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The Commercial Endeavors of a Virginia Merchant during the Confederation Period: The Rise and Fall of Richard Blow, 1781-1790

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THE COMMERCIAL ENDEAVORS OF A
VIRGINIA MERCHANT DURING THE CONFEDERATION PERIOD:
THE RISE AND FALL OF RICHARD BLOW, 1781-1790

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


Fredrika J. Teute

1976

APPROVAL SHEET

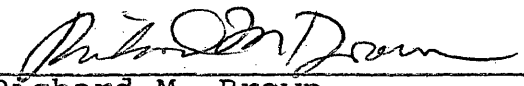
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present a portrait of a native Virginia merchant's commercial endeavors during the 1780s. Not a biography, this picture is meant to offer a view of the Virginia economy from the perspective of the middling Virginian commercial class rather than that of the elite planter class from whose papers descriptions of Virginia's economy most often have been painted. The Richard Blow Papers and the Blow Family Papers at the College of William and Mary provide information on Richard Blow's mercantile activities and on the interconnected indigenous commercial community of which he was a part. Certain patterns and problems of this class within the Virginia economy emerge. There did exist a vital group of Virginia merchants who hoped to establish themselves in a dominant position in the state's trade after the Revolution. The weakness of the post-war economy, the domination of planters' interests in state policy, and the predominant position of Great Britain in Virginia commerce undermined the attempts of merchants such as Blow to develop an independent, thriving, native-based trade during the 1780s. The detailed presentation contained herein supplies the substance and color to the above outline of the picture.



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INTRODUCTION

Many Virginians hoped that one of the results of the Revolution would be to free the state from the commercial domination of Great Britain. Throughout the eighteenth century merchants in England and Scottish factors in Virginia had controlled the tobacco trade, which was operated on the basis of long-term credit and debt. The development of an indigenous mercantile class had been inhibited by the presence of the Scots and by the agrarian base of the economy, but with the expulsion of the British traders from the state during the war, the way was opened for native merchants to develop a new system of direct trade with Europe.¹ The keystone in this commerce was to be France. This hoped-for rechanneling of trade had widespread support, for bitterness against the British commercial system was widespread throughout Virginian society. Thomas Jefferson's hyperbolic account of Virginians' economic dependence on Britain revealed how deep-seated the antagonism was:

Virginia certainly owed two millions sterling to Great Britain at the conclusion of the war. Some have conjectured the debt as high as three millions. I think that state owed near as much as all the rest put together. This is to be ascribed to peculiarities in the tobacco trade. The advantages made by the British merchants on the tobaccos consigned to them were so enormous that they spared no means of increasing those consignments. A powerful engine for this purpose was the giving good prices and credit to the planter, till they got him more immersed in debt than he could pay

without selling his lands or slaves. They then reduced the prices given for his tobacco so that let his shipments be ever so great, and his demand of necessaries ever so economical, they never permitted him to clear off his debt. These debts had become hereditary from father to son for many generations, so that the planters were a species of property annexed to certain mercantile houses in London.²

Jefferson himself, while he was minister to France in the 1780s, expended great effort to advance commercial relations between that country and Virginia. Nevertheless, his and other Virginians' expectations were never realized.³

At the same time James Madison in the Virginia General Assembly endeavored to promote commercial development within the state. In particular, in 1784 he proposed the port bill which he hoped would concentrate trade at one port and prevent a British monopoly of Virginia's commerce. Madison believed that British and Northern merchants were able to dominate the economy because the state lacked one large commercial center such as a Philadelphia or Baltimore. He intended the port bill to remedy this situation and thereby introduce into Virginia a more sophisticated mercantile system with centralized import-export facilities, commercial houses, and separate wholesalers and retailers. The act never served the purposes Madison intended, due partly to local opposition and the inclusion of additional ports in the bill, but also partly to those very restrictions which Madison favored but which tended to limit commercial expansion.⁴

The changes which both Madison and Jefferson advocated in the economic system of Virginia favored the planters, not the merchants. This bias on behalf of the planters was re-

flective of an agrarian, basically anticapitalist, attitude among Virginians, which was inimical to merchants and their interests. Madison's correspondence throughout the 1780s reflects a lack of awareness of the needs and situation of native merchants in Virginia. In August 1785 Madison wrote to Jefferson about the good consequences which he anticipated from the proliferation of retail stores "all over the Country."⁵ Just at this time, Richard Blow, William Barksdale, and other Virginia merchants like them, were complaining of this very competition which, combined with the overextension of their resources after the war, was forcing them into bankruptcy and driving them out of the state. The merchants' position was made worse during the Confederation period by the complex of laws passed by the legislature to regulate commerce.

At the end of the war the state's economy was devastated and on the verge of bankruptcy; personal indebtedness was close to £2 million. The state's efforts to pay off its war debt by obtaining money from internal taxation met with increased opposition as the post-war depression hit Virginia. Thus, as the decade progressed, the impetus grew to derive revenue from trade rather than personal taxation.⁶ At the end of 1786, Madison wrote George Washington that "the present rage seems to be to draw all our income from trade. From the sample given of the temper of the House of Delegates on this subject, it is much to be feared that the duties will be augmented with so daring a hand that we shall drive away our trade instead of making it tributary to our treasury."⁷ A

variety of tariffs, charges, and regulations were imposed on goods and shipping, many with the aim of 'more effectually securing the revenue and collecting the duties.'⁸

Consequently merchants in Virginia after the Revolution faced two overwhelming problems: widespread economic dislocation and indebtedness, and an agrarian tradition and policy not conducive to commercial development. The legislature was dominated by planters, and the legislation enacted reflected their interests. Antipathy towards merchants was made worse by the return of British merchants to the state and the resumption of the old channels of trade with England. Most Virginians seemed not to recognize the existence of an incipient native mercantile class and to believe that the British had entirely reestablished their commercial monopoly over Virginia. Madison claimed that

our trade was never more compleatly monopolised by G. B. when it was under the direction of the British Parliament than it is at this moment: But as our merchants are almost all connected with that Country & that only, and as we have neither ships nor seamen of our own, nor likely to have any in the present course of things, no mercantile complaints are heard.⁹

To the contrary, merchants' petitions and protests in the newspapers decrying the deplorable situation of commerce, urging discriminatory legislation against the British, and requesting legislation encouraging domestic trade indicate a vociferous, if not prospering, indigenous commercial class.¹⁰ The resurgence of the British in the trade agitated the Virginia merchants as much as it did the planters. The reemergence of the British traders obscured the native merchants' efforts

immediately after the Revolution to free themselves from a subordinate position in the state's economy and to establish a new pattern of commerce independent from British control and domination. Despite the resumption of the prewar channels of trade with Great Britain and the failure of the French to replace the British due to inadequate credit, shipping, and manufactured goods, Virginia merchants after the war did succeed to a limited degree in gaining a more important position in Virginia's economy and in developing a direct trade with Europe and the West Indies. Ultimately, however, the lack of stable financial foundations to build on and the failure of a flourishing commercial connection with Europe to develop meant that first British and then Northern capital would control Virginia's commerce.¹¹

Among the struggling merchants of Virginia was Richard Blow. The purpose of this thesis is to describe his mercantile endeavors during the period from the end of the Revolution to 1790. The intent was to discover the nature of the commerce and the channels of trade pursued by Blow, the opportunities and problems encountered by him, during the Confederation period. The research was carried to 1790 because this was the year in which Blow's longstanding partnership with William Barksdale was dissolved. The business cycle in which Blow was involved in the 1780s came to an end with the start of the next decade. The Blow Family Papers and the Richard Blow Papers at the College of William and Mary Library for this period are sporadic and incomplete. Almost all of the correspondence is

incoming; there are only two letterbooks up to 1790, one for 1770-1772 and one for 1789-1795. The story of Blow's commercial activities was pieced together mainly through information scattered about among the letters written to him.

Blow was well situated to take advantage of the commercial opportunities which the Revolution offered. His origins lay in the Southside of Virginia. This area south of the James River and the Appomattox Valley had become the principal tobacco producing region in the state, making Petersburg the most important shipping center for the trade. As tobacco production shifted southward, North Carolina also became an increasingly important exporter.¹² It was into these two areas that Blow extended his mercantile activities after the war. His beginnings as a merchant, however, can be traced back to before the Revolution.

Notes

¹Robert W. Coakley, "Virginia Commerce during the American Revolution" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1949), pp. 54, 59, 61, 122-28.

²"Additional Queries, with Jefferson's Answers [to D meunier]," [ca. Jan.-Feb. 1786], in Julian P. Boyd, et al., eds., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson (19 vols. to date; Princeton, 1950---), X, 27.

³See Merrill D. Peterson, "Thomas Jefferson and Commercial Policy, 1783-1793," WMQ, 3d ser., XXII (1965), 584-610 passim.

⁴William T. Hutchinson, et al., eds., The Papers of James Madison (9 vols. to date; Chicago, 1962---), VIII, 64-66, 102-3, 127, 307, 315; Richard M. Harrington, Jr., "The Virginia Merchant Community: A Case of Arrested Development, 1783-1789" (unpublished MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1972), pp. 13, 21-26. For the port act as passed by the 1784 legislature, see William W. Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619 (13 vols.; Richmond and Philadelphia, 1819-23), XI, 402-4.

⁵Hutchinson, op. cit., VIII, 344-45.

⁶Harrington, op. cit., pp. 21-41.

⁷Hutchinson, op. cit., IX, 225.

⁸See for example, "An act to raise a supply of money for the United States in congress assembled"; "An act to impose certain duties"; "An act concerning the duties on salt, wine, and malt liquors"; "An act to impose an additional duty of two per cent ad valorem, on goods, wares, and merchandise, imported into this commonwealth"; "An act to amend and reduce into one act, the several acts for regulating pilots, and ascertaining their fees"; "An act to amend the several acts of Assembly concerning Naval Officers, and the collection of the Duties"; "An act for placing the naval officers on the civil list"; "An act to amend the act, intituled An act to restrict foreign vessels to certain ports within this commonwealth"; "An act to amend the laws of revenue, to provide for the support of civil government, and the gradual redemption of all debts due by this commonwealth"; "An act to amend an act, intituled, An act to amend the act, intituled, an act to restrict foreign vessels to certain ports in this commonwealth"; "An act to amend the several acts of Assembly concerning naval officers and the collection of the Duties", in Hening, op. cit., XII, 288, 289, 290, 299-303, 304-19, 319-20, 320-23, 412-32, 434-38, 438-52.

⁹Coakley, op. cit., pp. 352-53, 359-60, 366-80; Madison to James Monroe, 21 July 1785, in Hutchinson, op. cit., VIII, 307.

¹⁰7 July 1784, Citizens of Portsmouth to John Kerr (Executive Papers, Box 35 [Vi]); Resolution of Norfolk Borough meeting of merchants, 15 Oct. 1785, Virginia Gazette, or American Advertiser (Richmond); Letter of Instruction from Nansemond County to Delegates, 12 Nov. 1785, *ibid.*; "Thoughts on the Commercial Interests of Virginia," 19 Nov. 1785, *ibid.*; 4 and 5 Nov. 1785, Petitions from Norfolk, Suffolk, Nansemond counties, and Portsmouth (Legislative Petitions, Oversize Petitions, Box I [Vi]).

¹¹Coakley, op. cit., pp. 367-79.

¹²Jacob M. Price, France and the Chesapeake: A History of the French Tobacco Monopoly, 1674-1791, and of Its Relationship to the British and American Tobacco Trades (2 vols.; Ann Arbor, 1973), II, 729.

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS OF RICHARD BLOW'S MERCANTILE INTERESTS, 1766-1781

Richard Blow was born in 1746, the son of Samuel (1701-1766) and Martha Drew Blow (d. ca. 1788) of Southampton County, Virginia. The will of Samuel Blow, dated 6 June 1766 and probated on 1 September 1766, left to his son Richard 847 acres in Southampton County known as "the Quarter," five Negroes, and "all the Profits that shall or doth arise from the Partnership with Charles Briggs," Richard Blow's brother-in-law. Upon the death of his father in 1766, Blow came into the property as stated in the will, which also stipulated that upon the death of his mother, he would inherit the home plantation together with all its stock, goods, etc., and one-fifth of the remainder of the estate. The Southampton County land tax books show that 685 acres were transferred from Martha to Richard Blow in 1788. In addition to the property which Blow inherited, in 1774 he obtained about 1190 acres in Sussex County from a Col. John Syms. This land constituted the main part of the plantation known as Tower Hill, to which Blow added another 203 acres in 1783.¹ Blow's acquisition of property in Sussex was significant since it placed him in a central location between Petersburg and North Carolina and Portsmouth--the areas in which he expanded his mercantile

activities in the late 1770s and 1780s.

There is little information to indicate the extent of Blow's concerns in the 1760s. There seems to have been a store at Tower Hill and a store in South Quay.² In the 1770s the main store of Briggs & Blow was in Southampton, with a second in Williamsburg, which Blow managed, as well as the store at Tower Hill.³ Briggs & Blow were mainly dealing in tobacco, buying and selling in Virginia, and making remittances in bills of exchange to Scottish merchants in Great Britain for dry goods imported. Their method of business in Virginia was to collect tobacco at Tower Hill and the other stores and then to sell it at court day in the various counties.⁴ In 1772-1773 Blow was regularly making the circuit at Sussex and Southampton courts.⁵ In the early 1770s they dealt with two merchants in Glasgow: Hugh Warden and William & Alexander Cuninghame. To both mercantile concerns they sent orders for goods and bills of exchange in payment. These merchants contracted with various traders of London, Leeds, and elsewhere, to fill Briggs & Blow's orders for dry goods, and they took a commission from Briggs & Blow for their services rendered.⁶

Thus the level on which they were trading was one step below that of the Scots factors in Virginia; they were not exporting tobacco directly to England in exchange for manufactured goods, but were merely doing a local trade in tobacco and goods. The advantages to this kind of trading were in the avoidance of all carrying and port charges involved in the export of tobacco, but the disadvantages were in the

difficulty of making remittances in specie. This was especially true in a period of depression such as the late 1760s and early 1770s when bills were scarce and the rate of exchange poor.

In 1770 Briggs & Blow did encounter difficulties in making remittances for their goods. Blow wrote Hugh Warden that the firm depended upon selling tobacco at court in order to make remittances, but that there was no demand for the staple and that he did not know of one bill being drawn for tobacco that court.⁷ In the same year Briggs & Blow were endeavoring to observe the non-importation on British goods. They asked William & Alexander Cuninghame not to send any goods which would violate the Association or any goods which would exceed the price limit set.⁸ Although the Cuninghame firm agreed to observe the Association in the articles which they shipped, they warned against a further depression in the tobacco market.

We have now a Prospect of this Nation being very soon Plunged into a War with Spain, and very provible [sic] other Powers of Europe. Should it take place, there will be a very considerable addition of Charges attending the Importation of your Staple to Britain, which, we are afraid from the large Crops lately made, and the Immence one now taking off the Ground, must fall entirely on the Planter and Seller in the Colony instead of the consumer here, you ought therefore to be very cautious this fall & next Spring, how you Purchase your Tobaccos, otherwise you may suffer, indeed we apprehend there will be but little demand, should you Ship any let it be as early as Possible, that it may be at Marcett 'ere the Glutt of the importation is made.⁹

Here were all the problems the tobacco planter and merchant in America confronted. In addition to the vagaries of weather and productivity, they were subject to that of European politics

and control of the market by British middlemen.

The cumulative effect of overproduction, overexpansion, and dependence on British capital and credit facilities was soon to be felt in Virginia. Signs of distress, as experienced by Briggs & Blow, appeared in the early 1770s and in 1772 a period of economic depression began. The economic disruption and inflation following the Seven Years War caused severe price fluctuations. The impetus to reap large profits, or to recoup large losses, furthered the process long under way since the first third of the eighteenth century: that is, of overexpansion by Virginia planters and overextension of credit by British merchants. Because of the large fixed charges whether tobacco prices rose or fell, a small change in consumer prices could occasion a large drop in the tobacco price received by the planters. The inelasticity in the volume of production and the uncertainty of the actual prices because of the indirect methods of sale caused gluts on the market to be carried over into the next year. The cycle of increasing indebtedness and of extending further credit resulted in the early 1770s in nonattendance of indebted planters and merchants at the court day meetings where business transactions took place. Debts due to British merchants rose and finally in 1772-1773 a credit squeeze in London cut off the advances on the tobacco crop in Virginia.¹⁰

Beginning in 1771 Briggs & Blow's situation worsened. They wrote Hugh Warden in May that they were unable to send remittance because there was no demand for tobacco. They had

not received payment for one hogshead sold for the current crop prior to the present Court and the greatest part of what had been sold was payable in June and October next. The difficult times and prospect of a war had determined them to stop trade for a time until the books were a little settled. Consequently they had not sent orders for any fall goods, but expected to be able to send an order for the fall of 1772.¹¹ Apparently they were following the advice of the Cuninghame firm; they indeed were being cautious. Business at Court day was falling off. "We made a full account to have remitted the whole to you from this Court, had not there been a general disappointment by many of our Principal Merchants not attending."¹² The contracting economy was forcing them out of business. They wrote again to Hugh Warden in July that they were unable to make full remittance because planters and merchants were not attending Court. They asked to be kept informed of the prices of tobacco "as that Article is our Principal Staple we do propose when we begin Trade again, to try Shipping some, if it wou'd answer you to do any thing that way you'll be pleas'd advise us on what terms you wou'd take the charge of the Sales & know your opinion in general on it."¹³ At the same time that they were searching for a new mode of trade, they were informed by William & Alexander Cuninghame that "as we find during the Course of our business in the Commission way we are drawn into very considerable advances, for which we have no Adequate advantages we are oblig'd to decline doing any more business in that way altogether." Consequently Briggs & Blow should look

elsewhere to fill their orders for next spring's scheme of goods.¹⁴ Briggs & Blow's business was undercut at both ends. They were unable to sell their tobacco to merchants in Virginia because of rising indebtedness, and scarcity of bills and specie. The contraction of credit in Great Britain deprived them of their source of supply of goods. A readjustment of their business was in order; in the fall of 1771 they began doing business as a subsidiary of John Hay & Company, Grays Creek in Surry County.

Briggs & Blow continued dealing indirectly with Hugh Warden through John Hay & Co. Hay, who himself was a factor of Baird, Hay & Co. of Glasgow, must have been underwriting Briggs & Blow's credit in Britain.¹⁵ Instead of changing their form of business into a more direct exchange of tobacco and goods with merchants in Britain, they had become more nearly local colonial storekeepers.

The invoices indicate that a number of middlemen were involved in supplying Briggs & Blow.¹⁶ Warden, as an export merchant, contracted with hatters, milliners, clothiers, haberdashers, and ironmongers in Great Britain to obtain goods "Consignd to Mr. James Baird to be delivered to Mr. John Hay & Co. Merchts at Gray's Creek," ultimately destined for Briggs & Blow.¹⁷ The price of goods which passed through so many hands inevitably went up with the addition of each trader's charges. With Briggs & Blow's being at the recipient's end of the expensive exchange, their profits were bound to be meager, especially since they were forced to do most of their

business in the colony on credit. They wrote to Cuninghame at the beginning of 1772 that they could not make any more remittances "as our dependance is chiefly on the Sales of Tobo. here, which Article we are obliged to Sell, intirely upon Credit this Court."¹⁸

The Court meetings constituted an important facet of their business dealings; they disposed of the tobacco, which they had collected at their stores in exchange for goods, at these meetings. Blow followed the circuit at Sussex and Southampton Courts and supervised the stores at Williamsburg and Tower Hill while Charles Briggs resided at Southampton and John Hay controlled their dealings with merchants in Great Britain.¹⁹ Hay, pursuing the course of many a Scottish factor in Virginia, seemed to be developing independent mercantile relationships apart from his own firm. This arrangement continued up to the Revolution when Hay's name disappears from Blow's accounts.

For Virginia merchants like Blow the Revolution offered considerable opportunities for large profits and free lance trading. Freed by the war from the mercantile system which had developed between England and Virginia, colonial merchants embarked upon independent ventures of privateering, smuggling, and running tobacco and supplies past the British blockade. It was during the Revolution that Blow expanded his commercial operations beyond that of a local storekeeper and trader in tobacco. In collaboration with several others in Virginia, Blow joined in a venture of purchasing vessels at Charleston to

carry goods, probably between Virginia and the West Indies. Because of the high risks involved, cooperative undertakings were more appealing, although in one instance Robert Crew wrote Blow that he did not want more than six concerned.²⁰ Beyond a certain number, profits would be too diluted to make it worthwhile. Through such partnerships Blow was probably carrying on a profitable traffic in tobacco and salt via Charleston until that town was captured in 1780.²¹ Blow reputedly supplied the country a number of times with ships and probably did some privateering under the aegis of the revolutionary government as well as on his own account.²² It is clear however that by 1781 Blow was deeply involved in the West Indies trade.

NOTES

¹Ancestral Records and Portraits; A Compilation from the Archives of Chapter 1., of the Colonial Dames of America (2 vols.; New York, 1910), II, 785-90; Southampton Co. Will Book 2, 1762-1772, pp. 166-67 (Vi[microfilm reel 16]); Southampton Co. Land Books, 1782-1784, 1792, 1794-1799, Alterations, 1782-1793, Box: Land Book Alterations, 1788, p. 3 (Vi); The Times Dispatch (Richmond, Va.), 11 Oct. 1914, sect. 4, p. 7; Sussex Co. Land Books, 1782-1794, Box: Land Book Alterations 1783-1786, p. 1 (Vi).

The home plantation in Southampton County probably was called Tower Hill. Blow's purchase in Sussex appears to have adjoined the family property in Southampton and came to be called Tower Hill while the original tract seems to have been referred to as the "Old Place."

²1767, on account of Martha Blow, Tower Hill Store; 1769, on account of Briggs & Blow, South Quay (Blow Family Papers [ViW] [hereafter cited as BFP], Scrapbook, 27, 28).

³The correspondence of Briggs & Blow is addressed mainly "Southampton" (see BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, Williamsburg, 1770-1772; Richard Blow Papers [ViW] [hereafter cited as RBP], I). Blow carried on business correspondence from Williamsburg and Tower Hill (see, for instance, 12 Nov. 1770, RB for Briggs & Blow, Williamsburg, to Hugh Warden, Glasgow [BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772]; 8 Aug. 1775, RB, Tower Hill, to George Nicolson, Southampton [RBP, I: fol. 2]). The Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, Williamsburg, 1770-1772 is the only one known for the 1770s.

⁴See 1767, 1771, 1772, accounts of tobacco sales and purchases at Tower Hill in BFP, Scrapbook, 27, 29, 33.

⁵1772-1773, RB's Account and Cash Memo books for Sussex Court and Southampton Court (RBP, I: fol. 1).

Blow was primarily in partnership with Briggs at this time, but he made an occasional shipment on his own account or in a joint venture with a ship's captain, or Scots factor in America (1773, accounts with RB [RBP, I: fol. 1]; 1772, account of tobacco purchased and shipped by Blow & Scramnel [BFP, Scrapbook, 37]).

⁶23 June 1770 and July 1770, Briggs & Blow, Southampton, to Messrs. William & Alexander Cuninghame, Glasgow; 23 June 1770, Briggs & Blow, Southampton, to Hugh Warden, Glasgow (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

⁷12 Nov. 1770, RB for Briggs & Blow, Williamsburg, to Hugh Warden (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

⁸ 4 July 1770, Briggs & Blow, Southampton Court, to William & Alexander Cuninghame, Glasgow (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

⁹ 5 Oct. 1770, William & Alexander Cuninghame, Glasgow, to Briggs & Blow (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

¹⁰ Lewis Cecil Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (2 vols.; Washington, 1933), I, 273-75; Samuel H. Rosenblatt, "The Significance of Credit in the Tobacco Consignment Trade: A Study of John Norton & Sons, 1768-1775," WMQ, 3d Ser., XIX (1962), 396-97; James H. Soltow "The Role of Williamsburg in the Virginia Economy, 1750-1775," WMQ, 3d Ser., XV (1958), 481-82.

¹¹ 15 May 1771, Briggs & Blow, Southampton Co., to Hugh Warden, Glasgow (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

¹² 1 July 1771, Briggs & Blow, Williamsburgh, to John Eam & Sons, Leeds (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

¹³ 1 July 1771, Briggs & Blow, Williamsburg, to Hugh Warden, Glasgow (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

¹⁴ 9 July 1771, William & Alexander Cuninghame, Glasgow, to Briggs & Blow (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

¹⁵ In a letter of 1 Jan. 1772, Briggs & Blow, Grays Creek, told Hugh Warden, Glasgow, that Messrs. John Hay & Co. had Warden apply £50 to Briggs & Blow's credit from Hay last October. "We are now engaged with Messrs. John Hay & Coy. to supply us with Goods for some time, they have sent to you for our Spring supply" (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

¹⁶ 1773, Invoices, Baird, Hay & Co., Glasgow, and 1773, Invoices, Hugh Warden, Glasgow, in account with various merchants for goods for Briggs & Blow (RBP, I: fol. 1).

¹⁷ 1773, Account, Hugh Warden, Glasgow (RBP, I: fol. 1).

¹⁸ 4 Jan. 1772, Briggs & Blow to William & Alexander Cuninghame (BFP, Letterbook of Briggs & Blow, 1770-1772).

¹⁹ 1772-1773 Account Book and Cash Memo, Sussex Court and Southampton Court (RBP, I: fol. 1); 1771-1773, 1775, Invoices, accounts (RBP, I: fol. 1, 2).

²⁰ 22 Nov. 1777, Robert Crew to [RB] (RBP, I: fol. 2).

²¹ In a letter of 15 Nov. 1778, William Hines, South Quay, to [RB], Charlestown, reference is made to Blow's business in tobacco and salt. If Blow dissolved his present partnership,

Hines would want to go in with him again. There are few papers in the late 1770s to indicate the exact nature or extent of Blow's dealings (RBP, I: fol. 1).

²²BFP, Scrapbook, 24; Ancestral Records and Portraits, II, 786.

Blow was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the 4th Virginia Regiment, Continental Line, in 1776, but it is unknown when he left the army (Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army during the War of the Revolution, April, 1775, to December, 1783 [rev. ed.; Washington, D.C., 1914], p. 108.

CHAPTER II

THE INVOLVEMENT OF RICHARD BLOW IN THE WEST INDIES TRADE AT THE END OF THE REVOLUTION, 1781-1782

In the early part of 1781 John Fisher made arrangements with Baker & Blow¹ to serve as their agent in the West Indies. He probably left Virginia from South Quay (on the Blackwater River in Southampton County) in February, going down through North Carolina and out of Ocracoke Sound, bound for St. Eustatius.² This route was one of the two most frequented channels in and out of Virginia during the war. The other was the inlets on the Eastern Shore. British privateers in the Chesapeake Bay and the British blockade off the mouth of the Bay between Cape Henry and Cape Charles made the usual route of transportation up through the Bay and into the main tidewater rivers of Virginia dangerous and nearly inaccessible. Necessity forced the development of alternate channels. Virginia galleys protected the trade in Ocracoke from 1776 to 1779. Until 1778 a large proportion of Virginia trade came up through the North Carolina sounds, but as British captures increased, the trade was forced to go through the Capes or Eastern shore inlets. After the British blockade was established in 1781 the North Carolina route once again was frequented.

Boats coming in Currituck Sound had no well established

port, but put in at improvised landings, the most important of which was Pitch Landing. Goods shipped via Ocracoke went to Edenton, from there up the Chowan and Blackwater rivers to South Quay just north of the Virginia line, which became a thriving boom town during the war. From there goods went to Suffolk, down the Nansemond River and around into the James or else overland to that river.³ Already a Southside merchant with a store at South Quay, Blow was particularly well situated to take advantage of this wartime commerce through the sounds. Profits were great but so were the risks. The waters of Albemarle Sound were treacherous and ships often ran aground. The dangerous waters, however, made it harder for the British to blockade.⁴

This route was vital not only to Virginia, but to the whole country. Merchants in Philadelphia and other northern ports used Virginia trade channels to import their own goods. The Virginia tobacco trade was the main means apart from governmental loans, of securing credit to purchase arms, munitions, salt, and other necessities for the American army.⁵ Several mercantile groups sent correspondents to the foreign West Indies to establish smuggling chains between Europe and the West Indies, and between the islands and Virginia.⁶ Virginians had looked to European ships to come to transport the tobacco back to Europe, but foreign ships were more vulnerable to British capture. The risk, high expenses, and depreciating American currency discouraged European merchants from embarking on many such ventures. As a result the West

Indies trade was the most popular route,⁷ one with which Virginian merchants were already familiar from the colonial provision trade, and for which their small ships were most suited. European goods were shipped in neutral bottoms to the islands: Martinique, Guadaloupe, French Hispaniola (France); Curacao, St. Eustatius (Netherlands); Cuba (Spain); St. Thomas, St. Croix (Denmark). American blockade runners took out provisions and picked up goods, with the collusion of island officials. Up to Rodney's attack in 1781 St. Eustatius was the most important center for the American trade and the channel for British goods, which constituted half the American imports from the West Indies. With the entrance of the Netherlands in the war the trade shifted to St. Thomas and St. Croix. The British Bahamas and Bermuda carried on illicit trade with the Americans. The islands needed the provisions while the Southern states badly needed the salt from Bermuda.⁸

It was this trade then in which Baker & Blow were involved and had by 1781 decided to secure a more regular mode of business for themselves in the islands by establishing an agent there. They had not chosen the most auspicious time. As Fisher was setting out from Ocracoke with two of Baker & Blow's ships, they received intelligence "of St. Eustatius being attacked by the English," and in consequence "it was concluded upon between Capt. Ogbourn, Capt. Hookey & myself [Fisher], to make for St. Thomas's." The voyage was not without adventure. "Within half an hours sail" of St. Thomas, they

were cut off by a Privateer Cutter of 14 guns who was lying at anchor under the lee of the Island, &

being windward obliged us to stand over here [St. Croix] where we arrived safe yesterday afternoon-- we parted company with Capt. Hookey the night after we came over the bar....[Capt. Ogbourn] has ever since our separation discovered the greatest anxiety about him as the Seas swarm with English Privateers & we were chased a whole day by a very large ship which we judged to be a man of war.

The capture of St. Eustatius had wrought havoc in the West Indies trade.

Many American Vessels have gone in there since Adml Rodney took Possession; some few from North Carolina went in but a few nights ago but I cannot hear who they were--I am sorry to inform you that I understand you are Sufferers in this general calamity that has befallen America, for it is certain that both Captains Butler & Littledale have gone in there & are made Prizes of--In short America has suffered more in her Shipping & trade by this blow than she has done for any one year of the Contest, she has not only new channels to find out for procuring supplies, but her shipping & effects in St Eustatius are totally lost to her & to a very great amount--A. Rodney has issued an edict ordering every person to give in an exact list of their effects real & personal under very heavy penalties, & the goods found there are now selling off at Vendue. The proceeds are to be lodged in the British Treasury till further orders in what manner it is to be disposed of.⁹

Clearly Baker & Blow were involved in the West Indies trade prior to sending Fisher out. Butler's and Littledale's ships were not the only losses suffered by them. Fisher wrote that a Mr. Ball had informed him that the "part of the Brig's Cargo" unsuitable for the English market he had shipped to Holland "& had orderd insurance on it but he is doubtful if the whole is ensured--what is unensured is gone for the Dutch fleet with the Convoy is also taken." Furthermore Fisher was having a hard time disposing of their bills of exchange on various merchants "as Curacao is also in a very ticklish situation...[and] what bills I have on St Eustatius will not

sell at any price." But at least Capt. Hookey reappeared, having had trouble in the "squally weather."¹⁰

Fisher's business, as agent, was to dispose of the ships' cargoes and to purchase return cargoes to best advantage, to collect on any bills of exchange, to settle any outstanding accounts which they might have in the islands, and to advise them from his vantage point the best course to pursue in future ventures as to cargo and destination. Baker & Blow apparently had shipped mostly South Quay tobacco which was little in demand and which brought lower prices than Richmond tobacco. Staves, on the other hand, were very much in demand. The return freight was to be in salt, but its price was very high, Fisher said, because of the capture of St. Martin. Following common practice, Fisher intended to send Capt. Ogbourn to the Leeward Islands to dispose of any remaining cargo and to pick up a return cargo although "it will be with some difficulty that we can procure a freight that may be worth running any risque for." He also advised that because of "the fate of St. Eustatius, you would alter Capt. Armisteads destination, I shall not therefore expect to see him here; in my own opinion an European Voyage is less hazardous & considering the price of goods may be more profitable than one to the Islands--dry goods are very high here."¹¹ For Fisher's services Baker & Blow had agreed to pay him a commission of 5% on sales and return cargoes.¹² Although Fisher recommended shipping directly to Europe, Baker & Blow did not follow the advice, but continued to ship to Fisher in the islands until the middle of 1782.

Baker & Blow mainly exported tobacco to the islands, with an occasional load of lumber and staves. They tried a shipment of flour in the fall of 1781, but it arrived at the same time as the fall fleet from Britain, which glutted the flour market. The inferior quality of their flour further insured the failure of this venture. Such carelessness in buying and shipping indicated, aside from lack of means, inexperience and ineptness on the part of Baker & Blow. Fisher continuously complained of the poor quality and packing of the tobacco from the Southside: South Quay, Pitch Landing, and Petersburg, and urged that they procure upland tobacco of better quality.¹³ Nevertheless Fisher managed to dispose of it, usually selling it to John Ball, who exported it to various markets in Europe.¹⁴

The vagaries of prices and markets reflected the course of the war. After Great Britain went to war with the Netherlands (20 December 1780), as Fisher explained to Baker & Blow, the Dutch market was gone; tobacco sold low on the Danish market; and if it was sent to England and did not suit, the weed had to be reexported, causing freight and insurance charges to double and yielding little proceeds to the shippers.¹⁵ In June Fisher wrote that the price was low in England due to the great quantity there, the expectation of a shipment from St. Eustatius, and of the crop seized by Arnold in Virginia, and the expected surrender of Virginia. At the same time there was a good price in the islands because of the news of destruction of tobacco in Virginia and the lack of produce in the

English Isles with which to load the ships. He expressed surprise that the sugars which he apparently had shipped Baker & Blow had brought only an "indifferent price." He had thought that they would have yielded the highest profit of any produce available in the isles, and that the confusion in Virginia must have caused the low price.¹⁶ Return cargoes usually consisted of rum, salt, and dry goods.¹⁷ Sometimes Fisher held back particularly valuable goods until there was less risk of capture; in April 1781 he was waiting to hear if it was true that the French were on their way, thus clearing the mouth of the Chesapeake. Another agent in St. Thomas also indicated the dependence of market conditions on the course of the war. Reporting low tobacco prices in the fall of 1781, he predicted that prices would remain steady or rise, depending upon the two armies in Virginia and that in case of a general peace, the prices would definitely fall.¹⁸

But whatever the going price of tobacco, Fisher found it necessary to sell the cargo in order to obtain the money or credit to purchase a return cargo.¹⁹ This was symptomatic of the experience of most Virginia merchants during the Revolution. Deprived of the familiar connections and unlimited credit of the British commercial structure, they had to develop a new mercantile network to replace the old. In the meantime, cash transactions replaced long credit; speculative trading replaced the old, established channels. The central problem lay in establishing sufficient credit with foreign merchants to enable Virginia merchants to import cargoes to be

paid later in American produce.²⁰ The problem of credit would plague Richard Blow all through the 1780s.

Upon Fisher's arrival in the Indies he found that "they are all so closely connected here" that if he antagonized one of them, Fisher feared that "it might perhaps be in his power to do us an essential injury" with other island merchants.²¹ As he became acquainted with the mercantile community in the islands, he developed contacts which he recommended to Baker & Blow. He sent their ships plying cargoes to other islands, in particular Port au Prince, since he had found that the French market was good and could recommend one Mr. Sterral there if they needed an agent. By June Fisher had formed a partnership with Lockhead, one operating out of St. Croix and the other out of St. Thomas.²²

Acting as their financial agent Fisher had more of a problem. He was unable to forward their bills of Thomas Webb & Co. because there was little intercourse between Curacao and St. Croix. The seas were swarming with English privateers; chances of capture were great. So Fisher entrusted the bills to the care of Telleman Cruger, Esq., with whom they would be safe in case the island were to be taken: Americans were in little favor.²³ Fisher was also charged with bringing a Mr. John Ross "to proper terms,"²⁴ in which business Fisher had a great deal of difficulty in getting a settlement. Baker & Blow held a share in a boat, of which Ross had disposed on unauthorized and disadvantageous terms and had not reimbursed them. They demanded interest, which Ross would not allow since

he was only one of four executors, and was not about to pay it out of his own pocket. Another of the partners, Morgan, had disposed the part of the cargo of bacon, indigo, and tobacco which he had had, for his own benefit and had not been seen on the island since. Fisher advised Baker & Blow not to go to court, but to try to take possession of any effects which Ross may have had in America. He thought that the business on the whole would be a loss for them except for the money which Ross had been holding all along subject to their order.²⁵ The venture was probably an instance of the joint enterprises undertaken during the Revolution. Highly speculative and hazardous, such partnerships protected the men involved from losing all their capital on a single voyage. But another danger lay in the trustworthiness of the partners involved; on this count Baker & Blow suffered a loss. At certain expense and risk, Baker & Blow were more fortunate in collecting on their bills of exchange.

In our last we advised you that Mr. Webb had accepted Messrs. Wells Cowper & Co.'s draft[s]. We have ordered up the Money from thence [Curacao] in a Danish bottom having been disappointed in getting money for it here. It is at your risque & we shall be obliged to allow 5 P Cent Commission for negotiating the bills & the Curacao currency is worse than that of St. Eustatius by two or three bits in a Joe whatever we receive shall be subject to your order.²⁶

The war made more complicated a cumbersome system of credit and money exchange. The rate on bills of exchange fluctuated with the fortunes of war. After the British captured St. Eustatius, the best exchange could be obtained there, but at the greatest risk for Americans. So Baker & Blow had to take

a considerable deduction on their bills as well as pay a commission for the service rendered them by Fisher.²⁷

Information came of the loss of the cargo shipped to Holland. "We think J. F has already wrote you that the Tobo. Mr. Ball shipt for you was taken & that there was reason to fear that the advices for Insurance had miscarried by war's commencing between Holland & England before the Vessels got home so that we apprehend the whole is lost."²⁸ Such an event constituted a substantial loss. Insurance rates during the war often were from fifty to seventy-five percent of the value of the cargo, as opposed to five percent before the war.²⁹ Their criticism of Mr. Ball's character in business dealings is understandable, particularly when it was the same man who gave them low prices on the tobacco shipped on the Nonpareil and the Jenny in the prior spring, which tobacco Fisher had criticized for its quality. Fisher defended Ball and claimed that there were better prices in the isles than in London and that the presence of the French fleet in the Chesapeake would have its effect on the price of the weed.³⁰

Their own captain, Bristol Brown, confirmed the poor quality of the tobacco they were shipping when he arrived at St. Thomas with a small fleet of their ships, the Polly, Commerce, and Flying Jenny. Brown acted as something of a supercargo for Baker & Blow. As well as disposing of the cargo, obtaining salt and rum from Fisher, and reporting market prices, "the principal object of his Commission" was to buy a ship, "but no such Vessel as he wants is at present to be had here. We should

imagine they may be had on easier terms at some of the English Islands."³¹

Brown also drew on Lockhead & Fisher for a large sum of about £720 on account of Baker & Blow.³² A common function of agents like Lockhead & Fisher was to serve as banker to the merchants whom they served, keeping a running account, collecting on their bills of exchange, holding funds, and supplying money on demand.

Lockhead & Fisher were sending British goods to Baker & Blow, which they were obtaining from the British isle of Tortola. Smuggling British goods, exchanged for tobacco, from Tortola to St. Thomas, under the Danish flag in "neutral" bottoms, had reached huge proportions by 1781. The French were exerting pressure to stop the illicit traffic. Lockhead & Fisher informed Baker & Blow that goods at St. Thomas had to be shipped directly because smuggling them to St. Croix was much too perilous an undertaking.³³

In Virginia Baker & Blow had a mercantile network that extended down into North Carolina. Col. Ben Baker, who directed the operation, was in South Quay. When he left that place John Redwood was in charge as storekeeper and took directions from Baker at Smithfield. Richard Blow was temporarily at Beaufort, N.C., in the fall of 1781, from which he coordinated the business with Baker in South Quay, and the privateering cruises. David Anderson was their partner at Pitch Landing; W. Barritz at Edenton, N.C.³⁴ Ships arriving from the West Indies usually first put in at Edenton from whence Barritz

forwarded the news of their arrival and directed their cargoes to the proper destinations.³⁵

A letter from Baker to Blow in early October indicated some of the effects of the war on trade and the channels open to merchants. Baker reported that trade was slow at South Quay since all the carts and wagons were being used for the army. He had plans for contracting with the French to supply them with tack beef and naval stores, and with time he would see how it went. Wanting to know whether Captain Stockdale was to embark on a merchant "voige" or a privateering venture, Baker preferred privateering. "I hope the privateer is out again. Send me by the little Sloop Something of everything that is good. I have nothing more to say, the Country has Seised all our Tobo. at Pitch Landing gro fearfull we shall not get it off."³⁶ The poor quality of the tobacco that they shipped was probably partly due to the depredations and seizures both by Americans and the British. The main commodity which Baker seemed to attempt to sell to the army was rum. He had an agent in J. W. Todd, who, after a trip to Williamsburg in mid-October, informed Baker & Blow that the market was glutted, but he would do his best to sell their rum. However, they were to send no more since the market was so poor. He was sending Sampson Wilson to the camp (the French and American armies at York) and Hampton to see if they could do any better over there. According to Wilson the price had fallen so amazingly because of the great quantities from Baltimore. Todd was still trying to sell it at the end of the month with

little success at either York or Hampton, due to the fall of the British army and the opening of the Bay. Great quantities flowed into the camp from all parts of the country. Baker also sold some flour that was bought for the army.³⁷

Trading was made more difficult in October, 1781, because of the shortage of carts and wagons impressed for the use of the army. Baker & Blow probably lost some profit to be made on provisions because of it.

Colo. Edward Triend, desires me to inform you--That his Waggon, his wheat & Flour has all been taken by the Country for the army's use, and that he has no prospect of getting his Waggon so This has been prevented . . . [his] sending you the Flour . . . engaged for, long since: He begs to know whether you insist upon having Flour for the remainder of the Salt, when the present [illegible] are over.³⁸

On the whole, though, it was a prosperous period. As one man put it, "In these Speculating times, when my neighbours are busy I wish to be doing something I can assure you with great truth."³⁹

Barritz wrote to Blow at the end of October warning him not to buy any goods dear because he thought that the price of goods would fall and tobacco rise since the surrender of Cornwallis and the opening up of the Chesapeake. His prediction was accurate. Baker informed Blow ten days later that the price of tobacco was rising while everything else was falling.⁴⁰ Early in that month Baker had anticipated the rise, and had told Redwood "miss no Tobo. as that article is Rising Fast. I say miss none." They were trying to get ships ready to send to the West Indies. Baker was anxious to get Stockdale out privateering. But neither Redwood at South

Quay, nor Barritz at Edenton could get men to man the ships. Baker himself went down to Edenton and still had trouble finding hands.⁴¹ Baker bought up guns and powder for the privateer; he wrote Blow that he wanted all the cannon and powder that the men could get and that the ship would pick up muskets and powder at Ocracoke.⁴² This was not the first privateering venture of Baker & Blow. Correspondence concerning the disposal of shares and division of the prizes indicate an extensive partnership in several expeditions. As well as Baker, Blow, their agents, the captains of the privateers, Governor Abner Nash of North Carolina, and the Banks brothers, John and Henry, of Hunter, Banks & Co. of Virginia and North Carolina, had interests in these ventures. Nash told Blow that he would pay him with tobacco or part of the share in the prizes for a proportion of the outgoing cargo. He reminded him to tell the captain that if he was taken on the homeward journey to destroy all letters concerning their accounts.⁴³

On this voyage, Baker intended to send out the Count de Gras as the privateer and to fill the old sloop with shingles and tobacco for St. Thomas. Baker & Blow's Jenny with captain and crew apparently was lost or captured, but Stockdale arrived at St. Croix in January having captured three prizes before his arrival and several more after. The French fleet had appeared in the islands, sending British vessels scurrying and making an open sea for privateers. However the French capture of most of St. Kitts had disrupted the "scheem" of Fisher. He had intended to invest Baker & Blow's money in

English goods to be obtained upon the arrival of the British fleet at St. Kitts, which was no longer feasible. The price of tobacco was good, but would fall if the French completed the capture of the island. For these merchants, nations and wars were largely irrelevant except insofar as they affected prices and trading conditions.⁴⁴ Despite the surrender of Cornwallis, the war continued in the West Indies. France had retaken St. Eustatius in November 1781; by February 1782, after the French captured St. Kitts in January, Great Britain still held only Jamaica, Barbados, and Antigua. In April of that year Admiral Rodney defeated the French fleet, took Count de Grasse prisoner, and saved Jamaica, thereby bringing the war to a close in North America.

At the end of February Fisher reported that one of Baker & Blow's ships had come into St. Thomas safely after a hard chase. France's capture of St. Kitts had caused the market to slacken. Rum, which was much in demand, was very scarce. By the first of April, now that American ports were open, the market was worse--glutted with tobacco--and the planters were holding out to keep the price of rum high, creating an immense demand.⁴⁵

In March, Baker & Blow tried a new shipment.

We congratulate you most heartily on your new branch of trade, the rice adventures, & beg leave to recommend your continuing to prosecute it for upon enquiring we find it will always command a Joe P 100 wt at this Island, & two or three Cargoes of it we are convinced would meet with a ready sale at Grenada, where rum could be got in a short time at a very reasonable rate in return. We doubt not but a Cargo or two might be disposed of very readily at St Kitts, where the demand for provisions has greatly

increased since the Siege--another reason why we would recommend the prosecution of this branch to you is, that we apprehend the price of tobo. will fall as the Summer advances, great quantities of it will be poured out from Petersburg & other Warehouses on James River, & there are no Vessels here to carry it to Europe--Indeed the demand already begins to slacken, as there is but one Vessel here now loading for Britain & her Cargo is nearly completed.⁴⁶

However, Baker & Blow did not pursue this line of trade. Captain Ogbourne carried two more cargoes, apparently of tobacco, in the spring and summer of 1782. He had trouble disposing of his cargoes; Fisher seemed no longer to be their agent for selling their shipments, but only for disposing of their bills and advising them of market conditions. In May Fisher reported that the Dart and the Adelphi had been carried into Bermuda.⁴⁷

It seems clear that with the close of hostilities Baker & Blow lost interest in the West Indies trade. As Baker had indicated, his main interest had been in privateering. There was not much of a market for their tobacco, particularly so because of its poor quality, and they were not much into the provision trade. Also by the closing months of the war, distrust and dissatisfaction existed between Baker & Blow and Fisher. Fisher exhibited impatience with being called upon to fill the petty personal orders of the two Virginia merchants. Baker & Blow objected to the high prices of the goods and to the commission charged by Fisher. They proposed new terms which Fisher claimed would "put it out of our power to do any business at all."⁴⁸ Baker & Blow at least put it out of the power of Fisher to do any more business for them, for they

did not send any more ships to the West Indies in 1782. Thereafter occasional voyages were made, but Blow shifted his attention to establishing a network of back country stores and connections in England.

Due to the restrictions placed on American trade to the West Indies, by 1784 Americans had taken recourse to smuggling as their chief means of satisfying their trade demands.⁴⁹ A series of Orders in Council regulated American trade with Great Britain. The most important Order was that of 2 July 1783 which excluded American ships from the carrying trade to the British possessions in the West Indies. American foodstuffs could be imported by British subjects in British-built and owned ships; Americans could import sugar products in British ships under the same duties and regulations as if they were in a British colony; American meats and fish were excluded in favor of British. At the same time France and Spain reapplied restrictive regulations in their colonies. France withdrew the trading privileges allowed by an order of 1778 and reenforced the decree of 1767 which excluded flour and other foodstuffs, permitted the export of rum and molasses only, and limited entry to two ports. France, however, admitted American shipping while Spain restored her old colonial monopoly excluding everything and everyone foreign.⁵⁰ A year later by an arrêt of 30 August 1784 France liberalized trade in the islands. The number of entrepôts was extended from two to seven, additional imports and exports allowed, and a general duty of one percent imposed.⁵¹ Extra duties on salt

beef and fish and a premium on French cod practically prohibited the importation of American fish and severely restricted the potential in American trading; the arrêt of 31 October 1784 opening all ports to colonial trade capable of receiving 150 ton vessels thus paved the way for extensive American smuggling.⁵² Although Blow made a few ventures in the island trade later in the 1780s, the reimposition of peace time restrictions and the reestablishment of trade with England diverted Blow from attempting new commercial adventures in the West Indies. He was primarily a tobacco merchant and the tobacco trade returned to its old channel after the war. The postwar boom was conducive to the easiest and most profitable trade--and that was still with Great Britain.

NOTES

¹The first mention of Baker & Blow in the correspondence is Fisher's letter to "Messrs. Baker & Blow" written from St. Croix, 24 Mar. 1781 (BFP, Scrapbook, 141-42). Benjamin Baker and Blow apparently formed the firm in 1781 for privateering purposes and based the operation in South Quay. Another partner, David Anderson, kept a store at Pitch Landing (1790, Brunswick County Court, Richard Blow v. Herbert Haynes [RBP, XIA: fol. 1]).

²24 Mar. 1781, John Fisher, St. Croix, to Baker & Blow (BFP, Scrapbook, 141-42).

³Coakley, op. cit., pp. 155, 158-61.

⁴Ibid., p. 160.

⁵Ibid., pp. 302, 336.

⁶Ibid., p. 133.

⁷Ibid., pp. 165-66.

⁸Ibid., pp. 151-53; David Makinson, Barbados: A Study of North-American-West-Indian Relations, 1739-1789 (The Hague, 1964), p. 112.

⁹24 Mar. 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow (BFP, Scrapbook, 141-42).

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²10 May 1782, John Fisher, St. Thomas, to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 3).

¹³See for instance 20 Apr., 21/27 June, 20 Dec. 1781, 1 Apr. 1782, John Fisher, St. Croix/St. Thomas, to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1,2).

¹⁴20 Apr., 15 Oct. 1781, John Fisher/Lockhead & Fisher, St. Croix, to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1).

¹⁵20 Apr. 1781, John Risher, St. Croix, to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1).

¹⁶21/27 June 1781, John Fisher, St. Thomas, to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1).

¹⁷See for instance *ibid.*; 27 Oct. 1781, W. Barritz, Edenton, to Richard Blow, Beauford (RBP, II: fol. 1).

¹⁸20 Apr. 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1),
31 Oct. 1781, Wm. Murdock, St. Thomas, to Baker & Blow (RBP,
II: fol. 2).

¹⁹20 Apr. 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1).

²⁰Coakley, op. cit., pp. 180-81, 193, 307.

²¹24 Mar. 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow (BFP, Scrapbook,
141-42).

²²20 Apr., 21/27 June 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP,
II: fol. 1).

²³24 Mar. 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow (BFP, Scrapbook,
141-42); 20 Apr., 21/27 June 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow
(RBP, II: fol. 1).

²⁴24 Mar. 1781, Fisher to Baker & Blow (BFP, Scrapbook,
141-42).

²⁵20 Apr., 21/27 June, 15 Oct. 1781, Fisher/Lockhead &
Fisher, to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1).

²⁶15 Oct. 1781, Lockhead & Fisher, St. Croix, to Baker &
Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1); Wills Cowper & Co. was
a mercantile firm established in Suffolk, Virginia, whose
primary occupation was privateering (Coakley, op. cit., pp.
343-44). A "Joe," or "Johannes" was the name used in the
British colonies in the last half of the eighteenth century
for a Portuguese gold coin worth about 36 shillings sterling.

²⁷20 Dec. 1781, Fisher & Co. to Baker & Blow (RBP, II:
fol. 2).

²⁸15 Oct. 1781, Lockhead & Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP,
II: fol. 1).

²⁹Coakley, op. cit., p. 310.

³⁰15 Oct. 1781, Lockhead & Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP,
II: fol. 1).

³¹5 Oct., 14 Oct. 1781, Bristol Brown, St. Thomas, to
Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1); 15 Oct. 1781,
Lockhead & Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1). Brown
finally found a schooner which was furnished by William Mur-
dock at St. Thomas for an eighth share in the cargo (31 Oct.
1781, Murdock to Baker & Blow [RBP, II: fol. 2]).

³²14 Oct. 1781, Brown to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1);
15 Oct. 1781, Lockhead & Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP, II:
fol. 1).

³³ 15 Oct. 1781, Lockhead & Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1); Coakley, op. cit., p. 358.

³⁴ 1 Oct. 1781, Ben Baker, South Quay, to Richard Blow, Beauford (RBP, II: fol. 1); 3 Oct. 1781, Ben Baker, Smithfield, to John Redwood, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1); 4 Oct. 1781, John Redwood, South Quay, to Richard Blow, Beauford (RBP, II: fol. 1); 12 Oct. 1781, Richard Blow, Beauford, to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1); 19 Oct. 1781, W. Barritz, Edenton, to David Anderson, Pitch Landing (RBP, II: fol. 1); and other correspondence in RBP, II: fol. 1-2.

³⁵ 19 Oct. 1781, W. Barritz, Edenton, to David Anderson, Pitch Landing (RBP, II: fol. 1); 27 Oct. 1781, W. Barritz, Edenton, to Richard Blow, Beauford (RBP, II: fol. 1).

³⁶ 1 Oct. 1781, Baker to Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1).

³⁷ 17/18 Oct., 27 Oct., 30 Oct. 1781, J. W. Todd to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1, 2); 16 Oct. 1781, Sampson Wilson, Smithfield, to Benj. Baker, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1); 27 Oct. 1781, Geo. Purdie, Smithfield, to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2); 20 Oct. 1781, Thomas Milner, Milners, to Benj. Baker (RBP, II: fol. 2).

³⁸ 28 & 29 Oct. 1781, Hector McNeil, Petersburg, to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2); 27 Oct. 1781, Robert Donald, Petersburg, to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2).

³⁹ 27 Oct. 1781, Purdie to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2).

⁴⁰ 27 Oct. 1781, Barritz to Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1); 5 Nov. 1781, Col. Ben Baker, Edenton, to Richard Blow, Beauford (RBP, II: fol. 2).

⁴¹ 3 Oct. 1781, Baker to Redwood (RBP, II: fol. 1); 4 Oct. 1781, Redwood to Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1); 27 Oct. 1781, Barritz to Blow (RBP, II: fol. 1); 5 Nov. 1781, Baker to Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2).

⁴² 22 Oct. 1781, Sampson Wilson, Smithfield, to Benj. Baker, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 1); 28 Oct. 1781, Joshua Oldner, Winton, to Ben. Baker (RBP, II: fol. 2).

⁴³ 12 Oct. 1781, Capt. Christian Calvert, South Quay, to Richard Blow, Beauford (RBP, II: fol. 1); 5 Nov. 1781, Baker to Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2); 26 Oct. 1781, John Banks, Beauford, to Baker & Blow or Henry Banks, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 2); 31 Dec. 1781, Accounts, Blow & Biggelow with Hunter Banks & Co. (RBP, II: fol. 2); 24 Oct. 1781, Gov. A. Nash, Newbern, to Richard Blow, Beauford (RBP, II: fol. 2); and other correspondence in RBP, II: fol. 1-2.

⁴⁴ 22 Jan. 1782, Jno. Fisher & Co., St. Thomas, to Messrs. Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 2).

⁴⁵ 22 Feb. 1782, John Fisher & Co., St. Thomas, to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2); 1 Apr. 1782, Fisher & Co. to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2).

⁴⁶ 6 Mar. 1782, John Fisher & Co., St. Thomas, to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2).

⁴⁷ 10 May, 7 Aug. 1782, John Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 3).

⁴⁸ 20 Dec. 1781, 10 May 1782, Fisher to Baker & Blow (RBP, II: fol. 2, 3).

⁴⁹ Makinson, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁵⁰ Charles R. Ritcheson, Aftermath of Revolution: British Policy Toward the United States 1783-1795 (Dallas, 1969), p. 6; Vernon G. Setser, The Commercial Reciprocity Policy of the United States 1774-1829 (1937; reprint New York, 1969), p. 53 and n.

⁵¹ The seven ports were: Santa Lucia and Saint Pierre (on Martinique), Point à Pitre (Guadeloupe), Scarborough (Tobago), Cap Français, Port au Prince, and Cayes-Saint-Louis (Santo Dominque). Additional imports were: salt beef, salt fish, rice, maize, and vegetables. Goods from France could be exported (Frederick L. Nussbaum, "The French Colonial Arrêt of 1784," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXVII [1928], 69).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 69, 74, 76-77; Setser, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

CHAPTER III

THE EXPANSION OF RICHARD BLOW'S COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, 1782-1784

At the end of the war, despite Shelburne's and other liberals' attempts to retain as much of the old Anglo-American connection as possible, the economic nationalism of the mercantile system was turned against the new American states. The policy put forward by Lord Sheffield in his Observations on the Commerce of the American States with Europe and the West Indies, published in London in 1783, was soon elevated to national dogma. His central tenet held that Britain must build anew its imperial system to insure self-sufficiency. American ships had to be excluded from the carrying trade to the West Indies in order to protect and maintain Britain's maritime supremacy in shipping and seamen. Further, he argued, Americans would soon find it in their own best interest to revive prewar economic customs. The agrarian nation would require British manufactures for a long time to come, and British markets alone had the facilities and capacity to absorb American produce.¹

Official British policy encouraged the resumption of old trade patterns; the Order of 2 July 1783, aside from excluding American shipping from the British West Indies, granted unprecedented privileges to the now foreign ships and goods

of the United States in the home ports of Great Britain. In fact, a series of Orders throughout 1783 liberalized trade with America, extending favors well beyond those allowed any other "most favored nation." Eager to make England once again the European entrepôt for American trade, the government chose to admit unmanufactured goods as if they still were colonial. An Order of 6 June allowed the free importation of indigo and naval stores. Tobacco was admitted upon payment of the "Old Subsidy" of five percent ad valorem and the giving of requisite bonds if reexport were intended. Two Orders in November allowed the giving of bond for the Old Subsidy and storage in the King's warehouses until the owner had determined disposal of the tobacco. The government continued the prohibition on domestic cultivation and maintained the high protective duties against Spanish and Portuguese tobacco.²

The popular acclaim with which Lord Sheffield's pamphlet was received encouraged the Fox-North ministry and Pitt after them to pursue this course of excluding Americans from the West Indies trade while securing their trade to the home isles.³ Although Americans, led by Minister Adams in London, fought the former part of the policy for over a decade, the hoped-for resurgence in Anglo-American trade was quick in coming. British credit, common customs, language, and business practices had created bonds which French and Dutch merchants with their alien ways were not able to break. Unwilling to supply long term credit and unable to supply the variety and quality of goods which the British could, Continental entrepreneurs did not

succeed in supplanting the British. By 1784 the old patterns of trade with Great Britain had been resumed; Americans were importing British goods in greater quantities than ever before.⁴

Virginians, both planters and merchants, had viewed the Revolution as an opportunity to rid themselves of their chronic economic dependence on Great Britain; Jefferson and others particularly had hoped that France would replace England as the principal market for Virginia's tobacco. Native merchants also had hoped that the elimination of British competition during the Revolution would enable them to establish themselves in a commanding position in Virginia's foreign trade afterwards.⁵ But the war's end found no large mercantile houses in Virginia ready to take over the functions served by British merchants before the war. Burdened by debts and disputed accounts arising from their Revolutionary ventures, most lacked the capital and ships necessary to establish expanded peacetime commercial enterprises.⁶ Conditions in Virginia during the closing years of the war had seriously undermined the merchants' position. The British invasion of the state in 1781 was disastrous to commerce; ships and tobacco were burned and channels of trade disrupted. Virginia's state government did not encourage the spirit of enterprise, either, by its policy of impressment of all means of transportation.⁷ Blow himself was unable to carry on his local trade because wagons were unavailable.⁸ State policy, dominated by agrarian planter interests, was unsympathetic in general to mercantile needs.

With the 1780 act calling paper money in at forty to one, circulating medium became scarce. The result was an increase in the disparity of higher prices for imported goods and lower prices for tobacco between Virginia and Philadelphia. The legislature was unreceptive to a proposal for creating a branch of Morris's Bank of North America in Virginia, leaving the merchants' need for a financial center unmet.⁹

With Yorktown and impending peace British goods and merchants slipped into Virginia in increasing numbers, which hastened the flight of specie from the state and worsened the situation of the local traders.¹⁰ Tobacco and provisions were a glut on the West Indian market; by 1782 because of the risk and impending peace no further profit was to be made in St. Thomas from trade with Virginia.¹¹ Having suffered large losses in ships and cargoes, having lost his market, and facing renewed competition at home, Blow, along with the greater proportion of Virginia merchants, chose nevertheless to continue his attempt to carry on a successful trade. As before the Revolution, the American traders occupied a position of much greater importance in the grain trade to the West Indies than in the tobacco trade.¹² That Blow chose the latter was probably due to insecure trading conditions in the islands, resumption of restrictive policies by the European powers over their possessions, his prewar relations with British merchants, and most importantly Blow's mercantile establishment and connections in the Southside and North Carolina, whose main products were tobacco and naval stores. Although English

merchants dominated this trade for another decade or two,¹³ Virginia commerce did not return exactly to its old colonial patterns. Neither did the potential for direct trade with Europe go completely undeveloped, nor did the newly developed class of Virginia merchants disappear to become once again storekeepers and factors of large British commercial houses.¹⁴ Blow's significance lay in his attempts to utilize his experience and to preserve his commercial independence gained during the Revolution instead of relapsing into his prewar position as a subsidiary of British firms and factors.

After a shipment of naval provisions to Port au Prince in August, Blow withdrew from foreign trade for the remainder of 1782.¹⁵ Remaining at South Quay, he carried on his local trade providing salt, rum, molasses, and dry goods for tobacco, flour, bread, and hemp. Cash was scarce; barter was the system of exchange.¹⁶ Blow dealt with other Revolutionary firms in Virginia, Shore & McConnico, David Ross & Company.¹⁷ During the fall he apparently reviewed and reorganized his business concerns. In September a trader in Petersburg with whom Baker & Blow had done some business suggested establishing a store there.¹⁸ This was the beginning of a partnership between William Barksdale and Blow which lasted for most of the decade. Blow had both Barksdale and his nephew George Briggs busy trying to collect debts from Shore & McConnico, James Neilson, and others--without much success. They were forced to take payment in kind: tobacco or flour; even then Neilson escaped to the south without paying, a practice which became increasingly

common during the 1780s. Barksdale wrote emphatically of his need for ready money. The tobacco trade began to flourish in the latter part of November 1782; because of the demand the merchants bid up the price. In a competitive market the most advantageous purchases were made in cash transactions, which explained why Barksdale was so eager for ready money since he was trying to buy up tobacco to fill Blow's ships.¹⁹

Blow intended to resume foreign trade; during the winter he and his wartime partner Ben Baker renegotiated the terms on which the business was to be continued.²⁰ Blow apparently did not like Baker's terms, for in May 1783 he wrote to Barksdale, "Colo. Baker and myself have come to a determination for a dissolution of our Copartnership, imediately to take place, we have divided our property in Vessells, by having them Valued by indifferent Men, and chuse [?] for choice, in doing which I think I have been very fortunate."²¹ In the autumn they publicized the expiration of the partnership of Baker & Blow and requested those indebted to settle their balances between 1 October and 1 January next, anyone with demands to bring them in to Daniel Anderson at Tower Hill.²² The problem of the unsettled debts of Baker & Blow was to plague Blow for the remainder of the 1780s.

Before they terminated the business, they had sent out the Nonpareil to Cadiz, seizing a prize ship, the Three Sisters on the way. The schooner returned to Virginia in May, and the profits of the voyage were divided among its owners. The cargo mainly of wines, Blow sent up to Barksdale.²³ Direct

trade to the Iberian coast was a part of Blow's scheme for expanding his commercial activities. He had engaged an agent in James Coffin, who wrote Baker & Blow that he had bought a brig in which he would ship wine, salt, and silks and requested that they insure her.²⁴ Further evidence of extensive trade to Spain or Portugal is scanty, but in the spring of 1783 Blow clearly meant this branch of trade to be one of four in which he and Barksdale would engage, with the emphasis to be on the tobacco trade to England. He and Robert Crew had agreed that Crew should go to London, there to act as their agent and to establish contact with British merchants. This arrangement in itself was innovative. The usual practice in colonial times was for British firms to send out to Virginia agents to whom native planters and merchants attached themselves. Blow was moving in the opposite direction, extending his firm into Britain and thereby attempting to maintain his independence.

Blow intended to send the Jolly Tar, the Venus, and the Tartar out to London and Bristol with tobacco. He made out schemes and wrote

Letters to establish correspondents in the different Seaport towns in England to git our fall good[s] out.... I have orderd out about £3000 for the fall if our Tobo. dont exceed meeting £10 [?] p hhd. if it rises £12. four thousand & if £15--five thousand which those two Scooners & the Brigs Cargoes will pay for....I have wrote my friend Mr. James Baird of Glasgow very fully and informed him particularly of our connection & that I mean to establish my self in Portsmouth. & mentioned to him if he thinks of engaging in trade in this Cuntry again that, it wou'd be agreable to us to grant him a Share with us, & to write us imediately about it.²⁵

The coastwise trade also lured Blow. New York and Philadelphia were good markets for tobacco and provisions; prices

were almost always higher than in Virginia, while imports could be obtained at much lower prices. Planters complained of these conditions, but for merchants like Blow profits were to be made from the situation. He sent two boats northward loaded with corn and flour, bacon and pease. He intended the sloop Industry to return by Turks Island to "fetch in a 1000 bushells Salt," which was still very much in demand. Blow & Barksdale kept the sloop plying the coastwise trade for the next several years.²⁶

Blow had his eye on several vessels "valued at peace price & I think low. If agreeable to you I wish to put them into our concern, which will be much the best as we can then Ship our own produce as fast as we collect it, keep the Brig in the Tobo. trade & the others in the West India & Streight trade."²⁷ Blow's intention to run his own ships in the foreign trade was another departure from common practice before the war. By so doing, he had a chance to save on carrying charges and to make a profit by shipping freight for others. By the "Streight trade" Blow meant the wine trade to Spain and Portugal, near the Strait of Gibraltar. As mentioned before, from the available documents Blow seems not to have devoted as much effort to this or the West Indies trade as he at first intended. In 1783 and 1784 he did send the schooner Venus on several voyages to the West Indies. In the spring of 1783 her destination was changed from Bristol in England to Cape François and Port au Prince. The Venus carried out a cargo of tobacco; her master James Bartlett was instructed to load back with

"Sugar. Coffee. & Cash if to be had as Mr. Blow is much in want of it & leave the whole of your Cargo in their Messrs Wall & Tardy or Messrs Maria & Co. hands the Sales of which may be accounted for at a future Day as its more than probable that House will have many more Consignments from Mr. Blow provided they give entire Satisfaction this Time."²⁸ The voyage was not a success; Wall & Tardy reported the poor sales of the cargo of tobacco because of the expectation of great quantities of the weed from the Chesapeake on French vessels and they discouraged going to Port au Prince since no manufactured goods were to be had there. The Venus made another trip in the fall to Cape François carrying tobacco, scantling, planks, and shingles and returning with brown sugar and coffee. Two more passages were made in the spring and fall of 1784 to Hispaniola and Kingston, Jamaica, respectively, the Jolly Tar accompanying the Venus to the latter destination, where both vessels were to be sold. Hogs, lard, shingles, and scantling were shipped out; rum, molasses, sugar, coffee, and tea were shipped in return to Blow & Barksdale.²⁹ Low prices and colonial restrictions may have discouraged Blow. By the end of 1784 he and Barksdale had imported large quantities of goods from England and both men were anxious to make "punctual remittance to London to Establish our futur Credit."³⁰ Blow probably did not have the capital or ships to carry on extensive trading both to England and to the West Indies. He seems to have dropped out of the Indies trade after 1784, although his activities up to that time had earned him a reputation

for knowledgeableness in the trade: other traders in the area referred to him for advice on prices and the best islands, expecting "it is in yr. Power to inform . . . the best Place in the West Indies having frequent Accounts" there.³¹

Blow also earned reproach from Crew in the fall of 1784 for carrying on trade to the West Indies and to Philadelphia.

Had I have had any idea of being brought into such difficulties by my ingagements for you when I first came here, I assure you I should not have shipped you more goods than the property of yours I had in hand. But I depended on your promises of sending two other cargoes of Tobacco after me, and could not have expected you would have entered into so wild a scheme as sending your Tobacco to the West Indies, Philadelphia &c and leave me in distress on account of my ingagements for you.³²

As well as discouraging Blow's continued participation in the West Indies trade, Crew's criticism in the spring of 1784 of the Jolly Tar as being too small and having too great expenses for use in the trans-Atlantic tobacco trade probably contributed to Blow's decision to send her in the fall to the West Indies to try to sell her.³³

By 1784 Crew had decided to establish himself in London by opening a counting-house and employing a clerk. Several journeys to various manufacturing towns in the autumn of 1783 seemed to have brought Crew to this determination, for he had come to the realization that great profits were to be made as a middleman in the American trade. "I did not before conceive that there was so great a difference in getting goods of this kind supplied at the first hand and doing it by the merch'ts at the sea ports....I can now have it in my power to put up a cargo on as good terms as any merch't. settled here,"



quoth Crew, rather ingenuously. He established correspondence and credit with a substantial house at each of the following: Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Halifax, and Leeds. He made his first trial of shipping goods himself in December 1783.³⁴

Barksdale had been displeased with the high price of the fall goods shipped to them on the Jolly Tar's first return voyage, and he knew the cause. He complained to Blow, "I fancy Mr. Crew has not given himself much trouble in laying in those Goods sent in the Jolly Tar. They would have Come 25 P Ct. lower if he had taken the Trouble of going to the defrent manufactoryes & bespeaking them himself, this I suppose he did not do." Blow, Barksdale, and Crew had all suffered from Crew's lack of knowledge and experience upon his arrival in London in the summer of 1783. Having fallen sick, he was unable to acquaint himself with the mercantile community and their practices before entrusting his business to some of them. He fixed upon "Messrs. Oxley & Hancock for our correspondents here, they are men of the first character and of large and permanet property," but Crew discovered later that they were "but new hands in shiping goods to America, and perhaps it might have been done rather better by a person better acquainted with what would suit" and that the goods which they sent he could have obtained himself for much less. Furthermore Crew discovered that the broker who aided him in the sale of the Jolly Tar's tobacco had "imposed on me, and taken advantage of my not being at that time acquainted with

the mode of conducting the business." Blow & Barksdale lost £100 to £200 on the cargo because of Crew's inexperience. Crew informed them that in future he would not be subject to such disadvantages and impositioning, "having taken a good deal of pains to make myself acquainted with the Tobacco business and with the purchasers and manufactors of that article."³⁵

As Crew gained experience and confidence, a perceptible change took place in the attitude and views expressed in his letters. From writing of "our credit and interest" in the summer of 1783, he had shifted by early 1784 to issuing directives to Blow & Barksdale as one of his American customers and to exhorting them superciliously to exert themselves in getting other consignments for him.³⁶ Blow & Barksdale, who had begun by sending out their own agent to Britain to establish correspondents and credit in the various seaports and manufacturing towns, ended in finding themselves in a commercial relationship with a merchant in England much the same as before the war. That Crew should have decided to establish himself independently in London is understandable. Situated in the largest trading center in the world, Crew observed that "the greatest advantages" could be expected in a trading connection between there and Virginia. With the resumption of trade with Great Britain in 1783, Virginians' demands for British goods soared after the austerity and deprivation of the war years, and tobacco prices reached unprecedented heights, from thirty to forty-five shillings per hundredweight. The post-war boom, which lasted until 1785, gave rise to an atmosphere of optimism,

in which Virginia planters and merchants increased their importations and expanded their plans for exporting tobacco while British merchants extended credit to them.³⁷

Both Crew and Blow & Barksdale fell prey to the pitfalls of prosperity by extending their commitments and expanding their credit far beyond their capital. Crew's decision to go into business was based largely on the potential which he believed to be in the commerce between Britain and Virginia. He was continually urging Blow & Barksdale to find consignments for him and requesting Blow to load ships which Crew had chartered to take in tobacco in Virginia. Such activities, Crew admitted, would not be to Blow & Barksdale's profit, but on the other hand he would be exerting himself on their behalf in England. Such reciprocal relationships in which each concern looked out for the business and interests of the other had often existed before the war, but the basis on which the consignment trade functioned was trust and confidence between the parties. The lack thereof between Blow & Barksdale and Crew undermined their commercial dealings with each other in terms of cooperation and of forwarding the other's interests (profits) to the best advantage. Blow & Barksdale consequently did not put forth their greatest efforts to find consignments for Crew or to push forward the loading of his chartered ships. Lack of cooperation, of experience, of financial resources, combined to deprive Crew of the benefit of those great advantages which he had anticipated in Anglo-Virginian trade. In the autumn of 1785 Crew's credit began to fail, he went bankrupt and ended

in the hands of the receivers. Barksdale wrote that it was "nothing more then Ive expected from the Shipments he has made to this Country, without one farthing Capital. A Man under those surcamstances Cant act too Cauceous wch. I am sorry to find he has not done."³⁸

Blow & Barksdale were not entirely irresponsible for Crew's failure. Blow himself had been overly optimistic in his estimates of the proceeds from the cargoes of tobacco shipped to Crew, and he consequently imported more goods than his shipments to London could pay for. Blow continued to overestimate his capability to remit to Crew, who became increasingly critical of Blow & Barksdale's business practices. Although Crew admonished them of the necessity of examining the tobacco before shipping it and of making certain that the tobacco was prized and shipped properly, they continued to send damaged and rotten cargoes. As Crew pointed out, the duty and other charges were fixed and would remain the same no matter for what the weed sold, and the broker's and merchants' commissions could not be supported when the price was low: tobacco of bad quality would be sure to "sink money." In March 1784 he wrote, "It is terrible to be at so much expence, in geting Tobo here and then that it should be rotten"--particularly when Blow & Barksdale were falling behind in paying for their goods imported. Apparently they were counting on prospective future profits as if the money were in hand and at their disposal. By the autumn of 1784 Crew was desperate and

he began writing urgent, threatening letters. Since they owed him for the previous fall and spring goods, he sent only part of the goods which they had ordered for the fall of 1784 and warned them that "if you do not observe more punctuality in future, your credit is at an end." Although they had sent several cargoes of tobacco, enough to forestay disaster for Crew, their remittances were not sufficient. As Crew admitted, he had sent them more goods than "the property of yours I had in hand" in the expectation, based on their promises, that they would have supported him "with something clever." Besides the poor tobacco, Crew criticized their undependability in shipping tobacco. Instead of consistently shipping their weed to one port, London, they had been casting about for the best market and making speculative shipments to Philadelphia and the West Indies. Crew attributed the cause of his distressing situation on their behalf to this wild scheme upon which Blow & Barksdale had embarked. Finally Crew vowed in December to send them no spring goods.³⁹

Part of Crew's distress was due to the failures of London houses in the American trade, beginning in the summer of 1784. The post-boom depression was approaching and the stoppages of payment caused British merchants to tighten credit to Americans.⁴⁰ The circulation of bad bills of exchange and short remittances frightened Crew and other merchants into being "very shy and spareing in sending goods on credit."⁴¹ Crew, new and un-established in the trade, was probably of the first to suffer the adverse effects from the cut-back in credit.

The inexperienced American also made mistakes, which Blow & Barksdale were quick to criticize: poor choice of correspondents in Messrs. Oxley & Hancock; unsatisfactory proceeds from the sales of the tobacco; high prices, late arrival in Virginia, and poor assortment of goods; and unfavorable terms of credit. The arrival of the goods late in the season of trading and the limited selection put Barksdale in increasingly ill-humor with Crew.⁴² Barksdale, in the country store in Petersburg, needed a wide variety of wares to compete with the other merchants for the planters' tobacco; the lack of merchandise cost him their trade. His exasperation reached its peak at the end of the fall of 1784 when he wrote Blow,

Dont you think it highly prevoking that our fall Goods, being not yet arrived. Mr. Cooper tels me that our worthy friend Ro. Crew has shiped his Unkle Scott a parcel of Kendle Cottons, which has been at hand upwards of three Weaks. I have Come to an unalterable determination never to send any further Orders for Goods to this Correspondent. & I hope his behaviour this fall will also rouse Your resentment. Be Asshured Crew is afeathering his nest well, this I've long seen.⁴³

Under these circumstances of mutual dissatisfaction and indebtedness, Blow & Barksdale and Crew ceased trading with one another after the winter of 1784-1785.⁴⁴ Blow & Barksdale's initial venture in post-war commerce had not been a success. Underlying their break with Crew was a determination to reorganize their mercantile affairs and to set them on a better footing. To effect this they intended to clear their debts and to establish trading relations with a new correspondent in Britain, who would be "able to advance a Stock & a man of Capital." Although they succeeded in forming a commercial

connection with the well-established and financially solvent mercantile house of Donald & Burton in London, Blow & Barksdale's debts proved to be a chronic problem, which finally resulted in the dissolution of their partnership in 1789.⁴⁵

NOTES

¹Ritcheson, op. cit., pp. 4, 6, 19.

²Ibid., pp. 8, 19-20. For a summation of the various Orders in Council of 1783, see *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

³Ibid., pp. 6, 19.

⁴Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Norfolk: Historic Southern Port (Durham, 1931), p. 83; Ritcheson, op. cit., p. 21.

⁵Coakley, op. cit., pp. 87, 123-29, 168, 222-24, 324-36 especially. Coakley's analysis of the situation was that neither business organization nor enterprise had advanced as far in France by the time of the Revolution as in England. "By mid-1779 it was obvious that the French merchants would not replace the British in a large-scale tobacco trade to Virginia. During the latter part of the war the French market shared with that in Holland and in Spain, such voyages as Virginian and other American merchants were able to send out, while more Dutch ships came to America than French. In general, however, no European power put forth the necessary effort to secure a position in the Virginia tobacco trade, and thus in the latter years of the war it tended to drift more and more back into the English orbit, long before the end of hostilities" (*ibid.*, pp. 335-36).

⁶Ibid., p. 366.

⁷Ibid., pp. 341, 346-48.

⁸See pp. 18-19 above.

⁹Coakley, op. cit., pp. 348-53, 370, 376, 378-80.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 352, 357-60. The illicit trade between British and American merchants reached huge proportions in 1781. The French exerted pressure to stop it so Congress recommended that all British goods on land and sea be seized. In 1782 the Virginia General Assembly enacted such a law, which did not become effective until 1 April 1783 and was repealed next session with the news of peace, when British goods were put on an equal footing with all others. Gov. Benjamin Harrison made attempts to deport Tory merchants, but they eluded his efforts. At war's end British factors had reestablished themselves ready to resume business (*ibid.*, pp. 358-60).

¹¹Ibid., p. 354. On 20 August 1782 Fisher informed Baker & Blow that the markets were low owing to the lack of money, that he could sell produce only for bills of exchange (Jno. Fisher, St. Thomas, to Baker & Blow [RBP, II: fol. 3]).

¹²Coakley, op. cit., p. 367.

¹³Ibid., p. 374. Merchants of the Northern cities, who already had been large operators before the Revolution, extended their interests to the export of Virginia tobacco during the war and gradually supplanted the British in control of Southern trade in the decades after the war (ibid., p. 367).

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 366, 372.

¹⁵6 Aug. 1782, John Andrews, receipt. to RB (RBP, II: fol. 3).

¹⁶16 Apr., 15 Oct., 8 Nov., 19 Nov. 1782, Wm. Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 3).

¹⁷4 Oct. 1782, David Ross & Co., Invoice (RBP, II: fol. 3); 8 Nov. 1782, Wm. Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 3); 13 Nov., 19 Nov. 1782, George Briggs, Petersburg, to RB, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 3); Coakley, op. cit., pp. 304, 324.

¹⁸30 Sept. 1782, Wm. Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 3). In the spring of 1782 Barksdale had shipped some tobacco on Baker & Blow's brig Nancy and had purchased molasses from them (16 Apr. 1782, Wm. Barksdale, Petersburg to Baker & Blow [RBP, II: fol. 3]).

¹⁹13, 19 Nov. 1782, George Briggs, Petersburg, to RB, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 3); 19, 27 Nov., 5, 16, 29 Dec. 1782, Wm. Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, South Quay (RBP, II: fol. 3).

²⁰16 Dec. 1782, Ben Baker to RB (RBP, II: fol. 3). This letter is a reply to proposals which Blow must have previously made to Baker. Baker agreed to Blow's suggestion of having stores at Petersburg, Tower Hill, and Pitch Landing. Apparently Blow wanted to involve "Mr. Crew," with whom Blow had joined in some privateering ventures during the war (see p. 10). Blow may have been considering embarking upon some sort of illicit trade, perhaps smuggling provisions and rum in the West Indies, for Baker told Blow he might do as he judged best with Crew, but not so as to "prejudice" their characters. The major part of the business was to be carried on at South Quay, being the seaport place. Baker intended to reside there and to direct and conduct the business there with Blow, who was to superintend the whole business. He wished his son Dick Baker to be a partner and thought one man ought to be constantly collecting debts.

²¹18 May 1783, RB, South Quay, to W. Barksdale (RBP, III: fol. 1).

²²1 Oct. 1783, Printed Announcement, South Quay (BFP, Scrapbook, 26).

²³16 Jan. 1783, Insurance account on prize ship Three Sisters (BFP, Scrapbook, 72); 10 May 1783, Bond for duties payable on Nonpareil's cargo (RBP, III: fol. 2); 24 May 1783, Division account in "royalls of plate" of owners of schooner Nonpareil (RBP, III: fol. 1); 24 May 1783, Invoice of goods (RBP, III: fol. 1); 5 Aug. 1783, Accounts due Rey & Brandenbourg, Cadiz; 1784 [?], Rey & Brandenbourg to [], concerning prize ship (BFP, Scrapbook, 163).

²⁴16 Nov. 1783, James Coffin, Cadiz, to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, III: fol. 3). Apparently, Coffin had not been informed of the dissolution of his employers' partnership.

In the spring of 1784, Barksdale noted receipt from Messrs. Hansford & Gossigan of wines and fruits, which were probably part of the cargo shipped by Coffin. Gossigan drew an order on Blow in favor of James Baird & Co., with whom Blow hoped to enter into business (7 Apr. 1784, William Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth [RBP, IV: fol. 1]).

There is evidence of sporadic voyages to Madeira and Cadiz through the rest of the 1780s. Blow was probably discouraged by the poor market which his shipments of Indian corn met there. Part of his motivation apparently stemmed from the desire for an occasional shipment of wines for his private use (4 Aug. 1785, 3 Feb., 22 Mar. 1786, Smyth & Co., Madeira, to RB [RBP, VI: fols. 4 Aug. 1785, 3 Feb. 1786, 22 Mar. 1786]; 1789, Accounts current, Lamar Hill Bisset & Co., Madeira, with RB [RBP, IX: fol. 2]; 10 May 1789, RB, Portsmouth, to Lamar Hill Bisset & Co. [BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795]; 4 July 1789, Lamar Hill Bisset & Co., Madeira, to RB [RBP, IX: fol. 5]; 17 Dec. 1789, Lamar Hill Bisset & Co., Madeira, to RB [RBP, IX: fol. 5]; 3 June 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to John Bulkeley & Son [BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795]; 11 Aug. 1790, John Bulkeley & Son, Lisbon, to RB [RBP, XI: fol. 1]).

²⁵18 May 1783, RB, South Quay, to Barksdale (RBP, III: fol. 1).

By the fall of 1783, Blow had established himself in Portsmouth. Blow was listed as head of family in 1785 in Norfolk County, "Portsmouth, South Side of the Western Branch to New Mill Creek" with three white souls and eight dwellings (Heads of Families At the First Census of the United States taken in the Year 1790: Records of the State Enumerations: 1782 to 1785, Virginia [1903; reprint Baltimore, 1970], p. 93).

Blow had just received news "that we have free access to any British port as before the War," which left him clear to send his ships to England. He also transmitted to Barksdale news of markets: English goods would be high, tobacco was low in England and New York, in which everything else was very low except Indian corn (18 May 1783, RB, South Quay, to W Barksdale [RBP, III: fol. 1]).

Baird, with whose mercantile firm Blow had been associated before the Revolution (see pp. 8-9), must have been one of the many Scots factors to leave Virginia at the time of the Revolution. He seems never to have answered Blow's letter, but he wrote several years later, saying that he wanted to collect

his debts in Virginia and asking that Blow keep him informed concerning the laws passed in America pertaining to collection on British debts and property and tell him whether it was worth the expense and trouble of coming to collect (29 Sept. 1785, 20 Apr. 1786, James Baird, Glasgow, to RB, Portsmouth [RBP, VI]).

²⁶18 May 1783, RB, South Quay, to W Barksdale (RBP, III: fol. 1); 1783, Accounts for sloop Industry, to Fredericksburg, to Cape Charles & back, to Philadelphia (RBP, III: fol. 1); 1783-1784, sloop Industry, sales of cargoes at New York--tobacco, corn, turpentine, pork (RBP, III: fol. 2); 2 Aug. 1783, Stephen Hookey, New York, to RB, concerning sale of cargo of corn (RBP, III: fol. 2); 2 Aug. 1783, sales at auction of schooner Brilliant's cargo of flour at New York (RBP, III: fol. 2); 1 Oct. 1783, RB, debit, to Joshua Oldner, for expenses on voyage of Industry to Philadelphia (RBP, III: fol. 1); 21 & 25 Oct. 1783, bills of lading for flour & oznaburgs shipped on sloop Industry, Capt. Joshua Oldner, master, from Philadelphia to Portsmouth (RBP, III: fol. 3); 1 Nov. 1783, Duty bond, Port of Norfolk, for Industry from Philadelphia (RBP, III: fol. 3); 28 Oct., 15 Nov. 1783, William Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, III: fol. 3); 1 Apr., 24 Apr. 1784, same to same (RBP, IV: fol. 1); 27 Sept. 1784, same to same (RBP, IV: fol. 2); 14 July 1785, same to same (RBP, VI: fol. 14 July 1785).

²⁷18 May 1783, RB, South Quay, to W Barksdale (RBP, III: fol. 1).

²⁸29 June 1783, [], Edenton, to James Bartlett, master of schooner Venus (BFP, Scrapbook, 57). In his letter of 18 May 1783 to Barksdale, Blow says that Captain Ogbourn in the Venus is to carry a cargo of tobacco to Bristol (RBP, III: fol. 1). Crew was to meet Ogbourn at Bristol upon his arrival and impatiently awaited news of him. Blow failed to write Crew of the change in plans until 22 August and Crew did not receive the letter until the first week in October, which considerably disrupted affairs. "It would have been a particular satisfaction to me to have been informed sooner what you were sending me, or that you had altered the plan proposed when we parted.... One of the inconveniencies among others, is that had I not expected a vessel to arrive in which I might send you any thing, I should before now have shipped the Liverpool ware, Sadlery, some more Kendal Cottons &c. For goodness sake be more punctual in your correspondence, or it is impossible to do any thing with satisfaction.... The only matter I complain of, is not being informed of it sooner, as I had mentioned to the people that I do business with here, that I expected some more Tobo immediately" (5 Aug., 17 & 19 Aug., 8 Oct. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale [RBP, III: fol. 2, 3]). The lack of regular and punctual correspondence was one of Crew's chronic complaints against Blow & Barksdale.

²⁹1783, Invoice of tobacco shipped on Venus from Petersburg store (RBP, III: fol. 1); 30 July, 17 Aug. 1783, Wall & Tardy, Cape François, to RB, Norfolk (BFP, Scrapbook, 60); Nov. & Dec. 1783, Bills of lading to and from Cape François (RBP, III: fol. 3); 31 Jan. 1784, Receipt for cargo of sugar and coffee on Venus (RBP, III: fol. 1); 5 Apr. 1784, Bill of lading from Portsmouth to Hispaniola, West Indies (RBP, III: fol. 1); 19 May 1784, Nusculus & Rondineau, account of goods shipped on Venus (RBP, III: fol. 1); 2 Oct. 1784, Shaw & Colland, Kingston, Jamaica, accounts for Venus and Jolly Tar (RBP, III: fol. 1); 15 Oct. 1784, 24 Jan. 1785, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth, concerning the sale of the Jolly Tar and Venus (RBP, IV: fol. 2; RBP, VI: fol. 24 Jan. 1785). In the spring 1784 voyage the Venus went to Cape St. Nicholas before returning to Portsmouth (June, 1784, Bill of lading, Cape St. Nicholas to Portsmouth [RBP, III: fol. 1]). The fate of the Venus is unknown (last document: 31 Dec. 1784, Ship's articles, bound for Port au Prince [RBP, V: fol. 9]). The Jolly Tar returned to Virginia, carrying the return cargoes for both and was sold in January 1785, apparently in such bad condition that the captain refused to sail her to London (31 Dec. 1784, Jno. Rochelle to RB, Portsmouth [RBP, IV]).

³⁰29 Dec. 1783, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, III: fol. 3).

³¹9 Jan. 1785, Wm. Wynns, Winton, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, VI: fol. 9 Jan. 1785). In a letter of 15 March 1788, James Belcher of Cabin Point wrote to Blow, requesting aid in procuring a vessel to charter for a voyage to the West Indies and asking which of the islands afforded the best market for corn and lumber (BFP, Scrapbook, 163).

³²11 Oct. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 2).

³³15 Apr. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale, Portsmouth (RBP, IV: fol. 1).

³⁴8 Oct., 14 Nov., 20 Dec. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to RB (RBP, III: fol. 3); 6 Mar. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 1).

³⁵12 Dec. 1783, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, III: fol. 3); 5 Aug., 17 & 19 Aug., 1783, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, III: fol. 2); 8 Oct. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, III: fol. 3); 20 Dec. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to RB (RBP, III: fol. 3).

Crew described the trading situation to Blow in his letter of 20 Dec. 1783 (ibid.):

"It is a custom which took place during the war
(and still continues to be so) to sell all Tobacco at public

sale and to allow the broker 1 P Ct on the gros sales. I hope the custom is now about being at an end for I am convinced the brokers have too much in their power by the present mode, and the brokerage they charge is extravagat. I have conversed with some of the purchasers and manufactors, as well as with some importers of that article, who wish to fall into some other mode. When I have any Tobacco I will try if I cannot sell it at private sale and employ a broker no further than in their proper line, that of looking out for purchasers, for which they do not have any such extravagant broker-age. I shall take care to employ a better man as broker hereafter.

"We are lately relieved by the government here from a very great hardship, that of being obliged to pay down part of the duties before Tobacco could be landed or sold. I was obliged to advance upwards of £1000 for the Jolly Tars Cargo before it could be landed which I was obliged to get the broker to pay for me, this I suppose might induce him to do the business so as to pay himself very well for his advances. Nothing now is required to be paid till the Tobacco is taken out of the Kings warehouse which must not be more than twelve months."

Crew was referring to the Orders in Council of 5 and 19 November 1783 (see p. 24 and n. 2).

³⁶17 & 19 Aug. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to RB (RBP, III: fol. 2); 20 Jan., Robert Crew, London, to RB (RBP, IV: fol. 1); 6 Mar. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 1).

³⁷Boyd, op. cit., XV, 644 n.; Alan Schaffer, "Virginia's 'Critical Period,'" in The Old Dominion: Essays for Thomas Perkins Abernethy, ed. by Darrett B. Rutman (Charlottesville, 1964), pp. 161, 163; Emory G. Evans, "Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796," WMQ, 3d. ser., XXVIII (1971), 361.

³⁸20 Dec. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to RB (RBP, III: fol. 3); 6 Mar., 15 Apr., 31 May 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 1); 20 Sept. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 2); Rosenblatt, "The Significance of Credit in the Tobacco Consignment Trade: A Study of John Norton & Sons, 1768-1775," WMQ, 3d. ser., XIX (1962), 385-86; 29 Dec. 1783, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, III: fol. 3); 3 Nov. 1784, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, IV: fol. 2); 1 Mar. 1786, Robert Crew, London, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, VIII: fol. 1 Mar. 1786); 10 Oct. 1786, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, London (RBP, VI: fol. 1).

³⁹For Crew's admonishments and criticism of the manner in which they were carrying on their trade, see 5 Aug., 17 & 19

Aug. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, III: fol. 2); 8 Oct., 20 Dec. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to RB (RBP, III: fol. 3); 6 Mar., 15 Apr., 31 May 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 1); 8 Mar. 1784, Robert Crew to RB (RBP, IV: fol. 1); 12 Aug., 28 Sept., 11 Oct., and 18 Dec. 1784 (RBP, IV: fol. 2).

See Appendix A for a detailed depiction of Blow & Barksdale's difficulties in 1783-1784 and of Crew's criticism.

⁴⁰In a letter of 12 Aug. 1784 to Blow & Barksdale, Crew wrote, "the house here of Pegou & Co who have been very large in the Philadelphia business have lately stoped payt. for a very great sum owing to disappointments in remittances from their correspondents. Mr Ross and his partner here have deceived the people here in an infamous manner by not making any remittances for the great quantity of goods shiped from here. Instead of remitting for the good, Ross has been drawing on Edwards for between nine and ten thousand pounds Stl which he accepted without any probability of being able to pay when they became due and they are now protested and going back to Virginia.

"Those with several other stopages of payment has affected the credit of every American, or American house very sensibly and causes every person in the American line to meet with many instances of diffidence in giving them credit, which could not otherwise have been the case and will require any new settler here being very cautious in supporting his credit, which those that do for a little time to come will find a great advantage by establishing a good credit ever afterwards. . . . There is a report just circulated here that Mr R Morris of Phila. has stoped payment. I hope it is not true, there is so many failures in the American line lately that I am affraid none of us will be trusted shortly" (RBP, IV: fol. 2).

⁴¹11 Oct. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 2). See also, 18 Dec. 1784, same to same (RBP, IV: fol. 2).

⁴²12 and 29 Dec. 1783, William Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, III: fol. 3); 6 Mar. and 31 May 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 1); 29 Apr. 1784, William Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, IV: fol. 1); 12 July, 27 Sept., 15 Oct., and 3 Nov. 1784, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, IV: fol. 2).

⁴³8 Nov. 1784, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, IV: fol. 2).

⁴⁴20 Sept., 11 Oct. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, IV: fol. 2); 1 Mar. 1785, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, VI: fol. 1 Mar. 1785).

⁴⁵See 24 Jan., 27 Feb., 1 Mar., 29 Mar. 1785, William

Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, VI: folders dated same as letters); 22 June 1785, same, in Halifax Mr. Yuilles, to same (RBP, VI: fol. 22 June 1785); 31 July, 10 Oct. 1785, same, Petersburg, to same, London c/o Donald & Burton (RBP, VI: fols. dated); 8 Aug. 1785, Barksdale, Petersburg, to Thos. Bland, Portsmouth (RBP, VI: fol. 8 Aug. 1785).

The firm of Donald & Burton had prewar commercial connections in Virginia. Alexander Donald had first come to Virginia in the early 1760s as a British factor. He re-established himself in Richmond after the war as an American citizen while Robert Burton, a man of substantial means, maintained the house in London (Coakley, op. cit., pp. 54-55; Boyd, op. cit., XII, 348; XVI, 383, 592; 8 July 1786, Robert Crew, London, to RB [RBP, VIII: fol. 8 July 1786]). Burton claimed that "in carrying on our business, we are often obliged to be £30 to £40,000 in advance for all Our Connections" (27 Mar. 1787, Robert Burton, London, to RB [RBP, IXA: fol. 27 Mar. 1787]).

CHAPTER IV

THE ENTANGLEMENT OF RICHARD BLOW IN INDEBTEDNESS, 1785-1790

Blow & Barksdale were victims of the depression which took hold of Virginia in 1785. They along with other merchants had indulged in the 1784-1785 period of speculation and intense commercial activity, which had been underwritten by easy credit. Merchants had overbought beyond the needs of the people and their own means of paying. Domestic exports to Britain could not cover the cost, and the closing of the West Indies had eliminated the provisions trade by which Virginians had earned their credits to pay for British goods.¹ The unfavorable balance of trade drained Virginia of specie and made the collection of debts increasingly difficult. Tobacco prices fell to 18 to 23 shillings per hundredweight for the period 1785-1787.² The Farmers-General's tobacco contract with Robert Morris worsened the situation by undercutting the price of tobacco and monopolizing the market.³

Merchants such as Blow & Barksdale were caught in an interlocking network of credit and debt. They were forced to be long-term creditors to the planters and necessarily to be debtors to their suppliers. Unable to collect from the planters, they were unable to pay their own debts. The policies pursued in the Virginia legislature and courts in general did

not encourage the development of a capitalist-creditor class.⁴

By the mid-1780s a chorus of complaints from native merchants arose, demanding prohibition of British trade, exclusion of British merchants, encouragement of native commerce, and repeal of the naval office act--the petition against which was signed by Blow.⁵ On 14 Feb. 1787 Thomas Brown reported to Gov. Edmund Randolph on the meeting of Portsmouth merchants who were petitioning for the repeal of the act:

Upon the whole, we are of opinion that the several laws passed at the last Sessions of Assembly, relative to Trade and regulations of the Customs, appear to be founded on imperfect and partial information, and that so far from producing a permanent addition to the Revenue, they will probably tend to decrease it by lessening the importations, and consequently affecting the price and value of our Exports.⁶

A few days later Charles Lee, the naval officer of South Potomac, related the bad consequences of the current navigation system of Virginia and the adverse effects of the commercial laws on the merchants and trade in general.⁷ Randolph, in turn, relayed more depressing information to the Virginia delegates in Congress:

The complaints of our merchants against the pressures of the late laws of trade have formed a distressing picture of our commerce: Yesterday was handed to me an address in folio from the mercantile interest at Norfolk; representing among a gloomy group instances of vessels, having touched in Virginia and immediately abandoning it for Maryland. Unfortunately too they were not acquainted with a tax of 6d. per month on Virginia seamen alone for the payment of annuities to the widows of sailors, registered, and the necessity of incurring a fee of pilotage, even for the smallest sea vessels. The act imposing the 6d. being of the revised code, and having passed in October 1785, crept into existence, unthought of at the last session, while the assembly were accumulating duties; and the fee of pilotage was certainly unknown to be capable of such desolation in our small shipping.⁸

Myra L. Rich summed up the effects of Virginians' dependence on an agricultural economy:

Because of the scarcity of specie and their commitment to land, to agriculture, and hence to regular borrowing, Virginia never accumulated capital or developed a class of native merchants who might in time have supplied it. Even the brief period of self-sufficiency during and immediately after the Revolution failed to provide the necessary impetus for Virginians to create their own capital and commercial services. Rather, they continued to rely on those sources of capital that were readily available: the merchants of Britain and the North.⁹

Here, then, was Blow's dilemma. Operating free of British merchants and restrictions during the Revolution, Blow had attempted to extend his independent mercantile activities after the war. By sending an American agent to England, Blow & Barksdale had a chance to keep themselves free of British commercial charges and long-term credit. But Crew had quickly detached himself from their interest and identified himself with the British mercantile community. Through their inexperience and eagerness to partake in the prosperous post-war trade, they had overextended themselves and by 1785 were in debt to British creditors (Crew and Oxley & Hancock) for some £3692.18.5½. In the summer of 1785 Blow went to England and arranged for Donald & Burton to take over this debt.¹⁰

That they had accrued such a debt is understandable since they had shipped most of their exports to Britain, rather than pursuing the other channels of trade which Blow seemed to have considered in 1783. In general, the value of British imports was three to five times greater than the value of American exports to Great Britain. To offset this unfavorable balance

of trade, Americans had to export to Europe and the West Indies and to transfer credits from there to Great Britain.¹¹ This Blow & Barksdale had not been able to do. They had reverted to the colonial pattern of total dependence on British commercial centers for market, credit, and goods.

After the refinancing of their debt, Blow & Barksdale's situation did not improve. By forestalling legal action against them and restoring their credit, Donald & Burton had obligated Blow & Barksdale to consign all their exports to them. The British firm also extended further credit to them to import goods. By 1787 the debt had grown to £9092.19.1, mainly owed by Blow. Barksdale apparently was able to make respectable remittances for the goods he ordered for his Petersburg store, but Blow made no payments on his own account. Blow's problem stemmed from involvement in the network of debts in Virginia. Barksdale wrote Robert Burton that Blow's "information to you that £40,000 being due on the different concerns wherein he had an Interest, it is very true, but the Laws of our Country is such that we cannot come at it."¹² At the same time Blow owed a number of outstanding debts, among them £3318.17.6 to Isaac Hazelhurst, £1121 to Daniel Tyson, £647.8 to Cornelius Buck, £600.5 to Stephen Lyon. Most of these debts were from unsettled accounts of the Revolutionary firm of Baker & Blow. Blow was forced to make payments to Hazelhurst and Tyson, but he was unable to collect much on the debts owed him.¹³

Virginians' inability to extricate themselves from the

entanglement of debts was made worse by the fact that the county courts were inadequate, overburdened, and reluctant to enforce payment. By refusing to allow the circuit court system to become operative, the Virginia legislature prevented reform which would have insured prompt discharge of debts. Not until 1788 with the creation of the district courts did Virginians have recourse to a more effective means of collecting debts. In 1786 debts had been made assignable so that a note could be transferred in payment of an obligation, which facilitated collection. The ratification of the Constitution and establishment of the federal courts also encouraged settlement of debts.¹⁴

For Blow these changes in policy clearly made a difference. Beginning in 1788 and continuing through 1790 Blow's correspondence is full of letters concerning suits in court, both for and against him, and payment and collection of debts. These actions to clear his debts, however, came too late to save Blow's credit with Donald & Burton. In 1788 Donald demanded security on Blow's real estate. As he had told Blow a year earlier, they had given him credit on the knowledge that Blow had "a large Property in possession," and with the understanding that Blow would sell whatever was necessary to meet his financial obligations to Donald & Burton. Donald commented, "I know that this doctrine is not much understood in this Country, but it is nevertheless Just & proper."¹⁵ Although Blow claimed that he had "not a particle of property in the world, that he can at the one half of its value turn into money"¹⁶ (which was probably true, because of the depression

and consequent devaluation), Donald had hit upon a cause of Virginia's commercial backwardness: the investment of capital in land and slaves and the reluctance to liquidate those assets to free money for liquid investments. Blow was a planter as well as a merchant, and the latter occupation suffered on behalf of the former.

In February 1789 Blow came to a determination to import no more goods and

to stop business untill I can git relieved from my present imbarishment, some time past I proposed to Mr. Barksdale to Stop importing any Goods for next fall, and make all the collection we could and pay of. but he was not disposed to come into the measure, and in consequence I proposed to him to wind up our concern, which we have agreed to do, a dissolution will take place the 1st. September next. you will therefore Ship no more Goods on our account after this reaches you.¹⁷

By 1789 Blow's debt to them totalled £9943.3.11.¹⁸

In attempting to make remuneration on this debt to Donald & Burton, in the latter part of the decade Blow pursued several new channels of trade. Beginning with Blow & Barksdale's fall 1786 tobacco shipments, they took advantage of the opening of the French market. They directed their ships to Collow frères, Carmichael & Co. in Havre de Grace (Le Havre), who were connected with Donald & Burton and who transferred all credit earned by Blow & Barksdale from their tobacco sales to the London firm.¹⁹ Despite the Farmers-General's reluctance in complying with the order to buy 15,000 hogsheads on the free market, Collow frères, Carmichael & Co. were able to dispose of most of their tobacco.²⁰ Encouraged with the good price, Blow & Barksdale continued to ship to France, and in 1788 they

contracted with Messrs. Brothers De Bacque of Dunkirk to make joint speculative shipments to that port. Most of the proceeds of those voyages also were drawn in favor of Donald & Burton.²¹

In the fall of 1789 the saleable tobacco crop was reduced by half due to a severe frost. Prices rose, planters held tobacco back, and freights to Europe became increasingly difficult to obtain.²² Furthermore, after the French Revolution had gotten underway, the uncertainty of the French market discouraged merchants from shipping tobacco to that country.²³ Unable to procure any freight to Europe, Blow decided to ship naval stores, flour, and herring to the French West Indies in the winter of 1789-1790. Blow's "Ship made me a tolerable good Voyage;...she brought me in a Cargo that was worth about £1250."²⁴ Tobacco prices remained high and freights low into the spring of 1790, so Blow sent his ship Portsmouth back to Port au Prince in the early summer with lumber, flour, herring, and tobacco. He also sent his sloop Polly out to Martinique in the fall with corn and flour. The return cargoes consisted mainly of salt, molasses, and sugar, which he intended to "turn...into the needful" in order to make remittance to Donald & Burton.²⁵

The Portsmouth's second voyage in the summer was not as profitable as Blow had hoped, however; £1000 worth of cargo had been left behind, the returns from and remnants of which the sloop Polly was sent out to retrieve in the fall. The highly speculative nature of the West Indies trade, because of the rapid fluctuation of commodity prices and the restrictions

on American trade with the French islands, contributed to the disappointing results of Blow's second venture.²⁶

In order further to help pay off his debt, Blow during this same period of 1789-1790 was acting as port agent in Portsmouth and Norfolk for Alexander Donald and Donald's manager James Brown in Richmond.²⁷ Blow directed the provisioning, loading, receiving, and entering of their ships and advanced his own funds to complete their cargoes, furnish supplies, and pay port charges. Blow sent his ship to the West Indies instead of Europe in 1790 partly because he was so occupied in supervising their shipping.²⁸ These commercial endeavors on Blow's part seem to have pretty well cleared his debt with Donald & Burton.²⁹

By the middle of 1790 Blow was clearly preparing once again to set himself up in the mercantile line, with a store in Petersburg under the direction of his nephew Samuel Briggs, one in Norfolk, and one in Portsmouth, both under his own management.³⁰ Despite his trial of the French, West Indian, and Dutch³¹ markets, Blow planned to keep his shipping primarily in the channel of trade between Great Britain and Virginia, although he apparently expected to do enough trading in the islands to provide his Petersburg store with West India goods. In outlining his intentions, Blow's correspondence in 1790 gives a good indication of the sources of his difficulties during the 1780s. He wanted to ship to Liverpool, or possibly Glasgow, not London, because port charges were cheaper and merchandize available on better terms in the out ports. Rather

than shipping solely on his own account, he hoped to ship freight for others and to act as a correspondent and provisioning agent for merchants in Britain or France who were interested in doing business in Virginia or the West Indies.³² Blow claimed that on the sales of tobacco in London, the charges came to "a Guinea a hogshead... [which] we could no longer bear to pay" Donald & Burton.³³ But more important than his determination to avoid the high costs of trading to London was his decision to extricate himself from the country store business with Barksdale in Virginia and not to re-establish himself in it upon his reentry into trade in 1790.

Besides the Portsmouth and Petersburg stores, Blow & Barksdale had maintained a number of country stores: at Blow's plantation Tower Hill in Sussex, at "Mr. Yuille's" in Halifax, at Charlotte Court House.³⁴ In 1785 they established a store in Cross Creek, North Carolina, where Barksdale thought there was "the Greatest opening for an advantageous business of any in our Country, our state is over Stocked at present with Country Stores."³⁵ This expansion of stores came just as the post-war depression hit Virginia, and with the advent of tight credit and scarce specie, merchants such as Blow & Barksdale found it increasingly difficult to compete for the planters' trade and to collect payment from them. Forced to go further in debt on a short-term basis to Donald & Burton in order to supply the stores with goods to attract the planters' trade, they at the same time had to extend long-term credit to their customers in Virginia. Consequently Blow & Barksdale had been

caught in a credit squeeze between Donald & Burton on the one hand and their country store clientele on the other; their situation was typical of Virginia merchants in this period.³⁶

One of the major problems for Blow & Barksdale in winding up their business concern in 1790 was the collection of debts due their back stores.³⁷ Blow laid part of the blame for his commercial failure on the country store trade. He declared in 1790, "I shall have no person concernd with me, or any thing to do with back Stores which I have sufferd very much by in my late concern at Petersburg by the extensive credits we gave."³⁸

Burton had warned Blow in 1785 against sinking into the downward cycle of credit and debt in Virginia:

We beg to recommend to you in the most earnest manner a Collection of your Outstanding Debts this year, which we Know are extensive....giving Credit has been & ever will be the bane of the Virga trade, it ought to be done away with as far as possible--never give an extensive or long one to any person--If you adhere to this, and avoid sinking profits on your trade as they are made on lands & Slaves, you will soon Carry on a most beneficial business.³⁹

But it was just this cycle out of which Blow was unable to break. As the decade progressed, the state of Blow's business paralleled that of Virginia's economy. Blow simply did not have the financial resources at hand to free himself from the entrenched habits and economic pattern of trade in Virginia.

NOTES

¹Ernest L. Bogart and Donald L. Kemmerer, Economic History of the American People (New York, London, Toronto, 1947), p. 184.

²Myra L. Rich, "Speculations on the Significance of Debt: Virginia, 1781-1789," VMHB, LXXVI (1968), 302-9; Evans, "Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796," WMQ, 3d. ser., XXVIII (1971), 362; Isaac S. Harrell, Loyalism in Virginia: Chapters in the Economic History of the Revolution (1926; reprint New York, 1965), p. 123.

³Morris's firm agreed to deliver 20,000 hogsheads for each of three years, 1785, 1786, and 1787, to the Farmers-General, who agreed to pay 36 livres tournois per hundred-weight minus certain deductions and agreed not to purchase tobacco from any other source. Morris received an advance of one million livres to manipulate the market. Jefferson claimed that this brought the price down from 40/ to 22/6 per hundred-weight in Virginia. He and Lafayette succeeded in convincing the French government to compel the Farmers-General in 1786 to buy up to 15,000 hogsheads per year imported by independent merchants and to pay 34 to 38 livres per hundredweight. However the French contractors evaded the government order, causing a glut on the French market and losses to those who took advantage of the open market (Rich, "Speculations on the Significance of Debt: Virginia, 1781-1789," VMHB, LXXVI [1968], 308-9; Gray, op. cit., II, 603-4; Schaffer, "Virginia's 'Critical Period'" in The Old Dominion: Essays for Thomas Perkins Abernethy, ed. by Rutman, pp. 167-68; Frederick L. Nussbaum, "American Tobacco and French Politics, 1783-1789," Political Science Quarterly, XL [1925], 501-3).

⁴Rich, "Speculations on the Significance of Debt: Virginia, 1781-1789," VMHB, LXXVI (1968), 302-5, 313-16; Harrington, op. cit., p. 61 and passim.

⁵Introduction and Introduction, n. 10; ca. February 1787, Memorial from merchants of Portsmouth &c., Enclosure #7, in 15 Oct. 1787, Gov. Edmund Randolph to Speaker of the House of Delegates (Executive Communications [Vi]; Evans, "Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796," WMQ, 3d. ser., XXVIII [1971], 369).

⁶14 Feb. 1787, Thomas Brown to Gov. Edmund Randolph, in William P. Palmer et al., eds., Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts (11 vols., Richmond, 1875-93), IV, 240.

⁷19 Feb. 1787, Charles Lee to Gov. Edmund Randolph, in *ibid.*, IV, 245-46.

⁸15 Mar. 1787, Edmund Randolph to Virginia Delegates, in Hutchinson, op. cit., IX, 312. See also *ibid.*, 313 nn. 1, 2.

⁹Rich, "Speculation on the Significance of Debt: Virginia, 1781-1789," VMHB, LXXVI (1968), 317.

¹⁰24 Aug. 1785, Receipt from Blow & Barksdale for draft on Donald & Burton in favor of Oxley & Hancock (RBP, VII); 24 Aug. 1785, Robert Crew, Receipt from Blow & Barksdale (RBP, VI); 27 Mar. 1787, Robert Burton, London, to RB (RBP, IXA: fol. 27 Mar. 1787).

¹¹Herbert Heaton, "The American Trade," in The Trade Winds: A Study of British Overseas Trade during the French Wars, 1793-1815, ed. by C. Northcote Parkinson (London, 1948), pp. 201-2.

¹²19 Dec. 1786, Barksdale, Petersburg, to Robert Burton (RBP, VIII: fol. 19 Dec. 1786); 14 Mar. 1787, Donald & Burton, London, to RB (RBP, IXA: fol. 14 Mar. 1787); 27 Mar. 1787, Robert Burton, London, to RB (RBP, IXA: fol. 27 Mar. 1787); 28 Feb. 1788, Alexander Donald, Richmond, to RB (RBP, X: fol. 26); 15 Aug. 1789, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

¹³26 Apr. 1785, Isaac Hazlehurst, Philadelphia, to Baker & Blow, South Quay (RBP, VI); 6 Dec. 1786, Daniel Tyson, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, VIII: fol. 6 Dec. 1786); 20 Apr. 1789, Daniel Tyson, Philadelphia, to RB, Portsmouth (BFP, IIIA: fol. 9); 16 May 1787, RB's bond to Cornelius Buck (RBP, IXA: fol. 16 May 1787); 27 Nov. 1788, Campbell & Wheeler, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth (RBP, X: fol. 90); 15 Aug. 1789, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795). Correspondence concerning Blow's debts is scattered throughout his papers.

¹⁴Hutchinson, op. cit., VIII, 163-64, 475, 481, n. 6; IX, 66-67, 68 n.1, 150, 200, 243, 245 n.1; Rich, "Speculations on the Significance of Debt: Virginia, 1781-1789," VMHB, LXXVI (1968), 302, 315-16; Hening, op. cit., XII, 358-59, 730-66; Evans, "Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796," WMQ, 3d. ser., XXVIII (1971), 371; Harrell, op. cit., pp. 157-73.

¹⁵28 Feb. 1788, Alexander Donald, Richmond, to RB (RBP, X: fol. 26); 22 Mar. 1787, Alexander Donald, Richmond, to RB (BFP, I: fol. 1[12]).

During the 1780s Blow had at most 2777 acres, 4 lots, 59 slaves, 22 horses, and 86 cattle, based on the extant records; he may have owned more (see Appendix B). Compared to Jackson T. Main's hundred richest Virginians in the 1780s (Blow was not among them), Blow was a middling to well-to-do planter, but certainly would not fall into the category of the very wealthy ("The One Hundred," WMQ, 3d. ser., XI [1954], 354-84).

¹⁶ 19 Dec. 1786, Barksdale, Petersburg, to Robert Burton (RBP, VIII: fol. 19 Dec. 1786).

¹⁷ 16 Feb. 1789, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton, London (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

¹⁸ 13 Apr. 1789, Donald & Burton, London, to RB (RBP, IX: fol. 4).

¹⁹ 24 July 1786, Donald & Burton, London, to RB (RBP, VIII: fol. 24 July 1786); 14 Nov. 1786, Donald & Burton, London, to RB (RBP, VIII: fol. 14 Nov. 1786); 31 Jan. 1787, Donald & Burton, London, to RB (RBP, IXA: fol. 31 Jan. 1787); 2 Sept. 1786, Barksdale, Philadelphia, to RB (RBP, VIII: fol. 2 Sept. 1786).

²⁰ 31 Mar. 1787, Collow frères, Carmichael & Co., Havre, to RB (RBP, IXA: fol. 31 Mar. 1787).

²¹ 12 June, 12 Nov., 4 Dec. 1788, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, X: fols. 47, 86, 91); 31 Mar., 10 Apr. 1789, Brothers De Bacque, Dunkirk (RBP, IX: fol. Receipts 1789); 7 Feb. 1789, RB, Portsmouth, to Messrs. Bordieu, Chollet & Bordieu (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 15 Feb. 1789, RB, Portsmouth, to Brothers De Bacque (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

²² Gray, op. cit., II, 605.

²³ The National Assembly, initially undecided about restrictions on tobacco, finally in 1791 removed the prohibition on domestic cultivation, which further depressed the demand for imports (Price, op. cit., II, 828; see also, 24 Aug. 1790, Collow frères, Carmichael & Co., Havre, to RB [RBP, XI: fol. 1]).

²⁴ 13 June 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to James Marsh (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

²⁵ 24 Jan., 13 June 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Brothers De Bacque (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 26 Jan. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Capt. John Cox (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 20 Feb. 1790, John Cox, Port au Prince, to RB (RBP, XI: fol. 1); RB, Portsmouth, to Capt. John Cox (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 5 June 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Capt. John Cox (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 17 July 1790, William Moore, Port au Prince, to RB (RBP, XII: fol. 2); 25 July 1790, John Cox, Port au Prince, to RB (RBP, XII: fol. 2); 1 Sept. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 2 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Capt. John Brown (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

Blow had sent the sloop Polly on a speculative venture to Cape François the summer before. She went out with a cargo of rice and lumber and returned with salt from Turks Island and with a little sugar and coffee (22 June 1789, RB,

Portsmouth, to Capt. Daniel Webb [BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795]; 14 Aug. 1789, Receipt to Capt. Webb, Cape François, and Aug. 1789, Bill of Lading, Turks Island [RBP, IX: fol. 5]; 18 Sept. 1789, Daniel Webb, Portsmouth, to RB [RBP, IX: fol. 4]).

²⁶12 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); Gray, op. cit., II, 607; Nussbaum, "The French Colonial Arrêt of 1784," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXVII (1928), 69-78.

When Blow's ship arrived in the islands, there was a glut on the market for much of the cargo: boards, shingles, scantling, tobacco. American fish was not competitive with French cod because of the premium given on the latter. Blow also risked smuggling sugar back to Virginia because of the demand for it (5 June 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Capt. John Cox [BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795]; 17 July 1790, William Moore, Port au Prince, to RB [RBP, XII: fol. 2]; 25 July 1790, John Cox, Port au Prince, to RB [2 letters; RBP, XII: fol. 2]).

²⁷For reference to James Brown as Donald's agent, see Boyd, op. cit., XVI, 29.

²⁸13 June 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to James Marsh (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 9 July 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

²⁹12 May, 9 July, 12 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

³⁰12 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

³¹Blow shipped some tobacco to Rotterdam in 1789, but was disappointed in the sales and thus decided against making a larger shipment (2 Aug. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Messrs. Gerhard Walters & Sons [BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795]).

³²12 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Donald & Burton (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 18 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Capt. John Powell (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 2 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to James Sterling (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 3 July 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to Messrs. Collow frères, Carmichael & Co. (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795); 2 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to James Baird (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

³³15 Aug. 1789, RB, Portsmouth, to Messrs. Brothers De Bacque (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

³⁴22 June 1785, Barksdale, "in Halifax Mr. Yuille's," to RB (RBP, VI: fol. 22 June 1785); 31 July 1785, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, VI).

³⁵6 Nov. 1785, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, VI: fol. 6 Nov. 1785).

³⁶ Blow's shopkeeper at Charlotte Court House wrote, "I find there is not half the chance of Trade in this Part of the country now as was last fall owing to the great number of back Stores settled Since then for now if you do not exactly Suit them in every article they may want they go immediately to some of our Neighbours & there lay out there Tobacco. There is a fine store Just now sett out within about two miles of us which is well assorted and sells cheap so of course must take a part of the cash & Tobacco in circulation" (9 Mar. 1785, Robert Rives, Charlotte Court House, to RB [RBP, VI: fol. 9 Mar. 1785]).

Rives wrote a month later, "I think we have had our share of the Trade since I came here. which I shall always be content with rather than silling the goods for what they cost, which is done by some of our neighbours. Though I think they will not hold long as they seem depreciating fast, that is to say not complying with there contracts. we have made but an indifferent collection of our last years debts as yet. though I think the greater part of them we shall git in the course of this month. I shall make it a point while I continue here to trust none but those I know to be Punctual forehanded men. our customers that pays of[f] now we must be oblige to trust untill the next fall. I find there is not much business to be done in the back country without giving Credit to such men as I have mentioned for the best of Planters has not money oftener than once a year" (9 Apr. 1785, Robert Rives, Charlotte Court House, to RB [RBP, VI: fol. 9 Apr. 1785]). See also 15 Apr. 1785, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB (RBP, VI: fol. 15 Apr. 1785).

For a general discussion of Virginia merchants' credit problems during the 1780s, see Harrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-68.

³⁷ Barksdale wrote to Blow a number of times complaining of the poor collections he was able to make on the various stores' debts and of the "deranged" state of their accounts (24 Feb., 9 Mar., 14 Apr., 1 July 1790, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB [RBP, XII: fol. 3]).

³⁸ 2 Oct. 1790, RB, Portsmouth, to James Sterling (BFP, Letterbook 1789-1795).

³⁹ 10 Dec. 1785, Donald & Burton, London, to Blow & Barksdale (RBP, VI: fol. 10 Dec. 1785).

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF THE 1783-1784 CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ROBERT CREW AND BLOW & BARKSDALE

The correspondence between Robert Crew and Blow & Barksdale for the period 1783-1784 gives a detailed account of the problems encountered by Blow & Barksdale in their commercial endeavors. In Crew's criticism and advice can be found not only an analysis of Blow & Barksdale's difficulties, but also a more general statement about the methods of conducting the tobacco trade.

In Blow's letter of 18 May 1783 to Barksdale, he said he expected to get between £10 and £15 per hogshead of tobacco from the full cargoes of the three vessels he intended to send to London that summer, which would pay for their fall goods (RBP, III: fol. 1). But Blow sent only one of the three ships, the Jolly Tar, whose cargo turned out to be damaged and of poor quality so that most of the tobacco was sold for reexportation at reduced prices (8 Oct., 20 Dec. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to RB, Portsmouth [RBP, III: fol. 3]). The cargo which Blow & Barksdale sent in the winter of 1784 turned out so badly that Crew had to throw 9000 pounds of it away and that the sale of what was sound was injured by its being "disfigured" (8 Mar. 1784, Robert Crew to RB [RBP, IV: fol. 1]).

Crew wrote in scathing sarcasm, "I admire your quickness

at calculating on having paid for your fall goods and got some thing handsom left. & the Vessel that was to bring the greatest part of the Tobo. from Virginia not having then left England and may never get here. the Tobo. being insured would not save our credit as the insurers never pay till after twelve months when a Vessel is not heard of. You also count £1000 on ginsang in Mr Williams hands you could not reasonably expect more than 2 or £300 for it, but probably may not ever get any thing" (6 Mar. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale [RBP, IV: fol. 1]). The brig Nelly, carrying some of Blow & Barksdale's tobacco to Oxley & Hancock, was shipwrecked in November 1783 (1783, Invoice of tobacco for Brig, Nelly [RBP, III: fol. 2]; 22 Jan. 1790, Samuel Kerr, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth [RBP, XII: fol. 1]). The loss of a cargo, upon which they were counting to help pay for their goods from England, constituted a setback both in their credit and in Crew's, who had extended his on their behalf. Crew had warned them from the first of the great advantage and importance of quickly paying for their goods in order to maintain their credit (17 & 19 Aug., 29 Aug. 1783, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale [RBP, III: fol. 2]). Having been disappointed in the fall of 1783 in the amount of tobacco which Blow finally sent over to him, Crew began to feel by the spring of 1784 that Blow & Barksdale were deceiving him, which was going to bring discredit on them and ruin and distress on himself. Crew wrote frankly of his skepticism, "You seem to be leading me again to expect what will not happen when you mention your new

Vessel to be ready by April or May. I will venture to predict that she will not sail till after September." In fact, Crew was too sanguine in his prediction, for the ship Portsmouth which Blow was having built did not sail until late spring of the following year (6 Mar. 1784, Robert Crew, London, to Blow & Barksdale [RBP, IV: fol. 1]; 15 Apr., 1785, Barksdale, Petersburg, to RB, Portsmouth [RBP, VI: fol. 15 Apr. 1785]; 22 June 1785, Barksdale, in Halifax Mr. Yuilles, to RB, c/o Donald & Burton Merchts, London [RBP, VI: fol. 22 June 1785, first copy]).

In a letter of 6 March 1784, Crew expressed his displeasure with the discovery that the tobacco which he was not receiving was instead being sent to Philadelphia and the Indies. "It must be a curious plan of sending Tobacco from Virginia to Philadelphia to sell; the merchants there would not be fools enough to buy it if they could not save themselves by shipping it to Europe; nor can goods be the better for coming through Philadelphia. It is very unlike a merchant, and more like a New England or Bermuda trader to be watching which is the best market---perhaps before the article gets there it is overstocked: the only sure way is to be constant to one great port where it is always sure to answer upon the whole, if the market should be dull at any time, a person should be in such a situation as not to be obliged to sell for want of money, but be able to keep up his Tobacco for a month or two. Let me assure you that no port in the world will answer so well as London for every kind of Tobacco, as there is agents here from every part of Europe who buy up the different qualities after it is sorted,

as it will suit the different countries, for in every Cargo there is Tobacco that must be consumed in quite different Countries" (RBP, IV: fol. 1).

Aside from Crew's sales pitch, there was truth in his observations. Blow & Barksdale lacked the capital necessary to support speculative ventures and consequently found themselves in the same position as planters--indebted to and dependent on British creditors. For men in Blow & Barksdale's position, the advice which Crew gave in his 6-7 March 1784 letter was quite sound: to establish their credit by promptly remitting a sufficient amount of good tobacco, to maintain punctual correspondence with one house, to ship consistently to one large port where the best markets could be found, and to refrain from expanding beyond their means. Crew was particularly critical of Blow's intention of venturing into the shipping business. Blow was building two ships, the wisdom of which investment Crew was very skeptical. "I am of opinion you would find it more to your advantage if you were not to own a single Vessel and I believe you will always find freight cheaper than having Vessels of your own....If you go on with an idea of fitting out a number of Vessels and keeping them running you will find them drain you of your money and perplex you in a manner you may not conceive till it is too late, and must most certainly cramp and injure your credit, unless you have a very great capital in ready money to go on with....I do not think you are well enough acquainted with shipping business (as it must be carried on in time of peace) to be entering into

it so largely as you seem to be doing. Nothing can be a more convincing proof to me, that you do not well understand it, than your talking of having your new Vessel out in time to bring home your next falls goods. If she can be here in time for your next springs goods I will venture to say it will be as much as she will do.

"No person is better acquainted with importing and selling goods; & purchasing Tobacco and other produce and shipping it than you are, and you will most certainly find it the most profitable and best business for you to bend your attention to, and push forward with spirit" (RBP, IV: fol. 1).

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF RICHARD BLOW'S PERSONAL PROPERTY AND LAND HOLDINGS, 1782-1790

It is not possible to determine exactly the amount of property that Blow owned during the 1780s or the extent to which he was buying and selling land or slaves. The personal property and land tax records are incomplete: not only are records entirely missing for some years, but for any particular year, one cannot be certain that the extant records are inclusive. The only known will of Blow's is in 1833 (Norfolk County Wills, Will Book 5, p. 316 [Vi (microfilm reel 50)]). Blow married Frances Wright (1767-1838) in 1786; there is no marriage bond for that year (Ancestral Records and Portraits. . . Colonial Dames of America, II, 787; Norfolk County Marriage Bonds [Vi (microfilm reel 74B)]). It is doubtful that Blow gained materially from the marriage; Frances' father Stephen Wright did not leave any property of substance to any of his daughters (7 Mar. 1779, Stephen Wright's will, Norfolk County Loose Wills, 1778-1845, Document #16 [Vi (microfilm reel 48a)]). Based on the known evidence, it seems reasonable to assume that Blow's property holdings remained relatively static or even slightly declined during the 1780s (although after his marriage he did indulge in the luxury of a phaeton and chair).

The personal property and land tax (including land alterations when extant) records for the period 1782-1790 for the following counties and cities were searched:

| County | Personal Property | Land | RB recorded |
|--|--|--|-------------|
| Surry Co. | 1782-1790 | 1782, 1787-1790 | no |
| | | alterations 1783-1786 | no |
| Sussex Co. | 1782-1790 | 1782, 1787-1790 alterations 1783-1786, 1788 | yes |
| Southampton Co. (An additional problem here is that there is at least one other Richard Blow recorded.) | 1782-1790 | 1782-1784 | yes |
| | | alterations 1784-1787 | no |
| | | 1788- | |
| | | 1790 | yes |
| Isle of Wight Co. (some years incomplete) | 1782-1790 | 1787-1790 | no/yes |
| Elizabeth City Co. (incomplete) | 1782-1790 | 1782-1790 | no |
| Norfolk Borough | 1783-1790 | 1787-1790 alterations 1782-1786 | no |
| Norfolk Co. | 1782-1783, 1785-1786 1784, 1787-1790 | 1787 | no |
| | | 1787-1790 | yes |
| | | alterations 1783, 1785-1786 | no |
| | | 1784-1785 | yes |
| Princess Anne Co. | 1782-1789 | 1782-1790 | no |
| Nansemond Co. | begins 1815 | 1782-1783, 1787-1789 | no |
| | | alterations 1784-1790 | no |
| City of Petersburg | 1788, 1790 1789 | 1790 | no |
| | | 1788-1789 | yes |

{ Blow &
Barksdale

| County | Personal Property | Land | RB recorded |
|----------------------|----------------------|--|-------------|
| Dinwiddie Co. | 1782-1789 | 1782, 1787-1790 alterations 1782-1785 | no no |
| Prince George Co. | 1782-1790 | 1782-1790 | no |
| Halifax Co. | 1782-1790 | 1782, 1784, 1787-1790 alterations 1783-1784, 1789 | no no |
| Charlotte Co. | 1782-1790 | 1782, 1787-1790 alterations 1783-1786 | no no |
| Chesterfield Co. | 1786, 1788, 1790 | begins 1791 | no |

TABLE I

PERSONAL PROPERTY--SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY

| <u>Southampton County</u> | <u>Free Tithables</u> | <u>Slaves</u> | <u>Horses</u> | <u>Cattle</u> | <u>Wheels</u> | <u>Tax</u> |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1782 (Richard Blow) (Martha Blow) | 1 1 | 16 9 | 3 10 | 34 38 | 0 0 | £9.4.6 6.96 |
| 1783 (Richard Blow) (Martha Blow) | 1 1 | 17 10 | 4 9 | 32 48 | 0 0 | |
| 1784 (RB) (MB) | 1 (1 under 16) 1 | 18 11 | 6 6 | 32 38 | 0 0 | |
| 1785 (RB)? (MB) | 1 | 11 6 | 3 4 | 18 38 | 0 0 | |
| 1786 (RB) (MB) | 1 | 8 7 | 2 4 | 16 27 | 0 0 | |
| 1787 (RB)? (MB) | 1 | 7 5 | 2 4 | 21 16* | 0 | |
| 1788 (RB)? | | 6 | 1 | | | |
| 1789 (RB)? | | 4 | 2 | | | |
| 1790 (RB)? | | 4 (over 16) | 2 | | | |

*Cattle were not assessed after 1787.

LAND---SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY

| <u>Southampton County</u> | <u>Acres</u> | <u>Price/A.</u> | <u>Price of Whole</u> | <u>l% on amount</u> |
|--|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1782 | 685 | 5/. | 171. 5.0 | 1.14.3 |
| 1783 | 685 | 15/1 | 516.12.1 | 7.15.0 |
| 1784 | 685 | 15/1 | 516.12.1 | 7.15.0 |
| Land alterations (Sept. 1787-Dec. 1788) From Martha Blow to RB | 685 | 15/1 | 516.12.1 | 7.15.0 |
| Land alterations (Dec. 1788-Oct. 1789) From Chas. Briggs to RB | 125 | 9/1 | 56.15.5 | 0.17.1 |
| 1790 Land alterations From Richard Marks to RB | 168 | 7/7 | 63.14.0 | 0.19.2 |

PERSONAL PROPERTY--SUSSEX COUNTY

| <u>Sussex County</u> | <u>White males 21 & over</u> | <u>Negroes</u> | <u>Horses</u> | <u>Cattle</u> | <u>Carriages & wheels</u> |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1782 RB | 3 | 28 | 12 | 50 | |
| 1783 RB John Kee, storekeeper Thos. James, overseer | 2 | 11 (tithes) 15 (not tithable) | 12 | 40 | |
| 1784 RB John Kee Thos. James | 2 | 16 (tithes) 12 (16-21 yrs.) | 11 | 33 | |
| 1785 RB John Key Thos. James | 2 | 14 (tithes) 11 (16-21 yrs.) | 12 | 50 | |
| 1786 RB John Key Thos. James | 2 | 15 (tithes) 11 (16-21 yrs.) | 10 | 50 | |
| 1787 RB Joshua Fort Howell Bosman | 1 (16-21 yrs.) | 16 (over 16 yrs.) 9 (under 16 yrs.) | 7 | 52 | |

(Personal Property--Sussex County, continued)

| <u>Sussex County</u> | <u>White males</u> <u>21 & over</u> | <u>Negroes</u> | <u>Horses</u> | <u>Cattle</u> | <u>Carriages &</u> <u>wheels</u> |
|----------------------|--|---|---------------|---------------|---|
| 1788 RB | 3 (over 16 yrs.) | 13 (over 16 yrs.) 2 (12-16 yrs.) | 6 | | |
| 1789 RB | 2 (over 16 yrs.) | 13 (over 16 yrs.) 2 (12-16 yrs.) | 8 | 2 | |
| 1790 RB | 1 (over 16 yrs.) | 13 (over 16 yrs.) 2 (12-16 yrs.) | 9 | 2 | |

LAND--SUSSEX COUNTY

| <u>Sussex County</u> | <u>Acres</u> | <u>Price/A.</u> | <u>Price of Whole</u> | <u>l% on amount</u> |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1782 | 1196 | 15/ | £ 657.16.0 | not listed |
| 1783 (land alterations) From Thos. Gilliam, Sr. to RB | 200 →203 | 6/7 6/7 | 65.16.8 66. 6.3 | 0.19.9 £1. 0.1 |
| 1784 | | | | |
| 1785 | | | | |
| 1786 (land alterations) From Holt Clanton to RB &c. | 190 →210 | 4/11 4/11 | 46.14.2 51.12.6 | 0.14.1 0.15.6 |
| 1787 " " (RB & Co.) | 1196 203 210 | 24/6 6/7 4/11 | 1465. 2.0 66.16.3 51.12.6 | 21.19.7 1. 0.1 0.15.6 |
| 1788 " (land alterations) RB &Co. to Jonathan Harp | 1196 203 -210 | 24/6 6/7 -4/11 | 1465. 2.0 66.16.3 -51.12.6 | 21.19.7 1. 0.1 -0.15.6 |
| 1789 | 1196 | 24/6 | 1465. 2.0 | 21.19.7 |
| 1790 | 1196 | 24/6 | 1465. 2.0 | 21.19.7 |

PERSONAL PROPERTY--ISLE OF WIGHT

Isle of Wight

1782-1790

No RB listed

LAND--ISLE OF WIGHT

| <u>Isle of Wight</u> | <u>Acres</u> | <u>Price/A.</u> | <u>Price of Whole</u> | <u>Tax</u> (@ 1½ p. A.) |
|--|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1787 (RB purchased of Richard Hardy) | 200 | 20/8 | £206.13.4 | 3. 2.0 |
| 1788 | 200 | 20/8 | 206.13.4 | 3. 2.0 |
| 1789 (records incomplete) | | | | |
| 1790 | 200 | 20/8 | 206.13.4 | 3. 2.0 |
| 1791 | 200 | 20/8 | 206.13.4 | 0.14.2 |

(@ 7/6 per
£100 value)

PERSONAL PROPERTY--NORFOLK COUNTY

| Norfolk County (includes Town of Portsmouth) | Free Males tithable | Free Males 16-21 yrs. | Slaves (over 16) | Slaves (under 16) | Horses | Cattle | Carriages & Wheels |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------|--------|------------------------|
| 1782 | | | | | | | |
| 1783 | | | | | | | |
| 1784 RB | 1 | 1 | 2 | | | | |
| 1785* | | | | | | | |
| 1786 | | | | | | | |
| 1787 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 1788 RB | 2 (over 16 yrs.) | | 6 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 (phaeton) |
| 1789 RB | 2 (over 16 yrs.) | | 7 | | 2 | 6 | 6 (phaeton & chair) |
| 1790 RB | 3 (over 16 yrs.) | | 6 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 6 (phaeton & chair) |

*1785 RB listed in census for Norfolk Co., "Portsmouth, South Side of the Western Branch to
New Mill Creek"
White souls - 3
Dwellings - 8

LAND--NORFOLK COUNTY

| <u>Norfolk County</u> (includes Town of Portsmouth) | <u>No. of Lots</u> | <u>Amount</u> | <u>Tax</u> |
|---|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1783* | | | |
| 1784 (land alterations) (fr. Richard Nestor to RB) | 1 | 400 | 6/ |
| 1785 (land alterations) (fr. RB to Thos Clarkson) | -1 [?] | -75 | -£1.2.6 |
| 1786 | | | |
| 1787 | | | |

| | <u>No. of Lots</u> | <u>Yearly Rent</u> | <u>Amt. tax @½PCT</u> |
|---------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1788 RB | 1 | £85.0.0 | £4. 5.0 |
| 1789 RB | 1 | 16.0.0 | 0.16.0 |
| 1790 | 1 | 32.0.0 | 1.12.0 |

*Land Alterations begin 1783, end 1786.
Land Books begin 1787.

PERSONAL PROPERTY--CITY OF PETERSBURG

| <u>City of</u> | <u>Negroes</u> | <u>Negroes</u> | <u>Horses</u> | <u>Wheels &</u> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| <u>Petersburg</u> | <u>(over 16 yrs.)</u> | <u>(12-16 yrs.)</u> | | <u>Carriages</u> |
| 1788 Blow & Barksdale | | | | |
| 1789 Blow & Barksdale | 2 5/ | 1 5/ | 2 1/ | 2 charriots 18/ |
| 1790 | | | | |

Tax:

LAND--CITY OF PETERSBURG

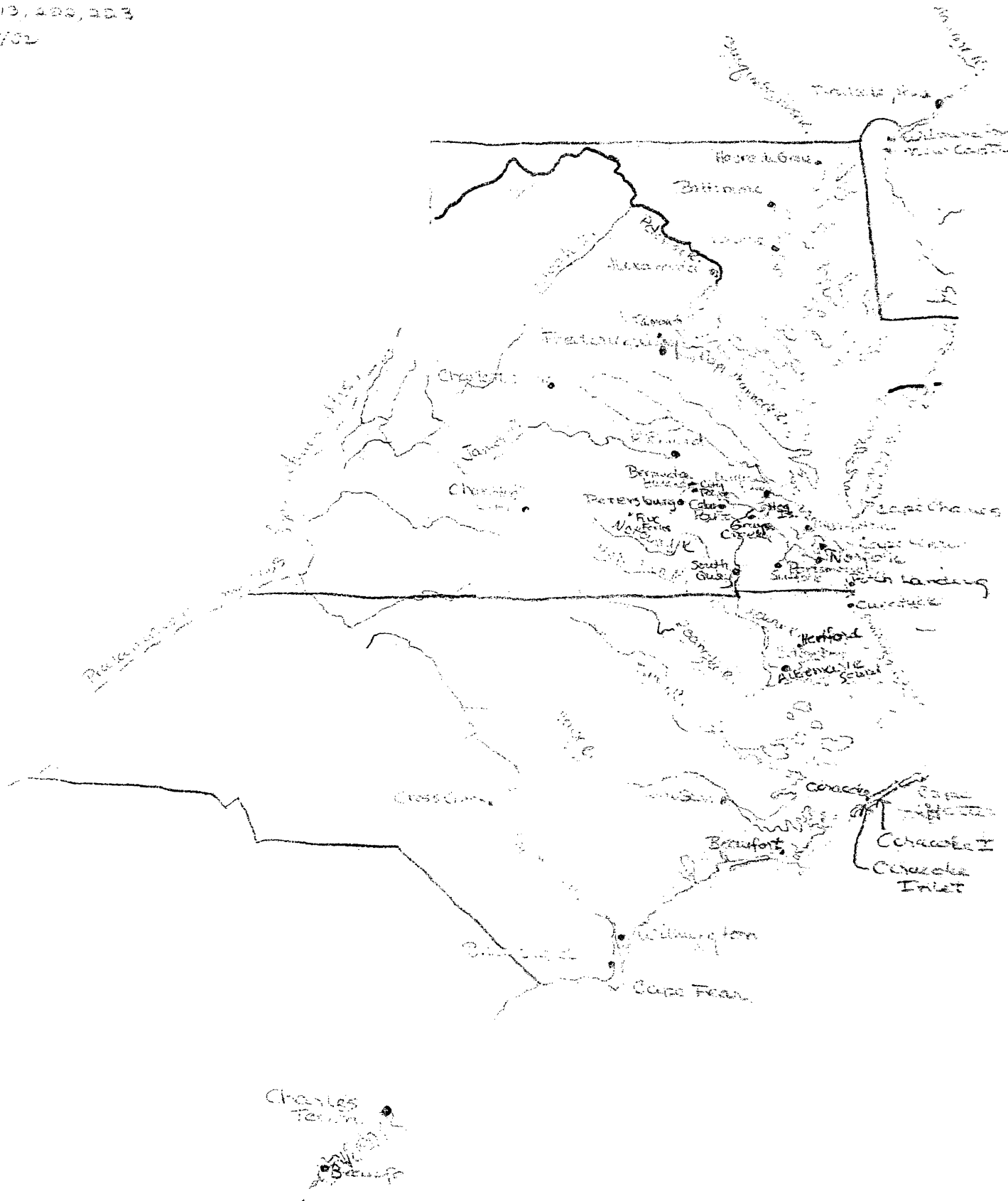
| <u>City of Petersburg</u> | <u>No. of Lots</u> | <u>Yearly Rent</u> | <u>Quantity of land</u> | <u>Tax [5% on annual rent]</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1788 Blow & Barksdale | 1 | £90.0.0 | store & mansion | blank |
| 1789 Blow & Barksdale | 1 | 40.0.0 | thin store | [2½%/annuity of land] |
| | 1 | 20.0.0 | Josf. Stacey's store or shop | |
| | 1 | 17.0.0 | Mrs. Bradley's Tenemt. | |
| | 1 | 70.0.0 | store & mansion house | [5%/annuity of land] |
| | (in Dinwiddie) | | | |

1790

100-2000, New York, 1960.

17, 155, 210, 400, 2003

4-1, 7-702



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