# Book Reviews

## Edited by Tom Costa

*Surveyors and Statesmen, Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* by Sarah S. Hughes. 1979. The Virginia Surveyors Foundation, Ltd., and the Virginia Association of Surveyors, Inc., Richmond.

For anyone interested in understanding William Preston the man, as opposed to the Revolutionary War patriot and leader in the westward expansion through Virginia, the pages of this book offer a rewarding experience. This history of surveying in colonial Virginia was produced in 1979 as a contribution to the bicentennial celebration of 1976, with and for the Virginia Surveyors Foundation and the Virginia Association of Surveyors, and with the assistance of the College of William and Mary and others.

Since then the book has been largely unknown or ignored by historians and by others interested in the history of Southwest Virginia, although a careful study of its contents reveals a portrait of the eighteenth century County Surveyor that can be taken as a virtual image of William Preston, the master of Smithfield.

*Surveyors and Statesmen* encompasses the entire colonial era in Virginia from 1621 to the end of the Revolution. It shows the role of the surveyor as embodied in the official office of County Surveyor. It develops the social, military, economic and political picture of that office and of the men who held the office. Three distinct periods are characterized by three distinct approaches to the task of laying out the lands in colonial Virginia.

The period 1621–1709 was the period of the Surveyor General — an era which saw a shift of surveying authority from the Virginia Company to the royal authority to the county courts. During this time, a most important precedent was established, that of defining the 50-acre tract as the standard unit for granting land in the colony. The 50-acre unit as a headright (and later extended to a treasuryright also) was a much more

generous disbursement of land than the methods used in the more northern colonies.

In the second era, an organization of rather shadowy origin and life was formed — the Society of Surveyors. During this period, the competition to control surveying among the Royal Governors, the Council, the Burgesses, and the surveyors themselves, led to action in 1693 by trustees of the College of William and Mary, who obtained control of the appointments of Surveyor General by virtue of Charter rights granted that year. The Surveyor General, Miles Cary, who served from 1699 to 1709, established the system that subsequently became entrenched. The system allowed the County Surveyor to become the holder of multiple offices in the political, military, economic, and social life of the county and the colony. In 1699, the Society generated a set of rules or procedures for surveyors that was incorporated into law in 1706 under the designation "The Duty of Surveyors."

This set the stage for the third colonial era of surveying in Virginia, from 1709 until the Revolution. During this period, the County Surveyor in the Piedmont, the Shenandoah Valley, and the western counties came into power under the system first perfected by eastern Virginia social and economic elites, now turned to benefit the more recent immigrants settling in the west. As the colony expanded, the new County Surveyors were often Scots-Irish immigrants and others not from the English elite of eastern Virginia — men such as James Patton and his successor, William Preston. Between 1720 and 1754, the entire Piedmont was surveyed, and twenty-five new counties were formed. Land grants were large, often greater than 100,000 acres, made to companies such as the Ohio Company and the Greenbriar Company as well as to individuals, such as Patton's great grant.

In the transition from the hegemony of the Eastern Virginia elite to the control of surveying by new westerners, power also shifted from the colonial authorities to the county, specifically to the county courts, in which resided the real political and legal power in the new counties. It is not strange that the County Surveyor was often a member of the court. Because Williamsburg was remote to most of the residents and settlers in the West, the County Surveyor became the link to the colony itself. Thus the holder of the office of County Surveyor, a public official, also became the leader in the political, economic, military and social life in the county.

Consider this quote from *Surveyors and Statesmen*:

> Virginia's eighteenth-century surveyors were recognized among their class-conscious contemporaries as gentlemen members of the county gentry whose right to govern polity and economy, as well as to set cultural standards, was seldom questioned. ... [They] formed a corps of secondary leaders whose influence was most formidable in their counties ... were numbered among the colony's practical-minded intellectual elite ... displayed by plural offices, by wealth, by daily lifestyle and by family connections their membership in the ranks of the exclusive county gentry.

The surveyor's place in this society was grounded in his power to control both the ownership of land and the access to land.

*Surveyors and Statesmen* is not limited to a history of the development of the surveyor and his place in society. There are chapters on the technical aspects of surveying in colonial Virginia, on the economics and costs of surveying, on the hazards of the job, and on the politics of the profession. To this reviewer, however, this book develops an unstated premise in the picture of the eighteenth-century surveyor. That is, that William Preston became the important person that he was because he was the epitome of the colonial County Surveyor of the eighteenth century in Virginia. That was how this Scots-Irish immigrant took on, almost overnight, the image of the typical elite Eastern Virginian, who normally took generations to evolve.

— **Reviewed by Wirt H. Wills**
Past Director, APVA at Smithfield

*After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800–1900.* Edited by Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000).

This collection of essays, which first came together at a conference in Lexington in 1995, represents a pathbreaking work in the study of the Virginia backcountry and, by extension, of all frontier regions. While much recent scholarship has focused on the backcountry during the formative period of the eighteenth century, scholars generally have not ventured into the region to examine what occurred over the course of the nineteenth century, after the frontier had moved on. Edited by Kenneth Koons and Warren Hofstra, *After the Backcountry* fills an historiographical void, providing a reminder that life continued and change remained a constant for residents of the region, even as the appearance of order replaced the transience of frontier existence.

The collective theme of the twenty-one essays contained in this volume revolves around the development of a stable agricultural economy, its links to the commercial world in which it existed, and the society that evolved around it — in short, the "consequences of social and economic processes put into motion by the pioneer generation" (xi). Drawing on the perspectives and expertise of scholars in a wide range of disciplines, and employing the "microhistorical" social history approach of studying discrete communities and ordinary people, this well-crafted collection makes a significant contribution to the field of rural history.

In their introductory essay, "The World Wheat Made," Koons and Hofstra effectively set forth some of the defining parameters of the collection, noting the central role that wheat production played in the Shenandoah Valley, as the basis of a mixed agriculture economy that was inherently tied to commercial markets outside the region. This agricultural base created a fairly equal distribution of wealth and gave rise to a foundation of "broadly prosperous middle class" farmers (xxii). The essay, however, also presents the ambiguities that complicate any study of the region. While the regional economy was based upon wheat production, for instance, slavery was widely practiced. And while some contemporaries and historians alike have characterized the valley as a "cultural and socioeconomic extension of Pennsylvania" (xvii), other indicators align the region firmly with the South.

Such enigmatic themes recur in the four major sections of the collection, the first of which is titled "Space: Economic Growth in Town and Country." In a separate essay, Koons reinforces the long-term importance of wheat in the valley, contradicting the notions that the Civil War permanently disabled the regional grain economy and that midwestern competition outstripped valley production during the late nineteenth century. Although the war represented a temporary setback, "it did not alter the basic pattern of economic activity by which valley farmers traditionally had earned their livelihoods" (9); they returned to their familiar commercial agricultural activity, which actually flourished well into the twentieth century. Looking at wheat production in the more challenging region of the Upper Potomac Basin, Kenneth Keller notes how initial potential for and interest in commercial wheat farming in the first half of the nineteenth century had faded by the outbreak of the war. Faced with limits on production caused by less hospitable topography and relative isolation, farmers on the Upper Potomac could not keep up with competition from other wheat-producing areas, as did their counterparts in the Shenandoah Valley.

Robert Mitchell places the commercial development of the region in a geographic context in "The Settlement Fabric of the Shenandoah Valley, 1790–1860." Basing his analysis on the concept of a "settlement continuum" pattern (34), by which areas pass from rural farms and hamlets to urban towns and cities, as well as on the relationships of "central-place theory" (35–36), Mitchell concludes that neither developed fully in the region, though the northern valley counties, with their greater population densities and more direct ties to eastern markets, enjoyed an advantage over the southern counties, which lagged behind and experienced population limitations. Warren Hofstra and Clarence Geier approach this question from an archaeological perspective, with an examination of development in the neighborhood of Winchester, at the Opequon community. The basis of their argument is that scholars must understand the physical layout of the landscape, which they characterize as "a complex product of socioeconomic arrangements" designed to meet the needs of production and consumption in a cultural context (48). In their view, links between rural settlement areas such as Opequon and larger service centers such as Winchester created webs of interdependence that formed the distinct "landscape of the mixed-farm, market-town world of the Shenandoah Valley" (59). Finally, in an essay whose fit

with the others in the section is somewhat tenuous, Joseph Rainer discusses the role of northern peddlers, "Commercial Scythians" who brought unique manufactured goods to the valley and represented the "vanguard of the Market Revolution" in the region (62), introducing valley residents to a new level of consumerism associated with the larger national economy, but who also became the "scapegoats for Virginians' unease with the rapidly evolving market economy of the early nineteenth century" (63).

Part II, "Patterns: Landscape and Material Culture," deals with the physical reflections of how people in the region viewed themselves in their changing world. Judith Ridner and Ann McCleary both address the importance of architecture, coming to similar conclusions that portray prosperous residents adapting more widespread patterns with local influences to form particular styles. While Ridner describes elites in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, who adopted eastern styles but modified them with backcountry characteristics such as the use of local stone rather than brick, McCleary analyzes the evolution of a distinctive regional style in the Shenandoah Valley, representing a mixture of cultural influences. While the details of design differed in the two areas, in both cases prosperous homeowners adopted styles "that seemed both progressive and connected to the community" (109).

Tonya Woods Horton takes the reader outside of the houses to discuss the "Hidden Gardens" of Lexington. Her main point is that "Kitchen gardens were the focus of the domestic landscape in an age before the front lawn became the predominant symbol of suburban living" (111). The author, however, does not convincingly reconcile important characteristics that she attributes to these kitchen gardens: were town residents dependent upon their own produce even though a "lively commerce was in effect ... between farm and town" (114); did Lexingtonians give as much atttention to aesthetic theories as does the author, or were they guided by the fact that "backyards were shared utilitarian plots lacking the space needed for ornamental naturalism" (123); and did the gardens reflect "an insistence upon maintaining a self-sufficient household economy buffered from an unreliable commercial flow of goods and services" (124), or did town residents enjoy "a ready availability of current fashions" and other consumer goods transported along "well-established trade routes" from eastern commercial centers (114)? Such inconsistencies hinder the effectiveness of this discussion of urban gardening.

The archaeological perspective again is employed to view the human landscape in an essay by Kurt Russ, John McDaniel, and Katherine Wood. Chronicling the rise and fall of iron manufacturing as an important rural industry, the authors address such topics as labor practices, technological progress, ethnic patterns, and environmental impact to conclude that even "rural" Virginia is "a product of three centuries of industrialism" that "impacted the ways in which Virginians perceived their landscape" (143). Audrey Horning interprets archaeological data in her study of communities within the Blue Ridge mountains. She argues that, contrary to the stereotypes of isolation and backwardness, "the material lives of hollow dwellers differed little from those of other Americans in terms of the types ... of manufactured goods that they purchased, consumed, and discarded" (147). Mountain residents had their distinct community identities, but they were part of an interdependent regional economy.

Part III of the collection, "Relations: Religion, Race, and Society," focuses primarily on the avenues of contact between whites and African Americans in valley society. Susanne Simmons and Nancy Sorrells describe the phenomenon of hiring out slave labor, commonly practiced in the mixed economy of the region. This essay at once dispels the myths that slavery was not widely accepted in the backcountry, that it was not well-adapted to a mixed agriculture economy, and that hiring out of slave labor was restricted to urban areas. Stephen Longenecker examines how three non-conformist religious groups reacted to the institution of slavery. While Methodists, Mennonites, and Dunkers initially all criticized the worldliness of the society that surrounded them and voiced objections to slavery, as the nineteenth century progressed and Methodism grew, it became less non-conformist. Mennonites and Dunkers continued openly to disapprove of the institution; Methodists drifted toward the mainstream on many issues, including slavery.

A related topic, less widely studied, is the subject of Ellen Eslinger's "Sable Spectres on Missions of Evil." Eslinger examines the increasingly uneasy environment which faced free blacks in the antebellum period in Rockbridge County. She effectively demonstrates that it is important to recognize the challenges which free blacks faced in a largely rural world that became progressively more hostile to their survival as a group over the course of the century. David Coffey continues this story, to a certain degree, in his study of race relations during the period of "Reconstruc-

tion and Redemption in Lexington, Virginia," where there was a conscious effort to recreate the pre-war social and racial structure of the community. Lexington residents welcomed a sense of prosperity and an influx of students — who played a very active role in community issues — into its two colleges. What they did not welcome was the newly increased free black population or the presence of the Freedmen's Bureau; they demonstrated their opposition through a variety of tactics, and by 1869 had succeeded in "redeeming" Lexington from the forces of Reconstruction.

The one essay in this section that does not fit with the common theme is Joan Jensen's work on rural women. Her point that women all too often are absent from southern rural history is well taken. Rather than an analysis of the experiences of women in the Virginia backcountry, this chapter is a call to action for scholars to alleviate the historiographical inequity.

Scott Philyaw starts Part IV, "Power: Politics and Political Culture," with an examination of how the conceptualization of Virginia changed over the course of the nineteenth century. While the eastern elite envisioned the western reaches of the state's colonial claims evolving into "closely allied sister republics" that would loyally "follow the lead of the Old Dominion in federal affairs" (235), residents of the western territories had other ideas and other agendas. Eastern Virginians refined an ever-narrowing vision of "true Virginia," and the Shenandoah Valley developed an "intermediate character" (244), tied to power structures of the state but not wholly in line with them.

In his essay "News in the Valley," David Rawson looks at power on the micro level. He uses periodical subscriptions, which brought news of the larger world into localities such as New Market, to surmise who had an interest in this information and thus how they could use it to their advantage. Rawson posits that local elites, by controlling the flow of information into the community, exerted their own influence in shaping both the regional identity and the spread of an emerging national identity. Lynn Nelson examines the role of one such member of the elite, William Massie, who attempted to lead his Piedmont neighbors in a progressive direction during the nineteenth century by emulating the economic success of the Shenandoah Valley. Whereas eastern planters resisted change and diversity from the plantation system, farmers in the valley incorporated slavery into a balanced, mixed economy. Massie and

others on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge saw this success, but they erred in their inability to modify their own power structures and in their refusal to deviate from the existing plantation structure.

Coming full circle in this section, Michael Gorman examines the political culture of the Shenandoah Valley as the crucial question of sectionalism loomed. In spite of a strong Unionist sentiment and a general resistance to secession in the northern valley, a political culture had developed in which local elites associated with the interests of their peers in the eastern half of the state, and thus the Shenandoah Valley threw its lot with Richmond rather than with the western counties that renounced the Confederacy.

The volume concludes with Hal Barron's "Reaping What Has Been Sown," a survey of the current state of rural history. He suggests that the growing scholarly interest in the subject is a reaction, at least in part, "to the accelerating disappearance of farming as a way of life in contemporary society, leading to a greater sense of urgency about recapturing and preserving the historical record" of America's rural past (287). A central theme in this work is the persistence of traditional agrarian values in the face of the emerging industrial market economy. It is a story of framers' reactions, adaptations, and compromises in a changing world, and of "the actual processes of negotiation with these larger forces of change" (290).

*After the Backcountry* represents a valuable addition to the literature on two levels. First, it fills a void by addressing a time and a set of questions that scholars previously have not approached. In a sense, doing so takes a step toward completing the story of the region, begun with the outpouring of fine scholarship on the frontier period produced during the last decade, but left incomplete in a chronological sense until now. This volume helps to fulfill the need for an inclusive regional history. Second, beyond the specifics of studying the defined region of the Great Valley during the nineteenth century, this work also provides a link, as well as valuable insights, into the larger question of what happens to peoples, economies, societies, and political systems of frontier regions once stability is realized. Thus, *After the Backcountry* makes a significant contribution to the field of rural history, demonstrating that scholars must recognize, appreciate, and account for the changing dynamics that affected rural society. The editors of this volume are to be commended for assembling such an expansive collection of scholarship

and for presenting it in a thoughtful format. It is no small feat to have crafted a work that brings together so many diverse studies and perspectives into a cohesive whole, but Koons and Hofstra have done so masterfully.

**Reviewed by Michael Puglisi**
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Virginia Intermont College