

## *Ties to External Markets: Imports and Exports in the New River Valley, 1745-1789*

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When George Draper, along with his family and associates, established the Draper's Meadows settlement ca. 1742, they were but a small part of a larger migratory movement into the New River Valley. During the mid to late eighteenth century, the New River Valley experienced a surge in European population as a wide variety of push factors in the east encouraged westward migration. Along the frontier a settler found a degree of religious toleration, dreams of economic independence, and a possible source of adventure as individuals or families attempted to make a living in a wild and untamed environment. Yet, for many, in fact the majority, of the frontier settlers, the dream of economic independence was never realized as squatters became tenant farmers or died in the French and Indian War or the American Revolution.

This theme of economic independence, although widely upheld since Frederick Jackson Turner had put forth his "Frontier Thesis," appears flawed and not applicable to the New River Valley during the region's frontier experience. Rather than a region isolated from outside markets with each family eking out its own existence, the area was actually extremely interdependent as local, regional, and even world trade allowed the frontier family to find access to a variety of goods not available in the New River Valley. These economic ties were strengthened as goods found along the frontier traveled east and in turn allowed the region to find an economic niche in a global economy.

That the Virginia frontier was in no way an independent region, operating entirely within a traditional economic setting, but was rather a region defining itself socially and economically in a world context, is evidenced by the speed with which the frontier settlers moved to establish trade relations with eastern markets. The presence of eastern merchants and peddlers along the frontier also brings doubt as to the validity of Turner's thesis, since economic ties to the east wore down any independent spirit felt by Virginia frontier settlers. Finally, the strong pres-

ence of trade goods coming from in and around Draper's Meadows and the New River Valley forged an interdependent, not dependent, relationship with the east; the Virginia frontier fit itself into a trade model within a world context.

The speed with which frontier justices moved to establish ordinaries, roads, and ferries along the Virginia backcountry is another strong indication that the region was aspiring to establish firm economic ties with eastern markets. By developing the backcountry in such a manner, justices provided the necessary infrastructure to support healthy trade relations with the east. These relations in turn allowed the region to forge economic relationships with the east that eroded any independence the region may have had when the first white settlers moved into the area. What the justices in essence did was create a strong economic bond between the east and the frontier; trade made the two regions interdependent.

One of the most important venues for the Virginia frontier economy was the local ordinary, or tavern. Daniel Thorp asserts that the ordinary provided a means through which settlers could find access to goods from outside the region and find potential buyers for their own goods.<sup>1</sup> As county government moved west, the justices of the new counties realized the importance of creating an environment that adequately supported economic growth. They moved quickly to provide individuals with licenses granting permission to set up ordinaries. Between 1774, when Fincastle County broke away from Botetourt County, and 1790, county justices granted 25 ordinary licenses in Fincastle and Montgomery counties, which then encompassed the New River Valley. On the first two days of the first court session alone, Fincastle County justices granted five ordinary licenses. William Ingles was the first to receive such a license, which was granted on the first day the justices met, while Charles Diverex, Joseph Drake, Samuel Simpson, and James Hollos all received licenses over the next two days.<sup>2</sup> Within these institutions the frontier travelers and eastern merchants found both room and board as they journeyed either east with their goods or moved through the region peddling merchandise. Thus the ordinary played a vital role in economic life.

Another indication of the settlers' interest in retaining access to eastern markets is the speed with which they moved to establish a road network throughout the region. The justices of Fincastle County named five overseers of roads on the first day of the first court session alone, and named a total of 234 overseers between 1774 and 1790. Two roads in particular provided the frontier settlers access to eastern mar-

kets. The Great Wagon Road ran along the Virginia frontier to Philadelphia while the Three Notch'd Road headed east to Richmond.

Settlers also realized the need for ferries in order to ensure passage across the various rivers in the region. By June of 1779, Montgomery County justices had granted licenses to William English (Ingles), Samuel Pepper, John Craig, and David Herbert to establish at least four ferries in the region. These men were allowed to ferry people and wagons across the New River for 4 shillings per man and horse.<sup>3</sup> Such activity indicates the desire on the part of the settlers to improve the region, as both roads and ferries allowed for easier access to both local and eastern markets. These developments further solidified the connection between east and west, as travel between the regions became less of a burden and frontier families found a means through which they could obtain items needed for daily living. The ordinaries, roads, and ferries all allowed merchants and peddlers from the east and north to establish ties to the region that facilitated the interdependent nature of colonial Virginia's frontier economy.

In addition to local trade, eastern merchants provided a means through which frontier families could obtain a variety of goods. This connection to eastern markets served the gentry particularly well as they established a variety of relationships with eastern merchants. William Preston, for example, had numerous dealings with four eastern merchants that allowed him access to goods and business opportunities from which he would profit. These merchants were Edward Johnson; Felix Gilbert; William, Robert, and James Donald; and Alexander and Peterfield Trent. Gilbert ran a store in Staunton, Virginia; Johnson and the Trents operated from Manchester, Virginia. The Donalds — originally from Glasgow, Scotland — also ran their business out of Manchester, Virginia. Through these merchants, Preston ordered, and subsequently had delivered, numerous items, including leather shoes, Irish linen, sugar, nails, a Dutch oven, stockings, steel shoe buckles, china coffee cups, and wine glasses, to name just a few. Generally the various lists of merchandise consist of non-essential items; however, Preston did order various tools, linens, and other clothes.<sup>4</sup>

While these merchants provided Preston with access to goods, the relationship also allowed him an avenue through which to find profit. Edward Johnson and Preston became business partners, as well as in-laws, and trafficked indentured servants throughout the backcountry. A market for labor existed during the early years of settlement, although by the 1770s that market had declined and the sale of indentured servants all but stopped.<sup>5</sup>

Preston and other members of the gentry were not the only ones who dealt with eastern merchants. The numerous court cases instigated by these merchants against various settlers who were not paying their debts indicate the importance of frontier trade to both regions. Between 1773 and 1779, Donald and company appeared thirty times in the Fincastle and Montgomery County courts in order to collect debts owed them by county residents. Generally the defendant was ordered to pay the debt in full, plus costs and interest. On at least two occasions the defendant's estate was sold in order to cover the debt. Such was the case with Peter Rife, who did not appear at his hearing in May of 1774. Rife's estate was sold in order to cover a debt of two pounds, eight shillings, and three pence.<sup>6</sup> That his estate was sold in order to cover such a small amount indicates that his estate was not of great value and that he was therefore not in the upper class. Generally a twelve-foot by twelve-foot cabin was valued at five pounds.<sup>7</sup> Since his debt was a little over two pounds, Rife's estate more than likely was valued somewhere between three and five pounds, indicating that he led a meager existence. This and the 29 other cases involving debts owed to Donald and Company indicate that financially insecure individuals also were caught up in the trade with eastern merchants.

Another way in which goods found their way to the frontier was through peddlers. While no sales records were found indicating that peddlers were traveling through the region, and Montgomery County did not grant a peddlers' license until 1803, an abundance of circumstantial evidence suggests that peddlers were quite active throughout the backcountry of Virginia. This evidence comes in two forms. First, the House of Burgesses passed legislation restricting the movement of peddlers, indicating that their activities were noticeable enough to cause problems regarding certain forms of trade, problems that could be controlled through legislation. Second, advertisements appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* warning settlers along the backcountry to be on the lookout for escaped servants who posed as peddlers.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1738 and 1762 the House of Burgesses passed a series of laws pertaining to peddlers, in order to restrict the movements of vagabonds posing as peddlers. The first such legislation, in November of 1738, noted the "divers" number of "vagrant and idle people ... frequently found traveling about the country, under the name of pedlars." The law went further in outlining various problems incurred by these itinerant merchants, or alleged merchants, and required all peddlers to acquire a license from their county justices in order to peddle goods.

Because this law did not seem to solve the problem adequately, the House passed more legislation in May of 1742. This time the law was clearer as to the exact problem peddlers were causing, and in what region the problems were occurring. The law mentioned that many “vagrant people” were traveling from the northern to the southern colonies peddling horses. These peddlers then “either buy or steal, great numbers of nett cattle, which in their return back they drive through the frontier counties, and often take away with them the cattle of the inhabitants of the said counties, under pretense that they cannot separate them from their own droves...” This problem was addressed in the legislation, which required the licensing of peddlers and insisted that the peddler present each county justice a list and a description of his cattle.

The House continued to pass laws pertaining to peddlers through 1762, each subsequent law requiring more regulation over peddlers and making fines and punishment stiffer for those peddlers who did not cooperate and follow the law. By 1762 a peddler who sold goods without a license and refused to pay the set fine was subject to “thirty-nine lashes on his bare back, well laid on ...”<sup>9</sup> The passage of such laws indicates that peddlers were moving along the backcountry, and that while some operated outside the boundaries of the laws, contact was being established between itinerant eastern and northern merchants and Virginia frontier families. In turn, frontier families were able to purchase those goods not otherwise readily available along the frontier.

Peddling in the backcountry was not always a safe avenue to find profit; several articles in the *Virginia Gazette* and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* gave notice of peddlers’ deaths in the backcountry. Such was the case of Leonard Croucher, a peddler who, the *Virginia Gazette* reported, was murdered along the backcountry in October of 1777. In August of 1768 the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported that an “old German pedlar was murdered and robbed of his goods...” in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. At that time Lancaster was part of Pennsylvania’s backcountry and was a starting point from which one could enter the Virginia backcountry. Other advertisements in those newspapers warned frontier families to be on the lookout for escaped convict servants and indentured servants posing as peddlers, or peddlers who had stolen goods from merchants and were moving through the backcountry. Such a guise provided an escapee or thief with a ready excuse for his or her itinerant nature. This was the case with John Harthe, a German who was supposed to sell goods for a Charles Bergee of Philadelphia. Harthe allegedly stole the goods he was supposed to sell in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and fled towards the Carolinas, passing through the Virginia

backcountry and more than likely selling the stolen goods and keeping the money for himself. Some of the advertisements in these newspapers mention possible goods the peddler, or servant passing as a peddler, was selling. In June of 1758 the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported the escape of two convict servants, John Jackson and his wife Mary. The paper reported that John was "much given to Swearing and Lying" and passed as a peddler with "Pins, Needles and Ribbons to sell..." Such advertisements, along with laws passed by the House of Burgesses, establish the definite probability that peddlers were traveling through the Virginia backcountry.<sup>10</sup>

One final method for acquiring merchandise appeared later as small towns began to develop along the frontier, and individuals established stores in order to sell goods to local families. Montgomery County granted its first merchant license on March 6, 1787. By 1790, six merchants held licenses in the county. The first town to establish itself in the region was Fincastle, which was founded in 1772. By 1784, fifty-nine buildings were included in a listing of homeowners, including 26 "log-dwelling houses," 21 "cabins to dwell in," one "double cabin," and 11 "frame dwelling houses." In 1777 a sawmill was established in Fincastle, and between 1787 and 1789, twenty-two individuals obtained licenses to retail goods.<sup>11</sup> Thus, toward the end of the New River Valley's frontier period, backcountry families could turn to local merchants, in addition to neighbors, eastern merchants, and peddlers, to receive goods and merchandise.

The frontier family desired to emulate eastern society and to create a more comfortable existence along the frontier. County government quickly established the necessary transportation routes to open the backcountry for trade with the east, allowing families access to eastern markets. County administrators established ordinaries that allowed travelers a place to stay and provided possible trade connections between east and west. Alongside the local trade grew an important import trade relationship with the east, as eastern merchants, peddlers, and later stores penetrated the frontier, allowing backcountry families a means through which to acquire a lifestyle similar to that which existed in the east. Yet goods did not flow in one direction. As goods and merchandise moved westward, an export economy also took hold along the backcountry. The exportation of goods from the region allowed the New River Valley to participate in both regional and world-wide trade, thus creating a truly interdependent relationship between these regions.

Upon reaching the frontier, a pioneer family immediately needed to build a dwelling in order to provide shelter and to clear land for the

production of enough food for the family's survival. With a lag time between arrival in their new location and first harvest, the pioneer family had to rely on the abundance of game the region offered, or possibly the generosity of neighboring families. Generally, during the early years of settlement, the typical family cleared 10 to 12 acres of land. Early exports from the region include furs and skins along with livestock. However, by the 1760s Virginia's backcountry had found a cash crop in hemp and flax, which could be sold to eastern and world markets. The American Revolution strengthened these ties, as hemp and flax increased in demand, and the need grew for lead from frontier mines for the production of ammunition.<sup>12</sup>

The abundance of game along the frontier provided access to a marketable product dating back to the seventeenth century. Trappers and explorers had penetrated the valleys of Virginia in search of game as early as 1654 with Wood's expedition across the Blue Ridge Mountains to seek out trading opportunities with western Indian tribes.<sup>13</sup> Although no substantial numbers of Indians inhabited the region, the valleys of Virginia served as a meeting ground between Native Americans and Europeans as trade connections were established along Indian road networks and European goods were exchanged for furs and skins. The Cherokee, Occaneechi, and Catawba tribes, in particular, played a vital role in the Virginia fur trade. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, when European occupation of the western valleys began, the Cherokee were the only remaining major aborigine trade connection, as the Occaneechi began to decline after Bacon's Rebellion and the Catawbas were devastated by war and disease.<sup>14</sup>

The fur and skin trade with Native Americans and white hunting expeditions became an important part of Virginia's export economy, ranking third and fourth respectively in net value. Hunters and early settlers of the New River Valley took advantage of the ready supply of furs and skins to establish market connections with the east. In 1749 Adam Harman, one of the earliest settlers along the New River in present-day Giles County, reported that Indians had stolen 96 deerskins and 3 elk skins. Such a large number of skins in the possession of one family show a definite surplus, indicating a probable plan on the part of Harman to establish ties with either local, regional, or world markets. Others along the frontier shared Harman's desire to establish external trade relations. In Augusta County between 1744 and 1749, ten individuals accounted for the collection of 1,286 deerskins, 93 fox furs, 67 raccoon skins, 14 otter pelts, 3 elk hides, 1 wildcat skin, and 202 pounds of beaver pelts. Such a collection amounted to between 120 and 150 pounds Virginia

currency, with the deerskins alone accounting for 100 pounds.<sup>15</sup> An assessment of Abraham Dundeberry's (?) estate in 1761 showed that he possessed 12 skins worth 43 pounds Virginia currency at his death. Ten of these skins were described as "Merchantable skins" and were valued at 38 pounds with 2 "Winter Skins not merchantable according to Wm. Davies" valued at 5 pounds.<sup>16</sup>

Skins and furs acquired along the frontier not for personal use were eventually transported via wagons or pack horses to Philadelphia or towns in eastern Virginia, such as Winchester, Fredericksburg, or Richmond. Merchants from these localities were also known to travel along the backcountry and to purchase furs and skins, thus negating the cost of transportation for the hunter.<sup>17</sup> Once the furs and skins made it to Philadelphia or eastern Virginia, they were either sold locally or shipped to British or other Atlantic ports. Between October 25, 1763 and October 25, 1766, 185 hogsheads and one box of skins were exported from the upper district of the James River alone. According to the surviving copies of the *Virginia Gazette*, during the years 1766 through 1770, 219 ships cleared the upper district of the James destined for Philadelphia, New York, Boston, or a variety of British ports. Of these 219 ships, 43 (20 percent) listed skins in their cargo. In addition to the colonial ports, ships clearing the James ended up in Liverpool, Glasgow, London, Greenock, Whitehaven, and Bristol.<sup>18</sup>

Although it is almost impossible to determine exactly how many skins were exported in these listings,<sup>19</sup> the majority came from the backcountry, since game tended to move west as European settlement took shape and available game became depleted as a result of both Native American and European hunting.<sup>20</sup> With the westward movement of game, Indian traders or European backcountry settlers made possible the majority of exports of skins or furs, resulting in a strong trading relationship between east and west. However, the number of frontier settlers practicing this trade was not substantial, as this trade was more supplemental than primary to a family's income. Generally, the frontier family focused their efforts on a more permanent agricultural base in order to bring about commercial ties with distant markets.<sup>21</sup> In particular, livestock, hemp, or flax provided the pioneer family with a commercial product that solidified eastern and world market commercial connections.

Livestock played an important role in the New River Valley settlers' lives, providing both a source for food and a marketable product traded both locally and regionally. While the horse played an integral role in the frontier family's life, being used both for transportation and as an instrument for labor, settlers along the frontier possessed other types of



livestock as well. Cattle, sheep, and pigs were all found along the frontier, with cattle ranking next to horses as the most numerous livestock. Out of 1,339 tithables on the 1782 Montgomery County tax list, 1,066 (79.6 percent) listed owning at least one head of cattle, with a total of 10,123 heads of cattle accounted for. The inventories for Botetourt, Fincastle, and Montgomery counties during the years 1770 to 1790 show a similar degree of cattle ownership, with 135 estates out of 172 (78.4 percent) listing at least one head of cattle.

The frontier family found that livestock provided an important source of food in the form of beef, butter, cheese, and milk; a source for clothing in the wool from sheep; and even on occasion could be used as a beast of burden. In addition to local consumption, a ready market was available for beef in eastern urban areas and the West Indies. Philadelphia was the ultimate destination of cattle drives originating in the Virginia backcountry as settlers drove their cattle northeastward through the Shenandoah Valley, across the Potomac, and into Pennsylvania. Cattle drives originating along the Virginia frontier began in the Shenandoah Valley as early as 1742. By the 1750s cattle from the upper valley, on the fringes of the New River Valley, were making their way to the Pennsylvania market.<sup>22</sup> However, the French and Indian War temporarily interrupted the cattle trade, as frontier settlers used their cattle to supply beef for local militia units and for the Cherokees. The war did not have a lasting effect on the trade, however, and by 1758 cattle were arriving in Philadelphia again, resulting in a steady growth until the mid-1760s, when a sharp decline occurred in the beef market. After the 1760s, livestock played a less-than-important role in the frontier family's commercial ventures and activities.<sup>23</sup>

While the fur and skin trade along with the exportation of livestock and related products allowed the frontier family access to regional and world markets, such economic activity only supplemented a family's income and was not the center of economic activity along the Virginia frontier. The economic base along the frontier, rather, revolved around agriculture and the export of cash crops.<sup>24</sup> The main cash crops grown in the New River Valley were hemp, flax, corn, and wheat; these crops are found listed in inventories more often than oats, cotton, or rye. These latter crops were typically used for home consumption, local trade, or, in the case of oats and corn, as fodder for livestock; thus they became indirectly connected to larger outside markets.<sup>25</sup>

Wheat, the principal bread grain for the frontier family, could provide settlers with a base for whiskey and, when combined with rye, produced maslin, a type of flour. While wheat found a market outside the

frontier, it did not attain the degree of importance that it reached in the Shenandoah Valley, where the soil was more suited for wheat production.<sup>26</sup> While wheat took hold in the Shenandoah Valley as the main cash crop, it took a back seat in the New River Valley to the more profitable hemp and flax. The latter crops were not new to the Virginia economy when backcountry exports peaked in the 1760s. As early as 1673 the House of Burgesses passed legislation to encourage the production of hemp and flax in Virginia in response to low returns from tobacco. The 1673 law stated that the county courts were to distribute hemp and flax seed to every tithable. Tithables were then expected to produce one pound of flax and one pound of hemp, or two pounds of either, annually under penalty of being fined by the county courts fifty pounds of tobacco per pound lacking.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the colonial period, the House of Burgesses passed various acts that either reinstated existing legislation encouraging hemp and flax production or enlarged the colony's responsibilities in collecting the plants. In 1682, the House passed legislation that made it necessary for an individual to take hemp and/or flax to a justice of the peace in order to have an official weight registered, for which the individual received a certificate authenticating the amount of hemp or flax grown. The bounty still remained at two pounds of tobacco per pound of hemp or flax. By 1745, however, four shillings were paid by the county courts per hundredweight of hemp produced, and a two-shilling bounty was paid per hundredweight exported to England. In 1766 the House responded to legislation passed in Great Britain that encouraged the exportation of hemp and flax to any of its home ports. This act in turn increased the amount of hemp production in Virginia by granting permission to the county courts to establish storehouses for hemp. This brought about more intervention from the colony in the production of hemp and flax, and allowed for a central location for the collection of the plants, thus allowing the hemp and flax farmers easier access to markets.<sup>28</sup>

Although hemp and flax were produced in Virginia before the valleys of western Virginia were settled, the hemp industry did not rise until that time. Hemp can generally grow in any type of soil; however, in Virginia the crop tended to do best in the Piedmont and along the Virginia backcountry where the heavy soil with limestone formations provided the healthiest environment. An anonymous author in 1775 made note of this fact, stating that Virginia and Maryland had better soil for raising hemp than did the Northern colonies and that the soil yielded the product "in large quantities." Western Virginia soil also allowed for a longer

plant to mature, producing a less-woody bark and allowing an easier separation of the fibers.<sup>29</sup>

Hemp and flax provided the frontier family with both a source for cloth, linen, and oil, and a product that was of value to the British Navy. In its “neat” form, hemp provided a source for the coarse cloth used to produce clothing, sacks, tents, or rope. The British Navy had an interest in the plant not only for all of the above uses, but also because manufacturers could use it to produce sails.<sup>30</sup> The same anonymous writer who in 1775 noted the quality of Virginia’s and Maryland’s soil for hemp production also recognized the importance of the plant to the British Empire:

This (hemp) is the commodity of all others which we must want from our colonies, for it is so necessary for our navy that we ought certainly to have it more within our command than it is at present . . . to raise it therefore in America is an object of the greatest importance.<sup>31</sup>

Flax also found a place in regional and world markets, as it produces a softer linen that was more suitable for the manufacture of clothing. Flaxseed provided for linseed oil, which could be used along the frontier or by buyers in the east or in Britain for illumination and occasionally as a food source for the poor.<sup>32</sup>

Although the valleys of Virginia had begun to support European occupation as early as the 1730s, and the Germans began growing hemp and flax soon after their arrival, production did not peak until the 1760s. The first record of anyone’s growing hemp west of the Blue Ridge Mountains was in 1762, when Thomas Lewis was given a certificate for 3,343 pounds of winter-rotted hemp. The latter stages of the French and Indian War gave a boost to hemp and flax production, since tents, rope, and sacks were needed to support the war effort. Following the war, hemp and flax output along the frontier increased, and was again boosted by the outbreak of war in 1775 as the colonies revolted against British rule.<sup>33</sup>

The American Revolution significantly increased the importance of hemp and flax production along the frontier, as imports all but stopped and the military demand rose. Both factors contributed to the sharp rise in hemp prices between 1776 and 1782. Between 1774 and 1775, the price for gross hemp was anywhere from 27 to 35 shillings per hundredweight. By the end of 1775, the price had risen to 180 shillings per hundredweight, and by 1779 a planter could earn as much as 220 shillings per hundredweight. Prices stabilized at this point and then began a sharp decline, bottoming out around 30 to 35 shillings per hundred-

weight in June of 1783. The war allowed the state to emerge as the greatest hemp market; the resulting subsidized transportation costs eased some of the financial burden on the planter.<sup>34</sup>

While the war stimulated hemp and flax production, it also had an effect on another industrial endeavor along the frontier. Located near Fort Chiswell, a series of lead-producing mines allowed a form of industry to develop that supplied large quantities of lead to both state militia and the Continental Army during the American Revolution. At the end of the war, the Virginia state government levied a claim against the United States for \$81,500.00 for lead produced at the lead mines and used by the Continental Army. In 1776 the *Virginia Gazette* reported that as of August 16, "15,000 wt. of pure lead have been got from our mines in the back country." The writer added that after this lead had been cast into bullets, he hoped they would "be unerringly directed against our enemies."<sup>35</sup>

The need for lead in order to make bullets created a unique relationship between the state and backcountry proprietors as the government placed controls on lead mines to ensure continuous and adequate production. Early on in the Revolution, the House of Burgesses, recognizing the importance of Virginia's backcountry lead mines, passed an act in July of 1775 ordering the Committee of Public Safety for Fincastle County, which at that time encompassed the Fort Chiswell lead mines, to contract with the proprietors of the mines for lead that Virginia's troops might need in the upcoming struggle with Great Britain. If the proprietors refused to produce the lead, the Fincastle committee was given the authority to "employ proper persons, and furnish necessary materials, for the making of lead, at the charge of this colony." In October of 1776 the House found it necessary to retain total control of the lead mines on the grounds that the mines had "been for some time past worked on the publick account" and that the mines would function better under direct governmental control. At this time the House passed "An act to empower the Governour and Council to employ persons for working the Lead Mines to greater advantage," which in essence granted full control over the mines to the Governor and the Virginia Council. In 1776 the lead mines belonged to William Byrd and to the estates of John Robinson and John Chiswell, who were reimbursed through the payment of an annual rent by the Virginia government for the use of the mines.<sup>36</sup>

What the October act effectively did was place the lead mines under the control of Virginia's state government agents, which in turn strengthened the ties between eastern and western Virginia as the Virginia government became directly involved in the manufacture of a backcountry

product. The act allowed the Governor, or in case of "his death, sickness or necessary absence" the president of the Council, to administer the production of lead by raising an adequate labor force to work the mines. Furthermore, the governor, or council president, had the power to direct the sale of lead to either the central government, other "sister states," or any individual willing to make a purchase. Through this act the state government was involved in every process of the mining of lead, from acquiring workers, to transportation from the backcountry to eastern markets, to final distribution.<sup>37</sup>

By 1782, as the Revolution was coming to a close, the state relinquished its control over the lead mines, returning production back to the private sphere. At this point Jacob Rubsaman and Charles Lynch had gained ownership of the mines. The Virginia government contracted the proprietors to furnish 50,000 pounds of lead for an amount of tobacco that they would later determine.<sup>38</sup> This marked the final transition from state-run to private control over the lead mines. The state during the Revolution had encouraged east-west ties as lead from the backcountry found its way to eastern markets.

Furs, skins, cattle, hemp, flax, and — to a lesser degree — lead all played a role in allowing the backcountry of Virginia to remain a part of larger economic trends and markets. The export of such products placed the frontier in a position of importance in the economic activities involving eastern Virginia and world markets since commodities that were scarce in other regions were in adequate supply within the backcountry. Western Virginia soil proved to be above average for the planter to grow hemp and flax. The large supply of game kept a steady movement of skins and fur heading east for market. Rich bluegrass kept cattle fed as the frontier settlers prepared their cattle drives towards Philadelphia or eastern Virginia. All the while rich deposits of lead awaited extraction within certain mountain chains.

Although several avenues of economic gain awaited the frontier settler, it must be remembered that none of the items produced along the frontier led any planter to the riches tobacco did in the East. The gentry leaders along the frontier never attained the same economic status as the Tidewater elite did, with their large Georgian plantations housing hundreds of slaves. At best, what the average settler could possibly find was a middling sort of position on the economic ladder. Yet it was this existence that prohibited the region from becoming entirely independent, and allowed an economic interdependency to take root. As settlers attempted to emulate the world they had left behind, they desired goods they could find only through local trade or eastern and world markets.

The frontier family also reinforced this economic interdependency as goods unique, or more abundant, along the frontier headed east. These economic ties created a relationship between east and west that was mutually beneficial and placed Draper's Meadows, and indeed the entire New River Valley, in a world setting and not simply an isolated, independent setting, as Turner's "Frontier Thesis" would have us believe.

## Endnotes

1. Daniel B. Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly* 48 (1991): 387-408.
2. General Index to Montgomery County Court order Books, p. 34; Montgomery County Order Books, 1:1-13.
3. Montgomery County Index of Order Books; Montgomery County order Books, 1:3 and 3:42; Howard Newlon Jr., "The Evolution of Transportation in Virginia," *Augusta Historical Bulletin* 16 (1980): 8.
4. Maggie Holland, "Notes and Queries," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 34 (1926): 149; Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), p. 155; *Virginia Gazette*, November 10, 1774, n. 1214, col. 4, col. 2; Preston Papers, reel 3, nos. 284, 293; reel 4, nos. 656, 758, 859.
5. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, p. 125.
6. General Index to County Order Books, Montgomery County; Montgomery County Order Books, 1:1-114; 2:1-145; 3:5.
7. Montgomery County Deed Book, book A., pp. 147-48.
8. William Waller Hening, comp., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia...* (13 vols.; Richmond, 1819-23), 5:54-57, 176-181, 355-57; 6: 124-131; 7:283-88, 585-87; *Virginia Gazette*, August 4, 1768, n. 117, p. 2, col 4; October 31, 1777, n. 144, p. 1, col. 2; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 4, 1735; June 15, 1758; June 9, 1763; March 30, 1774; "Finances of the College in 1755-1756," *William and Mary Quarterly*, v. 11, ser. 1 (1903); General Index to Montgomery County Order Books.
9. Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 5:54-57, 176-181, 355-57; 6: 124-131; 7: 283-88, 585-87.
10. *Virginia Gazette*, August 4, 1768, n. 117, p. 2, col. 4; October 31, 1777, n. 144, p. 1, col. 2; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 4, 1735; June 15, 1758; June 9, 1763; March 30, 1774.
11. Frances J. Niederer, *The Town of Fincastle Virginia* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), pp. 2-6; General Index to Montgomery Court House Order Books; Montgomery County Order Book, v. 1, p. 283.
12. Turk McCleskey, "Across the First Divide: Frontiers of Settlement and Culture in Augusta County, Virginia 1745-1770" (Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary in Virginia, 1990), pp. 154-55; Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 136, 167-172.
13. Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), pp. 168-69; David E. Johnston, *A History of Middle New River Valley Settlements* (Huntington: Standard PTG Publ. Co., 1906), p. 8.

14. Shirley-Virginia Parrish, "The Fur and Skin Trade of Colonial Virginia," Master's thesis, Old Dominion University, 1972, pp. 10-11.
15. Johnston, *A History*, p. 10; Mary B. Kegley and F. B. Kegley, *Early Adventurers on the Western Waters* (Orange: Green Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 81; Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, p. 134; Parrish, "Fur and Skin Trade," foreword.
16. Preston Family Papers, no. 366.
17. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, p. 81; Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 152-160.
18. *Virginia Gazette*: February 12, 1767, no. 821, p. 2, col. 3 (hereafter designated as 2/3); August 15, 1766, n. 795, 3/1; March 19, 1767, n. 826, 3/2; March 26, 1767, n. 827, 2/3; June 4, 1767, n. 837, 4/1; June 11, 1767, n. 838, 3/2; July 9, 1767, n. 842, 3/2; August 6, 1767, n. 846, 3/2; August 27, 1767, n. 849, 2/3; September 24, 1767, n. 853, 1/3; October 29, 1767, n. 858, 2/1; November 19, 1767, n. 861, 2/2; November 26, 1767, n. 862, 2/3; December 3, 1767, n. 863, 3/1; December 10, 1767, n. 864, 3/1; January 14, 1768, n. 869, 3/1; January 28, 1768, 871, 3/1; February 18, 1768, n. 874, 2/3; March 3, 1768, n. 876, 3/1; March 17, 1768, n. 878, 3/1; May 26, 1768, n. 888, 2/2; July 7, 1768, n. 894, 2/3; September 1, 1768, n. 902, 2/3; October 27, 1768, n. 910, 4/2; December 22, 1768, n. 918, 3/1; April 20, 1769, n. 935, 2/2; July 27, 1769, n. 949, 3/2; August 10, 1769, n. 951, 3/2; September 7, 1769, n. 955, 3/1; November 9, 1769, n. 964, 2/2; December 28, 1769, n. 971, 3/1; January 18, 1770, n. 974, 3/2; June 7, 1770, n. 994, 3/1; September 13, 1770, n. 1008, 2/3.
19. Shirley Virginia Parrish points out that hogsheads varied in size, thus varying the number of skins contained in such a unit. Parrish found one report from 1682 that mentioned a hogshead containing more than 300 deerskins plus a large number of fur pelts. The majority of ships listed in the *Virginia Gazette* noted as carrying skins used the term "hogshead" to describe the quantity of their cargo. Rarely were exact numbers used, as in the case of the *Mary Anne*, which listed a cargo of: "60 mink, 20 fox, and 30 rackoon skins."
20. Throughout the Eighteenth Century as more Europeans settled along the Virginia backcountry, hunters found it necessary to move further west in order to find game. Most noticeable was that by 1793 the buffalo was extinct in Kentucky, yet one hunt had yielded 21 buffalo skins to the hunters and, in 1771, an entire herd had been killed by French hunters from Illinois. Parrish, "Fur and Skin Trade," pp. 22-23, 123-24; *Virginia Gazette*, June 11, 1767, n. 838, 3/2; Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, pp. 81-83.
21. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, p. 133.
22. Kegley and Kegley, *Early Adventurers*, p. 156; Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 147-49.
23. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 148-49.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
25. Although corn is mentioned in the New River Valley inventories as often as are flax, hemp, and wheat, it is considered a minor crop in this study because it was not a heavily exported crop, but rather was used directly in the home as a food source for livestock and at times for family members. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, p. 137; Botetourt County Will Book A, pp. 1-277; Montgomery County Will Book B, pp. 1-152.

26. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 138, 172-78; Jeremy Black, "Agricultural Improvement in 1763: The Role of Foreign Examples," *Agricultural History* 64 (1990): 90-92.
27. Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2: 306-07.
28. *Ibid.*, 3:503-06; 4: 301-02; 5: 357-59; 6: 144-46; 8: 53-255.
29. One traveler along the Virginia backcountry noted that he encountered a field of hemp which had grown to fourteen feet in height. Generally hemp grew anywhere between eight to fourteen feet high. G. Melvin Herndon, "Hemp in Colonial Virginia," *Agricultural History*, 37 (1963): 86-87; Alfred J. Morrison, ed., "Schedule of Virginia and Maryland Exports, 1775," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 18 (1910): 106-07; excerpt from *American Husbandry, Containing an Account of the Soil, Climate, Production, and Agriculture of the British Colonies. By an American*.
30. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, pp. 138, 164; Kenneth W. Keller, "From the Rhineland to the Virginia Frontier: Flax Production as a Commercial Enterprise." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (1990): 492.
31. Morrison, "Schedule of Virginia and Maryland Exports," pp. 106-07.
32. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, p. 138; Keller, "From the Rhineland," p. 492.
33. Katherine G. Bushman, "An Eighteenth Century Tax Aid," *Augusta Historical Bulletin* 8 (1972): 48-52; Robert D. Mitchell, "Agricultural Change and the American Revolution: A Virginia Case Study," *Agricultural History* 47 (1973): 120; Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, p. 138.
34. Mitchell, "Agricultural Change," pp. 125-26.
35. William P. Palmer, M.D. and Sherwin McRae, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts, From July 2, 1790 to August 10, 1792* (Richmond: James E. Goode, Printer, 1885), vol. 5, p. 393; *Virginia Gazette*, n. 81, 3/1.
36. Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 9: 71-73; 287-88.
37. Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 9: 287-88.
38. Palmer and McRae, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 3:390.