180. Abraham Woodruff might have been peddling in a district with a greater proportion of yeoman farmers who raised more corn than cotton. Woodruff brought in only \$80 worth of cotton; he also received \$50 worth of whiskey in trade for a clock.¹⁹⁵ Other than the whiskey and a watch or two, the peddlers in Alabama took in no barter from their clientele. Out of a total of 175 customers, 23 (13%) paid in cash, in whiskey, or with a watch. Twenty-five (14%) paid for their clocks in cotton at the point of sale. The remaining 127 purchasers (73%) paid on about a year's credit.

Speculation on future cotton prices affected clock peddlers directly, and clock manufacturers indirectly, often with disastrous consequences. In 1822-1823 the peddlers offered 2¢ per pound for seed cotton and 8¢ per pound for bale cotton. This was over 25% less than the market price of 11¢ per pound for bale cotton in 1823, but the cost of transportation must be figured into the lower price.¹⁹⁶ The average price for clocks paid in cotton was \$40, and the average credit price was \$43; none of the planters or farmers paid in cash. But if a planter waited until he could market his crop at 11¢ per pound

1800-1840 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁵ Further analysis of the customers' wealth and status is necessary to determine whether Woodruff's customers raised more corn than cotton.

¹⁹⁶ For the marketing of cotton by factors, local merchants, and itinerant speculators, see Lavin, *William Bostwick*, pp. 3-5, 131. Harold D. Woodman, "Itinerant Cotton Merchants of the Antebellum South," *Agricultural History* 40 (April 1966):79-90. Hodges, *Erastus Hodges*, p. 245. Philip Barnes & Co. and its successor company, Upson, Merriman & Co., marketed their cotton in New Orleans through their factor Sylvester Carrington.

before he paid for the clock, he would have invested only 391 pounds of his yield for a clock, rather than the average barter price of 500 pounds bale cotton, thus saving about \$12. Cotton prices rose to a high of 19¢ per pound in 1825, and clock peddling companies saw their sales rise in tandem. But the following year the price of cotton dropped to 12¢, and in 1827 it bottomed out at 9¢ per pound, and did not rise above 10¢ until 1833.¹⁹⁷ The prices clock peddlers offered for cotton dropped as well in 1827, to 1.4¢ per pound for seed cotton, and 6¢ per pound for bale cotton. Many planters were reluctant to sell their crops at all, and the prospects for collecting cash for outstanding debts were dull. In 1827 Philip Barnes' peddlers brought in increasing quantities of cotton, but at 6¢ per pound Barnes calculated that the company would not lose on the exchange.¹⁹⁸ With so much of their proceeds caught up in deflated clock notes due to the drop in cotton, many other clock peddling companies and several marginal clock manufacturers went out of business.¹⁹⁹ The fortunes of clock peddlers on the cotton frontier and the clock manufacturers who supplied them were fatally linked to the international market for cotton. Could cotton planters have done without Yankee mantel clocks? Such frugality would have matched the rhetoric of community leaders in the panicky atmosphere of falling cotton prices. Yet the enormous sales peddlers made in the Cotton South and other regions testifies to the growing commitment of many Americans to a rising consumer culture, a material covenant which bound them to the national economy.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Cotton prices are from Sellers, *Market Revolution*, p. 277.

¹⁹⁸ Philip Barnes (Athens, AL) to Rensseleae Upson (Bristol, CT) 11/8/1826, 1/21/1827, 2/1/1827, 2/9/1827, 4/15/1827, 11/18/1827. George Rensseleae Upson Papers, CSL.

¹⁹⁹ Murphy, "American Clock Industry," pp. 100-103.

²⁰⁰ For the coexisting impulses towards subsistence and commercialism in the cotton belt in this era, see Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier*, pp. 1, 6, 13, 52-53, 65. For the

When peddlers collected on clock notes, they linked individual purchasers directly to the more rigid constraints of the commercial world. Clock notes were negotiated in face-to-face transactions between the peddler and the buyer. These commercial relationships were limited and short-run, in contrast to the long-term ties of social reciprocity found in exchange relations in rural markets. Clock peddlers had to overcome the distrust that their relative anonymity might engender, perhaps with the impudent familiarity that folklore attributed to the Yankee peddler. As employees of firms that were hard pressed to pay off clock manufacturers, clock peddlers probably showed little of the flexibility which characterized traditional local debt networks. In economic hard times, peddlers had to compete with local merchants who also pushed their customers hard for payments. Under such conditions, remarked George W. Bartholomew, it was nearly impossible to get “hold of a dollar which you have not a bond for.” With creditors pressing planters on all sides, and low prices for cotton in 1827, Bartholomew foreboded: “Alabama is and will be for eighteen months to come the poorest state in the union for pedlers to do business in.”²⁰¹

In the precarious economic environment of the early nineteenth century accurate predictions of customers’ solvency were nearly impossible. Employers expected clock peddlers to make safe judgements on the creditworthiness of customers, but the pressure to sell as many clocks as possible probably led peddlers to trust clocks to people whom

adoption of clock time and routines by southern slaveholders, see Mark Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁰¹ George W. Bartholomew (Monroe Co, MS, 10/22/1826; Mount Zion, Monroe Co, MS, 2/18/1827) to Rensseleer Upson (Bristol, CT). George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

the peddlers could discern as poor credit risks. Peddlers sued customers to recover what was due them, but recourse to the courts to collect debts was a slow and often futile endeavor.²⁰² Debtors avoided payments “by all sorts of stratagems,” complained Asaph Hall, through debtor relief laws or through illegal actions.²⁰³ George W. Bartholomew avoided using the law to collect on debts owed to him in Mississippi, because the debtors could request an automatic stay of thirty to sixty days on creditors’ claims.²⁰⁴ In some cases where clock peddlers sought payment for notes, it was discovered that the note signer was a minor, or the debtor brought counterclaims against the peddler for board and lodging. Clock manufacturer Eli Terry, Jr., who complained of losing “a good many thousands” through the clock note credit network, suggested a means of increasing collections by rewording the clock note blanks:

_____ months after date _____ promise to
 pay to _____
 _____ or bearer _____ Dollars and _____
 cents
 for value received without defalcation stay of execution or offset with interest as witness
 _____ hand and seal
 this _____ day of _____ 183__

The phrase, “without defalcation stay of execution or offset,” precluded the use of the

²⁰² Chatfield Alcott, *Journal to the South*, 5/11/1822, 5/12/1822. Alcott Papers, Houghton Library. Benjamin Bowles, Jr (Palmyra, VA) to Carlos Bates (Lovingston, VA), 2/23/1832. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. P. Barnes (Athens, GA) to Rensseleaer Upson (Bristol, CT), 1/21/1827. Henry Atwood (Bolivar, TN) to Rensseleaer Upson (Paducah, KY), 1/13/1838. George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL.

²⁰³ Asaph Hall, II (Clinton, GA) to Asaph Hall, III (East Goshen, CT), 3/4/1842, quoted in Lawrence P. Hall, *Asaph Hall, Clockmaker: 1800-1842* (Effingham, NH: unpublished typescript, ACWM, 1975), pp. 49-50.

²⁰⁴ George W. Bartholomew (Monroe Co, MS) to Rensseleaer Upson (Bristol, CT) 1/29/1826. George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL. For the breakdown of southwestern courts under the strain of debt cases, see Browne, “Eastern Merchants and Their

“stratagems” of which the peddlers complained: misappropriation of a deceased debtor’s assets, the thirty to sixty-day stoppage of a creditor’s civil actions against a debtor, and counterclaims made against the peddler. It also allowed someone other than the peddler to collect on the note. This was important to clock manufacturers like Terry, because the only assets a bankrupt clock peddling company could offer their creditors were uncollected clock notes. These blanks were of great use to clock peddlers, cutting off all complaints and “the money was paid on the second call.”²⁰⁵

Absconding debtors were a very common phenomenon in antebellum America, especially during the periods of widespread economic panic in 1819-1822 and 1837-1842. A debtor who could not pay a clock note probably had many other impatient creditors knocking on his door as well. Some debtors chose to pack up their belongings and flee westward under cover of night. Others hid from collectors in caves, swamps, and woods.²⁰⁶ A large number of Asaph Hall’s clock customers in Georgia fled to Alabama, Mississippi and Texas in 1842, which caused heavy losses for Hall.²⁰⁷ Benjamin Bowles complained that all of his clock customers who had it in their power were “disposed to shuffle.” Clock peddlers pursued debtors and their assets relentlessly.

Southwestern Collections.”

²⁰⁵ Eli Terry, Jr., & Co (Terryville, CT) to J. C. Lewis (Baltimore, MD), 6/20/1837. Eli Terry, Jr., & Co (Terryville, CT) to Correl Brooks (Baltimore, MD), 6/12/1837. Eli Terry, Jr., & Co (Terryville, CT) to Richard Miller (Washington, PA), 3/5/1838. Letter Books of Eli Terry, Jr. ACWM.

²⁰⁶ For debtors fleeing to the Republic of Texas, see Balleisen, “Navigating Failure,” pp. 341, 347. For debtors fleeing at night with armed escorts, see William Hardress Waller (Amherst County, VA) to Col. George Blow (Norfolk, VA), 10/17/1822, Blow Family Papers, VHS. For reports of debtors hiding in caves, woods, and swamps, see Sydney Fletcher (Tusculum Plantation, Amherst County, VA) to Calvin Fletcher, 11/5/1842, quoted in Briesen, *Letters of Elijah Fletcher*.

²⁰⁷ Asaph Hall, II (Clinton, GA) to Asaph Hall, III (East Goshen, CT), 3/4/1842, quoted

Carlos Bates' attitude towards customers who argued with him and tried to shuffle out of their debts was to "Put the plasters on them & show no *mercy*."²⁰⁸ Outstanding clock notes owed to different peddling companies became a speculative commodity in and of themselves.²⁰⁹ Henry Atwood knew that two men held money belonging to a Mr. Combs, who had "run away" owing \$120 to a clock peddler named White. Atwood purchased Combs' clock note from White at a discount (for only about \$20 or \$30 cash), and collected the debt from Combs' friends.²¹⁰ Since clock manufacturers were in contact with many clock peddling companies in various parts of the country, creditors were able to locate absconding debtors at their new habitations. For instance, the Reverend Gilbert Mason moved from Charlotte Court House, Virginia, to Mason County, Kentucky, indebted to clock peddler A. Cott. Clock manufacturers C. & C. Ives forwarded Mason's note to Seth Wheeler, whose clock peddling company was based in Paris, Kentucky, for collection.²¹¹ Such assiduous collection of debts undoubtedly were

in Hall, *Asaph Hall*, pp. 49-50.

²⁰⁸ Benjamin Bowles (Fincastle, VA) to Lothrop Robinson or Carlos Bates (Lovingston, VA), 11/30/1831. Carlos Bates (Alexandria, Rapides Parish, LA) to Mrs. Amelia Bates (East Granby, CT), 3/12/1835. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. Emphasis in the original. Putting the plasters on someone might refer to mustard plasters, a remedy for skin irritations.

²⁰⁹ As a young man, Collis P. Huntington bought a large number of southern clock notes from a New York merchant at a substantial discount, on which he collected very successfully. Oscar Lewis, *The Big Four: The Story of Huntington, Stanford, Hopkins, and Crocker, and of the Building of the Central Pacific* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938), p. 223. Cerinda W. Evans, *Collis Potter Huntington* (Newport News: The Mariner's Museum, 1954), vol. 1, p. 13.

²¹⁰ Henry Atwood (Bolivar, TN) to Rensseleer Upson (Paducah, KY), 12/10/1837. Henry Atwood described evasive, indebted clock buyers as persons who "smartmouted [?]." Henry Atwood (Paducah, KY) to Rensseleer Upson (Bristol, CT), 6/8/1840. George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

²¹¹ C. & L. C. Ives (Bristol, CT) to Seth Wheeler (Paris, KY), 1/25/1838. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL.

the source of much of the resentment against Yankee clock peddlers among Southerners and Westerners.

Clock peddling companies wedged themselves into an unenviable position between the national credit network and local debt structures. On the debit side of the ledger they owed heavy debts to manufacturers and banks, but the credit side of the ledger was full of uncertain revenues from uncollected consumer debts. Upson Merriman and Company were caught up in a cycle of debt that was hard to break. Henry E. Merriman reported to Rensseleer Upson in 1835 that they continued to manage their "Banking business" in the same manner, borrowing more money to pay off old debts and adding "a little each day to the amount of Bank debt."²¹² When the Panic of 1837 struck and many customers could not pay for their clocks, many peddlers nearly gave up in despair. As the economic crisis deepened in the second half of 1837, Chauncy and Lawson C. Ives repeatedly urged their peddling agent in Kentucky, Seth Wheeler, not to "give up the ship, but hold on where you are, and perhaps the tide will turn after a little."²¹³ Wheeler did hang on for several more years managing the Iveses' clock peddlers in Kentucky until June 1841. However, the prolonged panic and contraction of credit put many clock peddlers and clock manufacturers out of business. The few clock manufacturers who survived the Panic of

²¹²Asa Upson (Bristol, CT) to Rensseleer Upson (Huntsville, Madison Co, AL), 2/3/1823, 4/6/1823, 3/6/1823. George W. Bartholomew (Monroe Co, MS) to Rensseleer Upson (Bristol, CT) 1/29/1826. P. Barns (Athens, AL) to Rensseleer Upson (Bristol, CT) 2/1/1827, 9/20/1831. P. Barns and Sophia N. Barnes (Athens, AL) to Rensseleer Upson (Bristol, CT) 2/9/1827. Henry E. Merriman (Bristol, CT) to Rensseleer Upson (Frederick, MD), 3/15/1835. George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

²¹³C. & L. Ives (Bristol, CT) to Seth Wheeler (Paris, KY), 5/24/1837, 10/21/1837, 12/12/1837. Seth Wheeler Papers, CSL. The Iveses were staunch Whigs, blaming the downturn in business on "the Jackson times," and expressed hope that the Whig electoral victories in New York and elsewhere in late 1837 would "materially change the face of

1837 turned away from the Yankee peddling system and began distributing their clocks through stationary merchants and jobbers.²¹⁴ The chastened community of merchants and manufacturers that emerged from the depression tightened their demands on those who sought goods on credit. The Yankee peddling system of distribution, with its thousands of peddlers in the field, was too unwieldy for the chary business class.

As American industry and interregional trade grew in the first four decades of the nineteenth century, the Yankee peddling system was perhaps the best distribution network for a growing national marketplace. Without sufficient turnpikes, improved waterways, or railroads, the peddler's wagon was perhaps the most efficient way to get novel products to an expanding population. The growing national market was not just anonymous, it was terra incognita for most eastern merchants and manufacturers. Extending credit to local retailers in the great unknown was risky. So, a vast, loosely organized army of peddlers rode across the countryside, linking remote consumers to centers of industry in the Northeast. Eventually, improvements in the transportation and credit infrastructure allowed eastern merchants and manufacturers to establish more direct links to consumers through professional middlemen – jobbers. Peddlers would continue to serve consumers who were off the main paths of trade well into the twentieth century. However, the prominence of the Yankee peddler in the distribution of New England manufacturers ended by the mid-nineteenth century.

the times.”

²¹⁴ Murphy, “American Clock Industry,” p. 153.

Figure 7. "A Bill of Fall Goods"

George W. Bartholomew (Athens, A.) to Rensseleer Upson (Bristol, CT) 4/23/1823.

George Rensseleer Upson Papers, CSL.

2 Pieces Sattenett	125
4 " "	100
4 Do "	80
4 Do "	40 - 60
1 Piece Blue ribd cassimeer	150
20 Pieces Brown Shirting	10 to 12
6 Pieces Plain book Muslin	37½ - 62½
2 Do Tambourd do	75 - 87½
12 Pieces true blue callico	20 - 22
2 Do Do Black	20
16 Fancey assorted callicoes	22 - 30
10 Cambric	30 - 50
20 Cassimer Shawls	200 - 225
8 Pieces Bleacht Shirting	16 - 19
10 Cotton Shawls	50 -100
1 Piece blue Cloth	\$6 00
1 lb Sewing Silk	500
2 Pieces Brown Holland	18¾
5 Do blk Bombazell	8 to 12 dls
12 Do Cotton Flag Hkdfs	250 a piece
2 Do white Silk Gloves	300
12 Cassimere Points	
4 Doz Butter Pins	62½
50 Phials Hitchcock's snuff	
2 Doz wallets	
2 Doz Calfskin Pocket books	
10 Groce Ivory shirtbuttons	
4 Groce Pewt vest Buttons	75
4/4 6 Pieces apron checks	20 to 30
12 Patterns valeneto vestings	
12 Do Mersailes Do	
1 Doz Blk worsted hoes [hose]	800
8 Lb Patent thread	100
10 Pieces Camel Plaids	15 - 20
1 Doz cravats	3.75
2 Doz Dirk knives	
4 Do large Pocket Do	
2 fine pen knives	
6 Pieces flg Silk Hkdfs	
1 Doz white cotton hoes	5.00
1 Doz Do Do "	4.00

Figure 8. A “list of some articles” sold by George W. Bartholomew

George W. Bartholomew (Athens, GA) to Rensseleaer Upson (Bristol, CT), 12/27/1825.
George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, CSL.

2 pieces Blk gros De Naples
2 “ Figured Sorsnit[?]
1 “ “ Plain do.
24 White Muslin robes
8 Figured Canton crapes
4 do Nankin
10 Great grs suspenders Buttons bone
10 “ “ Block tin wide eyes
12 Pieces true Blue callico
3 “ Mourning do
10 Fancy “ do
8 Bolts Sheeting
8 Pieces cotton Flg Hkdfs
2 pieces Sattenetts cost 80 “
an assortment of muslins, cambrics and some fancy silk shawles.
24 Boxes cotton Balls
1 lb do do
8 groce Ivory Shirt Buttons
4 do Pearl do
1 lb silk Blk
¼ do colrd
12 Doz Horn side combs first rate cost 37½ buy at Mitchels
3 Pieces Blk Bombasett
1 do Purple do
2 do Figureed Blue
2 Pieces german Silk Hkdfs cost \$5.50.

These articles will afford a good profit and a quick sale. No hard ware unless you can get boxes of Needles with about 75 in a box. no horn tucking combs no siding do. no Ivory do. but be sure to send some silver spoons. I will try to get money to pay for them this spring. they are sure sale. some vestings. I want and 60 pare first chop Ladies shoes. you must make out the assortment and buy the best quality. it is bedtime. Mr Barnes People are all well.”

Figure 9. Trunk Peddler, circa 1840-1860
DAG no. 1189, Daguerreotype Collection, Library of Congress



Figure 10. Clock Peddler Wagon, circa 1815-1835
Photo courtesy of the American Clock and Watch Museum, Bristol, Connecticut

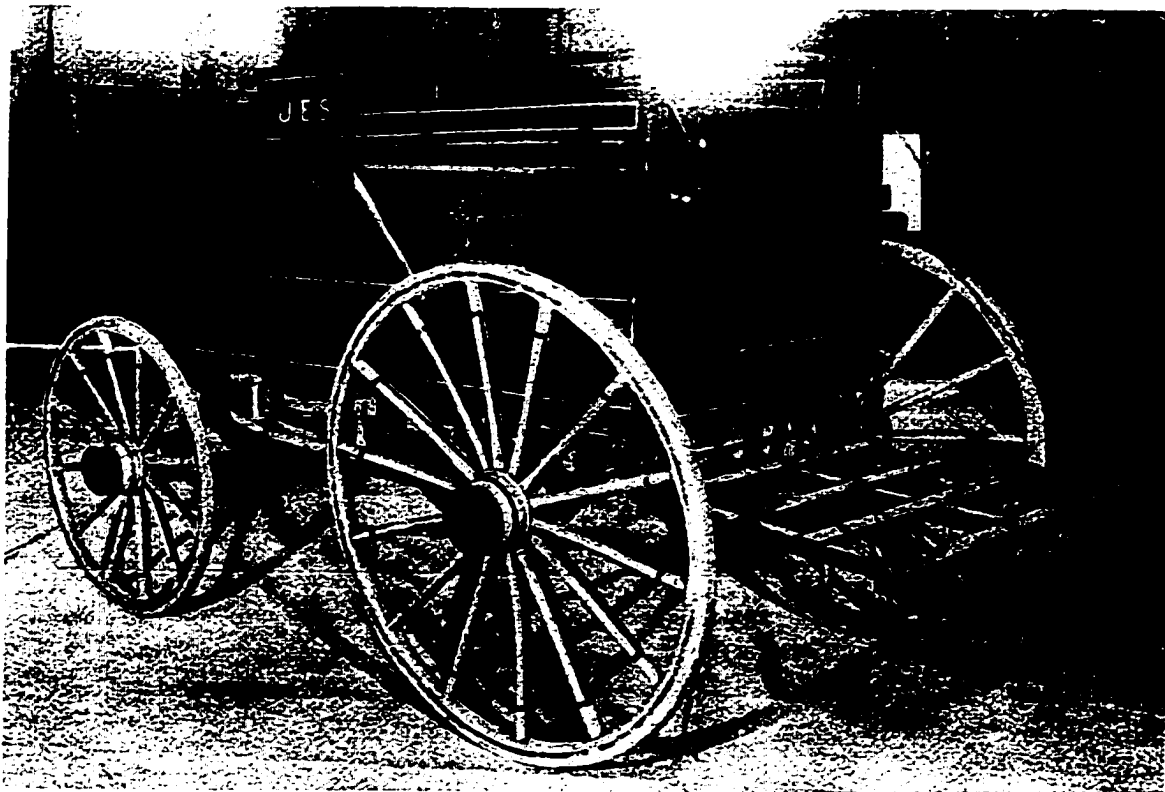


Figure 11. Peddler Licensing in Virginia, 1799-1850

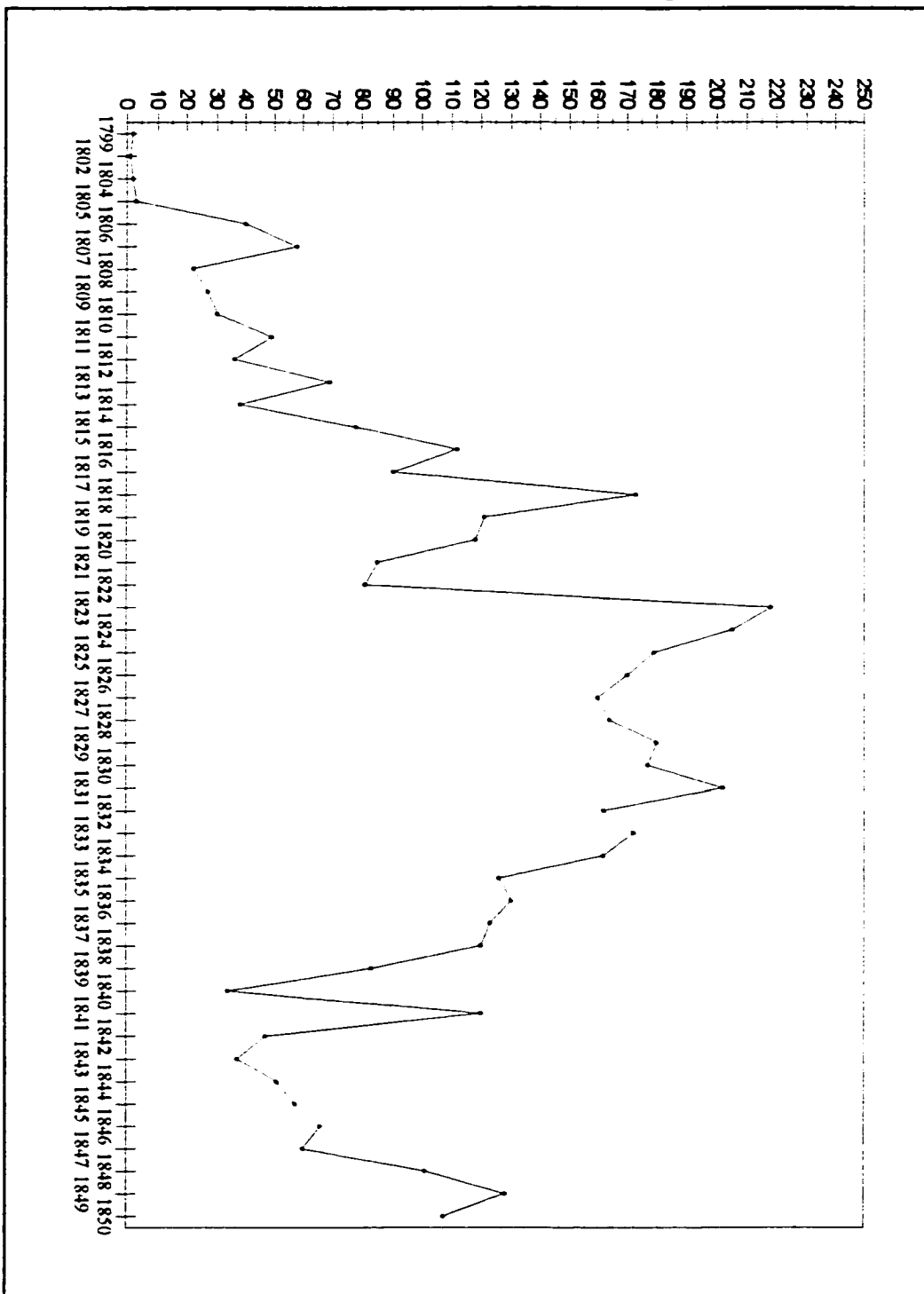


Figure 12. Map of Virginia Regions

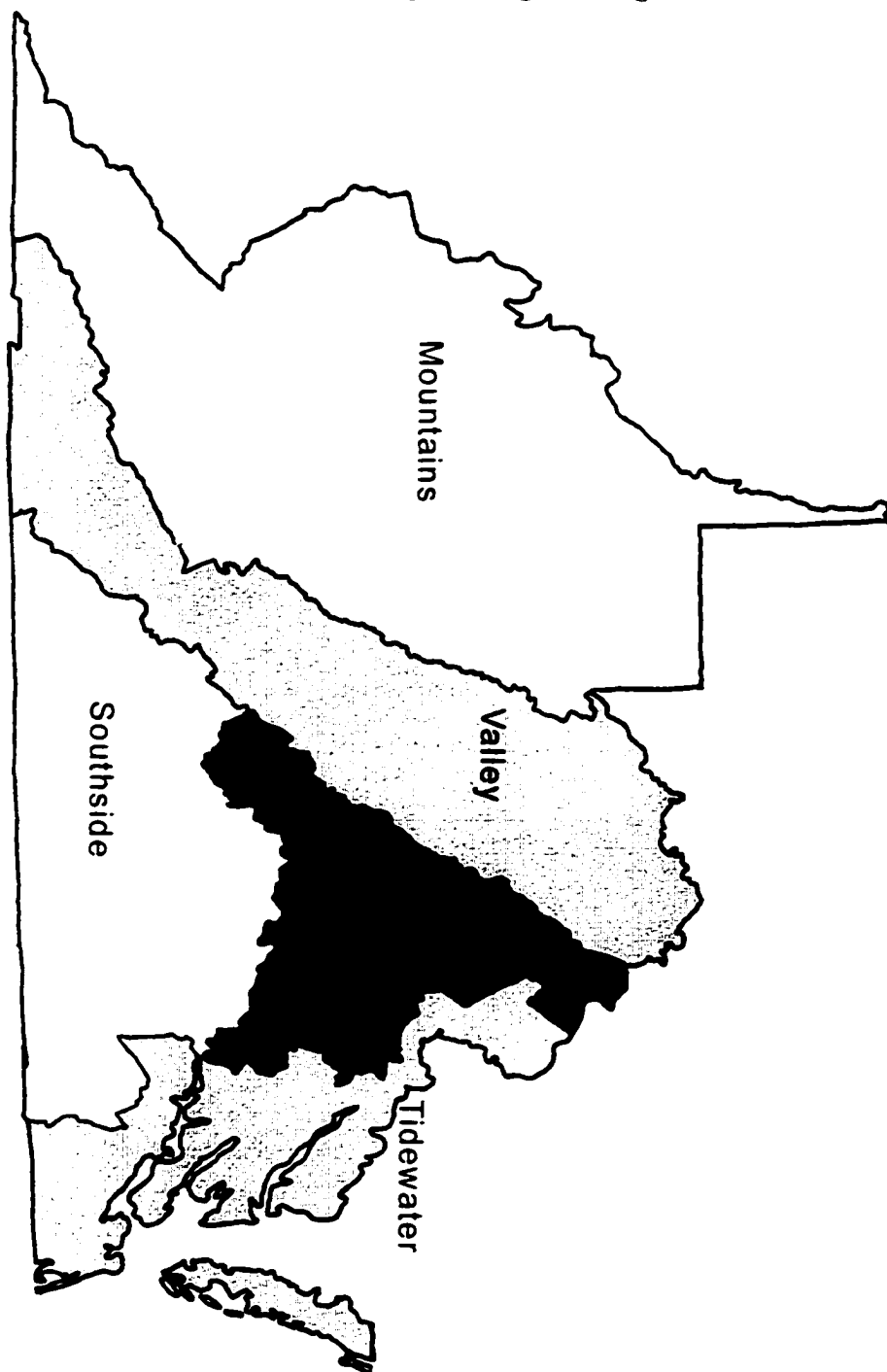


Figure 13. License Totals by Region

<u>Region</u>	<u>1799- 1810</u>	<u>1811- 1820</u>	<u>1815- 1822</u>	<u>1823- 1830</u>	<u>1831- 1840</u>	<u>1841- 1850</u>	<u>1799- 1850</u>
Middle	59	173	173	242	194	145	845
Mountains	5	34	29	182	282	152	660
Southside	78	344	311	638	441	218	1778
Tidewater	24	111	126	257	137	62	628
Valley	19	222	219	134	260	197	865
Virginia	185	844	858	1453	1314	774	4776

Figure 14. Concentrations of Peddler Licensing, 1799-1850

<u>Number (n) of Licenses Issued in One Year</u>	<u>Number of Instances a Locality Issued (n) Licenses</u>
0	678
1	981
2	496
3	250
4	152
5	101
6	49
7	32
8	14
9	15
10	2
11	6
13	1
17	1
19	1
40	1
Total	5,454 (4,776 licenses)

Figure 15. Frequency of a Locality Issuing 5 or More Licenses in a Year, 1799-1850

<u>Region</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Middle	41
Mountains	20
Southside	118
Tidewater	15
Valley	29

Figure 16. Frequency of a Locality Reporting No Licenses in a Year, 1799-1850

<u>Region</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Middle	91
Mountains	160
Southside	69
Tidewater	234
Valley	109

Figure 17. Regional Population per Peddler

<u>Region</u>	<u>1810</u>	<u>1820</u>	<u>1830</u>	<u>1841</u>	<u>1849</u>
Middle	17,890	12,780	6,060	16,480	11,680
Mountains	40,180	37,010	5,210	14,540	8,250
Southside	23,090	6,020	5,820	6,200	11,360
Tidewater	117,020	16,610	9,620	28,900	33,890
Valley	84,240	5,780	10,090	7,310	7,270

Figure 18. Peddler Concentrations in Median Counties

<u>County</u>	<u>Region</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Peddlers</u>	<u>Population in 1820</u>	<u>Population per Peddler</u>
Orange	Middle	1824	6	12,880	2,147
Cabell	Mountains	1824	2	4,789	2,395
Cumberland	Southside	1823	5	11,023	2,205
Mathews	Tidewater	1824	2	6,920	3,460
Wythe	Valley	1823	1	9,692	9,692

Figure 19. Peddler Concentrations in Counties with a High Number of Licenses

<u>County</u>	<u>Region</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Peddlers</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Population per Peddler</u>
Albemarle	Middle	1824	8	19,747 (1820)	2,468
Kanawha	Mountains	1829	9	9,326 (1830)	1,036
Charlotte	Southside	1824	13	13,290 (1820)	1,022
Accomack	Tidewater	1829	7	16,656 (1830)	2,379
Grayson	Valley	1831	7	7,675 (1830)	1,096

Figure 20. Stores in 1840 by Region

<u>Region</u>	<u>Stores</u>	<u>Population Per Store</u>	<u>Total Store Capital</u>	<u>Store Capital per capita</u>
Middle	766	556	\$4,201,133	\$13.44
Mountains	409	732	\$1,991,442	\$ 8.87
Southside	566	841	\$4,495,631	\$11.10
Tidewater	548	557	\$3,084,052	\$ 9.21
Valley	447	580	\$2,912,145	\$11.76

Figure 21. Stores in 1840 by County

<u>County</u>	<u>Region</u>	<u>Stores</u>	<u>Population Per Store</u>	<u>Total Store Capital</u>	<u>Store Capital per capita</u>
Albemarle	Middle	74	309	\$302,300	\$13.19
Orange	Middle	15	608	\$ 95,300	\$10.44
Cabell	Mountains	22	371	\$ 67,600	\$ 8.28
Kanawha	Mountains	29	467	\$117,000	\$ 8.62
Charlotte	Southside	20	729	\$133,640	\$ 9.16
Cumberland	Southside	16	649	\$163,300	\$15.70
Accomack	Tidewater	47	363	\$125,050	\$ 7.31
Mathews	Tidewater	20	372	\$ 33,900	\$ 4.56
Grayson	Valley	11	826	\$ 40,125	\$ 4.42
Wythe	Valley	15	625	\$173,000	\$18.45

Figure 22. Total Population and Percent Growth in Virginia, 1800-1850

<u>Region</u>	<u>1800</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1810</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1820</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1830</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1840</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1850</u>
Middle	198,903	8	214,678	7	230,051	11	254,553	-3	247,252	9	268,688
Mountains	48,122	67	80,356	38	111,027	41	156,359	30	203,592	30	263,886
Southside	252,965	10	277,060	9	300,920	12	337,803	-3	328,529	4	340,775
Tidewater	224,814	4	234,029	-1	232,495	4	240,624	-4	231,161	3	237,227
Valley	155,348	8	168,477	13	190,623	16	222,066	-1	219,171	19	261,712
Virginia	886,101	11	983,152	9	1,074,819	14	1,220,978	2	1,249,764	14	1,421,661

Figure 23. Slave Population and Percentage of Total Population, 1800-1850

<u>Region</u>	<u>1800</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1810</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1820</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1830</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1840</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1850</u>	<u>%</u>
Middle	89,887	37	102,471	42	113,955	45	124,958	44	118,869	48	127,385	48
Mtns	2,630	2	5,127	3	8,335	4	11,515	5	12,266	4	13,870	4
So'side	122,208	45	143,422	49	159,064	50	179,618	51	173,156	51	176,320	53
Tidewtr	110,104	52	113,814	50	108,978	48	111,744	48	103,225	46	104,208	47
Valley	20,927	6	27,682	9	34,816	11	41,922	12	37,192	15	43,124	15

Figure 25. Clock and Dry Goods Peddler Licensing by Region, 1830-1850

	1830-1839		1840-1850	
	Clocks	Dry Goods	Clocks	Dry Goods
Middle	26	202	10	138
Mountains	60	247	25	112
Southside	41	443	14	203
Tidewater	18	137	3	62
Valley	47	220	19	168
Virginia	192	1,249	71	683

Figure 26. Peddling Territories of the Woodruffs and Warners

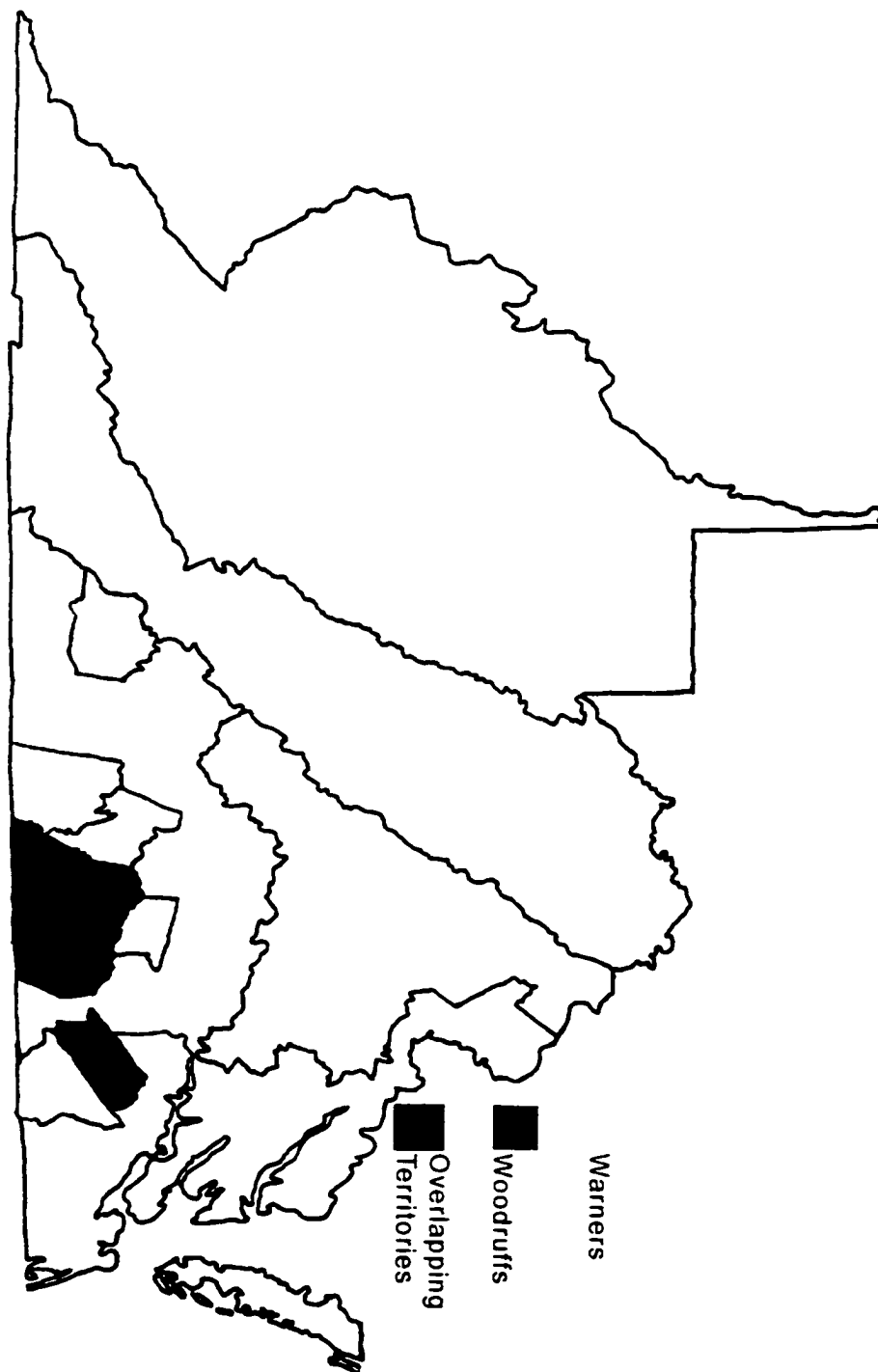


Figure 27. Peddler Licensing In Winchester, Virginia

1820-21	1821-22	1823-24
<u>Nov. 3, 1820</u>	<u>Aug. 3, 1821</u>	<u>Nov. 30, 1823</u>
Smith Blackman	John Peck	Smith Blackman
Robert Drakely	John Sherman	Francis Boyd
Thomas Drakely		William French
John Peck	<u>Nov. 30, 1821</u>	James Newton
John Sherman	Rodney Brace	Sterling Pierce
	Henry Howard	
<u>Dec. 1, 1820</u>	William Hubbard	
David Blackman	Marcus Parker	
Willis Brocket	Charles Phelps	
Henry Griswold	Silas Phelps	
Byrn Viets		
	<u>Jan. 4, 1822</u>	
	Thomas Drakely	

Figure 28. Territory of the Winchester Tinware Depot, 1820-1823

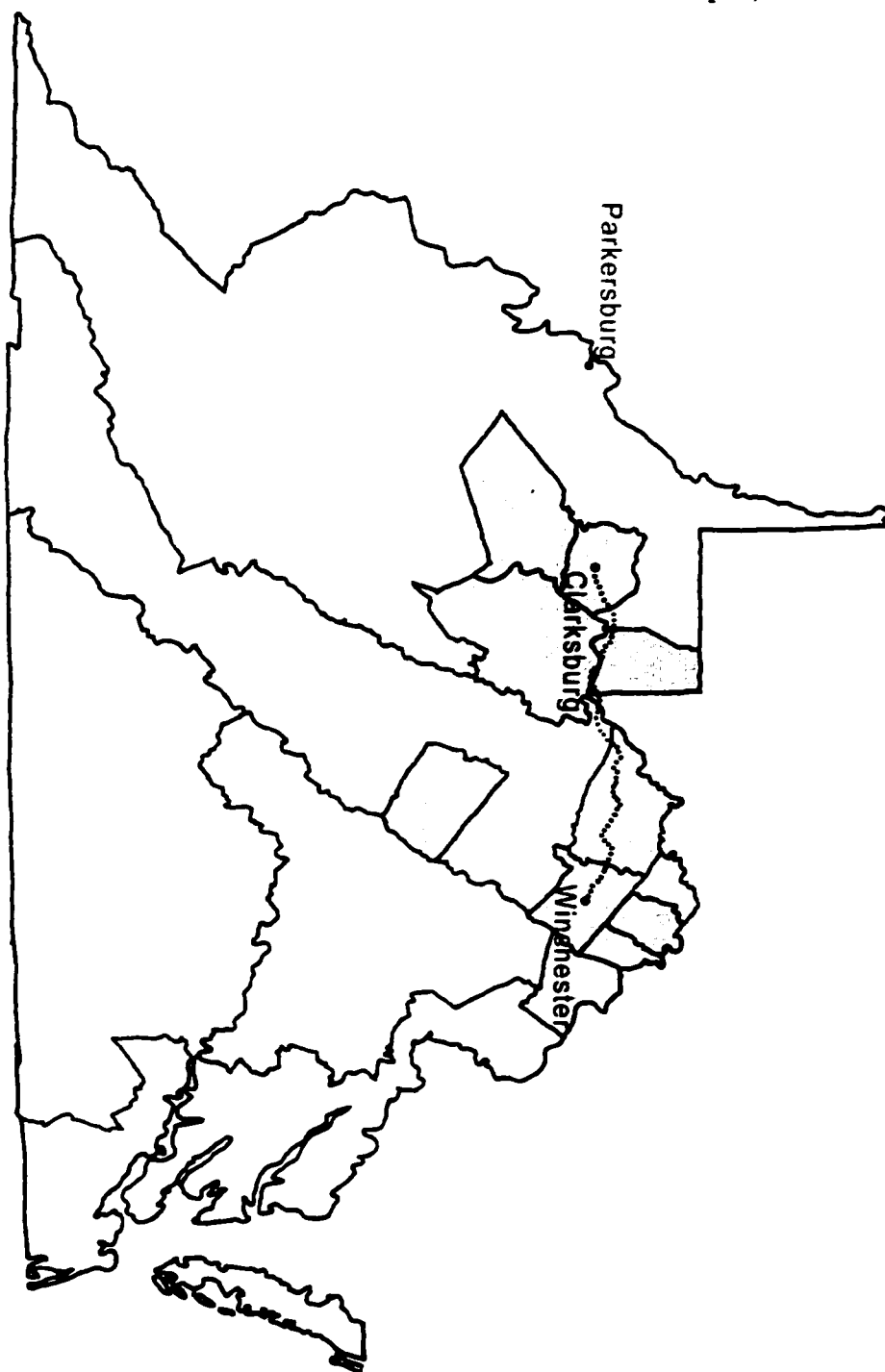


Figure 29. Territory of Clark & Haskell's Baltimore Tinware Shop, 1820-1821

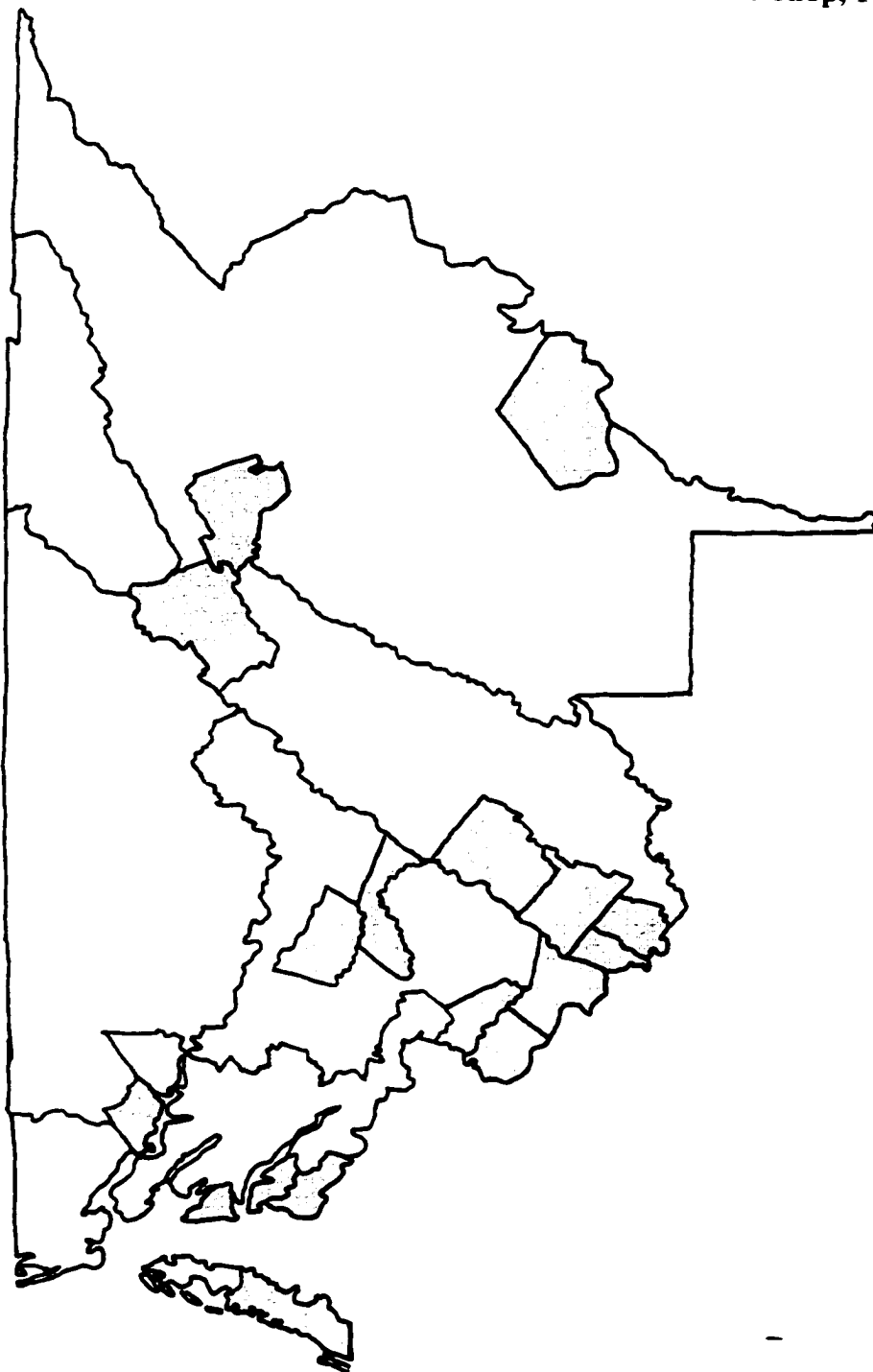


Figure 30. Tinware purchased by Chatfield Alcott from B. B. Tisdale
 Chatfield Alcott, "Journal to the South." Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Bought of Tisdale 31 of December 1821

1 ten Quarts	3/6
2 three Quarts	2/4
2 lantern pans	2/2
2 half galons	1/6
2 tea pots	1/3
3 Round pans	1/1
2 qts[?]	/10
4 Basons	/9
1 half sheat	/7
9 pints	/6
16 half pints	/3
12 tarts	/3
3 tumblers	12/
1 grose of butons	25
January 1 1822	
2 coffee pots	29 56
1 do do	18
1 do do	18
1 Bucett [Bucket]	18
2 cups 3	6
Wednesday 2	
1 Bucett	18
23 measure qut	18

Figure 31. Articles Removed by William Judd from a Shipment of Tinware
 William Judd (Petersburg, VA) to R & B Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 9/23/1820. Wilcox
 Family Papers, BHS.

6 Cov ^d pails				
5 gallon coffee potts	3/6		£1..18.. 6	
13 Three qt Coffee potts				
3 Open pails				
2 Bundle Boxes	2/4		2.. 2.. 0	
24 Lantern pans	2/2		2..12.. 0	
12 Five qt Coffee pots	2/-		1.. 4.. 0	
18 Small cov ^d Buckets				
18 Half Gallon pans				
10 three[?] pt Coffee pots	1/6		3.. 9.. 0	
50 Round pans				
5 Strainers				
3 open Buckets	1/1		3.. 2..10	
24 Baisons	/9		0..18.. 0	
50 Half pts	/3½		0..14.. 7	
25 Rattle[?] Boxes	2		<u>0.. 4.. 2</u>	
			£15.. 5.. 1	
	dis[count] 1/5		5.. 8.. 4	
			£10..16.. 9	
25 Whistles			<u>.. 1.. 6</u>	
			£10..15.. 3	\$36.37½
3 Nests of trunks 17/			2..11.. 0	
12 Sugar bowls /10			<u>..10.. 0</u>	
			3.. 1.. 0	
	dis 1/12		5.. 1	
			£ 3..15..11	<u>9.32</u>
				45.69½

Figure 32. Territory of the Wilcoxes' Petersburg Tinware Shop, 1818-1823

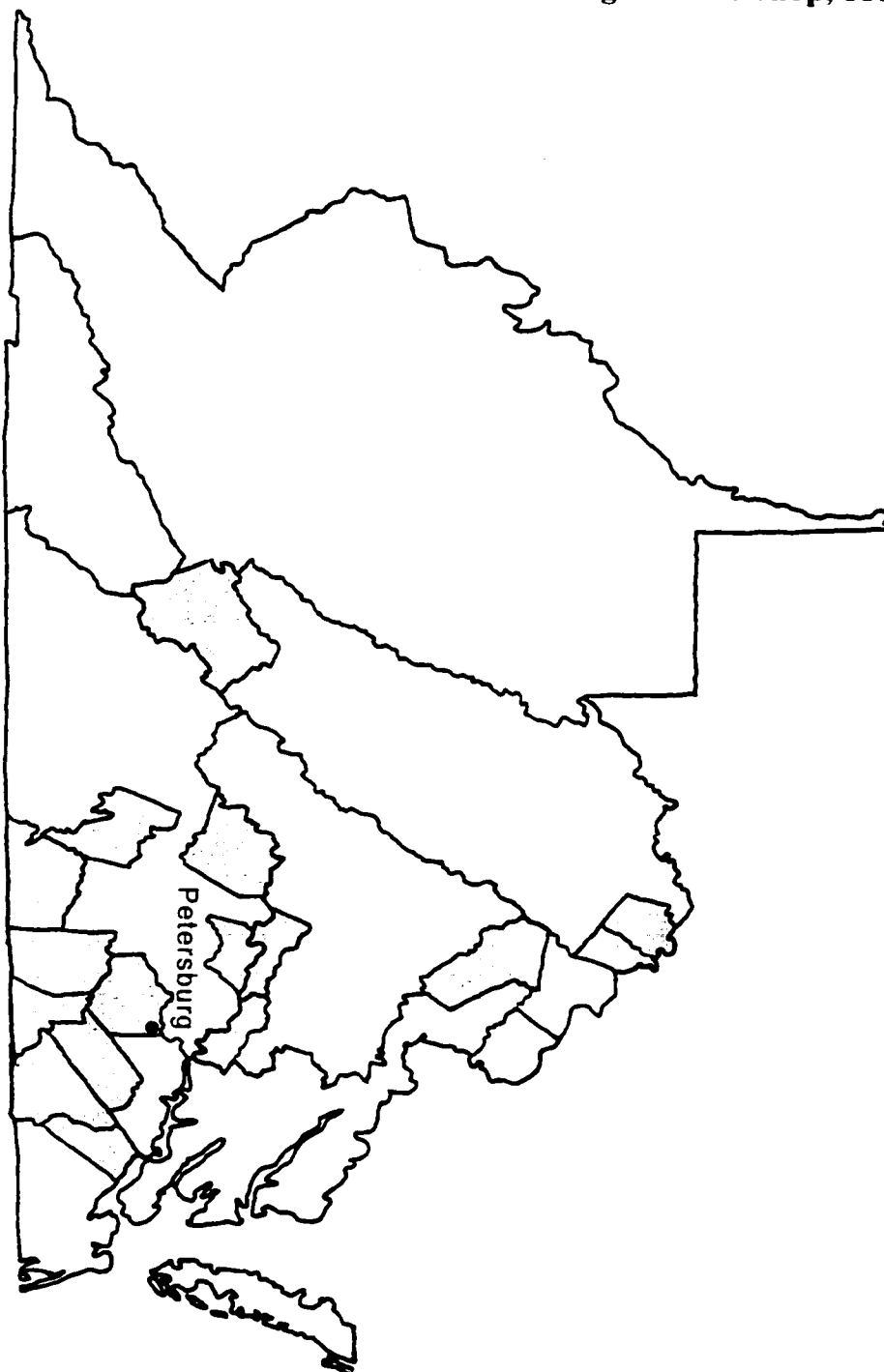


Figure 33. Tin Peddler Licensing in Virginia, 1813-1850

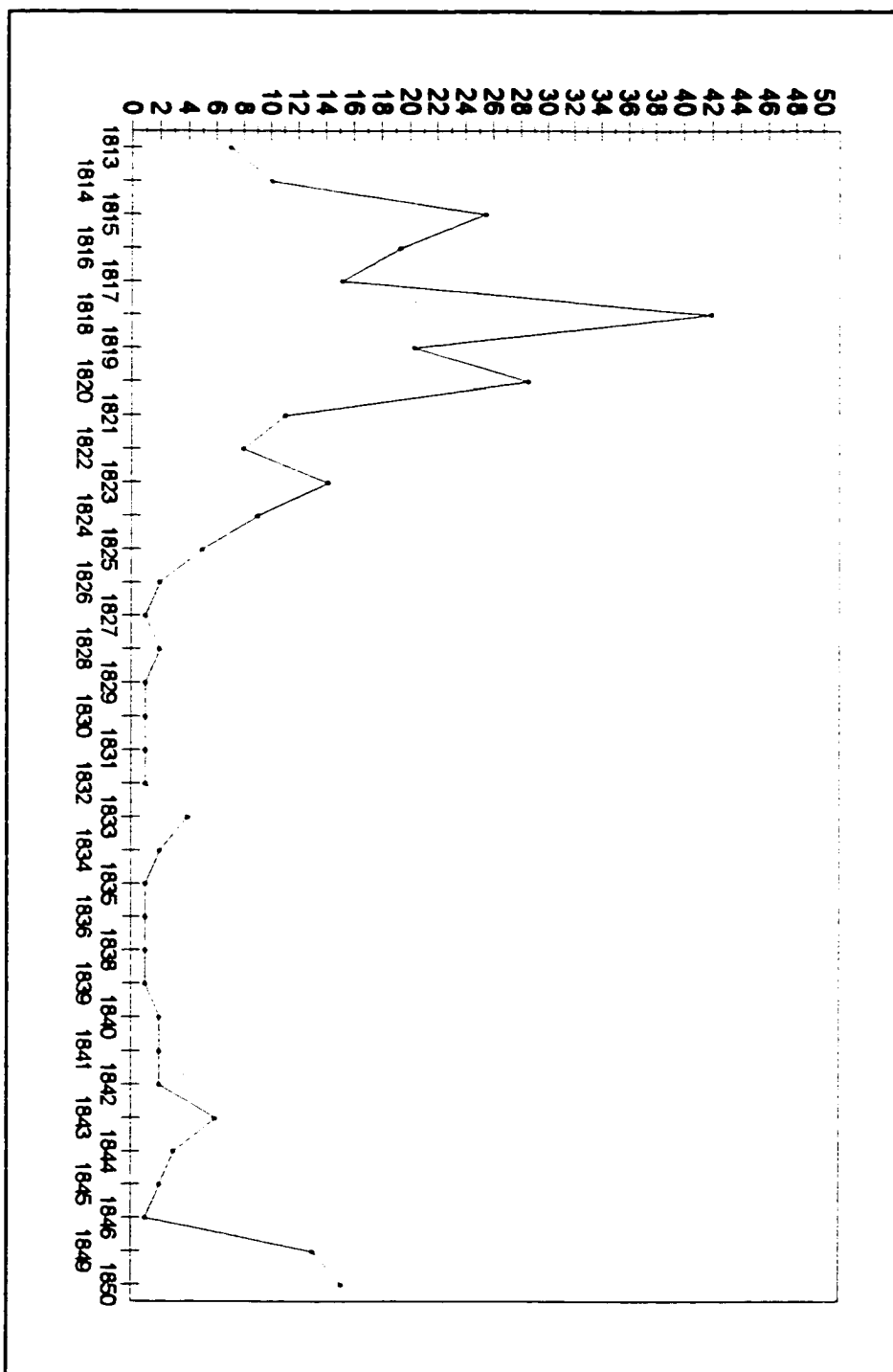


Figure 34. Latham & Robinson, Clock Peddlers, 1830-1831

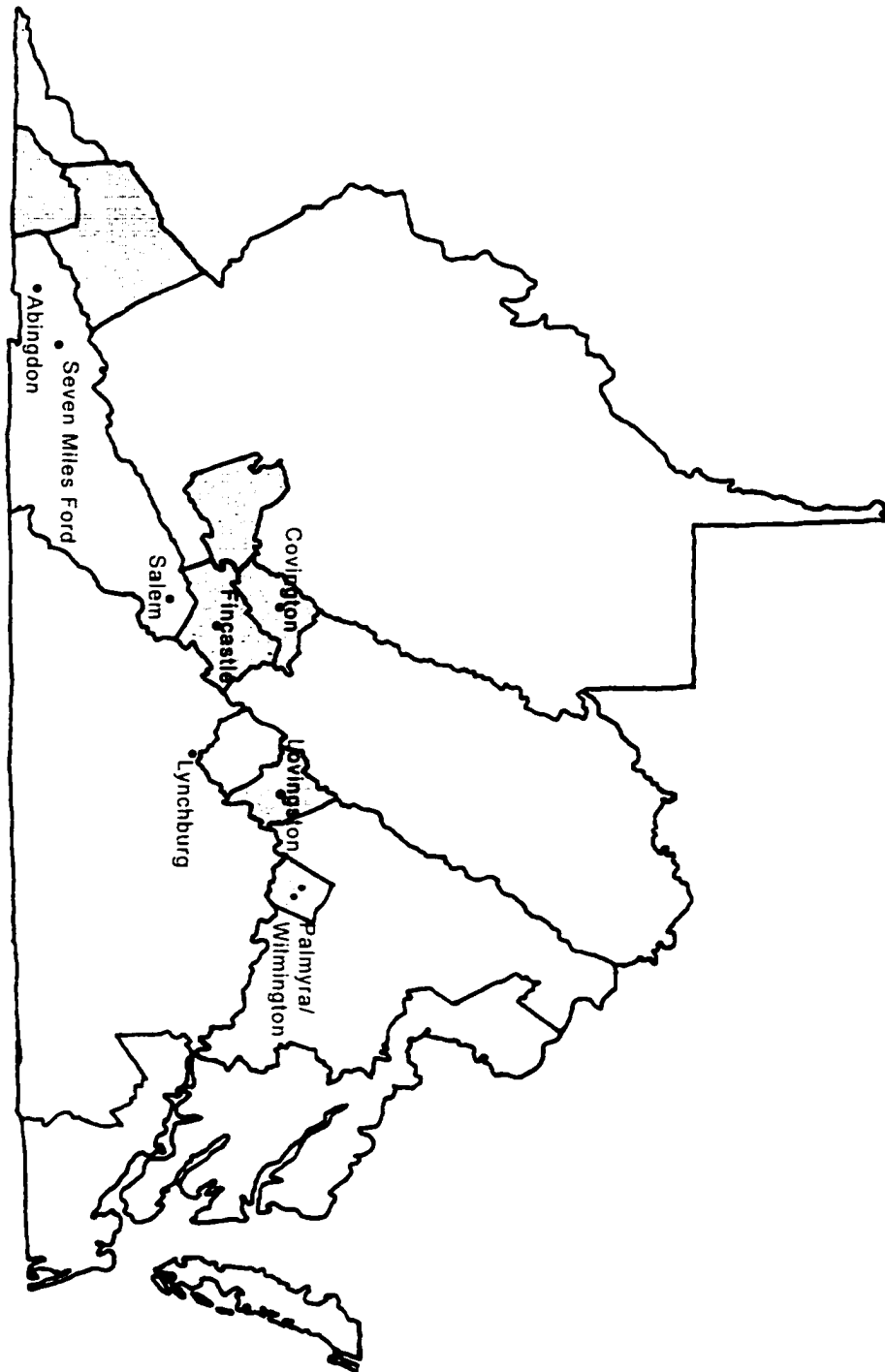


Figure 35. Orville Rice & Company, Clock Peddlers, 1833-1835

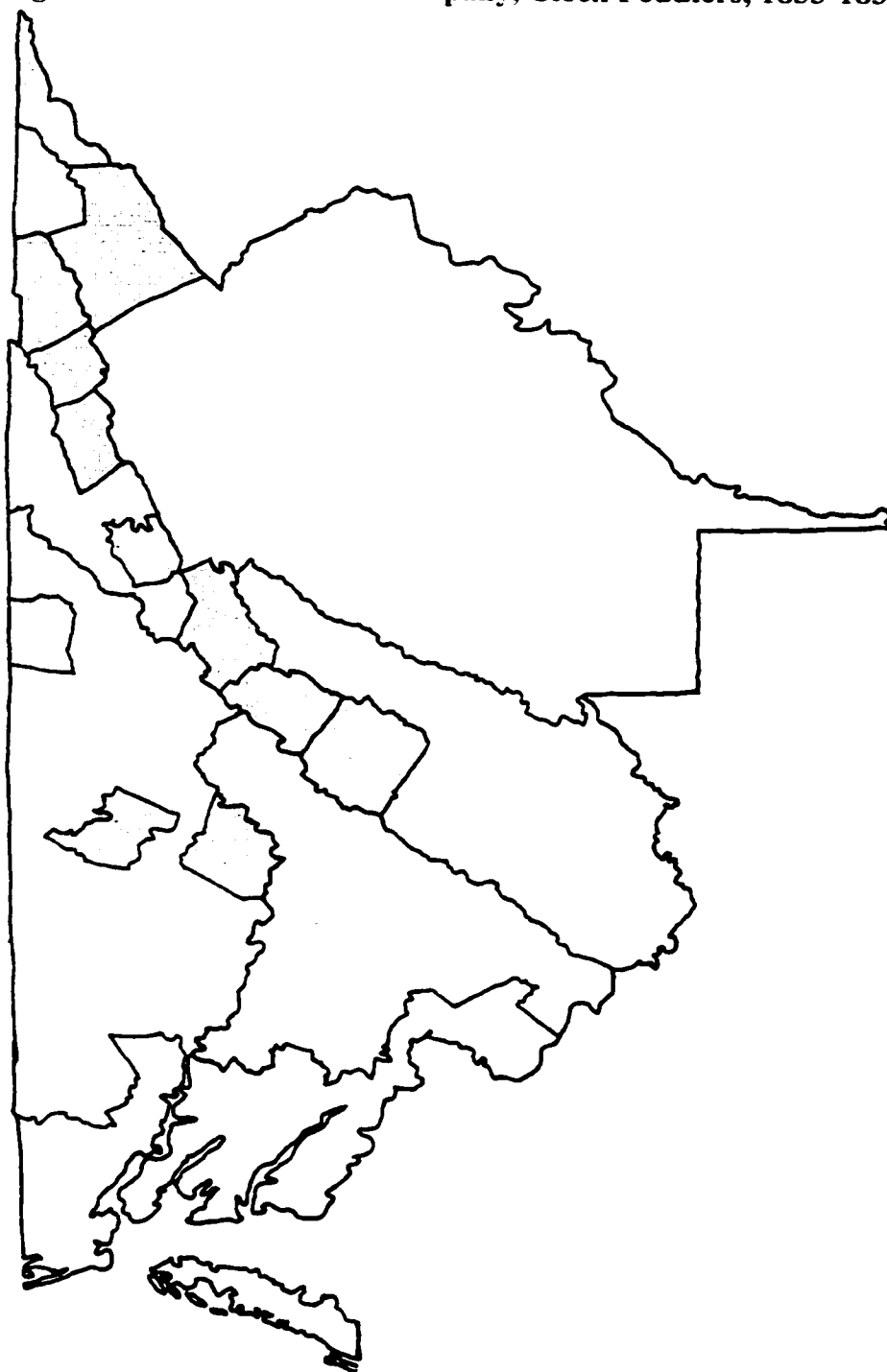


Figure 36. Gunn, Mattoon, Gilbert & Company, Clock Peddlers, 1836-1841

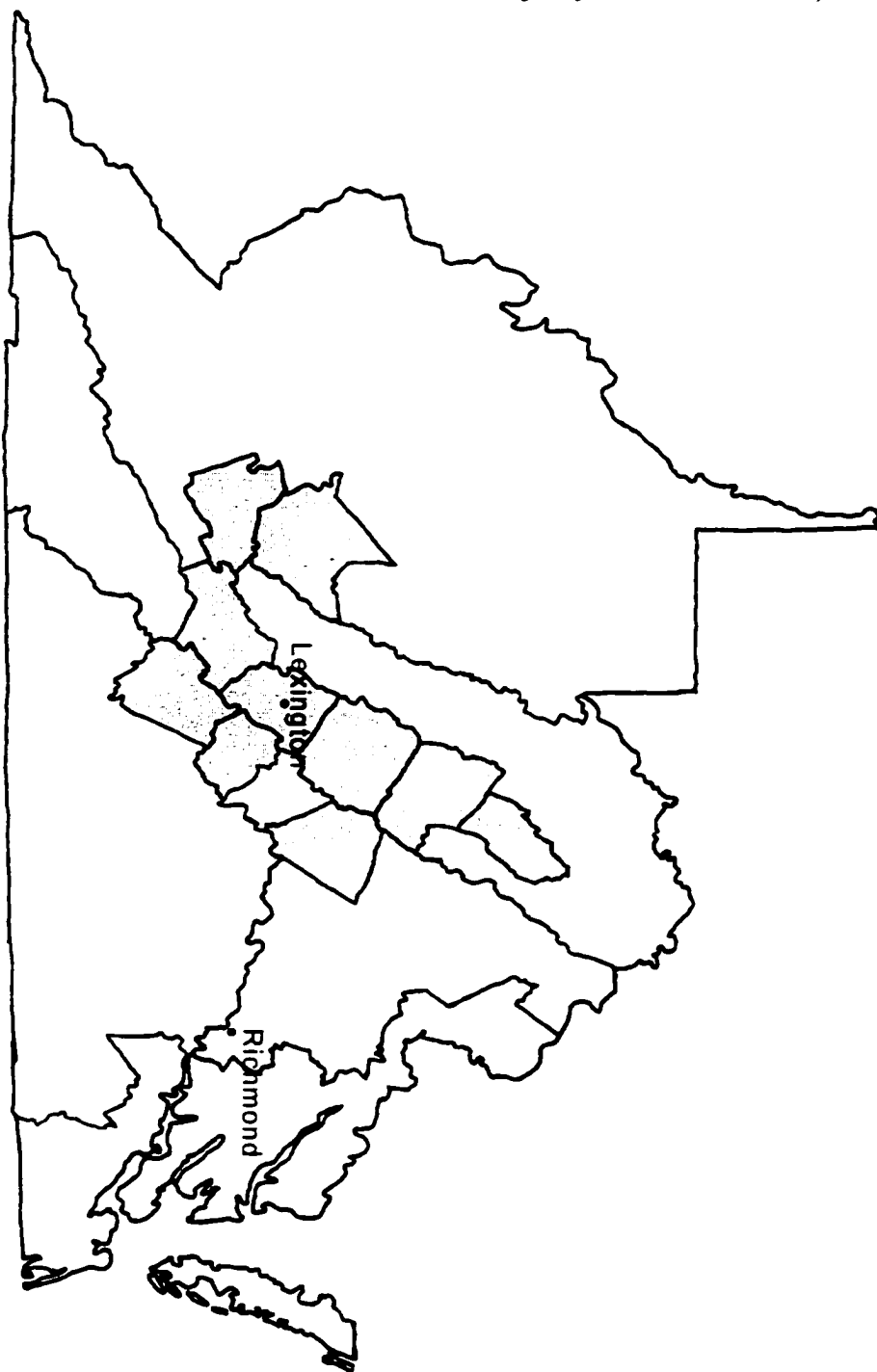
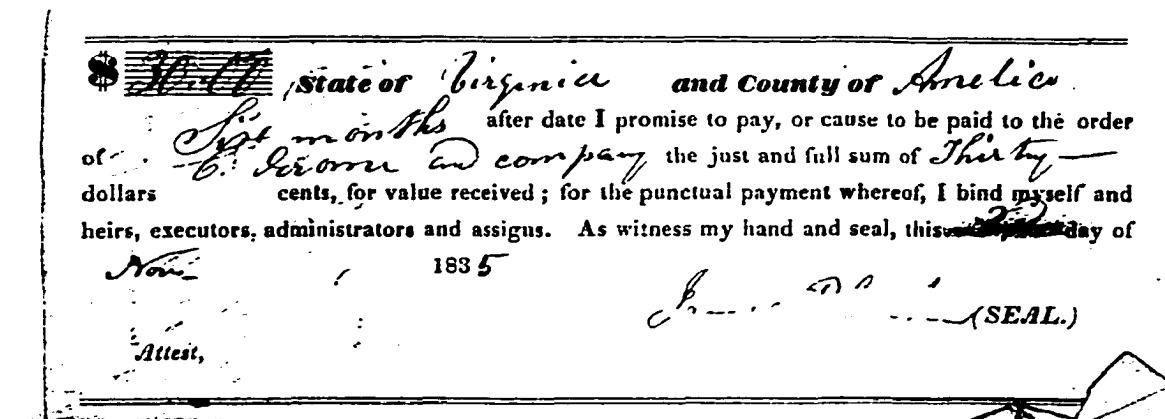


Figure 37. Clock note, from the Cocke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society



CHAPTER 3
THE FACE-TO-FACE ECONOMY OF THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH:
TRADE AND CONVIVIALITY BETWEEN WHITE AND BLACK SOUTHERNERS

Within the parameters of petty trade, a face-to-face market culture permeated the bottom of the social structure of the antebellum South. The motivations of the participants varied significantly, but the impetuses of poor whites, free blacks, and enslaved blacks to enter the marketplace ought to be considered as a whole. The investigation of the participation of non-slaveholding whites and enslaved blacks in the market has been extensive, but in separate studies. Petty trade should be examined as a biracial phenomenon, for people of diverse backgrounds encountered each other daily in the marketplace. The intersection of the interests of poor whites and African Americans was of grave concern to planters, who wanted to isolate their labor force from market influences, and strove to divide the poorer classes of society along racial lines. Poor and middling whites, free blacks, and enslaved blacks articulated their traditional economic interests and rights in their convivial and mercantile activities. Most of the intercourse between these groups of people occurred within the context and infrastructure of the formal economy, but distinct networks and venues of exchange also arose. Planters and other foes of this activity viewed it as subversive, ascribed criminal values to this network, and denied that they shared any of the market values expressed by lower-class traders. Historians have offered many names for the relation of enslaved people, poor whites, and small farmers to the formal antebellum economy: underground economy, informal economy, peasant breach, social economy, and

egalitarian exchange capitalism.¹ I use the term face-to-face economy to describe an exchange system in which farmers, tenants, and enslaved people traded their small surpluses in petty transactions within and outside of the normal channels of trade. These were transactions which extended beyond the familiar neighborhoods of household exchange, but where all the players were petty, unestablished or semi-established dealers. Such dealers included the farmer who speculated in a few staple items which he brought back in his wagon from a trip to the city, the enslaved man or woman who sold a few garden vegetables at the County Court or nearby town, the poorly capitalized peddler who sold Yankee notions for farm produce and a little cash, and the local huckster who attended every public event to sell gingerbread, sweetmeats, and whiskey. It was probably possible to find barter exchange and cash transactions operating side by side in the face-to-face economy. These petty traders made reference to the defense of traditional rights and obligations ascribed by historians to a moral economy, but they were also eager to exploit the opportunities offered by the cash nexus of the capitalist marketplace.

¹ For a discussion of enslaved people's petty trade as a moral economy, see the following articles in the special issue of *Slavery & Abolition* 12 (May 1991), entitled "The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas": Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, "Introduction," pp. 1-27. John Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman'?: Slaves' Market-Related Activities in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860," pp. 131-169. John T. Schlotterbeck, "The Internal Economy of Slavery in Rural Piedmont Virginia," pp. 170-181. See also: Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). Loren Schweninger, "The Underside of Slavery: The Internal Economy, Self-Hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-1865," *Slavery and Abolition* 12 (September 1991):1-22. Lawrence T. McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community," in Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Joseph F. Tripp, and Lyon G. Tyler, Jr., editors, *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988):31-44. Alex Lichtenstein, "'That Disposition to Theft, with Which They Have Been Branded': Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law," *Journal of Social History* 21 (Spring 1988):415-416.

Yankee peddlers, southern hucksters, and southern consumers had much intercourse in the face-to-face economy. To be sure there might have been some competition between southern petty traders and Yankee peddlers, but they often carried very distinct goods and merchandise. I draw a distinction between hucksters and peddlers. By peddlers, I mean long distance traders who sold "foreign" manufactures and products. Hucksters designate local traders who sold predominantly goods of their own manufacture or produce in local markets or nearby towns and cities. Licensing laws distinguished the two groups by the origin of the commodity, whether made in the state, or of "foreign" manufacture. Hucksters generally did not require licenses. Yankee peddlers and southern hucksters probably facilitated each other's trade; the itinerant northerners introduced many exotic and desirable goods into the face-to-face economy, and southern hucksters might have eased the Yankees' entree into the interracial marketplace.

The lower ranks of Virginia manipulated their access to the formal economy to their advantage. They utilized their roles in the formal economy as small producers and transporters of staple commodities to foster exchange networks among poor and middling Virginians. The boundaries of the niche occupied by watermen, teamsters, and hucksters in the formal economy were continually contested by planters and merchants who sought to order commerce into regular channels. Petty traders continually found ways to divert small amounts of produce away from the formal arteries of commerce. These lower-class middlemen were attractive alternatives for small producers who wished to limit their arrearage to established local merchants. In this fashion, the face-to-face economy reached up into the middling strata of southern society. The strategy of limited market participation was common in early nineteenth-century America. Fluctuations in market prices made

intensive staple agriculture unattractive to small farmers who wanted to buffer themselves and their property from the vagaries of the marketplace.² The face-to-face economy offered outlets for the “butter and egg” economy, the cash market for women’s domestic production. Profits from petty trade of home produce afforded households some independence from the capitalist market for staple crops. Poor and middling southerners did not reject the market, but limited their participation enough to keep themselves out of total dependence upon masters, employers, landlords, storekeepers, and factors. Petty exchange in the capitalist marketplace was an alternative means of earning a competence for poor southerners who spurned the life of dependence that southern society assigned them as slaves, quasi-free blacks, laborers, tenants, or poor house inmates. Petty traders embraced the marketplace, ironically, in order to avoid the capitalist domination of labor.

Slaveholders deemed the unregulated face-to-face economy as a threat to the plantation regime. The planter class countenanced trading by the enslaved only when it did not challenge their economic and social hegemony.³ However, as the capitalist marketplace created new opportunities and new challenges to the slave-based economy of the plantation South, planters felt pressured to reconsolidate their power at the expense of the rights of the poor and enslaved. In the two decades following the Missouri Compromise, slaveholders

² Vickers, “Competency and Competition,” p. 7. Harry L. Watson, “‘The Common Rights of Mankind:’ Subsistence, Shad, and Commerce in the Early Republican South,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 83 (June 1996):13-43. Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*, pp. 15, 122-126. John T. Schlotterbeck, “The ‘Social Economy’ of an Upper South Community: Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1815-1860,” *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies*, edited by Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 3-28. Steven Hahn, *The Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry*. Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men & Great Proprietors: Revolutionary Settlement of Maine, 1760-1820* (1990).

³Lichtenstein, “‘That Disposition to Theft,’” pp. 415-416.

felt increasingly besieged by the forces of the free market, abolitionism, slave revolts, and the dynamic economic and political competition of the industrializing Northeast. Assertions of enslaved people to sell the fruits of their labor on their own in the marketplace disrupted the calculus of slavery, and interracial commerce between poor whites and blacks threatened the class rule of the planters. Paradoxically, the planters who led a national political campaign for free trade, clamped down on the rights of poor whites, free blacks, and enslaved blacks to autonomous participation in the marketplace.

An important service sector in the antebellum economy was the transportation trade. Transportation workers resembled peddlers, because the farmers, wagoners and boatmen who hauled produce to markets often returned with foreign staples and merchandise. Small southern farmers often carted their produce themselves to market.⁴ Small landholders who lived near southern cities and towns were often seen at the markets selling melons and vegetables, or driving about the city selling firewood.⁵ Witt Bowden described an inland triangular trade that wagoners conducted in the antebellum South between backcountry farmers and herders, cotton planters, and tobacco planters. Their primary commodities were products from the backcountry, especially pork, whiskey, brandy, and homespun cloth for the enslaved. The wagoners exchanged these items for cotton, plug and twist tobacco, store goods, and staples such as sugar, salt, and coffee. They hauled the cotton to the growing mill industry in Virginia and the Carolinas, and brought tobacco and pork to plantations in

⁴ Janney, *Janney's Virginia*, pp. 32-33.

⁵ *The Farmer's Register* 8 (Sept 1840), p. 572.

the cotton belt.⁶ There were three types of wagon-freighting professionals: “sharpshooters” hired themselves out to haul goods to any location specified; “regulars” hauled goods over the same routes continuously; and companies operated “line teams” which specialized in long-distance hauling and freight. Clock peddling companies often hired local wagoners to haul clocks from ports to inland depots, or from one clock stand to another.⁷ The enslaved and free watermen who plied the James River and its tributaries and the Kanawha canal provided a necessary service to the agricultural economy of Virginia. Planters and farmers near the waterway relied upon the boatmen to transport their crops to market.⁸ To operate a large flatboat required four laborers and a pilot. Specially trained enslaved men often made up these boat crews, who were either hired or owned by the boat owner,⁹ but free blacks and whites also made up large proportions of the watermen. Southern statutes legitimated the petty trade of freehold farmers in local produce and staple goods, but heavily regulated outsiders who peddled goods of “foreign” manufacture and propertyless speculators who profited from their position in the channels of trade.

The transportation business generated economic and personal independence for African Americans. Free black proprietors who owned boats or wagons were not uncommon. The census of 1850 for Prince Edward County, Virginia, listed fifty-eight

⁶ Witt Bowden, *The Industrial History of the United States* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1930), p. 170.

⁷ Seth Wheeler Papers, Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. Atherton, “Itinerant Merchandising,” pp. 48-49. idem. *Southern Country Store*, pp. 96-97.

⁸ For example, see the receipt for \$27.62, dated 5/20/1820, given by John, the “head-man in John Craddock’s boat,” to Benjamin Brand for transporting forty-eight barrels of flour. Benjamin Brand Papers, 1807-1833, VHS.

⁹ Wilma A. Dunaway, *American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 212-13, 217-18.

boatmen, the largest occupational group in the county's free black community. There were many property owners among the forty or fifty free boatmen who lived in Petersburg in 1850.¹⁰ Edward S. Abdy met a free black wagoner on a stagecoach in the Shenandoah Valley who was very successful. He owned two wagons, which he drove between Tennessee and Baltimore. His teams and wagons were worth between \$1,200 and \$1,500. In business this free black wagoner's word "would be taken as soon as any man's," but in the social realm of a stagecoach or a tavern, he had to defer questions directed to him to white passengers and to wait until all the white patrons had eaten before he was served.¹¹ Some free black peddlers resembled the semi-autonomy of hired Yankee peddlers. Frederick Law Olmsted encountered two free black tobacco peddlers in South Carolina around 1853. The man and his son, who came from Rockingham County, North Carolina, were paid \$10 and \$5 per month respectively to drive two wagons for a white proprietor.¹² Black peddlers faced harsh discriminations that their white counterparts did not suffer. The wages of these two men were far lower than the \$25 to \$75 white peddlers earned, and their movements and opportunities were far more circumscribed.

White teamsters were reputedly proud, independent, and rough characters. It was common for wagoners to keep a stone quart bottle of whiskey in their wagon box along with

¹⁰ Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942), pp. 78-80.

¹¹ Edward Strutt Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834* (London: John Murray, 1835), vol 2, pp. 290-291.

¹² Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom. A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 162-164.

a curry comb and brush, according to John Jay Janney.¹³ Since most wagoners had ties to the local community, they were probably not as intemperate as workers in the more transient, long-distance transportation trades, such as stage drivers, canal and river boatmen.¹⁴ Teamsters took pride in their vehicles and their teams, which might include as many as four or six horses. Wagoners from the Blue Ridge region of Virginia decorated their horses with bells and braids and rosettes of red and yellow fabric.¹⁵ In his novel, *The Valley of Shenandoah*, George Tucker remarked upon the conceit of Virginia wagoners. With his “blue painted wagon, and a dozen or more tinkling bells,” claimed Tucker, a wagoner was as proud as a planter-class dandy, such as the “South Carolina dashers” or one of the “old-fashioned James River gentry.” Furthermore, teamsters exhibited what Tucker termed “buckskin independence,” an assertive egalitarianism which manifested itself in inconveniencing upper-class travelers by “stopping up the road, upsetting gigs, and preventing carriages from passing them.”¹⁶ Southern wagoners who owned land were most likely small farmers who had very few direct economic relations with the plantation economy.¹⁷ The public roadways were one locus in which the planter class and farmers encountered each other. What Tucker termed as “insolence” on the part of wagoners was probably a conscious affirmation of their independence and equality. These small producers were very protective of their independent status within the plantation-dominated southern

¹³ Janney, *Janney's Virginia*, p. 33. For a view of wagoners en route between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, see Flint, *Recollections*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, p. 140-41.

¹⁵ Samuel Mordecai, *Richmond in By-Gone Days; Being Reminiscences of an Old Citizen* (Richmond: George M. West, 1856. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 56.

¹⁶ Tucker, *Valley of Shenandoah*, p. 141.

¹⁷ Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 39.

political economy.

Farmers asserted their right to sell their own produce and the incidental goods which they brought back from the market without the burden of a peddler's or merchant's license. For instance, John Farr of Pittsylvania County, Virginia, bought a barrel of brown sugar in Richmond in 1803 to carry back in his wagon. After reserving as much sugar as he needed for his own use, Farr sold the remainder to his neighbors "at first Costs, and expense of waggonage." Farr claimed he did not profit from his venture, yet he was fined \$100 for retailing goods without a license. Farr appealed to the Virginia legislature, and perhaps in response to his case, the lawmakers made specific changes to the retail licensing statute to allow this form of entrepreneurship. The session laws of 1808 stated that "any farmer or planter" could sell "salt, tea, sugar, molasses, coffee, spices, iron or steel, to his neighbours, when such articles were purchased as a return load on carrying his produce to market, in his waggon or otherwise." The commodities in which Virginia farmers could speculate were staple necessities, not finished products or luxuries.¹⁸ When the Georgia legislature raised license fees to the prohibitive amounts of \$1,000 per year for foot peddlers and \$2,000 for cart or horse peddlers in 1831, the law specifically exempted "traders in tin, stone, earthen and iron wares, actually manufactured in this State" from the tax. The Grand Jury of Putnam County was not satisfied with the exemptions. The jury members complained that the statute might tend to "prohibit our own citizens carrying through the country and selling such articles as they manufacture in greater abundance than the demand in their own immediate neighbourhood."¹⁹ These laws restricted this trading to citizens, particularly

¹⁸Pittsylvania County, 12/8/1803, LPLV. Virginia session laws, 2/5/1808.

¹⁹ *Georgia Journal*, 10/4/1832. Oliver H. Prince, *A Digest of the Laws of the State of*

farmers and planters, whose primary income was from agricultural production. Non-producers who speculated by retailing goods they did not manufacture themselves were regulated by taxes. Legitimate trade was delimited to local exchange networks of staple goods or local produce.

A northern visitor to Norfolk, Virginia in the early 1850s questioned the economy of the market women who came into town from the surrounding countryside to sell produce, poultry, and other vendibles. Miss Mendell noticed “little intelligence or spirit” among the white market women, who, if they calculated the costs of the trip and their own labor, “might better stay at home and eat [their produce] themselves.”²⁰ Thomas O. Larkin, a Yankee pedagogue who traveled in Wilmington, North Carolina, doubted the practicality of some backcountry farmers’ wagon trips. Larkin related the story of a farmer who made a long trip from the back country merely to sell two barrels of turpentine. Another man traveled thirty-five miles to sell only five bushels of oysters. The journey took two days and he had to use two bushels on the way to pay for food and shelter. The three remaining bushels bought the man a gallon of molasses.²¹ Maintaining independence from the local debt network headed by local merchants might have been a motivation for carrying small amounts of produce to distant markets. Local merchants likely offered lower prices for home productions than urban market prices.²² Marketing small surpluses were more than just economic transactions to these petty traders and consumers. The calculus of profit was

Georgia (Athens: Oliver H. Prince, 1837), p. 613.

²⁰ Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, pp. 251-252.

²¹ Robert J. Parker, “A Yankee in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 14 (1937), p. 334.

²² Charles J. Farmer found that debt avoidance stimulated high mobility among consumers. Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns*, pp. 138, 187.

not the sole motivation to participate in the market, but also conviviality, socializing, and travel. Selling goods and treating friends to alcohol raised self-esteem and fostered social ties. The face-to-face economy had a culture and a calculus of its own.

In their petitions to their legislatures for the right to sell goods they hauled back to their communities from trips to distant markets, farmers of the western piedmont regions of Virginia and North Carolina combined appeals to patriotism with a republican small producer ethic. "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights" was a rallying cry of the War of 1812 which protested the impressment of American seamen by the British navy and interference with American overseas trade. Teamsters adopted this slogan during the war, and it resonated far into the antebellum period among backcountry farmers. When the British fleet blockaded the coastwise trade of the United States during the War of 1812, interstate trade had to rely almost entirely on wagons for transportation.²³ Farmers from Burke County, North Carolina, protested an 1816 statute that raised the peddler license fee from \$6 per county per year to \$25 per county per year. The petitioners were appalled that after having fought for and "gain'd at the price of wounds & blood free Trade," they were "now

²³ Under the headline "Inland trade," *Nile's Weekly Register* reported in 1813 that a wagon loaded with \$3,000 worth of merchandize made the trip from Boston to Philadelphia in two weeks, despite the wretched state of the roads. *Nile's Weekly Register* 4 (3/13/1813): p. 32. Jonathan Ramsey sought a teamster through an advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant*, 2/15/1814, to haul "thirty hundred of goods" from Hartford, Connecticut, to Charleston, South Carolina, and back. Federalists who opposed the war satirized the effects of the war on interstate trade in a series of articles under the headlines "Jeffersonian Commerce," "Horse & Ox Marine News," and "Free Trade and Teamster's Rights;" at the top of each article was a woodcut of a wagon waving a banner emblazoned "No Impressment." The articles were written in the style of announcements of ship arrivals, except they published the arrival of wagons full of tinware, patent medicines, and other "notions" typically carried by peddlers. The Federalists condemned the war policy that had reduced America's overseas trade to the petty trade of the peddler. *Connecticut Courant*, October 5, 26; November 3, 10, 16, 17; 1813. These articles also appeared in the

prohibited from enjoying the fruits of their labour.” The farmers protested that the tax structure favored the rich merchant over the poor farmer: “farmers of small estates are prohibited from exchanging the products of their industry for merchandise to increase their stock by selling it again amongst their fellow citizens – while men of affluent fortunes may buy & sell at low tax.” The petitioners ended their appeal with a short poem:

We’ve fought for free Trade & suffer’d in pain,
If gain’d nothing by it – we’ve suffer’d in vain
free Trade was the Motto, our standard did bear
Pray repeal that edict, then your servants we are²⁴

High taxes imposed on peddlers in Virginia in 1842 disrupted the trade between backcountry Virginians and North Carolinians. The exchange between Virginia farmers and North Carolinians who peddled cotton yarns that were spun in Carolina factories afforded the means “to a grate many Poor familys” in the Great Valley of Virginia to clothe themselves. But the high peddling fees put a stop to the trade, and compelled the Virginians to buy cotton for cash from merchants at a much higher price. Virginia farmers from Grayson and Carroll counties, which lie due north of Burke County, North Carolina, petitioned the legislature to modify or repeal the act “so as to affoord free trade and Sailors wrights betwine us and our nabours the north calians.”²⁵ The legislature heeded this appeal to

Baltimore Federal Gazette.

²⁴“Petition for the repeal of tax on Pedlars,” 12/2/1817, NC State Archives. See also Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), pp. 37, 51.

²⁵Grayson and Carroll Counties, 12/7/1842, LPLV. Petitioners from Loudoun County questioned the fairness of taxing a poorly financed peddler more than a merchant with a “commanding trading capital of \$4000.” The Loudoun County petitioners sought to protect “the just & Equal Rights of the citizen” under mercantile taxation. Loudoun County, 1/21/1842, LPLV. George Brent challenged the equity of charging Valley farmers a \$100 peddler license fee to sell fish they bought in Alexandria to resell to their neighbors. George Brent (Winchester) to Thomas T. Fauntleroy, Esq, 2/2/1855,

patriotism and reduced the license fee for peddlers of cotton yarns to \$10 per county per year. The petty trade in which small producers engaged was considered a sacrosanct right of small farmers.

The case of Peter Denny illustrates the boundaries of legitimate speculation by farmers. Denny was a native farmer of Loudon County, Virginia, who speculated in at least \$1,000 worth of clocks in 1836.²⁶ Denny might have been encouraged by the huge custom among local farmers which local hucksters found in northern Virginia.²⁷ In mid-June, 1836, Denny took out a \$100 clock peddler license in his home county,²⁸ but crops failed in Loudoun that year, and consequently few local farmers were willing to purchase a clock from Denny that year. Either Denny's internal constraints or community disapproval of Denny's speculation prevented him from peddling without a license in his own neighborhood in subsequent years. Denny appealed to the state legislature for a dispensation to peddle or auction the clocks under a less expensive merchant's license. To put the best face on his speculation, Denny claimed that his intent was to "increase his facilities" in agriculture, which was his primary occupation and interest. He also stressed that all his ties and interests were "identified with the County & State," and that he had served as a captain in a local Volunteer Corps of Riflemen, and "in that capacity was at considerable personal expense without a corresponding remuneration." Denny's folly was to engage in the commercial exchange of merchandize he had no part in

Frederick County Petitions, LPLV.

²⁶ Petition of Peter Denny, Loudoun County, 2/2/1839, LPLV. In his petition Denny does not indicate the source of his clocks. If he purchased them directly from a manufacturer in Connecticut for cash, his \$1,000 could have purchased up to 160 clocks at \$6.25 apiece, or about 125 clocks for \$8 apiece on credit.

²⁷ The local "market-men" of northern Virginia are discussed below.

manufacturing or producing, and to expect that since his primary income was from farming, his speculation would be deemed legitimate. However his neighbors may have judged his venture, the Virginia legislature rejected his petition.

Petty trade opened up opportunities for enslaved people to turn profits and make consumer decisions. The earning power and purchasing power of the enslaved were scanty, but the significance of the market participation of enslaved blacks went far beyond its monetary measure. By 1780 many enslaved Virginians had established de facto rights to Sunday off, to raise crops on garden plots, and to travel to nearby plantations for purposes of socializing and trade. Blacks sold garden crops, fowls, eggs, and handicrafts such as mats, trays, baskets, brooms, utensils, gloves, and farm tools, to neighboring planters and at courthouse fairs and town markets. Chickens and eggs were the most common commodities sold by blacks. As early as 1779 Virginian James Mercer noted that enslaved "Chicken Merchants" were ubiquitous.²⁹ Blacks could earn small amounts of money by working for their master or another plantation owner on Sundays. The annual earnings of South Carolina blacks from picking cotton on Sundays in the early nineteenth century was small, \$3 to \$8.³⁰ Some enslaved people even became marketing specialists for their plantation, accumulating commodities from fellow blacks and then conveying them to a nearby town for sale.³¹ Hauling goods to and from towns allowed enslaved blacks to act as middlemen in the marketplace, a potentially lucrative niche in the economy. A wagoner or boatman might

²⁸ Clock peddler license to Peter Denny, 6/13/1836, Loudon County, LRLV.

²⁹ Berlin and Morgan, "Introduction," p. 10.

³⁰ "Journal of a Tour in the Interior of South Carolina," p. 108.

³¹ Schlotterbeck, "The Internal Economy of Slavery," pp. 172-176.

invest his remuneration for carting in goods to sell back in his neighborhood. Some boatmen had free reign over what came back for the return load upriver. Henry S. Langhorne posted a notice in the *Lynchburg Virginian* in 1825 that he would not be responsible for any back loading that was taken on board his boat, skippered by head-man Billy Couch.³² Enslaved wagoners could earn money, because they expected tips for delivering goods intact and in a timely fashion. They also hauled extra store goods and other commodities in return loads which they sold in their neighborhood. A tiny minority of blacks amassed considerable wealth through market activities. In rare instances African Americans earned enough money to purchase the ultimate commodity – their freedom.

The primary impetus for enslaved blacks' involvement in the market was to meet bare necessities, but African Americans occasionally garnered enough cash or property to purchase inexpensive creature comforts. Plantation rations were scanty and monotonous, so blacks consumed most of the crops they grew in their small garden plots. Only a small surplus found its way to a market. Most of the meager discretionary income of enslaved blacks went towards the purchase of small luxuries, such as clothing, food and alcohol. Enslaved consumers of late eighteenth-century Bedford County, Virginia, purchased items such as rum, sweeteners, small mirrors, and high quality textiles.³³ Charles Ball made wooden bowls, ladles, and trays during his free time, which he traded to a local storekeeper to supply his family with molasses, winter blankets, "and some other luxuries."³⁴ The tastes and needs of free and enslaved African Americans were clear to manufacturers as well as

³² *Lynchburg Virginian*, 1/14/1825.

³³ Ann Smart Martin, "Buying into the World of Goods: Eighteenth-Century Consumerism and the Retail Trade from London to the Virginia Frontier" (Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1993), pp. 306-09.

merchants. Comb manufacturers in Massachusetts and Connecticut made brass, horn, and wooden combs specifically for the African-American market in the South.³⁵ The clothing issued by slaveholders was often made of coarse materials, shapeless, and of poor construction. Enslaved men and women personalized their clothing and attire by purchasing fabrics, handkerchiefs and jewelry.³⁶ Personal purchasing decisions regarding cloth, foods, and alcohol allowed enslaved people to express individuality as well as group identity. Participation in the face-to-face economy enabled African Americans to maintain cultural autonomy.

The possession of cash unlocked a wider range of commodities to enslaved people than barter could. Money allowed blacks to choose their trading partners, because virtually everyone would accept cash. Money was powerful within the enslaved community, enabling the possessor to make gifts and loans and even to hire others for personal tasks.³⁷ Money was the great equalizer in the marketplace. Possession and knowledge of its value empowered the enslaved to make autonomous decisions. The cash nexus offered a radical alternative to the hierarchy of slave society. Every time enslaved people exchanged commodities with whites they participated in a “subversive ceremony” that challenged social distinctions of race and caste. Market participation allowed blacks to improve their

³⁴ Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 194-195.

³⁵ Wright, *Hawkers and Walkers*, p. 35.

³⁶ Linda Baumgarten, “Plains, Plaid and Cotton: Woolens for Slave Clothing.” *Ars Textrina* 15 (July 1991), pp. 204-205. Linda Baumgarten, “‘Clothes for the People:’ Slave Clothing in Early Virginia.” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 14 (November 1988):27-70. Patricia K. Hunt, “The Struggle to Achieve Individual Expression through Clothing and Adornment: African American Women under and after Slavery.” in Patricia Morton, editor *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp.227-240.

lives materially, to possess and assert greater control and independence over their lives, create and strengthen social relationships among blacks on other plantations and with non-slaveholding whites. The most threatening aspect of black participation in the market place was how it defied the interests and power of slaveholders by undermining the material and psychological dependence of the enslaved on their masters.³⁸

Little hard or paper money passed through blacks' hands, but many enslaved people learned its importance from trading in the face-to-face economy. Some blacks made a fetish of money before they learned the workings of the market and the real power of money. Henry Gladney recalled the symbolic power of "de only money I ever have befo' freedom, a big copper two-cent piece wid a hole in it." He strung it around his neck "and felt rich all de time. Little niggers always wanted to see dat money and I was proud to show it to them every time." Similarly, the first ten-cent piece Gable Locklier ever received charmed him: "Ma give me a needle en thread en little sack en I sew my 10¢ in it. Put in de rafter en it stay dere till next Christmas. Believe I took it down en tote it a long time." Eventually Locklier bought some tobacco for his father with the dime.³⁹ Many black and white illiterates could not distinguish the value of different denominations of paper money. When Amos Kendall designed and printed money in 1814 for the town of Georgetown, Kentucky, he stamped the center of the bills with "the form of the cut half and quarter dollar, etc., enabling the negroes and others who could not read to recognize their value upon

³⁷ Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman,'" p. 151.

³⁸ McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master," pp. 31-35. Berlin and Morgan, "Introduction," pp. 13, 19-20. Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman,'" p. 131.

³⁹ McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master," p. 35.

inspection.”⁴⁰ This shows that the town expected the notes to have a wide circulation. Captain Simon Suggs, the character created by southwestern humorist Johnson Jones Hooper in 1845, derided some counterfeit money as so poorly rendered that “even the niggers knowd they warn’t no ‘count.”⁴¹ The inability to distinguish the value of paper money was a potential obstacle to full participation in the marketplace. For instance, an enslaved man of Brunswick County, Virginia, stole \$2,000 in Georgia bills from a man in Lynchburg but “could not distinguish the amount of one note from another; and was very careless in distributing it.” He presented the money to a free woman of color in Lynchburg “for the purpose of being changed at the bank for specie; but this woman told him that the money was not good and she did not like to be seen with it, and therefore advised him to burn it.” The man understood that the paper money represented more desirable hard money, but could not negotiate its actual value, and left it to “the *wiser* care” of the more worldly free black woman.⁴² For enslaved African Americans to have knowledge of the value of money was as potentially dangerous to the South as literacy or knowledge of abolitionism.

The inequalities of slave society sometimes manifested themselves in the intercourse between blacks and white traders. Since no southern courts recognized the testimony of a slave against a white, white traders took advantage of this situation in their exchanges with blacks. “In dealing with the slave,” complained Charles Ball, “the shop-keeper knows he can demand whatever price he pleases for his goods, without danger of being charged with

⁴⁰ William Stickney, ed., *Autobiography of Amos Kendall* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, Publishers, 1872), p. 111.

⁴¹ Hooper, *Simon Suggs*, p. 144.

⁴²[Lynchburg] *Virginian*, 8/18/1828. Newspaper’s emphasis.

extortion.”⁴³ For instance, a Darien, Georgia, storekeeper refused to pay an enslaved man for the eggs and moss brought into the store in any commodity but a “miserable material” from which the man’s wife had to make her gown. The man told his mistress, Fanny Kemble, that this sort of imposition was a common occurrence for which the enslaved had no redress. Kemble wrote with mistress-like sympathy: “Of course, the rascally shopkeepers can cheat these poor wretches to any extent they please with perfect impunity.”⁴⁴ Commentary on blacks’ market experiences must be read carefully, for where planters saw whites taking advantage of slaves in their dealings, blacks might have measured the situation very differently. Each transaction closed by an African American could have offered psychological rewards far more important than material gains or losses. To be sure, some slaves developed the savvy to succeed in the marketplace. Enslaved people in Piedmont Virginia showed “sophisticated market behavior” in the interplantation trade in fowls and produce. Blacks selected their trading partners among the neighboring planters according to a referral system that allowed slaves to find the best price for their produce.⁴⁵ African Americans sought markets and may have applied their own calculus to assessing their benefits or worth.

There was a broad class of poor and propertyless men and women – black and white, enslaved and free – who supplemented their livelihood through petty commerce. They were often small producers who marketed some of their surplus in local marts, or they were

⁴³ Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 191-192.

⁴⁴ John A. Scott, ed., Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 276.

⁴⁵ Schlotterbeck, “The Internal Economy of Slavery,” p. 176.

laborers in the transportation trades who supplemented their wages with small ventures of goods. Others were professional marketers. Hucksters from the lower orders of southern society usually vended their goods in their own communities or a nearby town, but some were more transient. Known as “market-men,” these small entrepreneurs linked northern Virginia farm women to outside markets. In the northern Virginia counties of Loudoun, Fairfax, Fauquier, and Prince William, free blacks and poor whites engaged in a marketing system that traded country produce for dry goods and provisions from merchants in the towns of Alexandria, Georgetown and Washington. The butter trade was already well developed by the late eighteenth century in the Mid-Atlantic states, including northern Virginia. “Country people and negroes” regularly hawked country produce from house to house in the town of Dumfries, Prince William County, as early as 1787.⁴⁶ By the 1840s “butterbelts” had grown up around many cities which provided large commercial markets for butter. Production of butter and other marketable products provided households with enough income for most of their commodity needs.⁴⁷ The market-men drove covered carts, carryalls and small wagons, which they generally owned, through the northern Virginia countryside, “levying their contribution upon all classes of Persons.” These “trading carts” made “regular and stated trips” in weekly rounds picking up butter, eggs, and poultry from customers which the market-men would trade to merchants in Alexandria, Georgetown, Washington, and Baltimore. As return loads the market-men brought back groceries such as sugar, coffee, tea, and cotton, and sundry manufactured goods. Farmwives could specify a particular need and on his return visit the market-man would furnish that article. John Jay

⁴⁶ Dumfries, Prince William County, 11/19/1787, LPLV.

⁴⁷ Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (1986).

Janney of Loudon County reminisced how his grandmother produced “a good deal” of surplus butter from the half dozen cows she milked. “A huckster called once every two weeks to get her butter, eggs, and such other things as she might have to sell.” The Janney children enjoyed the visits of this Scotch-Irish huckster, who often stayed overnight and entertained them with “his Irish stories.”⁴⁸ The middleman services of the market-men were greatly valued by farm-bound women and other household dependents. Contact between lower-class males – especially black males – and farmwives was potentially subversive of white male authority.

Like Yankee peddlers, local hucksters appeared at all public events to vend sweetmeats, candies, plums, oranges, gingercakes, and alcohol. Hucksters set up booths or sold their goods directly from carts in urban markets and streets, at sessions of the county courts, militia musters, and camp meetings. Even at a small affair like a turkey shoot, wrote John Jay Janney, there was “nearly always someone present with whiskey and ginger cakes to sell.”⁴⁹ The execution of several enslaved men, reported Charles Ball, turned into a fair which lasted three or four days. Hucksters and peddlers with wagons, carts, carriages, booths and tents served the assembly of 15,000 people, half of whom were black. The executions “were succeeded by music, dancing, trading in horses, gambling, drinking, fighting, and every other species of amusement and excess to which the southern people are addicted.”⁵⁰ An event which was meant to intimidate the enslaved population was turned upside down by the blacks and nonslaveholding whites in attendance, who engaged in a

⁴⁸ Janney, *Janney's Virginia*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ Schlotterbeck, “The Internal Economy of Slavery,” p. 176. Buckingham County, 9/7/1832, LPLV. Janney, *Janney's Virginia*, pp. 89-90.

⁵⁰ Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 375, 377-378.

festival of conviviality where interracial fraternization rather than racial segregation probably occurred. The face-to-face economy shared many venues with the formal economy, often imbuing the occasion with values and practices which ran counter to the ideal social order prescribed by the slaveholding class.

The eating and drinking habits within the face-to-face economy came under sharp criticism from middle- and upper-class southerners. Middle-class critics often pointed out the prodigal habits of the poor who wasted the little money they had on alcohol and frivolous creature comforts.⁵¹ Reverend J. B. Jeter moralized against the expenses of intemperance and called it “false economy” to eat or drink “what one does not need,” such as cider and gingercakes.⁵² Three foodstuffs in particular came to represent the intemperance of consumers in the face-to-face economy – molasses, gingercakes and alcohol. The intimate association of these viands is revealed in the memoirs of John Jay Janney’s life in antebellum Loudoun County, Virginia. Betty Spence, a black woman who was well known in Loudoun County, Virginia, for her gingercakes, made two sizes of cakes: “one very large one which she sold for a quarter of a dollar, or a quarter of it for a ‘fip’ (six and a quarter cents); and a round one like a saucer for one cent.” The favorite method of feasting on one of Spence’s cakes was “to buy a quarter of a large cake, which was about an inch thick, saturate it with whiskey, then eat it.”⁵³ Such confections might have contributed a significant portion of urban laborers’ daily calories.⁵⁴ In both the North and the South

⁵¹ For the changing motivations of white control over black petty trade in Georgia, see Wood, *Women’s Work, Men’s Work*, pp. 54, 140-159.

⁵² William Eldridge Hatcher, *The Life of J. B. Jeter, D.D.* (Baltimore: H. M. Wharton and Company, 1887), pp. 56-58.

⁵³ Janney, *Janney’s Virginia*, pp. 89-90.

⁵⁴ Personal communication from Anne Smart Martin.

middle-class moralists identified a repast of gingercakes and alcohol as an invidious marker of lower-class status.⁵⁵ Gingercakes were probably made with enough ginger to make the eater crave cider or whiskey to wash away the spiciness. The meal was doubly intemperate: overly-spiced cakes⁵⁶ followed by demon alcohol. Molasses, which was a major component of gingerbread, was a sweetener associated with slave rations, lower-class southerners, and lower-class Yankees.⁵⁷ John Cocke of Bremsa suggested that molasses ginger bread was a hearty snack for blacks in the field at harvest time. Cocke, a temperance advocate, also replaced rations of whiskey at harvest time with switchel, a mixture of molasses and water.⁵⁸ George Tucker claimed that to the Yankees' vulgar taste, switchel was superior to "Burgundy or Champaign."⁵⁹ Thomas G. Fessenden noted that the "peasantry" of New England drank a beverage called "Yankee," which was composed of whiskey sweetened

⁵⁵ Catherine Maria Sedgwick depicted a rural, lower-class Connecticut tavern as a rough "log hut; over the door was a slab, with a rude and mysterious painting, (which had been meant for a foaming can and a plate of gingerbread,) explained underneath by 'cake and beer for sale.'" Sedgwick, *New England Tale*, p. 41.

⁵⁶ For Grahamite objections to rich and spicy foods, see Carol Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Jacksonian America" *American Journal of Sociology* 84 (1978):212-47.

⁵⁷ For the stereotypical Yankee's voracious appetite for gingerbread and molasses, see Anne Newport Royall, *Letters from Alabama 1817-1822* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1969), p. 228. Wetmore, "The Pedlar." [Asa Greene], Elnathan Elmwood, esq. *A Yankee among the Nullifiers: An Autobiography* (New York: Wm. Stodart, 1833), pp. 19-20. Morris Barnett, "Yankee Peddler, or, Old Times in Virginia" (New York: Samuel French, 1853), p. 6. Van Buren, *Jottings*, p. 234. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumph*, p. 4. In the ultimate slur against the molasses-consuming Yankee, Algernon Sydney Johnston pictured the eternal damnation of Yankee peddlers to a "lake of boiling molasses." Johnston, *Memoirs of a Nullifier*, p. 40.

⁵⁸ "Harvest Management," *Farmer's Register* 2 (June 1834):57-58. M. Boyd Coyner, "John Hartwell Cocke of Bremsa: Agriculture and Slavery in the Antebellum South," (Ph.D. Dissertation, 1961, UVA), p. 335.

⁵⁹ Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, p. 36.

with molasses.⁶⁰ Southern moralists tarred all the participants in the face-to-face economy – lower-class southern whites, enslaved blacks, and Yankee interlopers – with the same molasses-laden brush.

The confectioners who baked and sold these cakes were often marginalized men and women. Their advanced age and poverty set them apart as charity cases at best, as desperate rascals at worst. A sample of cake sellers, hucksters, and market men from the 1850 census of Virginia turned up fifty-six hucksters, eight market men, and four cake sellers. Among these petty traders were fifty-one whites, eleven blacks, and six mulattos. The average age of the cake sellers was 51; the average huckster was 38; and the average market man was 42.⁶¹ The location of the cake sellers' residence reflected their marginality. For instance, black cake seller Jacob Walker lived in Brunswick County, Virginia, adjacent to laborer Thomas Stith, who was a former peddler from Massachusetts. Isaiah Fusemore, a black huckster, lived in a large boarding house in Henrico County, Virginia, which was filled with Irish laborers.⁶² Another "old woman cake-baker" lived on the edge of town in Salem, Virginia. As a youth J. B. Jeter visited this woman to buy a gingercake, but became drunk on vinegar-like cider instead. Even an eleven year-old boy reflected the society's disrespect and disdain for this woman when he "indulged in some rudeness to the cake-baker." Similarly, young schoolboys of Richmond tormented "Fat Nancy, the apple-

⁶⁰ Thomas G. Fessenden, *Original Poems* (Philadelphia: Printed at the Lorenzo Press of E. Bronson, 1806), p. 78, cited in "Yankee," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), vol 20, p. 692.

⁶¹ Numbers for enslaved African-American hucksters cannot be determined from the census. Female hucksters are also undercounted because it was not mandatory for the enumerators to record women's occupations. This random sample was collected while I searched for Yankee peddlers in the Manuscript census of Virginia for 1850.

⁶² Manuscript census of 1850 for Brunswick and Henrico counties, Virginia.

woman,” by stealing her apples and keeping her “scolding faculties in constant exercise.”⁶³ Cake selling was held in such ill repute that a typical prank of college boys, claimed William Alexander Caruthers, was to hang “cake and beer signs at magistrates’ and elders’ doors.”⁶⁴ Hocking cakes was a meager living relegated to people rejected by respectable society: the elderly, the impoverished, “scolds,” free blacks, and poor whites.

The few respectable cake bakers in southern society were the exception which proved the rule. Randle Evans, a confectioner in Winchester, Virginia, was considered “a source of great convenience and utility” to the citizens of the town. Fortune Thomas, a free woman of color, settled at Halifax County Court House around 1830 “as a baker and seller of Cakes, Tarts, Confectioneries, and oysters.” On public days “disorderly and intoxicated persons” intruded into her business, perhaps in search of the familiar sustenance of a cake and a glass of whiskey, but Thomas never suffered “any improper or indecent conduct” at her shop. By keeping “an orderly and decent house” which catered exclusively and to the satisfaction of “the very best class of the community,” Thomas established a character for outstanding respectability. The “ladies” of the community averred that “that no party or wedding” was possible without her confections. Just as market-men relied upon the custom of farmwives, cake bakers found their limited social acceptance from respectable white women.⁶⁵

The clientele of cake sellers were also considered vulgar. Caroline Gilman described the mortification experienced by a young woman of the planter class when she had to accompany a “cracker couple” on their excursion to King Street, the fashionable

⁶³ Mordecai, *Richmond*, p. 129.

⁶⁴ Caruthers, *Kentuckian in New-York*, pp. 81-82.

shopping district of Charleston, South Carolina. The rustic pair are brother and sister, with the apt patronymic of Slute. Susy Slute and her brother bargain with a black woman who sits at a street corner vending gingercake and molasses candy, "over which she waved a fly-brush of palmetto." The Slutes purchase a large square of gingerbread, and press upon their stylish companion to partake of it. The elite young woman is doubly embarrassed because the whole transaction is witnessed by a young beau. The young man snickers at "the gingerbread-eaters," who continue their stroll down the street, "munching" their cake, oblivious to the faux pas which they have inflicted upon their more fashionable companion.⁶⁶ Perhaps the most notorious consumer of gingercakes was Nat Turner. While in jail awaiting execution Turner reputedly sold his body for dissection, and spent the proceeds on gingercakes.⁶⁷ Their associating gingercakes with the most notorious rebel slave of the antebellum era was perhaps the strongest condemnation Virginia editors could make on the trade, custom, and culture of gingercake hucksters.

Whiskey was an integral part of the rituals of masculine life in the South, when all the free white men of a county or neighborhood gathered together, such as at elections, musters, barn raisings, corn huskings, and shad fishing.⁶⁸ Drinking whiskey also accompanied commercial transactions in both the formal and face-to-face economies. Perhaps drinking whiskey helped anonymous trading partners in the face-to-face

⁶⁵ Halifax County, 2/1/1850, LPLV. Jackson, *Free Negro Labor*, pp. 82, 100.

⁶⁶ Gilman, *Recollections*, pp. 134-136.

⁶⁷ The *Norfolk Herald*, 11/14/1831, reprinted in the *Richmond Enquirer*, 11/15/1831. Henry Irving Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1971), p. 140.

⁶⁸ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 329. Anthony F. Upton, "The Road to Power in Virginia in the Early Nineteenth Century" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 62 (July

marketplace gain confidence in each other. Serving whiskey at public sales was observed not just out of respect for custom, “but because it made the people bid more freely if they were a little mellow.” Storekeepers often stimulated sales by offering free libations of whiskey. In Loudoun County, Virginia, for instance, “every country store kept a decanter or bottle of whiskey, free to all, on the counter.”⁶⁹ Andrew Bailey attended an auction of an old stock of store goods at Union Hall, Franklin County, Virginia in 1831. During the auction, Bailey watched as the intoxicated crowd lingered about the store and “stagger[ed] around the waggon and yard.”⁷⁰ The admixture of alcohol and competitive bidding at an auction tested the limits of respectable behavior prescribed for southern gentlemen. A fictive description of an estate sale in the *Southern Literary Messenger* betrays the distaste of the genteel author for socializing with lower-class whites. The narrator notes the large numbers of plantation “managers” in attendance. These managers, conscious of the derogatory nature of the title “overseer” were trying to remake themselves into gentlemen, but the narrator has only scorn for their coarse attempts. The “rude footstep[s]” of these “Goths and Vandals” violate the sanctity of the home at auction. Finally, the auctioneer appears with “his badge of office, the jug of whiskey,” and plies his customers with drink. The whiskey excites lavish bidding and the sale ends “in one wild uproarious scuffle for every thing at any price whatever.”⁷¹

Respectable southerners might have found the obligatory convivial drink with a socially inferior white man distasteful, but the fraternization of lower-class whites and blacks

1954):259-280. Watson, “Common Rights,” pp. 31-32.

⁶⁹ Janney, *Janney's Virginia*, p. 89, 91-92.

⁷⁰ Bailey, *Chronicles*, pp. 34-35.

⁷¹ Nugator, “The Sale,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (1834-35):580-582.

struck fear in the slaveholding class.

Drinking establishments known as groceries, groggeries, grog shops, dram shops, or tippling houses which offered alcohol to poor whites, free and enslaved blacks were a lucrative business for agents in the face-to-face economy. Alcohol spurred trade and fraternization in the face-to-face economy. Whiskey seems to have been valued as good as cash in the marginal economy. Speculators in this commodity ranged from a small entrepreneur with a barrel of cider or whiskey to an “established” grocery keeper. P. W. Harper linked the proliferation of groceries to economic good times. In flush times, Harper noted that grog shops sprang up “at the forks of almost every public road, selling by jugs, bottles, and half pint cruets the meanest whiskey and northern rum, together with a kind of drink, they improperly call wine, the composition of which is made of ingredients of the most unhealthy kind.” Charles Ball guessed that there was “not a single district of ten miles square, in all the cotton region, without at least one of these vile ordinaries.” Alcohol trafficking was also geographically fluid. Transient hucksters with wagonloads of spirits attended to crowds wherever they gathered. Some flatboat crews vended whiskey to blacks and other inhabitants near the shores of the James River. Planters complained that these river boats were “moving dram shops.”⁷² Manna Alderman, a peddler from Burlington, Connecticut, retailed Connecticut-made brandy and “Double Boiled Cider” at county court sessions in the vicinity of Fayetteville, North Carolina, in 1822.⁷³ Whitemarsh B. Seabrook alleged that Yankee peddlers regularly sold whiskey to enslaved people.⁷⁴

⁷²Henrico County Petitions, 12/10/1833, LPLV.

⁷³Alderman, *Letters*, pp. 32-34.

⁷⁴Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, *An Essay on the Management of Slaves* (Charleston, 1834), p. 8, quoted in Campbell, “As ‘A Kind of Freeman,’” p. 138.

Although there were many statutes in place to restrict the traffic in alcohol, it was still a very lucrative business which tended to attract “adventurers for fortune” from the middling and lower classes. Anyone who entered the trade, however, had to surrender any pretensions to respectability. This was not a large sacrifice for men or women who felt comfortable in the social and cultural milieu of the face-to-face economy.⁷⁵ It could have been defiance of middle-class propriety and an affirmation of alternative values of the face-to-face economy. Proprietorship of a grog shop held very different meanings for lower-class Southerners. For free black owners, these shops were not only profitable, but a source of pride, self-respect, and independence from whites.⁷⁶

In the rural groceries and the back alley dram shops of southern cities both blacks and whites mingled in a variety of social pastimes: drinking, gambling, fighting, and sexual intercourse.⁷⁷ Petty trade facilitated the convivial consumption of alcohol and displays of manly prowess, which were important aspects of lower-class southern masculinity. When poor white men and black men gathered at a tavern, or enslaved people congregated for a

⁷⁵ *The Farmer's Register* 1 (1834), p. 565; [P. W. Harper] 2 (Oct 1834), pp. 284-286. Kanawha County Petitions, 1/19/1854, LPLV. Ball, *Slavery*, p. 343.

⁷⁶ Jackson, *Free Negro Labor*, p. 81. Campbell, “As ‘A Kind of Freeman,’” p. 135. McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master,” pp. 31-34. Schlotterbeck, “The Internal Economy of Slavery,” p. 177. I disagree with Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan who state that the slaves’ underground economy never gained a logic of its own. Berlin and Morgan claim that slaves’ marketing can only be understood in the context of the master/slave conflict, but I think that the “community” of the face-to-face economy offered alternative values even to its slave participants. Berlin and Morgan, “Introduction,” p. 3, 13.

⁷⁷ Regarding the interracial sex trade, Yankee bookpeddler Samuel Whitcomb recorded in his diary a fascinating exchange he overheard in Pittsburgh in 1818: “This morning about break of day overheard a strange interview between an Irish man & negroe (in the street) who appeared to be a Woman in man's cloathes! The Irishman declined her solicitations alleging that he had the _ _ _.” Samuel Whitcomb Diary, p. 3, 6/28/1818. He also noted that black prostitutes sought white clients in a Huntsville, Alabama tavern.

convivial drink, slaveholders grew nervous at the potential for disorder. John Pendleton Kennedy disparaged the appearance of a crossroads store and its clientele in his plantation romance novel, *Swallow Barn*:

As may readily be conjectured, this mart of custom was not without its due proportion of that industrious, thriving and reputable class of comers who laudably devote their energies to disputation, loud swearing, bets and whisky, – a class which, to the glory of our land, is surprisingly rife in every country side. Some six or seven of these worthies were congregated on the rail of the piazza, which extended across the front of the store, like so many strange fowls roosting along a pole.⁷⁸

Black and white fraternization might have increased on Sundays, when enslaved workers traditionally had the day off. Charles Ball noted that Sundays were “*set apart* for the blacks to meet at these grog shops and to have their parties, their games, their mirth and festivities.”⁷⁹ In the interracial atmosphere of grogeries enslaved and free blacks “emulated manly white behavior, boasting, carrying weapons, carousing with white women, parading a desperate, overblown, paper-thin honor.” Lucian Minor recorded the boasts of an African American he overheard. One Sunday afternoon in 1835, when there were “Many idle & some drunken negroes about the Tavern & in the road at Louisa” Court House, where Minor had his law office, he heard an African American man walking past his window: “in a drawling, low, drunken tone – ‘I’m quality blood – I’m none o’ your triflin’, awkward’ – & here he passed on round the house, so that I lost the rest of his self-

p. 57, 9/27/1818. Whitcomb Papers, MHS.

⁷⁸ John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn; Or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (Reprint. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986. New York: G. P. Putnam & Company, 1853; originally published in 1832), pp. 359-360.

⁷⁹ Schlotterbeck, “The Internal Economy of Slavery,” p. 172. Hanover County Petitions, 1/16/1844; Kanawha County Petitions, 1/19/1854, LPLV. Ball, *Slavery*, p. 343. *The Farmer’s Register* 2 (Oct 1834), pp. 284-286. My emphasis.

glorification.”⁸⁰ Did Minor record these words out of fear or ridicule of the man? Or was the ridicule only meant to mask his fears? Instances of drunken whites and blacks fighting each other were epidemic, and the memory of Nat Turner was still very fresh.⁸¹ The disorder created by rowdy, drunken black and white Virginians boded ill for a society in which half of its population was enslaved.

Camp meetings were occasions when members of the different classes of antebellum America mixed together. The camp grounds, though, were a contested space where the rowdy, masculine culture of the face-to-face economy challenged the hegemony of middle-class mores and order. In the late eighteenth century, critics of evangelical religion from all ranks of society fought the challenge the new morality posed to traditional masculine pastimes, such as drinking, fighting, gambling, and sharp dealing. But by the early nineteenth century evangelical preachers had won the support of the master class by a qualified adoption of the code of honor, and by ending their challenge to middle- and upper-class white males’ authority in the household. However, evangelical ministers still offended the insecure masculinity and lack of mastery among poor white males and black males.⁸² Throughout the upper South and old Northwest, and probably other parts of the

⁸⁰ Minor recorded these words in his *Commonplace Book*, p. 17. *Lucian Minor Papers*, MHS. Since this book was probably for his own reading, it seems likely that he did not fabricate the oaths.

⁸¹ McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master,” p. 38. Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 7, 46-47, 79-80, 93.

⁸² Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), pp. 206-52. The camp meeting rowdies were not necessarily all religious skeptics. Some could have been primitive Baptists who opposed the moral suasion of middle-class reformers. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *Journal of Southern History* 36 (November 1970):501-29.

country as well, hucksters and their customers disrupted camp meetings with their counter-cultural behavior. Minister J. B. Jeter warned that there was a “strong tendency” in Virginia society to make camp meetings occasions of “social pleasure, festivity, and even of frivolity, dissipation and vice.” Likening the camp meeting to another custom of public assembly, Jeter cautioned that Satan “muster[ed] and train[ed] his servants for mischief” at camp meetings.⁸³ Jacob Engelbrecht of Frederick, Maryland, declined to attend a Methodist camp meeting outside town in 1823 because he expected the “rascality” of the marginal participants of camp meetings would “overballance” the good intentions of the meeting organizers.⁸⁴ The rowdies’ presence was not merely a protest against evangelical morality, but a positive celebration of the culture of the face-to-face economy. Hucksters and their customers took advantage of the huge spiritual gatherings as an opportunity for conviviality and profit.

In the late fall of 1820 members of various churches in northern Virginia organized a petition campaign against the hucksters who plagued their camp meetings. Members of the Columbia Baptist Association of northern Virginia gathered at Grove Meeting House in Fauquier County to draft a petition. Churches from Loudoun, Fairfax, Prince William, Fauquier, and Stafford counties, and the town of Fredericksburg, sent representatives to the conference. Others drew up similar petitions at separate meetings in Fairfax, Prince William and Stafford counties. The petitions reveal a deep anxiety in Virginia society over the market behavior of poor black and white Virginians. In the years leading to 1820 they had watched with vexation how the “modern system of sutling” at camp meetings had sowed

⁸³ Hatcher, *Life of J. B. Jeter*, p. 158.

⁸⁴ Quynn, *Diary of Jacob Engelbrecht*, vol. 1 1818-1832. 9/5/1823.

“irregularity, disorder and confusion.” While revival swept respectable Virginians, the spirit of enterprise seized some members of the lower classes. These middle-class opponents of disorderly commerce referred to themselves as the “friends of good order,” “friends of peace and good order,” and “friends to Religion and morality.” A common complaint of the petitions was that hucksters interfered with the participants’ constitutional right to freedom of worship. The friends of order portrayed themselves as law-abiding citizens who contributed to the peace and stability of society by promoting morality. But hucksters interfered with the self-appointed moral stewardship of the friends of order. Hucksters victimized the “young, the thoughtless, and gay” by tempting them away from “the paths of duty and decency” and corrupting the entire proceedings with “the spirit of Levity & impiety.” Camp meeting managers wished to see the whole congregation “earnestly engaged in the solemn employment” of religious worship. Instead, “mercenary vendors” on the edges of the encampment waylaid some of the congregants en route to the meeting with offers of alcohol, turning the would-be worshippers into the “slaves of vice and dissipation.” The Virginia petitioners characterized the hucksters as deficient in every kind of discipline: hucksters were trained by no principle of self respect, had no regard for public sentiment, no obligation of private duty, no sanction of common decency, no principle of religion, and were restrained by neither law or morality. Rather, the hucksters were actuated “solely by the prospect of pecuniary profit.” The charges made against southern hucksters resembled the middle-class criticism of Yankee peddlers. The southern hucksters’ enterprise embodied the chaos of the atomistic marketplace, where traditional rules and loyalties were cast aside.⁸⁵ Most importantly, their interracial fraternization disrupted the racial order of slave

⁸⁵ Fairfax County, 12/6/1820; Loudoun County, 12/6/1820; Prince William and Stafford

society.

A certain amount of trade in provisions for the participants and their horses was necessary, especially at meetings which lasted for several days. Managers of camp meetings permitted trusted hucksters to sell food, and tolerated peddlers of maps and religious books. The hucksters did a brisk trade in pies, gingercakes, sweetmeats, candies, plums, oranges, watermelons, cigars, and tobacco. Cider and beer with low alcohol content were probably countenanced if there were no spring or well of clean water available near the campground. Hucksters pulled up to the "skirts of the Encampment" and vended food directly from their carts and wagons or from stalls and booths. The peripheral, convivial crowd was well prepared for a long bivouac, pitching "their tents a few hundred yards from the camp ground" of the central, spiritual participants. The sale of food was often a cover for the illicit but lucrative traffic in ardent spirits. Whiskey hucksters declared to the camp meeting managers that they had no intoxicating liquors, but this assertion was often refuted by the large number of drunken persons who gathered around their wagons. The business was profitable enough to encourage all kinds of creative schemes to circumvent the law. While selling distilled spirits at church meetings was prohibited by law, an omission in the revised code made the sale of non-distilled alcoholic beverages at camp meetings legal. The result, complained petitioners in 1820, was that hucksters sold beer, porter, and cider at camp meetings by the wagonload. The hucksters used "cunning devices" to hide the fact that they were selling distilled alcohol, even going "so far as to conceal spirits and Toddy in Water mellons and sell those articles in that way." Whiskey hucksters defeated the penalty in

Counties, 12/6/1820; Fauquier County, 12/17/1821, 1/3/1843; Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Miscellaneous Petitions, 12/15/1828, LPLV.

Virginia of a \$30 fine for selling spirituous beverages at a camp meeting by conveying the alcohol to an agent who was “not worth a cent, to sell in their own names,” so that if a grand jury fined the propertyless agent, he had nothing to lose. If the grand jury required the agent to give security for his good behavior, “the owners of the liquors can easily obtain another Agent without property.” Itinerant preacher Peter Cartwright encountered this strategy at a camp meeting in Illinois in 1832, where a “black-legged gang” fitted out a “complete bankrupt” with a fully stocked “huckster’s shop, with tobacco, segars, cakes, candies, pies, and almost all kinds of ardent spirits.”⁸⁶

Merry-makers often mocked and disrupted the religious proceedings of the camp meeting, perhaps out of indignation for the attacks on their traditional customs of conviviality. The manliness of the preachers was challenged by the hucksters and their customers, who felt their own manhood threatened.⁸⁷ Peter Cartwright frequently skirmished with hucksters and their rowdy customers at camp meetings in Illinois in the 1830s and 1840s. These liminal participants of the camp meetings came from the social and economic margins of society – the face-to-face economy. Cartwright described them as “a general rally from the floating population of the river, and the loose-footed, doggerly-haunting, dissipated renegades of the towns and villages all round.” The petitioners echoed the criticisms levied against gingercake hucksters by other middle-class moralists, chiding that they “ought to be better employed” than dissipating their strength and money on whiskey. There was a commingling of blacks and whites among the hucksters’ wagons that

⁸⁶ Hatcher, *Life of J. B. Jeter*, p. 158. W. P. Strickland, ed., *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright; The Backwoods Preacher* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972, reprint of 1856 edition), pp. 212, 248-251. Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, pp. 164-65. Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, p. 206.

disturbed the middling and upper classes. At a camp meeting in Loudoun County in 1820 petitioners complained that “even the Negroes became intoxicated,” a few of whom were tried before a justice of the peace “for fighting with white Men.”⁸⁸ One group of goodfellows at an Illinois camp meeting disrupted the service with animal noises. They barked like dogs, howled like wolves, and hooted like owls. As they drew nearer to the camp grounds, they slapped their hands and crowed like chickens. The merry-makers used a mild form of the charivari to express their disapproval of the conduct of the religious services and the attack on their culture of conviviality. Camp meetings were clamorous affairs in themselves. A critic of camp meetings described them as “brutal attempts to excite the passions,” and a cacophony of “fainting, shouting, yelling, crying, sobbing and grieving.” Some Virginia officials might have expressed their aversion for camp meeting culture by not enforcing the laws against hucksters. Petitioners complained that grand juries could not or did not indict hucksters, and that the exertions of a Loudoun County magistrate “were so unavailing” as to be entirely ineffectual. Cartwright related instances where armed rowdies intimidated local law officers from arresting hucksters. One group arose “in mob force” and rescued a whiskey seller and his wagon from a constable. The petitioners called for more effectual laws to suppress trading near camp meetings. The friends of order wanted to push the hucksters further and further into the periphery. In 1820 they requested a law to prevent hucksters “from coming near” the encampment. The following year petitioners delineated a two mile limit to the trading and carousing of hucksters and their

⁸⁷ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, pp. 230-32.

⁸⁸ Loudoun County, 12/6/1820, LPLV.

customers. By 1839 they requested a buffer of four miles.⁸⁹

The behavior of participants in the face-to-face economy increasingly alienated them from the middle and upper classes of society. Middle-class southerners sought to segregate themselves from the face-to-face economy. Southern slaveholders wanted to control the informal economy or quash it entirely.

The contest over the space of the camp meeting ground shows that the participants of the face-to-face economy actively defended their lifestyle from middle-class reformers. The face-to-face economy also intruded upon the formal economy by aggressively appropriating staple commodities. The brisk market in stolen goods undermined the plantation regime. Theft not only harmed slaveholders' property, but also the slaveholders' claims to their slaves' labor value. Many of the thefts perpetrated by enslaved people were merely attempts to improve their diet, such as stealing meat and grain to supplement their meager rations. But theft could also be viewed as the redistribution of the wealth of a plantation – an assertion by enslaved African Americans of their rights to the products of their labor.⁹⁰ South Carolina planter Whitemarsh B. Seabrook believed that such ideas were placed in blacks' minds by Yankee peddlers who encouraged them to steal by “easing the poor fellow's conscience by making him believe what he takes is the fruit of his own labour

⁸⁹ For southern customs of charivari see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, pp. 440-441. Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 52-55. Loudoun County, 12/6/1820; Fauquier County, 12/17/1821; Tyler County, 1/30/1839, LPLV.

⁹⁰ Alex Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft,” pp. 413-440. Schlotterbeck, “The Internal Economy of Slavery,” p. 175.

and he is therefore entitled to it."⁹¹ The planters' fears of slave rebellion and collusion between poor whites and blacks led slaveholders to overestimate the organizational cohesion of petty traders, criminals, and abolitionist firebrands. The appropriation of small quantities of goods by enslaved people was endemic to the plantation regions, but the trade in goods stolen by blacks was probably not as organized as planters feared. They read grand conspiracies when probably only ad hoc systems and opportunistic alliances existed.⁹² These exaggerations hid the real fears over changing racial demographics and stress over economic changes. A correspondent to the *Charleston Mercury* who was concerned about the effect on local population from the migration of poor and middling whites from South Carolina, was convinced that the "inland trade of pilfering and depredation" by blacks was both well organized and "infinitely greater than we have ever supposed it to be."⁹³ Planters and farmers bordering the James River who had been victimized by watermen pictured the transportation labor force as "a corps of marauders," two or three thousand strong, "operating upon a line of One hundred & thirty miles."⁹⁴ Anxieties over the growth and change of markets prompted slaveholders to perceive greater and greater disorder and thievery in the face-to-face economy. In the 1820s and 1830s commercial exchange at all levels of society intensified, grew more anonymous, and adhered more and more to the impersonal rules of the capitalist marketplace. On the national level the plantation export

⁹¹ Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, *An Essay on the Management of Slaves* (Charleston, 1834), p. 8, quoted in Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman,'" p. 138.

⁹² For example, the activities of John A. Murrell and his gang of horse thieves were inflated into a grand conspiracy of criminals stretching across the entire southern United States. James Lal Penick, Jr., *The Great Western Land Pirate: John A. Murrell in Legend and History*.

⁹³ *Charleston Mercury*, 10/6/1829.

⁹⁴ Goochland, Powhatan, Cumberland, and Fluvanna Counties, 12/10/1810;

economy was threatened by the interests of northeastern manufacturers. In their own midst, planters discerned a threat to their profits and their entire system of agriculture from the face-to-face exchange between the enslaved, free blacks, and whites.

The river transportation system for grain and tobacco in the formal economy also facilitated a bulk trade of enslaved market gardeners' produce as well as some stolen or appropriated goods.⁹⁵ Most of the boats which plied the James River began their voyage at Lynchburg, where the watermen's employers gave each boat's crew "a certain sum of money as an equivalent for the necessary provisions on the trip." The cash given to rivermen for pay and subsistence was a very "alluring medium of trade with the negroes of the Farms bordering on the river." The money the rivermen could offer was so desirable to African Americans on the riverbank that it operated "as a premium to stimulate their enterprize."⁹⁶ This invitation to enter the cash nexus was accepted heartily by many enslaved Virginians. The river traffic seemed to attract some of the poorest and most desperate Virginians. White watermen "of the lowest and most disreputable class" were very active in this interracial trade network. While attending his master's fishery, Charles Ball was approached by the white master of a keelboat who traded one hundred pounds of bacon for three hundred of Ball's shad. This initiated a trading partnership with Ball that lasted several weeks.⁹⁷ White watermen were careful to approach blacks on the riverbank only in the absence of the overseer or any other white person, because the watermen knew that a black could not testify against a white in court. Rivermen lingered along the shoreline

Miscellaneous Petitions, 1/7/1831, LPLV.

⁹⁵ For similar trading activities by boatmen on the Savannah River, see Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work*, pp. 77-100.

⁹⁶ Miscellaneous Petitions, 1/7/1831; Buckingham County, 1/19/1832, LPLV.

until the coast was clear, when they invited “the slaves on the adjacent plantations to bring them any thing they can lay their hands upon, while they themselves carry off whatever they can pick up on the Banks, or within the verge of their nocturnal excursions.” Overseers and planters on rivers had to be extra vigilant for black and white rivermen. General John H. Cocke, whose Bremo plantation was on the James, asserted that blacks should be prohibited especially from entertaining black watermen, whom Cocke believed to be “the chief seducers to villany amongst our slaves on the River.”⁹⁸ Watermen were a convenient cash market for blacks’ produce and provided an important influx of cash into the landlocked side of the face-to-face economy.

Watermen reputedly stole farm produce from riverside plantations and farms, and fenced the stolen goods in “groceries,” Virginia vernacular for the grog shops of the face-to-face economy. Fowl, sheep, hogs, and even grown cattle from pastures bordering the river were easy prey for the watermen. Maize, which often grew right up to the riverbank, was the most commonly stolen commodity. Some farmers on the James had lost “from five to fifty barrels of corn from their fields in one season,” claimed petitioners in 1810. The watermen displayed great diligence in the theft of wheat. Petitioners could recount instances of rivermen “threshing the wheat shocks, during a night’s encampment of boats in the vicinity of wheat fields, restacking the straw to increase the chances of escape, by postponing the discovery of the theft.” Through these thefts petitioners estimated that four to five thousand bushels of wheat were annually conveyed to market through this “foul

⁹⁷Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 300-302.

⁹⁸Powhatan, Goochland, and Cumberland Counties, 11/6/1790; Miscellaneous Petitions, 1/7/1831, LPLV. “Standing Rules for the Government of Slaves on a Virginia Plantation, with notes & observations received from Genl Jno H. Cocke,” 1837, William Galt Farm

channel.”⁹⁹ The establishment of groceries along the James provided the rivermen with a mart for their plunder. The riverside groceries were ostensibly meant to provide watermen with “necessaries,” but also acted as “depots” for the collection and bulking of stolen goods. Until 1811 when an inspection station was established at the Locks of the James, rivermen carried small parcels of stolen tobacco or wheat to groceries in the Richmond market. The establishment of groceries along the river increased the “iniquitous trade” in stolen goods “to a degree excessive and intolerable” and reduced the risk of detection to almost nil. The grocery keepers received the watermen’s swag on very advantageous terms, acting as a mart for large amounts of tobacco, grain, and many other pilfered items, “from a Clavis pin to a plough.” The grocery keepers prized up the stolen tobacco in hogsheads and sent wheat “by boat loads” to merchant mills “like other lawful owners.”

One particular twelve mile interval of the James River was notorious for such groceries. Between the town of Scottsville and the mouth of Bremo Creek in Fluvanna County there were five groceries in operation in the early 1830s, three of which paid the \$20 fee for merchant licenses. There are several islands in this stretch of the James, which probably afforded sanctuary for the watermen and their boats. The petitioners criticized the county court of Fluvanna for licensing these establishments; by contrast, the neighboring county of Goochland had no groceries on its shoreline. Deputy Sheriff Martin Tutwiler of Fluvanna County estimated that none of the groceries had as much as \$300 invested in stock at any time. and that four of the five groceries carried on “an extensive and nefarious trade with the Watermen.” John S. Turner, a grocery keeper at Ware’s Landing in Fluvanna

Diary, pp. 2-4. VHS.

⁹⁹Goochland, Powhatan, Cumberland, and Fluvanna Counties, 12/10/1810;

County, was notorious for his illegal trafficking with the rivermen. Turner's neighbors traded little or none of their produce with him, and Turner invested no more than \$100 in store goods. Yet Turner could boast in 1830 that he had sent eighteen hogsheads of tobacco to Richmond, and "had made a better crop than any other man in the neighborhood except Genl. [John H.] Cocke" of Bremo. Turner claimed that he obtained the tobacco from "responsible white & free coloured Boatmen," but witnesses, including Tutwiler claimed otherwise. Tutwiler had on occasion recovered stolen property from Turner's grocery on warrant, and had observed Turner "receive several bags full of corn under cover of the night." George N. Irving, who sojourned at Turner's grocery, was kept awake "nearly all the night" by the noise of rivermen bringing wheat into Turner's grocery. It must have infuriated slaveholders that they were powerless to stop poor whites like John S. Turner from profiting from trade that undermined their positions as slaveholders. Predictably, General John H. Cocke, Jr., the only planter to "make" a larger tobacco crop than Turner, signed the petition that contained the affidavits indicting Turner. Cocke was especially concerned with the sale of alcohol to his workers, for he was a great proponent of temperance and even established a temperance society among his workforce.¹⁰⁰ The petitioners' suggested remedy to this system of theft was to forbid any "Tavern or Grogery Licenses" within 800 yards of the banks of James River, and to forbid boats from touching shore except at public landings or when under duress.

The perennial problem of thieving watermen prompted many petitions between 1790 and 1848. In 1790 residents of Powhatan, Goochland, and Cumberland Counties

Miscellaneous Petitions, 1/7/1831; Henrico County, 12/10/1833, LPLV.

¹⁰⁰ Coyner, "John Hartwell Cocke," pp. 335-341.

threatened that unless if “easy and speedy methods for bringing [boatmen] to Justice ... some violations of the peace may take place.” In other words, the petitioners would resort to Lynch law. The petitioners suggested that the owners of boats that plied the James should register their craft and give security for the good behavior of their crew. About fourteen years later the abortive uprising of Gabriel Prosser in Richmond stirred anxieties over the possible connections between illicit trade and insurrection. Citizens of Richmond accused “Captains of the Northern trading vessels” with establishing “a clandestine and marauding intercourse and traffic,” bartering “spirits or baubles” for the goods stolen by enslaved Virginians. These outsiders, complained the petitioners, violated “the Laws of Hospitality, of social Intercourse and moral rectitude.” The “spirit of discontent tending to insurrection” was not due to the living conditions of enslaved Virginians, claimed the petitioners, but was inculcated in their minds by the encouragement they received from northern river merchants to trade.¹⁰¹ In 1810 watermen still plagued riverfront farms and plantations. Petitioners from Goochland, Powhatan, Cumberland, and Fluvanna Counties called for the establishment of an inspection system at the Locks. The “chief boat-man” of every craft passing through the locks would have to provide the inspector with an exact manifest of the cargo, which the inspector would compare with the freight on board. The legislature instituted the office of inspector at the locks in 1811, and this system curtailed thefts along the river for a while.¹⁰² By January 1831 the commercial intercourse on the river between white and black Virginians drew the attention of petitioners.¹⁰³ The social

¹⁰¹ Richmond City, 12/20/1804. Legislative Petitions, LV.

¹⁰² Goochland, Powhatan, Cumberland, and Fluvanna Counties, 12/10/1810, LPLV. *Virginia Revised Code of 1819*, vol 2, pp. 303-306.

¹⁰³ Miscellaneous Petitions, 1/7/1831. Legislative Petitions, LV.

demographics of the state were changing (Figures 22 and 23). Slaveholders grew fearful that the emigration of the honest, white yeomanry was leaving behind a growing proportion of enslaved people, free blacks, and degenerate whites. After Nat Turner's rebellion, there was a heightened sense of crisis regarding the watermen's trade networks. Henrico County petitioners complained in 1833 that depredations by rivermen "have increased & are increasing so rapidly as to render their property insecure and subject them to heavy losses." Planters on the James River claimed that the rivermen had "organized into a system, so well devised, as to defeat all the legal measures which have hitherto been provided for the protection of property along the river." Petitioners called for a ban on the practice of hiring out unruly blacks to boatmen, and removing troublesome enslaved people from the state instead.¹⁰⁴

The increasingly paranoid slaveholding class wanted to institute greater vigilance on the commonwealth's waterways and roads to interdict the illicit commerce and fraternization of poor whites and blacks. Boats allowed rivermen to travel rapidly over great distances, and horse-drawn wagons gave market-men great mobility. The transient nature of these occupations increased the anonymity of the traders. The self-segregation which respectable southerners imposed on themselves by avoiding groceries and other marts associated with lower-class trade only made the face-to-face economy even more "faceless" to middle-class and elite critics. The remedy to the disorders of "this peddling, & petty traffic" that most petitioners suggested was to regulate the traders through strict licensing. Licensees would have to produce a certificate signed by two justices that they were "persons of probity &

¹⁰⁴Miscellaneous Petitions, 1/7/1831; Buckingham County, 1/19/1832; Henrico County, 12/10/1833; LPLV.

integrity, & good deportment,” thus weeding out “all persons of notoriously bad character.” The cart or wagon of a licensed petty trader would have to display conspicuously the identifying number of the trader’s license. Similarly, riverboats should also be numbered and marked in large and plain characters for easy identification.¹⁰⁵ The face-to-face economy, its participants, and their conveyances were targets of vigilance.

Slaveholders suspected that all the commercial exchange between enslaved blacks, free blacks and poor whites involved stolen goods.¹⁰⁶ Traditional agricultural societies like the antebellum South cast vocations that relied upon marketeering rather than manual labor as exploitative of producers and corruptive of society. Petty trade was not considered “an honest support” because the participants often had no other “visible means of subsistence.” The market-men were roundly condemned as “persons not of good fame, or strict probity.” It was widely presumed that free blacks had bad morals, and that the “depraved class of white persons” who traded with them were “of no higher growth of character.”¹⁰⁷ Exchange in country pay – agricultural commodities – came under intense scrutiny as well. *The Farmer’s Accountant and Instructions for Overseers* recommended that no slave be allowed to trade in any commodity without a written permit, and offered a blank form for overseers to copy: “‘The bearer hereof (here name the negro) is the rightful owner of (here describe the article for sale) and has permission to dispose of the same.’ Dated and signed as

¹⁰⁵ Powhatan, Goochland, and Cumberland Counties, 11/6/1790; Fairfax County, 11/1836; Loudoun and Fauquier Counties, 1/13/1836, 1/9/1838; LPLV.

¹⁰⁶ For an essay which links slaves’ marketing, theft of crops, and the circulation of copper coins among the poor, see *The Southern Agriculturist and Register of Rural Affairs* 2 (May 1829):198-202.

¹⁰⁷ Loudoun and Fauquier Counties, 1/13/1836, 1/9/1838, Fairfax County, 11/1836,

before.”¹⁰⁸ It was highly disgraceful for storekeepers to accept anything from enslaved customers other than money or commodities which were recognized as the “usual products of the ingenuity and industry of the negroes.”¹⁰⁹ When Andrew Bailey transplanted his retail store in the early 1830s from Franklin County to Charlotte County in the heart of Virginia’s black belt, he could not continue his usual trading practice. Bailey posted handbills in Charlotte offering “to sell great bargains for cash or to prompt customers on time and take in exchange all kinds of barter.” Instead of a warm welcome back to his home county, Charlotte whites greeted Bailey with suspicion. In Franklin where whites outnumbered enslaved people, bartering was a principal part of his business, but in Charlotte, where the enslaved outnumbered whites, bartering “was looked upon as the door to trading with all kinds of people, for all kinds of things, under all kinds of circumstances.”¹¹⁰ In regions where large slave plantations dominated the formal economy, the face-to-face economy of small farmers and other small producers came under heavy scrutiny from the slaveholding class.

Southern slaveholders reckoned the capitalist marketplace to be a dangerous forum from which the enslaved, women, and other dependents should be shielded and segregated. The plantation regime was riddled with tensions over its own acquisitive economic values and the hierarchical authority structures which propped up slavery and planter rule. The reciprocity and obligations of patriarchy were at odds with the

LPLV.

¹⁰⁸ Pleasant Suit, “Instructions for Overseers,” *The Farmer’s Accountant and Instructions for Overseers* (Richmond: J. MacFarlan, 1828).

¹⁰⁹ Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 191-192.

¹¹⁰ Franklin County’s white population in 1830 outnumbered slaves 9,728 to 4,988. Slaves outnumbered whites in Charlotte County 9,433 to 5,583. Bailey, *Chronicle*, p. 63.

liberalism of the marketplace, which placed the rights of the individual over the demands of socially structured hierarchies. The total obedience demanded by patriarchy could not be expected from an enslaved person who acted as an individual in the marketplace.¹¹¹

The conventions of exchange relations in the marketplace which were uncomplicated by social values repulsed southern planters. Slaveholders, writes Eugene D. Genovese, rejected the idea that the cash nexus was a viable basis for human relations.¹¹² Their trading outside of the protective gaze of their masters corrupted the character of the enslaved. Dealing autonomously rendered slaves independent of their masters, wrote Charles Woodson of Prince Edward County, Virginia, and made them thoughtless, careless, inattentive, and even destructive of their master's interests. The fieldhand who participated in the marketplace was "only attentive to the means of carrying on his traffic, spending his nights in toilsome roving, and in debauchery."¹¹³ As Charles Ball noted, in the conflict between masters and the enslaved over the blacks' market behavior, African Americans were "no less vigilant than their masters" in defeating the masters' attempts to stop their night trading with local merchants. "The utmost caution and severity of masters and overseers [were] sometimes inadequate to repress the cunning contrivances of the slaves."¹¹⁴ The alcohol trade with enslaved men and women was singled out as particularly disruptive of obedience. Whitemarsh B. Seabrook warned that while Yankee peddlers intoxicated their fieldhands with whiskey, they were also poisoning the blacks'

¹¹¹ James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 67.

¹¹² Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), pp. 28, 30.

¹¹³ *The Farmer's Register*, 2 (Sept 1834), pp. 248-249.

¹¹⁴ Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 191-192.

minds with “new and pernicious ideas.” After dealing with Yankee outsiders, insubordination, despondency, and an incapacity to follow “any domestic regulation” ensued.¹¹⁵ Blacks’ relations in the marketplace disrupted the organic unity of the plantation “family.” Enslaved people discovered personal aspirations through market participation which made masters and blacks “look upon each other as natural enemies.”¹¹⁶ The self-interested consciousness that sprang from enslaved blacks’ participation in the market warped the organic, patriarchal framework of southern society.

The plantation regime crowded free blacks into a marginal position in southern society. Restrictive legislation, racial prejudice, and competition with white laborers left few remunerative trades open to free blacks.¹¹⁷ A law of 1807 in Virginia required free blacks to register with their county court for permission to remain in the state. The law was virtually a dead letter, however, since many free blacks continued to reside in the state. To avoid discovery and possible deportation, many free blacks had to adopt a vagrant lifestyle, “flying from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and from County to County,” with no permanent home. The commonwealth’s attorney for Loudoun County listed the names of thirty-six free blacks who had renewed their petitions to the county court to remain in the state numerous times over several years. The effect of this law, he claimed, was to force many free black Virginians “into poverty, vagrancy, and crime.”¹¹⁸ Immediately following Nat Turner’s rebellion in 1831, the social and commercial contacts between free and

¹¹⁵ Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, *An Essay on the Management of Slaves* (Charleston, 1834), p. 8, quoted in Campbell, “As ‘A Kind of Freeman,’” p. 138.

¹¹⁶ McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master,” pp. 36, 39.

¹¹⁷ Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, pp. 217-249.

enslaved blacks galvanized the intense watchfulness of nervous whites. Petitioners flooded the Virginia legislature with calls to control the trade between free blacks and the enslaved. Like the petitions against watermen, the slaveholding class was disturbed by the intercourse between the stationary plantation labor force and a transient class of traders. The “locomotive habits” of free blacks put them under intense suspicion from whites that they were “disseminating pernicious doctrines” among the enslaved. At liberty to travel unmolested in their own neighborhoods, free blacks had virtually unlimited contact with local fieldhands. Enslaved millers operated as “a sort of link of communication” between free blacks and the plantation workforce in Charles City County. The mills were like way stations for migratory free blacks. Enslaved millers in Tidewater Virginia were the commercial middlemen for “squads of free negroes” and the local enslaved population. To slaveholders, migratory free blacks exhibited a dangerous example to enslaved people through their “apparent exemption from want and care and servitude to business.” But life on the road in post-Nat Turner Virginia must have been extremely difficult.¹¹⁹

Free blacks who were able to lead a more settled lifestyle of farming were treated little better than slaves. For instance, two hundred and fifty free blacks of Northumberland County, or 25 percent of the free black population, hired themselves out in twenty-year labor contracts that provided little more than food, clothing and shelter. The contracts tended to reduce free blacks to debt peonage and tie them to the land.¹²⁰ Limitations to the mobility of these free black through the debt structure was probably deliberate. All of the free blacks’

¹¹⁸ Loudoun County, 12/17/1836, LPLV.

¹¹⁹ Charles City County, 12/27/1831, Powhatan County, 12/23/1831, James City County, 12/27/1831, Loudoun and Fauquier Counties, 1/13/1836, 1/9/1838, LPLV.

¹²⁰ Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, pp. 223-25.

business transactions, whether with white or black partners, were questioned. In Powhatan County some white planters and farmers doubted the ability of free blacks to subsist on their own farming. They suspected that most of the free black farmers bought stolen grain and produce from enslaved blacks and resold the boodle with their own crops. Richmond County petitioners were even less charitable, claiming that seven-tenths of all free black farmers and tenants in the state were engaged in this “secret, pilfering trade.” Free black farmers and their white neighbors traded grain and provisions too. White customers of free blacks admitted that they suspected some of the goods traded were contraband, but justified their business as dealings between free, small producers. Petitioners from Accomack, Powhatan and Richmond counties wanted the state to compel free black farmers to provide “written evidence” that they had raised the articles they were selling. The Powhatan petitioners suggested that each county court appoint four discreet, intelligent farmers in convenient parts of the county to assess the size and probable surplus of every free black farmer’s crop. Every free black farmer would have to apply for such a certificate before he or she would be allowed to sell any goods. There would be heavy penalties placed on free blacks who traded without a certificate and also on their customers. Special legislation was enacted in 1842-1843 requiring free blacks in Richmond and Accomack counties to register their crops with white inspectors. The petitioners did not want to subject free blacks to “unnecessary inconvenience,” but they did not think that the “honest portion” of the free black community would suffer much by the certificate system. After all, the petitioners claimed ironically, “a large majority of the intelligent part of the community are disposed and do act most liberally towards” free blacks.¹²¹ This system instituted yet another layer of

¹²¹Powhatan County, 3/10/1838, Richmond County, 2/18/1843, LPLV.

paternalism that free blacks had to negotiate in order to function in Virginia society.

Whether free blacks in Accomack and Richmond counties could continue their contacts with the face-to-face marketplace while under the surveillance of the plantation regime is unknown.

Planters abided mercantile activity by enslaved people so long as it kept them out of mischief. Giving blacks time to work their own gardens or crops was a subtle means of instilling self-discipline in fieldhands. Slaveholders hoped that growing crops would transform blacks' attitudes, behavior and values towards a respect for private property, and diligence at work. Free time spent at agriculture and in legitimate market activity channeled the blacks' time and energy into safe and non-threatening activities, helping to maintain order and stability on the plantation.¹²² As long as planters could supervise and direct the trade of enslaved blacks, they tolerated and even encouraged its practice.

Many slaveholders offered an alternative, closed market to their fieldhands on the plantation in the place of the open marketplace. Plantation stores stocked with molasses, tobacco, cloth, and other articles desired by blacks provided a mart for the crops, chickens, eggs and other commodities they raised. Maintaining a store, claimed the *Farmer's Register*, was economical and put blacks "out of the way of the temptation to roguery." Winbon Lawton of James-Island, Virginia, kept a store on his plantation, and as a result, Lawton's fieldhands were considered "among the most orderly and best disciplined on the Island."¹²³ Some masters without plantation stores established a line of credit at a reputable local store where blacks could make purchases. By extending credit

¹²²Berlin and Morgan, "Introduction," pp. 13, 19-20. Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman,'" pp. 153-154.

to enslaved customers rather than paying a black in cash for his or her produce, a slaveholder could dictate where the fieldhand made purchases. Occasionally an enslaved consumer might overspend his or her credit limit and had to promise future earnings to the master or the storekeeper, thus locking the blacks' semi-independent production into a controlled debt network.¹²⁴ Other slaveholders bought up slave produce for home consumption, or combined it with the plantation's market crop. Increasingly in the 1840's and 1850's slaveholders purchased enslaved people's garden and market crops outright. Masters claimed they were protecting their fieldhands from "unprincipled men . . . who might cheat them out of their earnings." Existing evidence suggests that blacks did not get the current market rate for commodities like cotton, but often far less. Selling to master also meant the blacks could not appropriate some of the masters' crop and sell it along with their own crops. The plantation mart also denied blacks true participation in the marketplace – the autonomy to select a trading partner and bargain over the price.¹²⁵ In this fashion planters also extended their paternalist control over their workers.

Southern romantics portrayed planters behaving with "disinterested kindness" as they imposed themselves as middlemen in blacks' marketing activities. Nehemiah Adams witnessed "a respectable gentleman" who escorted the enslaved Joe to market days to protect him from imposition, make change for him, all with "the glow of cheerfulness and good humor." The pair could be seen together in a wagon, "chatting side by side, counting their net profits, discussing the state of the markets, inventing new

¹²³ *The Farmer's Register*, 4 (June 1836), pp. 114-116.

¹²⁴ This system was a precursor of the debt peonage of the postbellum era. Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman,'" pp. 144-150.

¹²⁵ Schlotterbeck, "The Internal Economy of Slavery," p. 174.

commodities, the master stepping in at the Savings Bank, on the way home, and entering nine or ten dollars more in Joe's pass-book, which already shows several hundred dollars."¹²⁶ George Tucker created a fictive enslaved character, Granny Moll, in his 1824 novel *The Valley of Shenandoah*, which was probably intended to soothe planters' fears of blacks' acquisitive desires. Granny Moll reminisces about the Yankee peddlers who sailed up the York River "in Lord Botetourt's time." The Yankee came "in their little vessels, with their onions, and potatoes, and wooden dishes" to trade. This venerable old woman, in true form to the plantation myth of the happy, loyal slave, states that she did not appreciate the character of Yankees. To mollify his present fears about Yankees trading with the enslaved, Tucker created a mythic past where faithful slaves spurned Yankee peddlers as their masters did.¹²⁷ In another plantation romance the mistress of Swallow Barn plantation relied almost entirely on the enslaved women for fowls and eggs, "the negroes being regularly paid for whatever was offered in this way."¹²⁸

William J. Grayson's 1856 poem, *The Hireling and the Slave*, reinforces the paternal image of the planter protecting his workers (and himself) from imposition:

Calm in his peaceful home the slave prepares
 His garden spot and plies his rustic cares;
 The comb and honey that his bees afford,
 The eggs in ample gourd compactly stored,
 The pig, the poultry with a chapman's art,
 He sells or barter at the village mart,
 Or at master's mansion never fails
 An ampler price to find and readier sales.¹²⁹

¹²⁶Nehemiah Adams, *A Southside View of Slavery* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1854. Reprint, Savannah: The Beehive Press, 1974), pp. 25-26.

¹²⁷Tucker, *Valley of Shenandoah*, vol. 1:217, 300; vol. 2:97.

¹²⁸Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*, pp. 451-452.

¹²⁹William J. Grayson, *The Hireling and the Slave, Chicora, and Other Poems* (Charleston, 1856), p. 57. Quoted in McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master," p. 32.

Grayson's pastoral image of the slave quarter garden, and the benevolent presence of the big house, where the fieldhand can find better profits than the local market appealed to the sensibilities of slaveholders who wanted to believe they were protecting their enslaved workers from the dangers of the marketplace. Planters also believed they were shielding themselves from the marketplace. As the disinterested guardians of their fieldhands' welfare, this paternalist myth denied their exploitation of slave labor to profit on staple commodities of the marketplace.

The most paternalistic transactions made by planters were gifts of old clothing to favored enslaved workers.¹³⁰ Embedded in such exchanges was the sort of reciprocity and noblesse oblige that the southern gentry believed distinguished southern social relations from the cold relations of Yankees based on market values.¹³¹ Such transactions cemented the ties between house servants and the master and mistress. Enslaved people came to expect such gifts as part of the give and take of the master-slave relationship. William Gilmore Simms treated the subject of gift-giving in depth at the end of his novel *Guy Rivers*. Caesar, an enslaved domestic of the genteel Colleton family, rebukes the Yankee peddler, Jared Bunce, for trying to sell a pocket knife to the poor idiot, Chubb, for his reward money. If Bunce is to settle down in Carolina and become a storekeeper, admonishes Caesar, he must learn the "respectable" means of conducting business in the South. Caesar advises Bunce that he cannot take money from enslaved people or poor whites: "Der's a time for *trade*, and a time for *gib*, and you must do de genteel t'ing, and

¹³⁰ Baumgarten, "Plains, Plaid and Cotton," p. 204. Idem., "Clothes for the People," p. 39. Kemble, *Journal*, p. 102.

¹³¹ Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

nebbber consider wha's de 'spense of it. or de profit." Bunce feigns understanding and reaches into his box to give Caesar a "gift," and cruelly whips Caesar across the shoulders. Having put Caesar in his place, Bunce effects a reconciliation by giving Caesar "a flaming handkerchief of red and orange." The novel ends with the Yankee and the black riding together in the peddler's wagon: "Caesar all the way continuing to give the pedler a proper idea of the processes through which he might become a respectable person in Carolina." Simms shows contempt for the Yankee's brutality and, in Simms' view, social ineptitude. As a creature of the marketplace, the Yankee must learn from an enslaved man one of the basic premises of ideal southern social relations – the search for profits came last.¹³²

Slaveholders feared that contact in the marketplace between Yankee peddlers and blacks put notions of equality into the minds of African Americans. As early as the Missouri Debates, southerners viewed Yankee peddlers as firebrands who disseminated abolitionist doctrines among blacks and non-slaveholders. One Charleston newspaper noted that the number of Yankee peddlers in South Carolina had increased to an "alarming degree" in 1820. If these peddlers were "*political* missionaries," warned the newspaper, "they cannot be stopped too soon in their nefarious career. The doctrine of the Missouri question, is not yet, I hope, erased from our remembrance."¹³³ Unease over

1996), pp. 51-65, 70.

¹³² Simms, *Guy Rivers*, pp. 493-495.

¹³³ *Niles Weekly Register* 19 (12/16/1820):243. Hezekiah Niles thought it absurd that South Carolinians should fear the political designs of Yankee peddlers: "Buy Jonathan's wares and truck or trade with him, and he will never abstract his mind from his business to the Missouri question, depend upon it!"

the appearance and distrust of the motives¹³⁴ of abolitionists in the North in the early 1820s made southern slaveholders wary of the participation of Yankee peddlers in the face-to-face economy. Yankee peddlers were suspected of stealing enslaved workers and kidnapping free blacks to sell into bondage.¹³⁵ Merchant Richard Blow of Portsmouth, Virginia, heard a rumor in 1825 that Yankee boat traders only carried away blacks who could pay \$10.¹³⁶ When the governor of New York refused to return an enslaved Virginian whose escape was aided by three black New York sailors, the state of Virginia retaliated with a statute entitled "An act to prevent the citizens of New York from carrying slaves out of this Commonwealth."¹³⁷ The law was meant to coerce New York "into a renunciation of her unjust determinations relative to negro stealers" by trammeling New York merchants' boat trade with Virginia. The law required captains of New York vessels trading in Virginia to seek a security bond from a Virginia resident and allow an inspector to search their ships for runaway blacks.¹³⁸

In early 1836 the South was alarmed by the disclosure of yet another northern "plot" to subjugate the entire country. The *Richmond* published documents it purported were evidence of a "general system" contrived by New York merchants "to render the whole country tributary, politically and commercially, to the aggrandizement of the

¹³⁴ Sydnor, *Development of Southern*, pp. 125-26. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, p. 254.

¹³⁵ Leslie, *Pencil*, pp. 145-161. Wetmore, "The Pedlar."

¹³⁶ Richard Blow (Portsmouth) to Col. George Blow, 2/15/1825. Blow Family Papers, VHS.

¹³⁷ H. M. Henry, *The Police Control of the Slave in South Carolina* (Emory, VA: Copyright, H. M. Henry, 1914), p. 113.

¹³⁸ Virginia Statutes, 3/13/1841. This law harmed Virginians who traded with New York ships, see petition from York County, James City County, and Williamsburg, 12/10/1842, LPLV.

‘Empire State.’” The documents were a circular and accompanying letter received by Richmond lawyer Joseph Mayo from the New York firm of Griffin, Cleaveland & Campbell, an early credit rating agency. Griffin, Cleaveland & Campbell offered to Mayo the business of reporting on the credit-worthiness of merchants in the Richmond area. Mayo indignantly refused to take on the “duties of a *foreign commission of spy general* upon [his] fellow citizens,” and published the contents of the firm’s correspondence, believing that the “concealment of such a subject would be as treacherous as the execution of the design.”¹³⁹ The hysteria over “this continental system of *espionage*” spread through the newspapers to western Virginia,¹⁴⁰ North Carolina, and probably other parts of the South. “An excitement of no ordinary character” arose among the merchants of Newbern, North Carolina, wrote local merchant James W. Bryan, in consequence of their fear that Griffin, Cleaveland & Campbell would adversely affect their credit standing through secret agents. The opposition and fear towards credit rating agencies was not limited to the South, but it appears to have lasted longer there. Southerners linked the commercial conspiracy with the abolitionist mail campaign. The previous September the Huntsville, Alabama, *Democrat* reprinted a story from the New Orleans *True American*, which accused Arthur Tappan of maintaining secret agents in New Orleans to create racial disturbances, and urged southern merchants not to buy from him.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser*, 1/19, 1/21/1836.

¹⁴⁰ *Lexington Gazette*, 2/5/1836.

¹⁴¹ Lewis E. Atherton, “The Problem of Credit Rating in the Ante-Bellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* 12 (Nov 1946):540, 550-551. Lewis Tappan formed “The Mercantile Agency” in 1841 to rate the credit of country merchants, and probably had reporters in the field in the mid 1830’s.

The suspected instrumentality of northern abolitionists was in the form of direct agitation and the distribution of incendiary literature.¹⁴² Thomas Pinckney blamed Denmark Vesey's aborted insurrection in part on northeastern enthusiasts whose "indiscreet zeal in favor of universal liberty" instigated Charleston's black population to revolt. Given that the Missouri question had heightened political enthusiasm in the North, Pinckney warned that the South had "to be vigilant to detect any emissaries, and to stop all incendiary publications which may be sent from that quarter."¹⁴³ The slave conspiracy in the Georgetown District of South Carolina in 1829 was blamed on Yankee peddlers who sold whiskey to blacks.¹⁴⁴ In that same year southerners were distressed by the appearance of David Walker's *Appeal* in Savannah, Georgia, in the late Fall, and subsequently in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Louisiana.¹⁴⁵ Slaveholders feared that Yankee peddlers would use their renowned speaking ability¹⁴⁶ to cajole the southern body politic. Southern planters' intolerance for New England peddlers led them to fixate on "d----d Yankee pelaver." A fictional South Carolina planter in Asa Greene's *A Yankee among the Nullifiers* asserted that Yankees were "the very devil on the tongue," and claimed to be "credibly informed" that there was no Yankee "from the greatest to the

¹⁴² W. Sherman Savage, *Controversy over the Distribution of Abolition Literature* (Jefferson City, MO: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., 1938), p. 40-41.

¹⁴³ [Thomas Pinckney] Achates, *Reflections. Occasioned by the Late Disturbances in Charleston* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822), in *Slave Insurrections: Selected Documents* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), pp. 6-8.

¹⁴⁴ William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina 1816-1836* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), pp. 62-63, 334.

¹⁴⁵ Sydnor, *Development of Southern*, pp. 222-223.

¹⁴⁶ Robinson, *Life and Adventures*, pp. 29, 44. For the verbal play of peddlers, see Hinman, "The Yankee Peddler," pp. 37-38, 55-56. See also "Scrape with the Indians," *The Crockett Almanac 1840* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1840), p. 29.

least, but what can plead like a lawyer, or, if necessary, preach like a priest.”¹⁴⁷ The eminent “power of talking” and “superior acuteness” of Yankees inspired both terror and respect for Yankees among the denizens of the Ohio River valley, claimed Timothy Flint.¹⁴⁸ A writer to the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* accused Yankee peddlers of “industriously, though secretly, circulating and distributing” abolitionist pamphlets throughout South Carolina. The correspondent claimed to have been an “eye-witness” to the facility with which Yankee peddlers could “lead astray the minds of our too credulous neighbours.” Yankee peddlers, the writer went on, were “usually men of some information, and possessed of a remarkable fluency of speech.” The peddlers exercised “their insidious and *oily tongues*” not just to sell goods, but to sway the minds of non-slaveholders in South Carolina against the institution of slavery.¹⁴⁹ Only a few months after that article appeared, Nat Turner led his revolt in Southside Virginia. Virginia governor John Floyd wrote to South Carolina governor James Hamilton, Jr., of his conviction that the “spirit of insubordination” expressed so bloodily in Turner’s revolt “had its origin among, and emanated from, the Yankee population, upon their *first* arrival amongst us, but most especially the Yankee pedlers and traders,” who circulated “inflammatory papers and pamphlets” among the enslaved people of Virginia.¹⁵⁰

The deep and widespread suspicions against Yankee peddlers resulted in a close

Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*.

¹⁴⁷ Greene, *Yankee among the Nullifiers*, pp. 30, 67-68.

¹⁴⁸ Flint, *Recollections*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁹ *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, (Camden, SC), 4/12/1831.

¹⁵⁰ John Floyd to James Hamilton, Jr., 11/19/1831, in Henry Irving Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1971), p. 275. Speech of Governor Floyd to the Virginia legislature, *Niles Register* 40 (1/7/1832):350.

vigilance of the activities of peddlers and other strangers.¹⁵¹ The *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* called for the “vigilant assistance and co-operation” of “every citizen” in 1831 to frustrate the plans of suspected peddler-abolitionists. Vigilance was the universal duty “of every man in the whole State.” Unanimity in public opinion against Yankee peddlers meddling with the slave question was seen as essential to maintaining peace and protecting property.¹⁵² Vigilance Associations arose in many southern localities to curb the interaction of enslaved people with Yankee peddlers, immigrants, and other suspected abolitionists.¹⁵³ The Tappan brothers’ mail campaign in the Summer of 1835 fueled the hysteria over abolitionist agents in the South. Many travelers to the South expected to be greeted with distrust, thus some were surprised when they were welcomed cordially. A. De Puy Van Buren expected that, as a Northerner, he would have to “‘overhaul’ his politics” before he crossed the Mason-Dixon line, but Van Buren “found that the South that one reads and hears of, is altogether different from the one that one *sees* and becomes acquainted with,” and he talked politics peacefully with his southern hosts.¹⁵⁴ Northerners who voiced sympathy with southern sentiments could attain safe passage. Samuel J. Lewis, a peddler from Naugatuck, Connecticut, used a letter opposing abolitionism written by his father as a kind of passport through Virginia in 1836. Lewis showed the letter to many of his customers and hosts, who approved of the sentiments of the letter:

¹⁵¹ Savage, *Controversy*, p. 34.

¹⁵² *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, (Camden, SC), 4/12/1831.

¹⁵³ McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master,” p. 36.

¹⁵⁴ Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, p. 240. Van Buren, *Jottings*, p. 141.

One gentleman says tell the old man I wish him success. another says he must be a fine old fellow I recon, and a third says I could take such a man in my bosom. . . Colonel Daily, the Gentleman with whom I am staying over sunday . . . also says I must tell you you must put down the abolitionists.

The letter not only exonerated Lewis of the suspicion of abolitionism, but “may have been of some advantage perhaps to [his] business.”¹⁵⁵ By the 1850s Vigilance Associations had arisen in many South Carolina districts to curb blacks’ market contacts. The two commodities which gave the Vigilance Associations the most concern were alcohol and news. These associations focused their attention on outsiders, particularly Yankee peddlers, immigrants, and suspected abolitionists, but they also pressured more stable merchants.¹⁵⁶

Yankee peddlers, poor and middling whites, and free and enslaved blacks interacted daily in the antebellum South in a vibrant culture which combined exchange and conviviality. In this face-to-face marketplace trading partners discarded the hierarchies of economic and racial subordination, driving hard bargains with each other more or less as equals. This trade activated the individual longings of people on the bottom of southern society and a competitive drive to actuate those desires. This search for individual fulfillment and personal profit was subversive of slaveholder hegemony. Planters distrusted lower-class trade because it eroded their control of enslaved labor and the products of the slave economy. Yankee outsiders were conspicuous in this

¹⁵⁵ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Naugatuck, CT), 1/17/1836, 3/6/1836, 4/17/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

¹⁵⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 98. McDonnell, “Money Knows No Master,” p. 36.

commerce, which gave the slaveholding class a convenient scapegoat to rally all southern whites against lower-class trade.

CHAPTER 4
A LOSS OF MASTERY: NORTHERN INCURSIONS
INTO THE SOUTHERN HOUSEHOLD

In April, 1827, Minister James W. Alexander attended the court day fair at Charlotte County courthouse. An “immense and noisy multitude” composed of “all the ranks” of Virginia society surrounded the courthouse, where congressional and state elections were also in progress. Alexander discerned several divisions in the crowd. Near the taverns Alexander identified “the mob, whose chief errand is to drink and quarrel.” A market occupied another section of the courthouse grounds that featured “a fair of all kinds of vendibles, stalls of mechanics and tradesmen, eatables and drinkables, with a long line of Yankee wagons, which [were] never wanting on these occasions.” Fueled by alcohol, sharp trading, and political debate, the volatile lower-class males erupted into an “unspeakable riot.” Elite Virginians in attendance had to accede to the rowdy, masculine culture of the face-to-face economy in order to attract the votes of white males.¹ But their message was muffled by the allures of the face-to-face economy. Competing speakers created a din. “The loud cries of salesmen vending wares at public auction” strove against “the vociferation of a stump orator” for the attention of the crowd.² While

¹ Elliot J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *AHR* 90 (February 1985):18-43. Abdy, *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 296. Around the time of Edward Strut Abdy’s tour in 1834, gouging and fighting were diminishing since they were becoming “direputable.”

² John Hall, ed., *Forty Years’ Familiar Letters of James W. Alexander, D.D.* (New York:

Yankee peddlers auctioned off northern manufactures, across the courthouse yard a local politician might have been calling for the boycott of goods protected by the tariff, perhaps some of the very goods the peddlers sold. The orators might have echoed the sentiments of John Randolph in neighboring Prince Edward County, who crowed that he would never purchase “a dollar’s worth” of goods from northern factories. Yankee peddlers who sold northern-made broadcloth would have found few customers at Charlotte courthouse, for the “great majority” of the crowd was dressed in “domestic, undyed cloth,” or homespun, as a symbol of their contempt for protected northern fabrics. Yet Yankee peddlers did a booming business in Southside Virginia, where Charlotte and Prince Edward counties lay.³ To secure their national political agenda, southern politicians appealed to the domestic mastery of all southern white males. Dangers voiced in state and national politics masked a greater anxiety in the domestic sphere. Southern male heads of household were losing control over the issues of household consumption to their wives and dependents.

Southern society was in conflict socially, culturally, and politically over issues of consumption. The social disorder brought by market participation was not limited to the market culture of the face-to-face economy. The values of the capitalist marketplace

Charles Scribner & Co, 1870), pp. 100-101. For a fictive description of a fair at a Virginia courthouse which also includes Yankee peddlers, stump orators, and bullies, see Narrator, “Memoir of the Ambitious Lawyer,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (July 1835):645. See also George Tucker’s depiction of a “motley and grotesque collection” of people dressed in homespun at a Virginia courthouse fair in: Tucker, *Valley of Shenandoah*, vol. 1:217.

³ Randolph’s speech, *Niles Register* 35 (9/20/1828):58-64. Boycott resolutions of Prince Edward County printed in the Lynchburg *Virginian*, 10/13/1828. Of all Virginia counties, only nearby Buckingham County (153) issued more licenses to peddlers than Charlotte County (131) between 1798 and 1850. Prince Edward issued 109 in this time

were creeping into the domestic realm of middling and upper-class households as well. Conspicuously absent from the political debate over protected northern manufactures at Charlotte Court House were the women who made most of the purchases of northern cloth and whose labor outfitted the men in homespun. But women's voices were not entirely silenced in the debate over consumption in the "public sphere." Cynthia A. Kierner provides a broader definition of the public sphere that embraces not only formal political participation but also informal civic and sociable life, the world of letters, certain business and market transactions, and religious and benevolent activities. Women's decisions in the domestic sphere had an impact on political debate. Wearing a homespun gown to a ball, for instance, was a political expression.⁴ A gendered conflict ensued in southern households between women who led the cultural refinement of the household through consumption, and men whose calls for sectional independence pressured them to economize their expenditures on luxuries. The southern economy's deepening ties to the capitalist marketplace on the national and international levels wrought changes in the domestic economy of every southern household. The growing consumer culture was changing the household from a center of production to a center of consumption, and southern planters felt powerless to stop it. As southern planters lost their sense of economic independence in international commodity markets and interregional trading patterns, they tried desperately to reassert their mastery over their individual households. A feeling of powerlessness among southern white males as competitors in the capitalist marketplace translated into a sense that they were losing mastery over their own

period. License Returns, Auditor of Public Accounts, LV.

⁴ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-*

households and society.

The divergence in the northeastern and southern economies that led to conflict in the 1820's had begun in the late eighteenth century. At the onset of the American Revolution, the southern colonies led in wealth and population; all of the mainland colonies were rural and predominantly agricultural. Yet over the next fifty years the southern economies stagnated while the Northeast diversified into commerce and industry. New England produced no staple crop for export, and even had to import much of its grain for home consumption. This led New England merchants to seek out commodities for earning foreign exchange. In the process of consolidating a commercial economy the Northeast developed more urban trade centers, more skilled artisans, shopkeepers and merchants, and less aristocratic societies than the South. The merchant capital raised in overseas and coastal trade funded the expansion of the northeastern economy into industrialization.⁵ After 1815 the differences between the southern and northern economic systems became more apparent as industrialization picked up in the northeast, freehold settlement of the northwest expanded, and the southwestern cotton frontier developed. In the 1820s, the Northeast's diversified economic system began to outpace the relatively static economy of the old seaboard South states, and northern shippers and merchants began to monopolize the foreign and domestic shipping services of both the Southeast and the growing Southwest. The South's impressive wealth

1835 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 2.

⁵ Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 311. Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, pp. 338-43.

indexes hid serious structural flaws that emerged during the Jacksonian era.⁶

Pre-Revolutionary Virginia and Carolina planters built their fortunes through land speculation, commerce, and money lending, not just planting.⁷ But the flexibility, innovation, and speculative drive that made northern merchants successful were wanting among post-Revolutionary southern planters. Many planters were shrewd and dynamic managers of their estates, yet they were reluctant and ineffectual entrepreneurs. Slaveholders were intimately involved with capitalist markets. They needed cash, credit, and marketing services, and pursued profits with the same rationalistic impulse that other capitalists exhibited, but eschewed mercantile enterprise as a vocation. The lack of large cities in the South retarded entrepreneurship because opportunities, knowledge, cosmopolitanism, market information, education, and commercial credit did not converge in a native merchant class or any other segment of the southern population.⁸ Preoccupied with managing their estates and enslaved work force, planters had long left the marketing and shipping of their crops and the manufacture of their consumer needs predominantly to European and Yankee capitalists. After the Revolution, rather than replacing Scottish

⁶ James A. Henretta, *Evolution of American Society, 1700-1815*, (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1973), pp. 187-88, 200-05. Shore, *Southern Capitalists*, p. 9, 199, note 25.

⁷ R. C. Nash, "Trade and Business in Eighteenth-Century South Carolina: The Career of John Guerard, Merchant and Planter" *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 96(1995):6-29. Thomas Michael Costa, "Economic Development and Political Authority: Norfolk, Virginia Merchant-Magistrates, 1736-1800," (Ph.D. diss Coll. of William and Mary 1991). Charles G. Steffen, "The Rise of the Independent Merchant in the Chesapeake: Baltimore County 1660-1769" *JAH* 76(1989):9-33. Jacob M. Price, "The Last Phase of the Virginia-London Consignment Trade: James Buchanan & Co., 1758-1768" *WMQ* 43(1986):64-98. Walter B. Edgar, "Robert Pringle and His World" *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 76(1975): 1-11.

⁸ Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 111. Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, pp. 338-349. Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom*, pp. 53-54, 97. Shore, *Southern Capitalists*,

and British merchants with a native southern merchant class, southerners only intensified their indebtedness and perpetuated their colonial dependence on foreign merchants.⁹

Among elite southern agriculturists in the nineteenth century there was a strong cultural prejudice that rejected commerce as a vulgar vocation. By stressing the incompatibility of merchandizing with aristocratic pretensions, southern planters restated their fears of the effects of commerce on the hierarchical relations of society. Colonial Virginia planters had viewed their Scottish merchant factors distastefully as outsiders, especially as their debts to the factors grew ever larger.¹⁰ George Tucker wrote in 1816 that Virginians' "genteel laziness" made them unsuitable for "the drudgery of commerce," so they left that branch of business "all to the Yankees."¹¹ The *Southern Agriculturist* editorialized in 1836 that South Carolina planters regarded commercial occupations as "inconsistent with a proper gentility." "Noble blood will not trade in merchandise," noted the journal.¹² In 1854 a female book peddler met a young Virginian who, while travelling to improve his health, tried his hand at book peddling. At the third or fourth house he called on, a young boy labeled him a peddler, and the enslaved domestic, "coming to the door, looked at him as he would any other pedler, and said his mistress didn't want to buy any thing." Stinging from this rebuke from a small boy and an enslaved black, the young man immediately gave up selling books because his

pp. 1-32.

⁹ George T. Starnes, *Sixty Years of Branch Banking in Virginia* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), pp. 15, 26. Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, pp. 358-362. Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, pp. 114-15. Lorraine E. Holland, "Rise and Fall of the Ante-Bellum Virginia Aristocracy: A Generational Analysis" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1980), pp. 160-61.

¹⁰ Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, pp. 358-359.

¹¹ Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, p. 36.

“Virginia blood could not brook being called a pedler.”¹³ In spite of the cultural posturing of the southern gentleman, planters did exhibit acquisitiveness, but they expressed it in ways that were socially acceptable in aristocratic slave society. Profits were spent on the accumulation of more land and enslaved labor; they were rarely reinvested into commerce, farm machinery or manufactures.¹⁴ The claim that commerce was antithetical to southern chivalry was meant to protect the South and its hierarchical structure, but, ironically, anti-commercial propaganda contributed to the mercantile subordination of southern agriculture to northern shipping and marketing.

The pattern of northern and foreign control of commerce was repeated in every southern port and most inland towns and cities.¹⁵ The vast majority of the southern mercantile class – cotton factors, commission merchants, insurers, wholesalers, and retailers – was composed of Yankees and other outsiders. Northerners ran practically all of the business of Mobile, Alabama, including banking and manufacturing as well as commerce. Savannah, Georgia had a large Yankee population, and Augusta was known as a “Yankee town.”¹⁶ The “enterprising people” of Richmond, Virginia, were mostly outsiders, “Scotch, Irish, and especially New England men,” observed Morris Birkbeck in 1817.¹⁷ James Alexander noted in 1826 that Yankees, Irishmen, and Scotsmen

¹² Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, p. 14.

¹³ Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, p. 226.

¹⁴ Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, pp. 28, 30.

¹⁵ Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, p. 42. Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, p. 17. For the career of one Yankee merchant and cotton factor in the South, see Lavin, *William Bostwick*, especially pp. 6-10, 15-17, 343-355.

¹⁶ Robert Royal Russell, “Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-1861,” *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences* 11 (March, June 1923):99-100.

¹⁷ Birkbeck, *Notes*, pp. 17-18.

dominated the commission trade of Petersburg, Virginia.¹⁸ Yankee proprietors could be found behind the counters of crossroad stores in the Virginia backcountry.¹⁹ A Yankee merchant of Charleston, South Carolina, estimated in 1838 that five out of six merchants in Charleston and every other southern port were Yankees.²⁰ Frances Anne Kemble remarked in 1838 that most shopkeepers in Georgia were “thoroughbred Yankees, with the true Yankee propensity to trade, no matter on how dirty a counter, or in what manner of wares.”²¹ The planter class’s disdain for commerce and its “dirty counters” led to the occupation of an important niche of the southern economy by outsiders.

Planter neglect of the commercial sector led to economic stagnation. The old seaboard slave states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and to a lesser extent Maryland and Georgia endured a relative economic decline in the 1820’s and 1830’s. Slave-based monocultural production of tobacco, rice, and cotton on the worn out soils of the Tidewater and Piedmont could not keep up economically with the cheaper, richer land to the west or with the diversifying, increasingly industrial economies to the north. Unlike the rest of the nation, which witnessed a new boom cycle in the mid 1820s, most of the seaboard South did not recover from the Panic of 1819 until well into the 1830’s. The prices of southern staples had slumped into a trough that persisted until the early 1830’s. Tobacco prices were prevailingly low from 1819 to 1833, while the size of the crops produced in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina increased only slightly. Prices for upland cotton were high in the boom following the end of the War of 1812.

¹⁸ Hall, *Forty Years’ Familiar*, p. 94.

¹⁹ Bailey, *Chronicles*, pp. 36-37, 45.

²⁰ *Charleston Courier*, 10/17/1838.

²¹ Scott, *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 26, 118.

commanding from 21¢ to 30¢ per pound between 1815 and 1818, but the Panic of 1819 sent cotton prices plummeting down to 12¢ to 18¢ per pound between 1819 and 1825. The price of cotton bottomed out in 1827 at 9¢ per pound and did not rise above 10¢ per pound until 1833. South Carolina's cotton output increased only 25 percent between 1821 and 1839, dropping from first to fifth place among cotton producing states. Exports from Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia were no greater in 1833 than they were in 1819. The value of land declined sharply in Virginia. In 1817 it was estimated that the land values of the state were \$206 million. By 1830 the estimate had shrunk to only \$90 million. The perception of decline was stark and disturbing for southerners.²² The standard of living in the South in the 1820's and 1830's seemed but a pale comparison to a genteel past that Southerners nostalgically looked back to. As John Randolph gloomily concluded in 1831, poverty was "stalking through the land."²³

Due to the prolonged economic distress of the 1820s and 1830s the planter class found it difficult to reproduce itself on the eastern seaboard. Competing with more productive lands opening up in the southwest, eastern plantations barely paid for their own operation. Many large planters were content, wrote Jesse Burton Harrison in 1832, "if they barely meet their plantation expenses without a loss of capital; and that, of those who make any agricultural profit, it will in none but rare instances average more than 1-

²² Robert P. Sutton, "Nostalgia, Pessimism, and Malaise: The Doomed Aristocrat in Late-Jeffersonian Virginia," *VMHB* 76 (1968):41-55. Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 137. Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 11.

²³ Hugh A. Garland, *The Life of John Randolph of Roanoke* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1853), vol. 2, p. 345. *Richmond Enquirer*, 1/21/1832. The declension of Virginia was a major theme among the delegates who debated the future of slavery in the Old Dominion in 1832. Robert, *Road from Monticello*, pp. 23, 64-65.

1½% on the capital invested.”²⁴ Many planters were heavily indebted, and patrimonies went on the auction block to pay off creditors, rather than to set up sons independently, or to give daughters respectable starts in new households. With the abolishment of primogeniture, the estates parceled out to sons grew smaller and smaller, compounded by the worn out and less productive soil. Younger sons found their prospects had narrowed the most. They inherited less property, entered marriage later in life, and were more likely to migrate to another region than their older brothers. Younger sons were less likely to follow their fathers’ career path, and were more often steered into the respectable professions of law, medicine, or the ministry, or the ungentlemanly, despised vocations of merchandizing, plantation management (overseers), or the mechanical trades.²⁵ Just as a combination of economic exigencies at home and greater opportunities abroad led the younger sons of New England farmers to become peddlers, scions of Tidewater plantations migrated west to erect a new, more brutal, more acquisitive plantation culture in the Southwest.

Young southern men believed that immigration to the old southwest gave them a chance to assert their manly independence, but to remain on the seaboard meant to struggle under adverse economic conditions while deferring to the whims of fathers and other relatives in extensive kinship networks.²⁶ Southern fathers were alarmed by their loss of control over their sons, but just as disconcerting was a massive loss of population in the seaboard South. Population growth in the entire United States averaged 33 percent

²⁴ Jesse Burton Hall quoted from the *American Quarterly Review* in Holland, “Rise and Fall,” p. 213.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 244-309. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, p. 35.

²⁶ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men & Women on the Southern Frontier* (New

from 1820 to 1830, but Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas did not reach 16 percent (the opening of Georgia's backcountry contributed to its 51.5 percent growth). In the following decade the overall populations of Virginia and the Carolinas grew at less than 2.5 percent. Cheaper, more fertile lands to the west drew away large numbers of Virginians and Carolinians. By the 1840s whole sections of South Carolina were virtually deserted. Virginia suffered a demographic collapse (Figure 22); between 1830 and 1840 the state's white population increased a mere 3 percent, and eastern Virginia lost 26,000 inhabitants. Those who remained behind were worried by the degeneration of the population (Figure 23). While free whites were moving westward, and surplus enslaved workers were sold to the South and Southwest, the "most mischievous part" of the community, the free blacks, clung "to the bosom of society, and injuriously affects its best interests."²⁷ The seaboard South was losing many of its most enterprising and substantial citizens, "the bone and sinew of the country," to the lure of profits in the West.²⁸

The emigration of white artisans from the seaboard South was blamed in part on the competition from Yankee peddlers. Yankee peddlers, some Virginians believed, constricted opportunities in commerce and petty manufactures for young Southerners. The engrossment of the tinware trade by Yankee peddlers forced young men "bred in Virginia, to the Tin business . . . to look abroad in some neighboring State for means of a

York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 22-24, 33-35.

²⁷ Loudoun County, 12/17/1836, LPLV.

²⁸ Sydnor, *Development of Southern*, pp. 250-251. Sellers, *Market Revolution*, p. 277. Starnes, *Sixty Years of Branch Banking*, pp. 68-69. Holland, "Rise and Fall," pp. 209, 327. Faust, *Sacred Circle*, pp. 11, 106-07, 114. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, pp. 181-82.

support.”²⁹ The competition visited by Yankee peddlers, protested residents of four Virginia counties, caused many of Virginia’s “active and enterprising traders to emigrate to other States.”³⁰ It is likely that the denigration of labor and the mercantile trades also contributed to the emigration of some of Virginia’s native tradesmen. Had the cities of Virginia been able to develop without the unfair competition of the northern cities, reported Francis Mallory, they could have provided a market for local produce and added value to Virginia’s real estate. Furthermore, vibrant cities could have provided “to the rising generation employment as merchants, clerks, mechanics, seamen, professional men, &c., instead of forcing them to seek subsistence beyond her borders – as they have done for the last thirty years.”³¹ Not only did Yankee peddlers drive the socially stable elements of the nonslaveholding classes out of the state, but they further undermined the social hierarchy by trading with enslaved people, and robbing the region of its wealth.

Concerned by the prevailing economic depression in southeastern agriculture during the 1820s and early 1830’s, southeastern political economists placed the blame on the “monopolizing spirit of the great northern cities,” and the “centralism of the moneyed power.” In terms that paralleled the rhetoric against the Monster Bank, southerners raised the specter of “the monster of Northern monopoly.”³² For instance, a Norfolk, Virginia, newspaper claimed in 1834 that the geographical position of Norfolk entitled it to be “the great southern seaport,” but its foreign commerce had been captured by New

²⁹ Frederick County, 12/6/1822, LPLV.

³⁰ Brunswick, Fauquier, Prince William, and Shenandoah Counties, 1827-1828, LPLV.

³¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, 6/26/1838.

³² Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, pp. 116-117. *Charleston Courier*, 4/11/1838. *The Southern Agriculturist and Register of Rural Affairs* 2 (May 1829):198-202. *The Farmer’s Register* 5 (Dec 1837), pp. 548-550.

York, which, “vampire-like,” was “sucking her blood to the last drop.”³³ The *Columbia Telescope* grumbled that the city of Charleston had become “a colony of Yankee speculators, cherishing not a spark of Southern feeling.”³⁴ Writers such as correspondents to the *Charleston Mercury* and the *Richmond Whig*, Francis Mallory, and Colonel C. G. Memminger blamed the policies of the federal government and the manipulations of northern capitalists for the South’s economic backwardness. These statesmen outlined the history of how southern commerce “was swallowed up in the vortex of Northern enterprise, Bank influence and governmental oppression.” All the authors claimed that the South originally occupied a position of commercial dominance in the Union. The correspondent to the *Richmond Whig* provided statistics that showed that prior to the Revolution the direct trade of Virginia and South Carolina exceeded the commerce of Pennsylvania and New York. The geographically uneven capitalization and policies of the first and second Banks of the United States, fumed the authors, stimulated the manufactures and commerce of the northern states but depressed the trade of the southern states. The disproportionate expenditure of federal revenues in the northern states nearly annihilated the commerce and agriculture of the South, while the tariff system, culminating in the Tariff of Abominations of 1828 “gave the final blow to the commerce of the staple States.”³⁵

The perceived “rapid decadence” of the agricultural and commercial interests of the Southeast in the 1820’s and early 1830’s was blamed in part on the drain of capital

³³ Quoted in Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, p. 362.

³⁴ Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, pp. 178-179.

³⁵ *Charleston Mercury*, 9/17/1831. “Decrease of the Trade of the Southern, and Increase of that of the Northern Ports, from the Richmond Whig,” *The Farmer’s Register* 5 (Dec

from South to North, orchestrated, Southerners believed, by the Yankee commercial system. Yankee peddlers were seen as an integral part of the larger system of northern expropriation. A recurrent complaint against Yankee peddlers was that they drained the South of specie.³⁶ As early as 1806, petitioners from the Virginia counties of Campbell, Cumberland, and Spotsylvania warned that peddlers reduced the internal circulation of money in Virginia to the tune of \$300,000 a year, whereby even the established banks were “constantly drained of their specie!”³⁷ An appeal from residents of Frederick County in 1822 estimated that Yankee tin peddlers sapped “\$75,000 at the lowest calculation” each year from Virginia in cash and barter. The petitioners charged that the amount of money and barter taken out of the state by peddlers from Baltimore and other northern cities “would fall little short of \$100,000 annually.”³⁸ Citizens across Virginia protested to the legislative session of 1827-1828 that peddlers had “actually produced a balance of trade against the interior of the Commonwealth.”³⁹ Stats Nominis Umbra alleged in a series of articles to the *Charleston Mercury* in 1831 that the cause of South Carolina’s declension was the “annual abduction” of massive commercial profits by Yankee merchants that should have been added to the state’s productive capital. The writer reviewed for his readers the “mercantile history of our country for the last twenty years,” during which time three million dollars had been removed from the state to invest “in some profitable stock” in the North. Two individuals alone, claimed Stats Nominis Umbra, had extracted more than one million dollars, and many others had taken sums

1837), pp. 548-550. *Richmond Enquirer*, 6/26/1838. *Charleston Courier*, 4/11/1838.

³⁶ *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, (Camden, SC), 4/12/1831.

³⁷ Campbell, Cumberland, and Spotsylvania Counties, 12/6/1806, LPLV.

³⁸ Frederick County, 12/6/1822, LPLV.

ranging from \$20,000 to \$150,000.⁴⁰ Colonel C. G. Memminger described the practice of transient Yankee merchants as a “vampyre like” system that “sucks the very life blood of the South.” Memminger estimated that six or eight million dollars had been removed from southern cities in this manner “to enrich other sections and embellish other cities.”⁴¹ Yankee peddlers, merchants, and factors who worked in southern cities and towns were referred to as “birds of passage” who had no ties or interests to the community. Yankee traders milked the southern countryside, “diligently collecting” funds, but fled North “at the first alarm of disease” with all the silver they had acquired during their brief stay.⁴²

The Yankee assault upon the prosperity and social stability of the South demanded a vigorous response from southern white men. The rhetoric of manful defense of the South’s traditions and institutions ballyhooed on the national level reverberated in southern homes as well.

* * *

Appeals to manhood were very common in antebellum political discourse. In relation to northern industry and commerce, the South portrayed itself as a naive female consumer exploited by an aggressive Yankee peddler.⁴³ Southern politicians attempted several strategies to combat northern commercial dominance: onerous license fees on

³⁹ Brunswick, Fauquier, Prince William, and Shenandoah Counties, 1827-1828, LPLV.

⁴⁰ *Charleston Mercury* 9/14, 9/16, 9/17/1831.

⁴¹ *Charleston Courier*, 4/11/1838.

⁴² *Charleston Mercury* 9/14/1831. Poor Richard, “Hints On Economy – To Sothrons,” *Charleston Mercury*, reprinted in *Georgia Journal* 10/6/1828. *Richmond Enquirer*, 6/26/1838. Fauquier County, 2/2/1842, LPLV.

⁴³ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 256-61.

Yankee peddlers,⁴⁴ direct trade with Europe,⁴⁵ industrialization,⁴⁶ boycotts of protected goods, and Nullification.⁴⁷ In resistance to protective tariffs on northern manufactures and western produce, southern political rhetoric made explicit appeals to “manly independence” and the cult of honor. In the first call for a southern boycott of northern goods in retaliation for the Tariff of 1824, Henry L. Pinckney asked whether the South would “quietly submit” to the impositions of the Tariff, or “manfully resist” them. Submission and dependence would debase white males to the status of enslaved blacks. Pinckney likened the South’s acquiescence to Tariffs to riveting onto “themselves the chain of their own slavery and degradation.”⁴⁸ Until Georgians wore and ate nothing but home manufactures and local products, warned the *Georgia Journal* in 1828, they would not be truly independent, but the “‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ to other people” – in other words, slaves to the North.⁴⁹ To rescue the honor of all southern white males, wrote James Hamilton, Jr., Carolinians had a duty to “stand manfully at the Safety

⁴⁴ See chapter two.

⁴⁵ Vicki Vaughn Johnson, *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845-1871* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992). Herbert Wender, “Southern Commercial Conventions 1837-1859.” *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* Ser. 48 no. 4 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1930).

⁴⁶ Larry Schweikart, *Banking in the American South from the Age of Jackson to Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), pp. 245, 251-52. Shore, *Southern Capitalists*, pp. 32-38. Randall M. Miller, “The Fabric of Control: Slavery in Antebellum Southern Textile Mills,” *Business History Review* 55 (Winter 1981):471-90.

⁴⁷ Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, pp. 34-35, 304-306. Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, pp. 144, 146, 186, 210, 216, 253-55. Sellers, *Market Revolution*, pp. 296, 329.

⁴⁸ *Charleston Mercury*, 3/20/1824. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, p. 106.

⁴⁹ *Georgia Journal*, 4/28/1828.

valve of Nullification.”⁵⁰ The Compromise Tariff of 1833 allowed southern politicians to back down from Nullification and still save face, but the unmanly economic dependence on northern goods continued throughout the antebellum era. In 1850 William Gilmore Simms warned that the agricultural South’s utter dependence upon northern manufactures “emasculated” the South.⁵¹ Ultimately, the assertion of manly independence from northern manufactures would have to be upheld by the white male head of every southern household through boycotts. Southern white males joined the battle willingly, for changes in the domestic economy were challenging the mastery of husbands over wives and dependents.

The political expediency of boycotts had a long heritage in Anglo-America. Prior to the Revolution, American patriots tried to pry concessions from the British parliament by boycotting British tea and other goods. In post-Revolutionary Virginia, societies were formed in the late 1780’s to discourage extravagant spending, to encourage home trade, and to remedy the scarcity of hard currency in circulation. The four counties surrounding the city of Richmond called for “a spirited exercise of industry, by enlarging the production of the land and by practicing a strict frugality.”⁵² To combat depredations on American commercial shipping by France and Great Britain, Jefferson ordered a total embargo of foreign goods in late 1807. Protectionists also tried boycotts to further their political ends. A writer to the Philadelphia *Aurora* in 1819 called for the formation of an

⁵⁰ James Hamilton, Jr. (Rice Hope, Savannah River) to James H. Hammond, 1/16/1832. “Letters on the Nullification Movement in South Carolina, 1830-1834,” *AHR* 6 (July 1901):748-749.

⁵¹ William Gilmore Simms, “Summer Travel in the South,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, n.s. 2 (September 1850):24-65. Reprinted in Eugene L. Schwaab, ed., *Travels in the Old South*, 2 vols., Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973. II:470.

association for wearing only American manufactures, since the writer believed the protective tariffs had little chance for success due to the influence of the slave states in the federal government.⁵³ Thus the resort to boycotts by southern sectionalists in the 1820s and 1830s had many precedents – on the national level, in the North, and as a republican versus federalist strategy. In courthouses across the plantation South in the fall of 1828, particularly Georgia and South Carolina, committees drafted and adopted resolutions for the non-consumption of goods “*manufactured north of the river Potomac.*”⁵⁴ In Baldwin County, Georgia, a meeting of over one hundred people resolved to boycott Northern goods with “great unanimity.” The boycott movement was led by the “substantial planters of the county.”⁵⁵ William Cooper called for heavy license fees on retailers of protected western produce as well. Southern economic independence from the West could be achieved through the same measures that regulated Yankee peddlers’ marketing. All that was required was a “very slight alteration in our law regulating pedlars,” and the horse, hog, mule, cattle, bagging, and bacon trade of the West with the South would be halted.⁵⁶ Erecting barriers to western and northern goods, however, would prove nearly impossible.

By tying their personal honor and manliness to independence from northern

⁵² Starnes, *Sixty Years of Branch*, p. 16.

⁵³ Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy 1819-1821* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), p. 19. For the rise after the War of 1812 of protectionist societies which called for the consumption of American fabrics, see Arthur Harrison Cole, *The American Wool Manufacture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), vol 1., pp. 161-62.

⁵⁴ *Niles Register* 35 (9/20/1828), pp. 58-64. This article contains quotes from many anti-Tariff meetings held in the South.

⁵⁵ *Georgia Journal* 7/7/1828.

⁵⁶ *Statesman Patriot*, 11/12/1828.

goods, southern politicians risked ridicule and dishonor if they failed. One of the most insulting instances of Yankee guile was the imposition of Yankee buttons as British buttons on prominent southern politicians. It was rumored in 1832 that several leaders of the Nullification movement in South Carolina, who had resolved to boycott all northern goods, hired a local tailor to fashion suits for them from British cloth they provided. The Nullifiers asked the tailor to order gold buttons from Britain emblazoned with the palmetto, the symbol of South Carolina. The tailor, knowing he could get buttons cheaper and more quickly from New England, disregarded the political sentiments of the gentlemen, and finished the suits with "Yankee buttons." Long after accepting the suits, "general H. [James Hamilton?]" learned of the ruse, and admonished the tailor: "for God's sake, don't say a word about it."⁵⁷ It is unclear whether this story was true or if it was anti-Nullification propaganda. Asa Greene printed a similar tale, meant to ridicule southern boycotts, in his comic novel, *A Yankee among the Nullifiers*. In Greene's story a Yankee peddler calls at the house of a member of the "Nullifier gentry," who swore to the peddler that he would sooner "go bareheaded and barebacked till the end of time" than wear a coat or hat made in America. The peddler requests permission to examine the planter's coat and hat, which the planter asserts are all British manufactures. The peddler proceeds to point out that the hat and coat were manufactured in New England, and even the hat label, which reads "Bond-street, London," was actually printed in

⁵⁷ *Niles Weekly Register*, (11/3/1832):146. The previous year, *Niles Register* 41 (10/22/1831):149, tells of a Yankee who made "about 2,000 dollars a year by the manufacture of *shaving boxes* to assist the operation of *nullifying* the beards of southern gentlemen."

Hartford, Connecticut.⁵⁸ These Yankee tricks were a gross insult to the honor of southern gentlemen, who communicated and negotiated their status through the visible parts of the body and face. The Yankee counterfeits corrupted the surface appearances of the men, forcing them into a lie, a major breach of personal honor.⁵⁹ These tales demonstrated the permeability of the South to the pervasive and invasive commercial culture of the North, and the powerlessness of southern men to stop it.

The intrusion of the marketplace into the household of Georgian James Dowdell led to a remarkable public assertion by Dowdell of his domestic authority. Dowdell placed an advertisement in the *Georgia Journal* in 1826 to reassure his sense of mastery and to publicly declare to the community his manly independence from the marketplace:

Whereas a clan of designing, unprincipled mischief-makers, did influence, misguide and induce my wife (when she was only 15 years old) to buy a considerable quantity of store-goods, without my knowledge or approbation, and whereas I have waited a sufficient time for them to reflect, repent and make amends for their conduct, to no purpose, but in vain – Therefore this is to inform pedlars and venders of dry goods, that it will be entirely useless for them to call at my house, or make application to me with an expectation of selling their goods, as I have made a resolve to do without buying any more of such commodities for the term of 18 months from this date – March 15, 1826.⁶⁰

That Dowdell's announcement came after the violation of his manly domain reveals his lack of authority. Dowdell's anger over the imposition of goods upon his child bride reveals apprehension over the sexual seduction of his wife by these "pedlars and venders." Though asserting independence and authority, Dowdell's notice exposes

⁵⁸ Greene, *Yankee among the Nullifiers*, pp. 39-44. For an elite South Carolina household which paid a premium on British goods to boycott American goods, see J. S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842), vol 1. pp. 163-164.

⁵⁹ Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery*, pp. 3, 15-18.

southern men's powerlessness to shield women from the marketplace. Clearly, not all southern men tried to shield their homes from consumer culture. Non-intercourse turned out to be a feeble political gesture. Despite the many public resolutions to boycott northern manufactures, public support never grew strong enough for it to be effective. The *Lynchburg Virginian*, for instance, thought that the resolutions made in Prince Edward County to boycott American goods exhibited a "run mad spirit."⁶¹ As voluntary measures, boycotts were readily undermined by consumers and merchants. Neither southern politicians or male heads of households could arrest the demand for northern manufactures.

Hand in hand with calls for boycotting northern goods were efforts to increase domestic production. To maintain economic independence from the northeast, southern and western politicians called for a fundamental reordering of the household economy. Admonitions to manufacture cloth in the household rather than purchasing northern-made or imported fabrics began during the Panic of 1819 in the South and the West. Casting about for the cause of the financial panic, many placed the blame on speculative ventures and extravagant spending. Domestic manufactures, read the *Nashville Whig* in 1820, would prevent Tennesseans from becoming the "prey of the mercenary, sharp, keen cleverness of the importer of *cheap goods*," in other words, Yankee peddlers.⁶² Following the Tariff of Abominations in 1828, calls for domestic manufactures rose. Southern planters and farmers were urged to raise their own horses, mules, cattle, hogs,

⁶⁰ *Georgia Journal*, 7/11/1826.

⁶¹ *Lynchburg Virginian*, 10/13/1828.

⁶² *Nashville Whig* quoted in Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, p. 117.

and corn as well as to manufacture their coarse clothing at home.⁶³ J. D. Legare praised “domestic spinning and weaving, or making home-spun” as a “most useful and excellent kind of economy.”⁶⁴ But substituting market consumption with the auto-consumption of home manufactures required a fundamental reordering of domestic labor. How were decisions over the balance of auto-consumption and consumerism in individual southern families made?⁶⁵ Since women had prominent roles as both producers and consumers in southern households, any scheme to limit consumption of refined goods would have required the compliance of housewives. Would southern households continue to gear women’s home production and consumption patterns towards the market economy, or would the southern household’s market involvement be limited to the marketing of “male” staple commodities? A rhetorical gender battle ensued between masculine retrenchment and feminine refinement, male independence from the marketplace and feminine embrace of consumer culture.

Homespun was not intended just for household consumption and political consumption, but also for local trade. After clothing their families, women were encouraged to barter the surplus cloth they manufactured for the “little finery which they

⁶³ *Niles Register* 35 (8/30/1828):15; (9/13/1828):47-48; (9/20/1828):58-64. (Lynchburg) *Virginian*, 8/14/1828. “Domestic Economy,” Courtland [AL] *Herald*, reprinted in the *Georgia Journal*, 5/31/1828. *Georgia Journal*, 4/28/1828.

⁶⁴ J. D. Legare, “On Manufacturing in the South,” *The Southern Agriculturist and Register of Rural Affairs* 1 (Aug 1828):357-359. *The Southern Agriculturist and Register of Rural Affairs* 1 (Dec 1828):547-548.

⁶⁵ For a model of the decisions pre-industrial households faced when they increased their consumption of market goods, see Jan de Vries, “Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe,” in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 118-19.

must needs have for caps, capes, &c.”⁶⁶ In order to sustain sales in an atmosphere of retrenchment, merchants willingly bartered homespun for store goods and even wore homespun suits to show their support for domestic manufactures. An Alabama merchant offered a five dollar premium to the “lady” who presented the best piece of homespun.⁶⁷ Many southern agricultural societies offered premiums for the best examples of domestic cloth in their annual fairs.⁶⁸ The agricultural society of Buckingham County, Virginia, offered prizes for thirty-two categories of agricultural and domestic production. The society awarded subscriptions to agricultural journals for the best agricultural products. For items like the “best specimen of domestic fabric,” the “best piece of negro winter clothing,” the “best pair of stockings,” and the “best piece of carpeting,” it offered luxury items like silver sugar tongs, a Britannia coffee pot, a cream ladle, and a silver thimble. The society expected the exhibitor of the best suit of homespun, including coat, pantaloons and vest, to wear the suit on the day of the show and fair.⁶⁹

Substituting homespun cloth for protected northern cloth was put forward as a sartorial expression of manly independence. During a speech given at Columbia, South Carolina, in 1828 George McDuffie tore off his northern broadcloth coat, declaring it fit only for the livery of slaves. After McDuffie’s dramatic display, wearing suits of homespun became a popular political statement.⁷⁰ James O’Hanlon noted that once homespun came into political fashion, “every candidate soon had a homespun suit, and

⁶⁶ “Domestic Economy,” Courtland [AL] *Herald*, reprinted in the *Georgia Journal*, 5/31/1828.

⁶⁷ “Domestic Economy,” from the Courtland [AL] *Herald*, *Georgia Journal*, 5/31/1828.

⁶⁸ See for example the *Georgia Journal*, 7/7/1828.

⁶⁹ *The Farmer’s Register* 2 (Feb 1835):580-81.

⁷⁰ Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, pp. 147-148.

into the Legislature and Congress they went.”⁷¹ John Randolph of Roanoke followed suit. Randolph declared to his constituents in Southside Virginia that he:

had not purchased a dollar’s worth from northern factories, and so help him God he never would, and if *southern gentlemen* had one *drop of the blood of their ancestors*, they never would. He would neither eat, drink, nor wear *any thing from north of the Patapsco*.⁷²

Many of the planters in the crowd listening to Randolph in Prince Edward County probably dressed in homespun, like their neighbors in Charlotte County, Virginia. “A man would form a very incorrect estimate of the worldly circumstances of a Virginia planter,” claimed James W. Alexander, if he “should measure his finances by the fineness of his coat.”⁷³ Judge A. E. Earnest of Macon County, Georgia, appeared in court in a silk suit manufactured entirely on his plantation, including coat, pantaloons, stockings, pocket handkerchief, and stock. Earnest predicted that domestic silk would soon be adopted as “the most economical article for negro clothing, as well as for ladies and gentlemen.”⁷⁴ Just as the hunting shirt was a powerful symbol of manly independence during the Revolution and on the frontier, the homespun suit asserted the sovereignty of the southern male as head of his household and defender of his hearth, and the command of female labor. The Southern political and economic elite appropriated the clothing of the yeoman farmer to garner the political support of embattled white males of every class.

Antebellum southern women’s domestic production and management made limited self-sufficiency from store-goods for households and plantations possible. The significance of women’s work in augmenting household income or self-sufficiency,

⁷¹ *Columbia Telescope*, 10/8/1830.

⁷² *Niles Register* 35 (9/20/1828):58-64.

⁷³ Hall, *Forty Years’ Familiar Letters*, pp. 100-101.

however, was rarely acknowledged.⁷⁵ Ideally, this sexual division of labor was supposed to sustain male authority in the family. The industrialization of cloth manufacture and the movement of “work” outside of the home weakened women’s economic authority in the antebellum North, but southern women continued as significant producers of household wealth. Farm women labored on staple crops as well as at domestic chores.⁷⁶ Southern women produced much of the cloth, blankets, clothing, and sometimes even carpets and beds used on plantations. The critical food-production spheres of southern farms and plantations relied on women’s labor or supervision. Food production, purchase, and distribution within the big house and the slave quarters fell within the responsibilities of the plantation mistress.⁷⁷ Men supervised the cash crops, but women supervised the dairy, the garden, and the smokehouse. The “ponderous bunch[es] of keys” to larders and storehouses which southern women carried marked their control over household provisions.⁷⁸ “I keep all the keys and if anything is wanted they are obliged to come to me,” asserted Elizabeth Heyward Manigault, mistress of a plantation in South Carolina.⁷⁹ Presiding over storerooms and pantries hinted at masculine commercial and authoritative roles. Gilman wrote that

⁷⁴ *The Southern Planter* 1 (February 1841):23.

⁷⁵ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, p. 134.

⁷⁶ McCurry, *Masters of Small World*, p. 76. Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), pp. xv, 6-7, 22, 176-77. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), pp. 24-25, 27, 49-50, 61. For domestic gender roles in the colonial Chesapeake, see Alan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 178-79.

⁷⁷ Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 34-35, 43.

⁷⁸ [Henry C. Knight], Arthur Singleton, esq., *Letters from the South and West* (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1824), p. 69.

⁷⁹ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, pp. 7, 19-20.

plantation women measured out food and cloth to the family and enslaved domestics “with the accuracy and conscientiousness of a shopman.”⁸⁰ During their husbands’ absences women often had to take over the management of the entire plantation or farm.⁸¹ Thus, a purely economic understanding of the ideal of separate male and female spheres did not hold in the South. However, many nineteenth-century southerners did embrace the ideal of women’s domesticity, particularly the ideals of feminine purity and the view of the home as a wholesome refuge for men from the cares of the world and the marketplace.⁸²

Antebellum southern women made more consumption decisions than their colonial predecessors, but the legal system still gave ultimate authority over spending to male heads of households, since it was not thought proper for women to handle money, especially outside the household. Southern society discouraged wives from making financial transactions in their husbands’ absence.⁸³ Women might not have had legal control of household resources, but they often exercised “influence” over their husbands’ pocketbooks. The predominance of men’s names in ledger books entries mask the aggregate of decisions that went into a single purchase.⁸⁴ Women’s sway in the decision-making process of consumption was considerable, even when only their husbands’ names were recorded at the point of transaction.⁸⁵ But striving to raise the respectability of the

⁸⁰ Gilman, *Recollections*, pp. 47-48.

⁸¹ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, pp. 24-25, 27.

⁸² Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, pp. 162, 168.

⁸³ Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 210, 219, 298. Bushman, *Refinement of America*, pp. 440-41. Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, pp. 30-33.

⁸⁴ Jean-Christophe Agnew entreats cultural historians to look beyond the “impersonal price” at the completion of a market transaction, and to examine the process of exchange as part of the cultural construction of markets. Agnew, *Worlds Apart*, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁵ In colonial Chesapeake account books, female customers made up approximately 6 to

household through consumption stirred complex intra-family and communal conflicts in the antebellum South. The sheltering system of paternalist money management created friction in southern households. Some southern couples made financial decisions jointly,⁸⁶ but in the case of Mary Chesnut, the constant necessity of asking her husband for “pin money” humiliated her.⁸⁷ The cliché of the fanatical housekeeper who aspired to gentility and made life miserable for the men in her family in the process was a staple of American popular fiction in the early nineteenth century.⁸⁸ In the Old South the opposition to feminine domestic refinement came from white males who felt overwhelmed by commercial indebtedness. For these men, market participation had led to financial dependency.

The debate between self-sufficiency and consumerism was depicted as a battle between “feminine extravagance” and “male austerity.” Adverse portrayals of women as extravagant consumers had a long tradition in Anglo-American literature.⁸⁹ Almanacs are full of aphorisms of how women’s excessive attention to fashionable consumption was deleterious to domestic economy, such as “Silks and satins put out the fire in the kitchen.”⁹⁰

10 percent of all transactions. In her study of a late eighteenth-century Southside Virginia store ledger, Ann Smart Martin found women’s names were recorded in 1 in 20 of customer transactions. 1 in 10 transactions listed both a husband and wife’s names. Martin, “Buying into the World of Goods,” pp. 298-99. I think that antebellum southern women were engaged in commercial dealings far more than Catherine Clinton suggests. Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, pp. 24-25, 27.

⁸⁶ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, p. 206.

⁸⁷ Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, p. 168.

⁸⁸ Bushman, *Refinement of America*, pp. 265-66, 443. Merish, “Hand of Refined Taste,” p. 506.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 5.

⁹⁰ *Johnson & Warner’s Virginia Almanac, 1810*. By Joshua Sharp. Richmond: Johnson & Warner. *Cotton’s Virginia & North Carolina Almanack, for the Year 1828*. Richmond:

The consumption habits of elite women attracted especially heavy criticism from retrenchment-minded editors.⁹¹ In 1820, for instance, the Nashville *Whig* accused women of draining the region of \$40,000 in specie through their purchase of shawls alone.⁹² Even southern planters, who reputedly lived in the lap of luxury, were sometimes depicted as living in brutish conditions. However, men who squandered the household income on these male luxuries and kept their families in want of refinement were condemned as unworthy husbands. The ideal southern patriarch was an expert at husbandry, and could carefully and benevolently manage the demands of “feminine refinement” and “masculine thrift.”⁹³

The southern cult of chivalry encouraged feminine refinement because it reinforced the dependent status of women, reducing women to mere ornaments of the planter’s wealth. Yet even as chivalry buttressed southern paternalism, the feminine refinement it promoted undermined men’s mastery of the household. Southern men took paternalistic pride in the resplendence of their wives and daughters, and, conversely, felt shame if they could not maintain the comfort and refinement of their female dependents. John Davis alleged in 1803 that a Virginia husband was “enamoured of ornament,” and could not gaze upon the baubles of a jewelry peddler without emptying “his coffers of every

Peter Cottom. Calculated by Joseph Cave of Orange county.

⁹¹ For the pilloring of the southern “Lady” as extravagant and the farmwife as an ideal in the southern agricultural press, see D. Harland Hagler, “The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South: Lady or Farmwife?” *Journal of Southern History* 46 (Aug. 1980):405-18. Augustus Longstreet, “The Charming Creature as Wife,” *Georgia Scenes*. Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 150. Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, pp. 116-17.

⁹² Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, p. 117.

⁹³ Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1938). Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

dollar to adorn the apparel of his wife and daughters.”⁹⁴ Southern gallantry insisted that it was a husband’s duty to protect his wife and daughters from want and physical labor.⁹⁵ Since men held “the purse strings,” southern gallants assumed culpability for women’s “accustomed indulgencies.” If “ever our ladies spent more money than their pecuniary circumstances would justify,” wrote C. T. Botts, “it was because [of] the gallantry and generosity of our sex.”⁹⁶ A. De Puy Van Buren observed a Mississippi plantation mistress departing a store in a fine carriage driven by a liveried enslaved domestic, with her husband riding separately on his own mount, “as if he was the mere ‘attaché,’ or ‘purser,’ belonging to this lady and her splendid equipage.”⁹⁷ By escorting his wife on her shopping trip, the husband protected his wife’s reputation from the taint of extravagance. The wife probably selected the purchases, but the husband saved face through his role as “purser,” the ultimate fiscal authority. Southern white males were pulled in opposite directions over refinement. Displaying wives and daughters like art objects bolstered manly pride, yet the consumption decisions women were allowed in refinement of themselves and the home undermined husbands’ authority. But to deny a wife the choice to consumer could provoke criticism of a husband’s ability to adequately provide for his family.

Economic doldrums in the 1820s and early 1830s provoked calls for retrenchment. It was a direct challenge to the habits of the cult of chivalry and feminine refinement.

⁹⁴ John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: 1803. Reprint: New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), pp. 401-02.

⁹⁵ *The Southern Planter* 1 (November 1841):212.

⁹⁶ *The Southern Planter* 6 (Jan. 1846):19-20.

⁹⁷ Van Buren, *Jottings*, pp. 91-92.

Pervasive and continued extravagance on the household level despite the hard times, southern retrenchers believed, was partly responsible for dragging down the economy of the South. A correspondent to the *Southern Planter* had no doubt that Virginians like himself were “the most extravagant people in America,” and was convinced that extravagance was “the greatest, if not the only obstacle to the progress of agricultural improvement amongst us.”⁹⁸ Wearing homespun was a strong testimonial from a class that was renowned for its conspicuous consumption and that relied upon symbolic violence and lavish display to reinforce its social leadership.⁹⁹ The Southern gentleman was a powerful figure in the national imagination, and the model of gentility and honor for American society.¹⁰⁰ The “embarrassment”¹⁰¹ of financial insolvency was an

⁹⁸ *The Farmer's Register* 2 (August 1834), pp. 177-180. *The Southern Planter* 5 (Nov. 1845):268; 6 (Jan. 1846):19-20.

⁹⁹ Faust, *James Henry Hammond*, pp. 18, 143. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery*, pp. 3, 15-18. Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, pp. 16, 18. The illustrative quotes of southern conspicuous consumption from historical sources, notes Jane H. Pease, are inconsistent and often misleading. Comments on southern consumption habits often show a bias that defends southern institutions, castigates slavery, or demonstrates American crudeness. Jane H. Pease, “A Note on Patterns of Conspicuous Consumption among Seaboard Planters, 1820-1860,” *Journal of Southern History* 35 (August 1969):381-393. Northern elites also practiced conspicuous consumption, and southern planters certainly did not outdo the sumptuousness of Federalist Philadelphia merchants. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, p. 354.

¹⁰⁰ For the popularity of the Southern gentleman as cultural model in both North and South in the 1830s and 1840s, particularly as contrasted to the crass Yankee see: Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, p. 37. von Briesen, *Letters of Elijah Fletcher*, pp. 8, 21. C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” pp. 252-53. Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1833. Reprint: Johnson Reprint Corporation, NY, 1968), pp. 121-122, 127, 386. Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 417. Lucian Minor Diary, 11/24/1836, pp. 10-11. MHS. “Misconceptions of the New England Character,” *The North American Review* 44 (1837):257. Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, p. 168. Rev. E. W. Warren, *Nellie Norton: or, Southern Slavery and the Bible* (Macon, GA: Boykin & Co, 1864), p. 96.

¹⁰¹ “Embarrassment” connoted the shame of insolvency in both North and South. Dupre,

enormous blow to the pride of southern gentlemen who found it very difficult to reduce their expenditures.¹⁰² Retrenching expenses brought with it an imputation of poverty, which proud slaveholders could not stomach.¹⁰³ “Poor Richard” implored his readers to relinquish some of the emblems of wealth and leadership for the sake of financial recovery, such as quaffing “Burgundy and Champaign,” and rolling along in a “splendid carriage.”¹⁰⁴ The *Georgia Journal* asserted that the citizens of Georgia “must be brought to know and to feel that there is as much honesty and virtue in homespun, as there is in immense fold[s] of broad-cloth.”¹⁰⁵ Senator Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina stated to his southern colleagues and constituents during the debates over the Tariff of Abominations: “We must wear old cloathes, & put patch upon patch, & not be ashamed, provided we owe nothing, though we may not be dressed in the fashion, there is no better fashion, than to be out of debt.”¹⁰⁶ Debtors who continued to spend money lavishly brought censure.¹⁰⁷ The sight of “branded bankrupts, giving great dinners – sending their children to the most expensive schools – giving grand parties – and just as well received as any body in society,” scandalized John Randolph of Roanoke. Randolph blamed this

Transforming the Cotton Frontier, p. 58. Amos Bronson Alcott (Petersburg, VA) to Chatfield Alcott, 11/24/1822, in Alcott, *New Connecticut*, pp. 238-239. Douglas, *Autobiography*, p. 25. C. & L. C. Ives (Bristol, CT) to Seth Wheeler (Paris, KY), 10/21/1837, Seth Wheeler Papers, C.S.L. *Georgia Journal*, 4/28/1828. *Springfield Republican* [Massachusetts] 2/23/1829. *Richmond Enquirer*, 6/26/1838. *The Southern Planter* 5 (Nov. 1845):268.

¹⁰² Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰³ Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Rituals in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 259.

¹⁰⁴ Poor Richard, “Hints On Economy – To Sothrons,” *Charleston Mercury*, reprinted in the *Georgia Journal* 10/6/1828.

¹⁰⁵ *Georgia Journal*, 4/28/1828.

¹⁰⁶ Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁷ *The Southern Planter* 5 (Nov. 1845):268.

trend on a degradation of the values of Virginians by the marketplace. The character of the “good old Virginia planter,” lamented Randolph, “who lived by hard work, and who paid his debts, is passed away.” The “new order of things” countenanced “living by one’s wits – of living by contracting debts that one cannot pay.”¹⁰⁸ Randolph felt that the showy display of indebted planters had the opposite effect of its intention to awe poorer southerners; it was evidence of their unworthiness to lead society.

Along with retrenchment came calls for reordering the labor of white dependents in southern households. This was also a radical departure from the cult of chivalry, which idealized the leisure (or at least freedom from field work) of white women and children. Maintaining an idle, genteel household was falling beyond the means of heavily indebted planters. The time “when the father’s labor would easily support the family” had passed, wrote the *Southern Planter* in 1845, “it is not so now, and never will be so again.”¹⁰⁹ A correspondent to the *Charleston Courier* hated the very word “chivalry,” because it had “seduced more young men from useful pursuits, than half the grog shops in the State.” The writer preached from the text of a contemporary popular song, “My Pa supports his son,” which he called a “disgraceful admission.” The writer hoped that the time would soon arrive, when “no full grown, able bodied son of Carolina,” could possibly conceive that that song title could refer to himself. He called on Carolinians to “throw pennyless and arrogant chivalry to the winds,” and to embrace a “more useful spirit” of “industry and enterprise.” Only when Carolinians filled the roles of “artists, merchants, shopkeepers, mechanics, seamen, and other useful operatives,”

¹⁰⁸ Garland, *Life of John Randolph*, vol. 2:330.

¹⁰⁹ *The Southern Planter* 5 (Nov. 1845):268. Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, pp. 153-55.

would the state enjoy economic advancement.¹¹⁰ Feminine refinement was also censured. A correspondent to the Courtland, Alabama, *Herald* hoped that household matrons would find as much amusement in the “*Spinster*” and “*spring looms*” as in the piano.¹¹¹ “A Bachelor,” a correspondent to the *Southern Planter*, called on young men and women to pay for their own clothing through their own industry. Young girls should devote enough of their time to producing enough “marketable manufactures” to pay for their “ornamental apparel.” Bachelor blamed gentility and fashion for turning young men and women into drones who only consumed, and did nothing to add to the household income. The person who could persuade Virginia’s young men and women, wrote Bachelor, that there was “nothing ‘ungenteel’ in consuming the products of their own labor” would do more for the state “than will ever be effected by chartering rail road companies or debating Federal relations.”¹¹² A “Farmer’s Daughter” retorted to “Bachelor” that women of her class were the most “industrious, economical, and independent” of “ladies.” She suggested that farmers’ finances had a better chance of improving if men would stop “giving ‘Club dinners’ – dismiss their overseers, and attend to their own business,” rather than put the blame on hardworking southern women.¹¹³ Former enslaved black Charles Ball accused the Virginia planter of lacking the fortitude to “break through the evil tyranny of old customs, and compel his offspring to learn, in early life, to procure their subsistence by honest and honourable industry.”¹¹⁴ “Farmer’s

¹¹⁰ *Charleston Courier*, 2/16/1833.

¹¹¹ “Domestic Economy,” Courtland [AL] *Herald*, reprinted in the *Georgia Journal*, 5/31/1828.

¹¹² *The Southern Planter* 5 (Nov. 1845):268.

¹¹³ “A FARMER’S DAUGHTER” *The Southern Planter* 6 (Jan. 1846):19-20.

¹¹⁴ Ball, *Slavery*, pp. 54-55.

Daughter” and Ball’s criticism would have given slaveholders pause; how could planters maintain their patriarchal control over dependents at the same time that they encouraged the economic self-sufficiency that would lead to independence?

Consumer culture put southern white males in a quandary. How could planters retrench and still command the deference a display of wealth induced? How could they allow their households to participate in the liberal marketplace and still maintain their mastery? The remedy was the same for women’s consumption as it was for the perceived dangers from the face-to-face economy – vigilance and control.

* * *

Women’s participation in the marketplace of the formal economy was controlled by social custom and law. But even the most carefully guarded commercial activity of women could disrupt the fiscal and sexual authority of men. As was discussed above, few women held accounts in retail stores, and their trips to the store were chaperoned by a male relative. Only the most disreputable white women, however, attended the public markets.¹¹⁵ In a limited way, women could participate in the public realm of the marketplace as long as they were escorted by a male relative. The bounds of men’s and women’s spheres could intersect in genteel shopping districts. When the heroine of *Recollections of a Southern Matron* arrives at Charleston’s commercial quarter, she notes that “Fashion and business began, as usual, to throng King-street.”¹¹⁶ Fashion was an important measure of respectability, but women who pursued fashion too ardently risked being condemned as extravagant. To be a lady of fashion was socially enviable, but nonetheless southern moral precepts reviled

¹¹⁵ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, p. 178.

¹¹⁶ Gilman, *Recollections*, p. 135.

extravagant display as an indicator of vulgarity and “feminine” weaknesses – looseness of morals, self-promotion, and an excessive appetite.¹¹⁷ Fashionable consumption was therefore closely related to sexuality. Fashion played a major role in genteel courtship, which essentially was a sexual marketplace regulated by social mores.¹¹⁸ Young women used shopping excursions as opportunities to flirt discreetly with young men. Gottfried Duden claimed that few genteel American women would “forego the opportunity occasionally to ride to the country stores, where there is usually a concourse of strangers.”¹¹⁹ Eliza Lavalette Barksdale, a young genteel woman who lived in Charlotte County, Virginia, recorded numerous social visits to country stores in her diary. Captain Williamson enticed regular female customers “to look at his new goods” by treating them to candy, plums, and almonds. On one day Barksdale, a cousin, an aunt, and others visited three stores, staying a half hour in one store and an hour in another. When Barksdale stopped at Vaughns store, she had “the inexpressible pleasure of laying [her] two eyes upon the right honourable George Hannah whom to see is to love.”¹²⁰ So long as the milieu of women’s consumption could be monitored by men, the risks of sexual mischief could be minimized.

When a Yankee peddler crossed the threshold to sell goods directly to women, the domestic sphere and the marketplace became indistinguishable. The intercourse between women and peddlers violated gender norms and male authority. Peddlers’ visits to homes

¹¹⁷ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, p. 98. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 212-213. “Extravagance,” *Lynchburg Press & Public Advertiser*, 1/28/1819.

¹¹⁸ Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, p. 50.

¹¹⁹ Gottfried Duden, “Gottfried Duden’s ‘Report,’ 1824-1827.” Trans by William G. Bek. *Missouri Historical Review* 13 (April 1919):270.

¹²⁰ Eliza Lavalette Barksdale Diary, 5/19, 7/12, 7/14/1836. VHS. Emphasis in diary. One

might have given women greater leeway in buying goods.¹²¹ Angry male heads of households, like James Dowdell, complained that peddlers had a deliberate strategy of going to houses when the men were known to be away, at which time it was supposedly easier to get available money in the household.¹²² In fictive representations of exchange in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Anglo-American literature, buyers are usually depicted as feminine and submissive, while sellers are portrayed as masculine and dominant, regardless of their actual, respective genders. The emotionless masculine trader displays discipline, rationality, and holds sway over the customer. In contrast, the emotional feminized consumer appears irrational, labile, paroxysmal, and susceptible to the control of the businessman. Because her sense of self is heavily dependent upon others, the feminized consumer is vulnerable to penetration and mastery by the salesman. Through flattery the salesman shaped a customer's self image and awakened unrecognized desires in him or her. In a process akin to sexual seduction, the masterful salesman formed the feminized shopper into a yielding and compliant consumer.¹²³ Yankee peddler tales follow these conventions. White masters accused peddlers of stimulating acquisitive desires in women. This gave rise to notions of autonomy and individual will in female consumers, and, more provocatively, could also arouse sexual desires. The tales reveal that the umbrage

wonders if Williamson treated his male customers to whiskey.

¹²¹ In the late nineteenth century, mail order catalogues gave women and African Americans greater autonomy in retail exchange. Lu Ann Jones, "'Linking the Remote Countryside with the Marts of Trade': Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce in the Rural New South" *Journal of Southern History*, forthcoming.

¹²² See quote from *The Weekly Comet* (Baton Rouge), 5/6/1855, in Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising," p. 54.

¹²³ Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, pp. 4, 78, 84, 87, 89, 93, 100, 112. Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*, pp. 55, 60. Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 20, 22.

southern rhetoricians took from the northern domination of southern commerce also had an element of sexual insecurity. White masters feared that commercial exchange would lead white women into trysts with Yankee peddlers, black market-men, and potentially any other trading partners.

Humor about the Yankee peddler cast him as the ultimate outsider. The perennial migration of Yankee peddlers to the South and West drew comparisons to a pestilence or barbarian invasion of civilized society.¹²⁴ Commentators likened Yankee peddlers to “the Arab and Tartar hordes,” the Vandals, and a “modern irruption of the Goths.”¹²⁵ A Yankee peddler’s arrival was as welcome as the entrance of a large rat into a room, while the departure of a peddler after an overnight visit was “like being cured of the fever and agee.”¹²⁶ A southern merchant, claimed John Bernard, viewed a Yankee peddler as:

a commercial Scythian, a Tartar of the North whose sole business in life is to make inroads on his peace and profit. He ranks him in the list of plagues next to the yellow fever, and before locusts, taxation, and a wet spring; indeed, some go so far as to suppose that a shower of Yankees was the crowning pestilence which made Pharaoh give up the Israelites.¹²⁷

The depiction of Yankees as barbarian invaders or pestilence portrayed Southerners, by extension, as the seat of civilization, as victims, and as God’s chosen people. Distancing

¹²⁴Drew Gilpin Faust claims that George Frederick Holmes interpreted the book of Jeremiah literally as a text for the contemporary South. “Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land,” Jeremiah warned the people of Judah, and so Holmes made entries in his commonplace book for notes on the “Hordes from the North.” Faust, *Sacred Circle*, p. 46.

¹²⁵C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” p. 248. George Fibleton, Esq. [Asa Greene], *Travels in America* (New York: William Pearson, 1833), p. 43. James Strange French, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833; Reprint, Arno Press, 1974), pp. 150-58.

¹²⁶Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, p. 73. “Scrape with the Indians,” *The Crockett Almanac 1840* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1840), p. 29. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*. Baldwin, *Southern and South-Western Sketches*, p. 189.

the Yankee peddler other from southern consumers protected the interests of southern merchants as well as the mastery of white males.

In humor the household is depicted as unreceptive to the Yankee peddler or the marketplace he represents. These households are the ideal of domestic bliss, shelters from the marketplace. The scenes which the Yankee peddler intrudes upon are illustrated as pietistic, bucolic homes. The Yankee arrives at the “sweet hour of calm,” smoke floating from the chimneys mingles with “the blue ether,” and the laughter of children and (infantilized) enslaved people can be heard.¹²⁷ Eliza Leslie fashioned a scene of a respectable Pennsylvania Quaker home, where an industrious, temperate, simply furnished family has sat down to dinner on the porch, when “[s]uddenly, the shrill blast of a tin trumpet resounded through the woods.” The family looks up from their repast to see and hear a tin peddler’s cart “rattling down the hill at a brisk trot.” The cacophony of clanging tin pots and pans is accompanied by the blare of the tin horn, which the tin peddler continues to blow until he reaches the porch.¹²⁸ The appearance of a Yankee peddler in a southern neighborhood was a tocsin to close the doors and windows, double lock drawers, tuck away watch chains, bar stable doors, and halter horses.¹²⁹ The “genuine fear” of Yankees amused bookpeddler Miss Mendell, who caricatured wary Virginians as involuntarily seizing their purses when a Yankee appeared.¹³⁰ Drama and print portray frontiersmen

¹²⁷ Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 42-45.

¹²⁸ *ibid.* French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, pp. 150-58.

¹²⁹ Leslie, *Pencil Sketches*, pp. 148-49.

¹³⁰ Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 41-44. C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” pp. 255-56.

¹³¹ Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, p. 176.

and planters as warding off Yankee peddlers with rifles.¹³² The illustrations which accompany two stories from late 1830s Crockett almanacs depict the expulsion of the Yankee from the domestic environment (Figures 6 and 38). The husband or beau stands in the yard of the cabin, dismissing the Yankee, while the woman, standing in the threshold between the cabin interior and the scene of action, is restored to the domestic sphere. Significantly, the figures of the women are framed and contained by the cabin doorway.¹³³ Through fiction and humor white males who felt their authority threatened by consumer culture could achieve vicarious satisfaction, when a planter threatened to shoot a Yankee peddler.

Into these scenes of domestic security the peddler insinuates himself and his goods, whether invited or not. The persistency of Yankee peddlers was legendary. "There is no getting rid of [a Yankee peddler]," wrote John Bernard; "you can't deny, you can't insult, you can't fatigue him; you can only dismiss him by a purchase."¹³⁴ Often the initial response of the ideal woman of the household is to firmly decline to see the peddler's wares. When the tin peddler asked the Quaker housewife in Leslie's story "if she had any notion of a bargain," the woman replied that "'she believed that she had no occasion for anything;' her customary answer to all such questions."¹³⁵ In another anecdote, a woman greets a Yankee peddler's solicitation with "an indignant frown and

¹³² Wetmore, "The Pedlar." *The Crockett Almanac 1840* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1840), p. 29. Barnett, *Yankee Peddler*, p. 7.

¹³³ "A Corn Cracker's Account of his Encounter with an Eelskin," *Davy Crockett's 1837 Almanack, of Wild Sports in the West* (Nashville: Published by the heirs of Col. Crockett, 1837), p. 17. "Buying a Horse," *The Crockett Almanac 1839* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1839), pp. 19-20. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*.

¹³⁴ Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 41-45.

¹³⁵ Leslie, *Pencil Sketches*, pp. 148-50.

emphatic *no!*” Despite her refusal the peddler fills his arms with articles from his cart and deposits them on the floor of the woman’s house. Taking up the goods one by one the peddler explains to her “their uses, their beauty, their cheapness, and the lady’s absolute want of them.” After half an hour the woman pays the peddler thirteen dollars in cash, “besides all the paper, rags, old pewter, &c she had on hand.” The peddler claims he operates upon a principle of human nature: “if you show people your wares, you seldom fail of convincing them they are in pressing need of them.”¹³⁶ Sam Slick, the popular Yankee peddler character created by Thomas Haliburton, reiterated this belief in appeal of novel items to human beings: “We can do without any article of luxury we have never had, but when once obtained, it is not in ‘human natur’ to surrender it voluntarily.”¹³⁷ The Yankee peddlers themselves were sexual novelties. If peddlers could break down women’s resistance to merchandise, then sexual seduction was possible too.

Given that most Yankee peddlers were young men in their early twenties, it is not surprising that they flirted with southern women. Chatfield Alcott recorded his flirtations with Virginia girls in his 1821-1822 diary of a peddling trip through Tidewater Virginia. One Middlesex County tavern had “plenty of Girls thare,” where Alcott spent a Sunday “very well in reading & talking.” Alcott whiled away another Sunday in a King George County tavern “vary well with a vary prety Girl.” Near Farnham Church in Richmond County Alcott rated Clark’s tavern as “a vary good place besides having a prety Girl.”

¹³⁶ *Mobile Commercial Advertiser* [AL], 5/27/1829. Reprinted from the *Georgia Journal*, and the *American Advocate*.

¹³⁷ Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Clockmaker: Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick of Slickville* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1872), p. 13.

On one occasion, two young women “beset” Chatfield to accompany them to a wedding in the Northern Neck of Virginia.¹³⁸ Samuel J. Lewis was more critical of the sexual attractiveness of “Virginia Ladies.” Pretty women were as rare as “white crows,” and some were “so ugly they [could] hardly keep Sunday.”¹³⁹ Some Yankee peddlers seemed to put flirting before business. Carlos Bates had not seen his brother Alfred for a long period, but he “heard a young lady say that she was at a Quilting not long since & Mr Bates the pedler was there.”¹⁴⁰ The partners of a clock peddler named Hopkins complained that Hopkins loved “Girls much better than [selling] wood clocks.”¹⁴¹ Some peddlers were sexually aggressive. Edward Downing flirted with all of the “doxies” and “dulcineas” he met at Virginia taverns. In a miller’s cabin late one night where Downing and his peddling companion sought lodging, the wife of the miller, whose husband was absent, became the subject of Downing’s predatory gaze. Downing “Swaggered, giving three or four turns round the little hutt,” eyeing both the miller’s wife and “a Hoe Cake by turns that lay on a Shelf near the Bed.” Downing’s peddling partner could not tell if Downing desired the woman or the hoe cake more, but knowing that Downing was hungry and that the woman was not “handsome,” he concluded that Downing was after

¹³⁸ Chatfield Alcott, “Journal to the South,” entries for 12/16/1821, 1/19/1822, 1/31/1822, 3/24/1822, 4/4/1822, 4/5/1822, 4/6/1822. Alcott Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹³⁹ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Father, Naugatuck, CT), 1/17/1836, 3/6/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

¹⁴⁰ Carlos Bates (Natchez) to Albert Bates (Medina Co, OH), 12/2/1837. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

¹⁴¹ William D. Abernathy (Jacksonville) to D. W. Catlin (Harwinton, CT), 10/5/1833. Quoted in Murphy, “American Clock Industry,” p. 161.

the cake.¹⁴² Such aggressive philandering undoubtedly led to sexual dalliances between peddlers and southern women. For instance, in a deposition given to Captain William Preston in 1758, Virginian Martha Eliot exculpated John Wilson as the father of her bastard child, and blamed a peddler, William Thompson, who had promised to marry her before he “Debauched” her.¹⁴³ Intercourse between Yankee peddlers and southern women also led to intermarriage. Of fifty-four former Yankee peddlers found in the 1850 census of Virginia, thirty of them had wives who were born in Virginia, and one peddler married a woman from North Carolina. There was one English bride, ten bachelors, and five wives whose birthplaces were not determined. Only seven of the men married women from New England.¹⁴⁴

Many southerners distrusted the sexual motives of Yankee peddlers, even peddlers who properly courted southern women. George Kirby, a tin peddler from Middletown, Connecticut, married Elizabeth Briggs, of Brunswick county, Virginia, in 1822. The wedding was nearly called off, however, because someone had circulated a rumor among the bride’s friends that Kirby had a wife in Connecticut. To satisfy the bridal party that he was a single man, Kirby rode forty-five miles back to the Petersburg tin depot of Richard Wilcox, where Wilcox and “all the shops crew” signed a letter certifying that Kirby was unmarried.¹⁴⁵ Kirby apparently married well, which was

¹⁴² Beeman, “Trade and Travel,” pp. 177-78, 181-82.

¹⁴³ *Virginia Almanack, 1758* By Theophilus Wreg (Williamsburg: William Hunter). American Antiquarian Society. The manuscript deposition is opposite the December calendar.

¹⁴⁴ Peddler licenses from the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts cross listed against the 1850 census of Virginia.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Wilcox (Petersburg) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin), 2/19/1822. Wilcox Papers, BHS.

probably why the bride's friends distrusted Kirby's motives. Elizabeth Briggs might have been the daughter of Frederick Briggs, who was assessed for seventeen slaves in 1822.¹⁴⁶ By 1830 George Kirby, then living in neighboring Sussex County, held seven people in bondage.¹⁴⁷ Similar rumors were rampant in Canada in the 1850s that "Yankees came over and married Canadian girls, got their money – then were gone; and soon the intelligence came that they had large families in the States."¹⁴⁸ In New Orleans, reported A. Wetherby, the French Creoles were "afraid that the yankees will run away with their wives & daughters."¹⁴⁹ Clock peddler Carlos Bates claimed he was very popular among the "French Dulcineas" of Louisiana.¹⁵⁰ Mercantile clerks also had a reputation for social climbing through marriage. Joseph A. Scoville alleged that there was an organization in New York City of about ten "young counter-jumpers that formed a society to marry rich girls. They swore to protect and aid each other. All succeeded."¹⁵¹ Some Yankee peddlers did indeed see matrimony as a field of speculation. H. Bayley inquired of his cousin Carlos Bates about the chances for speculation in Virginia where Bates was peddling clocks, "[e]specially whether there would be a prospect for a fellow to get a rich handsome and good wife among those rich Virginians."¹⁵² The accusation that Yankee peddlers' true motives were economic and

¹⁴⁶ Brunswick County Personal Property, 1822B, frame 235.

¹⁴⁷ 1830 Census, Sussex County, Virginia, p. 35.

¹⁴⁸ Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁹ A. Wetherby (New Orleans, LA) to Levi Conant (Boston, MA), 9/16/1839. Wilson Family Papers, MHS.

¹⁵⁰ Susan L. Pinney to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS) 10/23/1834. Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS) to Susan L. Pinney (Brockport, NY), 7/16/1836. Susan L. Pinney, (cousin, Brockport, NY) to Carlos Bates (Natchez, MS), 5/15/1837. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

¹⁵¹ Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes*, p. 93.

¹⁵² H. Bayley and Apollos D. Bates (Austinburg, OH) to Carlos Bates, (Wilmington,

sexual exploitation had enough truth in them to reinforce southern white males' claims for mastery.

In reality, some Yankee peddlers respected the social boundaries southern masters erected around their households. Eighteenth-century Virginia plantation houses were set in landscapes in a manner to reflect the stratified nature of the economy and the society.¹⁵³ Some of these hierarchical cues survived into the early nineteenth century. Peddlers, like other lower-class visitors, were expected to stop at the gate to the plantation.¹⁵⁴ William Andrus Alcott described the danger of passing through a gate uninvited:

You see a gate of a particular kind, leading to a path which conducts through some grove, or forest, or peach-orchard, to a plantation. If you enter the gate a group of fierce dogs fly at you, to bark, or perhaps tear your skin. Your only safe way is to wait at the gate, when the dogs begin to threaten, till some coloured man, or a company of men, come out to meet you, and keep off the dogs, and 'carry' you, as they call it, safely to the house of the master or mistress.¹⁵⁵

Apparently, Bronson Alcott was oblivious of any hierarchical access designed into the plantation landscape. Alcott stepped right through this processional landscape to the front door. Bronson Alcott noted that:

It was a continual surprise and wonder to the household by what strategem I passed safely through the gates (guarded as these were by fierce mastiffs howling about my heels) and came hither to their doors. As I had no fear of

Fluvanna Co, VA), 3/22/1831. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL.

¹⁵³ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986). *idem.*, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, Robert Blair St. George, ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), pp. 357-69.

¹⁵⁴ In his 1811 manuscript play, "The Patriot Cool'd," St. George Tucker portrays a Yankee peddler who stops at the gate of the Allegheny farmstead of Col. Trueman. Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Archives, W&M.

¹⁵⁵ Alcott, *Recollection*, pp. 74-75.

the creatures, they seemed to take me as an accepted visitor, and affectionately escorted me thither. The only damage which I received was a slight rent made in my surtout skirts by the teeth of one of them.¹⁵⁶

Rhetoric and humor critical of Yankee peddlers was so abundant probably because peddlers received warm welcomes from many southerners. Several Yankee peddlers wrote that Virginians received them with great hospitality into their homes. In remote regions of Virginia, William Andrus Alcott was particularly welcomed by people who were eager for news and to hear Alcott's personal narrative.¹⁵⁷ Bronson and Chatfield Alcott entered "both the Rich & poor mans house alike, exposing & offering [their] Articles for sale." Conversing with upper-class Virginians was an enchanting "school of manners" for Bronson, who claimed that peddling in Virginia was "as good as travelling in Europe."¹⁵⁸ Only a minority within the "low vulgar class of the com[munity]" treated Bronson and Chatfield with contempt. Chatfield Alcott spent time in both plantation mansions such as the Tayloe's Mount Airy as well as in overseers' quarters. On eight occasions in his 1821-1822 diary Chatfield specifically states that he dined or staid overnight with an overseer. On such occasions, Chatfield would have had opportunity to trade with enslaved blacks on a legal footing, since enslaved Virginians could not buy or sell any goods without the explicit permission of their master, mistress, or overseer. Occasionally, Chatfield felt snubbed by wealthy young Virginians, whom he accused of judging people by the fineness of their dress. But Chatfield enjoyed the company of other

¹⁵⁶ Alcott, *New Connecticut*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁷ Alcott, *Recollection*, pp. 122-24, 149.

¹⁵⁸ Alcott, *New Connecticut*, p. 186. Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to William A. Alcott, 3/19/1820, Wagner, "Letters." Amos Bronson Alcott (Norfolk, VA) to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chatfield Alcox, 1/24/1820, Herrnstadt, *Letters*, pp. 1-2.

young people, particularly pretty girls, as noted above.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps Samuel J. Lewis summed up the ambiguous reception peddlers received from Southerners best: "Some of the people seem glad to see me and tell me I must settle here with them, others tell me dam a pedlar."¹⁶⁰

For some Virginia planters buying from a peddler was an expression of their sense of noblesse oblige. When peddler Oliver Deane visited the plantation of Cumberland County magistrate Linnaeus Bolling in January, 1820, Deane "called at the gate," which was probably the sort of deference Bolling expected.¹⁶¹ In reciprocity perhaps, Bolling bought a dollar's worth of black sewing silk from Deane. Such mutual respect bred familiarity between Bolling and peddlers like Deane, who were incorporated into the local debt network. Bolling acted like a clearinghouse for neighbors' debts to peddlers, or sometimes relied on a third party to pay a peddler cash. For instance, Bolling borrowed cash from tanner David Bondurant and from Captain John Miller to pay a tinker in September, 1807. The following month Bolling loaned Bondurant \$10 to pay peddler Nathaniel Loftus for "sundry goods." Likewise, Bolling paid off Deane's bill at a

¹⁵⁹ Chatfield Alcott, "Journal to the South," 2/24/1822, 4/4 – 4/6 1822. Alcott Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹⁶⁰ Samuel J. Lewis (Whittles Mills, Mecklenburg Co., VA) to Milo Lewis (Father, Naugatuck, CT), 1/17/1836. Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

¹⁶¹ Bolling was a paternal figure in the neighborhood. For instance, Thomas W. Pollok sought Bolling's patronage and influence in starting a school in the neighborhood, but Bolling had heard that Pollok was a hard drinker (January 12, 1820). About two weeks later, Mrs. Adcock came to Bolling to request \$200 to prevent the loss of her husband's land under a deed of trust. "Surely these people think I am made up with money!" Bolling wrote in his diary (January 22, 1820). Bolling tried local slaves for stealing wheat, but was still seen as a compassionate figure by some enslaved neighbors. An African American man who had a wife in the neighborhood asked Bolling to purchase him for \$700, because his master planned to move far away. Bolling suggested that the woman's master might hire her out near his new domicile (December 30, 1834).

blacksmith in order to balance his account with the peddler.¹⁶² Deane and other peddlers became regular callers to Bolling's estate, trading goods, but also dining and spending the night at the Bolling residence by invitation. Deane and Bolling conducted considerable business; in March of 1822 Bolling made a settlement with Dean for debts he owed the peddler to the amount of \$36.77.¹⁶³ Wealthy planter families infrequently shopped at crossroads stores, preferring to go to Fall Line towns for goods, or to the few local stores which catered to a respectable, female clientele.¹⁶⁴ This might explain also why Colonel Samuel Cabell, a congressman from Amherst County, Virginia, summoned an Irish peddler to his home in 1808. The peddler noted in his diary that he was "very politely treated, [and he] sold some Goods" to the family.¹⁶⁵ Planters' commanding peddlers to appear at their house reveals that the upper class of Virginia society expected deference from peddlers in their dealings and movements through the countryside.

* * *

The consumer culture promoted by Yankee peddlers offered mass-produced luxury items and objects of convenience to all classes of antebellum southerners. They truly democratized consumption in the South.¹⁶⁶ The strong appetite of southern consumers for Yankee notions nearly made the efforts of southern politicians and white masters to put up barriers to northern goods a lost cause. Southern critics of the liberal

¹⁶² For general stores acting as clearinghouses for the local debt network, see Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns*, p. 178.

¹⁶³ Linnaeus Bolling 1807 Diary, July 6, September 7, October 10, 1807, VHS. Linnaeus Bolling 1821-22 Diary, October 10, 11, 1821; March 13, 1822. VHS. Linnaeus Bolling 1820 Diary, January 9, 14, 15; February 15, 16, 17; March 3, 1820. Swem. Linnaeus Bolling 1834-35 Diary, December 4, 1834, Swem.

¹⁶⁴ Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns*, p. 148.

¹⁶⁵ Beeman, "Trade and Travel," p. 187.

consumerism of the capitalist marketplace impressed negative meanings upon the material goods of the Yankee peddler. They created an imaginary catalogue of counterfeit goods and imbued this material culture with the perceived dangers of the marketplace. The fabrication of bogus goods implicated the entire manufacturing economy of the Northeast. Opponents of protective tariffs pointed out the parallels between mass-produced counterfeits and the North's manipulation of tariffs for their own benefit. The operational aesthetic, claims Neil Harris, explains antebellum American's captivation with wooden nutmegs, patent machinery, and the practical jokes and humbugs perpetrated by showman like Phineas T. Barnum. Barnum's success was great and long lasting everywhere in the United States but the South. The cult of honor could not treat lies lightly, whether they were slights against personal reputation, or deceptions in commercial exchange.¹⁶⁷ Nothing was what it appeared to be in the marketplace – not a nutmeg, a wooden clock, nor the character of the Yankee peddler. The false appearances of the bogus Yankee notions echoed fears about the duplicity of women and enslaved blacks who were corrupted by commercial exchange. Deep down the planter class realized that the image of the content slave was also a fabrication. Underneath the false surface of the “happy slave” might lurk another Nat Turner.

Yankee peddlers reputedly carried a large inventory of bogus goods: basswood hams, white oak cheese and candles, birchen garden seeds, horn gunflints, stonecoal indigo, and “tortoiseshell” combs made of ox horn. The most notorious article fobbed off by the Yankee peddler was the wooden nutmeg. Virtually every account from the early nineteenth

¹⁶⁶ For the effect of Yankee peddlers in the North, see Jaffee, “Peddlers of Progress.”

¹⁶⁷ Harris, *Humbug*, pp. 67, 72, 75, 81, 84. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery*, pp. 3-23.

century of the Yankee peddler mentions such “wooden eatables.” Yankee peddlers reputedly infused whiskey with “pine-tops” and labeled it gin,¹⁶⁸ or sold powders that could turn common whiskey into fine French brandy.¹⁶⁹ Essence peddlers did in fact sell elixirs of peppermint, bergamot, evergreen, and spruce as flavoring for the low-quality whiskey of the backcountry.¹⁷⁰ In the early nineteenth century, women wore combs for adornment as well as for grooming.¹⁷¹ Northern manufacturers patented machinery to cut ivory and tortoise-shell combs, but also advertised “imitation,” “mock,” or “mock-shell” combs for sale.¹⁷² Unscrupulous peddlers supposedly passed off combs made of ox horn as “the real tortoise shell hair-combs.”¹⁷³ In one story, a plantation mistress bought a tortoise shell comb from a Yankee peddler, but when she wore the comb in a rainstorm, “she found the comb had all dissolved, and it took three weeks to clear her hair of the sticky mass of glue, sugar, and gum arabic, out of which it was composed.”¹⁷⁴ Yankee peddlers were also notorious for hawking pinchbeck, or goldplated, trinkets and counterfeit jewelry as objects of value.¹⁷⁵ William Andrus Alcott claimed he met a woman in Suffolk County, Virginia, who paid a Yankee peddler \$12 for a silver toddy stick. If the tin toddy stick “had any silver

¹⁶⁸ Flint, *Recollections*, pp. 26, 28-29, 52-53. The practice in New England beer brewing of substituting spruce needles for hops in beer makes this allegation sound plausible.

¹⁶⁹ George W. Knepper, ed., *Travels in the Southland 1822-1823: The Journal of Lucius Verus Bierce* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966), pp. 65-66. *Low's Astronomical Diary or Almanac* (Boston: Munroe and Francis, 1824), quoted in Hinman, “The Yankee Peddler,” pp. 62-63.

¹⁷⁰ “Yankee Pedlers, and Peddling in America,” *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* 6 (7/15/1837):269-70.

¹⁷¹ Janney, *Janney's Virginia*, p.110.

¹⁷² *Springfield Weekly Republican*, 5/4/1825. *The Constitutionalist* (Augusta, GA), 11/24/1826. *The United States Gazette*, 1/22/1828.

¹⁷³ *Springfield Weekly Republican*, 9/7/1825.

¹⁷⁴ Greene, *Yankee among the Nullifiers*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁷⁵ French, *Sketches*, pp.150-58. *Georgia Journal*, 4/5/1832, 2/21/1833. *Springfield Weekly*

about it," wrote Alcott, "the value of the whole could not have been twenty-five cents."¹⁷⁶

Southern opponents of consumer culture categorized the merchandise of Yankee peddlers as a foreign, insidious material culture. In a sense they were correct. In the process of building a national marketplace for manufactures, regional variations in style and use had to be bridged. The design process of an inventor or artisan in New England was embedded within a vernacular material culture that might have differed greatly from the material world of the backcountry South. For instance, Yankee peddler George Hubbard found that there were many tinware utensils that Virginia consumers would not purchase, such as sausage fillers, milk skimmers, water pots, dust shovels, and flour sifters. Hubbard's supplier, Richard Wilcox, noted that tin lamps would not sell in the hinterland of Petersburg, Virginia, because the "Co[u]ntry people use[d] light wood alltogether for Candles."¹⁷⁷ The fictive Yankee peddler Jared Bunce's explanation why his tinware fell apart when hot liquids were added to it humorously illustrates this point. Bunce claims that his Georgia customers boiled their water too hot, and that the wares were designed for a northern climate. Bunce promises that the lot of wares he would bring "next season shall be calkilated on purpose to suit the climate."¹⁷⁸ The point of Simms and other southern authors was that the material culture promoted by Yankee consumerism was out of place in the southern backcountry and even in old Tidewater settlements. For instance, when a Yankee peddler offers earrings to a frontier farmer's

Republican, 9/7/1825. Gilman, *Recollections*, p. 173.

¹⁷⁶ Alcott, *Recollection*, p. 111.

¹⁷⁷ George Hubbard (Cartersville, VA) to Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA), 2/15/1824. Richard Wilcox (Petersburg, VA) to Benjamin Wilcox (Berlin, CT), 2/18/1823, 3/5/1823. Wilcox Family Papers, BHS.

¹⁷⁸ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 79.

daughter, the farmer declares: “Jewelry in these backwoods! ‘Twould be as much out of place on my gal here, as my leather hunting-shirt would be on you.”¹⁷⁹ The backwoodsman also expressed discomfort with the purchase of erotically charged jewelry that would have made his daughter into a sexual object.¹⁸⁰ Algernon Sydney Johnston’s novel, *Memoirs of a Nullifier*, portrays an idealized southern consumer society that shows loyalty to custom. A Yankee inventor named Increase Hooker gulls the protagonist into investing \$20,000 in the manufacture of “Hooker’s Patent Self animated Philanthropic Frying Pan,” a mechanism in which “the slices of bacon, when exactly done, turn themselves over on the other side simultaneously.” Hooker declares bankruptcy and absconds with the narrator’s money. Meanwhile, the enterprise fails miserably, for the frying pans “were sold for next to nothing, amidst the ridicule of the assembly, who declared themselves resolved to stick to the real good old frying-pan of their forefathers.”¹⁸¹ Johnston’s story also illustrates how southern opponents to protective tariffs equated the vaunted Yankee ingenuity of the American system of mass production with Yankee trickery.

Perhaps the Yankee notion which had the greatest cultural impact on antebellum consumers was the mass-produced clock. Clocks changed the time and task perceptions of all Americans, including Southerners. The Yankee ideal of time thrift infected southern masters, housewives, plantation overseers, and enslaved blacks. The timing of social events, tasks in the field, and chores in kitchens shifted from noon marks scratched

¹⁷⁹ French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, pp. 150-58.

¹⁸⁰ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, p. 63. The intersection of sexuality and consumerism is explored below.

¹⁸¹ Johnston, *Memoirs of a Nullifier*, pp. 7-13.

on the floor and reckoning from the position of the sun to clocks.¹⁸² Despite their wide acceptance from southern consumers, Yankee clocks shared the same criticism of other Yankee notions. Clockmaker Chauncey Jerome noted in 1860 that wooden clocks “were always classed with wooden nutmegs and wooden cucumber seeds.”¹⁸³ The unfamiliarity of southerners with mechanical apparatus such as clocks was ridiculed in humor. In a Crockett almanac tale from 1839, a backwoods farm wife regulates her preparation of dinner with a clock sold to her by a Yankee peddler, but when the clock stops, “she took it down and opened it, and tried to hammer up the springs with the tongs, but the more she tried to fix it, the more it wouldn’t go.” As a consequence, the wife was belated in preparing dinner for her husband and his hunting companion.¹⁸⁴ The tricky Connecticut peddler Jared Bunce defended himself against charges of selling defective clocks by lecturing backcountry Georgians on the proper care of clocks:

A clock is quite a delicate and ticklish article of manufacturer, you see, and it ain’t everybody that can make a clock, or can make it go when it don’t want to; and if a man takes a hammer or a horsewhip, or any other unnatural weapon to it, as if it was a house or a horse, why, I guess, it’s not reasonable to expect it to keep in order, and it’s no use in having a clock no how, if you don’t treat it well.¹⁸⁵

Bunce takes advantage of his superior knowledge of mechanical apparatus and

¹⁸² Smith, *Mastered by the Clock*, pp. 60, 98, 113, 116, 126. E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” *Past and Present* 38 (Dec 1967):56-97. O’Malley, *Keeping Time*. David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*.

¹⁸³ Jerome, *History of the American Clock Business*, p. 54. For other stories of broken clocks and frauds by clock peddlers, see Greene, *Yankee among the Nullifiers*, pp. 67-68. Leslie, *Pencil Sketches*, p. 152. Barnett, *Yankee Peddler*, p. 8. *Georgia Journal*, 11/20/1833. *Lexington Gazette*, 8/5/1841.

¹⁸⁴ “Ben Harding and the Pirates,” *The Crockett Almanac 1839* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1839), p. 24. See also “Rare Economy,” *The Crockett Almanac 1841* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1841), p. 4. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*.

simultaneously insults the husbandry and housekeeping of southern men and women.

The descriptions of Yankee peddlers' alleged frauds provide intricate detail to make them sound plausible and appealing to the operational aesthetic. For instance, a description of some "Patent nutmegs" claimed that they were manufactured from birds-eye maple, a cut of sugar maple wood that has a wavy grain with many dark, circular markings.¹⁸⁶ Birds-eye maple is often used as a veneer, a socially acceptable form of surface deception. The selection of timber for a credible wooden nutmeg might rely upon the wood's aromatic qualities. Wooden nutmegs "that were made of sassafrass," reported the *Georgia Journal*, "were tolerably good; but those made of elm and beach, wan't worth a d-n."¹⁸⁷ An article written in defense of the New England character in *The North American Review* in 1837 tried to explode the wooden nutmeg myth, claiming that there was "no tree and no art existing in New-England, from and by which a tolerable counterfeit of the fruit nutmeg could be produced." Although Yankees were renowned for their skill with a penknife, noted the author, the time spent carving a wooden nutmeg would not be worthwhile. Further, "the lathe which could shape [a nutmeg's] likeness is yet to be invented."¹⁸⁸ But the *Southern*

¹⁸⁵ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 77.

¹⁸⁶ *Springfield Weekly Republican*, 9/7/1825. Bill Keenan, "Bird's-Eye Maple: Nature Flaunts her 'Midas Touch,'" in *Wood: The Best of Fine Woodworking* (Newtown, CT: The Taunton Press, 1995), pp. 18-20.

¹⁸⁷ *Georgia Journal*, 7/23/1822. A very similar description of sassafras and pitch pine knot nutmegs is in "Wooden Nutmegs," *Spofford's The Yankee* (Boston: Thomas Spofford, 1833). See also Yoseloff, *Voyage to America*, pp. 74-75. Haliburton, *The Clockmaker*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁸ "Misconceptions Of The New England Character." *The North American Review* 44 (1837):249. A local Connecticut historian related the theory that hardwood ball bearings manufactured in Bristol, Connecticut, might have been mistaken for wooden nutmegs. Carleton Beals, *The Making of Bristol* (Bristol, CT: Bristol Public Library Association, 1954), p. 100. One almanac provided its readers with a method to determine the quality of a nutmeg. If oil oozed out of the nutmeg when a pin was thrust into it, then the nutmeg

Literary Messenger replied in a mock serious reply:

we must still think that the fabrication of wooden nutmegs is not absolutely beyond the reach of a Yankee's wit. The lathe, or even the pen-knife, we suppose, may be brought to play very rapidly and effectively on white pine ... The fabrication, then, of such things as wooden nutmegs, is not so impossible as our writer seems to suppose.¹⁸⁹

Perhaps the detailed descriptions of Yankee frauds were not meant to entertain southerners as much as they were meant to warn them of the danger of dealing with Yankees. Like the confidence man, the surface of Yankee notions and Yankee peddlers could not be trusted. What lurked underneath was without material or social value.

Why the fascination with wooden frauds? Other than rare, tropical hardwoods like mahogany, wood had little intrinsic value. Americans used wood prodigally, as a construction material and a source of heat and fuel. Wood was very pervasive in American material culture; it was found in buildings, vehicles, furniture, fences, cooperage, tools, and even as planking in causeways and corduroy roads.¹⁹⁰ Americans put wood to virtually every use except as a foodstuff. The shapeable nature and relative abundance of wood made it the ideal medium for the early mechanization of American industry. Wood turning and whittling were considered of the essence of Yankee industriousness. Samuel Griswold Goodrich attributed the inventive genius of New England mechanics to whittling, the "alphabet of mechanics theoretical and practical."¹⁹¹ Humor exaggerated the skill of

was good. *Cottom's Virginia & North-Carolina Almanack, for the Year 1846* (Richmond: Peter Cottom. Calculated by David Richardson of Louisa county).

¹⁸⁹ *Southern Literary Messenger* 3 (July, 1837):414.

¹⁹⁰ Brooke Hindle, "Introduction: The Span of the Wooden Age," in Brooke Hindle, ed., *America's Wooden Age: Aspects of its Early Technology* (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1975), pp. 7, 12.

¹⁹¹ Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime* (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1856), 1:92-94

Yankee whittlers, claiming that with a penknife a Yankee could carve a wooden clock from a cedar shingle.¹⁹² Wood turning was a low capital enterprise in which many New Englanders engaged. The *Connecticut Courant* reported how a couple of “Yankies” with only \$50 between them, rented a mill site in Wheeling, Virginia, where in a few months they turned out several thousand dollars worth of wooden bowls. Wood turners often peddled their wares themselves.¹⁹³ Ingenious patented machinery churned out wooden clocks, gun stocks, bowls, shoe lasts, and other commodities. The irregular lathe invented by Thomas Blanchard in 1818 turned gun barrels and gun stocks, but was soon applied to a multitude of tasks, such as shaping axe handles and shoe lasts.¹⁹⁴ The eccentric turning of the Blanchard lathe conceivably could have been applied to the manufacture of wooden simulations, such as the Yankee peddler’s painted basswood hams. A story entitled “Kentucky Hams vs. Yankee Nutmegs” describes how a Kentucky riverman sold a boatload of wooden hams that were “neatly turned in the shape of a hog’s hind leg” and individually wrapped in canvas.¹⁹⁵ The *Georgia Journal* related an account of the manufacture and sale of wooden candles. The fake tapers were composed of a “piece of white oak wood turned in the shape of a candle, with a snug little wick in each end, cover’d with just about tallow enough to grease the bill of a Longe Island misketer!”¹⁹⁶ Technological and industrial changes seemed less

¹⁹² *Niles Register*, 10/22/1831.

¹⁹³ *Connecticut Courant*, 7/6/1808. Sedgwick, *A New England Tale*, pp. 44-45. Wright, *Hawkers & Walkers*, pp. 33, 48.

¹⁹⁴ Nathan Rosenberg, “America’s Rise to Woodworking Leadership,” in Brooke Hindle, ed., *America’s Wooden Age: Aspects of its Early Technology* (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1975), pp. 51-52. David Freeman Hawke, *Nuts and Bolts of the Past: A History of American Technology 1776-1860* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), pp. 105-07.

¹⁹⁵ *Springfield Republican*, 7/7/1830.

¹⁹⁶ *Georgia Journal*, 2/21/1833.

appreciated in the South, claims Harris, where only a very small proportion of the population was exposed to revolutionary improvements.¹⁹⁷ But even the most vocal opponents of protections for northern manufactures were not Luddites. John C. Calhoun worked against the special interests of industry as he saw it harming agricultural interests, but he was not opposed to mechanization, science, industrialization, or mass production.¹⁹⁸ But anti-Tariff politicians had to show reason why southerners should buy English goods rather than Yankee notions. Yankee razors, they charged, were not made to shave, but “made to sell.”¹⁹⁹ Yankee clocks, were “made to sell and not to go – or to go only while the vendors stayed.”²⁰⁰ Popular humor about the Yankee peddler had a serious message: northern manufactures were meretricious goods that were unworthy of protection.

The denigration of Yankee peddlers’ goods, or, “bads,” can be interpreted as a condemnation of northern industrialization in general. Critics characterized the entire industrial plant of the North as nothing more than bogus goods factories. Numbered among the spurious articles hawked by Yankee peddlers was stonecoal indigo. An “extensive manufactory” of artificial indigo was reputedly in operation in Philadelphia, where Bengal indigo was compounded out of lime, blue vitriol, logwood, and a small amount of genuine indigo, formed “into lumps of the usual size, neatly stamped.” The Philadelphia establishment was said to be a branch of a New York factory that produced large quantities

¹⁹⁷ Harris, *Humbug*, p. 84.

¹⁹⁸ Theodore Marmor, “Anti-Industrialism and the Old South: The Agrarian Perspective of John C. Calhoun,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 9 (1966-67):377-406.

¹⁹⁹ Hinman, “The Yankee Peddler,” p. 49.

²⁰⁰ *Southern Literary Messenger* 3 (July, 1837):414.

of Spanish indigo.²⁰¹ In Cincinnati, pork processing had become industrialized by the late 1830s. The division of labor greatly accelerated the slaughtering and packaging of pork products.²⁰² The industrialization of such a mundane task as sausage making was hailed in one joke. The *Georgia Journal* reported that a Yankee who started a manufactory of “red flannel and brown paper sausages” at Cincinnati failed, because “the maker of the real, no-mistake pork article affording to sell their genuine sausages cheaper than he could the counterfeits.”²⁰³ On the other hand, the mechanization of pork processing was also pictured as a mysterious and sinister trend of industrialization. The *Virginia and North Carolina Almanack* for 1834 described a fantastic contraption called the “New-England Sausage and Scrubbing Brush Machine.” By driving a hog into the center of the machine and setting the “screws a going,” the machine produced “*ready made sausages* from one end, and *patent scrubbing brushes* from the other.”²⁰⁴

In addition to the humorous but didactic tales of Yankee trickery, southern newspapers also reported real machinations supposedly perpetrated by Yankee peddlers and northern manufacturers. Yankee peddlers reputedly took advantage of the silk culture craze. Edmund Ruffin warned his readership in the *Farmer's Register* that “the old dealers in ‘wooden nutmegs’ and ‘horn flints’ had turned their attention to the manufacture of Chinese mulberry trees.” A Yankee peddler capitalized on the frenzy for silk culture by selling cabbage seed at \$5 per ounce, “affirming it to be genuine Chinese mulberry seed of the first quality.” In a similar vein, the *Georgia Journal* warned that a Yankee was passing through

²⁰¹ *Springfield Weekly Republican*, 10/5/1825.

²⁰² Hawke, *Nuts and Bolts of the Past*, p. 6.

²⁰³ *Georgia Journal*, 2/27/1838.

²⁰⁴ *Virginia and North Carolina Almanack*, 1834. By David Richardson, Louisa County.

the countryside selling stale “Peter’s Pills,” a patent medicine, as the eggs of a new, superior species of silkworm.²⁰⁵ “An Enemy To Villany” warned the public of the “Improved patent sewing thread” for sale in the Columbia, South Carolina market. The thread was “handsomely put up in gilt square boxes,” perhaps to deflect inspection of the spool, which was “sunk very little below the ends, so as to contain but a sixth or an eighth of the usual quantity.” The boxes did not indicate where the thread was manufactured, but the “numerous frauds played off upon the public,” charged the correspondent, “justify the conclusion that they are from the Yankee country.” The writer advised southern consumers to be vigilant “with respect to whatever articles come from [Yankee] manufacturing establishments.”²⁰⁶ Even the southern movement for home manufacturers was subject to Yankee exploitation. Georgia newspapers issued a “Caution To The South” in late 1828 about an attempt by “the shrewd and calculating policy of the northern manufacturers” to defeat the South’s boycott: “Sample Patterns of our Domestic cloth have been sent on to the Northern manufactories, that they may be made there, and sent here to be impose on us as *Southern Homespun*. Therefore beware of Counterfits – they will soon be here.”²⁰⁷ Southerners, innocent of the wiles of the marketplace, had to counter the shrewd calculations of the Yankees with vigilance.

* * *

In opposition to the ideal agrarian world of communalism and cooperation stood figuratively “Yankee calculation.” The fictive Yankee constructed by antebellum critics

Richmond: John Warrock, 1834.

²⁰⁵ *The Farmer’s Register*, 1836, 4:479. *Georgia Journal*, 4/23/1839.

²⁰⁶ *Columbia Telescope*, 8/27/1830.

²⁰⁷ *Georgia Journal*, 9/15/1828.

represented the self-interested individualist who disregarded traditional restraints on exchange behavior. The Yankee peddler personified the forces of the capitalist marketplace that were intruding more and more into Southerners' existence, a focal point for anxieties about the impersonality of exchange relations and market dynamics. The Yankee worldview reputedly considered all life as "one vast exchange." Market calculations and "sharp trading" seemed an innate ability of Yankees to some observers.²⁰⁸ "Arithmetic," presumed Thomas Hamilton, came "by instinct among this guessing, reckoning, expecting, and calculating people."²⁰⁹ To Achille Murat, Yankees seemed "born to calculate shillings and pence."²¹⁰ In contrast, the "exact calculations" and "rigid self-denial" required by the capitalist marketplace reputedly did not come naturally to Southerners.²¹¹ Critics chastised Yankee culture for putting the marketplace calculus of self interest before all other loyalties, including patriotism, philanthropy, local attachments, religion, and law. George Tucker claimed that Yankee peddlers broke "laws like cobwebs, whenever it suit[ed] their interest."²¹² In William Gilmore Simms' novel, *Guy Rivers*, the Yankee peddler Jared Bunce assists in the rescue of a southern gentleman. For his help, Bunce is offered a monetary reward and patronage from the aristocratic Colleton family. Bunce not only accepts the cash, but he tries to cheat a poor idiot out of his share of reward money. Unlike the magnanimous spy Harvey Birch who

²⁰⁸ William D. Martin, *A Journey from South Carolina to Connecticut in the Year 1809: The Journal of William D. Martin* (Charlotte: Heritage House, 1959), pp. 44-45. Hundley, *Social Relations*, p. 130.

²⁰⁹ Hamilton, *Men and Manners*, p. 127.

²¹⁰ Achille Murat, *A Moral and Political Sketch of the United States of North America* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833), pp. 6-8.

²¹¹ Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 160. Kemble, *Journal*, p. 353.

²¹² Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, pp. 36-40.

declined a similar reward in James Fenimore Cooper's novel, Jared Bunce did not transcend the market.²¹³

As commerce expanded in the early nineteenth century, knowledge of the value of commodities in distant markets was a distinct advantage. As long distance traders, Yankee peddlers often had better access to such information than their local customers. Anonymity in the expanded marketplace also made it more difficult to read the intentions of a trading partner. The fall of traditional restraints on market behavior meant that the buyer and the seller had to endeavor to evaluate the risk of extending trust. The process of negotiation became more antagonistic, and successful participants had to internalize the market calculus.²¹⁴ Marketers who could prevent their competitors from reading their intentions from their demeanor were the most successful. In the urban North the myth of the confidence man personified the anonymity and lack of sincerity in market relations. But the influence of the marketplace was by no means limited to the city; the Yankee peddler was the rural counterpart to the urban confidence man.²¹⁵ In tales of Yankee duplicity, the peddler often pretends to be simple-minded and naive, like the Brother Jonathan figure, in order to gull his victims into trusting him.²¹⁶ James Guild played upon the prejudices of two young women who thought he was a Yankee bumpkin by

²¹³ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 416. William R. Taylor's definition of the transcendent Yankee rests upon the magnanimous act of Yankee peddler Harvey Birch, in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy*, when Birch declines a reward of gold from General Washington. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, pp. 106-09.

²¹⁴ Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, p. 81. Agnew, *Worlds Apart*, p. 37.

²¹⁵ Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, pp. 40-41. William E. Lenz, *Fast Talk & Flush Times: The Confidence Man as a Literary Convention* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), pp. 20-21. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, p. 7.

²¹⁶ Hinman, "The Yankee Peddler," pp. 32-36. Baldwin, *Southern and South-Western Sketches*, pp. 180-185. *Springfield Weekly Republican* (MA), 7/7/1830.

standing with his “mouth wide open and about half bent and [making] the appearance of a fool.” Guild’s motive was to embarrass the women, not to cheat them, which he accomplished by later displaying his charm and respectable conversation to the young women’s mother.²¹⁷ The puritanical demeanor of Yankees was also deemed a mendacious mask. The grave demeanor of the Puritan was converted by his Yankee descendant into the market “poker face.”²¹⁸ Yankee peddlers quoted scripture and wore miens “of elongated gravity,” the *Georgia Journal* warned its readers, in order to make “a shattered tin pan or a bag of counterfeit flax seed pass current.”²¹⁹ Antebellum Americans looked for physical manifestations of the Yankee’s flawed character. George Watterston described Yankee peddler Ichabod Coffin as having a “very protuberant development of the organ of *acquisitiveness*” in his skull.²²⁰ When Jared Bunce gave up peddling, the “ugly *kink*, or double in his back,” caused by his pack receded as his character improved.²²¹ Since there were no obvious signs of a Yankee peddler’s honesty or dishonesty, Southerners invented a recognizable caricature of the Yankee peddler to

Hunt, *American Anecdotes*, vol. 2, p. 137.

²¹⁷ Guild, “Journal,” p. 264.

²¹⁸ A self-critical Whig stated that northern merchants always wore solemn expressions, and that the “seriousness of a miser surpasses the gravity of a devotee.” “Influence of the Trading Spirit upon the Social and Moral Life in America,” *The American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science* 1 (January, 1845):95-98, in Robert V. Remini, ed., *The Age of Jackson* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 183, 187. Thomas Hamilton claimed that Bostonians generally were “distinguished by a solemnity of demeanour,” and that “even the lower orders,” such as shopkeepers, wore hard countenances. Hamilton, *Men and Manners*, pp. 119-20.

²¹⁹ Candler, *Summary View*, pp. 451-452. C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” pp. 255-56. *Georgia Journal*, 3/30/1830. Johnston, *Memoirs of a Nullifier*, pp. 7-8. Robinson, *Life and Adventures*, pp. 22-23.

²²⁰ Watterston, *Wanderer in Washington*, p. 93. Phineas T. Barnum boasted in his autobiography that his “organ of ‘acquisitiveness’ was manifest at an early age.” Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, pp. 1-2.

forewarn Southern consumers of the dangers posed by Yankees in the marketplace.

The image of the lanky Yankee was a rich signifier for the contradictory meanings of consumption and the cultural fixation in Jacksonian America on the bodily functions of ingestion, digestion, and elimination. The popular representation of the Yankee consistently described him as tall and gaunt, or in the vernacular, lathy, wall sided, slab-sided and raw-boned.²²² For instance, James Strange French introduces the appropriately named Yankee clock peddler, Mr. Slim, as “a tall lank fellow, with a thin visage.”²²³ Ichabod Crane, Washington Irving’s Yankee schoolmaster, typifies the depiction of the lanky Yankee: “To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow from a cornfield.” Consume has paradoxical denotations in English; to consume means both to enlarge through incorporation, and to waste away. Consumption is a pattern of spending, but it was also a colloquial reference in antebellum America to the wasting disease of tuberculosis.²²⁴ The figure of the lanky Yankee is a paradox. The Yankee physique resembled a consumptive or starved body, but the Yankee was depicted sometimes as a prodigious eater. Ichabod Crane’s thinness was deceptive, for Crane was also a “huge feeder [with the] dilating powers of an

²²¹ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 416.

²²² Watterston, *Wanderer in Washington*, p. 93. Yoseloff, *Voyage to America*, pp. 42, 97. *Georgia Journal*, 3/30/1830. Hinman, “The Yankee Peddler,” pp. 35, 62, 72. Dorson, “The Yankee on the Stage,” p. 468.

²²³ French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, pp. 150-58. Peddlers are also depicted as overdressed dandies.

²²⁴ Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, p. 7. Caroline Gilman puns the meaning of consumption when Mamma gives “a little approbatory cough” to signal her desire for a peddler’s wares, Gilman, *Recollections*, p. 169.

anaconda.”²²⁵ One Yankee peddler assailed the provisions and whiskey barrel of his backwoods host like he was “a famine manufacturer,” which itself is an oxymoron.²²⁶ The Yankee peddler consumes, but he does not grow larger. Similarly, the Yankee peddler accumulates wealth, but like a miser he never spends it. The lanky Yankee is a creature of the market, following its rules and embodying its effect on traditional exchange networks.

The gaunt Yankee was also a synecdochic trope for the scanty resources and unforgiving landscape of New England. Southerners viewed New England as composed of nothing but granite and ice, with a “mountainous and sterile soil,” requiring arduous labor to wrest a living from the land.²²⁷ Antebellum commentators marveled at how profitable agriculture was in New England, despite the rocky soil and harsh climate. Cape Cod was nothing “but a heap of sand,” stated *Niles Register* in 1835, “yet it maintains thirty thousand people, and there is not a beggar among them.”²²⁸ The bodily functions of eating and elimination also provided formal models for New England’s manufacturing. Antebellum Southerners and Westerners who viewed agriculture as the only legitimate source of wealth deprecated the manufacturing interests of the Northeast as consuming agricultural profits for the self-aggrandizement of the Northeast. From a southern perspective, New England

²²⁵ Irving, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” *Sketchbook*, pp. 332-33.

²²⁶ “Scrape with the Indians,” *The Crockett Almanac 1840* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1840), p. 29. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*.

²²⁷ Thomas P. Kettell, *Southern Wealth and Northern Profits* (New York: George W. & John A. Wood, 1860; reprinted by University of Alabama Press, 1965), p. 52. Norton, *Alternative Americas*, p. 147. Norton suggests that New Englanders were proud of their ingenious ways of producing goods and wealth, but felt uncomfortable with the ensuing materialism. New Englanders tried to produce without consuming, “to excrete without eating.” Such behavior would lead to an emaciated figure.

²²⁸ *Niles Register* 48 (5/23/1835):209-10.

consumed cotton profits in the form of tariff revenue and spewed out cheap manufactures. William Gilmore Simms described the Yankee peddler's "go-cart" as having a "capacious stomach."²²⁹ The goods which come out of the cart's stomach, then, would be akin to vomit or excrement. After emptied of its noisome contents, the stomach of the cart would be filled up with the wealth of the countryside. The motif of an emaciated Yankee with a voracious appetite who never grew larger epitomized the southern critique of the American System.

The highly visible morality of New Englanders brought charges of hypocrisy. The ethical transition from Puritan to Yankee might have been completed by 1765,²³⁰ but New Englanders maintained a puritanical veneer of "steady habits" and Blue Laws well into the nineteenth century. Yankees were depicted as frugal, penny-saving, abstemious, and relishing lower-class victuals.²³¹ New Englanders were well known for adhering to "steady habits" of dietary constraint: "Salt [cod]fish on Saturday, cold meat on Sunday, pudding and beans on Monday."²³² Southerners and Westerners interpreted this as an unnatural repression of bodily needs and conviviality. The niggardly Yankees, claimed George Tucker, subsisted upon scanty diets. "A rasher of pork is a feast for [Yankees]," marveled Tucker, "even on holidays."²³³ The Yankee character Adonijah Allsaint carried abstention to extremes: "He always used to have a wooden bacon ham on his dinner table,

²²⁹ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 492.

²³⁰ Bushman, *Puritan to Yankee*.

²³¹ Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 41-44. Royall, *Letters from Alabama*, p. 228. Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 317. "Misconceptions of the New England Character," *The North American Review* 44 (1837):250.

²³² Parker, "Chapter in the Early Life of Thomas Oliver Larkin," pp. 149-50. Murat, *Moral and Political Sketch*, pp. 6-8.

²³³ Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, pp. 36-40.

jist for a shew, and painted so nayteral it wood make your mouth water to look at it. He said he did this to larn the vartue of self-denial.”²³⁴ The veneration of the Pilgrim Fathers and devotion to vestiges of puritanical asceticism probably acted as a salve on consciousness-stricken, market-oriented Yankees. As early as 1780 Yankees had a reputation for conducting business frauds “under the mask of sanctity.” Southerners mocked New Englanders for the incongruity of their sharp business practices and their obstinate observance of old customs, calling New England the land of both “*steady habits* and *wooden nutmegs*.”²³⁵ It would be a great mistake, jeered Algernon Sydney Johnston, to regard the “veracious histories” written by New Englanders about “Putnam and Warren and Timothy Dwight and the Pilgrim Fathers” as reflective of contemporary Yankee character.²³⁶ Yankees strictly observed the Sabbath, but cheated their customers every other day of the week, several commentators accused. Thomas Cather claimed to witness a Yankee supercargo cheat a simple French sailor of his money on a Sunday, and immediately after doing so, the Supercargo “called for his Bible and read two or three chapters with great devotion, saying that he had been piously brought up, and that

²³⁴ “Rare Economy,” *The Crockett Almanac 1841* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1841), p. 4. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*.

²³⁵ “New England Morals,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 3 (1837):764. A joke popular in Virginia in the early nineteenth century mocked Yankee Sabbatarianism. A farmer on his way to church saw a young man plowing a field and lectured him on the immorality of laboring on a Sunday. When the farmer saw his sermon had no effect, he yelled to the plowhand: “I say, young man, you won’t listen to religion, but you’ve got on an awful strong pair of trousers, will you swap?” Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 37-40.

²³⁶ Moser, *Nord-Amerika*, vol. 1:751. Martin, *Journey*, pp. 44-45. Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, pp. 36-40. Samuel Whitcomb Diary, 9/25/1818. Whitcomb Papers, MHS. C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” pp. 252-56. Johnston, *Memoirs of a Nullifier*, pp. 7-8. Hamilton, *Men and Manners*, pp. 121-22. For late-antebellum sectional rhetoric, see Jan C. Dawson, “The Puritan and the Cavalier: The South’s Perception of Contrasting Traditions,” *Journal of Southern History* 44

religion to him was the most precious treasure on earth."²³⁷

The eyes of the Yankee peddler were the eyes of the marketplace, scrutinizing the exchange value of a customer's property. The Yankee peddler of fiction has a sharp, predatory gaze. Coupled with the inquisitive nature of the Yankee,²³⁸ the Yankee gaze was a powerful and intrusive market mechanism of evaluation. With their stony, puritanical visages, Yankees were opaque to southern observers, but guileless southerners were transparent to the Yankee gaze. John Bernard describes the "keen grey eye" of a Yankee peddler "rolling round in selection of a victim." The clockpeddler Mr. Slim has "small dark grey eyes" that look "through you at every glance."²³⁹ William Gilmore Simms describes the face of Yankee peddler Jared Bunce as "a sort of kining {coining} machine." When Bunce looked around, his gaze translated what he saw into dollars and cents.²⁴⁰ The fictive Yankee peddler Fred Griswold could evaluate a man "at a glance, and could guess the kind of goods a man would want by the looks of his premises."²⁴¹ Yankee peddlers pried into all the "holes and corners" of every settlement, so that after they had passed through a

(1978):597-614.

²³⁷ Murat, *Moral and Political Sketch*, pp. 6-8. Yoseloff, *Voyage to America*, pp. 74-75.

²³⁸ "The YANKEE," *The Day* (Danbury, CT), 5/19, 6/9 1812. Dwight, *Travels*, vol 1:223. Perkins, "Yankee Tutor," p. 59. Johnston, *Memoirs of a Nullifier*, pp. 36, 80. Hamilton, *Men and Manners*, p. 122. Yoseloff, *Voyage to America*, pp. 74-75. Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, p. 163. Van Buren, *Jottings*, pp. 232-233. Warren, *Nellie Norton*, p. 96. Dorson, "Yankee on the Stage," p. 471.

²³⁹ Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 41-44. French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, pp. 150-58. Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, p. 36. The color reinforces the image, because grey eyes were supposedly the keenest:

²⁴⁰ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 69.

²⁴¹ "The Yankee Peddler or; How to Make a Fortune," *Washington Almanac* (Philadelphia: R. Wilson Desilver, 1848), pp. 32-33, cited in Hinman, "The Yankee Peddler," pp. 50-53. See also the article on "Advertising," *Mobile Commercial Advertiser*, Mobile, AL, 5/27/1829. Reprinted from the *Georgia Journal*, and the *American Advocate*.

neighborhood, they were “perfectly familiar with the pecuniary concerns of every man in it.”²⁴² During a debate over naval appropriations, Kentucky Congressman Hardin claimed that the people of Massachusetts “could see a dollar with the naked eye, as far as he could through a telescope.”²⁴³ A Yankee peddler who entered a customer’s home could evaluate not only their material possessions, but their behavior, their social standing, and their respectability. Yankee peddlers violate female privacy; women who look at merchandise are devoured by the Yankee gaze themselves.²⁴⁴ Through Yankee peddlers southern consumers were subjected to examination and judgment by the market mechanisms of commodification.

The construction of the Yankee peddler’s victims was just as mythic as the image of the peddler. No other antebellum American type could match wits with the Yankee peddler, but the most contentious allegation of victimization was made on behalf of Southerners.²⁴⁵ The popular image of antebellum Southerners, outside of the planter class, did not flatter their wit or worldliness; many travelers and commentators noted the prevalence of illiteracy in the southern states. Conversely, it was widely acknowledged that common schooling in New England had produced a well educated citizenry,

²⁴² Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 41-44. French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, pp. 150-58.

²⁴³ “Misconceptions of the New England Character,” *The North American Review* 44 (1837):248.

²⁴⁴ For the commodification of women by the male gaze, see Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, p. 93. For middle-class strictures against intrusive staring at women or strangers, see Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, pp. 126-27. For scenes of voyeuristic Yankees see: Gilman, *Recollections*, pp. 168-73. Davis, *Travels*, pp. 384-86. French, *Sketches*, pp. 150-58.

²⁴⁵ Candler, *Summary View of America*, pp. 451-452. Greene, *Yankee among the Nullifiers*, p. 5. “A Yankee Trick,” *Niles Register* 45, (12/28/1833):291.

including the lower classes from which many peddlers originated.²⁴⁶ Armed with a decent education and the cosmopolitan outlook of traveling, Yankee peddlers speculated “with destructive power” upon their supposedly “lazy, free-hearted, careless, credulous, and extravagant brethren of the South.”²⁴⁷ The opposition between Yankee peddlers and Southern consumers was characterized as an unfair contest between “shrewd, disciplined tacticians in the art of knavery” and “a stupid and ignorant population,”²⁴⁸ but it was really more a matter of experience with and cultural acceptance of the mechanisms of the capitalist marketplace. In many historic situations Yankee peddlers probably did have more information than their customers on merchandise, cash crops, barter goods, and cash exchange rates. While Southerners complained of the impositions of Yankee peddlers and the incompatibility of the new market behavior with traditional exchange practices, in reality many Southerners were willing and active participants in market exchange. Southerners were not foes of the marketplace, but of its structure, which appeared to them to centralize financial power and direct the flow of wealth to the Northeast. Condemnations of Yankee market trickery were part of the traditional revolt in the early nineteenth century against all

²⁴⁶ Faust, *Sacred Circle*, pp. 7-8. Richard M. Rollins, ed., *The Autobiographies of Noah Webster from the Letters and Essays, Memoir, and Diary* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 346-49, n. 7, 45. Martin, *Journey*, pp. 44-45. “Yankee Notions,” *The Saturday Evening Post* vol. 1 No. 13 (10/27/1821). Parker, “Chapter in the Early Life,” p. 13. James Russel Lowell, “A Virginian [Lucian Minor] in New England Thirty-Five Years Ago” *Atlantic Monthly* 26 (1870):174. Knight, *Letters*, pp. 127-128. Freeman Hunt, “New England Schoolmasters,” *American Anecdotes*, vol. 2:224-225. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1856), p. 115.

²⁴⁷ C. H., “Character of the Real Yankees,” pp. 255-56.

²⁴⁸ “Sketches of South-Carolina,” *Knickerbocker Magazine* 21 (March, May 1843):222-29, 333-48; 22 (July 1843):1-6. Reprinted in Eugene L. Schwaab, ed., *Travels in the Old South*, 2 vols., (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973) II:330.

forms of authority, whether religious, professional, educational, or economic.²⁴⁹

Southerners tried to put the best face on their inferior market knowledge; it was an opposition between market “larnin” and the “plain good sense” of traditional exchange.²⁵⁰

Stories of Yankee tricks and southern dupes represented the disadvantages southerners felt at the hands of these commercial conjurers.

The classes of people deemed most susceptible to the trickery of the Yankee peddler were the social subordinates of elite white males: women, children, the enslaved, and backcountry men and women. The victimization of these dependents was a projection of white males’ sense of inadequacy at protecting their wards. The stories demarcate the intellectual inferiority of these consumers with bedazzled eyes and gaping mouths. The gaping mouth suggests idiocy as well as voracity. Fiction generally portrayed men’s perception as more chary of the peddler’s “gaudy trinkets” than the “dazzled eyes of unsuspecting females.”²⁵¹ Old women, who were considered handicapped by their gender and their age, were particular targets of unscrupulous peddlers in fiction. Whenever they thought of the Connecticut peddler, Jared Bunce, the old women of backcountry Georgia

²⁴⁹ See Nathan O. Hatch’s chapter on the crisis of authority in popular culture in Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 17-48, and Charles G. Sellers’ chapter on the conflict between “Land and Market” in Sellers, *Market Revolution*, pp. 3-33.

²⁵⁰ Doddridge, “Dialogue between a Dandy and a Back-Woods-Man,” appended to “Logan, the last of the race of Shikellemes, chief of the Cayuga nation. Buffalo Creek.” (Wellsburgh, Brooke County, VA, 1823. Reprinted in *Three Centuries of Drama: American*), pp. 37, 44-46. “A Scierterifical Courtship,” *The Crockett Almanac 1841* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1841), p. 23. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*.

²⁵¹ Such attitudes were common in the North as well as the South. *Springfield Weekly Republican* (MA), 9/7/1825. *National Aegis* (Worcester, MA), 6/15/1842. Davis, *Travels*, pp. 384-86. Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 41-45. Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, p. 176. Woodworth, *Peddler’s Boy*, p. 28.

said their prayers backwards.²⁵² Children and infantilized blacks are struck dumb by the peddlers' goods. When a peddler exhibits his wares in a genteel South Carolina home, the enslaved house servants' reaction is to stand "with [their] eyes and mouths silently open."²⁵³ In the backwoods, where society was deemed to be less sophisticated than in coastal cities, men's eyes are also "dazzled by the bright looking ware of the pedlar."²⁵⁴ In frontier Georgia, wrote William Gilmore Simms, a Yankee peddler would open his cart "with a mysterious but highly becoming solemnity" to impress the "gaping and wondering woodsman" and his wife and children.²⁵⁵ By depicting the Yankee peddler as the uncharitable exploiter of the weak and childlike dependents of Southern society, the white male elite came across in contrast as the best superintendents of economic practice in the home and in society at large.

Women's reputed lack of an anchored subjectivity made them susceptible to the flattery of the Yankee peddler. The gaze of the Yankee peddler transforms the woman's perception of herself. "By a singular fatality," wrote John Bernard, every article of the peddler which a woman tries on "seems to be made expressly for the wearer; she never looked so well in anything before."²⁵⁶ After dispensing a few "'honied words and winning smiles,' for the benefit of the maids and matrons," peddlers supposedly found little difficulty in "bartering a small quantity of their stock in trade for a dinner, or a supper and bed."²⁵⁷

²⁵² Simms, *Guy Rivers*, pp. 69-70. Robinson, *Life and Adventures*, pp. 20, 23.

²⁵³ Gilman, *Recollections*, pp. 168-73. A visit to a tin shop in Connecticut in 1834 reminded Virginian Lucian Minor how as a child tinware "used to dazzle [him], when displayed by the peddlers." Lowell, "A Virginian in New England," p. 744.

²⁵⁴ Yoseloff, ed., *Voyage to America*, pp. 108-11.

²⁵⁵ Simms, *Guy Rivers*, p. 492.

²⁵⁶ Bernard, *Retrospections of America*, pp. 44-45.

²⁵⁷ "Yankee Peddlers, and Peddling in America," *The Penny Magazine* 6 (7/15/1837):269-70.

The insincerity of the peddler's flattery is visible to all but the object of it. In the ballad "Essence Pedler" a merchant tells a woman, "I have ribbons and chintzes, red, purple and green, / Which will make your sweet daughter a neat little queen," and then "laughs in his sleeve" as he counts her money.²⁵⁸ In another story, the clock peddler Mr. Slim compliments the beauty of a young woman, but suggests it would be enhanced by one of his tortoiseshell combs. Slim turns to her mother and offers her a comb, but she "thinks one for her daughter would be sufficient." "'Your daughter, madam!'" Slim would never have suspected her of being old enough to have a daughter grown." After this compliment the mother and daughter begin to recognize "new beauties in the pedler's wares." That night the daughter dreams of tortoiseshell combs and jewelry and the mother, "from Slim's compliment, believes herself both young and beautiful."²⁵⁹ In a similar story a peddler drops his yardstick "with a look of well feigned astonishment," when a woman tells him the young women with her are her daughters. The peddler's legerdemain with the phallic yardstick reinforces his feigned sexual attraction to the mother. Such a compliment "to a withered old vixen" wrote Thomas Cather, "required unparalleled impudence." But the woman "swallowed the flattery, gross as it was, crying out with a blush of gratified vanity, 'Oh, you tarnal critter.'" The daughters giggle, but the husband, recognizing the peddler's insincerity but impotent to put a stop to the flirtations, "in a quiet tone ejaculated, 'Oh Lord!'"²⁶⁰

Given Yankee peddlers' social status as outsiders, it is not surprising that the taboo of masturbation would be ascribed to them. Antebellum moralists believed that self

²⁵⁸ "Essence Pedler," (Boston: L. Deming, about 1832-37). AAS, Broad sides 1832.

²⁵⁹ French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, pp. 150-58.

gratification upset the balance of the “economic system” of the male body, threatening the development of a young man’s character into “sturdy manhood.”²⁶¹ Masturbation was considered a selfish, anti-social act, as was much of the behavior of the Yankee peddler. References to masturbation in proscriptive literature were encoded as innocuous manners, such as touching the nose, or hiding one’s hands in pockets.²⁶² A Yankee peddler in an 1841 story in the *Spirit of the Times* is depicted with his “hands playing with coppers and ten-penny nails in his pocket.”²⁶³ A *Crockett Almanac* of the same year told the story of Yankee peddler Adonijah Allsaint, who was “caught picking his own pocket in his sleep.”²⁶⁴ In this fashion, Allsaint robbed himself of his “sturdy manhood.” In Morris Barnett’s play, *Yankee Peddler*, the title character Hiram Dodge offers Mariah Fuller, the planter’s daughter, a string of sausages. The script gives the stage direction, “{Showing Sausages},” which was probably performed with a phallic gesture. Rebuffed by Mariah, Dodge propositions the planter’s niece, Jerusha, by offering her a free string of sausages if she will let him kiss her “right straight in the meouth.”²⁶⁵ Dodge’s increasing sexual frustration makes him exclaim: “It’s no use talkin – I’m gittin’ dreadful luv’in’, and I must kiss that gal, or I shall collapse my flue” – in other words, gratify himself.²⁶⁶ Attributing

²⁶⁰ Yoseloff, *Voyage to America*, pp. 108-11.

²⁶¹ G. J. Barker-Benfield, “The Spermatic Economy: A Nineteenth-Century View of Sexuality,” pp. 374-402.

²⁶² Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, pp. 124-125.

²⁶³ Hinman, “The Yankee Peddler,” p. 35.

²⁶⁴ *The Crockett Almanac 1841* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1841), p. 4.

²⁶⁵ Barnett, *Yankee Peddler*, , p. 6.

²⁶⁶ Since they often caught fire, wattle and daub chimneys were constructed at a steep angle away from a cabin, with a pole supporting the leaning structure. In case of fire the pole was kicked away, collapsing the burning chimney away from the cabin. The angle of these chimneys is suggestive of a tumescent phallus, and extinguishing the flames is akin to relieving sexual desire.

masturbation to Yankee peddlers reinforced their standing as social outcasts.

The actual sexual liaisons and marriages between Yankee peddlers and southern women probably made the folklore of Yankee peddlers' lasciviousness seem all too real to fearful southern white males.²⁶⁷ In antebellum stories Yankee peddlers use their goods to entice women into trysts. A Kentucky backwoodsman complains that with "their ribbons and dashy trash [Yankee peddlers] are enabled to make love to the gals with every advantage over the real natives." The backwoodsman relates how he dropped by his girlfriend's cabin unannounced one day to find his "little gal sitting in the lap of a tarnal pedlar." The backwoodsman scares off his rival, but is still enraged at his paramour's unfaithfulness. She sits in his lap and kisses him, so he gets over his "huff." In the peddler's hurry to leave the cabin, he left behind some ribbons, with which the woman adorns herself. The woman is rewarded for her indiscretion; her beau must demonstrate his honorable intentions and she gains a few ribbons from the peddler. In the ballad "Proud Pedler," sexual intercourse and commercial intercourse are confounded. A peddler sings aloud that he would gladly give up his pack worth 50£, "To lodge a night with a lady." A woman takes up his offer and they spend the night together. In the morning the peddler regrets the deal he has made and offers the woman twenty guineas for his "little dumb pack." The woman refuses his offer, and taunts the peddler by dandling the pack on her knee. To regain his pack, the peddler confronts the woman's "wedded lord," and describes graphically their tryst:

We had a frolick here last night,
Of pedlers as you see,
I wanted a mortar to grind my spice in,

²⁶⁷ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, pp. 70-71.

I borrow'd it of your lady.
 The mortar it was your lady's,
 The pestle it was my own,
 I have been using it all last night,
 A grinding my spices fine.

The husband orders his wife to surrender the peddler's pack, for he will not admit that the "proud pedler" has made a cuckold of him.²⁶⁸ The peddler's pack has much significance in this ballad. On the simplest level the pack is 50£ worth of merchandise. It is the currency with which the peddler pays for sex, and the enticement for the woman to offer sex. The "dumb" pack is like a receipt which testifies to the act of adultery. The woman dandles the pack on her knee as if it were an infant – the bastard offspring of the peddler and the woman. Lastly, the pack is evidence of the husband's humiliation which he must expunge from his house by returning it to the peddler. The husband tries to void his wife's intercourse with the peddler by relinquishing her compensation.

Yankee peddler tales depict women as incapable of determining the fair exchange value of commodities, or the quality or usefulness of goods. John Hovey Robinson preached to all American women:

Oh! ye fair but too credulous ones, be guarded in your acts in the absence of your lawful lords – beware of false prophets, mesmerisers and travelling merchants – be not charitable, lest ye be 'gulled.' Sin has come into the world, and so have peddlers and Indian doctors. Eschew evil and mountebanks.²⁶⁹

Southern gender conventions held that women were childlike and easily manipulated, and expected women to defer to men's protective control.²⁷⁰ John Davis recorded the supposed

²⁶⁸ "Proud Pedler, and Light House," (Boston: L. Deming, about 1832-37). AAS, Broad­sides 1832.

²⁶⁹ Robinson, *Life and Adventures*, p. 25.

²⁷⁰ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, pp. 51, 293.

conversation of two Virginia farm girls discussing the veracity of a peddler's broadside ballads of the murder of Peggy Placket and of a whale found in Chesapeake Bay with a 5,000 ton ship in its belly. Eliza wonders aloud if the stories are true. "True!" cries her sister Mary, "Do you think they would put it in print if it was not true?"²⁷¹ Young women with naive views of the world gleaned from novels are ill-prepared for the insincerity of the marketplace.

Women have long been caricatured as getting what they desired from men through "feminine wiles," scolding, and sex, a denigration of the concept of feminine "influence."²⁷² Many Yankee peddler stories depict a husband's fortitude crumbling before the onslaught of a peddler backed up by the wife and children: "Every one but the father perceives the necessity of Sally having a pair of shoes, Enoch a jack-knife, and the parlor a timepiece."²⁷³ Thomas Cather claimed to have witnessed a Kentucky housewife with aspirations towards respectability browbeat her husband into purchasing goods from a Yankee peddler. The father, Obid, spurns the peddler's goods, but the peddler is persistent and proceeds to "unstrap his box" even while the father is "buttoning his breeches' pockets with a resolute air." But as soon as the wife and daughters enter the room, Cather detects the resolution of Obid faltering, and his wife quickly overrules his "faint remonstrance." The wife orders her husband, "Now Obid, dear, pay the gent," which Obid knew was "tantamount to saying, 'Go and do it directly.'" After paying the peddler twenty or thirty dollars, Obid mutters an oath under his breath against the Yankee peddler for meddling in his domestic affairs. Obid's

²⁷¹ Davis, *Travels*, pp. 384-86.

²⁷² Bernard Mandeville draws such caricatures in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714); Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, p. 8.

²⁷³ Bernard, *Retrospections*, pp. 44-45.

misdirected anger from his wife to the peddler shows how the gender conflict over domestic consumption might have been projected onto the Yankee peddler. The wife rebukes Obid's impolite performance, which undermines her attempts to make her home appear respectable, especially since Obid's faux pas occurs "before the foreign gentleman," Cather.²⁷⁴

In another story the wife and daughters of a Tennessee farmer take sides with a Yankee peddler who wants to sell combs and jewelry to the women, and a clock to the man. With "the pedler in front," the wife, daughters, and peddler hurl at the farmer "volley after volley" of argument for purchasing the jewelry:

And, as a wall before some well-directed battery, [the farmer's] resolution grows weak – for a moment totters – then falls, leaving a clear breach. Through this the pedler enters; and having disposed of two *tortoise shell combs*, and a little *double refined jewelry*, the women retire from the field of action, and the pedler, taking advantage of the prostrate condition of his adversary, again reiterates the defects in his clock, and concludes with, 'Now let me sell you one cheap.'

The husband is the main target of the peddler; accomplishing the sale to the women was meant merely to weaken the farmer's resistance to buying an expensive clock. The conquest of the farmer's resolution by the peddler also includes imagery of male rape. The peddler's entering the "breach" of the "prostrate" farmer is suggestive of buggery. Another allusion to the ravishment of the husband by the peddler occurs that evening; as his wife and daughters dream of their new combs and jewelry, the farmer "never turns over but the corners of a clock prick him in the side."²⁷⁵ Emasculated by his submission to his wife and daughters, the unmanned farmer becomes vulnerable to other males. The farmer loses his independence and his manhood to the marketplace.

²⁷⁴ Yoseloff, ed., *Voyage to America*, pp. 108-11.

²⁷⁵ French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, pp. 150-58.

Yankee peddlers were not the only itinerant males to instigate women into asserting their roles as respectable consumers. Peddlers of the Gospel used the methods of the Yankee peddler to promote “cleanliness and decency” in the household. The Methodist *Discipline* forbade itinerant preachers to consort with women, but even the most ascetic preachers interpreted that rule as barring only intimacies with attractive young women, not with mature matrons, widows, or spinsters.²⁷⁶ An anecdote from the autobiography of Peter Cartwright, however, illustrates the sexual rivalry between itinerant preachers and male heads of households.²⁷⁷ On one of his circuits Cartwright lodged in a cabin with crude furniture, an earthen hearth, “wooden trenchers for plates, sharp-pointed pieces of cane for forks, and tin cups for cups and saucers.” The master of the house was not poor; he had three hundred dollars hoarded up to purchase land, so Cartwright thought it his duty to persuade the man to refurbish his squalid domicile for the sake of his wife and daughters. Like the Yankee peddler, Cartwright first appealed to the family by flattering the women; Cartwright praised the farmer’s “good-looking daughters, and noticed what a good cook his wife was.” Then Cartwright made his pitch:

‘Now, brother,’ said I, ‘do fill up this hole in the hearth, and go to town and get you a couple of plain bedsteads and bed-cords. Give your wife and daughters a chance. These girls, sir, are smart enough to marry well, if you will fix them up a little.’

Cartwright recognized immediately that: “the women were on my side, and ... joined

²⁷⁶ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, p. 162. For the trial of a Methodist minister for seducing and murdering a Rhode Island factory operative, see Catharine Williams, *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative*, Patricia Caldwell, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁷⁷ The passage can be found in Strickland, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, pp. 251-53. Lori Merish interprets this anecdote as evidence of “pious consumption.” Merish “Hand of Refined Taste,” pp. 485-523; Charles Sellers cites this episode as evidence that domestic refinement was the result of strong intrafamily pressures, Sellers, *Market Revolution*, p. 155.

with me in all I said.” The father charged that Cartwright was a “proud preacher,” and told him not to meddle in his domestic affairs. But on a subsequent visit, Cartwright surmised that the “females had taken my lecture to the old brother for a text,” for the house had been entirely refurbished to appear respectable, and even “the old brother himself looked better than usual.”

Caroline Gilman defends the market sense of southern women in *Recollections of a Southern Matron*.²⁷⁸ Gilman constructs a scene which challenges the cliché of the peddler always getting the upper hand of the “emotional” female consumer. The dialogue between Mama (the mistress of Roseland plantation), Chloe (her enslaved house servant), and the peddler also contrasts male and female habits of domestic economy, questioning the notion that men knew best how to manage household finances. Mama and Chloe conduct their negotiations with the peddler in the absence of the Colonel (the master of Roseland plantation). The two women communicate with each other nonverbally with significant glances and raised eyebrows so as to hide from the peddler their appraisal of his merchandize. Mama and Chloe subject the goods – cut glass pitchers and plated wares – to a careful examination. They find that there was “not a flaw” in the glass pitchers, which when tapped, “rang out the musical, unbroken sound, so dear to the housewife’s ear.” Mama and Chloe are also aware of prices of similar goods from Charleston, and conclude that the peddler’s wares are cheaper and handsomer. Mama is emotionally invested in the proceedings, with her temperament fluctuating between “concentrated resolution” and disconcertment, self-confidence and doubt. Mama trades the Colonel’s old hunting coat, pantaloons, and waistcoat for two decanters, one pitcher, plated

candlesticks, a hearth-brush, and a scarlet tray. In the end Mama smiles “triumphantly” over her successful bargaining with the peddler, who exits “with an air of humility.”

When the Colonel enters the room, Mama, with a mixture of “embarrassment” and “bravado” invites him to examine the trophies of her successful marketing. The Colonel “cannot stop a minute” to look at Mama’s bargains because he is heading out for a hunt, but he pauses for a moment at the table and in a cursory glance denigrates his wife’s bartering skill and careful evaluation of the merchandize: “What, this trash? ... blown glass and washed brass! Who has been fooling you [?]”²⁷⁹ When the Colonel learns that Mama traded his favorite old coat for the items, he is enraged that she would trade away “articles in which he said he felt at home.” In the past Mama had in vain represented the “economy” of cutting up his old clothes to make suits for the boys and the servants, but the Colonel would not consent. Old clothes were not an extravagance, but spending time hunting rather than managing the plantation would have been condemned by contemporary southern reformers. Hunting also represented a more primitive form of economy, in contrast to the civilizing influence of the cut glass decanters. “I hate new coats,” avers the Colonel, because he does not feel at home in them. The new coat which the Colonel finds so disagreeable could be read as the new mantel of the plantation mistress as primary purchaser for the household. Taking away the Colonel’s coat is like stripping him of the superficial claims to honor, emasculating him by forcing him to wear the sissified, feminine ideal of men’s fashion. The Colonel would rather keep to the old gender roles, and admonishes: “I believe, if they could, women would sell their husbands

²⁷⁸ Gilman, *Recollections*, pp. 168-73.

²⁷⁹ For a similar condemnation of a wife’s trading by her husband see Robinson, *Life and*

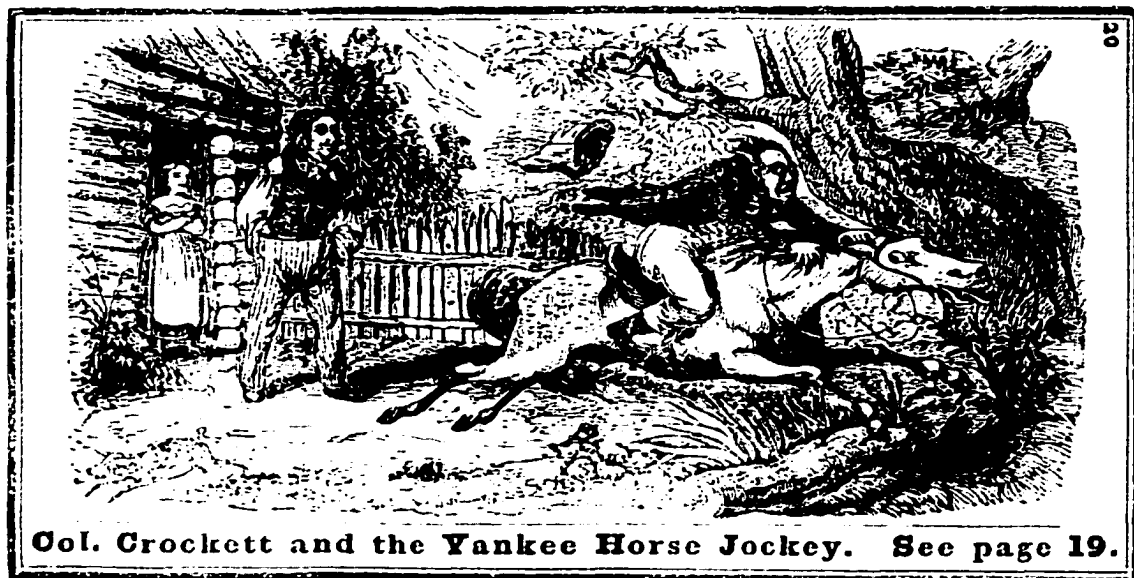
to those rascally pedlers!”

This is the world turned upside down for the Colonel; the new household economy where the wife engages in trade with “bravado” and objectifies her husband as a commodity for sale in the marketplace. Mama surrounds the Colonel with consumer objects, ensconcing him in an overprotective womb of feminine refinement and threatening his masculinity with an overbearing feminine influence. This fear of an inversion of gendered authority extended to cracks in racial subordination. The Colonel’s sale in the marketplace could be compared to a slave auction. Both white women and enslaved blacks were likely to turn the tables on white masters, once their individual desires were activated by the marketplace. Despite the efforts of southern politicians and white male heads of households, the antebellum southern economy was wedded to the national market. On the whole, southern consumers welcomed Yankee peddlers and fostered interregional trade connections to the growing market in mass-produced luxuries. Staple crops of the southern economy were inextricably tied to international commodity markets, which led to severe swings of boom and bust in the monocultural economy. During the periodic downturns of the economy, southern masters realized how tenuous their social and economic mastery was and how dependent they actually were upon international price structures and northern-made goods. What was the source of this threat to planter hegemony? – northern meddlers in the shape of crafty Yankee peddlers, and politicians who used federal tariffs to oppress the economic independence of the southern states.

Adventures, p. 25.

Figure 38. "Buying a Horse"

"Buying a Horse." *The Crockett Almanac 1839* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1839), pp. 19-20.
Reprinted in Michael A. Lofaro, *The Tall Tales of Davy Crockett: The Second Nashville Series of Crockett Almanacs 1839-1841* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987).



CONCLUSION

The Yankee peddling system touched upon nearly every variety of social relations in antebellum America – between parents and sons, employers and workers, buyers and sellers, husbands and wives, beaux and belles, masters and the enslaved. The face-to-face contacts between Yankee peddlers and southerners also had a huge impact upon the political and economic relations between the industrializing Northeast and the plantation South. The pervasiveness of the Yankee peddler in antebellum America demonstrates how the Market Revolution affected ordinary Americans' lives. Peddling was an outlet for underemployed New England men displaced by the demographic pressures and other exigencies that accompanied the rise of commercial agriculture. The burgeoning industrial plant of the Northeast drafted these young men into service as the primary distributors of many of the new, mass-produced consumer goods. They were the vanguard of the national marketplace, the ultimate links in interregional trade between northern factories and southern consumers. Much of the face-to-face contact between Yankee peddlers and southern buyers occurred in the informal settings of the home or the slave quarters. Yankee peddlers facilitated the underground economy of poor and middling whites and free and enslaved blacks, upsetting the hierarchical relations between white male heads of households with their black and white dependents.

The invasion of the South in the early nineteenth century by thousands of masterless, mobile young men from the North was a shock to the entire system of

southern life. Many Yankee peddlers' primary loyalty rested in their own self interest, followed by attachments to their peddling "fraternity" of like-minded, deracinated young men. They did not respect the social prescriptions imposed by tradition or emerging bourgeois morality, but were actuated by the credo of the hyper-competitive marketplace: "by hook or by crook." They impudently crossed all boundaries – moral, social, racial, and sectional. Yankee peddlers insinuated themselves, their goods, and their alien ideas into southern society. They introduced a consumer culture of mass-produced luxuries that wore away at the vernacular material cultures of every region of the nation. They appealed to the desires of all ranks of southern society in a consumer marketplace that was no respecter of hierarchies based on wealth, gender, or race. The pressures of the marketplace transformed these displaced farm boys into seductive salesmen who could convince women, lower-class white men, and blacks that they lacked material fulfillment. Yankee peddlers helped southern consumers shape their identities as equal, autonomous participants in the marketplace, thereby subverting the authority structures of the plantation and home. Yankee peddlers were the personal representatives of the northern commerce that southern sectionalists believed to be intruding upon southern economic independence. On the national level southern politicians battled the tariff – another intervention into southern governance – with political doctrine and economic retaliation. But southerners had to confront the Yankee peddler face-to-face.

For meddling in southern affairs Yankee peddlers became the targets of violent retribution. There are many documented instances of abolitionists and suspected abolitionists being lynched, but there were more rumors than actual cases of assaults on

Yankee peddlers.¹ Rebecca H. Lopes warned her cousin, Carlos Bates, that many Yankee peddlers in Virginia in 1833 had “had their waggons searched and injured very much and some of them have come very near being ‘*Lynched*’ at once.”² Thomas Cather reported in 1837 that Southerners in some districts “so heartily detest these Yankee Pedlars that if one has the temerity to enter their borders to practise his tricks, he is sure to be lynched.”³ Certainly, some Yankee peddlers must have had abolitionist sentiments, and some abolitionists disguised their intentions by posing as peddlers (not a very wise strategy). For instance, Leo Griswold, a man who applied for a job with George Merriman to peddle clocks in Kentucky but backed out, was later reported by Merriman to be “under Sentence of death in Mississippi for distributing Abolition tracts.” Like Samuel J. Lewis,⁴ Merriman concluded that abolitionism was bad for business: “fools are not all dead, yet [I] am very glad he is not in our employ.”⁵

Folktales of retribution against peddlers had wide circulation in the South. Southern backwoodsmen of Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Georgia were all portrayed as mortal foes of the Yankee peddler.⁶ The *Farmer's Repository* in 1808

¹ See for instance: Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, p. 101. *Niles Register* 49 (10/3/1835):76. Lynching of a “*suspected Abolitionist*” in Goochland County, Virginia: William Bolling Diary 1836-1839, 2/19/1839, typescript. VHS.

² Rebecca H. Lopes (Poquanack, CT) to Carlos Bates (Opelouses, LA), 1/4/1833. Carlos Bates Papers, CSL. Emphasis in original.

³ Yoseloff, *Voyage to America*, pp. 74-75.

⁴ See end of chapter 3.

⁵ George Merriman (Bristol, CT) to Rensselaer Upson (Louisville, KY), 11/6/1837. George Rensselaer Upson Papers, CSL.

⁶ Daniel Boone supposedly felt compelled to move whenever a “d----d yankee” settled within 100 miles of him. *Niles Register* 24 (5/17/1823), p. 166. The backwoodsmen of Buncombe County, North Carolina, reportedly hated both “cotton packers and yankee pedlars.” Lynchburg *Virginian*, 8/14/1828. The half-horse, half-alligator Tennessean could stand anything “but a clock pedler.” French, *Sketches and Eccentricities*, p. 150. One

reported the murder of a "New England Tin Pedlar" who was "pressed very hard by two women" to enter a tavern near Woodstock, Virginia, for some refreshment. While eating, "one [woman] held his head, and the other cut his throat, and they put him in the cart, shut it up, and started the Horse." About three weeks later the newspaper revealed that the murder was a "false report."⁷ In 1835 the *Lexington Gazette* reported the "horrid murder" in a Randolph County tavern of a clock peddler who "was hung up by his heels and bled to death by opening the juglar vein." This story, initially related as authentic, also turned out to be a hoax. Rumors placed the scene of the murder in at least half a dozen counties in western Virginia.⁸ These stories cast Virginians not as passive consumers cheated by sly peddlers, but as vigilantes purging their society of these vexatious outsiders. Circulating broadly in the Valley and across the Alleghenies, these stories probably also served as passive threats to the Yankee peddlers who might have overheard the tales in their travels.⁹

Southern humor and folktales not only turned Yankee peddlers into villains, it dehumanized them. In the story recounted by the *Virginia Gazette* the tavern keeper slew the clock peddler like he was slaughtering a hog. In a story of a peddler who was robbed

Georgia Regulator hated Yankees "worse than a polecat." Simms, *Guy Rivers*, pp. 70, 318. For more oaths against Yankee peddlers, see "A Corn Cracker's Account of his Encounter with an Eelskin," *Davy Crockett's 1837 Almanack, of Wild Sports in the West* (Nashville: Published by the heirs of Col. Crockett, 1837), p. 17. "Rare Economy," *The Crockett Almanac 1841* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1841), p. 4. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*. Hinman, "The Yankee Peddler," pp. 58-61.

⁷ *Farmers Repository* [Charles Town, Virginia]: 6/10, 7/1 1808.

⁸ *Lexington Gazette* 24, 31 July; 21 August 1835.

⁹ Other lynchings or threats of violence in fiction include: Simms, *Guy Rivers*, pp. 69-71, 86-87. Greene, *Yankee among the Nullifiers*, p. 71. "Scrape with the Indians," *The Crockett Almanac 1840* (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1840), p. 29. Reprinted in Lofaro, *Tall Tales*. Barnett, *Yankee Peddler*, pp. 7, 12-13.

and killed in a Tennessee tavern, the murderer made an explicit connection between Yankees and swine: "I kept my hand on his throat, and stuck him as effectually as ever you stuck a hog."¹⁰ Traditional agrarian culture placed the pig in a realm between fully domesticated animals and wild beasts.¹¹ George Tucker also described the Yankee as a liminal being: "A very strange animal ... It has the body of a man, but not the *soul*."¹² These stories dehumanized Yankees, facilitating acts of violence against Yankee peddlers, northern abolitionists, and ultimately, Yankee soldiers.

The Yankee peddling system diminished in importance in the mid 1840s, but the cultural memory of the sharp dealing and seditious behavior of the Yankee peddler remained keen in the South into the late antebellum era and beyond.¹³ When John Brown attempted to foment a slave uprising by seizing the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Unionists tried to defuse the crisis by comparing the militaristic response of the South to John Brown to the overblown and prejudicial reactions of southerners towards Yankee peddlers.¹⁴ But the stereotype of the Yankee peddler was firmly established as a scapegoat for all of the economic and political grievances the South harbored against the Northeast and the federal government.

¹⁰ George E. Dabney, "The History of an Adventurer, Part II," *Southern Literary Messenger* 6 (April 1840):263.

¹¹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 44-59.

¹² Tucker, *Letters from Virginia*, p. 36.

¹³ Dawson, "Puritan and the Cavalier."

¹⁴ John Gilbert, *The Curious Adventures, Painful Experience, and Laughable Difficulties of a Man of Letters, While Traveling as a Peddler in the South during the Late Harper's Ferry Excitement* (Baltimore: John Gilbert & Co., 1860).

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