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# A sufficient Competence to make them Independent: Attitudes towards Authority, Improvement and Independence in the Carolina-Virginia Backcountry, 1760-1800

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Larry Anthony Wise entitled "A sufficient Competence to make them Independent: Attitudes towards Authority, Improvement and Independence in the Carolina-Virginia Backcountry, 1760-1800." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

William Bruce Wheeler, Major Professor

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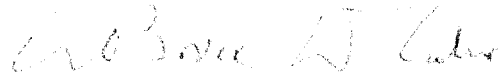
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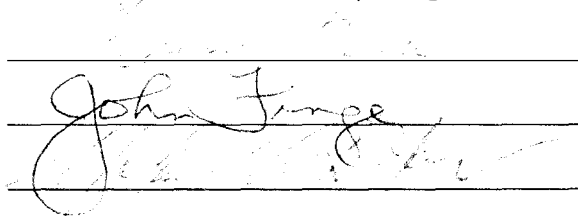
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W. Bruce Wheeler, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation  
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Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor  
and Dean of the Graduate School

'A SUFFICIENT COMPETENCE TO MAKE THEM INDEPENDENT':  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS AUTHORITY, IMPROVEMENT AND INDEPENDENCE  
IN THE CAROLINA - VIRGINIA BACKCOUNTRY, 1760-1800

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Larry Anthony Wise, Jr.  
December 1997

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Larry Anthony Wise

and

Ruth Hardin Wise

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although there were many times I felt this project to be a solitary burden, I realize that without the help of a great number of people it would not have been completed. Bruce Wheeler served as an enthusiastic and interested advisor, and for that I will always be grateful. The other members of my dissertation committee, John Finger, Elaine Breslaw and Michael Lofaro, offered criticisms and advice which were of enormous import. I must also thank members of the history department staff, particularly Kim Harrison and Penny Hamilton, who led me through the maze of departmental and university requirements with a friendly touch.

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In addition to support from the university community, I had the help of a number of friends and family members. Alan Karras, Fred Holder, Tom Lee and Michael Rogers all

read portions of the dissertation and provided support throughout the process. Larry Van Guilder deserves special mention for his willingness to read and re-read the manuscript without ever threatening to end our friendship. His editorial skill made me a better writer.

My wife's parents, Aubrey and Bernice Rogers, provided encouragement and support above and beyond the call of duty or family. My wife, Lynn, contributed as much to the project as anyone else. She allowed me the space to work and the opportunity to escape. I owe her more than I can ever repay. Finally, I must thank and dedicate this work to my parents, Ruth and Larry Wise. Over the last year, they have taught me the true value of strength and endurance and love; lessons as valuable as any I have learned over the last four years.



## ABSTRACT

One theme largely neglected by backcountry scholars to this point is the process of integration which allowed the interior as a region to fuse with the larger social and cultural ways of the rest of the South during the latter part of the eighteenth century. This study will examine, through a series of vignettes, this process of integration and ordering which allowed the backcountry to lose a number of its distinct characteristics and fostered the emergence of more clearly American and Southern values by early in the nineteenth century.

As a point of departure, this dissertation will rely on the ideas of independence and improvement which drove the colonization process of British North America from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Though the notion of independence in Colonial America has received far more examination as a political construct because of Thomas Jefferson and the rhetoric of the American Revolution, it carried important social and economic meanings as well. In societies that included dependent women, children, servants and slaves, personal independence offered European men freedom from the will of others and autonomy in both public and private affairs. Though complete independence through land and labor acquisition remained largely an ideal, the increased

possibility of attaining such status in North America encouraged many to immigrate to the eastern seaboard in the seventeenth century and multitudes to push inward from the coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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## INTRODUCTION

From Frontier to Region:  
The Carolina - Virginia Backcountry, 1760-1800

On May 31, 1791, with brassy tunes and a friendly manner, the United Brethren of Salem, North Carolina welcomed George Washington to their small backcountry community. The president, attended by a small company of servants, was traveling toward Mount Vernon as he completed a tour of the southern states. His journey south had already carried him along the seaboard through tidewater and lowcountry communities like New Bern, Wilmington, Georgetown, Charleston and Savannah. For the trip home, the president had decided to pass through interior settlements like Augusta, Columbia, Camden and Charlotte Court House in order to have a more complete look at the region as a whole. (Figure I)

After touring the "small but neat village" of Salem and visiting "all kinds of artizens" and workhouses, Washington participated in a public ceremony very similar to those that had taken place in other towns along his journey. Though grateful for his visit, the citizens were even more pleased with his role in the establishment of a "happy constitution" and those recent improvements which had allowed the United States to flourish.

Towards the end of the day's proceedings, the

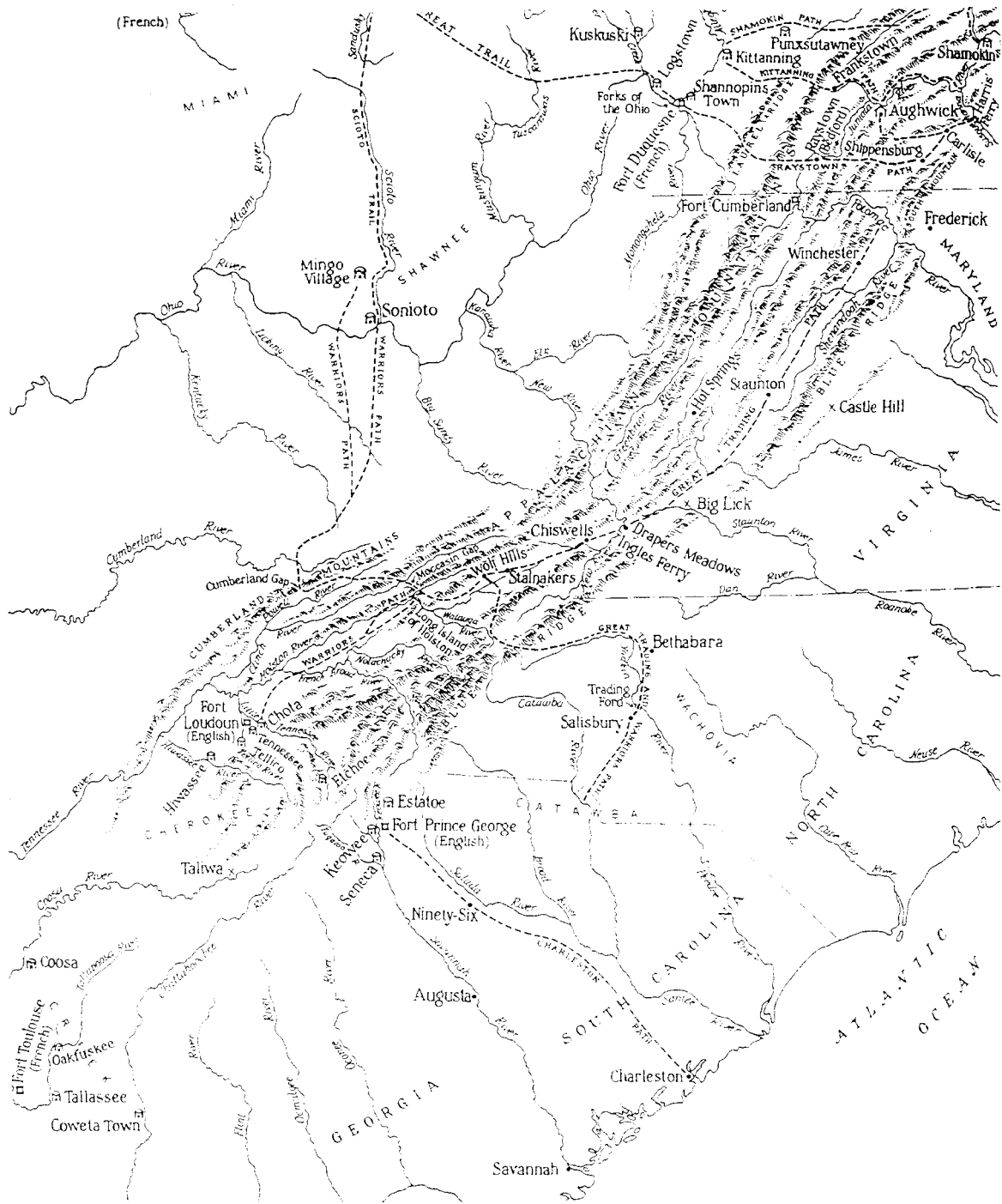


Figure I - The Southern Colonies about 1750

Source: Adapted from James Truslow Adams, Atlas of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 56.

president rose in order to speak to the sizable crowd of Moravians and other backcountry folk assembled in the village. After expressing his gratitude for their hospitality and kind words, Washington reminded his audience that the United States was a society whose governing principles were "industry and the love of order" and that an appropriate commitment to those principles would bring both "improvement and prosperity" to Salem and its citizens.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Moravians of Salem and their backcountry neighbors welcomed Washington's advice, they were already very much aware of the relationship between order and improvement. In fact, they, along with thousands of other backcountry settlers, had spent the previous four decades struggling with those very sorts of ideas and attempting to implement, as best they could, an order which resembled the firmly established coastal communities and European societies they had left behind. An appropriate sense of order would allow men of property the opportunity to govern the community and pursue economic and social stability.

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<sup>1</sup> Adelaide L. Fries, et al. Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, 11 vols. (Raleigh: State Printers for the North Carolina Historical Commission, 1922-1969), 5: 2324, 2402-2403; Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds. The Diaries of George Washington, 6 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 6: 99-158.

Washington, like other eighteenth-century Americans, recognized the existence of important differences between the communities of the interior and those along the coast. The "back parts" or "back settlements"<sup>2</sup> did not look a great deal like the longer established Southern coastal communities. Instead of finely-built lowcountry mansions, wood-frame houses and log cabins shared the interior with large forests and fields of tobacco, wheat and indigo. The number of slaves, while significant, did not match the numbers of slaves in coastal parishes and counties which had existed for a hundred years or more. In contrast to the lowcountry, transportation problems like impassable roads and rivers might limit access to warehouses, markets and European goods.

In the 1950s, Carl Bridenbaugh laid the foundation for the study of the interior by proposing that the Colonial South was a region comprised of a number distinct parts, including the Chesapeake, coastal Carolina and the backcountry. Bridenbaugh defined the colonial back parts as an "irregular shaped area" which stretched from Maryland to Georgia and included the Great Valley and western piedmont of Virginia and the Carolina - Georgia

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<sup>2</sup> During the colonial period, Americans used a number of interchangeable terms to describe the region beyond the established coastal communities including, "back country," "back parts," "back settlements" and "frontiers."



piedmont as far west as the Great Smokies.<sup>3</sup> Like this earliest examination of the backcountry, recent scholarship has relied on a definition of the region which recognizes the interior as "distinct and separate from the coastal colonies of the European empires." A significant portion of this body of work has also identified the backcountry as an early American frontier "zone of cultural encounter" between a variety of Native American, European and African societies.<sup>4</sup> As an examination of the development that took place in the Carolina - Virginia backcountry during the second half of the eighteenth century, this study will rely on this definition of the region which recognizes the variety of exchange within this early frontier. This work also draws from the scholarship of Frederick Jackson Turner because he placed the frontier at the center of the American experience and recognized the existence of a frontier process that influence American development from the seventeenth

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952; reprint, New York Atheneum, 1963), vii-ix; 119-122.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn A. Nelson, Sheila R. Phipps and David A. Rawson, "A Prospectus," The Backcountry: A Multidisciplinary Forum on Early American Frontiers vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1995): 1-2.

through the nineteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Bridenbaugh's efforts in the early 1950s, it has only been in the last decade that scholars have begun to examine in more detail the process of ordering that took place in the region during the eighteenth century. These most recent backcountry studies have centered around a few central themes: the attempt of diverse ethnic groups to maintain group identity during the region's development, the often tumultuous relationship between backcountry folk and colonial governments, and the emergence of local elites capable of ordering backcountry communities.<sup>6</sup> Scholars like Robert Mitchell, Richard Beeman, Roger Ekirch and Rachel Klein have been instrumental in painting a portrait of the backcountry that is increasingly complex in terms of its social, ethnic and economic diversity.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> George Rogers Taylor, ed. The Turner Thesis Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History, rev. ed. (Boston: Heath and Company, 1956), 1-19.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of recent scholarship on the backcountry see, Albert H. Tillson, Jr., "The Southern Backcountry: A Survey of Current Research," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 98 (July 1990): 387-422; Gregory H. Nobles, "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800," William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 46 (October 1989): 641-670.

<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Mitchell, Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977; Roger Ekirch, "Poor Carolina": Politics and Society in

However, one theme largely neglected by scholars to this point is the process of integration which allowed the backcountry as a region to fuse with the larger social and cultural ways of the rest of the South during the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> This study will examine, through a series of vignettes, this process of integration and ordering which allowed the backcountry to lose a number of its distinctive characteristics and foster the emergence of more clearly American and Southern values by early in the nineteenth century.

As a point of departure, this dissertation will rely on the ideas of independence and improvement which drove the colonization process of British North America from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Though the notion of independence in Colonial America has received far more examination as a political construct because of Thomas Jefferson and the rhetoric of the American Revolution, it carried important social and economic meanings as well. In societies that included dependent

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Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Richard Beeman, The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Rachel N. Klein, Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Tillson, 413-421.

women, children, servants and slaves, personal independence offered European men freedom from the will of others and autonomy in both public and private affairs. Though complete independence through land and labor acquisition remained largely an ideal, the increased possibility of attaining such status in North America encouraged many to immigrate to the eastern seaboard in the seventeenth century and multitudes to push inward from the coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

It was not enough for these settlers seeking independence to merely establish new communities. They had to improve those communities in order to transform their society into a place where the opportunity for independence was as great as possible. Much of this process required demanding labor, including the building

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<sup>9</sup> See, Jack P. Greene, "Independence, Improvement, and Authority: Toward a framework for Understanding the Histories of the Southern Backcountry during the Era of the American Revolution," In An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution, eds. Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1985), 3-36; Alan L. Karras, Sojourners in the Sun: Scottish Migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake, 1740-1800 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 211-213; Russell R. Menard, "Economic and Social Development of the South," In The Cambridge Economic History of the United States, vol. 1, The Colonial Era, eds. Stanley Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12-16.

of roads and towns, the establishment of markets and the construction of adequate political structures. However, a portion of this development also required the constant reassessment of the improving society against the well-established coastal communities and the Native American societies Europeans encountered during the process of colonization. Independence was possible only in a society that recognized the need for improvement and order and shunned the savagery of a frontier existence.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the most dramatic changes in the South occurred in the backcountry between the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 and Thomas Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803. Backcountry folk, like their predecessors along the coast, decided they would not live among savages and created boundaries to protect their property and their opportunity for independence. William Tryon, the governor of North Carolina during the late 1760s, found both personal and professional success in his active participation in the creation of a strong boundary line between the white residents of backcountry North Carolina and the remaining Native Americans. Such a border increased the possibility that colonial Carolinians might establish prosperous homes and communities in the

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<sup>10</sup> Greene, "Independence, Improvement and Authority," 16.

interior.

The problems of a frontier existence compounded the difficulties of creating definitive boundaries in the North American interior. Backcountry elites determined that they would not live like savages and used the authority of church and state to prevent, as far as possible, a social degeneration which might threaten their very existence. Frances Scott, through her ordeal as a Indian captive, symbolized the need for all Americans, especially those along the frontier, to resist barbaric and uncivilized behavior.

Backcountry folk also worked to create an economic and social order which would allow them an opportunity to own property in land and slaves and to have some access to markets where they could buy and sell goods. They protested vigorously when outsiders, like the Reverend Thomas Coke, threatened their economic prospects by challenging the practice of slavery which to many seemed a crucial part of the ideal path to independence. They relied on the extreme leadership of backcountry Whigs like Colonel Benjamin Cleveland who took advantage of ineffective state and local government structures and provided important transitional direction through the 1780s. Finally, they built trading centers and canals and roads in hopes of carrying their goods to markets and

achieving some economic success.

By the end of the century, the region's settlers had transformed the "back settlements" or "back parts" of the 1750s and 1760s into a society with a more unified culture, an integrated economy and a cohesive ruling class committed to staple agriculture and African slavery. No longer a separate society, communities in the interior had become variations on a common American theme: order and improvement made independence possible for some, but certainly not for all.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tillson, "The Southern Backcountry," 387-422; Menard, "Economic and Social Development of the South," 249.

## CHAPTER I

### "The Future Seat of a Flourishing People": Governor Tryon, the Boundary of 1767 and the Settlement of the Carolina Backcountry

June 4, 1767 was a day of festivity throughout the British world. George III, king of England, celebrated his thirtieth birthday in London with a "numerous and brilliant" court, who showered the monarch with compliments and planned "grand entertainments" in honor of the occasion. Various dukes, earls and royal climbers did their best to commemorate the king's special day in the most magnificent manner by hosting dinners and parties where George III's loyal subjects raised their glasses in honor of the king and his family and their position at the head of British society: "May the House of Hanover Preside over the United British Empire, to the end of Time."<sup>1</sup>

Thousands of miles from the royal court and the pomp and privilege of a formal social event, William Tryon, the colonial governor of North Carolina, tried to honor the king's birthday in the most appropriate fashion possible considering the circumstances. Tryon, along with a party of boundary commissioners and a military escort, found

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<sup>1</sup> New York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy, 20 August 1767; The 5 June 1766 and 29 May 1766 issues of the same paper include list of toasts given at both colonial and London social gatherings.



himself hundreds of miles from his seat of government and any sort of celebration worthy of the British king. In an effort to earn the praise and support of North Carolina's colonials, the governor had taken it upon himself to settle a boundary dispute between the Cherokee Indians and the ever-increasing number of settlers in the backcountry of North Carolina.

Despite some difficulty in the early stages of the proceedings, Tryon and his subordinates had managed to negotiate successfully a treaty line which would protect the Cherokees from infringements on their property and allow North Carolinians to mark and adapt the land for their own use. On the "auspicious and memorable" occasion of June 4, 1767, the governor ordered his men, under the watchful eye of the Cherokee, to begin some preliminary work on the new and definite boundary.<sup>2</sup> Though certainly important in a physical sense, Tryon's line, and other boundaries created in the colonial interior, also marked a complicated transitional process which saw land possession pass from surviving Native American societies to thousands of Europeans and a significant number of their slaves. These newcomers attempted to mold the landscape and the region along the lines of the communities they had left

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<sup>2</sup> Tryon to Earl Shelburne, July 8, 1767, The Colonial Records of North Carolina, ed. William L. Saunders, 10 vols. (Raleigh: Hale, 1886-1890), VII: 500-501.

behind.

After a morning's work on the new boundary, the strange conglomeration of soldiers, Indians and colonial officials spent the rest of the day celebrating the king's birthday and the successfully completed treaty. Over the course of the afternoon, the governor's men and some of the Cherokee "fired volleys after every toast that was given in honour of the day." Despite their remote location, the governor and his men attempted to prepare a dinner for "a Camp table in State" and likely toasted the king and their success once again. As the long day finally came to a close, some of the commissioners, members of the escort and his excellency "danced a War dance with the Indians."<sup>3</sup> A few days later, Tryon returned east, secure in the knowledge that his boundary would protect the interests of George III's loyal subjects deep in the American interior.

Tryon's mission illustrated the increasing pressures on Native American populations in the interior that characterized backcountry life in the middle of the eighteenth century. European peoples seeking an

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<sup>3</sup> Journal of His Excellency Governor Tryon's Escort from Salisbury to the Western Frontiers of the Province to meet the Cherokee Indians, June 4, 1767, The Correspondence of William Tryon and Other Selected Papers, ed. William S. Powell (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1980), 485-486.

opportunity for greater economic and social mobility flooded the region, bringing with them different and often competing ways of life. Native Americans had molded the landscape for thousands of years, but the introduction of European settlers and their social and cultural forms in the seventeenth century altered the landscape and people of the region over a fairly short period of time.<sup>4</sup> White settlement and expansion continued in the later part of the eighteenth century despite agreements made between Native Americans and British and colonial governments. The need for American colonials to express their personal independence through land ownership and improvement drove the population increase in the region and helped create a new landscape. Boundary lines and treaties worked well in the abstract, but they did not take into account the expansionist tendencies of British North America during the eighteenth century.

After the hunting season of 1766 ended, the Cherokee Indians asked John Stuart, superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Department, to use his influence

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<sup>4</sup> For a more complete discussion of colonial ecology see, William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Timothy Silver, A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Albert E. Cowdrey, This Land, This South: An Environmental History, Rev. ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

with the government of North Carolina to run a precise boundary between their hunting grounds and the rapidly growing white population. Settlement of the interior by Virginians and Pennsylvanians had already forced the Cherokees to defend their territory along the Virginia - Carolina - Georgia frontier in the early 1760s. Although the British government designed the Proclamation Line of 1763 to keep white settlers from encroaching on native lands, the Cherokees were in need of additional assurances that their homes and villages would remain safe from the multitudes seeking economic independence in the Carolina and Virginia backcountry.<sup>5</sup>

Stuart's boundary campaign began as early as 1765 with a letter to John Pownall, secretary of the Board of Trade. He warned the British government that by issuing land grants the colony of North Carolina had deprived the Lower Cherokee Towns of "the most valuable part of their hunting Grounds." While the Cherokees were also worried about the murder of five of their people in Virginia and the disorderly behavior of traders in their villages, they were most concerned about "Encroachments on their

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<sup>5</sup> John Stuart to William Tryon, May 28, 1766, The Correspondence of William Tryon, 294; Charles Hudson, The Southeastern Indians (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 442.

lands."<sup>6</sup>

Alexander Cameron, who helped survey the Cherokee boundary in South Carolina early in 1766, observed several examples of white settlement near or beyond the proposed border. There was a house within four miles of the line along the Savannah River, and near the division "about Saludy," there stood a cowpen, a plantation and several homes. Hoping to end white infringement on their lands, the Cherokees participated in the 1766 survey by blazing trees along the border to make it "very clear and strong." The line began on the Savannah River and ran east towards Dewis's Corner; from there it ran northeast fifty miles to the Reedy River where the line terminated. After completing the course in South Carolina, the Cherokees hoped to run the line from the point of termination straight through North Carolina to Colonel Chiswell's Mines in Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

Stuart wrote Governor Tryon of North Carolina on a few occasions to remind him that the Indians were adamant about protecting their hunting grounds and that fixing the boundary line was "necessary and essential" for peace. While Tryon agreed with Stuart on the necessity of such a

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<sup>6</sup> John Stuart to John Pownall, August 24, 1765, The Colonial Records of North Carolina, VII: 108-110.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, May 10, 1766, Ibid., VII: 207-208.

boundary, he was not entirely pleased with the line proposed by the Cherokees. Significant portions of Mecklenburg and Rowan Counties would be to the west of the line which would shut "a large Body of Inhabitants" out of the province. As an alternative, Tryon proposed that the line run from the Reedy River north to the mountains to make room for the residents of the western counties, before ending at Chiswell's Mines.<sup>8</sup> After receiving the approval of the Board of Trade "to secure the Western Inhabitants in their Legal Possessions," Tryon and his council proposed an expedition to chart just such a boundary. The governor hoped the line could be surveyed in the fall of 1766 so he could accompany Stuart to "prevent any little jealousies" between the Cherokees and the settlers.

The economic prospects described in the earliest overzealous descriptions of Carolina encouraged European settlement, eventually fostering competition for the region's resources among settlers and native inhabitants. Promotional material emphasized the fact that Carolina was a "fair and spacious Province on the Continent of America" bordered on the north by Virginia, on the south by "the 30 degree of Latitude not yet fully discovered," on the east

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<sup>8</sup> William Tryon to John Stuart, June 17, 1766, Correspondence of William Tryon, 312.

by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west, the very far west, by the "wealthy South Seas."<sup>9</sup>

The land was of a "divers sort." Some places near the coast were sandy and barren, but others abounded with a variety of trees, including pine, cedar, ash, birch, holly, chestnut and walnut. These woods housed deer and wild turkey of "a great magnitude." Despite the native abundance, early colonists hoped that economically valuable plants and crops from other parts of the Americas, including Barbados, Virginia and New England, could be transplanted with some success. They also noted that the marshes and meadows were very large and an excellent source of food for both cattle and hogs.<sup>10</sup>

When the English arrived on the coast of Carolina in the late seventeenth century, they found the region populated by a number of native tribes, including the Yamasee, Yuchi, Cusabo, Pamlico, Croatoan and Tuscarora. Because of contact with the Spanish and the consequent introduction of disease in the sixteenth century, many of

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<sup>9</sup> A Brief Description of the Province of Carolina, with an introduction by John Tate Lanning (London: Robert Horne, 1666; reprint, Charlottesville: Tracy W. McGregor Library, 1944), 1-2; See also, Thomas Nairne and John Norris, Selling a New World: Two Colonial South Carolina Promotional Pamphlets, ed. Jack P. Greene (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Brief Description of the Province of Carolina, 3-5.

the tribes in the Southeast were already in the process of reduction and reorganization.<sup>11</sup> The absence of any sort of natural immunity to foreign diseases like smallpox, measles, influenza, bubonic plague, diphtheria, typhus, cholera and scarlet fever caused a significant decline in the populations of many tribes and important changes in regional relationships. Due to their relatively isolated location in the southern Appalachian mountains and a lower population, the Cherokees emerged stronger, in a comparative sense, than their more populous neighbors in the region who suffered greater losses because of early contact with Europeans.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately for the Native Americans, the restructuring of their societies because of illness was not a one-time occurrence but a chronic nightmare in the post-contact world. The ravages of disease among the natives, combined with the influx of European settlers and their slaves, dramatically altered the population of the Carolinas and Virginia over the course of the eighteenth century (Table I). In 1697, a smallpox epidemic worked

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<sup>11</sup> Marvin T. Smith, "Aboriginal Depopulation in the Postcontact Southeast," in The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521-1704, eds. Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 257-259; Hudson, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Hatley, The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Revolutionary Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5-6.



TABLE I

Estimated Population, by Race, of Virginia,  
North Carolina and South Carolina, 1685-1790.

	1685	1700	1730	1760	1790
Virginia:					
Native	2,900	1,900	900	400	200
European	38,100	56,100	103,300	196,300	442,100
African	2,600	5,500	49,700	130,900	305,500
N. Carolina:					
Native	10,000	7,200	2,000	1,000	300
European	5,700	9,400	27,300	84,500	288,200
African	200	400	5,500	28,200	105,500
S. Carolina:					
Native	10,000	7,500	2,000	1,000	300
European	1,400	3,800	9,800	38,600	140,200
African	500	2,600	21,600	57,900	108,900

Source: Adapted from, Peter H. Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region" in Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast, ed. Peter H. Wood, Gregory Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 38. These estimates include only the population east of the mountains.

its way through the Carolina coastal tribes, and by early in the eighteenth century the disease also had affected Native Americans in the interior who traded with the English. The Cherokee population, which declined from 32,000 in 1685 to 12,000 in 1715, dropped off significantly again in 1738 due to another outbreak of smallpox. At the same time, a number of different piedmont peoples organized themselves into the Catawba nation in an effort to maintain viable social structures. Though at times ridiculed by European and Native American neighbors alike, the Catawba managed to step into a world that was increasingly white and foreign while maintaining an identity as a separate people.<sup>13</sup>

Conflict and competition joined with disease in unsettling the lives of Carolina's coastal tribes. While trade brought native peoples guns and manufactured goods they could not produce themselves, it also forced many of them into some sort of dependency on the European market. The fur and skin trade rapidly depleted the deer population along the coast and forced hunters further and further west. By early in the eighteenth century, many of the remaining coastal peoples were dislodged after

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<sup>13</sup> James Adair believed that a smallpox epidemic in 1738 reduced the Cherokee population by half. Hatley, 6-8; James H. Merrell, The Indian's New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal (New York: Norton, 1989), 27, 276-281.

conflicts with the colonists. The Tuscaroras moved north to join with the Iroquois after their defeat in 1713, while the Yamasee War of 1715 and 1716 dislodged other tribes already weakened by disease from their homes along the Carolina coast.<sup>14</sup> The removal of these tribes opened the interior to expansion and potential settlement by Carolinians seeking economic independence in the form of property ownership in land and slaves.

Another important development in the changing landscape of the backcountry began when the Europeans and Native Americans established trading relationships late in the seventeenth century. The founding of South Carolina gave southeastern tribes an opportunity for trade, and by 1690 hundreds of pounds of deerskins were brought annually to Charleston in exchange for arms and other goods. Between 1690 and 1715, Carolinians exported an average of 54,000 deerskins a year, including over 120,000 in 1707. Although the trade initially seemed benign and even economically beneficial to Native Americans in a region with an endless supply of deer, the attempt by South Carolinians to enslave captured Indians and the limited economic options of native peoples weakened the

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<sup>14</sup> William G. McLoughlin, Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 4-5; Hudson, 436-439.

southeastern tribes.<sup>15</sup>

Although there were still significant quantities of deer in the forests in the mid-1760s, some observers were beginning to wonder if irresponsible methods of hunting would destroy completely this valuable commodity. According to an anonymous French traveller passing through North Carolina in the spring of 1765, "the great plenty of deer in this part of the country . . . will soon diminish if they continue Destroying as they do now, in season or out of season, male or female all alike."<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, the valuable trade of skins and furs for "great quantities of Coarse cloths from England, powder, shott, guns, hatchetts, etc." caused conflict between the colonies themselves. Early in the eighteenth century, the Council of Virginia was disturbed by South Carolina's attempt to gain control of the Indian trade by claiming that the Native Americans lived under the government of South Carolina and were subject to their

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<sup>15</sup> Joel W. Martin, "Southeastern Indians and the English Trade in Skins and Slaves," in The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521-1704, eds. Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 309-313; Hudson, 436-437.

<sup>16</sup> "Journal of a French Traveller in the Colonies, 1765," American Historical Review 26 (July 1921): 736.

regulations.<sup>17</sup> During the colonial period, the absence of good ports handicapped the citizens of North Carolina to a great degree which led many to carry their goods to markets in South Carolina or Virginia.<sup>18</sup> In 1736, George Burrington, who had previously served as North Carolina's governor, noted that "Cattle, Hogs, Goods and Merchandizes of all Sorts" were leaving the colony annually for Virginia, which caused North Carolinians to "lose the value of half their goods."<sup>19</sup>

The export of furs and skins from Charleston comprised a vital part of the colonial economy until the 1750s when backcountry settlement began to increase significantly in the Carolinas. Large numbers of Scots-Irish and Germans from Pennsylvania along with some English from Maryland and Virginia transformed the landscape by forcing out the Indians and buffalo and deer

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<sup>17</sup> Report of the Council of Virginia on Internal Migration and Trade to the Lord Commissioners for Trade, October 19, 1708, The Colonial Records of North Carolina, I: 691.

<sup>18</sup> Jedidiah Morse, The American Geography or a View of the Present Situation of the United States of America (Elizabethtown: Shepard Kollack, 1789; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 414.

<sup>19</sup> George Burrington to the Honorable Commissioners of His Majesty's Customs, July 20, 1736, in Colonial Records of North Carolina, 4:172.

and altering the interior's economy.<sup>20</sup> Instead of participating in a regional economy based solely on hunting and trapping, these new settlers began to build homes and farms and to raise stock in an effort to stake a claim to personal independence in the backcountry.

The rapid reduction of the native population, who seemed to be "melting away like snow upon the mountains," did not go unnoticed by eighteenth-century European and American observers.<sup>21</sup> The German surgeon, Johann David Schoepf, who spent a couple of years travelling through the United States after the Revolutionary War, observed that only a few Catawba families lived on the Wateree River above Camden.<sup>22</sup> J. F. D. Smyth, who passed through the Carolinas and Virginia about the same time as Schoepf, also noticed the decline of the Catawbas from a "once numerous, powerful and even lately very respectable nation" to a state which other Native American tribes

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<sup>20</sup> Leila Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Hewatt, An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia, 2 vols. (London: Alexander Donaldson, 1779; reprint, Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, 1962), 1: 277.

<sup>22</sup> Johann David Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison, vol. 2, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, East Florida, the Bahamas (Erlangen, Johann Jacob Palm, 1788; reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968), 196.

considered "enervating effeminacy." This circumstance might have included the drunkenness and "begging in the neighbourhood" observed by Italian aristocrat Luigi Castiglioni.<sup>23</sup>

For Smyth, there was plenty of blame to go around for the seemingly sudden downfall of America's native peoples. The intemperance and proximity of white settlements were certainly a factor, as was the introduction of smallpox<sup>24</sup> and spirituous liquors. Smyth also proposed that the "frequent abortions" of young unmarried Indian women were a central factor in their decrease. Promiscuous intercourse before marriage was neither a source of disgrace nor a reason to prevent a subsequent marriage

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<sup>23</sup> J. F. D. Smyth, A Tour in the United States of North America, (London: Robinson, Robson, and Sewell, 1784), 185; Antonio Pace, trans. and ed. Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels in the United States of North America, 1785-1787 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1983), 151.

<sup>24</sup> For Smyth and other eighteenth century observers, the method in which the Catawbas treated smallpox seemed as deadly as the disease itself. "Their injudicious treatment of that infectious malady, generally renders it fatal, for they made use of hot stimulating medicines to promote a most profuse diaphoresis, in the height of which, whilst reeking with sweat, and dissolving in streams of warm moisture, they rush into the open air, quite naked, and suddenly plunge into the deepest and coldest stream of running water that can be found, immersing their whole body in the chilling flood." Smyth, 186-187. See also Hewatt, 279, and Alfred W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," William and Mary Quarterly, ser. 3., vol. 33 (1976): 289-299.

among native peoples; however, young Amerindian women were "careful to destroy the fruit of licentious connection" through the use of "medicinal samples." Smyth believed the potency of the medicine left the women subject to miscarriages and smaller families afterwards.<sup>25</sup>

While his observations about the modest size of families among Native Americans were fairly accurate, they may reflect greater cultural differences than attitude toward abortion. Native American women faced the colonial world aware of the limited resources of their people and made an effort to control the size of their families. European settlers looked at the same landscape as open and available for plantation and settlement, and they brought a number of different types of labor, including slaves, servants and their own large families, into this world to help them conquer the land.

The arrival of permanent European and African settlers along the Carolina-Virginia coast not only affected the already present human population, but also the native plant and animal populations. By the middle of the eighteenth century, these ecological pressures had begun to creep into the backcountry as well. The viability of trade and commerce was crucial to the survival of both the Carolinas and Virginia, and from the

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<sup>25</sup> Smyth 186; 189-190.



very start proponents of colonization looked for ways of achieving economic success. While settlers did not find the material riches which they thought they might, eventually planters did find wealth through the production of tobacco, indigo and rice. When population and land pressures forced settlers further and further into the backcountry, they continued to believe that new productions would allow continued economic success.

Travellers, government officials, botanists, potential settlers and natural historians who visited the backcountry looked for signs of economic opportunity and provided clues about changes taking place in the colonial landscape. John Brickell, an Irish natural historian who spent several years in North Carolina in the 1720s and 1730s, characterized the interior as the "most Sweet and healthful part of this Country" inhabited only by "Savage Indians" and "the wild Beasts."<sup>26</sup> These animals provided backcountry Carolinians and Virginians an opportunity for "profit and game" and early in the eighteenth century included rabbits, foxes, raccoons, possums, squirrels, wild cats, deer, elk, buffaloes, bears, panthers, wild

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<sup>26</sup> John Brickell, The Natural History of North Carolina with An Account of the Trade, Manners, and Customs of the Christian and Indian Inhabitants, with biographical notes by Thomas C. Parramore (Dublin: James Carson, 1737; reprint, Murfreesboro, NC: Johnson Publishing Company, 1968), 45.

hogs and a variety of fowl.<sup>27</sup>

Prior to heavy settlement of the region, settlers and travellers described parts of the backcountry as abounding with game. Tarleton Brown, whose family moved from Albemarle County in Virginia to the Barnwell District along the Savannah River in South Carolina, observed great numbers of deer and turkeys. He thought the former, of which he had seen fifty together at a time, "as gentle as cattle." The latter were innumerable and "so very fat" that often Brown had run them down on horseback.<sup>28</sup>

While some animals of the forest provided food for settlers, predatory beasts like bears, foxes, wild cats and wolves could be a hinderance in certain parts of the backcountry. They "literally infested" the area near Brown's home and were quite "annoying to the inhabitants; killing the stock and destroying the crops." The close proximity of the more dangerous animals made some settlers wary of going out at night unarmed and convinced others to

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<sup>27</sup> James Glen, "A Description of South Carolina," in Colonial South Carolina: Two Contemporary Descriptions, ed. Chapman J. Milling (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951), 68-69; George Milligen-Johnston, "A Short Description of the Province of South Carolina with an Account of the Air, Weather, and Diseases, Charleston, written in the year 1763," in Historical Collection of South Carolina, 2 vols., comp. B. R. Carroll (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), 2: 482.

<sup>28</sup> Charles I. Bushnell, ed., "The Memoirs of Tarleton Brown," in The Magazine of History, Extra Number 101 (Tarrytown, NY: William Abbott, 1924), 11.

use "every device to exterminate them," a policy liberally pursued by many Europeans.<sup>29</sup>

As thousands of settlers and a few of their slaves streamed into the Carolina - Virginia backcountry in the early to middle part of the eighteenth century, animal populations declined with a predictable impact upon the remaining Native American peoples. In the early 1760s, a chief of the Catawbias notified the governors of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia that over-hunting had spoiled his land a "100 Miles in every way" by creating a scarcity of buffalo and deer.<sup>30</sup> A description of South Carolina, written in 1763, noted that "the buffalo's are sometimes found in the woods near the mountains, but they are not so numerous as they were a few years ago."<sup>31</sup>

Botanist John Bartram also made observations about the impact the European settlement had on the animal population of the Carolinas by the 1760s. For example, he noted that "many wild creatures is drove back by mankind

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Talks of the Chickasaw, Upper and Lower Creeks, Choctaw, Cherokee and Catawba Indians to Governors James Wright of Georgia, Arthur Dobbs of North Carolina, and Thomas Boone of South Carolina, November 7-8, 1763, The State Records of North Carolina, ed. Walter Clark, 16 vols. (Winston and Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 1886-1907), 189.

<sup>31</sup> Milligen-Johnston, "A Short Description of the Province of South Carolina," in Historical Collections of South Carolina, 2: 482.

first settling near ye coast." He also theorized that the great bulk of buffalo and elk were part of the cause of their "utter extirpation."<sup>32</sup> Large numbers of these animals had encouraged over-hunting and the subsequent destruction of these populations in the region. Bartram's fifth son, William, who followed in his father's footsteps and made a number of exploratory trips into the Carolina backcountry along the Savannah River, noted that the "animal productions" were the same as those which originally inhabited the region. However, "the buffalo once so very numerous" was no longer found, and the few elk had retreated to the Appalachian mountains.<sup>33</sup>

Carolínians seemed to believe that if a crop or species failed to be profitable, it could be replaced easily by a production of another sort. Michael Collinson, a London merchant who carried on a correspondence with the elder Bartram about his work, feared the extinction of many animal species and perhaps even the Indians themselves despite the "amazing Recesses" the North American interior provided. Collinson only had

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<sup>32</sup> John Bartram to Peter Collinson, May, 10, 1762, in The Correspondence of John Bartram, 1734-1777, eds. Edmund and Dorothy Smith Berkeley (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 558; John Bartram to Michael Collinson, November 11, 1772, *Ibid.*, 752.

<sup>33</sup> William Bartram, Travel and Other Writings, comp. Thomas P. Slaughter (New York: Library of America, 1996), 61-62.

to look at the many thousands of beaver furs advertised for sale in London to realize that the grand continent could not protect all its inhabitants.<sup>34</sup>

The disappearance and reduction of certain animal populations did not leave the forests of the backcountry bare. In addition to the decline of deer, buffalo and elk due to hunting and trading, the introduction of competitive species also had a negative impact on native animal populations. From the very beginning, Carolinians turned their stock loose in the woods. Hogs and cattle found enough food in the marshes, meadows and woods of the lowcountry that the only real necessity for raising animals was a "swine herd" to prevent them from running completely wild.

As Carolinians pushed into the interior, they took their method of raising stock with them. John Brickell noted that by 1737 great numbers of wild cattle and horses were breeding continuously in the woods of backcountry North Carolina. It was not unusual to see "great Drovers feeding promiscuously in the Savannas amongst the Deer, fifty or Sixty Miles distant from any Inhabitants."<sup>35</sup> Along swamps and river banks, cattle fed on the "leaves

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Collinson to John Bartram, July 21, 1773, The Correspondence of John Bartram, 760.

<sup>35</sup> Brickell, 52.

and tender shoots" of cane practically year round which made raising stock "extraordinarily easy to the planter, who has little to spend on their keep until they are ready for fattening."<sup>36</sup> William Byrd found eighteenth-century North Carolinians so committed to the production and the consumption of "swine's flesh" that it contributed to the an increased susceptibility to the yaws, which caused "the downfall of their Noses" and made them "extremely hoggish in their Temper."<sup>37</sup>

The introduction of the open grazing of cattle and hogs into the backcountry, while seemingly chaotic, was actually ordered well enough to allow farmers and merchants alike to participate in the English colonial market. In the early 1780s, Johann Schoepf had the opportunity to observe the backcountry method of cattle and hog raising. Like others, he noted hundreds if not thousands of cattle and hogs "running loose in the woods and swamps." But he also observed planters and farmers branding their animals with special earmarks which were registered and recognized as "legitimate proof of ownership." Destruction or falsification of an earmark

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<sup>36</sup> Schoepf, vol. 2, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, East Florida, the Bahamas, 107.

<sup>37</sup> The yaws is an infectious tropical skin disease which marks the skin with multiple red pimples. William Byrd, Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina (New York: Dover, 1967): 54-55.

was treated as a felony. In certain parts of the region, a "woods-right" existed, which allowed each plantation a share of all wild herds. This right protected the economic interest of individual planters and farmers and could be transferred or sold by the owner just like any other property.<sup>38</sup>

The backcountry had more to offer potential settlers than just a place to graze their cattle, trade with various Native American tribes, or hunt and trap for skins on their own. The interior of the Carolinas and Virginia was "as pleasant and fertil a Country as any in Europe."<sup>39</sup> In his early history of North Carolina, John Brickell argued that it was the "cheapness and fertility of the lands" that convinced many people from the northern colonies to "come and settle in one of the mildest Governments in the World." All they needed was "moderate Industry" to acquire "all Necessaries convenient for life."<sup>40</sup>

Johannes Tobler, a Swiss farmer and store owner, who settled in New Windsor Township on the Savannah river near Augusta, wrote a description of South Carolina to attract

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 108-110; Terry G. Jordan, Trails to Texas: Southern Roots of Western Cattle Ranching (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 25-43.

<sup>39</sup> Brickell, v-vi.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 30.

others from eastern Switzerland to the interior of the province. His 1753 report told prospective immigrants about the province's "benevolent and agreeable" climate and "various beautiful rivers, busy with traffic."<sup>41</sup> Tobler hoped to convince other Europeans that despite the backcountry's isolation, it was still connected to the rest of the world in ways that would allow its inhabitants to participate in regional and global economies.

Governor James Glen collected important information about South Carolina which he used in a report to the Board of Trade and which was subsequently published without his consent in 1761. He noted the presence of various Indian tribes, including the Cherokees, the Chickasaws, the Creeks and the Choctaws, along the western boundary. The population of the colony included 25,000 whites and 39,000 blacks, the latter mostly slaves.<sup>42</sup> In the late 1740s, several hundred German and British families moved into the colony, an increase Glen expected to grow into the thousands because South Carolina had a large amount of territory "but thinly inhabited, Numbers of navigable Rivers which make Carriage easy and afford safe Ports, a fertile Soil and a pretty healthful Climate,

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<sup>41</sup> Walter L. Robbins, trans. and ed., "John Tobler's Description of South Carolina (1753)," South Carolina Historical Magazine 71 (July 1970): 143.

<sup>42</sup> Glen, "A Description of South Carolina," 12, 38.



Liberty of Conscience, equal Laws, easy Taxes, and, I hope I may add with Truth, a mild Administration of the Government."<sup>43</sup>

Glen was noting in the 1740s a trend that had begun at least a decade earlier in North Carolina when Governor George Burrington reported that 1733 was "a year of the greatest plenty ever known in North Carolina" and that "there will be abundance of New Settlers in the approaching winter from the Northern Provinces."<sup>44</sup> Like James Glen of South Carolina and other colonial governors, North Carolina's chief administrator, Arthur Dobbs, also made reports to the Board of Trade and Plantations about conditions in the colony. Dobbs' information came from a trip he made in 1755 to view the "Western Frontier."<sup>45</sup>

Travelling through the backcountry counties of Anson, Rowan, Orange and Cumberland, Dobbs noted areas with "very rich level ground" among some "very high hills" along the Yadkin River where settlers grew barley, oats, wheat and rye. Among the early Yadkin settlers were Daniel Boone and his family who farmed and raised stock like many of their neighbors. Boone made extra money by working as a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>44</sup> George Burrington to the Lords of Trade, October 5, 1733, Colonial Records of North Carolina, III: 529.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur Dobbs to the Board of Trade and Plantations, August 24, 1755, Ibid., 5: 353.

blacksmith and trading skins and furs in Salisbury, the seat of Rowan County.<sup>46</sup>

Governor Dobbs' tour carried him through that backcountry town where he found about seventy-five families of Scots-Irish Presbyterians by way of Pennsylvania. He had the opportunity to observe thirty to forty of them "and except two there was not less than from 5 or 6 to 10 children in each family, each going barefooted in their shifts in the warm weather." In addition to the Scots-Irish, there were also twenty-two German families in the region, "an industrious people" who raised livestock, planted corn, wheat, barley, rye and oats, made butter and cheese, and exported indigo to Charleston with some success.<sup>47</sup>

One of the groups of Germans that moved into the Carolina backcountry was the Moravians who settled on the Wachovia tract in the North Carolina Piedmont. In 1752, a small group of Moravians led by August Gottlieb Spangenburg made the trek from Pennsylvania to North Carolina to look for a suitable settlement site. One

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<sup>46</sup> John Mack Faragher, Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer (New York: Holt, 1992), 40-53; Michael A. Lofaro, The Life and Adventures of Daniel Boone (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 9-17,

<sup>47</sup> Arthur Dobbs to Board of Trade, August 24, 1755, *Ibid.*, 5: 355-356.

point of concern was the "unbelievable confusion" regarding land claims in the state which Spangenburg attributed to the absence of a general surveyor. Francis Corbin suggested the Moravians "go to the 'Back of the Colony,'" near the Blue Ridge Mountains to find a suitable tract of land that had not been surveyed or claimed.<sup>48</sup>

As Scots-Irish, German, English, Irish and Welsh families moved into the Carolina-Virginia backcountry, they began to place their own distinctive marks on the landscape, although for a time a number of observers of the region believed the interior had simply passed from one band of savages to another. Their dress certainly did not mark them as materially very different from the Native Americans, since backcountry folk often wore a fringed hunting shirt, leather britches made of elk or deer skins, leggings and moccasins.<sup>49</sup>

Charles Woodmason, an itinerant Anglican minister who spent several years in the South Carolina backcountry in the late 1760s, left a journal which frequently documented what he considered the uncivilized behavior of backcountry residents. Five days after arriving at Pine Tree Hill,

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<sup>48</sup> "The Spangenburg Diary," in Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, 11 vols., ed. Adelaide L. Fries and others (Raleigh: State Printers for the North Carolina Historical Commission, 1922-1969), 1: 32-33.

<sup>49</sup> Smyth, 180-181.

Woodmason discovered his congregation was full of people with "abandon'd Morals and profligate Principles." In addition, they were "Rude - Ignorant - Void of Manners Education or Good Breeding." By October 1766, he decided the "whole Body of the People in these Back Parts" was loose, dissolute, idle and lacking religion or decency.<sup>50</sup>

Part of the reason Woodmason had such a difficult time adjusting to the backcountry was because he seemed quite different from the region's inhabitants. While he was an educated English gentlemen who supported the established church, most of the people he encountered were uneducated, non-English and unchurched.<sup>51</sup> But what Woodmason and his uncivilized flock shared was a commitment to the eighteenth-century values of independence and improvement that dominated British North America.

Evidence of that common devotion first appeared during the period of protest in South Carolina known as the Regulation. Woodmason used pen and paper to describe the grievances of backcountry residents to the colony's Assembly in hopes of finding relief from a lack of law

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<sup>50</sup> Richard J. Hooker, ed. The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1953), 7-8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., xxiii.

enforcement and a burdensome court system. As "Free-Men - British Subjects - Not Born Slaves," inhabitants of the interior paid their taxes and performed their public duties just as diligently as the residents of the coastal parishes, despite the fact that the "Rights and Benefits" of citizenship were often denied them. Speaking for the backcountry's property owners, Woodmason reminded the colony's representatives that "Property is of no value, except it be secure" and urged them to extend the province's court system into the interior so that justice might be available to all who lived in South Carolina.<sup>52</sup>

Backcountry folk had left their homes and friends and relations to breathe "a Purer Air of Freedom, and possess the utmost Enjoyment of Liberty, and Independency," but found themselves "set adrift in the wild woods among Indians and Outcasts - To Live in a state of Heathenism." The threats to their property prevented the possibility of any improvements which might make South Carolina "a most valuable Country, and one of the Brightest Jewels in the Crown of Great Britain." While Woodmason was probably more comfortable with the refined independence expressed in the elegant homes of friends in London and Charleston, he also understood the desire residents of the backcountry

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<sup>52</sup> "The Remonstrance presented to the Common's House of Assembly by the Upper Inhabitants - 1767," Ibid., 213-233.

had to seek independence by moving to a region where economic and social mobility seemed a real possibility. Not everyone who settled in the region could hope for large amounts of land and slaves, but the availability of land made it possible for many to acquire some land and some sense of independence once the province was willing and able to provide ordering institutions.<sup>53</sup>

Others who had the opportunity to observe the backcountry also added to its unflattering reputation by commenting on the violence, ignorance and indolence of its inhabitants. Jedidiah Morse noted that in any country which "pretends to any degree of civilization, one would hardly expect to find a prevailing custom of putting out the eyes of each other."<sup>54</sup> Yet, eye-gouging and other forms of fighting were noted often by travellers in the region. August Spangenburg, when searching for a suitable tract for the Moravians, noted the presence of backcountry residents who "bear the climate well, but are lazy and do not compare with our northern colonists."<sup>55</sup> An Italian aristocrat, Luigi Castiglioni, found the inhabitants of the mountainous region beyond Salisbury living in "great

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Morse, 418.

<sup>55</sup> "The Spangenburg Diary," Records of the Moravians, 1: 40.

ignorance" with knowledge limited to "the environs of their cabins."<sup>56</sup>

Despite their appearance as less than productive members of colonial American society, backcountry residents were hard at work altering the landscape to suit their needs. The explosion of fences, pens, barns, homes, villages, roads, churches, courthouses and jails marked the changing nature of the interior landscape. Castiglioni commented on how Virginians used the land they inhabited: "if one were to judge the progress of agriculture in this country by the amount of land cleared one would say that it had arrived at a high degree of perfection."<sup>57</sup> Although Castiglioni was travelling on the far eastern edge of what can be considered the back country, the use and abuse of the land by tobacco farmers had an impact on the region as a whole by forcing people further and further west in search of new lands to clear and plant. In the early 1790s, General Le Clerc Milfort also observed the exhaustion of lands on the coast and how "Americans never have enough land, and the inhabitants who find themselves in this vast expanse, abandon their land and go to the west to drive out the savages and take

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<sup>56</sup> Pace, Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio, 180.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 114.

theirs."<sup>58</sup>

Taking the land of the Cherokees and Catawbas and other interior tribes involved more than cession treaties and setting boundaries. It also required the active participation of settlers. In staking a physical claim to the landscape by reshaping it, backcountry folk forced the passage of one sort of landscape and way of life. The new boundaries kept out those peoples, Native Americans, who did not subscribe to the values of independence and improvement at the heart of late colonial American society, while allowing white men to pursue economic independence in a number of different forms.

In his tour of the backcountry, William Drayton found numerous examples of "pleasing and exemplary" industry by persons seeking a degree of self-sufficiency. Farmer Savage planted 130 acres of corn, tobacco and European grains along the Saluda River and produced, with the help of nine slaves and his family, two hundred yards of yarn a year. Other immigrants supplied themselves and disposed of their produce at Ninety-Six, which hoped to be a place

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<sup>58</sup> General Le Clerc Milfort, Memoir or A Quick Glance at my Various Travels and my Sojourn in the Creek Nation, trans. Ben C. McCary (Kennesaw, GA: Continental Book Company, 1959), 113.



of "Trade and Consequence."<sup>59</sup>

Though the first backcountry houses were more like cabins than grand plantations, they altered the landscape. Many were built like William Mylne's cabin on Stephen's Creek near Augusta. His twelve by sixteen foot home was made of pine trees laid one on top of the other and covered with clap boards or split pines. A small bed stood in the corner. Like many others, Mylne hoped his move to the backcountry would allow him to make a comfortable and independent living through agricultural production and trade.<sup>60</sup>

Backcountry residents did more than just build simple cabins to mark the landscape as theirs. Often, they cut down all the trees near their homes and used some of those trees to make rails to fence in their corn fields. To clear the land, they "barked" the trees by "cutting a circle round the tree through the bark quite to the wood" and burned the underbrush so they could plant their corn and other crops among the dead trees. This process of clearing the land left a large number of dead trees

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<sup>59</sup> William Drayton, "Remarks in a Tour through the Back Country of the State of South Carolina," 1784, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> William Mylne to Robert Mylne, June 26, 1774, Ted Ruddock, Travels in the Colonies in 1773-1775: Described in the letters of William Mylne (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 30-31.

waiting to fall and created a landscape of a "very singular, striking and dreadful appearance."<sup>61</sup> Harry Toulmin, an English Unitarian minister, noted, with some disdain, the changes to the backcountry landscape. "Nor is the beauty of the country much improved by the cultivation which is bestowed upon it. The fields are so large, the tillage of them is so negligent, and the zigzag rail fences so remote from everything of rural elegance, that the country has by no means an inviting aspect."<sup>62</sup>

Settlers also took note of transportation routes in the region and adapted their modes of travel to overcome difficult passages. Tarleton Brown found when his family moved to Barnwell district of South Carolina in the 1760s that "the roads were very inferior; in truth they were not much better than common bridle paths." In fact, most of the roads in the Carolina and Virginia back settlements were in poor condition, marked only by blazes on the trees. But despite the state of the roads, settlers made do with "common wood slides" or used rivers to transport

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<sup>61</sup> Arthur Dobbs to the Board of Trade and Plantations, August 24, 1755, Colonial Records of North Carolina, 5: 362-363; Thomas Anburey, Travels through the Interior Parts of America, Foreword by William Harding Carter, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 2: 188-189.

<sup>62</sup> Reverend Harry Toulmin to James Leigh, November 29, 1793, in Reports on Kentucky and Virginia by Harry Toulmin, ed. Marion Tinling and Godfrey Davis (San Marino, CA: Castle Press, 1948), 56.

their goods to market.<sup>63</sup> Backcountry residents were aware of the difficulty of communicating with other parts of the world, but they also made concerted efforts to remain connected to the coastal communities so some of the goods they produced could be carried to market.

As American colonials and European immigrants moved into the backcountry and engaged in the process of changing the landscape, often they were aware of the impressions previous civilizations had left behind.<sup>64</sup> Botanist William Bartram made a number of trips into the South Carolina interior which took him over large savannas, cane swamps, and "frequently old Indian settlements, now deserted and overgrown with forests." These abandoned settlements were near river banks with "artificial mounts and terraces elevating them above the surrounding groves."<sup>65</sup> By the mid 1770s, Bartram noted that the Carolina interior was a "wild country now almost

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<sup>63</sup> Bushnell, 12; Smyth 47.

<sup>64</sup> This process of landscape alteration occurred in many different places in the Americas and has been the subject of increased attention in last few years. See, William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Landscape of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Timothy Silver, A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Albert E. Cowdrey, This Land, This South: An Environmental History (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> William Bartram, Travels and Other Writings, 56.

depopulated" but strewn with "heaps of white gnawed bones of ancient buffaloe, elk and deer, indiscriminately mixed with those of men, half grown over with moss." For Bartram, these scenes of "uncultivated nature" were disconcerting to a delicate and sensible mind, "since some of these objects recognize past transactions and events, perhaps not altogether reconcilable to justice and humanity."<sup>66</sup> What Bartram realized was that one way of adapting and using the landscape was surely giving way to another.

Tryon's boundary expedition was just one way of marking the changes taking place in the backcountry. During his tenure as governor, the rapid settlement and somewhat unstable social conditions in the backcountry kept the region on Tryon's mind. In a July 1765 letter, to his uncle, Sewallis Shirley, Tryon informed his relative that an industrious white population had pushed North Carolina settlements to within a hundred miles of the Blue Ridge mountains. He also reported the growing population to the Board of Trade, noting that "this Province is settling faster than any in the Continent."<sup>67</sup>

Since Governor Tryon wanted to play an active role in

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>67</sup> William Tryon to Sewallis Shirley, July 26, 1765, Correspondence of William Tryon, 139; William Tryon to the Board of Trade, August 2, 1766, Ibid., 341.

running the boundary, his poor health in the summer and fall of 1766 forced the postponement of the surveying expedition to the following year.<sup>68</sup> However, the governor revealed his commitment to the expedition by petitioning the North Carolina assembly to appropriate the necessary funds for the mission.<sup>69</sup> In February 1767, Governor Tryon reminded Stuart that the British government seemed "greatly apprehensive of a Rupture with the Indians and highly displeased at the encroachments made by some of the Colonies on the Indian Lands" and suggested that Stuart, Tryon, the boundary commissioners and the Cherokee meet in Salisbury on May 16th.<sup>70</sup> Although Tryon was disappointed that Stuart was not present at the proceedings in May, the Cherokees and North Carolinians were able to run the line by early June.<sup>71</sup>

The residents of Salisbury were pleased that Tryon had decided to play such a vigorous role in what for them

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<sup>68</sup> The Cherokees also appeared willing, but unable due to illness in their villages to survey the line in the fall of 1766. A Talk from the Cherokee Chiefs Head men of the Nation to their Father in Charles Town, September 22, 1766, Colonial Records of North Carolina, VII: 256.

<sup>69</sup> William Tryon to John Stuart, February, 16, 1767, Correspondence of William Tryon, 424.

<sup>70</sup> William Tryon to Stuart, February 16, 1767, *Ibid.*, 424-425.

<sup>71</sup> William Tryon to Earl Shelburne, July 8, 1767, Colonial Records of North Carolina, VII: 500.

was an important act. Despite recent unrest in the colony over the Stamp Act, the citizens expressed "the pleasure and satisfaction" they felt under Tryon's "prudent and wise administration." The establishment of a boundary with their "barbarous neighbours" was necessary to prevent frequent acts of violence and to give Salisbury the chance to be "the future seat of a flourishing people situated in this remote part of the world."<sup>72</sup> The opportunity for independence and property for white settlers had to be protected from those who could not and would not be allowed to participate in such a society.

Governor Tryon, his escort, and the commissioners for the boundary began their march west to encounter the Cherokees on May 21. On the last day of the month, the party met the Cherokees at the Tyger River Camp where talks and negotiations began in earnest. Governor Tryon addressed the Indians, trying to alleviate some of the confusion that had surrounded the proceedings due to the absence of Stuart and the failure to secure a definite meeting place and time. Tryon offered the Cherokee gifts from Salisbury and believed the proceedings would "strengthen and brighten the Chain which holds fast that

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<sup>72</sup> Address of Alexander Martin, Spokesman for the Inhabitants of Salisbury to William Tryon, May 19, 1767, Correspondence of William Tryon, 467-468.

Peace and Harmony which at present subsists between us."<sup>73</sup>

The following day Ustenuah Ottassatic responded for the Cherokee, hoping to do what was "fair and right," but aware that "the Deer and Buffaloe and Turkeys are almost gone." He wanted a line run that would stand "without alteration" where neither side would encroach on the other and promised his people would no longer love the land east of the line, but "give it to the white People."<sup>74</sup>

Although Tryon did not stay around until the line was surveyed entirely, the parties completed the negotiations by the middle of June. Before the treaty was signed, Ustenuah Ottassatic expressed his hope that "there will be no more Houses built on their Lands" because he had given "the Land with a free Heart, the Grass growing on it, the Waters running on it, and the Wood growing on it, and all that is raised upon it belongs to the White People."<sup>75</sup> The deer and the game on the other side of the line belonged to the Cherokee and were theirs to use as they wished.

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<sup>73</sup> William Tryon's Talk to the Cherokees, June 1, 1767, *Ibid.*, 496-498.

<sup>74</sup> The Cherokees' Reply to William Tryon, June 2, 1767, *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>75</sup> A Talk of the Cherokees at the House of Colonel Clark, June 13, 1767, *Ibid.*, 503-504.

The final treaty was signed on June 13, 1767. The line commenced where the South Carolina line ended, ran north into the mountains and from there on a straight line to Colonel Chiswell's Mines in Virginia.<sup>76</sup> (Figure II) But in some sense the line had been drawn and redrawn in many times and in many places. There was little the Cherokee or any other interior tribe, or for that matter the British government, could do to prevent the expansion of the exploding European and African coastal populations. Eighteenth-century settlers would not allow formal agreements to become an obstacle to their pursuit of economic opportunity and independence in the Carolina - Virginia backcountry.

When Thomas Anburey was captured during the Revolutionary War and held near Charlottesville, Virginia, he had the opportunity to observe one of the possible outcomes for the backcountry. He stayed in a house situated on a small hill above "the face of the country that appears an immense forest, interspersed with various plantations." These plantation sites often had a "dwelling house" in the center of the property surrounded by detached kitchens and other "out-houses." Each of these plantations looked like a small village with

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<sup>76</sup> Virginia Gazette, 13 August 1767, Correspondence of William Tryon, 546-547.



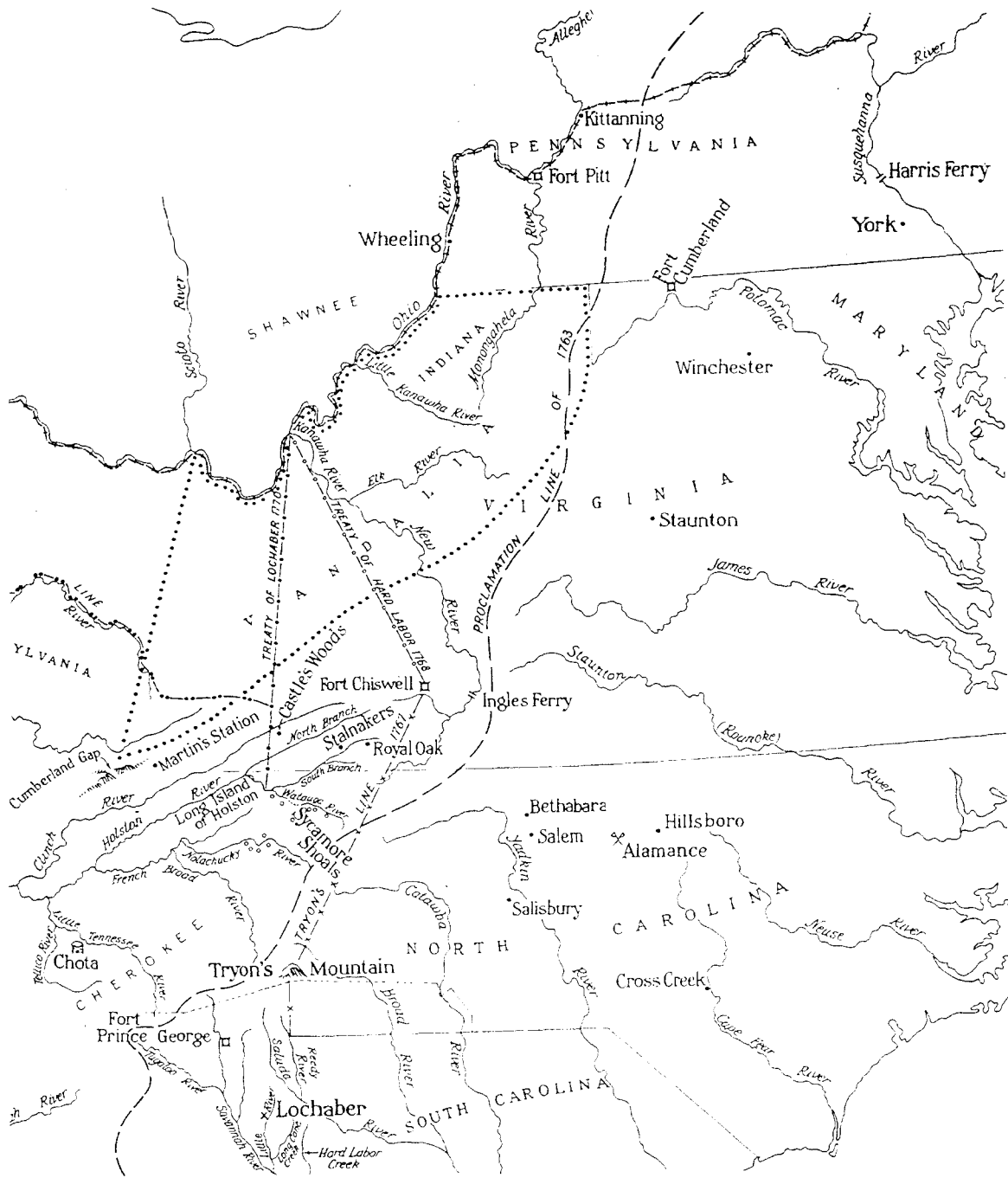


Figure II - Tryon's Line, 1767

Source: Adapted from James Truslow Adams, Atlas of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 61.

orchards, slave huts and tobacco houses.<sup>77</sup> Although many in the backcountry could not immediately claim a sizeable plantation with numbers of out-buildings and slaves, the backcountry did provide individuals the opportunity for economic independence. By the 1760s when negotiations formally granted much of the interior to the governments of the Carolinas and Virginia, backcountry folk had already spent several decades molding the landscape and the environment. They would spend the rest of the century trying to figure out what their relationship was to the societies they had left behind and what sort of community they wanted to create for themselves and their families.

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<sup>77</sup> Anburey, 187.

## CHAPTER II

### "On the Verge of Civilization": The Narrow Escape of Mrs. Frances Scott

The gentle sounds of a quiet summer evening slowly drifted through the open door of the Scott cabin. Life in the Virginia backcountry of the mid-1780s demanded a great deal of hard work, and many frontier families welcomed the peace and respite of nightfall. As her husband and children made their way to bed, Frances Scott tidied up the cabin and finished a few more simple chores. Her day's work ended, she extinguished the last burning candle and removed her worn shift.<sup>1</sup>

In an instant, gunfire and screams shattered the tranquility of this peaceful Virginia night. "Painted savages" rushed through the door with a "hideous shriek" firing guns and waving hatchets and knives. Within seconds, Archibald Scott lay on the floor dead along with

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<sup>1</sup> Narrative of Mrs. Scott and Capt. Stewart's Captivity, Garland Library of Narratives of North American Indian Captivities (Boston: E. Russell, 1786; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 8-11. In the same year, Frances Scott's story was also published with an account of the adventures of Daniel Boone. See, The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boon. One of the First Settlers of Kentucke: Containing The Wars with the Indians on the Ohio, from 1769 to 1783, and the First Establishment and Progress of the Settlement on that River: Written by the Colonel Himself: To which are added, A Narrative of the Captivity, and Extraordinary Escape of Mrs. Francis [sic] Scott (Norwich, CT: John Trumbull, 1786).

three of the family's children. The eldest daughter ran towards Frances Scott seeking the protection of her mother's arms, but was "tomahawked and stabbed" to death. Minutes later, the invaders departed, taking with them clothing, furniture, several rifles and the devastated Mrs. Scott.<sup>2</sup>

The following year, a Boston printer published "a true and wonderful narrative of the surprising captivity and remarkable deliverance of Mrs. Frances Scott." The title page promised full details of the almost unparalleled "sufferings and hardships" she endured between the time "she was taken by the Indians" on June 29, 1785, and her escape on August 11 of the same year. The editor offered the tale not only to gratify the curiosity of serious and pious readers, but also to serve their "spiritual interest."<sup>3</sup> Scott's story, like other

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<sup>2</sup> Another, quite similar, version of the narrative survived through Frances Scott's daughter, Elizabeth Johnson, and a physician in Lee County, Virginia, James W. Sage, who told the story to Charles B. Coale. See, Lewis Preston Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 1746-1786, Washington County, 1770-1870 (Richmond: n.p., 1903; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1966), 376-379; Summers, Annals of Southwest Virginia (Abingdon, VA: n.p., 1929; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1970), 1603-1606.

<sup>3</sup> Narrative of Mrs. Scott and Capt. Stewart's Captivity, i-iv.

seventeenth and eighteenth century captivity narratives,<sup>4</sup> carried meaning because it spoke to fears white settlers had about their frontier existence and their salvation. Her ability to conquer the wilderness and her captors allowed her to return home, remarry and resume her duties as wife and mother. It also gave her narrative symbolic importance because it reassured readers that they might find security and sustenance in a world not entirely their own.<sup>5</sup>

After taking the time and effort to remove Native Americans from coastal and interior areas, upper class whites could not allow elements of savage behavior to emerge in their communities and threaten the economic and social order. To that end, publishers placed women at the center of the frontier experience by lauding heroines, like Frances Scott, who resisted the savagery of their captors and reaffirmed the values of the American community through their struggles.<sup>6</sup> Locally, ministers and judges tried to prevent a complete degeneration of

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<sup>4</sup> See, Mary Rowlandson, A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (London: n.p., 1682; reprint, New York: Garland, 1977), 1-36.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 94-115.

<sup>6</sup> For the story of a woman who did not resist her captors, see John Demos, The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America (New York: Knopf, 1994).

frontier communities by enforcing idealized standards of sexual conduct. The attempt to control provocative dress and sexual misconduct was not unique to frontier communities, but the effort was important because of the perceived differences between the savage natives and civilized settlers. If they were going to improve the land they had conquered, white Americans inhabiting the first frontiers could not permit themselves, and could not be permitted, to become like the unorganized, inefficient and rude peoples they encountered.<sup>7</sup> Backcountry folk had to resist, or be forced to resist, every step of the way if they were going to create and recreate a society where independent men and their families sought the opportunity to improve their lives and their communities.

Created out of Fincastle County in 1776, Washington County, Virginia grew quickly as Americans began to push further west during and after the Revolutionary War. By the 1790s, it had a population of between five and six thousand people, and the county seat of Abingdon contained around fifty wood houses.<sup>8</sup> On the western edge of the

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<sup>7</sup> James Axtell, "The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America," in The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 41-55.

<sup>8</sup> Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 851; Thomas Chapman, "A Journey through the United States (1795-1796)," in Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times ed. Eugene Schwaab (Lexington:

backcountry, the valley of southwest Virginia had long served as a passage for northern and southern Indians, chosen for ease in crossing the mountains, an abundance of game and the absence of hostile inhabitants. (Figure III) Early white settlers adopted the travel route for many of the same reasons before they began settling in the region in the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

In was on this "Frontier Part" of southwest Virginia that Archibald and Frances Scott made their home. She had grown up in nearby Castle's Woods and developed the "coolness and fortitude" necessary for a frontier life.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1780s, they had settled in a small valley between Powell's Mountain and Wallen's Ridge trying to take advantage of the area's fertile soil and abundant water supply.<sup>11</sup> In this particular part of the Virginia backcountry, along with the western parts of the Carolinas, Native Americans and whites still confronted each other in a variety of situations on a fairly regular basis.

Despite its reputation as being a region remote from "predatory bands of Indians," there were a number of

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University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 34.

<sup>9</sup> Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Summers, Annals, 1604.

<sup>11</sup> Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 376.

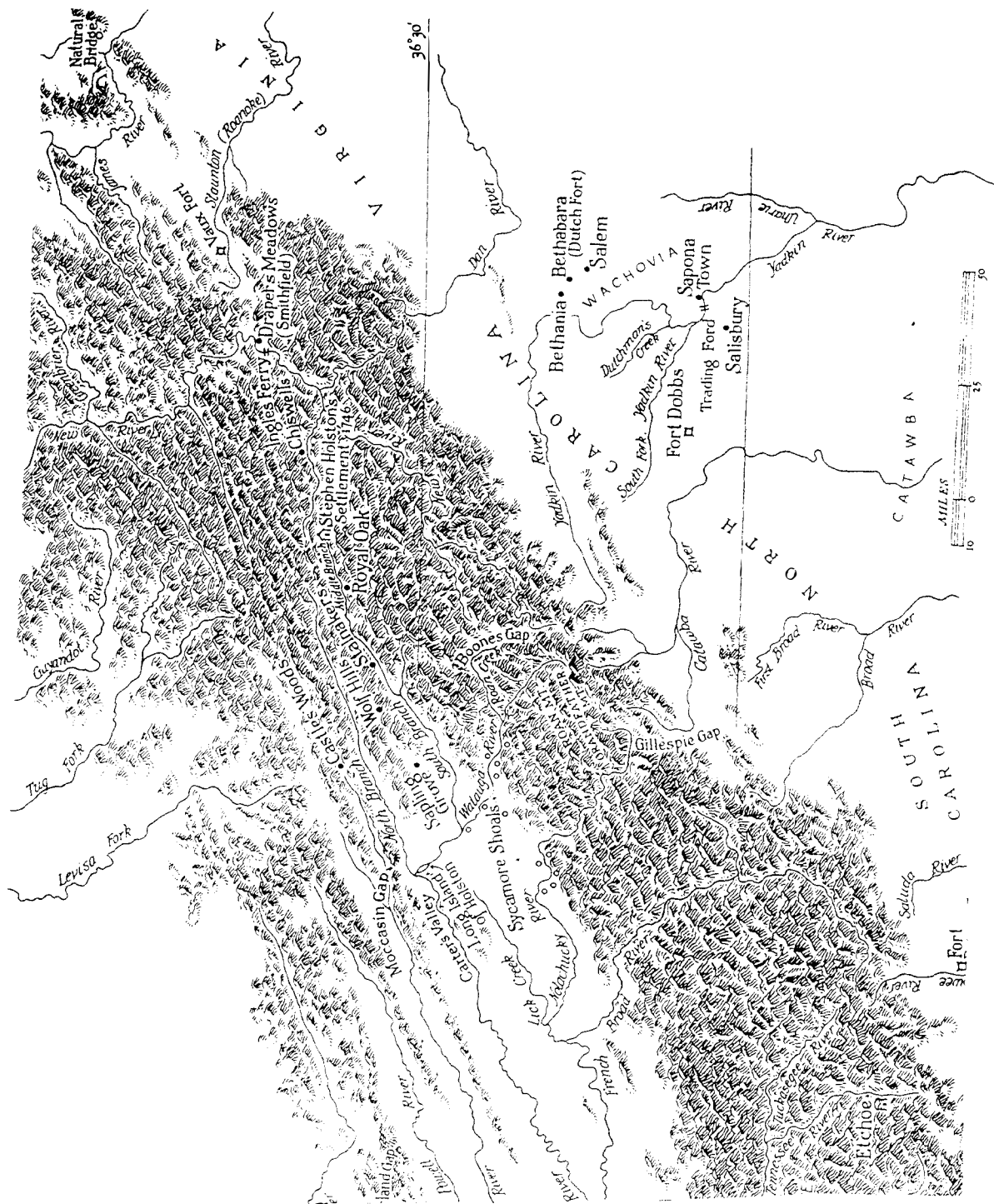


Figure III - Western Virginia and North Carolina

Source: Adapted from James Truslow Adams, Atlas of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 59.



violent incidents in and around Washington County during the 1780s, including several in the months just prior to Frances Scott's captivity.<sup>12</sup> On March 27, 1785, Colonel Arthur Campbell reported to Governor Patrick Henry that some Indians had killed two families at the New Garden settlement on the Clinch River. Campbell also referred to the recent murder of Mrs. Walling and to an incident involving Mrs. Cox, who "was Shot at by three Indians, but happily escaped."<sup>13</sup> In the 1840s, Lyman Draper began collecting stories about the settlement of the West, and David Campbell sent him information that in 1789 a family on the north fork of the Holston was captured and killed by a party of Cherokees. Two years later, with the help of neighbors, the family of Peter Livingston managed to escape from captivity and return to their home in southwest Virginia.<sup>14</sup>

The specific identity of Frances Scott's captors remains a mystery. In one version of the story, it is a band of twenty Shawnee led by a "notorious and cruel half-breed" named Benge. In another, Mrs. Scott's captors were

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 376-377.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Campbell to Governor Patrick Henry, March 2, 1785, in Calendar of Virginia State Papers, ed. William P. Palmer (Richmond: Derr, 1884), IV: 20.

<sup>14</sup> David Campbell to Lyman C. Draper, April 18, 1848, Draper MSS, 10DD70a.

a party composed of four different nations including Delawares and Mingoes.<sup>15</sup> However, in some sense, the ambiguity does not really matter because eighteenth-century Americans tended to group all Native Americans together. This image of the Indian was a creation of the white mind and went a long way towards not only defining how whites viewed Native American communities, but also how they viewed themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Although backcountry residents could never replicate the societies they left behind, in many ways the dominant cultural trends of European and coastal American societies influenced these new frontier communities. The backcountry family, similar to families in European and more established American colonial societies, was a patriarchy. Husbands and fathers represented the family in public affairs, while wives and mothers, like Frances Scott, served as their husbands' agents and occupied themselves with raising children and attending to

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<sup>15</sup> Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 377; Narrative of Mrs. Scott Captivity, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 3; See also, William Bartram, Travels and Other Writings, comp. Thomas P. Slaughter (New York: Library of America, 1996), 407; John Filson, The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke, Introduction by William H. Masterson (Wilmington: James Adams, 1784; reprint, New York: Corinth, 1963), 99-106.

household duties. Despite their limited civic power, women played a vital role in the expansion of European-American social and cultural forms into the North American continent. While men might provide the preliminary labor in exploring new territory, clearing land and fighting off enemies, only with the assistance of women could those men establish permanent homes and communities.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the fact that women in colonial America often performed tasks similar to those of men, only male members of society could hold positions of independence and power. The status of women, children, servants and slaves as dependents excluded them from many of the daily exchanges in land and property. The economic role of men required them to work outside in the fields, while their female partners managed the garden plots and the homes. Women were responsible for cooking meals, planting vegetables, breeding poultry, caring for cattle, producing butter and cheese, clothing the family and making household goods like candles, medicine and soap.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Julia Cherry Spruill, Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 19, 43-44; Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 3-9.

<sup>18</sup> Mary P. Ryan, Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 22-31.

In a tour of Europe in the spring of 1788, Thomas Jefferson took the opportunity to record his views about the proper role of women in a civil society. He noted that European women were "useful and rational companions" who also served as objects of pleasure. For Jefferson, it was an "honourable circumstance for man, that the first moment he is at his ease, he allots the internal employments to his female partner, and takes the external on himself." However, this beneficial system of social government was obviously not present in Native American societies, because every Indian man was a warrior constantly employed in fighting or hunting. The fact that Indian women engaged in the community's difficult work while their men were away was "a barbarous perversion of the natural destination of the two sexes."<sup>19</sup>

In the same year that Jefferson made his tour of Europe, he took time in Paris to comment on the active participation of French women in politics and to hope that American ladies were "too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics." Jefferson believed the political role of women should be limited to soothing and calming the minds of their husbands "returning ruffled from political

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Memorandums on a Tour, Paris to Amsterdam, Strasbourg, and back to Paris (1788)," in Writings, comp. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 651-652.

debate" and admired American women who had the sense to value and cultivate domestic happiness above all others.<sup>20</sup>

Backcountry settlers encountered Native American communities quite different from their own. John Filson found that the Indians were "not so ignorant as some suppose them," although the women were "very slaves to the men," which he and others emphasized as a common condition among uncivilized people. They lived in meager villages in small log huts, slept on animal skins and cooked in brass kettles and pots.<sup>21</sup> William Bartram's travels in the Southeast took him as far as the Tennessee River and gave him the opportunity to observe many different Native American peoples and communities. Despite the obvious cultural differences, Bartram found the Native Americans quite attractive. The males of the Cherokees, Seminoles, Chickasaws, Choctaws and Creeks were "tall, erect, and moderately robust" with "well-shaped" limbs, "features regular" and an "air of magnanimity, superiority and independence." To Bartram, Native American females, particularly Cherokee women, were "tall, slender, erect and of a delicate form; their features formed with perfect

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Anne Willing Bingham, May 11, 1788, in Writings, 922-923.

<sup>21</sup> Filson, 100-101.

symmetry."<sup>22</sup>

The Native American communities in the Southeast organized themselves in a different fashion than did the growing frontier communities. Instead of some form of patriarchy, they relied upon a matrilineal and matrilocal kinship system which served as the community's most important social unit and helped define an individual's relationship to the rest of the group.<sup>23</sup> Even though Native Americans of the Southeast traced their lineage through female relatives on their mother's side of the family, much of the social power was in the hands of the male members of the community who had more significant roles in politics and war.<sup>24</sup>

Just as the social organization of the Native Americans was obviously alien to European Americans, so were marriage customs, sexual practices and gender roles. Although tradition forbade individuals from having sex or

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<sup>22</sup> Bartram, Travels, 271-274; 386-387.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hudson, The Southeastern Indians (n.p., University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 184-193. See also, R. S. Cotterill, The Southern Indians: The Story of the Civilized Tribes before Removal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954).

<sup>24</sup> According to Thomas Hatley, the political role for Cherokee women was a strong one and included being present in the council house and the status of war-women for some. See Thomas Hatley, The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Revolutionary Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.

marrying others in their own clan, Native American women in the Southeastern tribes had a great deal more sexual freedom than did their white counterparts. Creek women had significant sexual choice before marriage, while single or married Cherokee women, just like Cherokee men, could have relations with anyone whom they chose.<sup>25</sup> White settlers assumed that this sort of freedom, if permitted in frontier communities, would undermine the patriarchal system of authority which governed those societies and create large numbers of unwanted dependents.

Native peoples of the Southeast were hunters and farmers with economic and social roles defined for their members primarily on the basis of gender. Native Americans in the region thought of men and women as very different forms of humanity and assigned them distinct tasks in subsistence activities. Males provided meat for the community by hunting and fishing and often had to demonstrate their competence at such tasks before marrying. Women provided vegetables from both gardening and gathering and did all of the work in running the household, including cooking, making pottery and basket weaving.

Like other European and American observers of native culture, William Bartram noted the important differences

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<sup>25</sup> Hudson, 197-201.

in production between the two societies. While Indians cultivated many of the same crops as their white counterparts, including corn, potatoes, beans, squash, pumpkins and melons, they raised their food in a "common plantation" quite different from the settlers' independent farms. The Native Americans' communal agriculture required the participation of the entire community in planting the fields and harvesting the crops for storage in a "public treasury." On the subject of mechanical arts or manufactures, Native Americans had "scarcely any thing worth observation," in part because white traders supplied them with all "necessaries, conveniences, and even superfluties."<sup>26</sup>

To white outsiders, it often appeared that women did much of the work in native society, while men spent their time at "leisure" activities, like hunting and fishing. Native American men "performed nothing" except for a few "trifling matters," like erecting their homes and building canoes. The women, on the other hand, were "more vigilant, and turned their attention to various manual employments," like making pottery, moccasins, belts, lace, fringe and other decorations for their apparel.<sup>27</sup> Thomas Jefferson devoted a portion of his Notes on the State of Virginia to

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 259-267; Bartram, 407.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



Native American societies, which he described as communities where "the stronger sex imposes on the weaker," forcing the women into "unjust drudgery." For Jefferson, and other colonial Americans, this misguided perception of the relationship between the sexes was surely a sign of the savagery of the natives and led him to the conclusion that if white Americans were "equal in barbarism, our females would be equal drudges."<sup>28</sup>

The existence of Native American communities presented a great intellectual challenge to Europeans from the very first encounters. Europeans and their descendants came to the Americas with a particular world view that assumed a single creation by their God and the placement of their society and culture at the pinnacle of human communities.<sup>29</sup> European colonials had to explain how these other people came to exist and how they fit into the rational and Christian world-view they carried with them. Although disease, warfare and white expansion had dramatically reduced the numbers of Native Americans by the late eighteenth century, the "Indian" as an intellectual problem remained important for whites. As peoples living on the periphery of European civilization,

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<sup>28</sup> Jefferson, Notes of the State of Virginia, in Writings, 186.

<sup>29</sup> Berkhofer, 40-41.

Americans in the eighteenth century were as concerned with the possibility of their own savagery as with that of the native peoples they encountered and subdued.

Samuel Stanhope Smith, professor of moral philosophy at the College of New Jersey, was one of those eighteenth-century Americans interested in civilization, savagery and variation among human beings. In February 1787, Smith presented many of his ideas on these topics in a lecture at the Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, and although his ideas were not particularly original, they accurately reflected late colonial thought on the subject of race and civilization.<sup>30</sup> In his speech and the published volume that followed, Smith made a great effort to dispute the "arbitrary hypothesis that men are originally sprung from different stocks, and therefore divided by nature into different species." Smith's task in this regard was an important one because it solidified the place of Europeans in the larger world by holding them up as the most civil and settled people of all.

Instead of the separate creation theory, Smith argued that variety in the human species derived from climate and

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<sup>30</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species, 2nd ed., ed. Winthrop Jordan (New Brunswick: Simpson, 1810; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1965), viii-xi.

social environment.<sup>31</sup> The "naked savage" lived in a miserable hut or simply slept under the open sky imbibing "the influence of the sun and atmosphere at every pore." The uncultivated region, "filled with stagnant waters, and covered with putrid vegetables," also contributed to the degeneracy of complexion among native peoples. A process which body-painting, over exposure to smoke, hard living conditions and an "intire inattention to a personal and domestic cleanliness" augmented further.<sup>32</sup>

Other eighteenth-century observers echoed Smith's environmental explanation in their descriptions of native peoples. John Filson observed that while the Indians were not born white, they took "great pains to darken their complexion by anointing themselves with grease and lying in the sun." James Adair noticed that Native Americans had "a copper or red-clay colour - and they delight in everything, which they imagine may promote and increase it," including the use of vermilion face paint. Adair attributed the color of the Indians' skin to a "certain fine cowl, or web, of a red glossy substance" underneath the outer layer of their skin. "Parching winds, and hot-sun beams, beating upon their naked bodies" deepened the

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, Essays on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Species (Philadelphia: Robert Aitken, 1787), fiche, 1-2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 44-47.

reddish hue, and the practice of "constant anointing themselves with bear's oil, or grease, mixt with a certain red root" produced in a few short years the Indian color.<sup>33</sup>

Although Smith, Adair, Filson and other eighteenth-century Americans believed climate helped explain part of the color variation in the world, they also felt the state of society played a role. William Bartram recorded his personal observations about Native Americans gleaned from several trips into the backcountry in the 1770s. The questions that Bartram hoped to investigate included:

Whether they were inclined to adopt European modes of civil society? Whether such a reformation could be obtained without using coercive or violent means? And lastly, whether such a revelation would be productive of real benefit to them, and consequently beneficial to the public?<sup>34</sup>

Whites saw numerous indications that the savagery of Native Americans would prevent them from reformation and integration into any form of civil society. Alexander Hewatt, one of the first historical writers of the region, believed that because Indian men were often away hunting or at war, agriculture, "the chief means of subsistence

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<sup>33</sup> Samuel Cole Williams, ed. Adair's History of the American Indians (Johnson City, TN: Watauga Press, 1930), 1-4.

<sup>34</sup> Bartram, Travels, 24.

among a civilized people," was neglected and viewed as "an occupation worthy of only women and slaves." Jefferson insisted that division of labor among a people contributed to the relative strength or weakness of the sexes. Indian men and white women were "small in the hand and wrist" and lacking athletic prowess because their respective societies indulged their lives with ease.<sup>35</sup>

The size of Native American families also seemed to concern Jefferson. Native families were smaller than white families, and Jefferson believed this condition was "found not in a difference of nature, but of circumstance." Frequent parties of war and hunting made child-bearing "extremely inconvenient." Severe exertion, times of famine, and abortion also contributed to the small family size of native peoples. Jefferson noted that Indian women who married white traders often produced and raised "as many children as the white women" because their husbands fed them and protected them from "excessive drudgery."<sup>36</sup>

John Bartram, in a letter to Peter Collinson, considered the possibility that Indian women could serve

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander Hewatt, An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia. 2 vols. (London: Alexander Donaldson, 1779; reprint, Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, 1962), 2: 278; Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 185-186.

<sup>36</sup> Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 186.

as able wives for European settlers. Although he did not know any Englishmen who had married an "Indian nymph," primarily because most considered it a "horrid crime," he thought it possible that Indian women might make "handsom dutyfull industrious loveing and fruitfull wives as many of our own women." All these women had to do to accept their new roles was dress well, clean themselves, quit drinking and whiten their skins a little.<sup>37</sup> Such ideas led Jefferson to the conclusion that the Native American was "neither more defective in ardor, nor more impotent with his female, than the white reduced to the same diet and exercise."<sup>38</sup> By changing the environment of native peoples through the introduction of settled agriculture, Christianity and political individualism, whites could help Indians lose their savagery.<sup>39</sup>

Like Jefferson, Samuel Stanhope Smith and James Adair also hinted at the possibility that changes in climate and environment might lead to a blurring of the distinctions between the two peoples. Smith found evidence for his

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<sup>37</sup> John Bartram to Peter Collinson, December 15, 1757, The Correspondence of John Bartram, 1734-1777, eds. Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 432.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 184.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard W. Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philosophy and the American Indian (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973).

claims in the observation that the people of New Jersey were "somewhat darker in their colour" than residents of Pennsylvania because in general the land was lower and "covered with a greater quantity of stagnant water." Further south in the Carolinas and Georgia, complexion, especially among the poor and laboring classes who were "always first and most deeply affected by the influence of climate and who eventually give the national complexion to every country," had degenerated to just a "few shades lighter than that of the Iroquois." Adair knew a Pennsylvanian, a white man and a Christian, who after years of living with Indians and trying to improve his red color was "tarnished with as deep an Indian hue, as any of the camp." While such a change was difficult to imagine for civilized Europeans, Smith was adamant that if a Briton "were thrown, like the native Indians, into a savage state they would be perfectly marked, in time, with the same colour."<sup>40</sup>

The responsibility of whites toward Native Americans remained a subject of concern, especially among those involved in the national government. The Reverend David Barrow, who travelled through the Virginia backcountry, believed that Native Americans, as the descendants of the

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, 1st ed., 1787, 22-24; Williams, Adair's History, 3-4.

lost tribes of Israel, were the predecessors of Europeans and entitled to respect and assistance which included the propagation of the arts and sciences among them through the establishment of English schools.<sup>41</sup>

During his second inaugural address, Thomas Jefferson made a similar effort to confront the problems faced by "the aboriginal inhabitants of these countries." Despite Jefferson's belief in their savagery, he also considered them "endowed with faculties and the rights of men, breathing an ardent love of liberty and independence." All they really desired was to be left alone from the "stream of overflowing population from other regions" which overwhelmed them and reduced their lands so much they could no longer hunt. For Jefferson, the solution to the problem was clear: "Humanity enjoins us to teach them agriculture and the domestic arts; to encourage them to that industry which alone can enable them to maintain their place in existence, and to prepare them for that state of society, which to bodily comforts adds the improvement of the minds and morals."<sup>42</sup> If native peoples could be taught to plow and hoe on enclosed lands, instead of constantly hunting and fighting, they might

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<sup>41</sup> David Barrow, 1795 Diary of Reverend David Barrow (Knightstown, IN: Bookmark, 1980), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Second Inaugural Address (March 4, 1805)," in Writings, 520.



find a place American society.<sup>43</sup> It seemed one solution to the problems between white and Indians required natives to give up those practices and beliefs which marked them as different.

Eighteenth-century Europeans and Americans tried to explain the differences between themselves and the Native Americans they encountered by incorporating them into an already existing world view. Accepting the idea of multiple creations would acknowledge "a weakness, of which infinite wisdom is incapable." For Smith and others, the effect of climate was "augmented by a savage state, and corrected by a state of civilization" which seemed to offer the possibility that Native Americans could be civilized. It also suggested that white peoples as they moved further and further from civil society might become as savage as the peoples they found there.<sup>44</sup>

When travelling through the states of North America after the Revolutionary War, the German surgeon Johann David Schoepf noticed several ways in which "half-savage" backwoodsmen lived "very much like the Indians" and acquired "similar ways of thinking." In his travels along the Alleghenies, Schoepf observed an emerging frontier

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Address to the Chiefs of the Cherokee Nation (January 10, 1806)," in Writings, 561.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, Adair's History, 3; Smith, 1st ed., 1787, 44.

culture that shunned everything "which appears to demand of them law and order." The object of the frontiersmen, and by comparison the Indian, was "wild, altogether natural freedom, and hunting is what pleases them." In certain cases, white Americans seemed to reject the settled, ordered agriculture of a civil society in favor of a more savage sort of liberty.<sup>45</sup>

Isaac Weld, an Irish traveller passing through western Virginia, made comments on climate and complexion very much in concert with the work of Samuel Stanhope Smith. As he travelled along the South Mountains which run nearly parallel to the Blue Ridge, he noted the presence of a growing population. As for the climate, he observed the heat was not so oppressive, and in general, "the salubrity of the climate is equal also to that of any part of the United States and the inhabitants have in consequence a healthy ruddy appearance." The backcountry women Weld encountered had charming complexions and an increased sense of sexuality, evidenced by the "carelessness of their dresses," which consisted of little more than a simple bodice and petticoat making them appear

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<sup>45</sup> Johann David Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison, vol. 1, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia (Erlangen: Johann Jacob Palm, 1788; reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968), 238-239.

"even still more engaging."<sup>46</sup> The remote location of many frontier communities and absence of certain civil institutions raised the possibility that white men and women might degenerate into the very sort of people they had removed from the landscape.

The Reverend Charles Woodmason noticed many of the same trends when he went to the Carolina backcountry in the 1760s to help establish the Anglican church. He found the residents and "their Living and Behavior as rude or more so than the Savages."<sup>47</sup> In August 1768, Woodmason preached before a large congregation at Flatt Creek, many of whom had never seen a minister and after the service went to "Revelling Drinking Singing Dancing and Whoring." He found backcountry women particularly provocative, since they wore their dresses "almost as loose and Naked as the Indians, and differing in Nothing save Complexion."<sup>48</sup> This state of degeneracy often concerned the minister, and he imagined how the polite members of London society would

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<sup>46</sup> Isaac Weld, Travels through the States of North America, 2 vols. (London: John Stockbridge, 1807; reprint ed., New York and London; Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), vol. 1: 205-206.

<sup>47</sup> Richard J. Hooker, ed. The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1953), 7.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

stare if they saw these very pretty women "come to Service in their Shifts and a short petticoat only, barefooted and Bare legged - Without Caps or Handkerchiefs - dress'd only in their Hair, Quite in a State of Nature for Nakedness is Counted as Nothing."<sup>49</sup>

Despite his best efforts, Woodmason could not break the frontier women of their habits in dress. Some wore their shirts and petticoats very tight against their breasts and waists, showing their fine limbs and shape. As far as he was concerned, these women "might as well be Puri Naturalibus." In fact, they went so far as to rub themselves and their hair with bear's oil, "tying it up in a Bunch like the Indians - being hardly one degree removed from them."<sup>50</sup>

Woodmason considered it his duty to bring about a reformation to prevent the complete degeneracy of backcountry folk. Immediately after arriving in the backcountry, he began preaching against "Vice and Immorality," hoping to improve the behavior of those who were "swopping their Wives as Cattel, and living in a State of Nature, more irregularly, and unchastely than the Indians."<sup>51</sup> Woodmason offered to marry those who had

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 15.

lived in "Concubinage" due to their own licentiousness and the lack of ministers in the region. The sexual practices of Native Americans were not fit for a civilized community, and ministers like Woodmason had an obligation to prevent the complete regression of backcountry settlers.

The need for reformation indicated the dangers of living in the Carolina - Virginia backcountry in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. The threat was not entirely physical, but also included the possibility that white settlers might degenerate to a point where they would adopt savage modes of living that could threaten the existence of a civil society of independent farmers and producers. These fears of regression had existed in the American mind at least as far back as the Puritans, who for a time hoped to change the Indian lifestyle through reformation and thereby eliminate the Indian problem.<sup>52</sup> Backcountry communities in the late-eighteenth century met this threat by defining savage behaviors and modes of dress and reminding white settlers that they were not appropriate attitudes for a civilizing people.

Civil and political institutions, just like frontier ministers and churches, had a vital role to play in the formation and reformation of backcountry communities. In

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<sup>52</sup> Axtell, "The Invasion Within," 57.

the late 1770s and early 1780s, the courts of Washington County, Virginia often dealt with women and issues of sexual morality and tried to reinforce the social values necessary for living in a society of independent men and their families. The court could not allow white women to act like sexual savages because they threatened the community by creating the possibility of unwanted dependents who would be a burden on the responsible members of society. In an effort to promote and preserve the values of civil society, the grand jury returned presentments against couples for living together without being married, adultery, bastardy and fornication.<sup>53</sup>

The court regularly brought charges against women for having base-born children, including five indictments in May 1782. Many of the indicted women were servants, and if found guilty, faced extended times of service for their crimes. In February 1777, the county court ordered Eleonor Pomphrey to "serve her Master one year after the time her present indenture is expired" for having a bastard child. In August of that same year, Nancy Norman received two additional years of service to her master for committing the crime of bastardy on two separate occasions. In May of 1778, Mary Daily brought a charge

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<sup>53</sup> Minutes of the County Court, Washington County, Virginia, in Annals of Southwest Virginia, 1769-1800, 955-1193.

against her mistress Katherine Shelby for mistreatment, but apparently only to cover up the fact that Daily was unmarried and pregnant. An unsympathetic court dismissed her case and added an extra year to her time of service.<sup>54</sup>

When dealing with indigent and bastard children, the court made every effort to ensure they would become independent, productive members of society by giving the opportunity to learn a trade. It bound Jeany Simpson, a poor child, to George Adams and John Long, a bastard child, to John Burk, who was to teach him the "art and mistery" [mystery] of the blacksmith trade." In a similar case, Philip Sword was bound to Archilaus Dickenson to learn to be a bricklayer.<sup>55</sup> While the courts were certainly interested in encouraging ethical behavior, they also wanted to make sure wanton sexual activity did not burden the rest of the community or threaten the income and property of virtuous men.

White Americans also dealt with their frontier existence and confrontation with Native American peoples by reading and telling stories about their encounters. The narrative of Mrs. Frances Scott spoke to Americans about savagery and civilization in a manner not entirely

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1101, 955, 967, 993.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 965, 981, 985.

different from the Reverend Woodmason or the Washington County Court. In the broadest sense, the published story spoke to all white Americans living on the periphery of European society and reinforced important values in the wake of the Revolutionary War.

According to the published narrative, Mrs. Scott had the opportunity to escape eleven days after her captivity. Her abductors left her alone with an old man who lessened his vigilance as they moved further west. Sent to retrieve water from a nearby stream, she simply wandered away, hoping beyond hope that she might find her way back home. Her journey back towards southwest Virginia became one of grand proportions as she travelled through the mountains for day after day and made a couple of death-defying leaps off small cliffs before a beautiful pair of birds led her down the path to the New Garden settlement on the Clinch River.<sup>56</sup>

The entire time she was in the woods, Mrs. Scott claimed to have eaten nothing but cane-stalk, sassafras leaves and other edible plants. While wandering in the woods, she saw "Buffaloes, Serpents, Elks, Deers, and frequently Bears and Wolves; not one of which offered her the least Harm." One day on her journey, she saw a bear

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<sup>56</sup> Narrative of Mrs. Scott and Capt. Stewart's Captivity, 11-17.



approach, carrying a young fawn, drop its prey and run off. Although tempted by hunger to go and "take the flesh and eat it," she refused, fearing the bear might return, "Besides, she had an Aversion to taste raw flesh."<sup>57</sup>

In the version of the story published shortly after her ordeal, the editor portrayed Mrs. Scott as a heroic Amazon woman capable of great physical actions in her attempt to escape her savage captors. She left her guard miles from civilization, crossed steep and difficult terrain, killed a venomous snake and survived on very little food. In the wake of the Revolution, it seems these stories of able-bodied women refusing to be subdued by uncivilized Indians were important to the emerging national mind, perhaps helping convince Americans that despite their recent separation from England they would not lapse into a state of utter savagery.<sup>58</sup>

Another version of the story, which survived through Frances Scott's children from her second marriage and neighbors, emphasized many of the same themes in a slightly different manner. She decided to escape after her captors concluded she should marry when they reached

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>58</sup> June Namias, White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 24-33.

the village.<sup>59</sup> Her escape and return to southwest Virginia reflected her fear of becoming savage in a community miles from her birthplace. After her ordeal, Mrs. Scott demonstrated her commitment to her community and its values by marrying Mr. Thomas Johnson and raising a family of children, "all of whom married and became useful and respectful members of society."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Summers, Annals, 1605.

<sup>60</sup> Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 379.

### CHAPTER III

"A Method of Delivery without Much Offence":  
Thomas Coke, Dissenting Churches and the Issue of Slavery

A "high-headed" lady offered "Fifty pounds to the man that gives the little doctor a hundred lashes." A small, but agitated group of backcountry farmers and planters had gathered outside Brother Martin's barn, talking in hushed tones about Thomas Coke. The diminutive Methodist minister from Wales had recently begun spreading the doctrine of emancipation in southern Virginia.

For nearly a week, Coke had travelled the roads around Charlotte and Halifax counties trying to convince decent, honest folk that they might liberate their souls by freeing their slaves. (Figure IV) At the funeral of Colonel Bedford, a slaveholder and opponent of the Methodist anti-slavery work, Coke struggled to find anything positive to say in his remarks. Believing Bedford to be nothing but a "dreadful thorn" in the side of this important movement, Coke felt relief that the Lord had mercifully called him away. Coke continued to work in this part of Virginia for the next week or so, testifying against the evils of slavery. Despite the fact that he was in the backcountry, the residents of Halifax and Charlotte counties owned significant numbers of slaves and

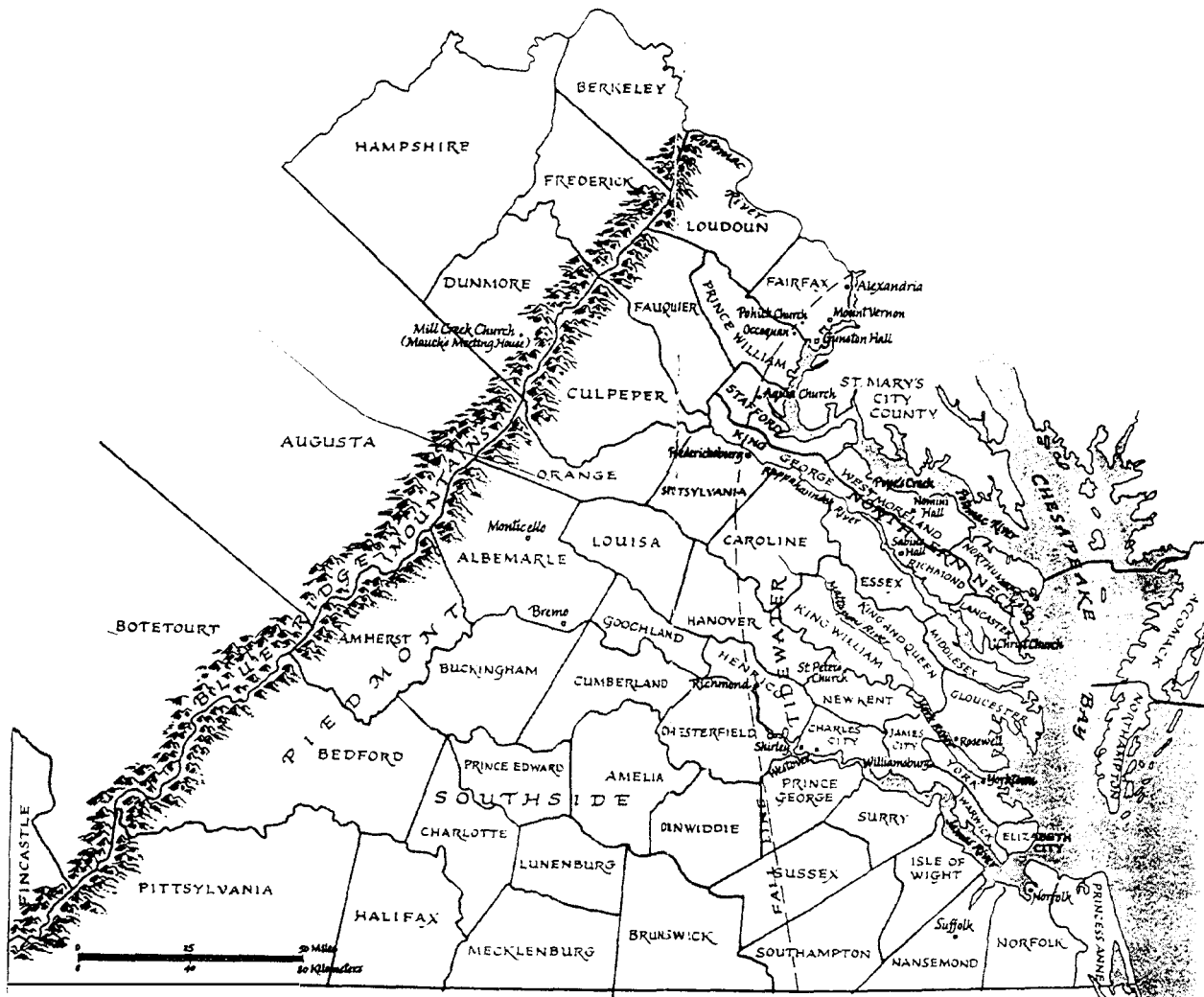


Figure IV - Virginia Counties, c. 1775

Source: Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982; reprint, New York: Norton, 1988), frontispiece.

reacted unfavorably to Coke's emphasis on emancipation.<sup>1</sup>

If the crowd that gathered in the Martin barn had not heard of Coke's activity, they soon learned of his opposition to slavery when he began to speak. The one or two who stepped forward and pledged to free their slaves as a sign of their commitment to God and the Methodists' Rules frightened many of the "unawakened," who feared the long-term results of Coke's message. A number left the service because of the offensive nature of the minister's remarks and gathered outside, hoping to beat Coke within an inch of his life.<sup>2</sup>

The work of itinerant preachers like Thomas Coke and the doctrine of dissenting churches during the second half of the eighteenth century offered Americans, including residents of the backcountry, viable alternatives to the established religion of colonial society. During the Revolutionary era, it seems that membership in one of these anti-establishment sects, whether it be

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Census of 1790, there were 10,078 residents of Charlotte county, of which 4,816 were slaves. The situation was much the same in Halifax county where there were 14,722 residents, including 5,565 slaves. Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966), 154-155.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Coke, Extracts of the Journals of the Late Thomas Coke, L.L.D.; comprising Several Visits to North America and the West Indies (Dublin: R. Napper, 1816), 62-65.

Presbyterian, Baptist or Methodist, was one way residents of the backcountry expressed their independence from the traditional orders in colonial society.<sup>3</sup> However, members of these churches, which challenged the traditional order and authority in the colonies by espousing more egalitarian and more inclusive doctrines, refused to allow these new sects to go so far as to threaten their own personal and economic independence.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, backcountry residents actively engaged in a process of negotiating the authority these new denominations would administer over their lives.<sup>4</sup> Converts were willing to associate voluntarily with certain denominational movements, primarily Baptism and Methodism, as long as those churches did not overstep the bounds of their authority. Religious institutions could advise, and even

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the conflict between the Anglicanism of the Virginia gentry and an emergent Baptist opposition culture in the eighteenth century, see Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> This concept of negotiated authority has been adapted from Jack P. Greene's idea that authority was negotiated between the state and colony in the early modern Atlantic world. Jack P. Greene, "Negotiated Authorities: The Problem of Governance in the Extended Politics of the Early Modern Atlantic World," in Negotiated Authorities: Essays in Colonial Political and Constitutional History (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 1-24.

censure the behavior of their voluntary membership in a number of areas, but they could not, because their members would not allow them, use the pulpit to threaten their parishioners' larger notions of independence, especially as those religious ideas challenged their economic well-being or social standing. When ministers like Thomas Coke began to exhort on the issue of emancipation, they violated the ideals of independence shared by slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike. Freedom for slaves, at least viewed through the lens of eighteenth-century values, would restrict the freedoms of those backcountry folk who owned slaves or hoped to own slaves.

J. B. Dunlop, a Scotsman who arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, in October of 1810 and spent nine months in the state before travelling north, made a number of observations about the state of religion in the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Most obvious and perhaps most odious to Dunlop was the absence of an established church in the wake of the American Revolution which left everyone at "liberty to worship God in the manner most suitable to himself."<sup>5</sup>

Dunlop's comments echoed the observations of Johann

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<sup>5</sup> Raymond H. Mohl, ed. "'The Grand Fabric of Republicanism': A Scotsman Describes South Carolina, 1810-1811," South Carolina Historical Magazine 71 (July 1970): 184-185.

David Schoepf, who travelled through Virginia shortly after the war. Schoepf observed that the Anglican Church could no longer be considered dominant in the state, since it had lost many of its privileges as the established church and because it had to compete with a great many other sects.

In a number of respects, Presbyterian churches throughout the postwar South were similar to the region's Anglican churches. Members of both denominations tended to be wealthier and own more slaves than their counterparts in other denominations. Baptists and Methodists appealed to persons at the margins of society who were poor, relatively isolated and owners of few or no slaves.<sup>6</sup> The efforts of Anglican ministers and leaders to secure and maintain the church's traditional legal pre-eminence had failed to sway public opinion, which generally held that since the state was "a republic no church nor its ministers should be preferred by the government above the rest, no matter how great the numbers of members professing allegiance."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John B. Boles, "Introduction," in Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Johann David Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison, vol. 2, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, East Florida, the Bahamas (Erlangen, Johann Jacob Palm, 1788;



Zachariah Johnston, a member of the state legislature from the Virginia backcountry, expressed a similar sentiment about the relationship between state and church. Although he was a Presbyterian like his parents before him and upon examination of his faith had no reason to abandon it, he pledged that "the very day that the Presbyterian church shall be established by law and become a body politic, the same day Zachariah Johnston will become a dissenter."<sup>8</sup> Postwar religious volunteerism gave Americans the opportunity to express social independence by joining, or not joining, the church of their choice, and Johnston, like many other backcountry residents, wanted to maintain that separation between church and state.

For J. P. Dunlop, this "torrent of liberty" in the 1780s led many to neglect proper religion and gave "Christians, Pagans, Atheists and Jews" equal opportunity to exercise their opinions.<sup>9</sup> Although Dunlop was

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reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968), 63.

<sup>8</sup> M. W. Paxton, "Zachariah Johnston of Augusta and Rockbridge and his Times," p. 15, Letters and Legal Papers, 1740-1848, Zachariah and Thomas Johnston Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Perkins Library, Duke University.

<sup>9</sup> Mohl, ed. "The Grand Fabric of Republicanism," 184-185; For a discussion of the impact of the Revolutionary War on American religion, see Patricia U. Bonomi, "Religion in the Aftermath of the American Revolution," in The American Revolution: Its Character and Limits, ed. Jack P. Greene (New York: New York University Press,

certainly overstating the case about the socially accepted range of religious opportunities in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century America, backcountry residents did have a number of religious options available to them. Daniel Grant, who moved to Wilkes County, Georgia in the 1780s, wrote several letters to his children in Granville, North Carolina describing his views on the various religious sects and their ideas. He found the Methodist plan both "apostoleck" and "calculated to do good." Methodists exalted the free grace of God which was available to the "whole race of man." On the other hand, he thought some of the practices of the Baptists were "very dangerous," particularly the convention which allowed the congregation to sit in judgment of prospective and current members.<sup>10</sup>

Devereux Jarratt, an ordained Anglican minister who served Bath Parish in Dinwiddie County, Virginia from 1763 to 1801, was a zealous preacher and a "warm friend" of early Methodist itinerants. Like the Methodist preachers Grant encountered, Jarratt emphasized "the entire depravity of human nature" and the "utter inability" of human beings "to evade the sentence of the law and the

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1987), 407-412.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Grant to John Owen, October 21, 1786, Campbell Family Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Perkins Library, Duke University.

stroke of divine justice by their own power, merit or good works."<sup>11</sup> Whatever an individual's preference, both the egalitarian nature of the Baptists' monthly business meetings and of the Methodists' free grace offered backcountry folk religious options outside the sphere of the traditional orders in late colonial society.

While American Methodism had its roots in the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s and the evangelicalism of ministers like George Whitefield, it was not until late in the 1760s that the first Methodist lay preachers sent by John Wesley arrived in America and began organizing local societies which would remain connected to the Church of England until after the American War of Independence. Itinerant ministers, including Francis Asbury, travelled through communities along the eastern seaboard admitting spiritually dedicated individuals to Methodist fellowship. By 1780, there were 8,540 American Methodists, the vast majority from the southern colonies and many of those in the backcountry or other frontier areas.<sup>12</sup>

J. P. Dunlop believed backcountry folk accepted

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<sup>11</sup> William W. Bennett, Memorials of Methodism in Virginia (Richmond: By the author, 1870), 61-62.

<sup>12</sup> J. Manning Potts and Arthur Bruce Moss, "Methodism in Colonial America," in The History of American Methodism, ed. Emory Steven Bucke, 3 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I: 81; William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840 (New York: Scribner's, 1952), 26-27.

Methodism because it was a "faith more consonant to their principles of Liberty under the influence of ignorance."<sup>13</sup> Both Dunlop and Timothy Ford observed that South Carolina seemed divided on matters of religion. Episcopalians seemed most prominent in the city of Charleston and the lowcountry, while the interior contained larger numbers of Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians.<sup>14</sup> The situation was much the same in Virginia where Jedidiah Morse recorded the presence of the most ancient church, the Episcopalian, in the eastern and "finest" part of the state. Presbyterians dominated the western region, along with large numbers of Baptists and Methodists, just as they did in South Carolina.<sup>15</sup>

The religious divisions of the Carolinas and Virginia were not simply geographic, but involved organizational and doctrinal issues as well. While the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches called on their ministers to preach regularly to established church congregations in fairly well-settled communities, the Baptists and Methodists

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<sup>13</sup> Mohl, ed. "'The Grand Fabric of Republicanism'": 184-185.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph W. Barnwell, ed., "The Diary of Timothy Ford, 1785-1786," South Carolina Historical Magazine 13 (October 1912): 197.

<sup>15</sup> Jedidiah Morse, The American Geography or A view of the Present Situation of the United States of America (Elizabethtown: Shepard Kollock, 1789; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 387.

often relied on itinerant preachers who delivered their messages several times a day, almost every day to audiences varying greatly in size and interest. To some, it appeared that these more recently-established denominations were reaching out to "the poorer sorts of people," many of whom were "very ignorant," though they also seemed to be "generally a moral, well-meaning set of people" who worshipped with much zeal and piety.<sup>16</sup>

Reuben Eller, a Methodist minister on the Yadkin Circuit in the North Carolina interior, worked in a "very rough part of the country," where the roads were exceedingly bad and, with few exceptions, the people were "rougher than the roads and accommodations." The combination of difficult travel conditions and the presence of other denominations made life difficult for Eller at times. He found the Baptists and Presbyterians were going to great lengths to fill "the peoples heads with Predestination," but never became overly concerned with their proximity because the Baptist preachers in the region were "grossly Ignorant."<sup>17</sup>

Local variations on matters of doctrine and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Reuben Eller to Edward Dromgoole, August 30, 1786, Edward Dromgoole Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

denominational preference did not prevent the evangelical religions from working together on occasion in the backcountry. Duke de la Rouchefoucault Liancourt uncovered a spirit of cooperation among backcountry worshippers in Staunton, Virginia, where he discovered a Presbyterian church which was "well frequented every Sunday by followers of that sect, as well as by persons of different religious persuasions." A Baptist preacher took the pulpit on occasion without making the "least alteration in the composition of the audience."<sup>18</sup>

If not united by doctrine or places of worship, the emerging sects frequently offered an evangelical version of religion which seemed a striking alternative to more ordered religious services. Evangelical Christianity in the late eighteenth century emphasized salvation through faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the messiah, scriptural authority and the magnificence of God's grace.<sup>19</sup> Gatherings in homes, churches, courthouses and camps often took on a fervor unimaginable in traditional forms of

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<sup>18</sup> Duke de la Rouchefoucault Liancourt, Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois and Upper Canada in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797, 2 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1790), 2: 92.

<sup>19</sup> See Russell E. Richey, "From Quarterly to Camp Meeting: A Reconsideration of Early American Methodism," Methodist History (July 1985): 199-213; Robert M. Calhoon, Evangelicals and Conservatives in the Early South, 1740-1861 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 1-9.

worship. Daniel Grant continued to write to his relatives about the strong work of God in Wilkes Circuit, where hundreds had joined society in just a few short months. A powerful meeting had recently taken place in his home, attended by many deeply concerned about the state of their souls. In fact, "the cry of distress in some and others rejoicing was so great that the preachers could scarce be heard across the room for two hours." A similar spiritual force interrupted a subsequent quarterly meeting where "the power of the Lord came down so forceful that the crys of the people stoped publick preaching."<sup>20</sup>

The enthusiasm and energy of the converted threatened some persons in early national society, who took a dim view of the camp meetings and other forms of evangelical worship in the backcountry and other frontier areas. Charles William Janson, who travelled through the United States in the 1790s, had the opportunity to observe the Methodists at their camp meetings. He found preachers bawling at the people for the duration of the gathering. If an individual began to exhibit the signs of conversion, ministers would gather around "exhorting a continuance of the efforts of the spirit." The signs of regeneration appeared extravagant to Janson and other skeptics, who

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Grant to John Owen, July 10, 1788, Campbell Family Papers, Manuscript Collection, Perkins Library, Duke University.

claimed to "have seen women jumping, striking, and kicking like raving maniacs."<sup>21</sup>

Like Janson, J. P. Dunlop was an outside observer of American religion, aware of the meetings where thousands of worshippers regularly gathered "under the canopy of heaven" to exercise their faith. These believers camped in the woods where they professed their religion during the day "with all the ridiculous fanaticism imaginable" before engaging in the "most illicit scenes" at night. While some, who were "under the immediate influence of the spirit," were pulling out their hair and participating in a most bizarre penitence, others were meditating "on the depravity of the preceding evening & making appointments for the next." In a sarcastic condemnation of the meetings, Dunlop wrote that the government endorsed these gatherings because "they tend greatly to population which is the first object of the ministers of a new state." The Scotsman had heard that "nine months after the celebration of one in Virginia upwards of nine hundred children were born, the fruits of the depravity of the Evenings."<sup>22</sup>

Although many elites and outsiders, like Janson and

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<sup>21</sup> Charles William Janson, The Stranger in America, 1793-1806, Intro and Notes by Carl S. Driver (London: n.p., 1807; reprint, New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1935), 107-108.

<sup>22</sup> Mohl, "The Grand Fabric of Republicanism," 184-185.



Dunlop, saw American religious developments as oddly chaotic during the latter part of the eighteenth century, the new sects and methods of worship demanded a certain amount of order in their own right. While individuals were largely free to choose a religious denomination, they still had to accept the doctrine and authority of that church in their lives. Those who joined the Methodist church were expected to follow the General Rules of the institution in order to remain members in good standing and to participate in the denomination's love-feasts. Derived from the work of John Wesley, the rules required members to consciously avoid evil, to actively do good and to willingly follow all of the ordinances of the church and God.<sup>23</sup> Those persons who joined Baptist churches subjected themselves to the criticism and judgment of fellow members through the monthly or quarterly business meetings.

The Revolutionary War had a serious impact on religious life in the Carolinas and Virginia, primarily because of the significant amount of fighting between backcountry Whigs and Tories. In the aftermath of the war, the churches hoped to establish and re-establish

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<sup>23</sup> Leland Scott, "The Message of Early American Methodism," in The History of American Methodism, ed. Emory Steven Bucke, 3 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I: 309.

themselves in the interior. As Methodism grew in the 1780s, society members and leaders focused their attention on the need for appropriate ministerial leadership. Thomas Cheever warned the Methodists that if the preachers were not interested in "the blessing themselves little fruit will appear."<sup>24</sup>

Late in the 1780s, the Presbyterian church tried to address issues related to the absence of pastoral leadership. A number of vacant congregations and the "miserable state of multitudes who have none to break the bread of life amongst them" greatly concerned the Synod of Virginia. To rectify this problem, the Presbyterian church resolved to recruit men of knowledge, integrity and piety to preach the gospel. The church would examine the credentials of the candidates, give them the necessary instructions, and raise funds for this important mission in an effort to extend the reach of Presbyterian church in Virginia.<sup>25</sup>

The postwar era offered Protestant churches, with the

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Sheridine Cheever to Edward Dromgoole, August 20, 1784, Edward Dromgoole Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>25</sup> Plan Adopted by the Synod of Virginia for Sending out Missionaries, 1789, in Religion on the American Frontier: 1783-1840, ed. William Warren Sweet, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1936; reprint, New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), 2: 754.

support of the new state governments, the opportunity to introduce a certain amount of discipline and morality in frontier areas.<sup>26</sup> During the 1780s and 1790s, backcountry ministers still encountered on a fairly regular basis unruly audiences who seemed more interested in socializing than participating in solemn religious services. Myles Greene, an itinerant Methodist preacher for the Brunswick circuit in North Carolina, preached to about twenty-four small groups in his region, often meeting with his charges in the homes of fellow members. At times Greene and his colleagues found difficulty maintaining order: "After I had done one of our Local preachers Exhorted a little as there has been no discipline at this place a great while." Although unruly behavior was a cross to bear, Greene kept the "wicked" out of the meetings to prevent disruptions.<sup>27</sup>

Jeremiah Norman, a Methodist circuit rider in Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia in the 1790s, made similar observations about the behavior of inland Carolina folk. Passing through Orangeburg, which at that point was little more than a village and a "very wicked" one at

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<sup>26</sup> Calhoon, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Myles Greene Journal, Entry for October 27, 1789, Myles Greene Journals, September 13, 1789-December 5, 1789, Manuscripts Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University.

that, Norman and a group of fellow ministers observed an enormous crowd gathered for a "great race that was to continue for 2 days more." Like the Reverend Charles Woodmason twenty years before, Norman found "the people nearly destitute of religion" and doubted whether they had any ideas about its proper form. When he had the opportunity to address the sinners in his circuit, Norman found they "did not sit as well as they might have done" and could not recall "a class in such bad order, running here and there."<sup>28</sup>

Others ministers, like Robert Ayres, a Methodist who preached in western Virginia around Winchester, encountered people who were openly hostile to the authority of the church. He confronted a young woman hesitant to join any church or society that had the power to turn out fellow members. In their conversations about religion, the woman argued that there was no benefit in religion and "began to speak hard of those who pretended, as she said, to be religious - as of their getting angry in turning the members out of Society."<sup>29</sup> Daniel Grant

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<sup>28</sup> Entry for January 1, 1798 and Entry for January 14, 1798, Jeremiah Norman Diary, 1793-1801, Stephen Beaugard Weeks Collection, Southern Historical Collections, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Ayres Journal, 1787-1789, July 7, 1787, Manuscripts Collection, Perkins Library, Duke University. Microfilm.

of Wilkes County, Georgia, also found this practice of removing particularly sinful members to be a dangerous proposition, especially for the Baptists who often sat "to judge the heart of every one that is admitted."<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the concern of some backcountry folk about subjecting themselves to the authority of religious associations, many others expressed their spiritual freedom and independence by joining churches which tried to control the activities of their members. The Baptists were the primary advocates of this sort of religious society on the local level and hoped the threat of excommunication would encourage members to act in a responsible and Christian manner. Those who failed to follow church doctrine were brought up on charges during regular business meetings and sentenced by their peers.<sup>31</sup>

In November of 1772, some residents of Rowan County, North Carolina formed the Dutchman's Creek Church of Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> At their first gathering, they appointed James

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Grant to John Owen, October 21, 1786, Campbell Family Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Perkins Library, Duke University.

<sup>31</sup> Henry S. Stroupe, "'Cite Them Both to Attend the Next Church Conference': Social Control by North Carolina Baptist Churches, 1772-1908," North Carolina Historical Review 52 (April 1975): 156-157.

<sup>32</sup> Dutchman's Creek Church was later reorganized as Eaton's Baptist Church and is in present day Davie County, North Carolina.

Tompkins deacon and agreed to have monthly meetings to discuss the business of the church and to hear disciplinary charges. Many times the charges were relatively mundane and only required the member at fault to admit to his or her sin to be restored to the fellowship of the church. Charges could be levied against members for "uncleaness," lying, irregular behavior, "disorderly walk," excessive drinking and a variety of other sins. Ebenezer Frost, who was censured by the church in June 1776, was quickly restored to membership after seeing "the evil of his transgression and acknowledging the same before God and the brethren."<sup>33</sup> Peter Walker, a member of Shoal Creek Baptist Church in South Carolina, apologized for hitting Jonathan Carter with a switch, and because he was remorseful, the church sympathized with him, allowing Walker to remain in fellowship.<sup>34</sup>

In other cases, members who refused to reform had to face the possibility of excommunication. In June 1774, James Reavis was censured for a dispute with Joseph Murphey and never returned to the good graces of the

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<sup>33</sup> Dutchman's Creek Church Records, 1772-1787, Southern Historical Collections, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>34</sup> Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Records, 1796-1853, Manuscripts Department, Furman University.

church. The members examined Reavis again in March, 1775, with "no reformation found in him." The church cited him again in July and December of that same year before excommunicating him early in 1776.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to disciplining its members, backcountry churches played an important role in other aspects of their members' lives. In August of 1786, the Turkey Creek Baptist Church in Abbeville County, South Carolina, "resolved unanimously that no member of this Church shall sell corn for more than two shillings per bushel nor wheat for more than three shillings per bushel."<sup>36</sup> In a similar fashion, the Shoal Creek Church cited Brother Josiah Burjis to attend the July 1796 meeting in order to answer charges that he was selling corn at a price of one dollar per bushel. Local churches were willing to let their members pursue economic success as long as it did not adversely affect other members of the religious community. Members of those churches willingly accepted a certain amount of religious authority in their lives as long as it did not adversely affect their status as

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<sup>35</sup> Dutchman's Creek Church Records, 1772-1787, Southern Historical Collections, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>36</sup> Turkey Creek Baptist Church, Minutes, 1785-1869, Microforms Department, Davis Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

independent persons.

The relationship between religion and slavery was an important one during the late eighteenth century and one that would become even more important during the nineteenth century. In part because of concerns about the propriety of enslaving Christians, Southern slaveholders made little effort to introduce their religion to their slaves until the middle of the eighteenth century. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, many backcountry churches, particularly those of the Baptist denomination, had slaves listed on their membership rolls. During this time, both Methodists and Baptists maintained a "fairly consistent" stance against slavery. Ministers and leaders, who seemed to accept the spiritual equality of black men and women, tended to criticize bondage in the abstract and suggest that its practice end as soon as possible.<sup>37</sup>

The records of Shoal Creek Baptist Church reveal a significant number of slave members, as do the records of Cedar Springs Baptist Church of Spartanburg County, South Carolina. In November 1795, the latter, accepted "Five Black Brethren . . . into Union with the church by letter

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<sup>37</sup> Boles, 2-8; Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (New York: Norton, 1968), 190-193.



from Tyger Church."<sup>38</sup> Charles Janson believed the Methodists did "great mischief among the slaves, whom they receive into their congregations, and place among the most select part of their white brethren."<sup>39</sup> The presence of slaves within Southern churches was an issue that brought the concepts of freedom, independence and liberty to the surface, especially with significant numbers of ministers pressing for an end to slavery in the aftermath of the American Revolution.

Both proponents and detractors of slavery were willing to use religious ideas and arguments to bolster their intellectual positions. The process of gaining political independence caused some Americans to reconsider the injustice of slavery. Timothy Ford, a member of the Charleston elite, was particularly concerned about this problem during the mid-1780s and recorded some of his thoughts in his diary. It was painfully apparent to Ford that the most obvious social distinction in the lowcountry of South Carolina was between black and white, with the former greatly outnumbering the latter. Ford found it "a strange confusion of ideas and principles" that in a

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<sup>38</sup> Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Records, 1796-1853, Manuscripts Department, Furman University; Cedar Springs Baptists Church, Records, 1794-1954, Manuscripts Department, Davis Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>39</sup> Janson, 101.

country dedicated to liberty and Christianity and built upon irrefutable human rights so many were denied the enjoyment of those rights and "devoted to perpetual slavery for no other cause but that God has formed them black." In South Carolina, the general rule was liberty, "but the Exceptions form a majority of 5 to 1."<sup>40</sup> Although the proportion of slaves was lower in the South Carolina backcountry, the emergence of a strong planter class in the region committed to preserving the system of labor used by lowcountry planters ensured the continuance of a social system where color was the most important distinction.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the Revolutionary War era there were a number of anti-slavery advocates who travelled through the South, including the backcountry, trying to convince slaveowners to emancipate their slaves. Many of these persons were itinerant ministers carrying out other duties as well. In the early 1770s, Patience Brayton and her husband, a pair of Quakers who had freed their own slaves, tried to convince others to follow in their footsteps. As

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<sup>40</sup> Barnwell, "The Diary of Timothy Ford, 1785-1786," 142.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the emergence of the planter class in the backcountry, see Rachel N. Klein, Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1990).

they passed through the South, they met with some resistance. In a meeting near Baltimore where most of the people present owned slaves, "darkness seemed to cover the whole meeting." Ministers realized the explosive potential of their doctrine and used great caution when preaching to audiences in all parts of the South. Brayton's journey and message carried her into the Carolina backcountry and places like Ano, Deep River, Rocky River, Holly Springs, Polecat, New Garden, Broad River and Padgett's Creek, where at times she felt uncomfortable and unwanted.<sup>42</sup>

Joshua Evans, one of the individuals who continued the anti-slavery work after the Revolution, decided to "plea for liberty to the black people, who were held in bonds of slavery among our fellow members." In the 1790s, Evans travelled through a number of states, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee trying to spread the anti-slavery message. In December of 1796, Evans arrived at Raleigh, North Carolina, where he and local supporters tried to convince the members of the General Assembly to alter "the cruel laws relative to Negroes." In their meetings Evans found the state

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<sup>42</sup> Patience Brayton, A Short Account of the Life and Religious Labours of Patience Brayton. (New York: Isaac Collins and Son, 1801), 23-29.

representatives friendly, but realized most were opposed to the presence of large numbers of free blacks in the state. Though faced with difficult opposition, Evans tried not to become discouraged and had "no doubt but way will be made for this poor people's liberation, but what way, or how soon must be left to the Lord."<sup>43</sup>

The following year while travelling through Camden, South Carolina, Evans boarded with a family "where there were tokens of hard usage to poor slaves." He was so appalled by the conditions that he had to speak to the lady of the house on the subject, but because "her heart seemed so hard" Evans made little impression. A young man in attendance that evening suggested that at "least slaves should be fed & clothed well, when they toil all day and often most part of the night." Shortly after this incident, Evans had another encounter with the horrors of slavery when he heard that a master and his wife had beaten a slave to death and left his body in the woods. On top of that despicable act, the slaveowner refused to bury the slave and "left the body to be destroyed or eaten by beasts."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Joshua Evans' Diary, December 5, 6, and 7, 1796, Joshua Evans' Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>44</sup> Joshua Evans' Diary, February 2 and March 13, 1797, Joshua Evans' Papers.

It was not just itinerant ministers who commented on the institution of slavery in the new republic. Foreign travellers like J. P. Brissott de Warville, a French professional writer touring through the United States in the late eighteenth century, also offered their observations on slavery and its impact on American society. Brissott de Warville believed the morals of Virginians needed to be reformed by rooting out indolence and the love of hunting and pleasure. The institution of slavery allowed select slaveowners to pursue a life of some leisure, while permitting other white males in Virginia and other slaveholding states to aspire to a life where they might enjoy more leisurely pursuits. Brissott de Warville offered what he felt was a reasonable plan to reform the morals of slaveowning Virginians. If the government could find a way to replace the current population with "frugal and energetic germans" and at the same time abolish slavery, which always deterred "sensitive Europeans" from settling in the state, industry and prosperity might rise to a position of greater importance.<sup>45</sup>

Although there were a number of individuals discussing issues related to slavery during the

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<sup>45</sup> J. P. Brissott De Warville, New Travels in the United States of America (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1964), 359.

Revolutionary era, the Methodist Conference in Baltimore in 1780 raised the matter to the institutional level. The spread of Methodist societies in the South had attracted a number of slaveowners into the organization and forced the group to decide whether the church should ignore the issue or take an active stance against slavery. The resolution of this issue, more than any other, revealed a great deal about the relationship between church and member, slaveholder and society, and non-slaveholder and ideas about independence and authority. Members of evangelical sects willingly submitted themselves to the authority of the church on certain matters and worshipped side-by-side with slaves in many places, but they were not amenable when the church threatened their opportunity for economic advancement and independence by challenging one of the institutions, slavery, that they thought protected that independence.

The Methodists' disapproval of slavery flowed from the pen of their founder, John Wesley, who outlined his opposition to the practice in 1774 and denied that slavery, whatever the form, could be "consistent with any degree of natural justice." He encouraged society members to recognize liberty as the right of every human being and to realize that "no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature." True

Christian behavior required Methodists to give "liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature."<sup>46</sup>

During the 1780s, the Methodists made a concerted effort to implement a number of plans consistent with Wesley's vision of humanity and liberty. At the Baltimore conference in 1780 and again at the conference meeting of 1783, church leaders like Francis Asbury advised ministers to free their slaves where they were permitted by law to do so. Despite the warnings of the church, a significant number of ministers continued to hold slaves. When the conference confronted the issue again in 1784, it decided to suspend those local ministers in Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania who had not freed their slaves, while giving ministers in Virginia another year to complete the emancipation process. Travelling preachers who owned slaves and refused to manumit them were no longer permitted to preach in the Methodist church.<sup>47</sup>

As much as any other person, Thomas Coke dedicated himself to the traditional Wesleyan anti-slavery stance

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<sup>46</sup> John Wesley, "Thoughts on Slavery," in The Works of John Wesley, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958-1959), 70, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Norman W. Spellman, "The Formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church," in The History of American Methodism, ed. Emory Steven Bucke, 3 vols (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I: 196.

and the conference decisions of the early 1780s.<sup>48</sup> Coke and the conference believed that slavery was "contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of the conscience and pure religion."<sup>49</sup> In his travels and ministry, Coke encouraged Methodists to emancipate their slaves where that was possible and tried to convince legislators to enact laws that would allow those citizens who wished to free their slaves the opportunity to do so.<sup>50</sup>

The stance of the Methodist church on the issue of slavery did have some influence on its members. After Daniel Grant joined a Methodist society, he became more and more convinced the practice of slavery was wrong:

When I consider that these people or their forefathers were born as free as myself & that they are held in bondage by compulsion only & that nothing but custom & the laws of an interested people . . . & when I consider that they are human creatures Indeed with Immortal souls capable of Everlasting happiness or liable to Everlasting misery as well as ourselves, & to think that they are considered in the Eyes of the law & many times by the owners no more than dumb beasts. It fills my

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<sup>48</sup> It was shortly after Coke's arrival in the United States in 1784 that Methodists separated themselves from the Church of England at the Christmas Conference and created the Methodist Episcopal Church. Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 66.

<sup>49</sup> Bennett, 129-32.

<sup>50</sup> Coke, 62-65.



mind with horror and devastation.<sup>51</sup>

Like many other Methodists opposed to slavery during the late eighteenth century, Grant's solution to the problem was gradual freedom, which allowed the church to take a moral stance without aggressively pursuing steps to end the practice.

If Thomas Coke represented the anti-slavery stance of the Methodists, then Devereux Jarratt embodied the intellectual opposite. Although Jarratt remained in the Anglican church after the Christmas Conference, he strongly supported the Methodist movement in the 1770s and 1780s, travelling hundreds if not thousands of miles through the North Carolina and Virginia backcountry assisting Methodist preachers and societies.<sup>52</sup> On his first trip to the United States, Thomas Coke had the opportunity to meet Devereux Jarratt and talk about the issue of slavery. Coke could not convince Jarratt that the church should take a strong stand on the issue of slavery, primarily because Jarratt had "twenty-four slaves of his own" that he was unwilling to emancipate.<sup>53</sup>

A few years after his encounter with Coke, Jarratt

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<sup>51</sup> Daniel Grant to John Owen, September 2, 1790, Campbell Family Papers, Manuscript Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University.

<sup>52</sup> Bennett, 61-62.

<sup>53</sup> Coke, 61.

outlined the position of Methodists opposed to the church's early attempt to eliminate slavery among its preachers and parishioners in a letter to Edward Dromgoole, a long-time Methodist minister. Jarratt noted that although recently there had been "a glorious revival of religion and a large in gathering of souls to the Lord," that the visit of a particular church elder left a "black, illboding cloud" by raising the issuing of slavery and causing "heart burnings, bickerings, reproaches, etc." While Jarratt was willing to admit to the possibility that the practice of slavery might be wrong, he did not think that meant slaveholders ought "to be put upon a level (as they are now) with horsethieves & hogstealers & knaves, etc; nor to be insulted at every turn with the odious Name of oppressors, rogues & men destitute of heathen honesty."<sup>54</sup>

Jarratt pointed to the slaveholding example of Isaac and Abraham and to the teachings of the Apostles, "whose directions and exhortations to Bond & free incline them to believe that such stations & relations were to exist under the Gospel otherwise 30 or 40 versus might as well be blotted out of the new lament, as being of no practical

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<sup>54</sup> Devereux Jarratt to Edward Dromgoole, March 22, 1788, Edward Dromgoole Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

use." Jarratt assured Reverend Dromgoole that he loved the Methodists for their works, but felt their attacks on him and other slaveholders were unkind and childish. He reminded Dromgoole of the important role he had played in the spread of Methodist societies, "once Mr. Asbury seemed to think nothing could be done so well without me - but now he thinks I have done more harm than all the Preachers have done good."<sup>55</sup>

Thomas Coke returned to North America for a second visit during 1787. He landed at Charleston, South Carolina and from the city travelled through the Carolinas and into Virginia, often "preaching in the midst of great forests, with scores, and sometimes hundreds of horses tied to the trees, which adds much solemnity to the scene." Upon his return to the backcountry of Virginia, Coke recalled that in his previous trips to Halifax County, he had met with "a little persecution" due to his public testimony against slavery. He also learned that grand juries in Halifax and several adjoining counties had charged him with sedition for the views he expressed on slavery. Although rather uneasy about his return to this area of the Virginia backcountry, Coke was peacefully received and believed his visit was a blessing to many. However, the minister also realized that however just his

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

sentiments were regarding slavery, it was "ill-judged" to preach on such a topic.<sup>56</sup>

Very likely Coke returned to the fashion of delivery he had used on his previous trip to Virginia. His method of public testimony, one "without much offence" to backcountry slaveholders, required him to address the slaves "in a very pathetic manner on the duty of servants to their masters" before the slaveowners and potential slaveowners would then "receive quietly" what he had to say.<sup>57</sup> Coke's words echoed the work of Thomas Bacon, an Anglican minister who was at the height of his career in the middle of the eighteenth century, by claiming the church's right to save the souls of the slaves and leaving planters' license to use their bodies as they saw fit. Other ministers adopted this technique and message in an effort to avoid violent confrontations in a region where the practice and possibility of slave ownership was closely connected to the idea of independence.<sup>58</sup>

This style of preaching emerged during the middle of the eighteenth century and reflected the process of negotiation taking place in the backcountry between residents and religious institutions. The rioters, who

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<sup>56</sup> Coke, 127.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>58</sup> Jordan, White Over Black, 191-192.

considered flogging Coke for his anti-slavery stance in 1784, were engaged in more than a simple act of violence. They were bargaining with Coke and forcing him to reconsider the wisdom of preaching about freedom and equality for all in a region where the enslavement of some meant liberty for others. Residents of the Carolina and Virginia backcountry might express their spiritual independence and freedom by joining a church or religious body that had a great deal of authority over their lives, but they were not willing to let the authority of those religious institutions threaten their economic independence.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Kidnapping of Colonel Cleveland: Liberty Men and the Ordering of the Carolina Backcountry

A vulture soaring high over the North Carolina backcountry near the Yadkin River on a particularly hot summer day in the early 1780s would have been intrigued. Far below, nestled in the lush forests adjoining the river, lay an enormous man, over six feet tall and weighing several hundred pounds, securely fastened to two stout trees. A short distance away, another man, handsomely attired, deliberately mounted a fine horse and rode off through the brush with another well-bred animal tethered behind him.<sup>1</sup>

To uncover the developments which led to this strange scene, it is necessary to visit Round About, the plantation of Colonel Benjamin Cleveland, towards the end of the Revolutionary War in North Carolina. Late one afternoon, a stranger appeared at the colonel's door and

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<sup>1</sup> Communicated by John Portman of Choctaw County, South Carolina, to Lyman Draper, February, 1841, Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, microfilm, 30S, 11-15. Lyman Draper began collecting documents and stories about early American pioneers in the 1840s, and much of the information in the Draper Manuscripts includes tales collected by Draper on trips through the South. Alice E. Smith, "The Draper Manuscripts," in The American Collector, ed. Donald R. McNeil (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1955), 45-48.

asked for a night's lodging and meal. Although Cleveland noticed the vast disparity between the stranger's tattered dress and fine steed, he made no mention of it and invited him into his home for the evening. The two passed what seemed to be several enjoyable hours discussing "the war raging through the land, & the varied success of the patriot cause." As far as appearances went, Cleveland seemed "scarcely a better Whig" than his guest.

The following morning, the stranger ate his breakfast and prepared to continue his journey. Cleveland, who seemed to have forgotten the pleasantries of the previous night, challenged his guest's loyalty to the Whig cause. Perhaps the stranger's dress or poor knowledge of recent events related to the war aroused the Colonel's suspicion, but it is just as likely that Cleveland admired the man's horse and wanted it for his own. Colonel Cleveland stated in "pretty plain terms" that he thought the man a "Tory" and relieved his guest of his fine animal. The stranger declared himself a "true liberty man" and told Cleveland of his efforts in his part of the state to aid the patriot cause. Cleveland ignored the man's protests, sent him off his property and ordered a slave to place the horse in the stable.

For many months, the stranger plotted his revenge, and it was obvious that Colonel Cleveland did not

recognize him when he returned to Round About a year or so after the end of the war. He seemed to be in every respect Cleveland's equal. Well-dressed and mounted on a very fine horse, he expressed an interest in some of the colonel's back lands. Cleveland, who was well-known in the North Carolina backcountry for his fine plantation and aggressive persecution of Tories during the Revolution, also had a reputation for speculating in lands in Wilkes and Surry counties. Perhaps the stranger heard that Cleveland had acquired additional lands at the expense of his unfortunate war-time opponents and hoped to acquire a nice piece of property at a relatively low price.

Colonel Cleveland was more than happy to show the stranger the lands he had available for sale, and the pair made plans to ride out and view the unoccupied acreage. The colonel asked one of his slaves to saddle "a fine horse he got from that damned Tory rascal" towards the end of the war. Once mounted, the colonel and his guest galloped off at a fairly rapid pace, despite the oppressive heat of summer, towards the property the stranger wanted to see.

After riding several miles through back woods along the Yadkin River, the pair dismounted on a fine piece of land and began to inspect the soil, perhaps even discussing the best methods for making such ground



productive or ways of improving the land. Unbeknownst to Cleveland, the stranger had not ridden with him to examine lands, but to exact a measure of revenge. At a point when Cleveland was distracted, the stranger very carefully drew a pistol on the colonel and asked him to search his memory for the occasion of their first meeting.

Cleveland, who knew most if not all of the important men in that part of the state, searched his memory but could not recall ever encountering the gentleman who now held him at gunpoint.

The stranger reminded Cleveland of an evening a couple of years before when he first appeared at Round About and asked for lodging and a meal. Although the stranger admitted to being rather shabbily dressed on the occasion of his first visit, he was mounted on a very fine horse, and Cleveland had agreed to provide him with food and shelter for the night.

On his return visit, the stranger had every intention of killing Cleveland immediately for the humiliation he had suffered at the colonel's hands. He ordered Cleveland to the ground, bound his hands and feet, stripped him to the waist and secured him, at a full stretch along the ground, between two trees about eight feet apart. The colonel begged "most piteously" for his life, which the stranger decided to spare for the moment. After

recovering his horse, the stranger mounted and rode off, leaving the colonel to die in the unsettled country.

There is little doubt that Colonel Cleveland and other Whigs in the backcountry flirted with immoral and illegal activity during the Revolutionary War. The residue of the Regulator movement and large pockets of loyalist support among backcountry folk forced patriot leaders beyond the bonds of appropriate civil and military conduct in an effort to guarantee the survival of Whig government and ideals.<sup>2</sup> Ineffective leadership on the colonial or state level left Cleveland and other backcountry leaders, who claimed power on the basis of their status as prominent landholders, county militia officers, local government officials and representatives in the state government, with the authority to administer justice as they saw fit. With the tacit approval of local organizations and government bodies, Cleveland and his counterparts made every effort to define membership in backcountry communities largely on the basis of political ideology, to drive supporters of the British cause out of the region and to order their communities with an eye towards the protection of Whig private property and civil

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<sup>2</sup> See Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert, An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry During the American Revolution (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1985).

liberties. For the duration of the war, those who chose to remain outside the boundaries of the Whig political community risked their lives and their property in the face of rabid patriot militias.

Whig leaders began by demonizing the Tories and claiming those persons who supported the loyalist cause were robbers and horse thieves. Then, they used their positions as judges and officers to condemn, capture, and convict Tories of crimes both real and imagined. Through aggressive and arbitrary means of distributing justice, Cleveland and other backcountry Whigs used Revolutionary ideology to promote a certain kind of social order and to improve their economic and political authority in their communities. After the war, the states of North Carolina and South Carolina relied on many of those same military officers and judges to administer local authority until more systematic forms of government and rule could be established.

Benjamin Cleveland and his family had always lived on the Carolina - Virginia frontier. Born to John and Martha Cleveland of Prince William County, Virginia, on May 26, 1738, he married Mary Graves before moving to North Carolina and settling on Roaring Creek in the late 1760s. The Clevelands remained there for just a few years before moving to a site on the Yadkin River, in what was then

Surry County, known as Round About for the way the river wound around the property's valuable lands.<sup>3</sup>

Although Cleveland earned a reputation for being lazy as a young adult and seemed to enjoy gambling and racing, he also expressed an interest in participating in the government of the frontier communities in which he lived.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after his arrival in Surry County, Cleveland acquired leadership positions in both the local court system and county militia. Even though Cleveland lived in a relatively undeveloped part of the North Carolina backcountry, community leaders, much like those in lowcountry and coastal locales, were selected from the ranks of independent, property holding men. Certainly the leaders of the backcountry did not possess the wealth and prestige of their coastal counterparts, but Cleveland and his colleagues owned land and slaves and always seemed eager to acquire more of both.

Despite his disdain for work, Cleveland built a

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<sup>3</sup> Backcountry folk also knew Cleveland as "Old Round About" for his great size and strong association with the Yadkin River plantation. "Col. Cleveland," Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 28S, 66; Lyman C. Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heros (Cincinnati, n.p., 1881; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), 426-429; J. D. Bailey, Commanders at King's Mountain (Gaffney, SC: H. DeCamp Publishers, 1926), 119.

<sup>4</sup> Communicated by Major Meredith Thurmond to Lyman C. Draper, March, 1841, Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 30S, 19-22.

plantation that was "one of the best" in that part of the country, using slaves to carry on much of the day-to-day labor so he could spend time hunting and adventuring. At the start of the Revolutionary War, Cleveland quickly aligned himself with the Whig cause in North Carolina, joining the local Committee of Safety and enlisting in North Carolina's Continental Line. In August of 1775, the Surry County Committee of Public Safety elected Cleveland chairman. At that same session, the group vowed to support the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia and outlined its opposition to the violation of their British birthrights through the practice of taxation without representation. These particular backcountry Whigs favored a system of government which protected their holdings and allowed them an opportunity to defend that property through locally elected representatives. When the actions of the British government seemed to threaten their vision of property and rights and representation in the mid-1770s, these Whigs were willing to use extreme measures to protect their ideas of independence.

At the September meeting of the Surry County Committee of Safety, the delegation resolved to suppress all immorality and vice, including any "Gaming, Betting,

or Wagering whatsoever."<sup>5</sup> This stance against public impropriety was an important one, primarily because of how Whig supporters employed it against backcountry loyalists. Throughout the war, Whigs branded those persons with loyalist tendencies as "thieves" or "robbers" and used resolutions against immorality to justify the often excessive violence against the Tories. Cleveland, who eventually resigned his post in the North Carolina line to become colonel of the Wilkes County militia, utilized his men to punish those indiscreet enough to express sympathy with the British cause.

The swift and often arbitrary brand of justice Cleveland dispensed during the war earned the colonel a reputation among Whig supporters for being "brave and decisive." Not surprisingly, the Tories found Cleveland and his men "unmerciful," since the colonel was "hanging them on the nearest tree whenever they fell in his power."<sup>6</sup> Rather than chaotic and frenzied, the activity of backcountry Whig militias actually followed a rather ordered pattern. After receiving a plea for assistance,

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<sup>5</sup> Proceedings of the Surry County Committee of Safety, August 25-26, 1775 and September 20-21, 1775, The State Records of North Carolina, ed. Walter Clark, 26 vols. (Winston and Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 1886-1907), 10: 228-229; 251-254; *Ibid*, 187-188.

<sup>6</sup> "Col. Ben. Cleveland," Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 27S, 103.

Colonel Cleveland or another of the backcountry leaders would call out the militia to pursue and apprehend the accused. If the leaders of the expedition determined that the actions of the prisoners were not so serious, then they might ask the captives to take an oath of allegiance or transport them to jail for a few days. On the other hand, if the persons in question had a particularly bad reputation for robbing and plundering Whig families and communities, then the Whig officers would quickly constitute a court of their own design and try the captives. After a quick trial, the militia, more often than not, hanged those persons found guilty.

In the fall of 1779, Esquire Hall reported to Cleveland that a party of Tories had robbed him along the New River. This account, like others sent to Cleveland during the war, claimed that Tories were pillaging and plundering backcountry communities. The absence of effective colonial or state government during the war left the administration of justice against both common criminals and war-time opponents in the hands of the Whig militia. Cleveland responded by leading a small force of his men, many of whom served under him in the Wilkes County militia, to the Blue Ridge to track down the Tories and thieves who had violated Hall. Once Cleveland's force captured the nine men they thought responsible, the

colonel sent for other military officers, including Joel Lewis and John Witherspoon, to help comprise a make-shift court. Cleveland and his colleagues tried and sentenced the men for their crimes. They executed the two "perceived ring-leaders," William Riddle and William Nichols, and transported the rest to the Wilkes County jail.<sup>7</sup> On another occasion that same year, Cleveland did not even bother with the formality of a mock trial. After a skirmish at the Shallow Ford on the Yadkin River in 1779, Cleveland ordered one of the Tory participants shot as he stood in the doorway of his home.<sup>8</sup>

Benjamin Cleveland and other Whig leaders like William Campbell, Isaac Shelby, Martin Armstrong and Joel Lewis always seemed to have their men in the field, ready to respond to any increase in Tory activity. In 1780, Campbell and fifteen of his soldiers surprised a Tory camp along the Dan River and apprehended eighteen loyalists, including Captain Nathan Reed. As was the practice among the Whigs, Campbell escorted the prisoners to a site near the Moravian settlement and sent for other Whig officers to help him try the captives. The judges in this particular case, including Campbell and Cleveland, offered

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<sup>7</sup> "Col. Cleveland and the Tories," Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 28S, 36-38.

<sup>8</sup> "Skirmish at Shallow Ford," Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 28S, 25.



to spare Reed if he would take an oath of loyalty to the patriot cause. He refused and paid for his stance with his life.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to participating in the local skirmishes against the Tories, Cleveland and his men, in various combinations, fought in a number of campaigns that had a significant impact on the outcome of the Revolutionary War in the South. A number of the Surry and Wilkes men, including Cleveland, participated in the maneuvers against the Cherokee Indians at the start of the war, and many more participated in the campaign and battle of King's Mountain.<sup>10</sup> By the fall of 1780, Cleveland's reputation for excessive violence had passed through the region and beyond. Just prior to the battle at King's Mountain, Major Patrick Ferguson described Cleveland's methods to General Henry Clinton:

Two old men have been brought in here today most barbarously maimed by a party of Cleveland's men, who after drinking with them in disguise for some time fell upon them altho

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<sup>9</sup> "Col. Cleveland and the Tories," Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 28S, 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> Whig participation in the frontier war against the Cherokees combined with the perception of British and loyalist aid to the Native Americans on the western border of the Carolinas convinced many backcountry residents to support the Whig cause. See Rachel N. Klein, Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1990), 91-95.

unarmed, & after butchering two young men, one of whom a son to the old, left them for dead & I fear past recovery. It appears from various accounts that Cleveland gives orders for such cowardly acts of cruelty.<sup>11</sup>

Although Cleveland administered justice in forms used by other Whig officers, his tendency to inflict harsh punishments at times went beyond the boundaries established by his colleagues. By the end of the war, Cleveland "probably had a hand in hanging more Tories than any other man in America," and his men had earned the sobriquet, "Cleveland's Devils" for their willingness to do the colonel's bidding.<sup>12</sup>

In the fall of 1780, Cleveland and his men were already out in the field, near the New River, when Cleveland received word of Ferguson's activity in backcountry South Carolina. The Wilkes County militia joined the overmountain men and other forces from the Carolina backcountry and defeated Ferguson and the

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Ferguson to Henry Clinton, October 1, 1780, The Sir Henry Clinton Papers, file 3, 160-161, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Michigan, quoted in David C. Hsiung, "Isolation and Integration in Upper East Tennessee, 1780-1860: The Historical Origins of Appalachian Characterizations" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991), 27.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Ashe, ed. Biographical History of North Carolina: From Colonial Times to Present (Greensboro, NC: Van Noppen, 1906), 71; Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heroes, 445.

loyalist army at King's Mountain in early October.<sup>13</sup>

Just as they did after local skirmishes, the Whig officers gathered after the battle to decide what to do with the prisoners of war. Many of the Whigs, including Cleveland, wanted to punish the captives severely for their participation in the hanging of Whig soldiers at places like Camden, Ninety-Six and Augusta. Cleveland carried the additional burden of wanting to honor a pledge to execute certain persons whom he considered the "chief marauders" in his part of the state.<sup>14</sup> John Rutledge, the governor of South Carolina, hoped to collect information concerning the "House Burning, Plundering, & other Cruelties, & Acts of Barbarity committed by the British in South Carolina and Georgia," but the officers in the field acted to bring about justice much more swiftly.<sup>15</sup>

Colonel William Campbell, the officer in charge of the campaign, agreed to hold a court to consider the fate of those certain individuals branded as the "most

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<sup>13</sup> Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heros, 173-180; 248-261.

<sup>14</sup> Bensen J. Lossing, The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1850), 2: 429.

<sup>15</sup> John Rutledge to the South Carolina Delegates of the Confederation Congress, November 20, 1780, John W. Barnwell, ed., "Letters of John Rutledge," South Carolina Historical Magazine 17 (October 1916): 143-144.

notorious horse Thieves & Tories" by backcountry leaders.<sup>16</sup> Several Whig captains and field officers served as the judges for the trial, while twelve other officers, selected at random, served as the jury. The mock court found thirty-six men guilty of various crimes against Whig soldiers and their families and sentenced them to death by hanging. Colonel Isaac Shelby intervened and stopped the proceedings, but only after the court had executed nine of the prisoners.<sup>17</sup>

Using their authority as county court justices, militia officers, and prominent local landholders, backcountry Whigs used the Revolutionary War to promote the values in which they believed. They favored a society where independent, propertied men controlled the positions of authority and leadership, but also believed, or claimed to believe, the right to acquire property should be shared by many. Backcountry Whigs did not accord these privileges upon the Tories in the region. In fact, they routinely harassed, assaulted, robbed, plundered, tortured and executed those persons who seemed the greatest threat to Whig authority in an effort to win the war and to increase their own wealth and status.

Although these backcountry Whigs owned land and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heros, 331-343.

slaves, the societies in which they lived were not as well-developed as those communities along the coast. They could not express their power as independent men in the same ways lowcountry planters could. There were not any particularly fine homes or long-established churches or social groups in the backcountry which reinforced the independence and status of the region's leaders.

Backcountry Whigs unmercifully persecuted those persons who seemed to oppose their particular vision of the region and the nation as a way of protecting and reinforcing their position as independent men and leaders in their communities. Many Carolinians tried to maintain a stance of neutrality, while others signed petitions protesting the arbitrary impressment, murder, plunder and torture that seemed to be constant elements of Whig tactics during the war.<sup>18</sup> However, Cleveland and his colleagues continued to label their loyalists foes as "thieves," and punished them for being unfit for membership in a society of self-reliant, landholding white men.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A. Roger Ekirch, "Whig Authority and Public Order in Backcountry North Carolina, 1776-1783," in An Uncivil War, eds. Hoffman, Tate, and Albert, 109-111.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey J. Crow, "Liberty Men and Loyalists: Disorder and Disaffection in the North Carolina Backcountry," in An Uncivil War, eds. Hoffman, Tate, and Albert, 127-129.

The ideas and practices of backcountry elites exercising authority in local communities emerged in the decade prior to the Revolution. By the mid-1760s, settlement in both Carolinas had pushed white Americans "beyond the effective jurisdiction of existing governments."<sup>20</sup> Lowcountry elites and crown representatives administered the colonies' governments through a system of courts and assemblies. However, persons living beyond the lowcountry found themselves in communities where the authority of the colonial assembly and courts or the royal government had little influence on individuals who broke the law.

In the late 1760s, the South Carolina Regulators were "among the first consciously to confront the contradictions between law and authority." Backcountry elites took authority in their own hands and began to punish those persons who could not or would not live by socially recognized standards.<sup>21</sup> This process of ordering included lynch law, which first appeared in the South Carolina backcountry during the late 1760s and reappeared in the Virginia Piedmont in the 1780s. Rather than a social response that took advantage of the absence

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Maxwell Brown, The South Carolina Regulators (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1963), vii-viii.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

of order, this form of vigilantism was primarily a conservative reaction designed to protect the property of independent individuals and to reinforce the ideals of law and order valued in British North America.<sup>22</sup>

The absence of effective courts exposed backcountry residents and visitors to various sorts of crime. Thomas Griffith, an employee of Josiah Wedgwood sent to the United States to search for Cherokee white clay, had the opportunity to observe the violence of the backcountry first-hand. He arrived in Charleston in September of 1767 and proceeded towards the Cherokee country, passing through the backcountry hamlet of Orangeburg. In the day or two that he rested his horse there, he found the town a "considerable large neighborhood" with a tavern, a shop and "a man that pretended to preach." The day after he left Orangeburg, a hot day's march and the absence of accommodation forced Griffith to sleep under a tree "very near the place where five people had been rob'd and murder'd but two days before." Perhaps while in Orangeburg Griffith had learned about the "sett of thieves that were join'd together to rob travellers and destroy

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Maxwell Brown, Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 21-22; James Elbert Cutler, Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States (n.p., Longmans, Green, and Company, 1905; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 13-40.

the poor defenseless inhabitants of the new settlements."<sup>23</sup> Despite the presence of some aspects of civil society, including taverns, shops and churches, backcountry communities did not have a civil government in which they could entrust their lives and property.

Thieves like those who plagued the Orangeburg area posed serious difficulties of jurisdiction and administration when backcountry folk sought justice. For the first one hundred years of South Carolina's existence, the only courts to be found in the colony were in Charleston. It took a great deal of time and effort to apprehend suspects, transport them to Charleston, and convict them of their crimes. Witnesses found it difficult and inconvenient to leave their farms and families for a journey to Charleston to testify against the accused. Eventually people on the frontiers of South Carolina were so far removed from the courts that they "were induced occasionally to inflict punishments in their own ways and by their own authority, on knaves and villains."<sup>24</sup> The Regulator movement of the late 1760s

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Griffith, "A Journal of the Voyage to South Carolina in the Year 1767," The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views 1697-1774, comp. H. Roy Merrens, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), 240-241.

<sup>24</sup> David Ramsay, History of South Carolina from its First Settlement in 1670 to 1808, 2 vols. (Newberry: W.J. Duffie, 1858; reprint, Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint



was one way backcountry leaders could capture the attention of lowcountry elites who seemed more concerned with the Stamp Act than protecting residents of the backcountry from Indians and crimes against their property.<sup>25</sup>

In September of 1769, John Harvey received a beating that was fairly typical of frontier vigilantism in South Carolina. A large crowd of people, perhaps as many as fifty or sixty, captured Harvey near Nobles Creek. The mob chained their captive to a tree, stripped him to his waist and whipped him with a bundle of rods or switches. Over the course of an hour or two, each person in the mob gave Harvey ten lashes, until he had received five hundred or more. When they were done, "the blood streamed down his back . . . and some days after it appeared that his Back was then in a shocking condition very sore & much festered." One member of the mob refused to lash the victim and asked the other participants why the punishment was so severe. Someone in the crowd responded that Harvey had to be punished in such a fashion because he was so

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Company, 1968), 2: 70. This work was original published in 1808.

<sup>25</sup> Klein, Unification of a Slave State, 38.

"roguish and troublesome."<sup>26</sup>

Though backcountry elites used the Regulator movement in South Carolina as a way of protesting against ineffectual government on the local level, they also used their protests as a way of defining membership in their communities and excluding those persons not interested in creating a society where independent men might own slaves. No longer threatened by the matriarchal and egalitarian Cherokee, backcountry landholders wanted to make sure that misfits in their own community would not threaten their own independence. They labeled frontier hunters "thieves" and "bandits" because their solitary actions in the open forest threatened the very basis of a property holding society and used summary justice to drive those persons from their communities.<sup>27</sup>

The Regulators, as landowners and aspiring planters, wanted the convenience of their own courts and jails and greater representation in the assembly.<sup>28</sup> Their labors resulted in the passage of the Circuit Court Act of 1769

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<sup>26</sup> South Carolina Council Journal, February 3, 1772, in American Violence, ed. Richard Maxwell Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Klein, Unification of a Slave State, 51-61; Tom Hatley, The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Revolutionary Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 180-183.

<sup>28</sup> Klein, Unification of a Slave State, 51.

which created district courts throughout backcountry settlements like Camden, Orangeburg, Cheraw and Ninety-Six.<sup>29</sup> The efforts of the Regulators to create a more even distribution of justice across South Carolina were just the beginning of the struggle between law and authority. Backcountry residents, during and after the American Revolution, continued to search for order through a combination of state government and local adaptation.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the intentions of his ill-treated house guest, Colonel Cleveland did not die a horrible death in the hot summer sun on his vast back lands. The colonel's prolonged absence from home alerted his family and friends to the possibility of danger, and they began to inspect the lands around Cleveland's plantation. The searchers, after three days and nights of diligent work, located Cleveland, a little worse for the wear, but still alive.

Shortly after this incident, Cleveland made plans to leave the Wilkes County area for a site on the Tugaloo River along the South Carolina - Georgia border. Although he wielded a great deal of influence in the North Carolina backcountry, Cleveland lost title to his prized plantation on the Yadkin River. While Cleveland maintained a large

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<sup>29</sup> Ramsay, History of South Carolina, 2: 71.

<sup>30</sup> Jo Anne McCormick, "The Camden Backcountry Judicial Precinct, 1769-1790," (M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1975), 98-102.

number of loyal followers, others were likely silently critical of the rather arbitrary form of justice he practiced and the means he used to acquire additional wealth during the war.

A letter from Benjamin Booth Boote to Governor Richard Caswell in October of 1778 pointed to some of the problems Cleveland had with his land dealings and raised questions about the legitimacy of his position in the community. The letter concerned a dispute between Cleveland and two other men, William Terrel Davis and Samuel Bicknell. Boote expressed concern that Cleveland and Bicknell had engaged in "unfair practices" and encouraged the governor to investigate land acquisition in the backcountry before granting any additional territory to Cleveland or Bicknell. <sup>31</sup>

Cleveland's violence against the Tories, while lacking legal authority, received some support from the North Carolina state government at crucial times. In the fall of 1779, Cleveland was accused of murdering Lemuel Jones and William Coyle and of assaulting James Harvel. Shortly after he took his seat in the North Carolina senate in October of that year, the house requested the governor pardon Cleveland for his role in the recent

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<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Booth Boote to Richard Caswell, October 10, 1778, State Records of North Carolina, 13: 486.

violence against Jones, Coyle, and Harvel because the deceased were "known Traitors, Murderers, Robbers and Horse thieves."<sup>32</sup>

In the mid-1780s, Cleveland left his land problems and moved his family and many of his followers from Wilkes County to a site in northwestern South Carolina. There he once again engaged in many of the practices that earned him such a harsh reputation during the war: he speculated in lands, administered his own brand of justice and served as the center of the local community. Once again the absence of functional local government allowed Cleveland to act independent of other forms of authority.

The end of the Revolutionary War in the Carolinas did not bring immediate stability and peace to the backcountry. The absence of effective courts and government institutions still plagued parts of the region, as did the tension created by the violence of the Whig-Tory conflict. William Henry Drayton left Charleston in the spring of 1784 to take a tour of the South Carolina backcountry and had the opportunity to observe first-hand the "Unhappy consequences of the late war."

One evening, Drayton stopped for a rest along the Edisto River at a dilapidated public house where the

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<sup>32</sup> Senate Journal, October 18, 1779 and November 6, 1779, State Records of North Carolina, 13: 825-826, 888.

condition of the room and board matched the sour countenance of the owner. Drayton asked why the man was not better equipped to receive travellers since he seemed to be in an ideal location. The man informed Drayton that he had invested little in his house lately because he would soon be leaving the area out of fear that he would be hanged. The man's neighbors had threatened to haul him over the coals for killing two of their number, and "he was certain if he stayed, he should be obliged to kill several more." The fact that the man spoke coolly and calmly about killing his neighbors alarmed Drayton, who believed the murders troubled the man about as much as killing a pair of bucks. Along the Edisto, Drayton found the recent war had "incited men to the wanton shedding of Blood and dissolved not only the ties of Friendship and Neighborhood but even Humanity."<sup>33</sup>

The situation was very similar in other parts of the backcountry as well. From his home in the Barnwell District, Tarleton Brown found the Tories "still troublesome" after the war, "plundering and occasionally killing the inhabitants." The most notorious of the Tories and thieves included John Black, Zekial Maulfers and Lark Loudon. This band murdered a man at Cherry Hill,

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<sup>33</sup> William Drayton, "Remarks in a Tour through the Backcountry of the State of South Carolina," 1784, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 1. Typescript.

Georgia, for which John Black and two others were hanged at Savannah. Maulfers and Loudon escaped into South Carolina where "they murdered and plundered until the citizens were afraid to travel the roads day or night." When these two learned "the Whigs were upon the look out for them," they stole several horses and slaves and headed for the "Western Country." Brown and three other men pursued the criminals into East Tennessee over the Watauga River and captured them. Although one escaped briefly, both were eventually hanged for their crimes.<sup>34</sup> For several years after the end of the war, the tension and the language of the Tory-Whig conflict permeated the backcountry. Whigs, still in search of order, labeled those persons on the fringes of frontier society "troublemakers," "rogues" and "Tories" and persecuted them with the same ferocity they exhibited during the war.

The backcountry beyond Augusta was rather mountainous, especially compared with the level sandy plains of the middle portion of South Carolina. (Figure V) The area near the Tugaloo was part of this "hilly country, everywhere fertile and delightful, continually replenished by innumerable rivulets . . . ." Although the hills could

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<sup>34</sup> Charles I. Bushnell, ed. "The Memoirs of Tarleton Brown," The Magazine of History, Extra Number 101, (Tarrytown, NY: William Abbot, 1924), 34-35.

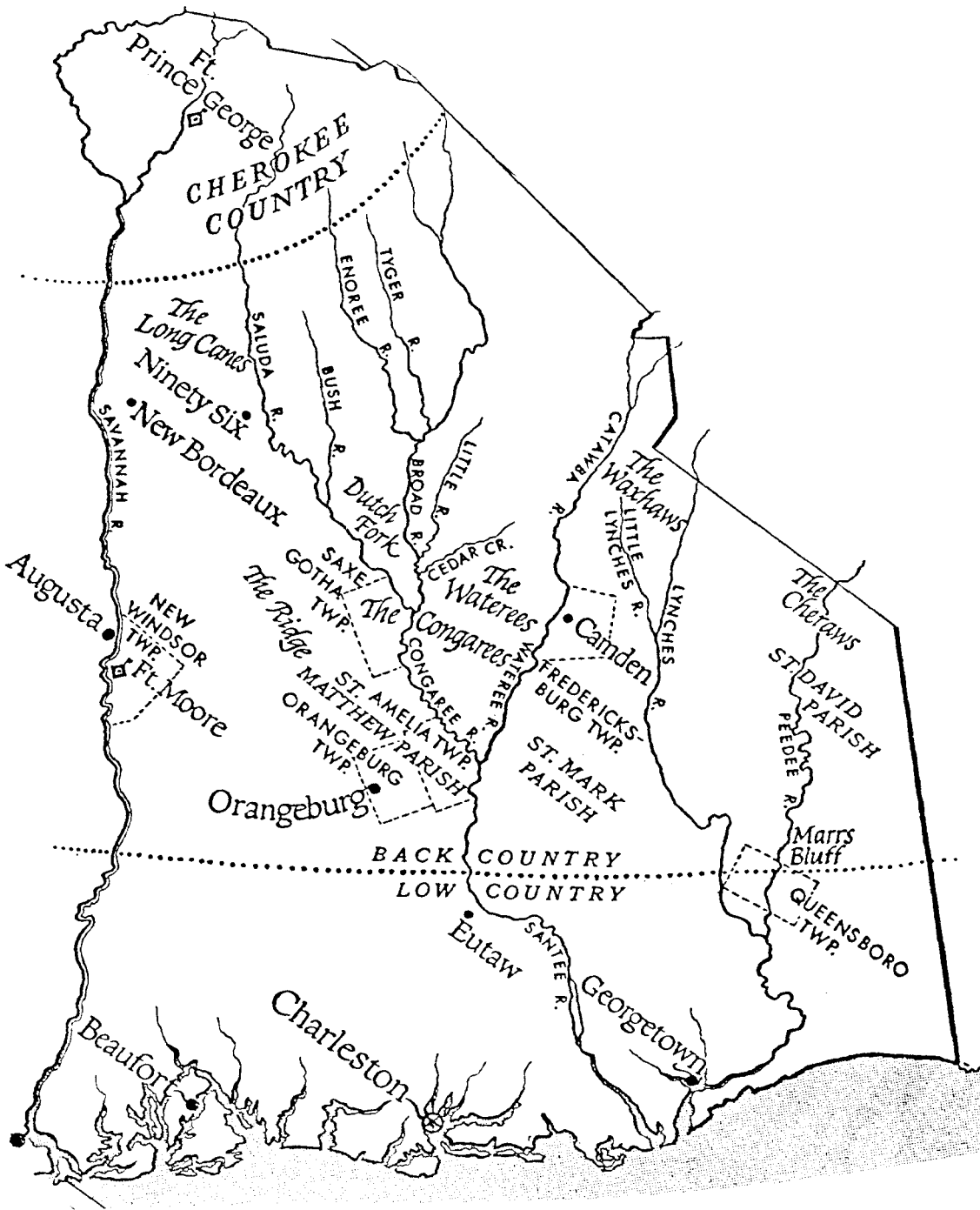


Figure V - South Carolina

Source: Richard Maxwell Brown, The South Carolina Regulators (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1963), facing page 1.



be rocky, the soil was of good depth and very fertile.<sup>35</sup> The Cleveland family, along with several other North Carolina families, located on lands still held by the Cherokee, building a large wooden frame home on valuable lands near the "eastern bank of the Tugaloo, a beautiful stream skirted by a lovely country."<sup>36</sup>

The state of South Carolina had made plans to acquire this territory and was concerned about the arrival of Cleveland and his followers.<sup>37</sup> Andrew Pickens wrote the Privy Council in the spring of 1784 to inform them that Cleveland and about one hundred families from North Carolina had settled on lands reserved for South Carolina's Continental soldiers. The location of the settlement also concerned the Cherokees who were a little uneasy about whites living amidst their old towns between

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<sup>35</sup> William Bartram, Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws, in Travels and Other Writings, comp. Thomas P. Slaughter (New York: Library of America, 1996), 52, 270.

<sup>36</sup> "Col. Cleveland," Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 28S, 76-77; "Colonel Benjamin Cleveland," Communicated by John Miller to Lyman Draper, Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 30S, 8.

<sup>37</sup> D. Huger Bacot, "The South Carolina Up Country at the End of the Eighteenth Century," American Historical Review 28 (1922-23): 690.

the Tugaloo and Keowee rivers.<sup>38</sup>

Cleveland's reputation for severity followed him to South Carolina, and some people had the impression that the colonel had amassed a great deal of wealth during the war by pillaging Tories.<sup>39</sup> However, once he and his family established themselves in their new home, Colonel Cleveland exercised a great deal of authority in the frontier community. Cleveland and Pickens, wealthy landowners with significant numbers of slaves, worked within the tradition of backcountry regulators and Whigs who had often relied on extra-legal measures to maintain order and property in their communities until legal authority was sufficient to the task.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Cleveland and Pickens "constituted a court, & tried all cases, & executed their own laws for all that country for several years and kept it in complete subjection . . ."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Andrew Pickens to the Members of the South Carolina Privy Council, April 13, 1784, Journals of the Privy Council: 1783-1789 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), 102-103.

<sup>39</sup> "Colonel Benjamin Cleveland," Communicated by John Miller to Lyman Draper, Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 30S, 9.

<sup>40</sup> N. Louis Bailey and Elizabeth Ivey Cooper, Biographical Directory of South Carolina Representatives (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1981), 3: 552-554.

<sup>41</sup> F. W. Pickens to Charles H. Allen, March 26, 1848, in John Logan, "The Upper Country of South Carolina: Manuscript Notes," Caroliniana Library, University of

The practice of summary justice was not uncommon in the backcountry in the 1780s and even into the 1790s. On occasion "the foremost men of the state" acted without consulting a jury or court in an effort to bring swift justice. The difficulty of transporting prisoners to jail, and keeping them there, motivated people like Colonel Cleveland to act on their own initiative. One early historian likened Cleveland's influence to a "patriarchal government" which lasted until courts could be extended over the northwestern part of the state. Cleveland, as the "head" of this government, reportedly executed his duties with "much judgment and discretion."<sup>42</sup> Others living in the region found Cleveland to be a man "great in every respect" who acted "frankly and fearlessly."<sup>43</sup>

Although the South Carolina assembly had been a bit more responsive to the needs of backcountry residents after the Regulator movement in the 1760s, population growth and expansion in the 1780s again created a situation where the courts beyond the coastal region of

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South Carolina, Columbia, 169.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Johnson, Traditions and Reminiscences, chiefly of the American Revolution in the South (Charleston, SC: Walker and James, 1851), 401.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Meats and Edwin T. Arnold, eds. The Writings of Benjamin F. Perry, 3 vols. (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1980), 2: 109-118.

the state were largely ineffective. The County Court Act of 1785 created a system which could hear cases at common law involving damages of less than fifty pounds, personal actions with minor damages, and some criminal litigation. However, these new county courts, administered by justices of the peace chosen by the state legislature, could not hear criminal cases which involved the loss of life or limb or the possibility of corporal punishment, which again created logistical problems for backcountry folk seeking justice.<sup>44</sup>

Cleveland, as much as any other person in the backcountry, was willing to act decisively to prevent disruptions in the frontier community in which he lived. When a horsethief named Henry Dinkins created problems for the Tugaloo community by stealing livestock, Cleveland acted to solve the problem. He observed Dinkins' habits, relied on his neighbors to help him capture the thief, and hanged him on the spot.<sup>45</sup> On another occasion, a group of Cleveland's neighbors brought "a notorious horse thief

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<sup>44</sup> The South Carolina legislature created Pendleton County in 1789 and incorporated it into this court system. Cleveland and Pickens were among the first justices of this court. Alexia Jones Helsley, "The County and Intermediate Court," The Carolina Herald and Newsletter 20 (Summer 1992): 2-3.

<sup>45</sup> "The Clevelands," Communicated by Major Meredith Thurmond to Lyman Draper, Lyman Draper's Notes, Draper MSS, 30S, 25-27.

and Tory" to the colonel for his opinion. Cleveland ordered the man hanged in an effort to enact justice quickly and to save trouble and expense.<sup>46</sup>

Another horsethief, who might have felt that he was somewhat fortunate to fall into the hands of Cleveland's men while the colonel was away on business, received the same sort of justice from the colonel's wife, Mary Cleveland. Late in the day and fearing an escape, the group asked Mrs. Cleveland what should be done. After making inquiries into the case and the evidence against the captive, she told the crowd to do what the colonel would do if he were in the same situation. The mob hanged the thief at the Cleveland's gate.<sup>47</sup>

Luigi Castiglioni, an Italian aristocrat who came to the United States to examine personally "the political birth of A Republic composed of diverse nationalities, scattered over vast provinces far removed from one another," had an opportunity to observe first-hand the postwar violence of the backcountry and raised important questions about the relationship between the aggressive persecution of marginal members of society and the established ideals of the Revolution. His travels carried

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<sup>46</sup> Meats and Arnold, eds. The Writings of Benjamin F. Perry, 2: 109.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, 401-402.

him into the Carolina - Georgia backcountry near Augusta where he found "a mixture of people of various countries," many prone to "idleness and amusements."<sup>48</sup>

Among this diverse and indolent group, a significant number of fugitives from the clutches of justice existed, since they could not live "within limits necessary for a controlled system of society." Castiglioni found evidence of persons unwilling to live within an ordered society in an incident involving a famous horse thief and Colonel Cleveland.<sup>49</sup>

In the spring of 1786, some inhabitants of Wilkes County, Georgia, recognized and apprehended a thief and Tory who had "stolen various horses" during the war. After an examination, the local county court justices absolved the captive of all his crimes because they took place prior to the end of the war and the peace treaty stipulated that "all offenses perpetrated by the Whigs and Tories during the war must be pardoned." The justices, as agents of the government, had no recourse other than to release the prisoner.

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<sup>48</sup> Antonio Pace, ed. Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels in the United States of North America, 1785-1787 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>49</sup> Although Castiglioni only refers to the leader of the part as "Colonel C\_\_\_\_\_" (well known in America for his turbulent character)," the geographic location and detailed description of the incident point to the nearly certain involvement of Benjamin Cleveland.

Almost immediately, "a number of those people" under the leadership of Colonel Cleveland captured the thief with the intention of executing him for crimes committed during the war. When the mob reached the town of Galphinton, they discovered they had no rope to hang their victim. While a member of the party went to look for an appropriate piece of rope, the prisoner made a valiant, but unsuccessful escape attempt. To punish their prisoner, Cleveland's men "struck him in the head several times with their sabers" while they waited for their colleague to return.

News of the beating and pending execution reached the attorney general of the state, who happened to be in the region on business. Moved by "such illegal and barbaric behavior," he went to Galphinton and argued against the summary execution of the man, finally persuading the mob to spare his life. Unfortunately for the accused, he died the next day from wounds received during the beating. Castiglioni found it strange that the assault would go unpunished "in a country which has just published Constitutions most favorable to personal security" and believed the current system of government lacked the ability to control "an already vicious multitude."<sup>50</sup>

Through the 1780s, backcountry leaders found

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<sup>50</sup> Pace, Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio, 144-145.

themselves living in communities lacking the legal authority to deal with all of the situations that confronted them. In northwest South Carolina, the county courts could not act in cases involving loss of life or limb, but Colonel Cleveland could and did. In fact, he executed "several tories and thieves without any of the formalities of a trial or prosecution," a behavior which continued even after the state established courts of justice in Pendleton District.<sup>51</sup>

By the time Cleveland retired from the courts in the late 1790s, his brand of justice was no longer necessary. The South Carolina legislature had moved the state's capital inland to Columbia and had revamped the courts system a number of times in order to provide all its citizens effective and fair local government. Moreover, a planter class had begun to emerge, even in the northwestern part of the state, that could serve their interests on both the state and local level.

Although many persons accused Cleveland, more often than other Whig leaders, of excessive violence, his activity was an extreme attempt to order the backcountry along the lines of the more established coastal

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<sup>51</sup> Personal Autobiographies, Benjamin Perry, 1849, Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, 5; Personal Autobiographies, Benjamin Perry, 1874, Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, 11.



communities. Backcountry folk from the Regulator movement through the Revolutionary War and into the postwar era used violence to protect a society that valued property and independence. The persons they prosecuted were "thieves" and "Tories," the most obvious threats to an ordered, independent society during the later part of the eighteenth century. Their excessive methods were likely a function of their existence on the fringes of a frontier society and represented the effort they were willing to make to participate in an independent and improving community.

## CHAPTER V

### "The Prospect is Unbounded": Economy and Independence in the Carolina - Virginia Backcountry

General Le Clerc Milfort did all he could to suppress the laughter welling up inside his chest. In the many years he had been in the American states, he had never encountered a scene as pathetic or amusing as the one that lay before him. Although he did not have any real connection to the backcountry family who were hosting the evening's small dinner party, Milfort saw no reason to add to the obvious embarrassment of their social ineptitude by laughing out loud. So, he held out as long as he could.

Milfort, a member of the French middle class and sometime official of the French government, spent nearly twenty years in America in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. His extended stay began in New London, Connecticut and included visits to many important American cities and to the southern backcountry. During a visit to the Tugaloo River region in the mid-to-late 1780s, Milfort had the opportunity to observe and record some of the most bizarre scenes to be found on the American continent.

It was there, along the Tugaloo River, that Milfort first encountered the "Crackers" or "Gougers." These "quarrelsome and mean" frontier fighters, who seemed

remotely connected to English pugilists, engaged in "more murderous" contests than their distant counterparts, leaving many men permanently maimed.<sup>1</sup> At one of these backcountry eye-gouging confrontations, Milfort received an invitation to dine at the home of "local man." The man and his wife took their duties as host and hostess very seriously and made every effort to ensure the evening would proceed flawlessly. Despite their location on the very edge of American civilization, the wife had heard that it was proper to serve tea in "well-bred company" and asked her husband to exchange some tobacco for a half-bushel of the best tea leaves.

When Milfort and the other guests arrived for dinner, the mixture of enticing aromas from the hearth could only lead them to believe they were about to partake of an

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of backcountry social attitudes and gatherings, see the following: William Loughton Smith, Journal of William Loughton Smith, 1790-1791, ed. Albert Mathews (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), 69; John Budd, "A Short Account of South Carolina," in Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times, ed. Eugene Schwaab (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 23; Francois-Jean, Marquis de Chastellux, Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781 and 1782, trans. and ed. Howard C. Rice, Jr., 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1963), 2: 386; John Bernard, Retrospections of America, 1797-1811, ed. Laurence Hutton and Brander Matthews (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), 155-156; Jedidiah Morse, The American Geography or a View of the Present Situation of the United States of America (Elizabethtown: Shepard Kollack, 1789; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 418.

outstanding meal. After everyone had taken their places at the table, their hostess made some final preparations. She removed the ham from a large pot, where it had been cooking with the tea leaves, and set it on an earthenware dish. After draining the liquid from the vessel, she placed the tea leaves in another dish and carried the assortment to her company.

Milfort saw the faces of the other guests "light up at the sight of an inviting dish about which they were building up high hopes, and every one was getting ready to have a real treat." He then watched with great amusement as each person took some of the tea leaves and began to chew them, releasing their rather bitter taste. The distorted faces and puzzled looks of the guests caused the wife to fly into a great rage against her husband for buying inferior tea. After Milfort had a good laugh at the comical scene, he instructed the women on the best method for making a proper cup of tea.<sup>2</sup>

While Milfort might have laughed at the lack of cultural sophistication he found in parts of the backcountry, he and other eighteenth-century observers had to be impressed at the effort frontier residents made to

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<sup>2</sup> Louis le Clerc Milfort, Memoirs of A Quick Glance at My Various Travels and My Sojourn in the Creek Nation, trans. and ed. Ben C. McCrary (Kennesaw, GA; Continental Book Company, 1959), 116-120.

develop economic connections with other regions.

Milfort's hosts had no idea what they should do with a pound of tea, but they certainly knew where they could find one and what they were willing to pay for it.

The importance of fostering economic associations with other communities cannot be understated. The process of building roads, clearing rivers, digging canals and establishing market-towns was vital to the improvement of the backcountry during the last four decades of the eighteenth century. These activities had been the hallmarks of the American economy throughout much of the colonial era, and the principal actors in those activities, speculators, farmers, artisans, planters, merchants, servants and slaves, played significant roles in the development of the interior.<sup>3</sup>

Economic changes in the Southern backcountry during the eighteenth century paralleled developments in other parts of the United States as well. The economy of the Southern backcountry, like that of the Susquehanna Valley, originally centered around fur trading and exchanges with Native Americans. A secondary phase of development saw a shift towards the production of a variety of goods which could be exported into the ever-changing Atlantic market.

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<sup>3</sup> Edwin J. Perkins, The Economy of Colonial America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), ix-x.

Folk in the Susquehanna Valley produced maple sugar, potash, grains, lumber and coal, while their Southern counterparts harvested grains, indigo and tobacco and raised livestock for exchange in markets beyond the borders of their communities. By committing to the improvement of their districts and their property through the development and maintenance of an economic infrastructure, backcountry residents of all classes might enhance their status as independent men in developing communities.<sup>4</sup>

The occupation and settlement of the back parts of the American colonies followed a pattern similar in many ways to the process that allowed Europeans to gain control of the Atlantic coast in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A combination of promoters, investors and settlers visualized various types of communities and commodities that might be transplanted to or developed in the Americas. Then, those persons worked, with varying degrees of success, to build productive societies along the lines of their visions.

In the 1760s, Henry Laurens, a merchant, planter and public official in South Carolina, began to outline some of the possibilities for the backcountry based on the

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<sup>4</sup> Peter C. Mancall, Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture Along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700-1800 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1-10.

region's recent progress. In a series of letters to friends and colleagues, many of them London merchants, Laurens offered advice about the opportunities for economic gain in the American interior. The end of the French and Indian War opened a "large field of Trade" in the colonies and allowed a vast number of people to settle on "our frontier Lands."<sup>5</sup>

Two of South Carolina's earliest historians also recorded the dramatic changes taking place in the continent's interior during the 1760s. Alexander Hewatt, who wrote one of the first histories of South Carolina, argued that a "scarcity of improvable lands" in Virginia and Pennsylvania left poor people without spots "equal to their expectations." In an effort to improve their economic opportunities, they migrated to the south, carrying everything they owned and driving their livestock before them. These settlers from the northern colonies encountered other families from coastal communities, which were beginning to "stretch backward and spread their branches."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Laurens to Richard Oswald, February 15, 1763, The Papers of Henry Laurens, ed. Philip Hamer et al., 13 vols. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968-1980), 3: 260.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Hewatt, An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia, 2 vols. (London: Alexander Donaldson, 1779; reprint, Spartanburg, South Carolina: Reprint Company,

Writing early in the nineteenth century, David Ramsay, a Charleston physician and historian of the Revolutionary War, recorded his observations about the backcountry's economic growth in the last half of the previous century. Ramsay went on to describe how "by degrees public roads were made" which allowed backcountry farmers the opportunity to carry their produce to Charleston in wagons, "where they found excellent markets for all their productions."<sup>7</sup>

Laurens took a particular interest in the investment possibilities of a London merchant named Richard Oswald, offering criticism and constructive comment on his friend's various plans for a plantation in the backcountry. While Laurens found Oswald's design for establishing a farm and vineyard in the back parts of South Carolina "commendable, Generous & . . . truly noble," he feared his friend had overlooked some important considerations. Laurens informed Oswald that while the recent peace with the "savages" of the region opened the backcountry to settlement, the influx of a "divers people" as settlers in the region made it increasingly difficult

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1962), 274.

<sup>7</sup> David Ramsay, History of South Carolina from its First Settlement in the 1670s to the Year 1808, 2 vols. (Newberry, SC: W. J. Duffie, 1858; reprint, Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, 1959), 1: 9.



to find a sufficient tract of land.

While Laurens was not opposed to the production of wine and thought that certain parts of the backcountry offered real opportunities for growing grapes, he reminded his friend that carrying wine to market over backcountry roads would be very expensive and might make it difficult to produce an "advantageous return." Laurens suggested Oswald should consider silk, indigo, cattle and hemp, productions which had brought other backcountry farmers and planters success.<sup>8</sup>

By late in the 1760s, Laurens could report to his overseas connections that the backcountry continued to grow and change. Andrew Pickens, who settled in the Long Canes community earlier in that decade, worked diligently to earn a return from a variety of backcountry enterprises. Shortly after arriving in the area, Pickens helped in the construction of a Block House which served as "a resort for the neighbors to fly in order to protect themselves from the Indians" and as a regional trade center. Pickens transported the skins, ginseng and pink root he obtained through exchange with Native Americans to a warehouse he owned near Augusta, which by the end of the 1760s seemed to be "a very healthy, thriving place." In

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Laurens to Richard Oswald, July 7, 1764, The Papers of Henry Laurens, 4: 332-337.

addition to what seemed to be a lucrative backcountry trade, Pickens also drove beef cattle to Philadelphia for market.<sup>9</sup> As Pickens' stature grew in the Carolina interior during and after the Revolutionary War, he made a concerted effort to distance himself from his past associations with the Cherokee. He and other backcountry elites, like their coastal counterparts, claimed status on the basis of their position as planters rather than through their previous experience as frontier traders.

The activities of Pickens and other backcountry producers attracted the attention of the colony's newspapers by the end of the decade. In the fall of 1768, the *News-Dispatch* of Charleston, South Carolina reported that "several large quantities of excellent tobacco" from the back settlements had been brought to market in the city. The paper went on to inform its readers that despite the recent involvement of backcountry folk in "the works of Reformation or Regulation"<sup>10</sup> that the northern part of the colony was "greatly improved." This improvement included not only the rapid settlement of the region, but also the production of marketable crops and

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<sup>9</sup> F.W. Pickens to Charles H. Allen, March 26, 1848, in John Logan, "The Upper Country of South Carolina: Manuscript Notes," *Caroliniana Library*, University of South Carolina, Columbia, 168-170; Henry Laurens to Robert Dodson, September 13, 1768, The Papers of Henry Laurens, 6: 110.

<sup>10</sup> The Regulator movement of the late 1760s.

the development of various economic possibilities. The quantity of hemp produced in the region had doubled when compared to 1767, and the volume of good wheat was so high in 1768 that Charleston merchants expected to export 2,000 barrels of flour and 1,500 of ship's bread. The inhabitants' production of cloth and linen made it possible to suggest the creation of a "stocking manufacture among them," and new sawmills were appearing everywhere.<sup>11</sup>

The increase of economic activity in the 1760s established trading connections not only to Charleston, but also throughout the backcountry and beyond. William Alexander Sample of Mecklenberg County, North Carolina operated a wagon train between Charlotte Court House and places as far away as Philadelphia. (Figure VI) In addition to trading skins and grains from backcountry hunters and farmers, he sought luxury items for his family and his customers.<sup>12</sup> On one trip to Philadelphia, his

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<sup>11</sup> Charleston, South Carolina News-Dispatch, November 14, 1768, in H. Roy Merrens, comp. The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views, 1697-1774 (Columbia; University of South Carolina Press, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Perkins has argued that a consumer frontier existed during the later part of the eighteenth century in Kentucky, and the Carolina - Virginia backcountry seems to have developed along similar lines. These "economic border region" contained cultural elements of both subsistence agriculture and capitalist production, including the consumption of manufactured goods. See Elizabeth A. Perkins, "The Consumption Frontier: Household



Figure VI - Colonial Roads

Source: Adapted from James Truslow Adams, Atlas of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 55.

shopping list included enough blue cloth for a suit of clothes, three pairs of silver buckles, a ream of good writing paper, a dozen linen handkerchiefs, bonnets, red material for two petticoats, bibles, men's stockings, tableware, spices and coffee.<sup>13</sup>

Although partially removed from direct participation in Atlantic world markets, backcountry folk still had the opportunity to "Live comfortably in respect to every article necessary for the support of Life." Regional entrepôts offered some connection to larger markets, and prospective settlers remained enchanted by the descriptions of the soil distributed by Henry Laurens and other promoters of the region. The monetary success of many farmers in the production of hemp and indigo, who were "the other day Very indigent," convinced many of the backcountry's economic viability.<sup>14</sup>

The likelihood of success in the backcountry attracted both European immigrants and American colonials to the region. William Mylne, a Scottish architect and

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Consumption in Early Kentucky, " Journal of American History 78 (September 1991): 486-510.

<sup>13</sup> William Sample Alexander Papers, 1770-1778, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Laurens to Andrew Turnbull, October 28, 1769, The Papers of Henry Laurens, 7: 179.

master mason, left Edinburgh because of professional controversy and personal debt, eventually settling on Stephen's Creek in the South Carolina backcountry, about seven miles up the Savannah River from Augusta.<sup>15</sup> By the end of May 1774, Mylne had spent three months in the woods by himself. He had travelled to Augusta only twice and sometimes went as long as ten days without seeing another human being. His remote situation allowed him time to think about his professional failure in Scotland and how he might make his way in the world. Mylne informed his sister that "a planter's life is that I would prefer." He knew that the "produce and profits" of a planter were great, although "cloathes and necessaries" for their families consumed much of their income.<sup>16</sup>

A set of industrious planters from Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and New England had settled the region around Mylne's backcountry cabin, many bringing with them "a good number of negroes." The wealthier planters had the advantage of sending their produce to Charleston by water or carriage, and all of the new planters would soon be able to live well because the

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<sup>15</sup> Ted Ruddock, ed. Travels in the Colonies, 1773-1775: Described in the Letters of William Mylne (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 5-8, 22.

<sup>16</sup> William Mylne to Ann Mylne, May 29, 1774, Travels in the Colonies in 1773-1775, 25-27.

excellent ground of the backcountry made it easier to produce "much larger crops than lower down." Mylne's personal plan for success, which he outlined for his sister, included purchasing a tract of land along the Savannah River, buying three negroes, bringing a couple of family servants over from Scotland and building a farm that would allow him to lay by some money yearly.<sup>17</sup> The assistance of dependent laborers and the development of market accessible transportation allowed Mylne to dream that he might regain a measure of his independence.

In June 1774, Mylne wrote his brother, Robert, to inform him that he was trying to make a planter's life in the backcountry. Though he had few possessions in his small cabin, a hard bed and a couple of pots and pans, there was a mill nearby where he could go to grind his corn. Lacking the capital to purchase any slaves, Mylne told his brother how he planted his own garden of greens, cucumbers and watermelons, tended a small peach orchard and raised a few chickens. Although his personal circumstances remained difficult, Mylne tried to convince his brother, and perhaps himself, that he might find his way as a planter.

The Scottish architect certainly thought he knew more than his neighbors who "seemed very ignorant of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

world." Many would raise their crops and then carry them to the local store to barter in exchange for goods at unattractive rates. Mylne believed that economic success in the backcountry required farmers and planters to transport their goods to Charleston or Savannah where they could receive cash and a better return on their produce. To that end he asked Robert if any money remained "from the rubbish of my affairs to purchase this [land] and three or four negroes." With the help of slave labor, he would be made for the rest of his days, planting corn, tobacco and indigo and raising cattle and hogs for the West India Market.<sup>18</sup>

Although the War of American Independence brought interruptions in trade and agriculture, population growth and economic activity rebounded in the years after the war. The backcountry economy retained forms and practices first established in the middle of the eighteenth century. Long-term residents and newer settlers remained committed to obtaining independence in a variety of fashions, and many community leaders worked to encourage improvements that might make access to markets and products a little easier.

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<sup>18</sup> Mylne eventually abandoned his plans for a backcountry plantation and returned home. William Mylne to Robert Mylne, June 26, 1775, Travels in the Colonies in 1773-1775, 30-32.



Throughout the Carolina and Virginia backcountry, small towns, many of them county seats, began to provide the region's farmers and planters connections to other trading centers. Although a number of the residents of the Great Valley of Virginia farmed in a "rather slovenly manner," they managed to cultivate wheat and corn with "great success" in a region that seemed to be "excellent farming country with a deep, stiff, clay soil, susceptible of great improvement."<sup>19</sup> (Figure VII)

The possibility that the soil might be improved became important when the development of backcountry towns offered wheat and corn producers a place to market their crops.<sup>20</sup> Staunton, in Augusta County, served as one of the region's trading centers, attracting business from places in the "farther mountain country." Although there was not a navigable stream in the town, the nearby Shenandoah River provided access to the Potomac River and other trade outlets.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Archibald Alexander, *Memoir of the Reverend William Graham, 1784-1786*, Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, 1-4, microfilm; original in Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Edwin Hendricks, "Town development in the colonial backcountry - Virginia and North Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784*, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison, 2 vols. (Erlangen: Johann Jacob Pal, 1788; reprint, New York Bergman Publishers, 1968), 2: 69.

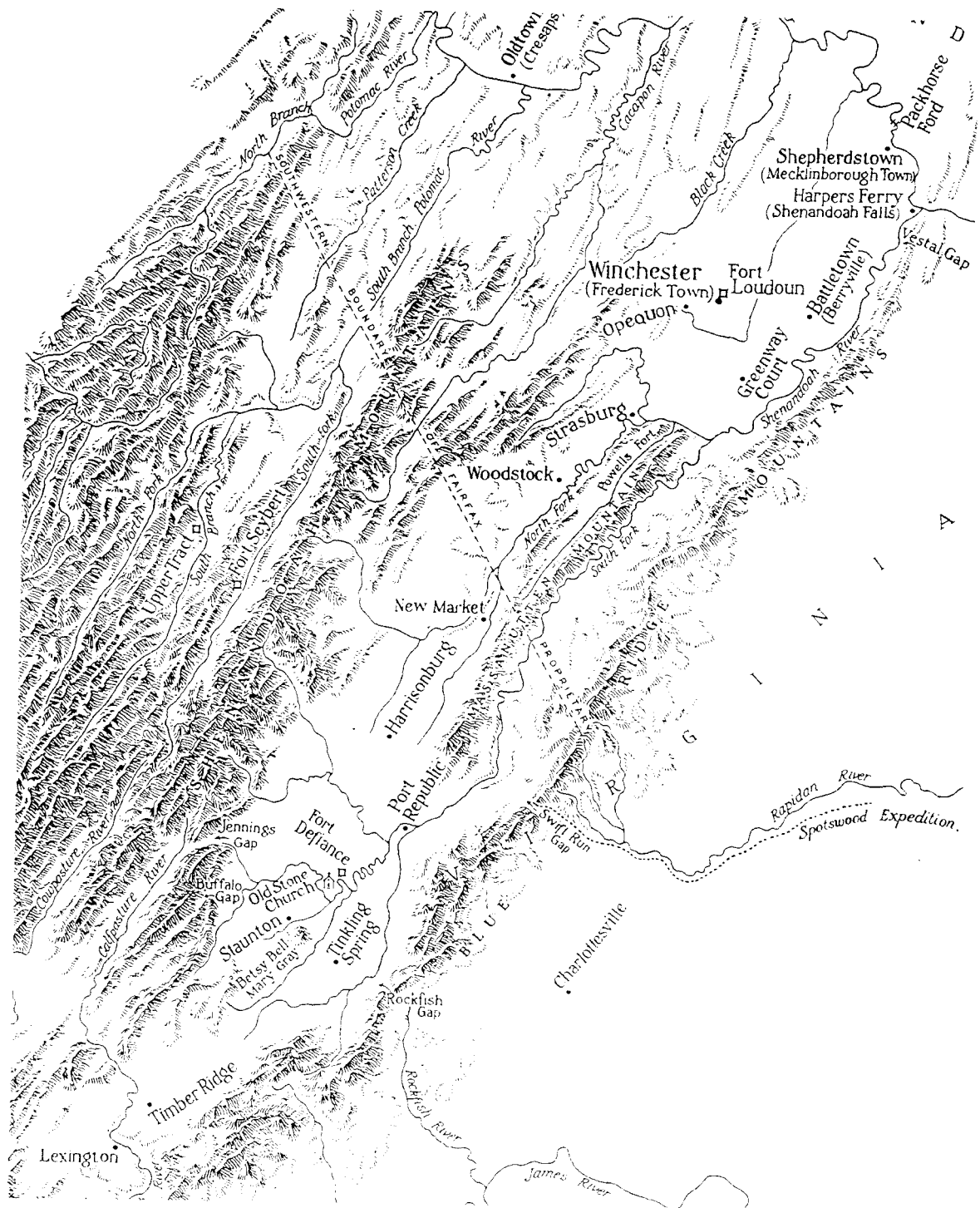


Figure VII - The Great Valley of Virginia

Source: Adapted from James Truslow Adams, Atlas of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 58.

By the middle of the 1790s, Staunton was a town of 800 residents and 150 houses, many of them "large Commodious Mansions Built of Brick, Stone, and Wood." Around fifteen stores received backcountry agricultural products, including wheat, Indian corn, rye, hemp, linseed, wax and honey, and large quantities of bear-skins, beaver-skins and ox-hides. A recently established tanyard purchased most of the later, while storekeepers offered the region's farmers and planters goods from Baltimore and Philadelphia.<sup>22</sup> Some persons, like J. P. Brissott de Warville, a French journalist and professional writer, considered the region's grain crops "superior even to those of Pennsylvania." The success of the valley's grain would only grow as additional trade outlets opened and that was almost a certainty since "its wheat and flour are transported by land and sold as far away as one hundred miles."<sup>23</sup>

In many ways, Staunton was similar to Winchester, a

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Chapman, "A Journey through the United States (1795-1796)," in Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times, ed. Eugene Schwaab (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 34-37; Duke de la Rouchefoucault Liancourt, Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois and Upper Canada in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797, 2 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1790)Liancourt, 2: 91.

<sup>23</sup> J. P. Brissott de Warville, New Travels in the United States of America, trans. Marc Soceani Vams and Durand Echeverria (Cambridge: Belknap, 1964), 358-359.

backcountry trading town in northern Virginia. When Harry Toulmin passed through Winchester, he noted the presence of "various mechanical arts" including saddlers, hatters, shoemakers, weavers, braziers, smiths, clockmakers, riflesmiths, cabinet makers, buckskin breeches makers, a painted-chairmaker, an earthen-ware-maker, a coach maker and a wagon maker. A considerable number of stores obtained goods from Philadelphia, Baltimore and Alexandria, which were sold to people of the town, the neighborhood and the region. Every spring backcountry folk came to Winchester with their horses, sometimes bringing hemp, but always returning with salt, iron and "the products of Europe and the West."<sup>24</sup> The area's cattle producers flocked towards the trading centers in an effort to supply livestock to recent immigrants. John Pope met an old friend in Winchester engaged in just such activity, but they had to cut their visit short, "lest others might supplant him in the sale."<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the Virginia backcountry was marked by the presence of numerous small towns and trading centers which

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<sup>24</sup> Harry Toulmin to James Leigh, November 20, 1793, in The Western Country in 1793: Reports on Kentucky and Virginia by Harry Toulmin, eds. Marion Tinling and Godfrey Davis (San Marino, CA: Castle Press, 1948), 57.

<sup>25</sup> John Pope, A Tour through the Southern and Western Territories of the United States of North America (Richmond: John Dixon, 1792; reprint, New York: Woodward, 1888), 9.

allowed the region's farmers and planters markets to sell their produce and stores to buy goods from outside the region. Pope believed New-town, a small village about eight miles from Winchester, would eventually eclipse its larger neighbor in importance because it had a decided preference in its "Locality" near the future navigation of the Shenandoah.<sup>26</sup>

Location served as a primary consideration in the development of backcountry towns and often determined how much contact the region's producers had with outside markets. For this reason, many towns developed along trade routes, like the Great Wagon Road, or navigable and improvable rivers. During the 1780s, both Abingdon and Lynchburg developed as important county towns. Because of its "advantageous situation for carrying on trade with the rest of the country," the latter had nearly one hundred houses and a thriving tobacco warehouse by the mid-1790s. Inspectors examined approximately two thousand hogsheads of tobacco a year before shipping it to Richmond in long, narrow boats with three-man crews. The craft could return from the east laden with goods in just ten days.<sup>27</sup>

Economic developments in the Carolina backcountry

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup> Chapman, "A Journey through the United States (1795-1796)," 34-37; Weld, 210.

paralleled the situation in Virginia in a number of important respects. The soil offered large numbers of people the opportunity to become independent by improving their land and contributing to the development of the region's economic infrastructure. Like farmers and planters of backcountry Virginia, frontier producers in North and South Carolina relied on local merchants and the development of long-distance transportation routes to carry their goods to market. The absence of a deep and productive port along the North Carolina coast forced many of that state's backcountry farmers to carry their crops to market in Petersburg, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina where they might be exchanged for flour, cheese, hides, potatoes and European goods.<sup>28</sup>

While the North Carolina backcountry lacked a major trading town along the lines of a Winchester or Staunton, it did have a number of important local communities, like Salisbury and Guilford Court House, which served similar functions on a smaller scale. In Burke County, F. A. Michaux found a warehouse, "supported by a commercial house at Charleston." People from twenty miles around came to purchase "jewelry goods" from England, often by

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<sup>28</sup> Liancourt, 1: 635-638; Morse, 414.

exchanging hams, butter, tallow, skins and ginseng.<sup>29</sup>

Lincolnton, the county seat of Lincoln County, North Carolina, had forty houses "surrounded by the woods like all the small towns of the interior." Two or three large shops sent "the produce of their country to Charleston" and offered goods from cities as far away as Philadelphia. According to Michaux, the economic situation of Lincolnton was similar to other principal county towns in Western and Southern states. These towns did not have fairs or markets, but inhabitants sold their goods to shopkeepers or carried them in wagons to the seaports.<sup>30</sup>

Ninety-Six, South Carolina and Augusta, Georgia certainly met the description provided by Michaux. In the years after the Revolutionary War, the former "bid fair" to be "a place of Trade and Consequence." A high and healthy location, plenty of springs, land of excellent quality and close proximity to the Cherokee Road enhanced the village's economic prospects.<sup>31</sup> The latter also

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<sup>29</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. Travels West of the Alleghenies Made in 1793-1796 by Andre Michaux; in 1802 by F. A. Michaux, and in 1803 by Thaddeus Mason Harris, vol. 3, Early Western Travels, 1748-1846 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clarke, 1904), 290.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-294.

<sup>31</sup> William Henry Drayton, "Remarks in a Tour through the Backcountry of the State of South Carolina," 1784, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 4-5. Typescript.

benefited from good level lands, and during the 1780s a significant number of lots had been sold "in the prospect and hope they entertain of increasing the trade of the place." Augusta's seven hundred residents hoped to take advantage of the town's situation at the "head of navigation," which allowed it to command "the trade and commerce of vast fruitful regions" above the town.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the expense and difficulty of carrying goods to market, particularly to ports like Charleston, backcountry folk used whatever means and methods at their disposal to establish and maintain connections with economic centers. Backcountry farmers "were willing to undertake laborious methods of transport and to accept small returns" in an effort to get their goods to market. They relied on rivers, large wagons and rolling hogsheads to move their produce.<sup>33</sup> For much of the eighteenth century, heavy wagons with very narrow wheels, drawn by teams of four to six horses, carried two or three tons of produce to market. The weight of the wagons often damaged

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<sup>32</sup> William Bartram, Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws, in Travels and Other Writings, comp. Thomas Slaughter (New York: Library of America, 1996), 262.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis Cecil Gray, A History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, 2 vols. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958), 1: 123.



the rudimentary roads, which only added to the problems of transport and market.<sup>34</sup>

Because of the difficulty of transporting goods by road, backcountry towns developed along the region's most navigable waterways in hopes that produce could be floated down the river to port cities. The backcountry gentry in charge of the county courts initiated important activities like road building and river improvement which contributed to economic development and the emergence of commercial and export agriculture.<sup>35</sup>

On his tour of the southern states in 1791, George Washington passed through a number of backcountry towns and often reflected on the economic possibilities of the communities. The fact that Augusta was well laid out with "wide and spacious streets" impressed the president, but not as much as its situation at the "head of present navigation." Augusta, with a "fine Country back of it for support, might become a large town through the export of tobacco."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John Drayton, A View of South Carolina as Respects her Natural and Civil Concerns (Charleston: W. P. Young, 1802; reprint, Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1802), 141, 158.

<sup>35</sup> Jack M. Sosin, The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763-1783 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 171.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds. The Diaries of George Washington, 6 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 6:142.

Columbia's location at the meeting of the Broad and Saluda Rivers also offered its producers the opportunity to ship grain to the coast. As he travelled through North Carolina's backcountry towns, Washington took a few moments to reflect on the three southernmost states and the possibilities the states' rivers offered to residents of the backcountry. "The Inland navigation of the Rivers of these three States, may be improved . . . to a very extensive degree - to a great & and useful purpose and at a very moderate expense compared with the vast utility of the measure."<sup>37</sup>

In the early 1790s, backcountry communities continued to search for easier connections to coastal trading towns. William Loughton Smith, a Federalist representative of the Charleston district in the first Congress, passed through Richmond on a trip from Philadelphia to Charleston in April of 1791. He noted that "a company has associated for purposes of navigation." The venture hoped to cut a canal to bring the river to Richmond. Using ninety slaves, four overseers and a head manager, the canal reached "within two miles of Town, and when finished will open a valuable commerce with the entire country."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 6: 147, 158.

<sup>38</sup> Journal of William Loughton Smith, 1790-1791, 66.

Concerned about access to economic structures, residents of South Carolina's backcountry petitioned the legislature for permission to build a tobacco warehouse opposite Augusta. These two hundred "Sundry Inhabitants of Ninety Six District" had studied the region and believed the chosen location "would be greatly advantageous to the back settlements of this state." The warehouse and subsequent settlement would provide a "repository for their produce" until it could be carried to market.<sup>39</sup>

Residents and travellers passing through the region found much to recommend in the backcountry for persons seeking their economic independence. Richard Champion, a paymaster in the British army who settled in Camden, South Carolina after the war, believed that the farther people settled from the sea, "the more profitable will be the establishment, from the superiority of both soil and climate." The interior's temperate weather, fertile soil, rich valleys, fine woods, numerous springs and pleasant meadows endowed the region with a productivity that offered the "fairest prospect" to settlers who hoped to raise livestock or plant crops, seeming to be the very

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<sup>39</sup> Theodora Thompson and Rose S. Lumpkins, Journal of the House of Representatives, 1783-1784 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1977), 444.

"paradise of America."<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century, the backcountry was in essence a region of varied economic activity and opportunity. Its residents operated under the basic notions of independence and improvement that guided white adult males in the British world. Independence, or a measure of personal autonomy, required maintenance on an individual and society level. As farmers and planters these men chose to engage in a number of activities that would help them secure their independence and provide for their dependents. These activities might have included planting crops for local exchange, raising livestock to export or producing the vast majority of the clothing their families needed. Income was important only as it contributed to the independence of the head of household and the stability of the family. As members of the community, these same men helped build and maintain economic structures like roads, canals, bridges and warehouses which connected them to larger markets and other opportunities.

Just like the first European settlers in the seventeenth century, eighteenth-century backcountry

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Champion, "Advice to Settlers in America, 1787," in Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times, ed. Eugene Schwaab (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 61-62.

residents experimented with a variety of crops and livestock and numerous methods of marketing those products. As the Marquis de Chastellux approached the Southwest mountains in his travels through the Virginia backcountry, he fell in with a North Carolinian of Irish ancestry. The idea that the man lived more than three hundred miles from the coast in a settlement which was "wholly dependent on agriculture" fascinated Chastellux. Since the man's country was "remote from all trade," he produced goods sufficient for his family's consumption, lacking access to markets or trade venues. In his amazement at the remote location of the settlement, the Marquis seemed to have overlooked his companion's commitment to establishing some simple economic connections between his community and the rest of the state. Intent on improving his lot and the prospects of his neighborhood, the North Carolinian sold horses and livestock, "the only trade possible in his country."<sup>41</sup>

In a tour of the South Carolina backcountry shortly after the Revolutionary War, William Henry Drayton found a farmer named Savage who represented the "pleasing and exemplary" industry of the region. Savage, with the help of nine slaves, planted one hundred and thirty acres of corn, tobacco and grains and produced, with the help of

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<sup>41</sup> Chastellux, 2: 390.

his family, all their clothing.<sup>42</sup>

On subsequent trips to the interior, Drayton found other examples of men committed to their independence through agricultural production with the help of slave labor. A Captain McCree, who served under Francis Marion during the War for Independence, planted over one hundred acres of corn each year with the help of two plows, two horses and two slaves. If the weather cooperated, McCree could expect to harvest about 1200 bushels of corn. Another officer, Major Kimorough, lived in a "superior style" about 150 miles above Georgetown. He planted three hundred acres of corn using ten plows. After harvest, boats carried corn and lumber produced from local mills down the river to Georgetown.<sup>43</sup>

Although Liancourt found few rich planters and inconsiderable numbers of slaves in parts of the Virginia backcountry, he did discover large numbers of petty planters trying to grow grain, hemp and flax. Each had "one slave who shares in their toil and distress."<sup>44</sup> To

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<sup>42</sup> William Henry Drayton, "Remarks in a Tour through the Backcountry of the State of South Carolina," 1784, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 4-5. Typescript.

<sup>43</sup> William Henry Drayton, "Remarks in the Course of the Northern Circuit," 1789, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 9-10. Typescript.

<sup>44</sup> Liancourt, 2: 89.

Liancourt, the South Carolina backcountry shared many unfortunate similarities with Virginia. Though the region favored tobacco and cotton, in addition to various grains, the farmers and planters were "people of less property, or of no property at all." The backcountry offered only the most basic and simple manufacturing, in the form of a few corn-mills, which their owners had built on indifferent principles. The mills did not produce any product for export, although they did grind some corn for shipment to a few lowcountry families.<sup>45</sup>

Jedidiah Morse observed many of the same developments in the Carolina and Virginia backcountry as Liancourt, but placed them in a more positive light in his geography. The farmers of the region were men who "have names," a few negroes and a little money. These farmers plowed the ground for the production of corn, wheat, rye and potatoes, which they used to feed their families. Although conditions obliged them to manufacture their own cotton into clothing, these same men also planted tobacco, wheat and indigo for exportation.<sup>46</sup>

In Lincoln County, North Carolina, along a branch of the Catawba River, F. A. Michaux found one farmer who owned eight hundred acres and kept about 150 of those

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1: 576.

<sup>46</sup> Morse, 430.

cultivated in corn, wheat and oats. He also owned several machines, including a corn-mill, a saw-mill, a tan-mill, a distillery and a small forge. The male slaves worked in the farmer's various enterprises, while their female counterparts manufactured cotton and linen for the family's use.<sup>47</sup>

Because of their isolation from coastal ports, backcountry folk made a number of important adjustments to maintain their independence in a frontier region. These changes included balancing the productions of crops for consumption against those which could be sold in local or regional markets, producing goods on site, like clothing, which could not be procured without great difficulty and expense, and developing and lobbying for the creation of connections to the larger Atlantic and American worlds.

Although the numbers of slaves in the backcountry did not approach those of coastal areas, backcountry farmers showed a commitment to slavery early in the settlement process, one that eventually formed the backbone of their independence and allowed them to produce staple crops for export. Many frontier leaders duplicated features of lowcountry and Tidewater life in an effort to give their lives meaning and importance. Those persons with less wealth and fewer slaves could still aspire to independence

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<sup>47</sup> Thwaites, 3: 292.



through the improvement of their farms.<sup>48</sup>

A passage in the diary of Marquis de Chastellux pointed to the importance of slaveholding in backcountry Virginia as well as the rest of the southern states. After a visit to Monticello, Chastellux dined with a man named McDonald and his brother. Both men seemed honest and agreeable, and their companion was certain they could never be mistaken for European peasants. These backcountry Virginians were much like other Virginians: always free, possessing a share of the government, and commanding a few slaves.

Since these two men and other slaveholding Americans could claim to be both citizen and master, Chastellux equated them with the individuals who comprised "the people" in the ancient republics. The Marquis believed, as did many Americans in the South, that the dignity of man was a "comparative matter," with the dignity of a man increasing in proportion to the classes underneath him. This outlook allowed Chastellux to write: "It is the plebeian who makes the dignity of the noble, the slave that of the free man, and the Negro that of the white."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Paula Hathaway Anderson-Green, "The New River Frontier Settlement on the Virginia-North Carolina Border, 1760-1820," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 86 (October 1978): 430-431.

<sup>49</sup> Marquis de Chastellux, 2: 397-398.

Whether or not they ever achieved the status of prominent landholders with large numbers of slaves, most backcountry farmers realized that they had an opportunity for independence that many among them did not. They could buy one slave and a little land in hopes of buying more of each.<sup>50</sup>

In 1802, the governor of South Carolina, John Drayton, took the opportunity to record and publish his observations about the civil and natural concerns of the state. In some ways this work marked a change in perspective, for although Drayton noted both the natural beauty and economic prospects of the state, he no longer divided the state into lowcountry and backcountry. Instead, Drayton chose to employ lower country, middle country and upper country.<sup>51</sup>

These back parts, no longer possessed by their original inhabitants, had been incorporated into the rest of the state by decades of political, economic and social development. The tools of battle and the war whoop's

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<sup>50</sup> Though the commitment of many backcountry landowners to slavery is obvious, it is quite difficult to determine the economic impact of their acceptance of this institution. For a discussion of the relationships between blacks and whites and liberty and slavery, see Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: Norton, 1975); Winthrop D. Jordan, White over Black: Americans Attitudes towards the Negro, 1550-1812 (New York: Norton, 1968).

<sup>51</sup> John Drayton, A View of South Carolina, 11.

shrill tone no longer echoed from the mountains, replaced instead by the implements of husbandry and "the cheerful song of the husbandman, the best music of its glades."<sup>52</sup>

With the establishment of farms and plantations and towns all across the interior of South Carolina, Drayton believed heaven had finally bestowed the blessings that so many had predicted for the region over the last thirty years. Valuable woods dotted every hill, the soil proved equal to "every vegetable production," and beautiful rivers led to the sea. Backcountry folk had marked the land with thousands of new farms and plantations, in an effort "to turn these Blessings to our Best Advantage."<sup>53</sup>

Wine and silk might prove useful productions, but cotton had recently been introduced with "good prospects of success." Interior farmers still planted wheat and hemp and raised horses and livestock for sale in other parts of the state. With plain and decent manners, these folk obtained "a sufficient competence to make them independent, and a sufficient independence to make them

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Clunie, The American Traveller: Or Observations on the Present State, Culture and Commerce of the British Colonies in America, and the further Improvements of which they are Capable (London: Dilly and Alman, 1769), 96.

happy." They planted a hogshead or two of tobacco and perhaps a little cotton which formed a little income, "which pays the taxes and expense of the farm and makes a family happy and contented."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Drayton, A View of South Carolina, 112-114, 135, 221-222.

## CONCLUSION

### "The Character of the Several States": Region and Nation at the End of the Eighteenth Century

During his first term as president, the government of France presented Thomas Jefferson with a perplexing opportunity. Having abandoned the idea of a Caribbean-American empire, Napoleon offered the entire Louisiana territory to the United States. Though the constitutional issues raised by such a purchase troubled Jefferson, he was equally fascinated by the prospect such an enormity of land offered for the "blessings of freedom and equal laws." Like other Americans, Jefferson believed in the possibility of a northwest passage and hoped this new frontier would advance the promise of economic gain, political stability and social growth. Control of the Mississippi River would allow Americans an "independent outlet for the produce of the western States" and prevent conflict with the former powers in the region. The fair climate of this vast, fertile country seemed certain to produce an "ample provision" for successive generations of Americans.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time that Jefferson's purchase opened the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Third Annual Message, October 17, 1803, in Writings, comp. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 511-517.

territory west of the Mississippi for American settlement, the folk of the Carolina-Georgia backcountry were in the process of defining their membership in particular American communities.<sup>2</sup> The residents of the backcountry had spent the latter part of the eighteenth century securing land, creating institutions of authority and shaping their communities.

Europeans settling the interior during and after the 1760s committed themselves to the idea that they would own property and have an opportunity for economic and social independence. To make that possible, residents of the interior had to secure both physical and psychological boundaries. The authority of colonial and state government worked to define tangible boundaries on the land between Native Americans and the growing number of white inhabitants. Ministers, judges and other elites reminded their neighbors of the possibility of a fall into savagery and the need for vigilance in these early frontier communities.

Those persons who settled the interior during the latter part of the eighteenth century did so with the full

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<sup>2</sup> These constructs were borrowed from recent literature on the Western frontier. See, William Cronon, George Miles and Jay Gitlin, "Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History," In Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past, eds. William, Cronon, George Miles and Jay Gitlin (New York: Norton, 1992), 11-18.

intent of establishing and maintaining economic connections with the communities they left behind. To that end, they worked to build roads and canals and bridges so their crops could be carried to market. They also relied on slave labor, when they could, and held out the possibility that any hard working man might find independence through land and labor ownership in the interior.

As the eighteenth-century drew to a close, Jefferson believed the one characteristic that united all American citizens was their desire to be independent and free from the control of others. Collectively, many Americans had participated in a War of Independence because they believed the threat to their liberties might jeopardize their economic and social well-being. As individuals, American men of European descent sought independence in opportunity throughout the century, even in the back settlements and on the earliest frontiers.<sup>3</sup>

While Jefferson's comments were general observations about America and its regions, they do suggest a recognition of important developments taking place in the new nation over the course of the eighteenth century. These developments, marking boundaries, taking land,

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<sup>3</sup> Jefferson to Chastellux, September 2, 1785, in Writings, comp. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 827.

defining community membership and maintaining market connections, bound the backcountry to the coastal South between 1750 and 1800. Despite the importance of these developments, there has been relatively little work on the backcountry as a whole which has focused on the final steps of the process which saw the backcountry pass from a stage where it was an appendage to the coastal South into a stage where it was a vital part of a more comprehensive Southern region.

Backcountry folk, just like their coastal counterparts, committed themselves to the American value of independence. They organized and ordered their communities upon principles and ideas which allowed most white men the opportunity to acquire property and some social standing. They drew boundaries on the ground and in their minds that prevented the "native savages" from participating in the new societies. They chose their leaders and their institutions with an eye towards preserving an order that favored propertied men who could own other human beings. And they worked to build and maintain economic connections that would allow them to prosper in their new communities. The commitment to these values appeared time and time again in stories by and



about backcountry folk. In the case of this American frontier, the settlers were much like the people they left behind and much like other Americans. They valued their independence and worked to protect it.

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