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"With Unalterable Tenderness": The Courtship and Marriage of St George Tucker and Frances Randolph Tucker

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"WITH UNALTERABLE TENDERNESS":
THE COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE OF
ST. GEORGE TUCKER AND FRANCES RANDOLPH TUCKER

A Thesis

Presented to

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

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

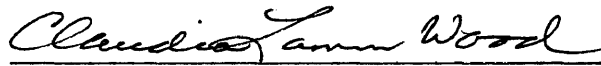
by
Claudia Lamm Wood

1988

APPROVAL SHEET


This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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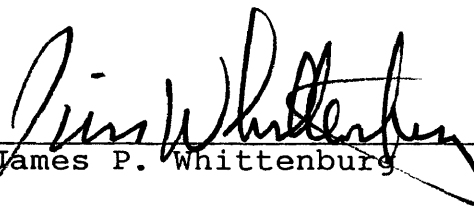
Approved, December 1988



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.vii
ABSTRACT.viii
CHAPTER ONE.2
CHAPTER TWO.	20
CHAPTER THREE.	41
CHAPTER FOUR.65
BIBLIOGRAPHY.84

PREFACE

This thesis explores one of the most intimate human relationships--marriage--through examining the letters exchanged between a couple, St. George and Frances Tucker, during their courtship and marriage.

St. George Tucker (1752-1828) was born in Bermuda and came to Virginia in 1771 to study at William and Mary. He started his law practice after he graduated in 1772. He met Frances Bland Randolph, the widow of John Randolph of Mattoax, in 1777. They married on September 3, 1778. During their courtship and early marriage, Tucker served in the Revolution, first in Lawson's militia and later as an aide to Lafayette at Yorktown. During this separation, the couple wrote the letters that are examined in Chapter Three.

The Tuckers had several children of their own, three of whom lived to adulthood: Anne Frances Bland, referred to as Fan; Henry St. George; and Nathaniel Beverley. In addition Frances had three sons from her marriage to John Randolph.¹

After the war, St. George concentrated on his law career, often traveling to Richmond to attend court and conduct business. The letters from this period (1786-1788)

are analyzed in Chapter Four.

Finally, while letters and diaries can reveal an intimate world of the past otherwise inaccessible to the present, they must be examined for what they are: expressions of personal ideas, feelings and thoughts. Social conventions, so prevalent in relationships of the eighteenth century, influenced the content and expressions in letters. Was an expression of love a socially acceptable manner of address during courtship or was it an ardent declaration that flouted convention? Understanding the conventions of the period and the personalities of the subjects can aid in interpretation, but ultimately there is risk and uncertainty in analyzing personal documents: "No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought--what he thought happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought."²

NOTES TO PREFACE

¹Biographical information about the Tuckers is from Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXIX (1921), 129-179. There is inconsistency among sources regarding the death date of St. George Tucker. Other sources cite 1827 as the year, one being A Brief Outline of the Tucker Family, by Janet Coleman Kimbrough (Williamsburg, VA, 1977).

²Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (New York, 1977), 11-12.

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I wish to thank Professor Jim Whittenburg for his patient guidance throughout this project. Also, I am grateful to Professors Jim Axtell and Charles Hobson, for their astute critique of my efforts; and to Margaret Cook, Librarian of Special Collections at Swem Library, for assisting me in my research, and for introducing me to the Tuckers.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I have explored the nature of marriage in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chesapeake, interpreting the marriage of one eighteenth-century couple, St. George and Frances Tucker, and comparing their relationship to the general practices of the period.

The thesis begins by analyzing the recent work done in the field of family history. Two schools of historians have pursued the study with different perspectives and different tools. One school focuses on demography, the other on the emotional bonds that exist within the family. The latter historians use letters, diaries, and artifacts as evidence to discern the changing nature of the family.

The second chapter describes the demography, social customs, and family relationships of the Chesapeake in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Changes in demography, economics, and society also brought changes to courtship and marriage practices. In courtship, couples adhered to specific procedures that defined the roles of each individual and the boundaries of propriety. Among the upper class, courtship carried familial and financial responsibilities. Consequently, parents dominated the choice of a partner throughout most of the eighteenth century. In later years, love became a factor, parents were less involved, but the economic and social factors were not ignored. In the ritual of courtship, the woman was to guard against impropriety, and she set the rules for the relationship. After marriage, the control of the relationship shifted to the man. As in courtship, marital roles were defined by conventions that did not encourage an honest partnership between spouses.

The next two chapters delve into the letters exchanged between the Tuckers, in an effort to interpret their communication in the context of the period. Their courtship appears traditional in many ways: he, the romantic persuader; she, the cautious woman, clearly controlling the relationship to maintain propriety. Once they were married, they recognized their new social roles and the control shifted. Yet, in other ways, their marriage was an unusual partnership, as evidenced by their honest communication, their shared burdens and decisions, and their sincere concern for each other, all expressed openly and honestly in their letters.

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CHAPTER ONE

In the relatively young study of family history, historians have split into two groups: those who compile and analyze demographic statistics to discern a concrete pattern of family life, and those who interpret personal documents, such as letters and diaries, to explore the realm of emotions in the family. Each group has its strengths and its weaknesses. The first group, the demographers, have contributed much to the understanding of the family in history. Through statistical analysis of births, deaths, marriages, and population growth, historians have gained a more precise picture of the family and observed that differences in family structure exist from region to region. This concrete, objective, and precise approach satisfies historians who strive to maintain their objectivity, for it is much easier to maintain objectivity when confronted with statistics of fertility and mortality than with the emotional reactions to those events. On the other hand, flaws in methodology, fragmented data, and inadequate samples can discredit conclusions.¹

Limitations of this approach include an "artificially static picture" of the family and an inability to

reconstruct the inner life of the family from data.²

In response to those questions ignored by demographers, other historians have explored the emotional aspects of family relationships (parent-child relationships and sex role patterns), using sources largely ignored by demographers--letters, diaries and other literature. This school of historians has exposed the changing nature of human relationships to historical analysis, and, in doing so, they have added a new perspective to history. Their efforts have been praised and criticized. Reviewers have praised their sensitivity to their subjects, their interdisciplinary approach, and their originality. Their works have been described as controversial. One reviewer succinctly summarized a recent work as "fascinating and exasperating."³ The same reviewer praised the author for "treading new and difficult ground" and criticized her for "ultimately treading too far."⁴ In general, critics of historians who explore the emotional fabric of the family fault their work for lack of explanation about the cause of change, overgeneralization, lack of objectivity, and inability to provide convincing evidence.

This thesis draws on both schools to explore the marriage between St. George and Frances Tucker. However, because personal documents are the primary sources for examining the emotional relationship of marriage, this

chapter summarizes the works of four historians from the second school who have shed light on the marriage relationship in history: Philippe Ariès, Lawrence Stone, Daniel Blake Smith, and Jan Lewis.

All these historians would agree that the marriage relationship--and the family in general--changed over time. The family changed from a patriarchal, emotionally distant relationship to an affectionate one.⁵ But when this change occurred, how gradual or swift was the transformation, and what caused the shift in authority and emotional tone are topics that each historian views slightly differently.

A study of the Tuckers alone can neither prove nor disprove any one of these hypotheses. Although the Tuckers lived in a period that several historians point to as a time of great change within the family, they are only one family and cannot adequately represent the entire society at that time. Second, most of the theories discuss change over time. To support or disprove any one of the theories, it would be necessary to select a more numerous sample that spanned time and social class. It would also be necessary to be consistent geographically. Finally, it is debatable whether historians can invincibly prove a theory regarding marriage--the most intimate and private of human relationships. This subject remains open to broad interpretations, as can be seen by examining the theories

presented by several historians.

In 1962, Philippe Ariès wrote Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life and introduced "the history of the idea of the family."⁶ By examining portraits, architecture, and the written word in France between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries, Ariès concluded that the changing attitudes toward children coincided with the changes occurring in the family. From this analysis, he concluded that "the concept of the family was unknown in the Middle Ages, that it originated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and that it reached its full expression in the seventeenth century."⁷ Regarding the cause of these changes, he postulated that the modern family emerged from a struggle between centripetal forces and centrifugal forces, the centripetal forces being the bonds between family members and the centrifugal being the external pull of friendships, social standing among a vast network of persons, etiquette, and ambition.⁸ In short, the less involvement with burdens of the outside world, the stronger the role of the family became.

In the Middle Ages, a person's primary allegiance was to the line or extended family. Practical reasons ensured this: in a weak political state, each individual depended on the line for protection and support. In this situation, the nuclear family "existed in silence" and,

in fact, was insignificant as a social unit. But as society changed, so did the view of family. Ariès stated that the eventual emergence of the nuclear family as the primary social unit was not merely a "progressive substitution of the family for the line" but rather a continual "loosening or tightening of the ties of blood, now extended to the whole line . . . , now restricted to the couple."⁹

By the eighteenth century, families valued privacy and isolation. Houses changed from one room which was used for all functions by all people in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to a larger house with many rooms. Independent rooms opened off a corridor, ensuring privacy for their occupants. Rooms developed for specific purposes, such as the bedroom. Previously the kitchen was the only function-specific room.

Manners changed also, from a code that established "an art of living in public and together" to one that emphasized respect for each other's privacy.¹⁰ For example, it was no longer acceptable to call on a friend or acquaintance without notice. The use of calling cards solved the problem. These changes provided the privacy and limited the density of social existence. What emerged was a family that consisted only of parents and children. Servants, clients, and friends were excluded.

A second characteristic of the eighteenth-century

family according to Ariès was the emphasis placed upon the child. Previously considered trivial matters, details of family life became worthy of attention. Men and women filled their correspondence with details about children's health, behavior, and education. The use of nicknames for children and intimate names between husband and wife indicate a greater familiarity among family members than that which existed in earlier centuries. The trend also indicates a desire by family members to address each other differently from how they would address strangers.¹¹

Despite Ariès's focus on Western Europe and specifically France, his contributions to understanding the development of the family can apply to other cultures. In stating that the concept of the family developed when the centrifugal forces and centripetal forces reached an equilibrium, he has provided a gauge (albeit a nonquantifiable one) for all families at all times in all places. He does not set a rigid structure for the changes that occurred, as do Stone and Smith, but instead emphasizes the gradual evolution of the idea. Finally he opened the realm of emotions to exploration by historians. Other historians have continued in this vein, including Jan Lewis, who explored the emotions of people in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Virginia, and Lawrence Stone, who traced the development of the family and the marriage relationship

in England between 1500 and 1800.

Like Ariès, Lawrence Stone explored the family as a social relationship, both a catalyst for and a victim of the broader cultural changes. In Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, Stone concluded that the emotional tone of the family moved from deference to a patriarchal head of a large kinship group to affection for members of the nuclear family. To analyze the family relationship in England over three centuries, Stone used personal documents, advice handbooks, reports of foreign visitors, literature, house plans, folk customs, legal documents, and demographic statistics. His model for the development of the family comprises three stages: the Open Lineage family (1450-1630), the Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family (1530-1700), and the Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family (1640-1800).

Stone's description of the sixteenth-century family resembles Ariès's portrayal of the family in that same period. Stone stated that the nuclear family constituted "no more than a loose core at the center of a dense network of lineage and kin relationships," while marriage meant "not so much an intimate association with one individual as entry into a new world of the spouse's relatives."¹² Permeability to outside influences, loyalty to the kinship network, and lack of respect for autonomy of the individual

characterized the sixteenth-century family. In this society in which long-term economic interests of the group took priority over the emotional gratification of the individual, marriage decisions were made by the collective efforts of family and kin members. Money, status, and power issues dominated. As a reason for marriage, love was "condemned as ephemeral and irrational grounds."¹³ Furthermore, both parents and children believed that a marriage decided upon by the individual would be no happier than an arranged marriage. Thus, marriage could unite kinship groups, improve the economic status of the group, and create useful political alliances. In a world governed by the patronage system and an economy determined largely by the laws of primogeniture, one could not afford to consider marriage for romantic reasons.

The next stage of Stone's model, the Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family, began about 1530 and existed to 1700. This form of family prevailed between 1580-1640.

The characteristics of this family model are a new emphasis on the nuclear family as the social boundary, as opposed to the kinship network; a strong patriarchal leader of the family unit; and an increased importance of affective bonds in the marriage relationship, although families still used marriages to cement alliances. Stone pointed to several causes for this gradual, but important change in the English

family: as the state and church grew in power, loyalty to the line was replaced by universalistic loyalties to the government and the church. Kinship groups became less important politically. In turn, this change strengthened the patriarchal leader of the nuclear family and, with the weakening commitment to the line, people diverted their loyalties to the nuclear family. The church stressed the value of morality and familial relationships, reinforcing the trend.

In Stone's theory, the changes in the family related closely to the politics of the period, one reason why Ariès and he differed slightly in their assessments of the period and the stage of development. Stone asserted that after 1640, changes undermined the patriarchal society and transformed the family into the Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family.

This stage in Stone's model of family development lasted from 1640-1800. He attributed the changes in the family to the declining patriarchal society in favor of individualism (which he labeled Affective Individualism). For the first time, emotional satisfaction of the individual became more important in the selection of a marriage partner than ambition for money or status for the line. Consequently, individuals selected their own marriage partners. The families of this period were characterized

by less patriarchy and more autonomy for the individual. Homes accommodated individual privacy and separated the family from the outside world. Stone theorized that greater freedom for children and more equality between spouses resulted from the change from patriarchy to individualism.

Daniel Blake Smith's theory regarding the emotional development of the family is less intricate than either Ariès's or Stone's. Smith focused his study on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chesapeake. Smith concluded that in the mid-eighteenth-century, the "obsession with balance and a well-ordered family government presided over by a patriarchal father" developed into the family of the late eighteenth century that valued "intimacy, affection, and even a measure of passion."¹⁴ The increased autonomy of children and the emphasis on affection resulted in a change in marriage practices. Smith observed that in the eighteenth century parents influenced their children's marriages, stressing economic and family status, while children came to prize friendship and mutual affection. He concluded that the resolution of this conflict, in favor of children selecting their own partners, resulted in a flourishing of romantic love. In spite of the new emphasis on companionship in marriage, "conjugal love did not imply a democratization of authority in the household."¹⁵ The husband served as master of the house,

protector, and friend of his wife. A proper wife satisfied and pleased her husband through her submissive and obedient conduct. Marital harmony depended on the clear understanding of these roles. Smith concluded that "given the tension between the ideal of romantic attachment and the understanding of the proper roles of spouse on the one hand and the realities of a man's almost absolute power in the family on the other, it is not surprising that in more than a few households, the well-ordered family remained largely an ideal."¹⁶

Smith's work presents several problems to the researcher. Although he has provided numerous examples from primary sources and demographic information and generally supplies much information about the Chesapeake family, his vague references to dates creates confusion if one attempts to analyze his thesis. Although his thesis states the family changed in the "mid-eighteenth century" he often uses the words "eighteenth century" when discussing a critical aspect of change in the family. In addition, he contradicts himself in places, creating more confusion for the reader. For example, in describing the affection that developed between men and women in the late eighteenth century, he states on page 136:

Love was a rational, sensible commitment to another based upon genteel accomplishments. The head clearly governed the heart in these

relationships, but affection was important."¹⁷

In reference to the same time period, he writes on page 137:

Many young men and women in the late eighteenth century gave expression to emotional and passionate language that suggested a full flowering of romantic love unchecked by reason.

In addition, he is vague about the origins of the new emphasis on romance. He states: "the growth of privacy and affectional ties in family life by the mid-eighteenth century probably encouraged this interest in romantic intimacy."¹⁹

Jan Lewis analyzed the same society as did Smith; however, she concluded from reading the letters and diaries of pre-Revolutionary Virginia that the writers used them as a catalog of events and transactions only. The writing was not introspective and the authors seemed reluctant to dwell upon feeling, choosing reason instead. The documents related external events, not how the individuals felt about those happenings. In contrast, writers of diaries and letters in nineteenth-century Virginia wrote for a different purpose: "to explore and soothe their feelings."²⁰ Lewis saw these evident changes as indicative of changes in family values, a transformation that occurred gradually between 1775 and 1830. In contrast to Smith, who described the affectionate family of the

eighteenth century, Lewis stated that the families of this era "stifled emotional intensity. Love was important, but it was not central. Both within and without the family, other ideals--such as peace and moderation--prevailed, creating the context within which emotion might be safely displayed."²¹

To comprehend the emotions of this society, Lewis analyzed the prevailing attitudes toward love, death, success, and religion. She concluded that the pre-Revolutionary gentry derived the "ideal life" from the entire social, cultural, and economic situation, whereas later Virginians relied almost entirely on love.²²

In their relationships with others, Virginians of the late eighteenth century valued peace and domestic tranquillity above honor and affection.²³ Consequently, moderation and restraint were advocated in the realm of emotions. It was better to erect barriers between one's self and others than to succumb to strong emotion: "The canon of moderation erected barriers between an individual and his baser instincts, whereas the canon of independence raised barriers between individuals. In the writings of Virginians one feels the restraint, the withdrawal--from the colony's boisterous past, from its still raw present, and even from certain sorts of emotional engagements, with others and with the self."²⁴

As a result of these values, Virginians created elaborate, formal social expectations, more rigorous than those of the nineteenth century, in which "each obligation was paired with a reciprocal expectation, so that no one might feel taken advantage of, imposed upon, or troubled."²⁵ Further, Virginians "did not expect or demand intimacy with others"; feelings remained closely guarded behind formalities. Families developed similarly: relations were affectionate yet formal. Society defined relationships: courtship, marriage, parenthood, and childhood carried expectations and specific boundaries.

Virginians did not hold family life as the central, sole source of happiness; happiness came from a variety of roles. Family life was "pleasant, but not central"; affections were carefully managed to achieve the goal of domestic tranquillity.²⁶

In contrast, nineteenth-century Virginians valued love above all else. Intense emotions were not shunned; rather, these new Virginians voiced their feelings with vivid, unrestrained language. Emotions and feelings became the subjects of letters and diaries. Instead of holding intense emotion in check (love included) to maintain tranquillity, nineteenth-century Virginians saw love as a "refuge from formality and reserve, and it was only love that could relieve suffering and pain. Unchecked

emotion could heal."²⁷ Love gave meaning to life--it was of greater value than success and religion.²⁸ As a consequence of the emphasis placed on love, the family became a higher priority in Virginians' lives. Through the family--specifically marriage--individuals could develop the loving relationships they yearned for. The pursuit of happiness was directed inward, to the home.

Consequently, the function of the institution of the family changed. Instead of "society in microcosm" it became "a haven from that increasingly complex and threatening world."²⁹

Each of these authors focused on the ideas and emotions that either drew families together or held them at a safe distance from one another. These analyses enrich our understanding of life in the past, but their interpretation creates questions. How can we come to understand the colonial American family? Despite their intriguing explorations, the psychosocial historians have been criticized for lack of evidence, while demographic historians do not give the complete picture. To reach the middle ground requires an extensive interchange between the two groups. John Demos pointed out that the "two approaches are or should be mutually complementary." Psychological theory "cries out for solid evidence" while demographic theory can be "arid and sometimes quite without

a leavening of qualitative insight.'"³⁰ The exchange of ideas and perspectives from both schools is needed to enrich and solidify the study of the family in history.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹ Daniel Blake Smith, "The Study of the Family in Early America: Trends, Problems and Prospects," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 8.

² Smith, WMQ, 10.

³ T. R. Clayton, review of Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia, by Jan Lewis, in Journal of American Studies, XIX(1985), 272.

⁴ Clayton, 272.

⁵ Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, tr. Robert Baldick (New York, 1962). Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (New York, 1977). Daniel Blake Smith, Inside the Great House: Planter Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society (Ithaca, NY, 1980). Jan Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia (Cambridge, 1983).

⁶ Ariès, 9. This focus differed from earlier works that described daily life of the family, specifically Arthur W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family (Cleveland, Ohio, 1917), Alice Morse Earle, Home Life in Colonial Days (New York, 1898), Edmund S. Morgan, Virginians at Home (Williamsburg, Va, 1952).

⁷ Ariès, 353.

⁸ Ariès, 375.

⁹ Ariès, 355, 364.

¹⁰ Ariès, 399.

¹¹ Ariès, 400. Ariès cites the letters of General deMartange to his wife between 1760-1800 as an example.

¹² Stone, 3.

¹³ Stone, 87.

- ¹⁴Smith, Great House, 141.
- ¹⁵Smith, Great House, 160.
- ¹⁶Smith, Great House, 174.
- ¹⁷Smith, Great House, 136.
- ¹⁸Smith, Great House, 137.
- ¹⁹Smith, Great House, 135.
- ²⁰Lewis, 212-13.
- ²¹Lewis, 30.
- ²²Lewis, 191.
- ²³Lewis, 36.
- ²⁴Lewis, 11.
- ²⁵Lewis, 22.
- ²⁶Lewis, 172.
- ²⁷Lewis, 206.
- ²⁸Lewis, 208.
- ²⁹Lewis, 210.
- ³⁰John Demos, "Demography and Psychology in the Historical Study of Family Life: A Personal Report," in Household and Family in Past Time, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1972), 569.

CHAPTER TWO

Courtship patterns changed over time in the Chesapeake. Demographics, economics, and social standing affected when one married and who one married. Couples adhered to an unwritten but established code of courtship that defined the roles of each individual and set the boundaries of propriety.

In the seventeenth century, high mortality, immigration, and a predominance of men influenced the attitudes toward marriage. In the early seventeenth century, men outnumbered women four to one.¹ Indentured servants comprised eighty-five percent of the population,² and they were forbidden to marry until they completed their service. Women and men usually achieved freedom in their late twenties. While women may have married shortly after this, men often waited several years, primarily because of the scarcity of women in the colony. The high mortality rate, coupled with the unbalanced sex ratio, meant that once women married and were widowed, they very likely remarried.³

Marriage patterns differed among native-born men and women. The high instance of parental death characterized the family life of the first native generation. According

to Darrett and Anita Rutman's reconstruction of the average family in seventeenth-century Middlesex County, Virginia, the first two native-born generations lost the mother while the children were aged eighteen, fifteen, nine, five, and one. Five years later the father died, leaving orphans of twenty-three, twenty, fourteen, ten, and six. For the orphaned children, this situation contributed to an earlier age at marriage and less, if any, parental control in selecting a marriage partner.⁴ The age at marriage dropped from the late twenties of the parents' generation to age twenty-four for men and twenty for women.⁵ Because of the high parental mortality rate, young men and women established themselves financially at an earlier age than their parents did. Most received their inheritance as soon as they came of age (eighteen years for women and twenty-one for men). But in some cases, children inherited at a younger age, primarily because of a father's wish to protect his children's fortune from his unknown successor.⁶

By the eighteenth century Chesapeake society had achieved a more stable footing. The sex ratio was balanced, and adults, especially men, lived longer. As a result, more parents survived to see their children marry and therefore exercised more control over the decision.⁷ The age at marriage changed only slightly in this period:

both men and women tended to marry while in their early twenties.

For the families that could provide little inheritance to children of marriageable age, courtship tended to be spontaneous and informal, and parental approval carried less import.⁸ But for wealthy families, for whom marriage arrangements resembled a business transaction, the role of parents in the marriage decision was crucial.

Among the members of Virginia's upper class, and those aspiring to it, courtship carried familial and financial responsibilities that often superseded romantic love. In these social circles, the courtship code regulated and controlled youthful passions, thereby serving a vital purpose. This development contrasts with the seventeenth century and with practices among the lower classes in the eighteenth century, to whom courtship procedure was not quite as burdensome.

Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, the parents' role dominated the match. Economic class, social status, and parental preference weighed more heavily in determining the match than did mutual companionship or romantic love.⁹ Children were seen as "the possessions of their parents" and, with such a status, it would be a "kind of theft, [to] give away themselves without the allowance of those that have the right in them."¹⁰ Women

were "seldom permitted to make their own Choice; their Friends Care and Experience are thought safer Guides to them, than their own Fancies."¹¹

If a child married against his parents' wishes, the couple could lose the marriage portion, dower, and inheritance. Parents managed to exert control over children's marriages in this way even after their own deaths. Wills executed with provisions to deny inheritance were one means. One father willed his daughter Elizabeth £2,000 with the condition that "if she marry Bacon, void." She did marry Nathaniel Bacon, in spite of her father's threats, and later sued to obtain her inheritance. But the Lord Chancellor ruled against her, saying that for such "presumptuous disobedience" she deserved the punishment.¹² John Thompson of Virginia, angered by his daughter's elopement, brought about the same result by denying her husband the marriage dower and marrying his own housekeeper so he might have more children to inherit his property.¹³

In the later years of the eighteenth century, companionship and love grew in importance as factors in the marriage relationship, sometimes outweighing financial concerns.¹⁴ However, many sons of wealthy families continued to feel a familial obligation to marry women of equal status, women who would understand the

responsibility toward the family property. Charles Carroll ended his courtship of an English girl in 1764 when she refused to move to the family estate in Maryland. He explained to his father that "the situation of our affairs absolutely require[s] my residence in Maryland; and I cannot sacrifice the future aggrandisement of our family to a woman."¹⁵ Thus, while parents exercised less authority in the decision and permitted sons and daughters to follow their emotions in choosing marriage partners, certain social criteria still existed. The shift in marriage patterns did not result in a sudden unleashing of romance, but rather an acknowledgment that love was the most important factor and that, to contract a truly successful match, social compatibility and financial security should be considered. The idea of autonomy in marriage decisions made the choice a more private affair, a decision between two people rather than an alliance between two families.

With the stabilization of society in the early eighteenth century and the rise of a more entrenched elite whom others emulated, courtship and its rituals carried more import than ever before. The amount of literature designed to educate young women in the manners and morality appropriate to ladies, as well as in the code of courtship and the proper conduct of a wife, attests to the importance of contracting a successful marriage. Manners defined

roles in all aspects of planter society, and expressed the Virginians' desire to emulate the lives of English aristocrats.¹⁶ For this reason, etiquette books advised girls to be modest and obedient, "the two grand Elements essential to the Virgin State."¹⁷ Young ladies were urged to develop their beauty and rely upon their emotions rather than their mind: "You have more strength in your Looks, than we have in our Laws," advised George Savile, "and more power by your Tears, than we have by our Arguments."¹⁸ This instruction created expectations of behavior, leading to an almost ritualistic approach to relationships. These guidelines served as a basis for the specifications of the courtship code. The literature of the period also reinforced the idea of romantic love, establishing this emotion as essential to the marriage relationship, a cultural ideal, and an individual expectation.¹⁹

Courting often began at social occasions, especially the ball. Dancing was an important aspect of a youth's education, for both boys and girls. Andrew Burnaby, a visitor to Virginia in 1759-1760, observed the popular jig: "These dances are without any method or regularity; a gentleman and lady stand up, and dance about the room, one of them retiring, the other pursuing, then perhaps meeting, in an irregular fantastical manner." In its

seemingly chaotic practice of switching partners, a jig appeared "more like a Bacchanalian dance than one in a polite assembly."²⁰ Dancing was more than a good time, however. The purpose to dancing was to meet a future spouse and attract his or her attention. The dance was one of the socially acceptable means for young men to prove their prowess.²¹ As the historian Rhys Isaac described it, a jig was "a stylized representation of bold, active courtship on the part of both sexes."²²

To court a woman, a young man first had to assure himself, his parents, the woman, and her parents of his financial means.²³ He then asked permission of the girl's parents to "pay addresses" to their daughter. To neglect this formality was considered "a species of dishonorable fraud," no matter how well the family knew the potential suitor.²⁴ The man's father also had to approve of the courtship and, if he consented, he gave his son a letter to present to the girl's father informing him of the property settlement that could be expected at marriage. Her father would then respond and state the amount of money he would contribute, usually about one-half the sum offered by the man's parents.²⁵

For the couple, the courtship ritual involved clearly defined roles. Women, seen as morally superior to men, were charged with guarding against impropriety. To do

so, they must not reveal their true feelings for a man until he proposed marriage. Consequently, a man's role in the relationship was to "gauge sentiments that women sought to conceal."²⁶ With no indication of reciprocal feelings, it is no wonder that men approached proposing marriage with great trepidation.

Women were carefully instructed in how to react to the marriage proposal. In the seventeenth century, The Ladies Calling, a popular guide to female morality published in 1673, stated that a lady should never listen to a marriage proposal addressed directly to her, but should refer the suitor to her parents. This procedure was appropriate to the feminine virtue of modesty and enforced the idea that marriage was not a matter of the woman's choice but rather an act of obedience.²⁷ When she was addressed directly, a woman's reaction to a proposal should be one of surprise and disapproval. She should not encourage her suitor or betray "the acknowledgement of a mutual flame in the female breast;" her consent should be "obtained by importunity, and granted with deliberation."²⁸

But by the eighteenth century, the decision to accept or reject a proposal was placed in the woman's hands alone. During this period, women were instructed to immediately consider a proposal. If she decided to refuse the offer

of marriage, she should respond gently, to protect her suitor's pride. And for the same reason she should keep the proposal a secret.²⁹ However, any advances of a woman were considered indelicate and taboo. George Washington explained the convention to Nelly Custis: "The declaration, without the most indirect invitation of yours, must proceed from the man to render it permanent and valuable."³⁰

The woman's role as guardian of propriety and maintainer of self-control was a source of domestic and social power. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the final stages of courtship. Women set the rules for the relationship at this stage. In the case of Frances and St. George Tucker, she forbade St. George to visit and requested that he keep their relationship secret. He obeyed, albeit begrudgingly. In fact, it was in women's best interests to "promote a mating system that maximized their sexual control and minimized their vulnerability."³¹

From Molly Tilghman's account of a friend's three-year dalliance, it seems that proper timing in accepting a suitor was a matter of skill: "Her reign has been brilliant, and she has closed it in very good time, while her train was undiminished. It is a nice point for a Belle to know when to marry, and one in which they are very apt. She understood the matter."³² In The Spectator of June 12, 1711, the writer acknowledged the necessity of a lady

rejecting the first marriage proposal, but advised "neither the one nor the other to persist in refusing what they secretly approve."³³

Before the wedding, men seldom expressed fears or indecision about the change they would soon make, while women expressed anxiety, indecision, and in many cases, attempted to delay the event. Although young men were "eager to hurdle any obstacles," the instinct of young women was to "shy at the gate."³⁴ It was the woman's decision to choose the wedding date, and few chose the earliest one.³⁵ Agreeing to be married did not present a problem. Women had been raised for the roles of wife and mother. Marriage was an essential step to fulfilling those roles and thus, an ideal to be sought. However, women also knew the costs of marriage. While for men marriage meant the end of loneliness and the chance to have a family, to women marriage meant separation from family, the fear of death from childbirth, the end of girlish pleasures, the beginning of responsibilities and "accepting the limits of domesticity."³⁶ To ease the transition for women, wedding conventions and rituals involving family and friends developed. A lengthy wedding trip for the couple after the wedding for the purpose of visiting relatives and friends was one such custom.

Once courtship ended, the relationship between a man

and a woman changed from gentlemanly pursuit to manly dominance. As with courtship, women were taught how to conduct themselves, one source being published works. The roles of husband and wife were clear and for the most part unchallenged: a wife was to make her husband happy and a husband was to make his wife comfortable.³⁷

Consequently, women were responsible for the happiness of others, yet completely dependent on their husbands for their well-being.³⁸ The success of the marriage rested upon the wife's shoulders, who was to "live so upon your Guard, that when you shall be married, you may know how to cure your Husband's Mistakes and prevent your own." While the author admitted that "obey is an ungentle word," the wife must accept her husband as he is, "to make the best of what is settled by Law, and not vainly imagine, that it will be changed for your sake."³⁹ Learning to live with a husband required much effort on the woman's part, for it was she who must adapt to his ways.

In spite of such guidance, marriage was a source of happiness for many couples. While mutual affection formed the root of conjugal felicity, it seems that the honest expression of love was restrained in favor of domestic tranquillity. Harmony and peace within the home were the most valued aspects of domestic life. Intense feelings, both of love and anger, were often masked under formalities

and conventions. The emotion existed, but it was rarely expressed with intensity.⁴⁰ Sally Logan Fisher's description of her marriage illustrates the strength of the feeling and the inability to express it: "Our Hearts have been united from the first, in so firm, so strong, so sweet an Affection, that words are incapable of setting it forth."⁴¹ There were exceptions, however, as Landon Carter noted in his diary that Mrs. Foy was "more fond of her husband Perhaps than the politeness of the day allows of."⁴² Other couples displayed a more honest acknowledgment of their feelings. When Elizabeth Jones spent a summer in England, her husband, Thomas, wrote frequently and sent presents, admitting that absence demonstrated the dependence he had upon her, saying that "all the real enjoyment and comfort I can expect in this World is confined to you, and if it was not for the hopes of having your dear conversation again, life would be but a burthen to me. . . . How is it possible for me to live without my only Joy and Comfort?"⁴³ But affection for one another, whether openly demonstrated or not, did not imply an equality of authority in the household. Harmony in marriage still depended upon the balance of power being weighted in the man's direction. He was the master, his wife his obedient subject.⁴⁴

Not all women accepted this subjugation as easily

as others did. Moreover, the dependence--both economic and social--of a woman upon her husband created a trap for many wives. Alexis de Tocqueville observed that in America, "the independence of women is irrevocably lost in the bonds of matrimony" to the extent that a married woman "lives in the home of her husband as if it were a cloister."⁴⁵ If a woman was unhappy with her husband, she had little recourse in the bounds of proper behavior. She was not even to discuss the subject of her discontent with him, her "Discretion and Silence" were "the most prevailing Reproof; and an affected Ignorance, which is seldom a virtue, is a great one here." The wife's humility and complacency presumably would evoke her husband's good will and "persuade him not to be unjust." If a man had particular faults, the wife should not mention or even notice them. To complain is "more Ridiculous than the Injury" that provoked her. Moreover, a wife should be thankful for her husband's shortcomings, as it is "the Faults and Passions of Husbands [that] bring them down" to a woman's level. Faults make it possible for a man to be "content to live upon less unequal Terms, than Faultless Men would be willing to stoop to."⁴⁶

Divorce was not at all common. In the Chesapeake, especially during the seventeenth century, the high instance of death and short life expectancy may have ended a few

unhappy unions. But if both partners lived, marriages endured. Mary Cooper lamented on her wedding anniversary in 1769 that "this day Is forty years since I left my fathers house and come here and . . . I think in every respect the state of my affairs is more than forty times worse."⁴⁷

Frustration with marriage was compounded, perhaps even in part created by, women's legal status in the colonies. English common law prescribed that, upon marriage, women entered a state of coverture, the tradition that "interposed husbands between their wives and the civic community."⁴⁸ As Blackstone tersely explained, "the husband and wife are one and that one is the husband."⁴⁹ A feme covert, the legal term for a married woman, could not enter into a contract, sell property, make a will, or sue in court without her husband's consent. These restrictions were justified as the woman's protection.

There were ways around the common law status. Equity, which is judge-made law decided on an individual case basis, provided some legal freedoms for women. The judge was not bound to the strictures of coverture and in some cases made it possible for women to sue their husbands.⁵⁰ Another way to avoid coverture law was to draw up a prenuptial contract, stating that the wife would retain control over her property. A more effective method was to create a

trusteeship in which a woman's property was vested in another adult male. If a woman wanted to conduct any business or legal transactions, she could apply to the legislature for feme sole status, although married. In most cases, however, a woman's husband had to consent.⁵¹

Although some women managed to achieve a degree of legal autonomy, for the most part they depended on their husbands for any defense of their rights. Coverture was not eliminated in the colonies, nor did equity law sufficiently counterbalance the disadvantages created by common law. Nor did the situation improve with the nation's independence. St. George Tucker, himself a lawyer and a judge, felt that the law changed little by the American constitutions. Women were still taxed without representation. In the case of a daughter who was raped by her father, she was penalized for depriving him of her labor by her seduction, on the grounds that a daughter is a father's servant. Tucker noted that "there is little reason for compliment to our laws for their respect and favour to the female sex."⁵² Indeed, the first half century of the republic seemed the hardest time for wives to control their own property.⁵³

The most effective way for a woman to retain control over property was to be a widow. Under law, if her husband died without a will, a wife received one-third of personal

property and one-third life interest in real estate. A husband could leave less of his personal estate to his wife in a will, but she could not receive less than a child did.⁵⁴ A husband often bequeathed more than the required amount to his wife with the provision that she not remarry. Rowland Burnham of Virginia spelled the terms out explicitly: "My will is that my wife shall enjoy the third part of the house and clear ground for the employment of her servants during her widowhood and no longer but then [after her remarriage] to depart without injuring the houses."⁵⁵ Other husbands were more generous; John Ball of North Carolina represented one extreme. If his wife remarried, he willed that she and her new husband "Remain upon my now Dwelling Plantation During her Naturall Life and Injoy the Same with all the Rights and Privileges in as Large and ample manner as She did in my Life Time."⁵⁶

Both courtship and marriage were influenced by laws and conventions during the seventeenth and particularly the eighteenth centuries. The seeming lack of honest communication between spouses, in spite of a recognition of romantic love as the foundation of marriage, was encouraged by stylized and formal courtships. The education of women and the expectations of men perpetuated the image and prepared both sexes for a relatively artificial relationship. Some couples were happy, either satisfied

with the status quo or managing to transcend the veneer.

Others were miserable, trapped in a situation for which there were few solutions.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

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²Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Ser., XXXIV (1977), 542.

³Smith, Great House, 128.

⁴Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, "'Now-Wives and Sons-in Law': Parental Death in a Seventeenth-Century Virginia County," in Tate and Ammerman, eds., Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century (New York, 1979), 158.

⁵Rutman and Rutman, 158. Walsh, "'Till Death Us Do Part,'" 131. Smith, Great House, 128.

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- ¹⁴ Smith, Great House, 140-142.
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- ²² Isaac, 86.
- ²³ Rothman, 56.
- ²⁴ Spruill, 143.
- ²⁵ Edmund S. Morgan, Virginians at Home (Williamsburg, VA, 1952), 33.
- ²⁶ Rothman, 34.
- ²⁷ Spruill, 214-215.
- ²⁸ The Lady's Magazine, Nov. 1772, 514-515, in Spruill, 148-149.
- ²⁹ Rothman, 33.
- ³⁰ Spruill, 149.
- ³¹ Rothman, 54.
- ³² Spruill, 149.
- ³³ Spectator No. 89 (June 12, 1711) in Spruill, 149.

³⁴Rothman, 71.

³⁵Rothman, 70-71.

³⁶Rothman, 71, 75.

³⁷Rothman, 70.

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³⁹Savile, "Advice," in Cott, ed., 79.

⁴⁰Jan Lewis, "Domestic Tranquility and the Management of Emotion among the Gentry of Pre-Revolutionary Virginia," WMQ, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 136.

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⁴²Landon Carter, July 27, 1774, in Greene, ed., Diary of Carter, II, 814-815, 837, in Lewis, WMQ, 145.

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⁴⁶Savile, "Advice," in Cott, ed., 80, 81.

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CHAPTER THREE

At age eighteen, St. George Tucker vowed never to marry a widow. Six years later he broke that vow. He was first attracted to Frances Bland Randolph, widow of John Randolph, in the fall of 1777. St. George's earnest attempts to win her affections received little or no encouragement from the widow until April 1778. On September 23, 1778, they were married. The story of their courtship and early marriage, told in their own words through the letters they exchanged, offers a glimpse into the intricacies of an emotional bond that was in some aspects controlled by traditional social dictates. Yet in many ways their relationship transcended older customs. Their honesty and sense of partnership, as well as his relationship to his new family, indicate that change was occurring.

During his courtship of Frances, St. George viewed himself as a foolish lover, compelled by romantic impulse, and weakened with thoughts of his beloved. At that time, romantic love was recognized as an important element of courtship; but to have the qualities essential to marriage love must also be balanced by reason. Romance was in vogue, and expressions of it fell prey to stylized representations.

St. George attempted to convince Mrs. Randolph of his genuine love by writing that "if inconsistency of Conduct be a proof of Love you have now the strongest evidence against me." He told her that since falling in love, he had broken every resolution he had made, one of them a vow never to "put it into the power of a Lady to laugh at the extravagances" to which love provoked him.¹

His writing overflowed with romantic phrases and effusions of flattery and admiration. A friend teased St. George about the style of his letters to Frances, and called him the "arrantest Madman in the Commonwealth."²

St. George wrote love letters in an almost predictable style. Letters written before April 1778 contained no information or news, only an outpouring of emotion. Once Frances had assured St. George of her affection, other topics became viable subjects for their correspondence. But always, at the beginning and at the end of letters, St. George wrote of his longing for Fanny (her nickname), his concern for her welfare, and his unfailing affection. He recognized the repetitive quality his prose developed. In a letter written over half a year after their correspondence began, St. George suggested that if Fanny compared his letters, "There would be such a similitude of sentiment, and such correspondence of phrases that one might almost suppose I kept one original, the diction of

which being transposed might serve for half a dozen Epistles."³ Romance had become a cultivated style, a carefully planned strategy intended not only to win a woman's affections, but to establish socially proper relations. St. George observed that his own romantic style differed from that of a friend, who, "to smooth over the glowing parts of his Letter--I say to melt down the Colours . . . he has concluded with a very sober piece of Advice." He asked of Fanny, "Shall I follow his Example?"⁴ But it seems from his letters St. George did not feel the need to moderate his passionate writings with sobriety.

St. George did, however, consider reason an important element of true love. In the spring of 1778 he began to express affection for Frances as a friend. Although he labeled himself the foolish lover, he credited reason with confirming "the raptures which my love inspires."⁵ It seems love by itself proved reckless but when "tempered by Reason it loses all its dangerous Qualities and seems to bear a strong Resemblance to Friendship quickened by some very powerful Impulse."⁶ Such a relationship, founded on love and reason, proved far superior to an ardor born of "Indulgence to a capricious fondness."⁷

Reason was important, but the love must also have certain qualities. Early in their relationship, St. George spelled out his concept of love to Fanny. "The solid basis

of Esteem," open and honest communication, and, above all, "a most exalted Respect" comprised genuine love.⁸ Moreover the "full power of Love" arose only from a return of affections similarly composed.

In their courtship, St. George and Fanny illustrate the traditional roles of men and women--the woman moderated the relationship and the man sought to convince the woman of the sincerity of his affections. St. George reiterated time and again the importance of mutual affection, but Fanny did not seem free--or willing--to express such emotion. In an undated letter, presumably written early in 1778 by St. George after proposing marriage to Fanny, he wrote at length about "our Distresses the last Evening" until reason "for a moment resum'd her long deserted Empire." He wrote to Fanny that "your hand, without the entire possession of your heart, will only serve as a perpetual source of Misery to us both . . . I have obtained a promise of your Hand yet dare not hope to possess it--the same Instant that made me the happiest, rendered me the most miserable Being in the Universe--And whilst I lash'd you to my Breast with Tenderness, which Love, Joy and Expectation had inspired, my Bliss was destroyed by finding that you would not partake with me in the Raptures I enjoyed."⁹

Exactly why Frances felt this restraint is difficult

to know, but social dictates as well as her responsibilities as a mother and a steward of the estate may have made her hesitant to reciprocate. The woman's role in courtship was to guard against indiscretions. To do this she was expected to wait for a suitor to state his intentions and to be certain of marriage and reciprocal feelings before revealing her true feelings.¹⁰ Frances's reluctance served a purpose. The courtship code, the prescribed ritual, could not be ignored, even by someone as earnest and desirous of honest communication as St. George. The woman controlled the relationship; propriety must be maintained because her reputation rested upon it. Strict rules governed courtship in eighteenth-century Virginia in order to prevent young women from making a mistake in such an important decision. Virtue was carefully protected, and genteel men complied with the social proprieties imposed. It was, however, the woman's duty to ensure that men took no "liberties that would not have been strictly decent."¹¹

Frances Randolph employed several tactics to maintain propriety: forbidding St. George to visit, encouraging rivals, disguising her affections, and, once a more than casual relationship developed between the two, compelling St. George to keep it a secret.

St. George accepted the situation but frequently remarked on the misery he suffered. He made it clear that

it was not without a "severe struggle" that he obeyed her requests.¹² He considered it "impossible to give my dearest Fanny a more convincing Proof of my implicit Regard to whatever she wishes, than my remaining three Days so near her without seeing her, in obedience to her Request."¹³ St. George expressed frustration at this imposed "Exile," for he knew the only chance to win her affections was "by embracing every Opportunity" to convince her that she had "nothing to dread by uniting your happiness with mine."¹⁴

Frances forbade St. George to visit her plantation for a reason other than propriety. As a wealthy young widow, she attracted a number of men and her future became a subject publicly discussed. To encourage a variety of suitors, she placed restrictions on St. George's attention. He was clearly under no delusions as to her reasons. He wrote in an early courtship letter, filled with despair at his situation, "I leave you with the full Conviction that I have a rival whom I can not but esteem--I am apprised of his merit and his sincere Attachment to you, nor can I offer a single Argument in favor of my Wishes, which does not operate in his Behalf."¹⁵ In a later letter, written in April 1778, a rival--perhaps a different one--was still in the picture, but St. George viewed the situation with more sarcasm than despair: "I had yesterday the

pleasure of drinking yours and Coll. Griffins Healths, jointly, at an Entertainment given by the newly installed Lord Chancellors. Your old Friend the Attorney had the Honor of giving you as his Toast and the Coll. was provided by some other Gentleman as a suitable match to the Widow--You may guess with what Degree of cordiality I drank the Toast--"¹⁶

Frances also controlled the courtship relations in her desire to maintain the secrecy of their affection. Several times St. George wrote of his frustration. On one occasion, he spent two days in her company "without venturing to pay the smallest Attention to you in public, or without compensating for the Unhappiness by listening to the Charms which your conversation always yields me in private."¹⁷ St. George related an incident to Fanny in which it is clear that friends knew of his affection for Mrs. Randolph, but that the seriousness of that emotion remained privy only to the couple. He wrote that his "sober Airs" have brought much pity and teasing from friends, who presumed him to be among the lovelorn. In reaction, St. George "solemnly protested I was determined never to let another widow get hold of my heart--The good Folks took it for granted you were included in the protestation and I laught very heartily in my sleeve on the occasion."¹⁸

While St. George often expressed his feelings about

their relationship at great length, it is only in letters she wrote shortly before their marriage and especially in letters after marriage that Frances gave any idea what she expected from a relationship of love. After St. George had been injured in the war, more than two years after their marriage, she reevaluated her criteria, realizing she "did not know how tenderly" she loved him until she heard of the danger he faced. She continued, "I used to tell you it was necessary for your bravery to be put to the test before I could give you all my heart but I little thought when I was jesting it would be so soon. . . ."19 She also wrote, seven months after the wedding, of her desire to be with him, for the restoration of "that tranquil state which your company ever affords me."20

While St. George and Fanny were not affected by parental dictates as much as a younger couple would be, once their intention to marry became known, relatives and friends expressed their opinions on the match. Her family offered congratulations and had little else to say. Anne Blair, a close friend of both, wrote to Frances of her high esteem for her choice, and offered to "launch forth on his many Virtues" to make sure Fanny was "not blind to his Merit."21 The reaction of the Tucker family--and the manner in which St. George handled the situation--shows a conflict between generations resulting from a transition

of social expectations. In early April, St. George's brother Thomas Tudor Tucker, who lived in Charleston, wrote to wish him "success and felicity," but expressed reluctance to comment further.²² Less than two weeks later, he answered a letter of St. George's: "I must now take Notice of your Letter on the interesting Subject of Changing your Condition in Life." He continued with words of congratulations and approval of Frances, then proceeded to offer the advice St. George requested: "As to the objections rais'd by particular Circumstances, I consider them as relating chiefly or wholly to a Man's own Fancy." It seems St. George did not instantly retract his vow not to marry a widow and that perhaps the new responsibility may have caused anxiety. His brother reassured him, but added his concern that there was "one thing only excepted, which has some weight with me, and that is your being induced by such a Connection to settle at a Distance from your Friends. This will, no Doubt, give pain to our tender parents and to the rest of your Relations."²³ His brother suggested a visit to Bermuda to appease his family.

If this aspect bothered St. George he avoided the situation entirely by not writing, let alone visiting. The first Bermuda family member to write of the proposed marriage was his mother, who complained of not hearing from St. George at all. In May she wrote that she had heard

through a friend that St. George planned to marry, and added she was "very sorry for I am afraid I must bid adieu to you."²⁴ But she did not mention the subject again, nor did St. George inform his family. In July 1778, he received a sterner letter from his brother Thomas, who informed St. George that his "Intention of marrying is not a Secret in Bermuda, so that your Motive for declining to mention it ceases, and I would recommend to you no longer to delay showing our Parents that Mark of Respect which is to be expected from you on such an occasion. My Father may perhaps take it amiss that you should put it off to the last. . . . I think you had better get over your Reluctance and make it known to them at once."²⁵

Obviously a certain deference and respect on the part of children was expected. In the near past, parental permission to marry was essential. St. George's own father must have sought the approval of his wife's and his own family. But St. George seemed defiant, refusing to seek permission or even to inform them. Yet this defiance, a deviation from the courtship code, did not lower his esteem in the eyes of his fellow Virginians. This attitude of freedom to make a decision to marry free of family influence characterized the shift in family relationships that began at the time of the Revolution. Apparently the first letter St. George sent to Bermuda mentioning their marriage was

dated October 26, 1778--over one month after the event.

Once Frances and St. George became engaged, their relationship gradually shifted from one that the woman controlled to one in which the man became the leader. The first evidence is Frances's more open, honest communication, confessing her emotions for the first time. A woman who, earlier in the relationship, seemed so practical, unswayed by the emotional outpourings of her suitor, became sentimental. She wrote in July after a visit from St. George, lamenting his early departure, saying she "cou'd not for some hours think you were gone, but was soon convinced of the sad truth, and found I had nothing left of value, but the hair I rob'd you of, which has been my Bracelet and Constant companion."²⁶ More important, she indicated that although bound by custom to maintain a certain emotional distance from her betrothed, she found that although "our scruples be ever so great, I find we have not resolution to resist the virtuous solicitations of the Man we love."²⁷ And with that to justify loosening her restraints, she dared to write to him of her "tenderest affection."

Deference to St. George's wishes and to his intellect also indicated the changing roles of the two lovers. Although Frances "counts the hours of his absence and anticipates the delight of his return," she quickly added,

lest he think she was too demanding, "let not my wishes to see you prevent your stay in town."²⁸ About one month before they were married, she received letters addressed to him. Because one came by post, she thought it could be important and thus decided to open it. In conveying the information to St. George, she felt it necessary to apologize, although she assured him "it did not proceed from an impertinent Curiosity so prevalent in our sex."²⁹

St. George also indicated the change that occurred in their roles. After an outpouring of affection in a letter to her written after marriage, he wrote, "You would suppose that I had forgot this character of an husband, and had relaps'd entirely into that of the Lover."³⁰ It seems the lover was free to be the romantic fool, while the husband carried, among other responsibilities, the duty of restraint and reason.

Control of their relationship was not authoritarian. Rather it was a recognition of a prescribed social role. Together they comprised a partnership, in which one of them was the leader. The origin of this role did not appear to be a yearning for power, but instead an obligation of duty and concern that sprang naturally from a relationship of love and reason. During their courtship St. George explained it as his "Regard for whatever can afford her

satisfaction" that prompted him to comply with her dictates.³¹ He held no "Idea of Felicity" unconnected to Fanny's, "which he regards as his own."³² Furthermore, each felt a sense of duty to provide for each other's happiness in marriage. Once Fanny had indicated her affection for St. George, he responded with profuse gratitude, assuring her that, "every grateful Tribute of Love and Attention is due from him whom your goodness has unalterably attached to you."³³ Frances expressed a similar sense of duty when writing to her husband during the war. She asked if he had received her recent letters, writing that "tho they are fill'd with Womanish fears, I shou'd wish you to get them, that you might not think me unmindful of what is not only my duty but my greatest happiness."³⁴

The duty the couple felt toward each other seemed to originate from a concern for each other's happiness and welfare. One aspect of that concern, expressed by St. George during their courtship, involved his relationship to Frances's sons from her marriage to John Randolph. He approached the subject in the letter he wrote to suggest marriage to her. While he considered her happiness of paramount importance, he realized he could not "be indifferent to any Circumstance which has a Tendency to contribute towards it." He knew that for her to be fully happy in their union, the children must be also. He urged

her to "render the Idea of a new Parent familiar to them." He expressed his desire to treat them with the "same parental Tenderness, which they would have experienced from the best of Fathers had heaven thought proper to permit his longer care of them."³⁵ St. George's perception shows sensitivity--he did not attempt to ignore the previous existence of John Randolph or to erase their attachment to him, but hoped to love them as best he could. He displayed the same awareness of Fanny's situation and wrote of it in a frank manner during their courtship. In one of the early letters to her, written in January 1778, he acknowledged the "arduous Task" he had undertaken, "in attempting to make an Impression on a Mind, which, from the Remembrance of what has once pleased, can more readily discover the Defects of those who wish to please again."³⁶ A few months later, when the situation seemed conducive to marriage, he reassured her that he hoped to help her forget the misery and loneliness of losing "the Man whom you loved, beyond Comparison," but not to forget or ignore his existence.³⁷

Their concern for each other manifested itself in ways and situations that arose only because of their separation. During courtship, St. George expressed his longing for her, and after betrothal, both of them wrote of anxiously awaiting the next visit. St. George referred

to separation during their engagement period as "one of the most unfortunate Incidents of my life."³⁸ In May 1779 they parted again. In her first letter to St. George after their marriage, Frances teasingly assured him of her faithfulness. She vowed her lips "have not been touched since you blessed them. Do you be as good, or I will retaliate two fold. The next opportunity that offers--take care--I may not allways confine it to coquetry."³⁹

Frances expressed melancholy and bitterness as a result of his absence. When she expected his discharge from the militia and received no word of it, she wrote "I have been robb'd of ten days happiness," and expressed her envy of those soldiers already released.⁴⁰ As that particular period of absence grew even longer, she wrote to St. George that, "the gay Widdow is changed into an old Pumpkin faced, dropsical, Mope."⁴¹ By 1781 she concentrated on alleviating the depression, assuring St. George that to fulfill her promise of keeping up her spirits, she "set about repairing this smokey Cabbin, It amuses me till the evening."⁴²

St. George expressed his concern for his wife's well-being during her "temporary Widowhood" in his frequent letters. He asked many questions--about her health, her spirits, the children, who had visited her, and what plans she had made. He explained the deluge of questions, writing that "all these circumstances" he wanted to know about,

"as from some of them I can form a conjecture in what State of Health and Spirits my Fanny is in During my Absence."⁴³

The Tuckers depended on writing and receiving letters to survive separation and to overcome loneliness. Several times during the summer of 1781, each wrote of the joy they found in writing. Fanny felt she could not have tolerated "this tedious separation" without writing to him.⁴⁴ St. George loved writing because he enjoyed "even an imaginary Conversation" with Fanny.⁴⁵ Likewise, in receiving letters he "transferred the scene in [his] Imagination" and indulged his thoughts of speaking with Fanny.⁴⁶ They exchanged letters frequently; St. George wrote nearly every day, sometimes twice a day. It seems that such devotion was not the norm. St. George wrote to Fanny that "Holcombe is swearing that you will conceive that I have run mad from the number of Letters you receive." He added he hoped she would consider it the "result of the most perfect Sanity."⁴⁷ When he chided her for not writing often enough, she reminded him of the difficulty in finding a carrier for the letters and explained, "very few feel the attachment we do, and therefore, few think it necessary to inform me of an opportunity."⁴⁸

Letters eased the minds of their recipients. Since word of mouth and personal letters provided the only means

of communication, relatives who had heard nothing from absent loved ones in months often feared the worst. St. George neglected to write to his parents for eighteen months at one point and consequently received many anxious letters from his mother, who wondered if he were dead or alive. Likewise, when Frances and St. George were apart, their letters often contained questions or statements about health. St. George expressed a great concern over his wife's health; apparently she was often ill. He wrote in March 1781, before returning home, that his "only anxiety" was her poor health. He wished to hear of her welfare before his return, for the fear of finding her "in an unhappy situation" depressed him.⁴⁹ In her letters, she often discussed her health, and promised him that his "injunctions, relative to health shall be implicitly obeyed--perhaps more so than if you were present."⁵⁰ He urged her to take care of her health as it is "of more Importance" to him than anything else. He told her to "be very particular in the Account" she writes of her situation.⁵¹ He also realized the anxiety she experienced and the importance of telling her where he was and what he would be doing during his absence.⁵²

In a time of war, letters carried even greater reassurance, for the risks and the fear were greater. During their first wartime separation, Frances expressed

the anxiety she felt: "The uncertain and alarming accounts we receive keeps me in continued pain--in vain do I endeavour to persuade myself that your danger is not great--Indeed I have not till this day enjoyed one moments quiet--my mind was so agitated I determined to come over and make myself if possible acquainted with the state of our troupes."⁵³ In this case, hearing news--if only what the troops were doing--calmed her. But in one instance she received news of a battle which she supposed him to be near. She wrote that nothing he could tell her would distress her more "than the cruel suspence" she suffered since hearing of the battle. In the middle of writing the letter, she received word he had been wounded. She continued writing, bemoaning his discomfort and her inability to be with him.⁵⁴

War affected their relationship in other ways. Frances's experience of running the plantation, moving the entire household several times to escape the British, and facing the destruction and ruin caused by the war seemed to have cemented a partnership between the two. During the summer of 1781 St. George wrote on several occasions to tell Frances to move to Bizarre, near Farmville. He gave what instructions he could, especially the first time. But in July she seemed to have been, although distraught, more aware of the situation than he. She wrote of her

plans: "I am not without an intention of crossing Potomack but shall endeavour to stay somewhere on the other side of James River till I hear something more of their rout, or hear something from you which is what I most ardently desire."⁵⁵

Frances also demonstrated her involvement in plantation finances. In a letter to her brother Theodorick, she explained the apparent embezzlement of her sons' inheritance. She stated that she always felt it "was wrong to entrust any one" without an annual review of the books. She vowed there would be no more embezzlements.⁵⁶

Joint decision-making further exemplified the partnership of their marriage. St. George seemed to have kept Frances informed of business and sought her opinion on decisions concerning the family throughout their early marriage. In 1780 he discussed purchasing land in Williamsburg, asking her if she could "resign Matoax and the Gayeties of its unparallell'd neighborhood for the prospect of enjoying health, and less pleasure in this little Village." He added that he wished she liked Williamsburg as well as he did.⁵⁷ Four months after Fanny died, St. George purchased a house in Williamsburg. Perhaps her opinion vetoed the earlier plan.⁵⁸

St. George and Frances exhibited a strong attachment to each other especially in letters written during the

last months of the war. During the period of their courtship, St. George expressed his hopes for their relationship, as he sought to become "the partner of every future Bliss--or the soother and sharer of every succeeding Misfortune."⁵⁹ Sharing the experience of the war and of separation seems to have strengthened their love. St. George wrote to Fanny of his devotion, acknowledging the "sympathy in hearts which are sincerely and reciprocally attached, that impels them as it were insensibly to do whatever they conceive gives pleasure to the Object beloved."⁶⁰ Frances wrote of her sorrow at his absence and of the self-confidence she felt when with him, writing, "for with you I cou'd encounter every hardship, but I must support myself without that comfort."⁶¹ In this statement, Frances acknowledged both her dependence on him and her self-reliance in his absence, a necessary development of the war. As the war drew to a close, St. George wrote eagerly anticipating the "uninterrupted Enjoyment of that Felicity which I always experience with you."⁶²

In many ways, the Tuckers' relationship upheld traditional roles and expectations. The romantic, gentlemanly pursuit by St. George during courtship, along with Fanny's distance and restraint to guard propriety and her reputation, maintained the accepted code of courtship. The couple also fulfilled an expectation of

marital life, as Frances became submissive to her husband, a position both men and women expected the latter to occupy

But they also demonstrated differences--ways in which the concept of marriage was changing among the elite. Companionship and partnership described their union. They expressed an unabashed attachment to each other and sought to fulfill each other's wishes out of the concern and sense of duty that emerged from their love. Their decision to marry was not made with parental approval, a challenge to social and familial expectations. Each expressed feelings openly and honestly to the other after marriage. Ardent though it was, their love was founded on reasonable mutuality, which allowed the lovers to become the best of friends.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

¹ St. George Tucker to Frances Bland Randolph, December 19, 1777, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Earl Gregg Swem Library, Williamsburg, VA. All subsequent citations are from this collection.

² SGT to FBR, March 31, 1778.

³ SGT to FBR, April 25, 1778.

⁴ SGT to FBR, March 31, 1778.

⁵ SGT to FBR, April 16, 1778.

⁶ SGT to FBR, July 22, 1778.

⁷ SGT to FBR, April 16, 1778.

⁸ SGT to FBR, January 15, 1778.

⁹ SGT to FBR, [1778?].

¹⁰ Ellen K. Rothman, Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America (New York, 1984), 34.

¹¹ Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Boston, 1980), 52.

¹² SGT to FBR, [1778?].

¹³ SGT to FBR, March 2, 1778.

¹⁴ SGT to FBR, [1778?].

¹⁵ SGT to FBR, [1778?].

¹⁶ SGT to FBR, April 19, 1778.

¹⁷ SGT to FBR, [1778?].

¹⁸ SGT to FBR, April 19, 1778.

¹⁹ Frances Randolph Tucker to SGT, March 24, 1781.

- ²⁰FRT to SGT, May 23, 1779.
- ²¹Anne Blair to FBR, June 11, 1778.
- ²²Thomas Tudor Tucker to SGT, April 8, 1778.
- ²³Thomas Tudor Tucker to SGT, April 19, 1778.
- ²⁴Anne Tucker to SGT, May 8, 1778.
- ²⁵Thomas Tudor Tucker to SGT, July 21, 1778.
- ²⁶FBR to SGT, July 10, 1778.
- ²⁷FBR to SGT, July 10, 1778.
- ²⁸FBR to SGT, July 10, 1778.
- ²⁹FBR to SGT, August 27, 1778.
- ³⁰SGT to FRT, May 18, 1779.
- ³¹SGT to FBR, [1778?].
- ³²SGT to FBR, March 2, 1778.
- ³³SGT to FBR, April 5, 1778.
- ³⁴FRT to SGT, March 24, 1781.
- ³⁵SGT to FBR, April 12, 1778.
- ³⁶SGT to FBR, January 15, 1778.
- ³⁷SGT to FBR, April 12, 1778.
- ³⁸SGT to FBR, April 12, 1778.
- ³⁹FRT to SGT, May 3, 1779.
- ⁴⁰FRT to SGT, May 23, 1779.
- ⁴¹FRT to SGT, May 25, 1779.
- ⁴²FRT to SGT, March 2, 1781.
- ⁴³SGT to FRT, May 6, 1779.

- ⁴⁴FRT to SGT, October 14, 1781.
- ⁴⁵SGT to FRT, May 22, 1779.
- ⁴⁶SGT to FRT, July 5, 1781.
- ⁴⁷SGT to FRT, September 23, 1781.
- ⁴⁸FRT to SGT, July 7, 1781.
- ⁴⁹SGT to FRT, [between March 18-24, 1781].
- ⁵⁰FRT to SGT, May 3, 1779.
- ⁵¹SGT to FRT, May 22, 1779.
- ⁵²SGT to FRT, May 18, 1779.
- ⁵³FRT to SGT, May 17, [1779].
- ⁵⁴FRT to SGT, March 22, 1781.
- ⁵⁵FRT to SGT, July 14, 1781.
- ⁵⁶FRT to Theodorick Bland, June 4, 1781.
- ⁵⁷SGT to FRT, September 21, 1781.
- ⁵⁸SGT to Gov. Randolph, July 2, 1788.
- ⁵⁹SGT to FBR, April 25, 1778.
- ⁶⁰SGT to FRT, September 15, 1781.
- ⁶¹FRT to SGT, July 14, 1781.
- ⁶²SGT to FRT, September 14, 1781.

CHAPTER FOUR

Beginning in the spring of 1786, St. George Tucker traveled to Richmond for weeks at a time to conduct business at the courthouse. During his absences he and Frances exchanged letters frequently. The couple had been married nearly eight years. As the new nation struggled to define its philosophies and laws in a constitution, St. George Tucker eagerly sought to establish his law practice and Fanny managed a growing family and the business of the plantations they owned.

In the fifty letters the couple exchanged between 1786 and 1788, the primary topic remained their relationship with each other. Expressing love for each other, divulging personal feelings, and bemoaning their separation occurred in nearly every letter and was by far the most frequently mentioned topic.¹ Other important topics included the children, business and discussions of health and expressions of concern for the other person's well-being. The letters also served to transmit news--of friends, of politics, of travel arrangements.

Parents' absorbing interest in their children, specifically concern for their health and education, has been heralded by Phillipe Ariès (Centuries of Childhood)

as the roots and even the impetus of the development of the modern family, where affection for family members dominates.² Other historians see in the eighteenth-century Virginia family a stern patriarchal father, dutiful children and, at times, unbounded affection towards each other.

Jan Lewis (The Pursuit of Happiness) writes that "sentimental notions of childhood had been in vogue" since the early eighteenth century.³

The most striking characteristic regarding the Tucker children was St. George's involvement and concern for them.

Affection for the children dominated, but the patriarchal directives were also dispensed affectionately. In April 1786, St. George wrote to Fanny of his concern for Richard, who was in Williamsburg, presumably to study. Although Richard was not his natural son, St. George displayed a genuine fatherly affection and concern toward him. St. George expressed the difficulty of letting this boy--whom he thought of as his own son--go his own way in the world: "In such a place as Williamsburg, at his age, it is hard trusting a Boy to his own head." This step proved so difficult for St. George that he appears to have made arrangements to "serve as a Check to the imprudences of youth." These measures, however, proved "perfectly futile and ineffectual."⁴ A year and a half later, Richard was in Princeton, and his father remained concerned; this time

not for his moral character, but for his happiness, writing to Fanny that Richard "seems to be fixed in his dislike to Princeton." St. George also expressed his wish to find a place more suitable for Richard.⁵

St. George and Fanny had five children of their own,⁶ in addition to Fanny's three sons. Details of household life and specifically of the children dominated a series of letters exchanged between the couple in early 1787. On April 4, Frances mentioned that "the little ones are well; Fan has had two teeth drawn and was very much the coward."⁷ Three days later, St. George responded, writing to Fanny "he will not reproach her [Fan] with a little Cowardice--in your sex it is natural and some times even amiable." He also wrote that he would "perform his promise to her [Fan] very punctually." Here is evidence of a father's involvement with the occurrences in his children's lives. He continued with directives for the other children: "Tell Henry I hope he does not neglect his Book, and Tudor, that if he does not learn his, I shall not permit him to sit by me at Table."⁸ Parents' affection and discipline combined in a concern for the education of their children.

On April 6, St. George asked Frances to write to him with details of how "the Children, Maria, the Pease, Peaches, plumbs, etc. all do."⁹ She responded with an unusually lengthy letter for her, filled with details of

their daily life, so clear the reader can form a picture of the family that evening.

The Children are very well but intolerable Noisy and troublesome--it is a hard days work to attend to them and the drudgery of the house--their interruptions at this moment are so frequent I scarcely know what to write--Beverley wants to know who brought this letter and must sit by my elbow to see the light. Tudor has just com in as dirty as a pig from Toms house with his arms full of wood to make me a fire. Fan and Hal are rather more decent, say their Books tolerably well, and often Fan smiles at the thought of learning Musick--but I fear she will not be very fond of applying to it. If Beverley R. was to see them now I think he wou'd be convinced they used exercise, and were fully dirty enough.¹⁰

In this letter, Fanny expressed in some way the personality of each child. Clearly, she viewed them as individuals, a factor considered by family historians as significant in the development of the family.¹¹ The length of the narrative and the extent of detail--a relative preoccupation with their children in spite of her frustration--hint at the importance of these children to St. George and Frances.

That these details would be of interest to both of them signifies a focus on their family, specifically the children.

To achieve happiness in late eighteenth-century Virginia, individuals needed more than family, more than love. Economic independence--freedom from debt--was an essential ingredient to happiness and success.¹² To attain

this goal, one need not be wealthy, but financially secure.

The post-Revolution generation of Virginia gentlemen believed that mercantile professions "promised inevitable ruin," but farming, law, and medicine offered "modest success and independence, if not great fortune."¹³

In eighteenth-century Virginia, pleasing a husband required above all that a wife not interfere with her spouse's personal freedom in this public and economic life.¹⁴ This convention could have several manifestations: that a woman not question her husband's business dealings, or perhaps not even speak of them; that a wife accept uncomplainingly any absences necessitated by travel; and that a wife follow the decisions of her husband regarding their financial matters. Laws restricting a woman's involvement in business and defining her financial position supported the latter condition.¹⁵

Frances and St. George Tucker, however, frequently discussed his business in their letters. He wrote both of frustrations and of successes. In April 1787 he wrote that Richmond was "the dullest place in the universe."

He saw no one but lawyers and judges, the former being "like Mutes at a Funeral." And he confessed to his wife that "among this number I must be ranked, for I have not opened my Lips more than twice in three weeks," perhaps an indication of a small caseload.¹⁶ In the fall of 1787,

his attitude differed considerably--his words to Fanny conveyed his excitement and pride: "What do you think of my having James French and Robert Donald for clients? . . . I begin to expect I shall grow in favor with the Scots." In this letter he added a puzzling remark that perhaps indicated he would change his politics for the benefit of his business--a clear indication of priorities: "If the new Constitution takes place I believe I must turn cat in pan once more and be a Tory, for it will I fear be down with the Whigs."¹⁷ In this letter also, he clearly stated his goal to Fanny: "You see I have the prospect of becoming very rich."

During this period, St. George wrote many details of his business to Fanny, and she responded with encouragement. In one exchange, he wrote the night before he was to argue several admiralty cases. He expressed the difficulty of the task and, despite that, his undaunted confidence in his ability to succeed: "I am almost sanguine in my hopes of success, though I shall have to oppose my single voice to the whole Bar, or nearly all of them in the different suits."¹⁸

She returned his letter and reinforced that confidence: "I am afraid to flatter myself that you succeeded in the Admiralty causes, but if my fervent wishes will avail, you will ere this receive the applause of your hearers

and what perhaps is more important the Gold of your clients."¹⁹ Here Frances echoed St. George's statement of his profession providing the monetary reward they both sought. Success at a profession could secure a life of independence and happiness.

Frances seldom complained of St. George's absences in her letters to him, even though she was ill. While her letters reported her health regularly, in only one instance did she directly address his absence. She wrote that she was "as well, my dear S^t as you left me but very dull and lonely, if you stay much longer, I shall wish for the £90.000."²⁰ St. George responded, concerned that she would confine herself. He hoped that she would not, for it "always gave [him] pleasure to hear that [she was] amused in [his] absence."²¹ The length of his absences was unpredictable. Many letters and hastily scrawled notes conveyed news of delays and told of St. George's frustrations at his inability to leave Richmond. Fanny's silence on the subject can only be interpreted as compliance with the situation, her few complaints indicate an unhappiness that, for the most part, she hid from her husband.

In her letters, Frances Tucker demonstrated a confidence in making business decisions regarding the plantations, Bizarre and Matoax. Significantly, Frances

had managed these tasks before, as a widow and during the absence of her husband in the Revolution. During the Revolution, women handled aspects of household business previously allocated to men and as a result retained a new view of their own capabilities. In some cases, their husbands relied upon them to continue handling finances and managing property.²² The extent of Frances' involvement cannot be entirely known, but clearly she possessed knowledge and confidence in these areas. In a letter written to St. George regarding the decision of where to purchase corn, her deference to him was only a formality. She raised the issue, stating that "you [St. George] might have the corn provided you wou'd take it in small quantities from his Mill." But in fact, she had already made the decision and she presented her reasoning: "We should have to go ten miles every day, round and back again, and never know the quantity we get. It would be impossible for me always to see it Measured. . . . I rejected the offer of the small quantities & have not since heard from him."²³

From her explanation, she and not St. George would oversee this particular operation and she would not be cheated with a short load of corn. In a situation concerning slaves at Bizarre, Frances demonstrated the same confidence, practical business sense and polite deference. She began by apologizing to St. George for her absence on his return,

but she explained: "the necessity is so great I flatter myself you will think it a sufficient apology; the existence of everything at Bizarre probably depends on it."²⁴ And as before, she was the one truly managing the situation, whether or not he was present: she stated that since he could not accompany her even if she had waited for him, she decided to solve the situation while he was away. In her explanation of the problem, she demonstrated an awareness of the financial consequences as well as the humanitarian aspects: "The extreme and repeated cruelty of the Overseer . . . has driven off many of the most Valuable Negroes one of which has come down to me on a horse which is an addition to the injury done the plantation but the poor unhappy Wretch was unable to come to me without."²⁵ Not only the loss of the slaves concerned her but the loss of a horse as well.

As in their earlier correspondence, the communication between St. George and Fanny Tucker appeared relatively open and honest. Emotions became the subject of some letters; while they expressed their emotions, it is impossible to know how fully they expressed them. How much did each spouse hold back for the sake of domestic tranquillity? Women especially were taught to limit their expressions of emotions--of fear, anxiety, love--in favor of maintaining peace.²⁶ Frances expressed this idea in

a letter to St. George: "I have now my d^r St George to beg your pardon for the unnecessary disquiet you had when at home, it shall be my future care to conceal every circumstance that will give you the smallest uneasiness."²⁷

She felt she had done wrong by expressing the fear, anger or anxiety honestly to her husband and vowed to withhold further expressions in favor of tranquillity. St. George, however, reacted passionately, expressing his concern, his love, his hurt at her suggestion in his immediate response to her letter. He insisted that the "only disquietude" Fanny could have caused him during their visit was "on account of your solitude and lowness of Spirits." He reasoned with her, asking why she would conceal anything from him "who is devoted to your happiness, who has not, nor can have a wish independent of it." He proceeded to plead his case:

Have I ever been indifferent in any matter that concerns you, or those whom you regard? Why then, my Fanny, will you talk of concealing your thoughts, your fears, your wishes or desires on any Subject? . . . If you feel a pain permit me to share it with you--If your Breast should at any time be disturbed by inquietude, repose in mine the cause of your anxiety. If Joy dilates your heart, let me see it and I shall be sure to catch it from you. Should you refuse me this, I shall consider myself as a poor Solitary being who by some act which he is unconscious of has forfeited the greatest of Sublimary blessings.²⁸

To St. George, marriage included honest communication,

sharing confidences, and addressing feelings. He did not only tolerate it; he expected it and Fanny's new attitude surprised him.

This couple valued honesty: in a cryptic reference, St. George wrote to Fanny, apologizing for his mysterious behavior, assuring her that "instead of possibilities I hope to have certainities in my grasp soon." He promised to explain "to her hearts satisfaction," but reminded her "not a word of this or the other Letter to anyone."²⁹

While Frances referred only once to her frustration at their separation, St. George complained of it more frequently. He "begged and entreated" her to accompany him to New York, responding to her protests by saying "with the sum added to Mr. Banister's bill I trust we may with Oeconomy live in NYork during that period which was destined for a cruel separation."³⁰ Many times he expected to return home, only to be delayed. He began one letter: "You cannot conceive with what reluctance I set down to write, instead of setting out to see you--"³¹ Letters provided the only means of bridging the gap created by separations, and St. George urged Fanny to write often, to "write of everything you can think of."³² Indeed, most letters contain small bits of news, minor details of their lives, even the weather. St. George wrote often, telling Fanny that "nothing gives me more pleasure than writing to you, unless

it be the receiving of your Letters."³³ Upon receiving one letter from her, he responded immediately (although he had written her only four hours ago) to express his delight in her letter, saying that "I must give you credit for greater punctuality in your correspondence than on any former occasion."³⁴

While health was frequently mentioned in letters between friends and family, in the letters exchanged between the Tuckers in this later period, especially October and November of 1787, health became the primary subject. St. George left on September 30 for a two-month stay in Richmond. Only frequent letters could alleviate his anxiety about his wife's health. She suffered from stomach pains and weakness. In his first letter of this period, he urged her to write frequently "and to be particular in informing me of the State of your health, about which I have more anxiety than on any other subject whatever."³⁵ She wrote often, focusing on details of health. Her condition fluctuated; she seemed to be at times too weak even to write, while at others she traveled to Bizarre to handle the slave problem mentioned before and on December 2 to visit her sister for a few days.

Every letter St. George wrote during this period contained lengthy queries about her health, attempts to cheer her and suggestions to aid her physically, primarily

exercise and medicine. He wrote that he was more concerned about her health than about "the federal government or any other human concern." He urged her to be honest with him: "Don't let me detect you of concealing from me the true State of your situation both of mind and body."³⁶ He wished she would "ride out everyday, if not on horseback, at least in the Chair, the jolting of which I am inclined to believe is more wholesome Exercise than that of a Chariot."³⁷ He encouraged her to "consult doctor Hull on the propriety of taking some medicine to assist your weak stomach.--You will really be reduced to the utmost debility if you continue to get nothing."³⁸ Once she received a prescription, he encouraged her "not to lay it aside" but to persist. He also suggested that she should visit friends or have them stay with her.³⁹

From their letters, it appears each viewed the separation as a necessity. Twice during these months, Frances encouraged him to remain until his business was completed, in spite of her illness, promising to send for him if necessary. He bemoaned the separation but felt justified in the necessity of it: "I lament most sincerely that my Absence leaves you so much alone, but you know too well the necessity of my attention to my profession to require anything in the nature of an apology on the subject."⁴⁰

In November 1787, St. George became even busier than he expected and postponed his leave as he was involved in "almost every case depending in the Court of Appeals, that is, in all the Admiralty suits." He determined that the cases were "of to much importance not to be minutely attended to."⁴¹

In her last letter to St. George, dated December 2, 1787, Frances again urged St. George "not to return till the court rises," although she felt "much disordered."⁴²

St. George responded the next day, filled with anxiety at her report. Friends had reported to him that she was better; her letter prompted his eloquent reply, which he closed with the thought: "I cannot taste any happiness in which my ever dear Fanny is not a sharer; consequently, when from the precarious state of her health she is subjected to inquietude, my mind must share in her misfortune."⁴³ In his last letter to her before she died less than two months later, he wrote: "My heart can scarcely contain itself under the pressure of anxiety which I feel on your account my best beloved. Today I was obliged to attend the Court till the stage hours had passed. Tomorrow, nothing shall withhold me from her I love beyond all sublunary things--adieu my dearest Fanny, may we meet with more joy than I can ever expect while I fear to see you in pain."⁴⁴

Fanny died a short time later. Although St. George later remarried, a letter written many years later attests to the strength of the bonds between he and Fanny and the joy her memory brought. In response to a letter from Robert Wash in which Wash vowed never to marry a widow, St. George recounted his breaking of that vow over thirty years before:

I could but laugh at your vow never to marry a Widow. At the Age of eighteen, I made a similar vow, and till four and twenty, no Man would have convinced me that I shou'd ever be guilty of a breach of it. But going to Church on the day when there was a thanksgiving in Williamsburg for the capture of General Burgoyne's army, I happened, unwittingly, to take my seat next to a pew in which all the Ladies were kneeling most devoutly. I had not time to seat myself, when they rose from their humble situation, and one of them turning round to the pew where I was discovered a face I had seen some years before with an Infant in her arms; she was then a Married Lady : she was now a Widow! And from that moment, had I been a Roman Catholic I should have applied to the Pope for Absolution from my Vow. But as I had no such recourse, I took upon myself the Authority to pronounce my own solemn recantation, and absolution. And I expect you will follow my example, if ever the beautiful little Widow of whom I wrote to you, should surprise you in the same manner.

The letters of St. George and Frances Tucker provide a window into that most intimate relationship of marriage, and in this framework, their feelings about their relationship, their children, separation, business and death are revealed. Married ten years, they exhibited

a strong and deepening attachment to each other. Their roles were in some respects traditional: St. George pursued his career while Fanny deferred to his needs. Yet their partnership extended beyond this simple formula. St. George expressed his constant desire to attend to Fanny's needs, both by his actions and his words. He tended to her children as if they were truly his own. He wrote of his concern for her emotional and physical well-being, eager to provide any relief from her suffering that was possible. Fanny tended to the plantation business; she was clearly the decision maker in this area. Although a woman's involvement in business decisions was rare, some women continued to run farms and plantations after the Revolution. The Tuckers' devotion to their children indicates their focus on the family as a source of happiness and fulfillment. Fanny's illness brought the fear of death yet, in spite of great anxiety, both acknowledged the necessity of their separation. Above all, honest communication remained central to this couple; indeed, it formed the core of their partnership and of their enduring affection.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

¹The letters referred to are those exchanged between St. George Tucker and Frances Randolph Tucker. They are from the Tucker-Coleman Collection, Earl Gregg Swem Library, Williamsburg, VA. All subsequent citations of these letters are from this collection.

²Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, tr. Robert Baldick (New York, 1962), 364-365, 403.

³Jan Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia (Cambridge, 1983), 184. Philip Greven, The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America (New York, 1977), 178-179. Daniel Blake Smith, Inside the Great House: Planter Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society (Ithaca, NY, 1980), 141.

⁴St. George Tucker to Frances Randolph, April 23, 1786.

⁵SGT to FRT, October 3, 1787.

⁶St. George and Frances had several children of their own, three of whom lived to adulthood: Anne Frances Bland, referred to as Fan; Henry St. George; and Nathaniel Beverley. In addition Frances had three sons from her marriage to John Randolph.

⁷FRT to SGT, April 4, 1787.

⁸SGT to FRT, April 7, 1787.

⁹SGT to FRT, April 6, 1787.

¹⁰FRT to SGT, April 1787. Frances concluded the letter with a report on the plants and herself: "Your Peaches, plumbs and Apricots look indifferently, the Cherries Apple and pears well, and I am much as you left me--except more active from the great exercise I use; I am out half the day and find myself fatigued but much better for it."

¹¹Ariès, 364.

¹²Lewis, Pursuit of Happiness, 108.

¹³Lewis, Pursuit of Happiness, 115.

¹⁴Smith, Great House, 161-162.

¹⁵Linda K. Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980), 139, 141, 148-149. Joan R. Gunderson and Gwen Victor Gampel, "Married Women's Legal Status in Eighteenth-Century New York and Virginia," WMQ, 3d ser., XXXIX (1982), 114.

¹⁶SGT to FRT, April 19, 1787.

¹⁷SGT to FRT, October 27, 1787.

¹⁸SGT to FRT, October 29, 1787.

¹⁹FRT to SGT, November 1787.

²⁰FRT to SGT, May 3, 1786. No previous reference to the £90.000 sheds light on this reference.

²¹SGT to FRT, April 2, 1787.

²²Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Boston, 1980), 212-216.

²³FRT to SGT, April 18, 1787.

²⁴FRT to SGT, November 1787.

²⁵FRT to SGT, November 1787.

²⁶Lewis, Pursuit of Happiness, 37.

²⁷FRT to SGT, April 18, 1787.

²⁸SGT to FRT, April 24, 1787.

²⁹SGT to FRT, [May 1786].

³⁰SGT to FRT, July 1, 1786.

³¹SGT to FRT, [May 1786].

³²SGT to FRT, April 17, 1787.

³³SGT to FRT, April 23, 1787.

³⁴SGT to FRT, April 24, 1787.

³⁵SGT to FRT, September 30, 1787.

³⁶SGT to FRT, October 3, 1787.

³⁷SGT to FRT, September 30, 1787.

³⁸SGT to FRT, October 17, 1787.

³⁹SGT to FRT, October 29, 1787.

⁴⁰SGT to FRT, October 29, 1787.

⁴¹SGT to FRT, November 3, 1787.

⁴²FRT to SGT, December 2, 1787. On this letter appears the added inscription by St. George: "The last letter that my best beloved ever wrote."

⁴³SGT to FRT, December 3, 1787.

⁴⁴SGT to FRT, December 5, 1787. St. George added the inscription to this letter: "My last letter to my beloved Fanny."

⁴⁵SGT to Robert Wash, October 2, 1812.

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