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The importation of English furniture into Virginia, 1750–1800

Packer, Nancy Elizabeth, M.A.
University of Delaware, 1989

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THE IMPORTATION OF ENGLISH FURNITURE
INTO VIRGINIA, 1750-1800

by

Nancy Elizabeth Packer

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University
of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American
Culture

December 1989

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INTO VIRGINIA, 1750-1800

by

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Chapter I
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The influence of English culture and design on British colonial America has long been acknowledged by scholars of American social history and material culture. From comprehensive overviews to narrowly focused investigations, the scholarly scrutiny of the transplantation of English culture to North American soil has been intense and wide-ranging.¹

This transplantation has been well-documented in the area of American decorative arts—particularly furniture—through the comparison of English and American forms, styles, and construction methods. Avenues such as

the presence in America of English design books and craftsmen have also been explored in some depth to account for the obvious familiarity of Americans with contemporary English goods in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Surprisingly, a third possible vehicle of transmission—English furniture imported into America—has received scant attention. It may be argued that English furniture imports comprised only a small portion of the furnishings of colonial American households by the second century of settlement. However, to dismiss American consumers' choice of English products—in spite of and undoubtedly with full knowledge of the inherent challenges of trans-Atlantic purchase and

transportation—is to ignore a potentially relevant insight into the fundamental motivation underlying the dependence of American furniture upon English models.³

Such an observation is particularly true of the role of importation in the Southern colonies, whose vigorous trans-Atlantic trade relationships have long been believed to have fostered an especially close cultural dependence upon the mother country. For many years, historians of the colonial South routinely dismissed Southern craftsmanship as negligible, due, they argued, to the largely agrarian nature of the staple-dominated economy and the resulting symbiotic trade relationship with Great Britain. As recently as the 1950s, such scholars of the colonial South as Carl Bridenbaugh and Louis B. Wright asserted that "beyond basic needs, almost no crafts developed" in the early South, as Southern planters "with money . . . and direct communication with

³Furniture is the chosen subject of this study, as its importation may be demonstrated to have arisen largely out of choice rather than of necessity, but related goods—often ordered concurrently with other furnishings and frequently supplied by the same craftsmen, such as bed hangings and wallpaper—will be treated as they bear upon this analysis.
London and Bristol preferred to import most of their household articles.  

Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, however, a recognition and appreciation of a distinct body of Southern cabinetmaking began to emerge, and, within a relatively short time, a body of literature began to develop on the model of the classic scholarly studies of New England and Mid-Atlantic cabinetwork of a half century before. With the discovery and rise to popularity of high quality Southern craftsmanship, the role of importation as a factor in early Southern culture and lifestyles began almost immediately to be depreciated, as it had before been overstated—in both cases, with little or no supporting evidence. Today, the study of Southern furniture and decorative arts has reached a high level of sophistication, and much


5One exceptional earlier study was Paul H. Burroughs, Southern Antiques (New York: Bonanza Books, 1931).

attention has been directed towards social, political, and economic analyses of Southern colonial culture. Yet the literature treating the role of imported goods, particularly furnishings, remains limited to a small number of articles, the majority of them several decades old, strictly limited in scope, and all highly selective as to the sources consulted.  

What, then, is the evidence for importation? It is, in fact, both extensive and varied, though not without limitations. In a study of imports to Virginia, substantial evidence of both a public and private nature, generated by governments, mercantile firms, and individuals on both sides of the Atlantic, survives to document in detail the eighteenth-century trade in agricultural products and goods between England and her

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plantation colonies. This paper will focus specifically on this trade relationship as it existed between England and her oldest North American colony, Virginia. In view of Virginia’s inextricable links with the economic and cultural bases of her geographical neighbors, Maryland and North Carolina, much of what is asserted herein may be equally applicable to the Southern colonies in general.

In the first century and a half of English settlement in the Chesapeake colonies, a variety of systems were being developed for the exchange of tobacco for credit and European manufactured goods. By the eve of the Revolution, the predominant system was that of direct purchase, by which the great majority of the colonial crop was sold in Virginia by the colony’s numerous small-scale producers to the resident representatives, or factors, of Scottish mercantile firms. In return, small and middling planters were extended credit on imported goods available at stores set up by factors at various points along Virginia’s rivers. While the Scottish stores sold a wide variety of goods,

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their merchandise was intended to meet the everyday needs of Virginia's smaller, less wealthy planters. The Scots factors could thus expect requests for a regular and limited range of goods, varying only with seasonal and economic changes.

In addition to the Scots factors, the eighteenth century witnessed the rise in Virginia of a native mercantile community. This group, equipped with substantial credit derived from its involvement in the West Indies and European grain and flour trades, emerged in the 1760s as an extension to the traditional consignment system described below. Like the colony's more substantial planters, the merchants involved in the "cargo trade" placed seasonal orders for goods directly with one or more firms of London consignment merchants. After a twelve-month extension of credit on the goods purchased, the Virginia merchant was expected to remit payment for his cargo in consignments of tobacco or bills of exchange to the London house. A late payment would incur an interest charge at an annual rate of 5 percent. 9

9The cargo trade is most fully discussed in Jacob M. Price, Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 127-30.
Records of the import activities of the various elements of Virginia's mercantile community include correspondence with British mercantile firms and orders for imported goods, as well as contemporary newspaper advertisements for imported merchandise offered for retail and wholesale. More descriptive and revealing are the annual stock inventories and account books maintained by Virginia merchants, particularly those involved in the cargo trade, which record in detail the types, quantities, and prices of the various imported household wares available to Virginia's planters through their local stores. Taken as a whole, these sources provide little evidence to support the wholesaling or retailing of imported furnishings by merchants in Virginia before the Revolution, but suggest that, with Virginia's growing urbanization and the emergence of new trans-Atlantic trade patterns in the post-Revolutionary years, Virginia's mercantile community was to take on increased importance and activity in the import trade in English furnishings.

In contrast, records of the oldest system of trans-Atlantic tobacco trade—the consignment system—reveal substantial evidence of the mechanics and extent of furniture importation into Virginia before 1775. Within
this system, the Virginia planter consigned his annual tobacco crop to one or more English merchants, who undertook to sell the tobacco for home consumption or, more typically, for reexport to Continental and other markets. The merchant was then engaged by the planter to purchase and send to the colony a variety of household goods, of English and foreign manufacture, for which the merchant was ideally compensated by the sale of the tobacco and a small commission fee, usually 2½ percent. As this system rarely operated so ideally, due to the erratic demand for tobacco, fluctuating freight costs, and inadequate communication, a credit relationship quickly tended to develop in favor of the English merchant—an aspect of the trade which had a profound impact not only upon the personal relationship of the client and his supplier, but also upon the trade in

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imported goods, particularly in the politically tenuous post-Revolutionary era.

In spite of the underlying tensions of this economic relationship, a routine process was established by which goods were ordered from England and, eventually, received in Virginia. This process is well-recorded in contemporary documents, particularly in the letters and letterbooks of Virginia planters, which contain the planters' copies of the original orders or invoices for goods—by far the most common and, usually, the only available means of relaying a desire for goods from the colony to England. Such invoices varied widely in length and in specificity, even within one planter's letterbook. Orders might range from a short notation for a few items within a letter to an English merchant to a detailed and comprehensive list of several pages length appended to a short note. Unfortunately, the planter often did not transcribe the order itself into his letterbook, but made tantalizing reference in letters to "my usual Invoice . . . here inclosed."\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12}Richard Corbin to John Backhouse, 12 July 1768, Richard Corbin Papers, Colonial Williamsburg. The papers of John Norton & Sons include some of the original invoices sent to the firm. See note 13 below.
Where such invoices have survived, as in the rich collections of papers of George Washington and Robert Beverley, they provide valuable information about the importation of English goods, revealing details as to the types, forms, and quantities of furnishings purchased by Virginians. The accompanying letters also afford crucial insight into the importation process and illuminate the concerns which plagued Virginia planters as a result of the incipient uncertainties of the existing system of trans-Atlantic exchange.

British merchants' responses to their clients' requests, including correspondence, business records, shop notes, and bills of lading, are also invaluable in documenting this trade. Notable within this body of evidence are the records of the firm of John Norton & Sons, of London and Virginia, which survive in both published and unpublished form, and the London letter-books of William Lee, which record the activities of a

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13 Accounts and correspondence of John Norton & Sons survive in several American archives, including Colonial Williamsburg; the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.; the Valentine Museum, Richmond, Va.; and the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va. A broad selection of the firm's correspondence from the second half of the eighteenth century has been published in Mason, John Norton and Sons.
Virginia planter working as a consignment merchant in London shortly before the Revolution.\textsuperscript{14}

Correspondence and receipts from British consignment merchants may also be found within the collections of Virginia planters' papers. Receipts or "shop notes," also termed "invoices," which recorded a merchant's purchase of particular items from a specific shop, often with the printed bill-head of that shop, were sent to the client at the same time as were the objects. These documents allowed the client to ensure that he had been equitably charged and had received all that was debited to his account. Providing concrete evidence of the purchase of a given item, including the date, place, and price of its purchase, such documents are as valuable as they are rare. Bills of lading, evidence that the purchased goods had been loaded onto a ship bound for

\textsuperscript{14}The London Letterbooks, 1769-1771, William Lee Letterbooks, Stratford Hall Plantation (microfilm, Alderman Library, University of Virginia). Mention should also be made of the ledgers, journals, cash books, and other papers of the Harford family—a Bristol mercantile firm active in the Virginia tobacco trade—which were examined, but which yielded little information regarding the trade in furnishings to Virginia. The records examined were largely those of the merchant Edward Harford, Jr. (1720-1806), for the period 1750-1800, but despite frequent furnishing purchases and accounts with various cabinetmakers and upholsterers, there was no evidence to indicate that these purchases were for export rather than personal use. Harford Family Papers, Bristol Record Office, Bristol, England.
Virginia, also accompanied the goods and thus provided an additional layer of security for both merchant and client against the inherent hazards of long-distance transactions.

In contrast to the predominance of personal and business records which document the order and receipt of English furniture by Virginians, British materials recording the exportation of furniture to the Chesapeake are largely bureaucratic in nature. Among the most significant of these materials is a series of official state documents commissioned by the British government in the late seventeenth century. They vividly reflect the intensification of the mercantilist mentality largely responsible for the initial cultivation and much of the subsequent development of Britain’s colonies and colonial policies. This series—the Inspectors'-General Ledgers of Imports and Exports, covering the period 1697 to 1780—summarized on an annual basis Britain’s balance of trade with her colonies and mercantile partners by recording the quantities and values of agricultural and manufactured products imported to and exported from Great Britain via both London and England’s outports. The

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15 The Inspectors'-General Ledgers are catalogued as Customs 3/1-80 in the Public Record Office, London, and will hereinafter be cited as Cust. 3. In 1772, the
Ledgers were explicitly intended to "enquire, examine into, and take an account of the estate and condition of the general trade of England, . . . and to enquire into and examine what trades are or may prove hurtful, or are or may be made beneficial to our Kingdom of England." The Ledgers have been the single most consulted source in previous explorations of English furniture exportation to colonial America, and, for that reason, some time will be spent in assessing their true value to such a study.

The limitations of the Ledgers lie in part in the overtly stated mission of their authors to not only determine but to actually manipulate Britain's balance of trade through the statistics thus gathered. These limitations were recognized at an early date, as Joshua Gee recorded in 1729: "It is a matter of great difficulty to know the true balance of trade; some expect the Customs-House accounts will set us to rights, but there

Ledgers were joined and, later, supplanted by a second series of Customs House accounts, entitled the States of Navigation, Commerce and Revenue (PRO, Cust. 17/1-30), which were intended to simplify the accounting process, but which were themselves discontinued in 1808.

may be a great many falacies in those accounts," and by the mid-eighteenth century, it appears to have been generally accepted that the inaccuracies of these accounts greatly diminished their value and caused them to be dismissed as "an insufficient ground of reasoning."\textsuperscript{17}

In part, the shortcomings of the Ledgers as a bona fide record of the changing state of English trade lay in the fact that the official values for goods subject to duty, which were established in 1697 and predicated upon prices of 1694,\textsuperscript{18} bore increasingly little resemblance to actual market values over the course of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{19} As many goods of English manufacture, however, including furnishing and upholstery goods which were unrated or rated "ad valorem" (according to their

\textsuperscript{17}Joshua Gee, \textit{The Trade and Navigation of Great Britain Considered} (1729), and David Hume, \textit{On the Balance of Trade} (1752), quoted in Clark, \textit{A Guide to English Commercial Statistics}, 26-27.

\textsuperscript{18}Werner Schlote, \textit{British Overseas Trade from 1700 to the 1930s} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), 3.

\textsuperscript{19}John J. McCusker in "The Current Value of English Exports, 1697-1800," \textit{William and Mary Quarterly}, 3d ser., 28 (1971): 614, notes that, while the official valuations were modified to some extent to reflect changing market values during the first few years of keeping the Ledgers, "after about 1702, when the values were finally fixed, the Customs 3 ledgers, whatever their accuracy in the amount of goods imported and exported, are not an accurate record of England’s balance of trade."
real value as declared by the exporting merchant), were exempted from export duties after 1721, the declared values were unlikely to have been deliberately understated as those for goods subject to duty may have been. 20

Even so, contemporary commentary reveals a concern that British merchants were inclined to overstate the quantities of the duty-free manufactured goods they were exporting to the plantations, in order to create the illusion of a glutted market, deceive their mercantile

20 Carll incorrectly states both that the value of exported furnishings recorded in the Ledgers were determined by the fixed official values and that English furnishings were subject to export duty from Britain. Carll, "Assessment of English Furniture Imports," 7-9. Furthermore, as furniture and upholstery were exempt from export duties, there could have been no incentive to smuggling, which, as Carll suggests, might have furthered skewed the figures recorded in the Ledgers. See Clark, A Guide to English Commercial Statistics, 34-35, and Schlote, British Overseas Trade, 7, who records that just 50 species of exported goods were subject to export duties in 1787, down from 550 in 1660. As "Mr. Rolt," a contemporary analyst of the customs system, noted in 1761, the repeal of export duties on most English manufactured goods was aimed at "the encouragement of these manufactures." Rolt also recorded, however, that the exemption was valid only "provided that due entries of the goods so exempted from duty, be first made in the custom-house in the port of exportation, in the same manner and form, expressing the quantities and qualities as was before practiced; and that they be shipped by the proper office; on failure whereof, the goods are to be liable to the same duty as before." Mr. Rolt, A New Dictionary of Trade and Commerce (London, [1761]), n.p.
competitors, and "carry on some mystery of the trade."\textsuperscript{21} Such overstatement is unlikely to have played a major role in the figures recorded for exported furnishings, however, as such goods played an almost negligible role in the speculative trade in manufactured goods to the colonies, which derived its profits primarily from the massive wholesaling of textile goods, particularly English woolens, to American merchants.\textsuperscript{22}

Of greater consequence in determining the value of these records is the possibility that some quantity of the furnishings exported may have been completely excluded from the Inspectors'-General Ledgers as the personal belongings of colonial governors, their retinues, and emigrants to the colonies.\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore,

\textsuperscript{21}Quoted in Clark, \textit{A Guide to English Commercial Statistics}, 15. Note also that this conflicts with Carll's suggestion that the export figures for furnishings may actually have been underdeclared by a significant amount. Carll, "An Assessment of English Furniture Imports," 9.

\textsuperscript{22}Where imported furnishings were being retailed by American merchants, as in Charleston, South Carolina, and post-Revolutionary Virginia, British merchants may have been motivated to overstate the value of their furniture cargoes to mislead their competitors. In general, however, there is little evidence to indicate that the exportation of English furniture to the American colonies ever constituted a substantial profit-making enterprise in trans-Atlantic commerce.

\textsuperscript{23}E. T. Joy, "Some Aspects of the London Furniture Industry in the 18th Century" (Master's thesis,
the main series of Ledgers (Customs 3) does not distinguish between Virginia and Maryland in recording the intended port of entry for exported goods, thus obscuring the quantity and value of furnishings exported to Virginia alone, particularly in view of Maryland's two prominent ports and retailing centers of Baltimore and Annapolis.24

In sum, then, the Ledgers of Imports and Exports present a substantial, yet unquestionably flawed source

University of London, [1955]), 96. Clark's comment that "goods imported on behalf of owners in the plantations" were among the "invisible" exports not recorded in the Ledgers cautions an even greater care in their use for evaluating the furniture export trade to the colonies. Clark, A Guide to English Commercial Statistics, 22.

24A much shorter series of Ledgers (PRO, Cust. 16) treats the North American ports in detail for the period 1768-73, illuminating the primary Ledgers by distinguishing the individual Virginia and Maryland ports, and breaks down furnishings into such distinct categories as cabinetware, chairs, clocks, looking glasses, and upholstery. This document records no importation of any of these goods, excepting upholstery, into Virginia's five ports for 1769-70, and records neither upholstery, cabinetware, nor other furnishings entering Virginia ports for 1770-71 and 1771-72. As this data is directly contradicted by entries in the Bristol Port Books and by dated invoices and receipts for English furnishings imported by Virginia planters in these years, the integrity of Customs 16 must be seriously questioned. As the years covered by the document coincide with those of the Non-Importation Associations passed by Virginia's House of Burgesses and signed by many of Virginia's most prominent planters, it is possible that some of the discrepancies in data may be accounted for by the rerouting of banned imports, including cabinetware and upholstery, via non-Virginia ports.
of information for the exportation of goods, including furniture and finished upholstery materials, to the American colonies. In the absence of some corrective data or formula, both the values and quantities of goods exported must continue to be considered suspect, particularly in view of contemporary assessments of the Inspectors' General accounts as "a hopeless muddle," and the Ledgers should be consulted to provide, at most, only a record of broad trends in exportation over time and an indication of the relative importance of London and the outports in the furnishings export trade.

Some clarification and amplification of the Ledgers is provided by another series of British customs records registering the goods entering and leaving England's ports from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Originating in 1565, the Port Books were intended to safeguard against customs fraud, but, like the Ledgers of Imports and Exports, supposed inaccuracies in declarations and recording procedures led to their discontinuation in the late eighteenth century.26


26 Clark, English Commercial Statistics, 52-54. The Port Books are now catalogued in the Public Record Office,
Nevertheless, the Port Books provide an insight into the actual workings of the export trade in goods to the colonies, as they record the process of the consignment of goods by a British merchant or mercantile firm to ships bound for colonial ports. The documents include the merchant’s name, date of consignment, and ship's name and destination, as well as the type, quantity, and value of goods consigned. Because the books list individual consignments made by a merchant over the several week period of a ship’s loading, they provide greater detail as to the nature of the goods consigned than do the more summary Ledgers.27

In addition to the potential inaccuracies in recording noted by contemporaries and questionable accuracy as to the declared ports of destination,28 however, the utility of the Port Books is severely limited by their poor survival rate. The greatest loss is that of the London books, which survive only for the period 1588 to 1697, after which they were destroyed.

London, as Exchequer 190 and will hereinafter be cited as E. 190.

27For example, in December of 1763, George Ware of Bristol consigned "20 bound Books, 2 ps figured Wilton, 1 Old Press and Furniture value 4s." to the York, bound for Virginia. PRO, E. 190/1225/4 [1762-63].

under schedule. As London was unquestionably the center of the trans-Atlantic consignment trade in tobacco, the vast majority of the export trade in furnishings would almost certainly have been conducted through the busy London port system. Without the London Port Books for the eighteenth century, then, a true picture of the extent of the furnishings export trade to the colonies cannot be reconstructed.

The Port Books of Bristol do survive in relatively complete form for the period 1565 to 1788, however. Bristol's importance in the Virginia tobacco trade in the eighteenth century is reflected in the number of ships bound for Virginia ports that are registered in the Port Books. While the books have little value for a


30 In addition to being the center of the consignment trade in Chesapeake tobacco, the port of London also accounted for a full third of England's enormous annual income from Customs of £1.3 million, thus providing additional testimony to the city's crucial role in England's international trade. Rolt, A New Dictionary of Trade and Commerce, n.p. The preeminence of London in the furniture export trade is further confirmed by surviving orders and receipts for goods, which were directed almost exclusively to London mercantile agents by their Virginia planter clients.

31 Kenneth Morgan notes that Bristol was one of two leading English outports in the trans-Atlantic trade of
statistical analysis of the furniture trade, in view of the missing London data, the Bristol Port Books that have been examined for this study, covering the period 1760 to 1776, have been useful for their illumination of the process of consignment, the types and values of goods exported, and the identification of specific Bristol mercantile firms involved in the export trade in goods to Virginia.

Finally, these documentary sources are complemented by the physical evidence of surviving English furniture with a Virginia provenance. Though necessarily dependent upon the imperfect document of family tradition, such visual sources provide valuable support, clarification, and sometimes supplementation of the written record. While the body of such furniture is quite small, when combined with surviving descriptions and accounts, it serves to amplify and refine our knowledge of the range of forms, styles, and materials available to the colonial consumer of English furniture.

Further, an analysis of such documentary evidence as invoices and shop bills has identified a small, but distinct group of London cabinetmakers supplying the

export trade in furniture to Virginia. By studying the body of their documented works, as well as their trade practices and professional associations, a more complete image of the export trade in furnishings to America is obtained, including the normal range of available services and products, the stylistic and constructional level of export goods in relationship to contemporary products for the home market, and the attitudes of urban English craftsmen towards their provincial clients. Above all, the isolation of a body of export craftsmen provides crucial illumination of the respective responsibilities of client, agent, and craftsman in the export trades, as well as of the pivotal role of consumer choice in the success or failure of this cultural and commercial exchange.

This paper thus stands primarily as a case study of the role of furniture importation in Virginia in the second half of the eighteenth century, with an intent to gauge the extent and scope of this trade, its operation and cultural import, and, finally, the impact of the American Revolution upon each of these factors. The study has suggested that, while the importation of furniture was by no means the universal choice of nor the only available option for contemporary Virginians,
English goods unquestionably played a significant role in colonial Virginia society. The demands of their importation produced a network of complex personal and commercial relationships as well as a well-established physical system of ordering, purchase, and transportation. Furthermore, these networks seem to have been substantially affected by the Revolution, both in the quantity of objects imported and in the apparent shift from an individual to a mercantile consumer. Taken as a whole, these assessments suggest that the importation of English furniture reflected not merely economic relationships, but, more profoundly, the ever-changing identification of colonial Virginians with the mother country.
Chapter II
THE MECHANICS OF THE TRADE

At the root of eighteenth-century Virginians' predilection for English furnishings lies the economic and cultural exchange system which emerged between Virginia and Britain in the first century of English settlement after 1607. The assumption readily suggests itself that the heavily tobacco-dominated economy and largely rural landscape of seventeenth-century Virginia were likely to have fostered an extraordinarily close cultural dependence, particularly for the supply of manufactured goods, on the mother country. In fact, during the first year for which official figures of the volume of trade were recorded in the Inspectors'-General Ledgers of Imports and Exports—1697-1698—the value for upholstery alone sent from England to the ports of Virginia and Maryland far exceeds any such values recorded for any given year in the eighteenth century.32

32 The figures recorded for upholstery shipments to Virginia and Maryland in 1697-98 were £7305.9.10 from London and £242.3.9 from the outports. These figures excluded valuations for such related goods as beds and
The same source documents the continued flow of imported furnishings into Virginia throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, though apparently with less vigor after the first decade of that century. E. T. Joy's examination of the ledgers of this period have led him to suggest that, in fact, "after 1703 the value of these recorded exports dropped sharply; and . . . only rarely . . . did the annual value of furniture exports approach those of the first years."33 Joy's projection of a steady decline between 1700 and 1750, based on values of London shipments alone to all of the North American colonies, however, is not corroborated by a study treating solely Virginia and Maryland imports. Instead, an examination of upholstery shipments to these two colonies from both London and the outports in the second quarter of the century reveals wide fluctuations in annual values, which deny broad generalizations concerning the course of trade [Table 1].34

bedding, chairs, and curtains and "vallens," as well as various forms of cabinetware. PRO, Cust.3/1, transcribed in E. T. Joy, "English furniture exports to America 1697-1830," 93. See also note 41 concerning the changing definition of "upholstery" in British customs records throughout the century.

33Joy, "English furniture exports," 94.

34The difficulty of pinpointing the variety of factors which determined these fluctuations is highlighted by a comparison of customs figures of furniture imports to Virginia and Maryland in the eighteenth century with
TABLE 1

Upholstery exported from England to Virginia and Maryland, 1725-1750, in £s.d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>From London</th>
<th>From Outports</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1725</td>
<td>30.16.06</td>
<td>124.06.00</td>
<td>155.02.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td>50.08.03</td>
<td>13.10.00</td>
<td>63.18.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1735</td>
<td>555.00.00</td>
<td>186.06.00</td>
<td>741.06.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td>25.00.00</td>
<td>3.04.00</td>
<td>28.04.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1745</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>44.00.00</td>
<td>1061.10.00</td>
<td>1105.10.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PRO, Cust. 3/25-50.

In addition to the limitations of reliability of the Ledgers of Imports and Exports set forth in Chapter I, it should be recognized that dramatic fluctuations in annual trade values also reflect such major external forces as drastic tobacco crop failures and intermittent Anglo-European warfare. Other gauges of the extent of English furniture importation into Virginia in the first half of the eighteenth century, particularly the eyewitness reports of observers of the trade, thereby gain heightened significance. Moll Flanders' comment on her remove to Virginia in Daniel Defoe's novel of 1722 provides significant insight into Virginia's cultural relationship with Britain in the early eighteenth century, as perceived by contemporaries: "I was far from being ignorant of what was needful on that occasion; particularly all sorts of tools . . . for building; and all kinds of house-furniture, which, if to be bought in the country [Virginia], must necessarily cost double the price."\textsuperscript{35} In his own voice, Defoe was to echo Moll's observation in A Plan of the English Commerce of 1728:

all those People must fetch from Great Britain only . . . all their House Furniture, Kitchen Furniture, Glass Ware, [and] Upholstery Ware.36

Nor were such statements limited to observers outside the Virginia colony. As Robert Beverley, the ancestor and namesake of the pre-Revolutionary planter of Blandfield Plantation, wrote in 1705 in his History of Virginia, "they [Virginians] have all their Wooden Ware from England; their Cabinets, Chairs, Tables, Stools, Chests, Boxes, Cartwheels, and all other things, even so much as their Bowls, and Birchen Brooms, to the Eternal Reproach of their Laziness."37 The continued strength of this dependence was implied a few decades later in the report of Virginia's Lieutenant Governor Gooch to Britain's Commissioners for Trade and Plantations. Gooch warned the Commissioners that New England's progress in the "Mechanic Arts" and the exportation of "Scrutores, Chairs, and other Wooden Manufactures . . . from thence to the other Plantations . . . may be of ill Consequence to the Trade and Manufactures of this Kingdom

36Quoted in Joy, "English furniture exports," 95.

Yet in 1738, at least one observer was confident of England's preeminence in the Virginia market for manufactured goods:

The Tobacco Plantations take from England their Cloathing, Houshold Goods, Iron Manufactures of all Sorts, Saddles, Bridles, Brass and Copper Wares; and notwithstanding their dwelling among the Woods, they take their very Turners Wares, and almost every Thing else that may be called the Manufacture of England: So that it is a very great Number of People that are employed to provide a sufficient Supply of Goods for them.  

Beginning in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, a general trend is more clearly discernible in the statistics of the furniture trade between England and Virginia. In fact, during a period in which Virginia's own cabinetmaking trade was becoming firmly established, the values of imported upholstery goods rose markedly and sustained their height until the eve of the Revolution. With the exception of a sharp decline in the early 1750s, upholstery values recorded in the Customs Ledgers exceeded £1000 annually, often by several times

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40 For amplification of this theme, see Gusler, Furniture of Williamsburg and Eastern Virginia.
that amount, for virtually the entire quarter century [Table 2].

A British observer of the trade noted in 1763 that "North America is at length become an immense market for . . . household furniture of all sorts."

As previously noted, 1771 marked a high point in colonial importation of British goods—a situation reflected in the figure of £4318 recorded for upholstery exports to Virginia and Maryland in that year, despite attempts throughout the colonies to limit importations and to express disapproval of Parliamentary proceedings.

PRO, Cust. 3/50-75. The interpretation of these figures is complicated by the changing meanings of the designated headings of "cabinetware" and "upholstery" in the customs records of this period. To mid-century, furnishings were categorized variously as "chairs," "escrutores," "joynery," "looking glasses," "upholstery," etc. After 1750, these designations were gradually codified into broader categories, and by 1755, all imported furniture was recorded simply as "cabinetware" or "upholstery," without a breakdown of each category. Of the two, "upholstery" was almost certainly the more inclusive term, and one can speculate that a London merchant may well have declared an entire furnishing shipment to his Virginia client as "upholstery," although the shipment comprised both cabinetware and upholstery goods. This would help to account for such discrepancies as the 1765 shipment to George Washington of a mahogany dressing chest and glass from Philip Bell of London in a year in which the Customs 3 Ledger recorded no cabinetware exports from London to Virginia or Maryland. December 1765, Invoices and Letters 1755-1766, George Washington Papers, Library of Congress (photostats, Mount Vernon).

TABLE 2

Cabinetware and upholstery exported from England to Virginia, 1750-1775, in £.s.d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cabinetware*</th>
<th>Upholstery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td></td>
<td>1105.10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751</td>
<td></td>
<td>151.15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1752</td>
<td>188.00.00</td>
<td>354.18.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1753</td>
<td>310.00.00</td>
<td>30.00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1754</td>
<td>125.04.00</td>
<td>35.00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1755</td>
<td>162.16.00</td>
<td>2109.09.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1756</td>
<td>174.04.00</td>
<td>2152.15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757</td>
<td>189.00.00</td>
<td>1035.06.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1758</td>
<td>77.00.00</td>
<td>1243.12.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1759</td>
<td>26.00.00</td>
<td>1940.00.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>92.00.00</td>
<td>1911.00.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>297.00.00</td>
<td>2239.00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>150.00.00</td>
<td>4060.05.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1763</td>
<td>135.00.00</td>
<td>3680.07.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>20.00.00</td>
<td>3670.08.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>18.00.00</td>
<td>527.00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1766</td>
<td>8.00.00</td>
<td>2430.14.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Cabinetware" does not appear as a heading until 1752, but superseded all other furniture-related headings other than "Upholstery" by 1755. See note 41 above.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cabinetware</th>
<th>Upholstery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1767</td>
<td>27.00.00</td>
<td>2984.15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1768</td>
<td>58.10.06</td>
<td>2053.18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>30.00.00</td>
<td>3017.08.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>120.00.00</td>
<td>3214.16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>15.00.00</td>
<td>4318.00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>160.00.00</td>
<td>2806.09.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>305.00.00</td>
<td>1350.08.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>165.00.00</td>
<td>1490.00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PRO, Cust. 3/50-75
through the Non-Importation Associations of 1769 and 1770. As late as 1774, nearly £1500 in upholstery goods was sent to Virginia and Maryland. Yet by 1775, the value of all English exports to the same colonies had rapidly dwindled to £50 in "Unrated Goods Several Sorts," with the onset of hostilities between Britain and her colonies, and the remaining Ledgers to 1780 make no further reference to the two colonies. British manufactures, including upholstery and cabinetware, continued to find a market in other North American colonies, including New York and Georgia, during the Revolution, confirming E. T. Joy's proposition that "the trade continued in those areas where British military power was firmly established."43

Yet the interruption of Anglo-Virginian trade by the Revolution by no means signaled the demise of that trade or of previously strong cultural ties. By December of 1783, the U.S. ship, "Peace," was bound for Virginia from London with a cargo which included cabinetware and household furniture, and the States of Navigation, Commerce and Revenue recorded total exports of cabinetware and upholstery to Virginia and Maryland for

the year of £508. Within a year, that value had increased to over £3300.\textsuperscript{44}

One Briton who observed the renewed dependence with delight was Lord Sheffield, whose \textit{Observation on the Commerce of the American States} was published in London in 1784:

\begin{quote}
\textit{can it be supposed, our manufactures being so much better, so much cheaper, and so much more suitable as to support themselves against all [these] disadvantages in war, that they will not occupy the American markets in peace?}
\end{quote}

Sheffield went on to list those "articles in which there will scarce be any competition" with British goods for the U.S. markets, including looking glasses and "Materials for Coachmakers, Sadlers, and Upholsterers":

\begin{quote}
The articles must be imported from Great Britain, as well as such of the articles for house furniture, which are not manufactured in the United States. The materials at least will be imported. Upholstery in many articles, is too bulky, but all that goes from Europe, will be taken from England.
\end{quote}

Sheffield attributed Americans' dependence to their backwardness in manufacturing due to the high cost of labor and the drawing off of potential labor for agricultural pursuits, as well as "the superior credit afforded by England." He concluded triumphantly that "no

\textsuperscript{44}PRO, B.T. 6/187; PRO, Cust. 17/8,9, transcribed in E. T. Joy Archives, Dept. of Furniture & Woodwork, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
American articles are so necessary to us, as our manufactures, &c. are to the Americans."45

Despite Sheffield's patent biases, his observations are largely corroborated by reference to other sources. Thus, a Virginia merchant noted in 1784 that the scarcity of goods in Virginia had heightened the demand for imports and that "furniture, especially bookcases, will [sell]."46 British customs records also reveal a steady flow of imports of cabinetware and upholstery into Virginia and Maryland throughout the last two decades of the century [Table 3].47 As late as 1796, Henry Wansey encouraged prospective emigrants to the United States: "if to settle take plenty of kitchen furniture . . . , feather beds & mattrasses. . . . All these articles are dear and bad if had in America." Wansey's additional


47 PRO, Cust. 17/1-30, transcribed in E. T. Joy Archives. As will be discussed, these figures may be misleadingly low, reflecting the rerouting of some of the post-Revolutionary import trade to Virginia through the North's less protective ports, such as Philadelphia and New York.
### TABLE 3

Values of cabinetware and upholstery exports from Britain to Virginia, 1783-1800.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s.</th>
<th>d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1783</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>3330</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785*</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PRO, Cust. 17, transcribed in E. T. Joy Archives.

*Exports to both Virginia and Maryland are reflected in the figure for 1785.*
caution that "the air at New York is so dry as to crack mahogany furniture brought from England, unless the wood was seasoned there first" would seem simply to provide additional proof of an active trade.48

Yet official statistics reveal that Virginia's imports of cabinetware and upholstery during the War of 1812 had fallen to less than £40, although Maryland's imports of these manufactures were still valued at over £200, and, by 1818, a traveller in the United States directly advised emigrants to bring "no cabinet furniture," but "a good stock of table linen and bedding."49 By 1820, neither Virginia nor Maryland appears to have directly imported even £70 worth of English furnishings, and a British report of 1846 lamented that, whereas "formerly we had a most extensive export . . . now we have an import of furniture."50

In order to flesh out these figures, it is necessary to turn to the other available evidence of furniture


50Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on Import Duties, 1846, quoted in E. T. Joy, "London Furniture Industry," 89.
importation to Virginia, particularly the correspondence and documents which passed between a London merchant and his Virginia clients during the course of trade. Above all, the planters' letterbooks and associated invoices for goods are revealing of the subtler system and sets of relationships underlying this exchange of commodities—of the respective roles of client and supplier and of the very real impact of their relationship upon trade.

In particular, the planters' letters disclose the uncertainties and instability inherent in the trans-Atlantic exchange of products and goods and reflect a common concern on the planters' part that the invoices might miscarry in some manner. The letters of such Virginians as Robert Beverley frequently contain duplicates or even triplicates of orders sent some months earlier. Thus, in March of 1771, John Clayton of Virginia wrote to the mercantile firm of John Norton & Sons in London that "I have here inclosed a copy of that invoice that in case the first should be actually lost I

may not be disappointed in receiving the goods by some
good ship to York River before this autumn."52

Invoices also reveal something of the time involved
in the importation process. While the majority of
documents examined record orders in the late summer and
early fall, particularly August and September, and the
arrival of cargos in Virginia in the early spring of the
following year, there are enough exceptions to this
generality to suggest that the mechanism for the
ordering, buying, and shipping of goods essentially
operated on a year-round basis.53 For example, Thomas
Knox, a Bristol merchant, shipped a card table to
Virginia in August of 1758 which had been ordered by
George Washington some eight months before, in January,
while in the following year, Robert Cary, Washington’s
London agent, filled a May order for furnishings in just
three months.54 Many planters chose to send their orders
regularly each year, as did Robert Beverley: "I have from

52 John Clayton to John Norton & Sons, 16 March 1771, John
Norton & Sons Papers, Colonial Williamsburg.

53 For a discussion of the seasonal cycle of the tobacco
plantation, see T. H. Breen, Tobacco Culture (Princeton: Princeton

54 George Washington to Thomas Knox, January 1758; to
Robert Cary May 1759; and corresponding invoices, August
1758 and August 1759, Invoices and Letters, George
Washington Papers.
Time to Time order'd out Goods just as the Necessity of them has occurr'd, but for the future, I shall send you my annual Invoice."55 Not uncommon, however, were later additions to and deletions from this yearly order.56

The English merchant's task of purchasing goods for export was also a year-round process, as revealed by three surviving shop notes for goods sent to Virginians in the second half of the eighteenth century, which are dated variously December, May, and July, thus providing evidence that the English merchant's purchasing role in the Virginia trade was not strictly limited by seasonal factors.57 The Port Books of Bristol for the third quarter of the eighteenth century also support this view of a year-round process. For example, the Port Book for the year 1767 lists no fewer than twelve ships bound for Virginia during the year. One of these ships, the Betsey

55 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 10 January 1762, Robert Beverley Letterbook.

56 For example, Nathaniel Lyttleton Savage requested John Norton & Sons to purchase goods "to be added to my next Springs Invoice." Savage to Norton & Sons, n.d., Brock Collection, Norton-Savage Dixon Papers, Henry E. Huntington Library (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg).

and Hannah, was loaded in Bristol in the month of March 1767. By December of the same year, it reappears in the records, with a different master, having apparently completed a round-trip voyage between Bristol and Virginia before being prepared for a return journey to the colony. Furthermore, the loading of such ships sometimes occupied over a month's time, during which a merchant might make several consignments of goods to be exported.58

Despite the apparent regularity of this system, Virginians were nevertheless largely dependent upon circumstances beyond their control for the reception of goods. As Charles Goore, a Liverpool merchant, wrote to Thomas Jones of Virginia in 1766, "I would willingly have sent the goods You order'd but Captn Scott having informed me ... that He had no prospect of Loading with Tobo it must be inconvenient to me to ship goods except I could have returns in the Vessel I send."59 Other merchants attributed the delay to the tradesmen who supplied the goods. Thus, Wakelin Welch & Company of London warned George Washington in 1789 that his

58PRO, E. 190/1227/3.

59Charles Goore to Thomas Jones, 14 August 1766, Jones Family Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg).
terrestrial globe "may take up two Months to Compleat &
that will be as early as a Conveyance may offer, for
after this vessel none is expected to Sail before
Febry."\textsuperscript{60}  A similar excuse was presented by a Liverpool
mercantile firm to Lady Jean Skipwith of Prestwould in
Virginia: "Many of the articles required a considerable
time to have them manufactured which has [occasioned]
some delay & when they were ready the Vessel was not so,
to take them."\textsuperscript{61}

That these often extended delays were a source of
continual annoyance to Virginians is well documented in
their correspondence with their English agents. Clients
were concerned not only with the so-called "necessities"
of plantation living, but, like Nathaniel Lyttleton
Savage, with such luxuries as "2 large handsome Glasses .
. . & 12 ps handsome paper hangings" of which Savage was
"in Immediate want."\textsuperscript{62}  Similarly, Meriwether Shelton
wrote to John Norton in London that he "should be very
glad to have . . . the Cylinder and the Chairs . . . as

\textsuperscript{60}Wakelin & Welch to George Washington, 8 October 1789,

\textsuperscript{61}James Maury to Lady Jean Skipwith, 5 September 1816,
Skipwith Family Papers.

\textsuperscript{62}Nathaniel Lyttleton Savage to John Norton & Sons, 27
August 1767, Brock Collection, Norton-Savage-Dixon
Papers.
soon as they can be ready . . . the other things will be
in time when your own ship returns." Despite such
hints, clients were often forced to inquire several times
into the status of their orders. Thus, Robert Beverley
wrote to John Bland of London in December of 1762 to
repeat an order for twenty-four hair-bottomed mahogany
chairs which Beverley had placed in July of that year,
adding that he hoped that they "are now upon their Voyage
hither." Short of severing relations with the agent in
question, however, the Virginia client had little
recourse other than a forceful written complaint, as that
registered by Charles Carter of Virginia over the delayed
reception of his goods a full six weeks after the ship
itself had arrived in the colony.

E. T. Joy has suggested that the American colonies
could receive exports of furniture and other English
goods in shorter time than could the more distant English

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63 Meriwether Shelton to John Norton & Sons, 22 July 1769, Brock Collection, Norton-Savage-Dixon Papers.
64 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 1 July 1762 and 26 December 1762, Robert Beverley Letterbook.
65 Charles Carter to Cary & Co., 5 May 1760, Carter-Plummer Letterbook 1732-1782, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
provinces—a view substantiated by one English observer in 1724:

most houses [in Virginia] are built near some landing-place; so that any thing may be delivered to a gentleman there from London, Bristol, etc. with less trouble and cost than to one living five miles in the country in England.

While this estimate was undoubtedly exaggerated, the atrocious conditions of England’s roads throughout the eighteenth century and the expense of transportation of goods by wagon and packhorse until the development of the country’s canal system in the last quarter of the century must have minimized the seeming inconveniences of overseas shipment, particularly regarding cost.


Regarding transportation within eighteenth-century England, Roy Porter has noted that "as late as 1740, there was no turnpike on the London to Edinboro road north of Grantham, and the journey could still take over a fortnight." Furthermore, Porter records that the cost of inland transport of goods by canal after 1770 was considerably safer and four times cheaper than the same journey made by wagon. As English consumers were responsible for the freight costs of their cabinetware and upholstery orders, while the freight on exported goods sent to America was generally assumed by the exporting merchant, the cost of English furnishings may actually have been cheaper for the American consumer than his British counterpart. Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), 207, 224; Christopher Gilbert, The
H. Cole has determined that a transit time of seven to ten weeks was common for letters sent from Yorktown, Virginia to London, while Raleigh Downman recorded an eight-week sea voyage in his emigration from Gravesend, England to Norfolk, Virginia in 1765. As shipping comprised only a small portion of the entire importation process, however, the other incertitudes of this process, whether due to manufacturers' delays, merchants' procrastination, or the lack of available transport, ensured that delay was rather the rule than the exception. Where goods may be traced from order to arrival, a lag of six months or more was clearly far from uncommon.

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Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale (London: Studio Vista and Christie's, 1978), 29. See also note 169 below.


70 Stuart Bruchey suggests that "too much emphasis has been placed upon the irregularity and uncertainty of communications" in the trans-Atlantic trade. Bruchey, "Success and Failure Factors: American Merchants in Foreign Trade in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," Business History Review 32 (1958): 284. With regard to the importation of goods, however, this uncertainty seems to be upheld by the precautions taken and concerns voiced in the correspondence of eighteenth-century Virginians. For examples of delayed receipt of imported goods see orders and corresponding shipping invoices of April and November 1757, January and August 1758, September 1760 and March 1761, and 26 August 1789 and 14 February 1790, in Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers. Note that these dates do not take into account additional shipping and delivery time.
Even the relatively short period of time occupied by the shipping of goods presented a variety of potential threats to their safe arrival in Virginia. The ship itself was subject to inclement weather, physical damage, or even hostilities from enemy ships. Raleigh Downman wrote from England upon shipping a clock to his uncle in Virginia in 1762 that "I have not Insur'd it, as I thought to have done, because . . . the reduction of Martinico . . . & some other Islands since; have put a stop to so many Privateers that the risk is much lessen'd: besides the Fleet is pretty large & goes under Convoy of two of his Majesties ships of War; these reasons I trust you will think good & hope it will come Safe & give satisfaction."71

More typical are the frequently expressed concerns for damage to objects through careless packing. George Washington thus asked his agent in London, Richard Washington, to direct that the chairs and tables to be sent to Mount Vernon in 1757 be "carefully packd and Stowed," as "without this Caution they are liable to infinite damage." He repeated this injunction in 1764 concerning chairs to be sent by James Gildart of

71Raleigh Downman to Joseph Chinn, 16 April 1762, Joseph Ball Letterbook.
Liverpool, adding that, without care in packing, "they generally meet with very great abuse."72 A client’s instructions for packing might be more specific, as when Thomas Jefferson directed that a small table was "to be put into the large one, both wrapped up in green bays, put into a tight box, & that tied over with oil cloth."73

The invoices of goods shipped often provide information as to the packing material employed. Cargos of furniture were most commonly accompanied by cases, "matts," and battens, as seen in a number of invoices for goods shipped to George Washington between 1757 and 1760.74 Christopher Gilbert’s examination of Thomas Chippendale’s commercial practices provides insight into the usage of these materials.75 According to Chippendale’s accounts, wooden crating was charged at a rate of 2½d. per foot or 5d. per foot for fragile objects such as looking glasses. Thus, in an invoice for statuary and ornaments shipped to Washington in 1760, there is


73 Thomas Jefferson to Captain Colley, 22 August 1790, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

74 Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers.

75 Gilbert, Chippendale, 28-29.
an item "To 56 feet in two Cases at 2.2 per foot." The same invoice includes "Tow to Pack all the things" in reference to the short coarse fibres of hemp or flax, which was used by Chippendale as a padding material in packing furnishings. More frequent in colonial invoices are references to "matts" or, as in a 1759 invoice of Washington, "dble Matting" at a charge of three shillings. An earlier invoice documents the "packing and battenning" of a set of dining tables and reflects a charge for "A Case wt partitions" for a set of twelve "Gothick" chairs--references which may be illuminated by Chippendale's practice of packing "richly finished" chairs suspended from cross battens in a crate.

Finally, an invoice of furniture bought at auction in England and shipped to Washington in 1757 records a five shilling charge for porters, apparently to transfer the goods to dockside.76 The absence of such a charge elsewhere in this group of invoices suggests that the porterage of furniture for export may have generally been the responsibility of the cabinetmaking firm involved or was regularly subsumed within the agent's commission fee.

76 Invoice, August 1757, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers.
Soft goods, including upholstery fabrics, might be shipped simply in bundles or in trunks or cases. In his request to his London agent for eight yards of purple-and-white copperplate fabric and a sealskin trunk in 1773, Raleigh Downman wrote from Virginia: "I suppose this Trunk will hold most of the small Articles but if anything else is wanted for package I suppose a Deel case will do for the [black?] Trunks I have had heretofore come dear and are of no use to me." 77 Robert Beverley expressed the opposing view in 1791: "as the deal boxes are costly & useless I wish you would always send the dry goods when they are not too bulky in a trunk, wh[ich] altho it costs something more may be of some use." 78

Despite the elaborate precautions taken, damage might still occur, particularly to goods shipped by water. Chippendale noted that "sometimes the damp of the ship affects the drawers and locks of good work which is made very close," 79 while Sheraton's Cabinet Dictionary of 1803 prescribed a complex packing system for looking glasses to "resist any dashes of salt water that may

77 Raleigh Downman to Edward Athawes, August 1773, Joseph Ball Letterbook.
79 Gilbert, Chippendale, 29.
occur on the voyage, which would totally ruin the silvering."\(^8^0\) Raleigh Downman discovered yet another risk inherent in the trans-Atlantic transportation of goods as he wrote in 1766 of opening a case of looking glasses, one of which was "cract in two quite from top to bottom." He continued, however, that "I am satisfied it was not owing to the packing or any pressure in the case but I apprehend to the backboards being brad[d]ed too close."\(^8^1\)

Regardless of the cause of damage, its frequency apparently led colonial consumers to consider insurance a necessary, if expensive, measure. In 1757, Charles Carter instructed his London agents "to insure my goods till directed to the contrary," while, two years later, Washington ordered that his goods should be insured "and in case of Accident reshipp’d witn Delay."\(^8^2\) The concerns which led Virginians to insist upon insurance were most clearly expressed in Thomas West’s directions from Yorktown, Virginia, to his mother in London, whom he

\(^8^0\)Quoted in Gilbert, Chippendale, 28.

\(^8^1\)Raleigh Downman to George Kemp, 31 March 1766, Joseph Ball Letterbook.

was encouraging to make up a venture cargo for the Virginia market in 1756. He instructed her to insure the goods and to get bills of lading, "otherwise shou’d ye Goods be Lost, you cou’d not recover a farthing, because you have nothing to shew, that you ship’d such goods as you insur’d."\(^{83}\)

Barring loss or damage in transportation, goods which arrived in Virginia were still liable to miscarriage before they reached their final destination. A cause for concern apparently lay in the fact that an incoming ship might be bound for one of Virginia’s four primary rivers other than that of the waiting client. Robert Beverley wrote to Edward Athawes in London in 1761 that "I should always prefer Rappahannock Shipg for my Goods of either of ym because the[n] I may depend upon receiving them." He expressed the same thought a year later to another London merchant, John Bland, and asked that his goods be "committed to the Care of some Cautious Captain to this River."\(^{84}\) Such clients as Charles Carter and George Washington more particularly instructed that

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\(^{83}\) Thomas West to Mrs. Esther West, 12 November 1756, PRO, H.C.A. 30/258 (Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilm, Virginia State Library).

\(^{84}\) Robert Beverley to Edward Athawes, August 1761; to John Bland, 27 December 1762, Robert Beverley Letterbook.
their goods be delivered directly to their respective houses. As Washington noted in 1759, "it is almost as much trouble and expense getting Goods from any of the Rivers round to the Potomack as the Original charges of shipping them amounts to, unless they are committed to the charge of very careful captains who has an Interest in forwarding."85

The arrival of the goods was preceded by written receipts, as Charles Carter indicated in 1758: "Yesterday I received my Invoices and Bills of Lading for my Goods from [Captain] Coxen who assures me they are free from any damage."86 Still, the delays in delivery experienced by Carter and others led Robert Beverley to suggest an alternative solution to his London agent in 1771:

I find the Scotch, who are the principal Importers of Goods from London, insist that the Captains shall sign their Bills of Lading, deliverable at a particular Landing on this River, whereon they reside—By this Means they receive their Goods, in due Time in proper Order, & without any Inconvenience whatsoever. I wish therefor, as I am told this is the constant Practice, you wd insist upon their


acting in the same Manner, because I am frequently ill-used in this particular.87

By 1795, the system of delivery of imported goods had apparently become somewhat more regularized, as described by Robert Gamble to Sir Peyton Skipwith of Virginia:

Respecting your goods—when the ship arrives—the Capt by oath is bound to put all letters into the first Post Office for which he receives two cents each—The letters then go as directed—you will send back your Invoice, & bill of Lading to your friend at the port where the goods are to be discharged—Who will, then, as your agent make out the acct—producing the Invoice &c. to shew it right—the amt of duties being ascertained, that friend will Pay, or Bind them as the Case may be & obtain a permit from the Naval Officer to Land them—& will get craft to go along side to take them, when directed 15 Days is allowed for delivery after the Vessell arrives.88

Skipwith’s active importation of English goods via the consignment system is, however, remarkable for the last decade of the eighteenth century. As has been demonstrated, all evidence suggests that Virginia continued to be an important market for English furniture exports in the post-Revolutionary period. Yet evidence of the system as described above, derived from planters’

87 Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 15 April 1771, Robert Beverlee Letterbook.

88 Robert Gamble to Sir Peyton Skipwith, 29 July 1795, Skipwith Family Papers. It is probable, given the date of this communication, that the system described by Gamble reflected newly established U.S. Customs practices.
letterbooks and related documents of the consignment trade, is notably lacking after 1776. Even amongst the records of such individuals as Robert Beverley and George Washington, who had previously imported goods in some quantity, orders and receipts for English furnishings are conspicuously absent. Given the sustained strength of furniture and upholstery imports documented in the post-Revolutionary period, with the concurrent diminishment of the evidence for importation by individual planters, another outlet for Virginians' consumption of imported goods must clearly be sought. The changing role of the Virginia merchant in the trans-Atlantic trade provides the most likely solution.

Comprising both the resident factors of the Glasgow tobacco-trading firms and the growing class of native Virginia merchants involved in the trans-Atlantic cargo trade, Virginia's mercantile community was an important element in the importation and marketing of English and European goods to the colony's small and middling planters in the colonial period. Yet despite sizable annual investments of £5000 or more in imported goods purchased for speculative sale through stores clustered in Virginia towns and scattered along the numerous rivers, the colony's merchants appear to have engaged to
a strictly limited extent in furniture importation before the Revolution. Contemporary advertisements and broadsides of such merchants as Balfour and Barraud of Norfolk include only such furnishing and upholstery goods as "painted floor cloths," "mahogany and walnut dressing boxes," "cases with bottles," and "looking glasses of all sizes." Related goods might comprise nests of trunks, tea chests, and framed prints.

The invoices and annual stock inventories of Virginia merchants in the third quarter of the century provide crucial insight into the otherwise generalized references available through such advertisements. The records of William Allason of Falmouth, Virginia are of particular interest, as changes in his stock may be closely traced over a thirteen-year period. Thus, Allason noted in his inventories of the 1760s painted looking glasses ranging in price from six to twelve pence each and walnut-framed looking glasses from one shilling, four pence to seven shillings, six pence. Upon replenishing his stock in 1772, Allason recorded painted and walnut-framed looking glasses ranging from eleven to forty pence, and twenty-one pence to twelve shillings.

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85 Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg, 25 July 1766 (microfilm, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary).
six pence, respectively.\textsuperscript{90} Two decades earlier, Alexander Gordon, a merchant of New Castle and Hanover Counties, had similarly recorded his sales of imported looking glasses, including both painted and "walnutree" frame varieties. While the prices of Gordon's small or painted glasses were comparable to Allason's, at six to seventeen pence each, the most expensive looking glass sold by Gordon, probably a walnut-framed example, was just four shillings.\textsuperscript{91}

Allason's records also provide some details as to the appearance of goods which he imported for resale. One invoice documents the varying dimensions of his stock of looking glasses, from five-by-four inches to eighteen-by-twelve inches, while in an inventory of 1765, the costliest looking glass is noted as having a walnut stand. Allason also carried "Paper Covers" to the looking glasses, "pockett" glasses at four pence each, and, after 1772, sconce glasses at ten shillings, six pence and twelve shillings, six pence. Another variety of the form, specified as "Ladys Dressing Glasses,"

\textsuperscript{90}Invoice Books, Falmouth Store, 1760-1772, Allason Papers, Virginia State Library.

appears in two 1772 invoices from the merchant, William Anderson of Yorktown to John Norton & Sons of London, at a proposed cost of eight and ten shillings apiece.\textsuperscript{92}

Equally prevalent in the stocks of pre-Revolutionary merchants in Virginia were nests of trunks of various types. Most typical are William Allason’s references to "gilt," "leather gilt," "red gilt," and "black" nests of trunks, ranging, depending upon their size, from two shillings, six pence to twenty shillings. Far less costly were the "paper," presumably paper-lined or covered, trunks, sold by Allason at just nine pence each. At the opposite end of the scale were hair or sealskin trunks, "with brass Locks Handles & Scutchions," which were not stocked by Allason, but which were ordered from London by many of his fellow merchants. Most descriptive is William Armistead’s invoice to John Norton & Sons for "1 Seal Skin Trunk Neatly Mounted at 30/ or 35/ about three feet long."\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{92}Invoice Books, Falmouth Store, 1762, 1765, 1767, and 1772, Allason Papers; William Anderson to John Norton & Sons, 20 September 1771 and 7 February 1772, John Norton & Sons Papers.

\textsuperscript{93}Invoice Books, Falmouth Store, 1760-1774, Allason Papers; invoices to John Norton & Sons from Hart & Marshall, June 1769 and 10 November 1770; from Francis Jerdone, 16 May 1771; from William Anderson, 30 October 1771 and 7 February 1772; and from William Armistead, 27 July 1769, John Norton & Sons Papers.
References to other types of imported furnishings in the records of Virginia merchants are relatively rare before the Revolution. Perhaps most typical, aside from looking glasses and trunks, are violins and bows, purchased from London, and gilt-framed prints. Also occasionally recorded are pairs of backgammon tables, including "1 pr neat Back Gammon Tables with Leather Boxes & 2 pair Dice" at £1, shipped in 1768 from Liverpool to Colonel William Cabell, Jr., who operated a store in the Virginia Piedmont area. While the description offers little information as to the appearance of these tables, a folding backgammon game board is depicted and described as "backgammon tables" on the trade card of an eighteenth-century London cabinetmaker, suggesting that the term referred not to a

94 See, for example, a reference to six "London Fiddles & bows" at ten shillings each in Invoice Book, Falmouth Store, 1764, Allason Papers, and a shop note for six violins and bows, purchased from London musical instrument maker, Maurice Whitaker, by Perkins, Buchanan & Brown, for Thomas Adams of Virginia, in Thomas Adams Accounts, Bland Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. References to "Pictures in Gilt frames" include Invoice Books, Falmouth Store, 1764, 1767, and 1772, Allason Papers.

95 Invoice, February 1768, Cabell Family Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary.
variety of card table, but to a rather expensive, ornamented box.\textsuperscript{96}

Less common are occasional invoices for such items as waiters, tea chests, and architectural moldings, all of which are documented in mercantile records of this period. Truly exceptional is William Allason's "House Clock--goes 8 Days," costing £6.6.0. Recorded in Allason's annual inventory for at least 5 years,\textsuperscript{97} its unsold status and its uniqueness in the records suggests a weak market for such luxury items among the general public to which these stores catered, and, thus, a reasonable reluctance on the part of Virginia's merchants to stock such large and costly objects.

In fact, just two Virginia merchants appear to have attempted the sale of a wider range of imported furnishings in the pre-Revolutionary period. In 1751, John Mitchelson offered for sale in the Virginia Gazette "for ready Money or Short Credit," a "GREAT Variety of Household Furniture, of . . . London Make," including

\textsuperscript{96}Trade card of Charles Pryer, London, 1794, Banks Collection, Dept. of Prints & Drawings, British Museum. Two such backgammon boards or tables, with original die cups, dice, and markers, survive in the collections of the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

\textsuperscript{97}Invoice Books, Falmouth Store, 1764-1769, Allason Papers.
mahogany chests of drawers, dressing tables, card and "claw" tables, chairs, upholstered bedsteads, and "Fine large, gilt, carv'd and plain" sconce-, chimney-, and dressing-glasses. A decade later, Richard Barrett of Alexandria, Virginia advertised imported "Houshold and Kitchen Furniture; of every kind and Quality," which he intended to sell "by Wholesale." Other advertisements of imported furnishings in Virginia before the Revolution are limited to notices of new or used goods offered privately for sale, such as "an exceeding elegant SPINNET," "A COMPLETE HARPSCORD," or "A VERY NEAT HAND ORGAN, in a mahogany case, with a gilt front." By contrast, merchants' advertisements of London-made furniture for sale routinely filled the pages of the Charleston-based South Carolina Gazette in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Typical is Reeves & Cochran's notice in September of 1766 of "neat mahogany tea-tables and tea boards, ... ladies and gentlemen's


99The Maryland Gazette, Annapolis, 12 February 1761, (transcription, research files, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as MESDA).

100Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg, 27 May 1773; 6 August 1767; 17 September 1767 (transcription, MESDA).
dressing stands, desks, . . . bookcases, and neat glass doors, card tables and racks, . . . eight-day clocks in mahogany cases, . . . very fine gilt leather screens," and even "a very neat Charriot compleat," all "just imported in the QUEEN CHARLOTTE, from London."¹⁰¹

Not until the 1780s did such advertisements of imported stocks become similarly common in Virginia newspapers. In comparison to the two notices of stocks of imported furnishings placed by Virginia merchants in the twenty-six years between 1750 and 1776, at least seven such advertisements appeared in Richmond newspapers between 1784 and 1789. Thus, in 1784, John Barret & Co. of Richmond announced the sale of "a compleat assortment of the most fashionable MAHOGANY FURNITURE," imported from London, and a year later, offered a new stock of imports which included "bedsteads and furnitu[r]e[,] Dining tables, with ends to fit or serve as boards[,] Card and tea tables[,] Desks and bookcases[,] Ladies dressing tables[,] Chairs . . . [and] gilt and hair trunks brass mounted," as well as "A few patterns of elegant paper tapestry for rooms." On the same date, Boyd & White of Richmond advertised mahogany furniture

¹⁰¹South Carolina Gazette, Charleston, 1 September 1766 (transcription, MESDA).
imported from London, including "chairs, card tables, dining tables, bedsteads, &c., &c." as well as a more typical stock of "gilt and hair trunks," and a "backgammon table."\footnote{Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser, Richmond, 15 May 1784 (transcription, MESDA); Virginia Gazette or, the American Advertiser, Richmond, 29 October 1785 (microfilm, Virginia State Library).}

One of the most diverse stocks of imported furniture was that advertised by James Warrington of Richmond in 1787, which included:

- Compleat setts Mahogany Dining Tables, with circular end on Frames.
- Sofha's. Secretary Book Cases.
- Elegant Celleret Side-Board Sweep-Fronts.
- Neat Mahogany Wine Coolers, Octagon and Saxagon [sic] Looking Glasses.
- Knife Cases.
- Backgammon Tables.
- Tea Tables.
- Tea Caddys.
- Fine Mattresses.\footnote{Virginia Gazette & Weekly Advertiser, Richmond, 11 October 1787 (transcription, MESDA).}

The importers frequently noted that goods would be sold by retail or wholesale, and the Richmond firm of Warrington & Keene announced in 1789 that their stock of imports, including furniture, was to be sold "by Package, PIECE, or RETAIL . . . on Very reasonable terms for CASH, TOBACCO, WHEAT, and PUBLIC SECURITIES at their current value."\footnote{Virginia Gazette & Weekly Advertiser, 8 October 1789 (microfilm, Virginia State Library).}
The availability to Virginia consumers of a full range of English furnishings through merchants operating in the state’s growing urban centers, as indicated by these advertisements, would clearly serve to explain, in part, the apparent disappearance of the planter-importer in the post-Revolutionary period. The identification of this new source of imported goods must also suggest that caution be used in evaluating the purchases of Virginians dealing with native merchants. For example, Sir Peyton Skipwith of Mecklenburg County, one of the few Virginia planters importing English furniture in quantity via the consignment system after the Revolution, also purchased various goods from Richmond and Petersburg merchants in the 1780s and '90s. Skipwith’s bill of 1790 for two knife cases at £5 and a backgammon table at £1.13.0 from Warrington & Keene must certainly be viewed as evidence of purchases of English, not Richmond, furniture in the context of the firm’s 1789 advertisement of London goods for sale, including "Backgammon tables in mahogany and leather."105

Similarly, in December of 1798, Richard Corbin purchased a writing desk at a cost of £3.12.0 from Wyllie

105Virginia Gazette & Weekly Advertiser, 8 October 1789 (microfilm, Virginia State Library).
& Langley of Richmond, who had placed an advertisement
the previous August of imported "mahogany liquor cases,
with bottles; ditto portable writing desks complete;
ditto knife cases, &c. &c." Documentation of other
Virginians' transactions with native merchants clearly
bears further examination for potential identification of
other Virginia consumers of English furniture, whether of
small goods such as looking glasses and trunks in the
pre-Revolutionary era or one of the full range of forms
available following independence.

Virginia's mercantile community of the post-
Revolutionary period also suggests a potential supply
source for English objects which survive with a Virginia
provenance, but without documentation of purchase. A
pair of neoclassical side tables of the late eighteenth
century with a history of ownership in the Carter family
of Shirley Plantation provide a prime example. While the
tables have been identified as English, and Charles
Carter of Shirley is known to have purchased English
furniture and other goods prior to the Revolution, no

106 Virginia Gazette & Weekly Advertiser, Richmond, 21
August 1798 (microfilm, Virginia State Library).

107 Catalogue of Early Southern Decorative Arts, MESDA; for
eamples of Carter's purchases of English goods, see his
correspondence with John Hanbury & Co. of 12 June 1756,
and 14 September 1756, Carter Plummer Letterbook.
order or receipt for the slab tables has been identified.\textsuperscript{108} In 1784, however, an advertisement appeared in an Alexandria paper for "a Pair of Parian Marble Side Tables, curiously inlaid, and suitable for the most elegant Room."\textsuperscript{109} It is tempting to speculate that the Shirley tables are the pair in question, suggesting that—although the process of importation had clearly changed—the underlying motivation to purchase English goods lingered in the mindset of post-Revolutionary Virginians.


\textsuperscript{109}Virginia Journal & Alexandria Advertiser, Alexandria, 28 October 1784 (transcription, MESDA).
Chapter III
EMBLEMS OF A CHANGING IDENTITY

Inducements to the importation of English furnishings in the second half of the eighteenth century undoubtedly varied to some extent among individuals. Yet a review of evidence of the trade suggests that certain essential motivations were shared by those Virginians who chose to import English goods. Ranging from questions of cost and convenience to more fundamental matters of social and economic identity, these issues reveal that the importation of English furniture into Virginia reflected in microcosm the broader cultural relationships existing between the colony and the mother country.

A crucial element in the identification of the initiatives underlying importation has been the exploration of the socioeconomic status of the Virginia consumers of English furniture to determine the relevance of social position to the purchase of imported goods. As noted in Chapter I, much of the evidence for the importation of English furniture has been discovered in
correspondence generated by the trans-Atlantic consignment trade in tobacco. In itself, this correspondence is indicative of a relatively high level of income among Virginia consumers of imported furnishings, as the consignment system was, to some extent, a "badge of class," distinguishing the larger from the smaller tobacco producers. As little as one-quarter of the Chesapeake tobacco trade with Britain was operated on a consignment basis on the eve of the Revolution, as the trade was dominated by the Scots factors resident in Virginia who extended credit on goods to small and middling planters in exchange for their annual tobacco crops. Producing as few as two or three hogsheads of tobacco a year, the average Virginia planter generally did not represent a worthwhile investment to the English merchants involved in the consignment trade.

110 T. H. Breen, Tobacco Culture, 36.

111 Price, Capital and Credit, 6.

112 Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the capacity of a hogshead of tobacco increased in both size and weight, from just 400 to 800 pounds in the seventeenth century to between 750 and 1400 pounds and 2½ feet in diameter during the eighteenth century. The heavier weight of the oronoco or sweet-scented tobacco accounts for some of the variation in capacity. Arthur Pierce Middleton, Tobacco Coast (1953; reprint, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press and Maryland State Archives, 1985), 112-13.
In contrast, the annual tobacco production of one of Virginia's greater planters could be as much as one hundred hogsheads in the pre-Revolutionary period, thereby attracting the business and extensive specialized services of the mercantile houses of London and the English outports. While the consignment trade was a speculative system and thus represented certain risks for both planter and merchant, it could also generate correspondingly higher profits, particularly as it represented a significant portion of England's inland tobacco trade, centered in London and Bristol. The tobacco intended for home consumption within England was typically of a higher quality and commanded better prices than that purchased in Virginia under the factorage system for reexport to the Continent. The large-scale producer of this "sweet-scented" variety could thus expect higher prices for his crop and greater credit from

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113 In 1766, John Wayles wrote that "in 1740, no man on this River made 100 hogsheads of tobacco: now not less than six exceed that Number." Quoted in Price, Capital and Credit, 18.

his English agent, to be invested in expanded tobacco production and imported goods.

In addition to the predominant choice of the consignment method of tobacco marketing by the importers of English furnishings in the second half of the eighteenth century, a variety of evidence suggests this group's relative social and economic prominence within contemporary Virginia society. While a complete economic profile of known importers has not been undertaken here, it is noteworthy that Jackson Turner Main's study of the one hundred wealthiest Virginians in the 1780s includes at least ten individuals known to have imported or owned English furniture. Of these, Robert Beverley, George Washington, and Sir Peyton Skipwith imported large quantities of furniture and upholstery, the two former in the decades preceding the Revolution and the last in the 1790s. Also recorded among "the One Hundred" is Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, who purchased a London-made gilt looking glass in 1770 and who was described in 1773 as

"confessedly of the highest quality and greatest worth of any in Virginia."\textsuperscript{116}

A similar study of the 110 leaders of the Virginia House of Burgesses between 1720 and 1776 by Jacob Price is further revealing of both the economic and social status of this group of consumers. In addition to the names of several of the wealthiest Virginians noted above are those of William Beverley, John Clayton, and Robert Carter Nicholas, whose names also appear in the documentation of furniture importation. The absence of Robert Beverley's name from this list is, in fact, exceptional, as wealth in colonial Virginia was often regarded as a call to civic duty. The examination of lists of Virginia's militia officers, burgesses, justices of the peace, and vestrymen would almost certainly yield the names of other importers of English furnishings.\textsuperscript{117}


As community leaders in both economic and political circles, Virginians involved in the consignment tobacco trade and, thus, in the direct importation of English goods, also held positions of prominence in local and colonial social spheres. Both Rhys Isaac and T. H. Breen have explored the social dominance of the Virginia gentry in the pre-Revolutionary era and the peculiar significance of external appearances in the maintenance of that dominance. Their conclusions have particular relevance for the study of the importation of goods into Virginia, as they provide insight into the function of luxury items in this culture and, thus, into the social incentives which underlay importation.\(^{118}\)

As suggested by the title of his recent work, Tobacco Culture, T. H. Breen has posited the concept of a "tobacco mentality" underlying all elements of pre-Revolutionary Chesapeake culture. In this society, Breen suggests, appearances were paramount, from the appearance of the tobacco plant, itself, as an index to a planter's agricultural skills and prospective income, to his entire external estate, in which was made tangible his access to

credit and, thus, relative standing in society. Rhys Isaac similarly views the Virginia gentry's predilection for outward displays of wealth and power, particularly the great plantation houses built from the 1720s following, as a form of social contest and as the "[legitimization of] . . . distinctions of rank." Such displays as "setting, dress, and demeanor" thereby functioned in Virginia as a means of visual communication by which to "[reinforce] existing relationships."

The particular choice by Virginians of English goods and fashions as vehicles of social communication was thus motivated in part by their role as incontrovertible evidence of favorable trans-Atlantic commercial relationships. On a more fundamental level, the purchase of English goods also proclaimed the buyer's deliberate identification with the social and cultural standards of the mother country. As Rhys Isaac has noted, "with [English] goods came tastes, standards, and a whole set of assumptions about the proper ways of ordering life [and of] shaping the environment for use in accordance with ideas of well-being." Thus, Robert Beverley, on

119 Breen, Tobacco Culture, esp. Chapters 2 and 3.
120 Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 136, 122.
121 Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 116, 19.
his return to Virginia in the early 1760s after the completion of his education in England, asked his London agent "to chose the China of the most fashionable Sort, for in all human Probability, I shall spend my Life in this [country, and] I shall always desire to make it as commodious as this Place [will] admit of." Beverley was not unique in his aspirations as Edmund Randolph recorded in his History of Virginia:

[having] the sons of the most opulent families trained by education and habits acquired in England and hence perhaps arrogating some superiority over the provinces not so distinguished, [Virginia] was charged with manifesting a consciousness that she had more nearly approached the British model . . . of excellence.123

122 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 27 December 1762, Robert Beverley Letterbook.

The economic and social function of English goods in Virginia society takes on specific relevance when it is considered that the large-scale purchase of English furnishings by George Washington and Robert Beverley coincided with their respective emergence into independent tobacco production in the 1750s and 1760s—a period during which, as T. H. Breen has noted, they were making the acquisitions of "clothes, housing and slaves that they knew were necessary to sustain their claim to gentry status."\textsuperscript{124} Without the outward display of luxuries, which thereby came to be considered as necessities, the great planter was threatened by the loss of the credit, both social and economic, which sustained his estate.

The very real nature of this fear was expressed by contemporaries, particularly in the decade preceding the Revolution, when economic overextension and failure of a single large producer could have economic ramifications throughout the region, due to the complex credit network of the colony and the wealthy planter’s dual role as the community’s primary debtor and creditor. Landon Carter of Sabine Hall was among those to assert that "we cannot know whether the Mr. Nelson, Mr. Page, and Mr. Nicholas, \textsuperscript{124}Breen, \textit{Tobacco Culture}, 147.
&c. Gentlemen of the first fortune in the Country, be rich or poor, for who knows what Mortgages, Drawbacks, and the like, may have eaten out their Estates."\textsuperscript{125} George Washington's advocacy of the Non-Importation Association of 1769, which was signed by a number of Virginia's political and economic leaders, voiced a similar fear:

[though] prudence dictated economy . . . [the planter's] resolution was too weak to put it in practice, for how can I, says he, who have lived in such a manner change my method? I am ashamed to do it; and besides such an alteration in the system of my living, will create suspicions of decay in my fortune, and such a thought the world must not harbour.\textsuperscript{126}

Significantly, among the goods which supported this "system of . . . living" and which were to be banned from importation were "Clocks, Tables, Chairs, Looking Glasses, Carriages, Joiner's and Cabinet Work of all Sorts, [and] Upholstery of all Sorts."\textsuperscript{127} Of even greater

\textsuperscript{125}This wording is the Reverend John Camm's paraphrasing of Carter's argument from a contemporary pamphlet dispute on the subject, as quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 171.

\textsuperscript{126}George Washington to George Mason, 5 April 1769, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 92.

\textsuperscript{127}In the Non-Importation Association of 1770, upholstery was further defined to include "paper hangings, beds ready made, furniture for beds, and carpeting." Both the 1769 and 1770 Associations are reprinted in Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence, comp. William J. Van Schreeven (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1973), 72-84.
significance, the 1769 Non-Importation Association and its successor of 1770 were notably unsuccessful throughout the colonies—1771 actually represented a high point in the American importation of British goods.\textsuperscript{128}

An appearance of wealth was thus considered to be crucial to the maintenance of credit, both locally and abroad. As John Syme of Virginia wrote to the Bristol mercantile firm of Farell & Jones in a request for an extension of credit: "My situation in a Publick Place Obliges me to live in a Way, somewhat Expensive wherby I am better able to serve your interest."\textsuperscript{129} In fact, as both the Virginia planter and his British creditor knew, social reputation and connections were crucial to the business of the consignment merchant. In the close social world of the Virginia gentry, a merchant’s reputation could be made or broken on the word of just one satisfied or disgruntled planter.

Personal recommendations were of particular importance in the establishment of the commercial relationship between planter and merchant. As Charles Carter wrote to John Backhouse of Liverpool in 1760, he

\textsuperscript{128}Van Schreeven, Revolutionary Virginia, 78, 85.

\textsuperscript{129}John Syme to Farell and Jones, 2 June 1760, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 156.
had undertaken the correspondence with the knowledge that Backhouse had "generally given satisfaction to Gentlemen of my Acquaintance."\textsuperscript{130} Elizabeth Jones was more specific in her introduction to an English merchant: "Having occasion for some goods from London and I applied to Coll Lyme to advise me who to Consign my Tobacco to which he mentioned you as a person that would use me well both in the sail of my Tobaco and in the choice of my Goods."\textsuperscript{131} A post-Revolutionary example of such a personal network is evidenced in the 1780s recommendation of the British consignment firm of Dawes, Stephenson & Co. by Thomas Shore of Petersburg, Virginia to Sir Peyton Skipwith: "if I had not thought them worthy of every confidence, I should not have taken the liberty of giving them your address."\textsuperscript{132}

As Rhys Isaac has demonstrated, the credit-based society of colonial Virginia "reduced the impersonal now-and-done-with quality of cash transactions, sustaining in its place a network of continuing face-to-face personal

\textsuperscript{130}Charles Carter to John Backhouse, 5 July 1760, Carter-Plummer Letterbook.

\textsuperscript{131}Elizabeth Jones to [?], n.d., Jones Family Papers.

\textsuperscript{132}Thomas Shore to Sir Peyton Skipwith, [c. 1785], Skipwith Family Papers.
This personal nature of economic relationships was expected to extend to trans-Atlantic associations, as evidenced by the frequent and mutual address of commercial correspondents as "friends." Richard Corbin most fully expressed the sentiment in 1758:

I know there is something that may not improperly be called a Commercial Friendship, because I feel it glowing in my own breast, which takes its rise from a long Correspondence and is established by a Punctual and Steady Integrity on both Sides.\textsuperscript{134}

Corbin's mention of "both Sides" is crucial to an understanding of the relationship between client and supplier in the consignment trade, as the ideal "Commercial Friendship" was conceived of, at both the local and international levels, as a "mutual exchange of services."\textsuperscript{135} As Charles Carter wrote to Farell & Co. of Bristol, "I have taken this Opportunity of beginning a Correspondence, with your House, which I shall keep up with Pleasure as long as it tends to our mutual

\textsuperscript{133}Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 29.

\textsuperscript{134}Richard Corbin to [?], 13 June 1758, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 108.

\textsuperscript{135}Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 113.
Advantage."136 From the planter's standpoint, this reciprocity consisted of a regular shipment of tobacco on his part and no less than a high price for his tobacco, carefully purchased goods, and extensive credit on that of the merchant.

The satisfactory selection and shipment of goods was an important aspect of the merchant's duties, and Richard Corbin was assured in 1770 that "no merchants on this side the Atlantic [England] have it more in their power to give ample satisfaction" than William Lee, being "well acquainted with the expectations of the Planter, the fashions of the Country . . . & the price of British Manufactures."137 Of necessity, the Virginia planter was largely dependent upon the discretion and judgment of the merchant in the execution of an order for goods, and Robert Beverley's injunction to Edward Athawes to "[exert] . . . yr Taste in the Choice" of his furniture has the note rather of a plea than an instruction.138

136 Charles Carter to Farell & Co., 16 April 1760, Carter-Plummer Letterbook.

137 [?] to Richard Corbin, 26 January 1770, William Lee Letterbooks.

The correspondence between planter and merchant can, however, be extraordinarily revealing of the duties and responsibilities which the planter expected the merchant to fulfill in the purchase of his goods. While merchants were frequently directed by their clients to exercise their "particular care," it was not uncommon, particularly in the choice of clothing and furnishing textiles, to apply to the discrimination of the merchant's wife. Thus, John Custis's order for bed hangings in 1741 included a request that Robert Cary's wife "choose the materials... [for] Womens fancies in things of this nature exceeds that of mens."139 Similarly, Lady Jean Skipwith wrote to James Maury of Liverpool in the 1790s with an order for materials needed in the construction of the Skipwiths' house, Prestwould, in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. While Lady Skipwith directed Maury to consult an upholsterer or carpenter concerning most of the goods, she noted that she could "readily submit to Mrs Maury's taste" in the choice of the carpet pattern.140 John Norton's wife was applied to in the purchase of a set of


140 Transcripts concerning the construction of Prestwould, n.d., Skipwith Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
china for the personal use of a Virginia merchant,\textsuperscript{141} though the role of the merchant's wife was more typically restricted to the execution of the separate invoices of clothing and textiles sent by the wives and daughters of her husband's clients.

The merchant's discretion in the exportation of goods was also relied upon in other instances, as when Maury and Latham of Liverpool judged that Lady Jean Skipwith's order, "if untimely executed, would have cost to[o] much more [than £300], & we have therfore sent those articles which we thought you would most want."\textsuperscript{142} William Lee of London even took it upon himself to judge the compliance of his clients' invoices with the short-lived Non-Importation Associations of 1769 and 1770, and he assured Elizabeth Ransdell that, as her "order was (as a true Patriots shou'd be) strictly conformable to the association, there needed not any alteration." Lee was clearly aware of the dangers of error inherent in such long-distance commissions and urged one client in 1771 to "please in your future orders for Goods to be very particular in your directions about them, because

\textsuperscript{141}Robn. Hart to John Norton & Sons, [Fall] 1771, John Norton & Sons Papers.

\textsuperscript{142}Maury & Latham to Lady Jean Skipwith, 5 September 1816, Skipwith Family Papers.
mistakes are very lyable to be made from inaccuracies in the Invoice." He reminded his brother in Virginia later that year that "I make it [a] rule, unless a discretionary power is given to me, to adhere to the Invoices, & if there are any mistakes, you know where to lay the blame."143

On occasion, the British merchant was directed by his client to purchase his goods from a specific tradesman or at a predetermined price, suggesting some awareness of the British market on the part of the Virginia consumer. This awareness probably derived in part from past experience with goods, as suggested by George Wilson's order for "1 Simpson Violin large & good 10/- the last was good." Other orders revealed more specific knowledge and may have reflected a personal recommendation. For example, James Carter requested John Norton of London to purchase "1 Steel Mill lately invented by Sam & Samson Freeths as do have a patent for it--It will cost five guineas at Birmingham."144

143 William Lee to Elizabeth Ransdell, 31 October 1770; to Jonathan Tayloe, 28 February 1771; to Francis Lightfoot Lee, 8 October 1771, William Lee Letterbooks.

Certainly some Virginians had a first-hand knowledge of British tradesmen, derived from their own travels or education in the mother country. Having returned from his studies in England in 1761, Robert Beverley wrote from Virginia to his London merchant, John Bland, early in the following year:

when I point out any particular Tradesman, (though he may live at a Distance) I desire you to purchase of him, because those whom I have employ’d are not concern’d in the Exportation Trade, & of Course the Goods will be better & more to my own Inclination.

In his order to a specific craftsman, Beverley directed Bland to "mention for whom they are & he will be more careful to oblige having worked for me before."145

It is likely that Beverley’s requests for particular tradesmen were more of a burden than an aid to the London merchant. Bland and other consignment merchants, including James Buchanan & Co. and John Norton & Sons, were clearly dealing with tradesmen who specialized in goods for export. This has been demonstrated to be particularly true of the export trades in such goods as linens, woolens, and ironware, which were operated on a

145 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 10 January 1762 and 16 November 1761, Robert Beverley Letterbook.
wholesale level, but it is probable that a particular group of tradesmen in the smaller-scale cabinetmaking and upholstery industries may also be identified as specialists in the export trade—a point which will be examined at some length later in this study.

For the most part, the merchant's choice of tradesmen and goods was left largely to his discretion, owing in great part to his clients' ignorance of the craftsmen, price, and availability of the goods he ordered. Thus, Richard Corbin's order for summer clothing in 1761 included the note to his mercantile suppliers that "I leave . . . it to your choice as I am unacquainted with their Several Manufactures." Even the officious Beverley, in ordering a cross chafing dish from London in 1791, conceded that his correspondents might purchase instead "any other invention which may be fashionable & cheap that can answer the purpose."

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147 Richard Corbin to Messrs. Rumbold & Walker, 3 August 1761, Richard Corbin Letterbook 1758-1768, Colonial Williamsburg.

Though they recognized and even admitted their lack of control over the purchase of their goods, Virginia consumers were clearly not reconciled to accepting what they considered to be inferior merchandise. While Robert Beverley remarked to John Bland that his goods "in general suited tolerably well, some few things excepted," Charles Carter considered a more forceful protest to be necessary: "I was much surprised to find many Articles very indifferently bought, (as Mr Cary's House has long been remarkable for sending the best Goods)." Significantly, Carter went on to credit the fault with the tradesmen rather than Cary, himself, and noted that he hoped that he would not "be so imposed on for the future by the Tradesman in the Purchase of my Goods." 149

In an invoice for goods, including chair bottoms and a window curtain and cornice, sent to the same mercantile house in 1758, George Washington suggested that "particular care . . . be taken in choosing them, the want of which gives some Tradesmen an opportunity of Imposing upon us most Vilely." 150


It is not clear if it was concern for his commercial and personal relationship with the consignment merchant that led the Virginia consumer to direct his complaints about imported goods at the English tradesmen from whom they were purchased. It is readily apparent, however, that an apprehension of being "imposed upon" was a constant theme among those who imported goods in any quantity—a fear that was closely allied to a sense of being viewed as mere provincials. As Washington complained at length to Cary in 1760:

It is needless for me to particularise the sorts, qualities, or taste I would choose to have them in unless it is observ'd, and you may believe me when I tell you that instead of getting things good and fashionable in their several kinds we often have Articles sent us that could only have been used by our Forefathers in the days of yore—'Tis a custom, I have some Reason to believe, with many Shopkeepers, and Tradesmen in London when they know Goods are bespoke for Exportation to palm sometimes old, and sometimes very slight and Indifferent Goods upon Us taking care at the same time to advance 10, 15, or 20 pr Ct. upon them.151

The following year, Washington attempted to safeguard against such imposition in the purchase of a spinet by requesting that Mr. Cary "would bespeak this Instrument

as for himself or for a friend, & not let it be kno[wn] it is intended for Exportation.\textsuperscript{152}

Beverley also appears to have attributed the reception of unsatisfactory goods to the unpalatable English view of the colonies as a cultural backwater, and he argued plaintively that he knew not "why I am not to enjoy the same Priviledge [as Englishmen] . . . unless it arises from the Distance from Thence."\textsuperscript{153} Clearly, constraints upon his political privileges were not the only restrictions feared by the pre-Revolutionary Virginian. This sense of resentment and indignation on the part of the consumer was most explicitly expressed by Peter Lyons of Virginia in 1770:

I know they [the tradesmen] think anything good enough for Virginia, but they should be informed better, and be made to know that the People in Virginia have a good taste and know when they are imposed upon, as well if not better than most of their Gentry or Quality in England, and that when they send to London it is to get the best of Goods in their Kind, not so much regarding price or quality, and that it injures the Merchant as well as the Tradesman

\textsuperscript{152}Washington's concern is particularly noteworthy, as he had already specified that the spinet should be purchased of "Mr. Plinius Harpsicord Maker in South Audley Street, Grosvenor Square." George Washington to Robert Cary, October 1761, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers.

\textsuperscript{153}Robert Beverley to John Bland, 11 August 1765, quoted in Breen, \textit{Tobacco Culture}, 135.
when he sends goods that are indifferent or bad.\textsuperscript{154}

Though Lyons indicated that Virginians ordered British goods, "not so much regarding price,"\textsuperscript{155} it is apparent from other correspondence that importers were, in fact, keenly aware of the prices that they were paying for their goods and ever cautious of the danger of being overcharged. George Washington's letter to Robert Cary in 1771, concerning "A [Bottle] Case bought of Philip Bell at the price of 17 Guineas," reveals that such concern extended to the importation of furniture:

Surely, here must be as great a mistake, or as great an Imposition as ever was offerd by a Tradesman. The Case is a plain one, and such as I could get made in this Country (where work of all kinds is very dear) of the same stuff, and equally as neat for less than four Guineas—is it possible then that 16 Gallon Bottles with ground Stoppers can cost 13 Guineas?—I think I might safely answer NO.\textsuperscript{156}

Similarly, Charles Carter complained in 1763 that "the whole Invoice amounts to much more money than I expected it would, & therfore can't help expressing my Displeasure at the sum total." Carter's assessment was apparently

\textsuperscript{154}Peter Lyons to John Norton & Sons, 25 September 1771, John Norton & Sons Papers.

\textsuperscript{155}Peter Lyons to John Norton & Sons, 25 September 1771, John Norton & Sons Papers.

\textsuperscript{156}August 1771, quoted in Fede, Washington Furniture, 20.
based on a comparison of the prices for goods and insurance charged his neighbors, rather than on a firsthand familiarity with the British market and shipping costs.157

Washington's complaint of the excessive cost of the bottle case is noteworthy for another reason. Crucial to a comprehension of the motives underlying importation is the recognition that, by at least the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Virginians were able to acquire locally furniture comparable in style and quality to that being imported158—"such as I could get made in this Country," as Washington commented. Yet, despite the challenges, costs, and difficulties of overseas transportation, imported English furnishings appear to have actually presented a less expensive alternative to comparable products by Virginia craftsmen. Washington's protest was clearly motivated by his astonishment that the cost of the imported case was higher than that of the

157 Charles Carter to [?], 10 August 1763. Carter's correspondence includes numerous other allegations against his London agents of overcharging on goods and insurance. See, for example, Charles Carter to Concannon & Jordan, 30 October 1760; to Capel & Osgood Hanbury, [12 August] 1759, Carter-Plummer Letterbook.

same object made locally, "where work of all kinds is very dear." His sentiments were shared by his contemporaries, such as Robert Beverley, who excused the large invoice for goods, including an invalid's chair, sent to a London agent in 1763 on the basis that he was "quite tired with Dealing in ye Store at their exorbitant Rates, and shall send to you for every thing I shall ever want."\textsuperscript{159}

Much of the misunderstanding and ill-feeling which arose over a seemingly extravagant charge for English goods may well have been occasioned by the client's ignorance of the current market. Not infrequently, British merchants were charged to purchase goods "of the best sort according to the prices limited."\textsuperscript{160} Yet an understanding that an unrealistically set price could result in goods of questionable quality seems largely to be absent from all but the merchants' correspondence. As

\textsuperscript{159}Robert Beverley to John Bland, 11 October 1763, Robert Beverley Letterbook.

William Lee wrote from London in 1770, "the Goods . . . are lay'd in as well as the prices wou'd admit."\(^{161}\)

Perhaps of greater importance for the trade in imported goods was the planters' relative detachment from the actual economic exchange taking place in London. Due to the speculative nature of the consignment trade, the Virginia planter could be in ignorance of the sale price of his tobacco crop, and, thus, his current financial position for a considerable length of time. Fluctuations in crop prices added to his financial uncertainties and could result in his overextension in purchases or credit.\(^{162}\) As Robert Beverley wrote to John Bland in 1761, "I imagine that I am in your Debt, tho' I can't even form a guess, but I should be glad if you would send me in a sheet how the Account stands between us."\(^{163}\) The magnitude of the problem is revealed in the 1730s request of Robert "King" Carter that an English correspondent


\(^{162}\)Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 93.

send an "acc[oun]t Curr[en]t wch I think I have been without since ye yr 1717."164

The complex and seemingly mysterious English customs system of drawbacks and discounts on tobacco intended for reexport further frustrated the planters' attempts to ascertain their financial position and to advance their interests. As an eighteenth-century observer of the system noted, "in many cases it is very difficult to know whether a law is in force or not: therefore it is no wonder that they are no better understood by too many, whose business it is to execute; and much less by most others, whose interest it is to know the privileges to which they entitle them, and the penalties to which they subject them, that they may reap the benefit of the one, and avoid the punishment of the other."165

Such inequities in the consignment system must certainly at times have fostered a false sense of security on the planter's part. At best, he believed himself capable of quickly redressing the imbalance which had arisen with the yield of his forthcoming crop.

164Robert Carter to [?] Evans, [1731-34], Robert King Carter Letterbooks 1723-1732, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

It was with a sense of self-righteous optimism that Beverley wrote to Bland in London in 1761 concerning an order for a chariot:

Do not conclude that I am embracing those Maxims so generally embraced in this Country; viz that of being in Debt--& making great Promises for the future; those Sir, are Notions wh I condemn as much as you can, and though at this Time I desire you to be a little in advance, it is only because I propose to make you a large consignment wh will fully reimburse you, & hereafter when I send for any Thing I will take care to lodge Cash for those Purposes. 166

Yet less than a year later, Beverley was again in the position of pleading for a substantial extension of credit from the same correspondent:

I am sensible that the purchase of the above Goods added to what I have before sent for from you will have me in yr Debt, but as I design to ship the above mentioned Tobo, I am in Hopes that the Ballance will be nearly equal. 167

In the same year, Virginia’s lieutenant-governor, Francis Fauquier, identified such self-deception as the prime motivation behind the phenomenal increase in planter debt, in his report to the Lords of Trade:

I am entirely of opinion there is a . . . fundamental Cause for this Rise, to wit, the

166 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 16 November 1761, Robert Beverley Letterbook.
167 Robert Beverley to John Bland, June 1762, Robert Beverley Letterbook.
Increase of the Imports, to such a Height that the Crops of Tobacco will not pay for them.\textsuperscript{168}

The practical effect of this debt on the merchant’s purchase of goods for export cannot be fully ascertained, but attitudes voiced outside the formal and polite context of the merchant/planter correspondence suggest an underlying exasperation on the merchant’s part which may well have manifested itself in the quality or price of items purchased. As William Lee of London wrote to his kinsman in Virginia:

Coll F. Thornton has Ship’d 4 hhds of Tobo & sent for about £100 worth of Goods, which I suppose he thinks the Tobo will pay for, as he writes me his Goods are to be bought with ready Money—he will indeed be Satisfied that I should charge Commission on them, but then he expects I am to pay the Freight Charges out of my Pocket. This is Reason & Justice in Virginia is it?\textsuperscript{169}

It was with the same note of frustration that John Norton of London wrote to his son and representative, Hatley, in Virginia in 1771:

\textsuperscript{168}Francis Fauquier to Lords of Trade, 1762, PRO, C.O. 5/1330, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 130.

\textsuperscript{169}William Lee to Philip Ludwell Lee, 28 September 1771 [?], William Lee Letterbook. Despite Lee’s indignation, the Virginia planter could generally expect to "pay no freight for goods from London," in "gratitude" for which he would consign tobacco to his London agent, as documented by Hugh Jones in 1724. Quoted in Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 15.
have just rec'd an Invo from P W Claiborne for his fall Goods, suppose to the amot of upwards of £1100, which really staggers me when he is so largely in arrears, & little or no remittance.

Surprisingly, Norton concluded that he "shall ship [Claiborne's goods] in Robertson."\(^{170}\)

As the English merchants well knew, the extension of credit was crucial to the continued profitable operation of the tobacco trade—not least for new investment in land and labor, but also for the maintenance of favorable commercial relationships with the easily offended planters. An early eighteenth-century observer of the relationship between the Virginia planter and London merchant accounted thus for the mutuality of the association: "they very justly consider their Interests the same and dependant on each other, therefore go hand in hand, without any clashing or Jealousie."\(^{171}\) Yet substantial overextension on the part of a planter could consequently endanger his mercantile partner's own


financial stability and reputation.\textsuperscript{172} As William Lee wrote from London to his brother in Virginia in 1770, "the Good people with you, are in general not the most punctual in the world . . . a delay in the Remittance will hurt me much."\textsuperscript{173} John Bland expressed what was certainly a common sentiment among the mercantile community in his request to Thomas Jones of Virginia for payment of a three-year-old bill for goods: "I shou'd gladly do anything Reasonable to serve you, but am in so many advances that I cannot suffer any to stand unnoticed." Significantly, Bland signed his request as "Your Real Friend."\textsuperscript{174}

The curtailment of credit was a matter of some delicacy, and many an English merchant must have found himself absorbing more debt in order to retain a valued client. Where personal friendship or a face-to-face relationship was involved, a denial of credit was almost certainly more difficult, and John Norton was forced to admonish his son in Virginia "not to advance (except to

\textsuperscript{172}For a more complete discussion of the role of credit in the trans-Atlantic trade, see Price, \textit{Capital and Credit}, esp. Chapters 6 and 7.

\textsuperscript{173}William Lee to Francis Lightfoot Lee, [November 1770], William Lee Letterbooks.

\textsuperscript{174}John Bland to Thomas Jones, 30 January 1767, Jones Family Papers.
particular Persons) more than the Value of their Consignments." Norton's concern was occasioned by the growing indebtedness of many Virginia planters in the late 1760s and the resultant undermining of many English merchants' financial bases. As Norton reminded his son, "our Credit depends upon Punctuality in payments to the Tradesmen & Custom House for Dutys."  

Despite John Norton's apprehension, long-term credit was as well established between a London merchant and his suppliers as it was between the merchant and planter. An essay on credit written after 1772, but not published until 1784, reveals something of the credit system in the export trade to the colonial plantations:

no American or West Indian merchant can fulfill all the orders of his correspondence, without asking credit of his tradesmen till there is time to expect his returns. Hence proceeds the long credit given for goods, from nine months to two years.  

As planters' debts not infrequently extended well beyond this period, however, the merchant could easily find himself in the position of operating at a substantial deficit. Furthermore, such relatively small-scale trades

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175 John Norton to Hatley Norton, 31 March 1769, John Norton & Sons Papers. See also Price, Capital and Credit, Chapter 6.

176 John Hope, Letters on Credit (2d ed. 1784), quoted in Price, Capital and Credit, 119.
of those of the cabinetmaker or upholsterer could scarcely bear the burden of sizable extensions of credit as could such massive and complex financial systems as those of the textiles exporters.\textsuperscript{177}

Even so, as Christopher Gilbert has demonstrated, London cabinetmaking firms of the eighteenth century were not unfamiliar with the late payment of bills—noble or wealthy patrons being most notably and consistently delinquent. As Sir Edward Knatchbull wrote to Thomas Chippendale in 1771, "as I receive my rents once a year, so I pay my Tradesmens Bills once a year wch is not reckoned very bad pay as ye world goes."\textsuperscript{178} If, as might be expected, merchants handling overseas commissions regularly dealt with fairly substantial cabinetmaking firms, able to supply stock goods on short notice, the need for credit may have had little impact upon the type or quality of furnishings purchased for export.

The modification or curtailment of planters' invoices seems to have been a more typical practice of the consignment merchant to reduce the debts owed by his

\textsuperscript{177}Price, Capital and Credit, 119.

\textsuperscript{178}Quoted in Gilbert, Chippendale, 30-32. Gilbert also reveals that Chippendale had several large outstanding balances due him for four years or more and, at his death in 1779, had over £1600 in bad debts.
correspondents. The planters themselves acknowledged the right of their suppliers to thus restrain their expenditures:

I have sent you an Invoice of goods which I am very desirous should be sent to me, if they will not Occasion too great a trouble to you—the meaning of this is. That I have not Better Foundation for it than the twenty hhds tobob sent you last year by Cants. and twenty now on board the Charles. To make the matter as easy as I can I have sent Inclosed Bills of Exchange. . . . But after all it must be Left to your self whether you will sen[d] the Goods or not. 179

Robert Beverley similarly expressed the wish, "if the sending [the goods] wd be attended with the least inconvenience to you, I entreat you not to send it but settle my Acct. . . . I will make Shift without them." 180

John Norton was among those merchants who considered such curtailment to be well within their rights, as he advised Hatley Norton, in Virginia, that "you . . . will be the best judge how to act on the delivery [of Mann Page's goods], when you see what remittance, or Security he can give for payment of so large a debt." 181

179 John Carter to Edward Athawes, 12 August 1735, Carter-Plummer Letterbook.

180 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 17 December 1763, Robert Beverley Letterbook.

actual practice of such reductions was, however, dimly viewed by the planters, and any merchant who so exercised his rights risked his clients' displeasure. Charles Carter thus voiced his dissatisfaction to Charles Goore of Liverpool in 1765: "I hear complaints from everybody, that you have given them nothing for their Tobo and that you have curtailed their Invoices at least one half." On the eve of the Revolution, Landon Carter more clearly revealed the impact of debt on the merchant/planter relationship and, consequently, on the trade in imported goods:

though he [John Backhouse of Liverpool] never tells you so because it would be against his interest, yet you feel when he is cool to you by all that he sells, buys, or does for you.

In fact, Carter's observation reflected a tendency in this relationship that had intensified significantly in the decade preceding the American Revolution away from the trusting "Commercial Friendship" described by Richard Corbin in 1758. The heightened tension may be attributed in part to the growing indebtedness of

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183 Diary of Landon Carter, 20 May 1774, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 136.

184 Richard Corbin to [?], 13 June 1758, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 108.
Chesapeake planters to the British merchants—debt which actually doubled between 1766 and 1776 and which accounted for over 46 percent of the total colonial debt to Great Britain, though representing only 30 percent of the collective population of the American colonies.  

It was not debt alone, however, which fostered a growing sense of unease in Virginia in the late 1760s. As already noted, indebtedness had long been regarded by Chesapeake planters as an accepted, if lamented, byproduct of the tobacco exchange system with England. With a change in response to debt by English merchants, the perception of debt as a positive factor in Virginia society—reflecting access to buying power and apparent autonomy—was transformed into a negative force—implying financial instability and economic enslavement. The latter clearly endangered both the individual and his community.

Lieutenant-Governor Fauquier noted the changing sentiment as early as 1765, remarking that "the Colony is greatly indebted to Great Britain . . . which renders them uneasy, pevish, and ready to murmur at every price also notes that Virginia and Maryland’s per capita debt on the eve of the Revolution was twice that of the other eleven colonies totaled. Breen, Tobacco Culture, 128; Price, Capital and Credit, 12.
occurrence."\textsuperscript{186} Yet Virginia planters still counted at this date on their mutuality of interest with their agents and the vague commitments of "friendship." The authors of the Non-Importation Resolution of 1769 protesting the Townshend Acts clearly alluded to these commitments in expressing their hope "that our Example will induce the good People of our Colony to be frugal in the use and Consumption of British Manufactures, and that the Merchants and Manufacturers of Great Britain may, from motives of Interest, Friendship, and Justice be engaged to exert themselves to obtain for us a Redress of those Grievances, under which the Trade and Inhabitants of America at present labour."\textsuperscript{187}

In fact, as Alison Olson has demonstrated, the Virginia merchants of London had constituted an important lobby since the late seventeenth century on behalf of economic policies and legislation that benefited both the tobacco merchant and planter. Olson also records, however, that this circle had functioned primarily as a social and commercial interest group and information exchange and had acted only secondarily in the role of

\textsuperscript{186}Francis Fauquier to Lords of Trade, 1765, PRO, C.O. 5/1345, quoted in Breen, \textit{Tobacco Culture}, 133.

\textsuperscript{187}Van Schreeven, \textit{Revolutionary Virginia}, 74.
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political advocate. Furthermore, this lobby was demonstrating considerably less activism by the mid-eighteenth century, even as British politicians were becoming increasingly detached from the economic and political realities of American society, and the reciprocity of interest depended on by Virginia planters thus began to erode.188

In addition to the growth in the sheer size of the debt burden sustained by the British merchants involved in the American trade, the relative importance of that trade to England's commercial well-being had also increased throughout the eighteenth century, thereby heightening the dependence of Britain's mercantile community on its trans-Atlantic correspondents.189 Moreover, with the contemporaneous rise of the cargo


189 Brinley Thomas has documented the "Americanization" of English commerce over the course of the eighteenth century from comprising just 10 percent of English foreign trade in 1700 to over 40 percent by 1776. Thomas has also suggested that, with the close of the Seven Years' War, American reliance on Great Britain was lessened just at the moment of the mother country's increasing dependence on colonial materials. Brinley Thomas, "The Rhythm of Growth in the Atlantic Economy of the Eighteenth Century," Research in Economic History 3 (1978): 4, 36.
trade outlined in Chapter I, involving substantial annual credits of £5000 or more in goods sent to a single Virginia merchant, the possibility of financial over-extension and ultimate failure of a London firm substantially committed to the trade became a growing threat.\textsuperscript{190}

It was Britain's two great financial crises of the third quarter of the century which finally fractured the foundations of the merchant/planter relationship.\textsuperscript{191} The crisis of 1763 at the close of the Seven Years' War undoubtedly served to shatter mercantile complacency and to raise the initial specter of failure among English merchants. It took the far more devastating and pervasive credit crisis of 1772, however, following as it did a credit boom and imports of unprecedented height,\textsuperscript{192} to call into question in the minds of both planter and

\textsuperscript{190}Price, Capital and Credit, 127. In November of 1770, William Lee of London remarked to his brother, Francis Lightfoot Lee, in Virginia: "Suppose, I am in advance £10,000 for Goods sent to sundry Merchts, and they delay Remittances, how am I to pay the Tradesmen[?]" William Lee Letterbooks.


\textsuperscript{192}Sheridan, "British Credit Crisis," 162; Breen, Tobacco Culture, 137.
merchant the basic premise of mutual interest underlying their relationship and, more profoundly, Virginians' cultural identification with Great Britain. These questions and their ultimate solutions were to have a fundamental and lasting impact on the trade in imported goods.

As British merchants responded to the growing credit risks of the 1760s through the imposition of demands for interest, curtailment of invoices, denials of bills of exchange, and other tools of financial restraint against their debtors, Virginia planters began to verbalize their indignation, though still calling on the bonds of commercial interest. Thus, William Nelson's confident assertion to John Norton in 1765 that "we are so connected in Interest that we shd have fallen together" was supplanted just three years later by Beverley's less assured and vaguely threatening charge that the merchants "shd consider [that] an Injury done to us must ultimately affect them." When curtailment increasingly gave way to the outright suit for debts by overextended British

merchants, the thin veneer of friendship was irreparably damaged. John Dickinson recorded the extent to which the ramifications of such an action were felt throughout the closely linked economic communities on both sides of the Atlantic:

If creditors sue, and take out executions, the lands and personal estate, as the sale must be for ready money, are sold for a small part of what they were worth when the debts were contracted. The debtors are ruined. The creditors get but part of their debts, and that ruins them. Thus the consumer breaks the shopkeepers; they break the merchants, and the shock must be felt as far as London.194

The 1760s and '70s thus witnessed the planters' growing consciousness that their locally determined concepts of interest and trust based upon mutual dependence could not be sustained in the context of the impersonal realities of trans-Atlantic commerce.195 Initial reactions to this insight were accusations of mercantile betrayal of "true Friendship" and assertions of unjust oppression of "the few Privileges & Comforts of Life wh[ich] this miserable Colony enjoys," as Beverley complained to two of his English

194 John Dickinson, "The Late Regulations Respecting the British Colonies . . . " (1765), quoted in Thomas, "Rhythms of Growth," 34.

195 Breen, Tobacco Culture, 123.
correspondents. Nor was Beverley alone in voicing his opinion in 1765 that "our being so much incumbered arises wholly from their [the merchants'] own Conduct, for they dispose of our Commodities upon such wretched terms, that I am Conscious upon the strictest Frugality & Oeconomy 'Tis impossible for us to keep the Ballance of Trade in our favour." Just a few weeks earlier, Charles Carter had likewise vindicated himself of blame for his financial situation, claiming that "with all . . . frugality, nay even Parsimony, I cannot keep out of de[b]t." Despite such assertions of thrift, however, the increasing number of failures of Virginia estates threw the private issue of financial overextension into public view and forced Chesapeake planters to question the very foundation of their culture and the tangible elements that supported it. As T. H. Breen has remarked:

Chronic indebtedness forced the great Virginia planters to provide excuses for . . . a style of life that had become emblematic of gentry

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196 Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 17 October 1770, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 129; and to John Bland [?], [c. 1763], Robert Beverley Letterbook.

197 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 11 August 1765, quoted in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 139.

culture. Gentlemen who viewed themselves as Old Testament Patriarchs detested having to apologize for private matters. These were concerns over which outsiders rightfully exercised no control.199

Yet the reverberating impact of loss of credit and financial failure on the interdependent economic networks of Virginia ensured that personal indebtedness had become a matter of public relevance. In direct conflict with the obligations of political and community service by which Virginia's paternalistic aristocracy of merit identified itself, debt and the emblems of debt thus became the primary targets in a campaign of self-reform.

Rhetoric decrying the prevalence of extravagance and ostentation had appeared in accounts of the Chesapeake ever since planter indebtedness had first begun to escalate in the 1730s. It was not until the credit crises of the 1760s and '70s, however, that such charges were leveled at the Virginia gentry by critics from within its ranks, generating calls to abandon "insignificant Pride of Dress, the empty Ambition of Gaudy Furniture, or a splendid Equipage" as symbols of the

199Breen, Tobacco Culture, 145. Jack Greene has remarked on the similarity of the Chesapeake gentry's role in the eighteenth century as the center "of local networks of dependence" to that of the contemporary "landed elite of Britain." Greene, Pursuits of Happiness, 94.
degradation of fiscal autonomy and social virtue.\textsuperscript{200} That the loss of economic independence was coincident with the perceived infringement of political rights in the decade preceding the American Revolution undoubtedly served to heighten the planters' reactions to both threats. Thad Tate's observation that British "imperial policy threatened an established ruling class not given to lightly renouncing its power and self-government privileges" may be extended to illuminate that class's economic identity, as well.\textsuperscript{201} This assumption is further supported by Edmund Randolph's contemporary assessment of the "ornament" of the Virginia gentry as a "high sense of personal independence," suggesting that menace to that independence in any form would be vigorously opposed.\textsuperscript{202}

Modern historians have debated at length over the role and significance of Chesapeake debt as a motivating factor in the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{203} Ultimately, there

\textsuperscript{200} Quoted in Greene, "'Virtus et Libertas,'" 67-68.


\textsuperscript{202} Edmund Randolph, History of Virginia, quoted in Greene, "'Virtus et Libertas,'" 64-65.

\textsuperscript{203} Significant discussions of the role of planter debt in the Revolution include Marc Egnal and Joseph A. Ernst, "An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution,"
can be no question that planter indebtedness did not in itself incite the Virginia gentry to revolt. Nevertheless, economic subservience and the physical manifestations of that servitude, including imported furnishings, may well have given practical relevance to the more abstract and theoretical issues of political sovereignty. By simultaneously threatening both the economic and political autonomy on which the Virginia gentry's social dominance was based, British merchants and legislators forced the colonial planter to seek or to create a more feasible and reliable cultural model than that of the mother country—a model that only began to take shape through the act of revolution.

As tangible symbols of the exchange system that fostered economic dependence, imported English goods must certainly have been tainted by the negative responses to this system. Yet substantial evidence survives to suggest that Americans' initial impulse following the

Revolution was to resume former trading patterns with Great Britain, evidenced in part by the renewed vigor of imports documented in Chapter II. This tendency alarmed contemporaries, such as John Ridout of Annapolis, who noted in 1785 that "immense quantities of goods beyond the people's wants or at least beyond their ability to pay for have been imported since last winter."\textsuperscript{204} The following year another Maryland observer recorded his countrymen's obsession with the purchase of "carriages, furniture, silks, lace, jewelry, gowgs and frippery."\textsuperscript{205} James Madison of Virginia concurred that "our trade was never more completely monopolized by Great Britain than it is at this moment,"\textsuperscript{206} and a Virginia newspaper lamented in 1787 that the state's citizens had "religiously preserved the fancies, prejudices, and


\textsuperscript{205}Maryland Journal, Baltimore, 3 August 1786, quoted in Papenfuse, \textit{In Pursuit of Profit}, 145.

customs which they [the British] . . . stamped on our minds for the produce of their manufactures."^{207}

At the basis of this renewed dependence appears to have been Virginia's self-perception as "a supplier of raw materials dependent upon the decisions of merchants outside the Commonwealth."^{208} As Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman have suggested in their investigation of urban development in the colonial South, the growth of a diversified mercantile class and, hence, relative economic autonomy in Virginia before the Revolution was limited to a great extent by the colony’s dependence on tobacco as a staple crop. By virtue of the salient characteristics of tobacco production, including the labor intensity of its cultivation, the limitation of its principal market to Great Britain, and the complex demands of its processing, urban development at the point of the crop’s receipt in England was enhanced and furthered, while the maturation of urban functions within the colony itself was correspondingly retarded.

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Furthermore, the tobacco economy of colonial Virginia contributed to the disparity of wealth and of consumer demand for goods and services that might have fostered mercantile diversification and expansion. The direct importation of goods by Virginia’s wealthy elite was thus a logical solution to the decentralized nature of both the marketing and production of luxury wares within the colony prior to the Revolution.

Yet despite the apparent return after the Revolution to the colonial dependence upon imported goods, evidence suggests that new commercial routes were indeed being embraced in Virginia, particularly for the trade in English furnishings, that dissociated the individual consumer and his taste for imported goods from social censure and economic dishonor, while providing him with a measure of control over his purchases that would previously have been inconceivable. At the heart of this new system were local merchants, whose unprecedented venture in the last quarter of the century into the speculative trade in imported furnishings, as evidenced by contemporary advertisements, has already been explored. By distancing the consumer from the

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trans-Atlantic financial exchange while assuming such hazards of importation as damage in transport, the purchase of inferior goods sight unseen, and unexpected costs and delays in the receipt of goods, Virginia's mercantile class appears to have offered an acceptable and even welcome alternative in the post-Revolutionary era to the traditional procurement of imported furnishings via the tobacco consignment system.

This new native mercantile role had undoubtedly been fostered in part by the demands of the war for self-sufficiency and diversification. In addition, more fundamental changes were occurring in Virginia's economic base that would facilitate the post-Revolutionary expansion of urban functions and native mercantile initiative within the state. These patterns had actually begun to emerge before the Revolution in areas of Virginia where tobacco production was less profitable due to a shortage of labor and poor soils, particularly along the western frontier and portions of the eastern and southern Chesapeake. As planters in these areas had turned earlier in the eighteenth century to the cultivation of less labor intensive crops such as wheat and corn that expanded the colony's trading network and

fostered a more egalitarian and consistent demand for consumer goods and services, mercantile relationships had already been established by the era of the Revolution that would promote the emergence of more fully-developed urban centers to facilitate Virginia commerce in the last quarter of the century.\textsuperscript{211}

A principal benefit of the economic exchange system that developed around the wheat and flour trades was Virginia's unprecedented access to markets and services other than those of Great Britain and the enhancement of extant regional commercial hubs within Virginia by the centrifugal effect of new trading networks. Thus, such small-scale mercantile towns as Norfolk, Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Richmond, and Petersburg, which had initially developed as tobacco inspection stations and trading centers,\textsuperscript{212} became increasingly important links within the "extensive urban systems" that were emerging through the grain trade just before the Revolution.


Located largely within the fall zones of Virginia and Maryland's primary rivers, including the James, Rappahannock, and Potomac, these towns "integrated the commercial staples [of grain and tobacco] of the backcountry and eastern coastal plain" and created forward linkages to more extensive American markets, as well as to pre-existing Atlantic exchanges.  

Perhaps the most crucial of these new markets to Virginia's post-Revolutionary commercial history and the trade in imported goods was that of Baltimore, Maryland. Though founded only in 1730, Baltimore had experienced phenomenal growth in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, due in large part to the progress of the wheat trade, and, on the eve of the Revolution, was already the ninth largest city in America, with nearly 6,000 inhabitants. Via Baltimore, Virginia merchants located in Alexandria, Falmouth, Fredericksburg, and other towns

213 Earle & Hoffman, "Staple Crops and Urban Development," 57, 28. Though an important commercial center in the quarter century preceding the Revolution, Norfolk was to lose ground as a major distribution center after American independence to other towns, notably Baltimore—in part, perhaps, owing to its devastation by fire in 1776 and the British blockade of the port during the war. See Earle and Hoffman, "Staple Crops and Urban Development," 27, 44-46; and Goldenberg, "Virginia Ports," 310, 334.

214 Todd Cooper, "Baltimore Merchants," in Chesapeake Bay in the American Revolution, 282.
along the fall zone attained access after the war to such national and international centers of commerce as Philadelphia and New York. Baltimore thus became a formidable rival to London in the last decades of the eighteenth century for preeminence in Virginia business and culture, including the retail trade in imported goods.\textsuperscript{215}

In fact, Edward Papenfuse has suggested that Chesapeake "retail merchants backed by American capital took over the market for drygoods" completely following the Revolution, with Baltimore at the "center of a movement that led to the demise altogether of the London middleman in the Chesapeake retail import trade." With Baltimore assuming the role of wholesale center for imported goods, as a contemporary Maryland merchant recorded in 1783, American merchants situated within the radius of Baltimore's trading networks, including Virginia, clearly had access to a hitherto inconceivable range of imported consumer goods which could then be passed along to their customers. Furthermore, American merchants purchasing imported goods in quantity on

\textsuperscript{215}Baltimore's usurpation of London's role was completed by the early nineteenth century with the successful conquest, by 1823, of the tobacco consignment trade that had been centered in London for over two centuries. Papenfuse, \textit{In Pursuit of Profit}, 223.
speculation could compete favorably with the prices charged by London consignment firms purchasing and shipping custom-ordered goods on behalf of individual consignors. What was lost in the personalization of the exchange was almost certainly made up in cost and convenience to the consumer.

The concept of the depersonalization of the acquisition of English furnishings is corroborated by evidence suggesting that the tobacco consignment system continued to be the route by which specialized or custom goods were obtained by Virginians despite the near disappearance of the direct importation of other furnishings following the Revolution. Thus, even George Washington, who had largely abandoned the tobacco consignment system in favor of wheat cultivation and who had agitated against planter indebtedness as early as 1769, ordered a harpsichord and a terrestrial globe through his London agents in the 1780s and 1790s. While it seems logical that specialized musical and

216 Papenfuse, In Pursuit of Profit, 218, 179.
217 Fede, Washington Furniture, 44, 53-54. Note also the Skipwiths' importation of a pair of globes, a medicine chest, and a pianoforte from London in the early nineteenth century, at a time when they had begun to make an increasing number of purchases of American furnishings. Invoice, 3 July 1800, and abstract entitled "Skipwith Pianoforte," Skipwith Family Papers.
scientific instruments would have to be custom-ordered directly from London rather than purchased through the available stock of an American merchant vending English goods on speculation, Thomas Jefferson also placed an explicitly detailed order for a pair of tables from London in 1789, to be constructed to his exacting specifications after a model which he had seen on shipboard. Detailing even the quality and appearance of the wood to be utilized, Jefferson's order is evidence that direct importation remained the method of choice where specialized or personal involvement in the selection of goods was required. 218

The dissociation of the importation of English furnishings from the tobacco consignment trade in the post-Revolutionary era may actually have opened the market for such luxury items to a wider American market that had previously lacked the necessary commercial liaisons to facilitate such acquisitions. It unquestionably raises the issue of "invisible" imports coming into Virginia via northern states, including Maryland, Pennsylvania, and even New York. This prospect is further strengthened by the consideration that, prior to the

218 Duplicate of memorandum from Thomas Jefferson to Capt. Colley, 16 November 1789, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
uniform assignment of federal customs regulations after 1789, Virginia customs tariffs on imported cabinetwares were notably higher than those of its neighboring states—as prohibitive as 20 percent ad valorem. In contrast, New York's duty on imported furnishings was 7½ percent, and Maryland's just 2 percent, or 4 percent, if imported in British bottoms. These considerations suggest that Virginia merchants and consumers had alternative and cost-effective options to the acquisition of English manufactured goods via direct importation and underscore the need for further research into Virginia's post-Revolutionary trade with other states.\footnote{E. T. Joy Archives, n.p. Note also that federal customs duties on imported cabinetware rose from 7½ percent in 1790 to 15 percent in 1801 and 33 percent in 1822. While E. Milby Burton argues that such prohibitive duties "must have cut foreign importation to a mere trickle," the continued increase of the tariff suggests that demand remained high and necessitated such protective measures. E. Milby Burton, Charleston Furniture 1700-1825 (Charleston: The Charleston Museum, 1955), 8.}

At the same time, however, it must also be recognized that Virginia's enlarged access to interstate markets following the Revolution also represented vastly broadened cultural exposure in the last years of the eighteenth century. The trade routes that made possible the purchase of cheaper imported goods via Baltimore and
Philadelphia likewise facilitated the acquisition of furniture manufactured in the well-established cabinet-making shops of those cities, while the newly expanded urban centers of Virginia that were sustained by thriving interstate commerce attracted a growing class of skilled craftsmen to satisfy consumer demand for sophisticated cabinetware and upholstered goods. Virginians' detachment from British affiliations was almost certainly furthered by the virtual collapse of the tobacco market after 1793 and by the federal government's vastly improved provisions in the last decade of the century for the repayment of debts owed to British merchants, thereby removing Virginians' last buffer from the economic realities and redefinition of the American Revolution.

220 A representative instance of such shifting patterns of consumer behavior is Robert Beverley's purchase of three dozen windsor chairs "painted green, & . . . . an fashionable colour" from Philadelphia in 1793, in sharp contrast to his pre-Revolutionary buying habits. Robert Beverley to Owen Jones, 13 June 1793, Robert Beverley Letterbook. Evidence of Virginians' importation of windsor chairs from London prior to the Revolution also survive, including invoices of goods for Mann Page and Nathaniel Lyttleton Savage from John Norton & Sons. Invoice, 22 February 1770, John Norton & Sons Papers; invoice, 1773, Brock Collection, Norton-Savage-Dixon Papers.

As Virginians thus began to participate in the formation of a national American character after 1783, their tastes, possessions, and cultural emblems began likewise to evolve through changing patterns of economic, political, and social interaction. Shifting trends in both the allure of imported English furnishings and the methods of their acquisition clearly reflect this process of cultural redefinition and provide meaningful insight into the transformation and maturation of Virginia's identity in the second half of the eighteenth century.
Chapter IV
IMPORTED FURNITURE AND ITS MAKERS

The physical evidence of English furniture importation is not extensive—only some two dozen objects surviving with histories of ownership in eighteenth-century Virginia have been identified to date. This evidence, however, is considerably amplified by written orders and receipts for goods and by a study of the London cabinetmakers engaged in exportation, including the substantial body of their labeled and documented products. A synthesis of this information provides crucial insight into Virginians' importation of furniture, particularly a sense of the range of goods and services available to the American consumer and a concept of the English cabinetmaking system in which these wares were produced.

As noted in Chapter III, an examination of documents of the consignment trade quickly reveals that the Virginia planter rarely played an important personal role in the selection of suppliers for his imported goods.
This seems to have been particularly true in the case of imported furnishings, and Virginia consumers evinced little familiarity with or curiosity about the English cabinetmakers contracted to fulfill their orders for goods, even in instances where the importer had had an opportunity to develop the necessary contacts through travel in England or previous importation experience. Thus, while George Washington received several extensive shipments of cabinetware and upholstery goods from the London shop of Philip Bell between 1759 and 1765, his correspondence from this era with Robert Cary, the agent responsible for the purchase of those goods, discloses little interest in Cary's choice of Bell or personal observations on the quality of the products, other than a forceful complaint regarding the cost of Bell's bottle case. Washington may, in fact, have been introduced to Bell's work through his marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis in 1759, who had received a mahogany bureau by Bell through Cary & Co. in 1757. It is far more likely, however, that Washington "married" into the Custis's established mercantile relationship with Cary, thereby

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222 Orders and invoices, March and August 1759, March 1760, March 1761, April 1762, 13 April 1763, and December 1765, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers.

223 Invoice, 1757, Custis Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
inheriting the merchant's pre-existing business association with Philip Bell and other London craftsmen supplying the export trade.

The concept of a community of specialists serving the export market is well supported by the available information about identifiable craftsmen involved in the trade. The examination of family and mercantile papers recording economic interchange between Virginia and England in the second half of the eighteenth century has been invaluable in isolating the names of some eleven London cabinetmakers or upholsterers supplying their goods to the Virginia market in this period. While the dates of these references range over a half century, from 1750 to 1800, an analysis of these craftsmen's business establishments, trade, and commercial practices suggests some vital links within the structure of the London cabinetmaking trade that may provide further clues as to the nature and scope of English furniture exportation to the American colonies.

One of the most striking revelations of such an analysis is the physical proximity of the majority of these craftsmen. Of the eleven individuals or firms named in the documents, eight are recorded as carrying on their businesses within a few miles of each other in the
City of London. The earliest such reference is to a Mr. Belchier, who supplied £4/13/- of "cabinetware" to John Mercer of Virginia in 1750. This reference has been associated with John or Jonathan Belchier, a "Cabinet & Looking-Glass-Maker at the Sun on the South-side of St. Pauls," who is known by several pieces of cabinetware of the second quarter of the eighteenth century which bear his printed label (fig. 1) and by a body of documented furnishings at Erddig, in Wales. Also working from a shop in St. Paul's Churchyard was Philip Bell, already mentioned as Washington's primary supplier of cabinetware in the third quarter of the century. Bell carried on his trade at "the White Swan" against the south gate of the churchyard, having


225 Ledger entry, August 1750, John Mercer Ledgers 1725-1750, Bucks County Historical Society (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg).

succeeded Elizabeth and Henry Bell, almost certainly his mother and father, at this location.227

Philip Bell is recorded in various contemporary sources, including London directories, the City License Books, and the records of the Upholders' Company, as a "citizen and vintner," as well as upholsterer or cabinet-maker, between 1758 and 1775.228 During the same period, a numbering system of addresses was being introduced to London, and Bell's shop at "the White Swan" was apparently first assigned No. 18, then No. 23 St. Paul's Churchyard. Bell was succeeded at No. 23 by Henry Kettle after 1774, as evidenced by Kettle's trade label (fig. 2). Kettle had earlier operated from a neighboring shop at No. 18 St. Paul's Churchyard between 1768 and 1774, in partnership with William Henshaw. Although neither Kettle nor Henshaw have been firmly linked to the

227Henry Bell succeeded Coxed and Woster at "the White Swan" after 1736. His trade label and that of Elizabeth Bell are identical but for the name, and Elizabeth Bell retained the same design after taking her son, presumably Philip, into the business. Philip's succession to head of the firm probably took place by 1758 and had undoubtedly occurred by 1759, as indicated by the Washington accounts. Heal, London Furniture Makers, 6, 13-14; Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 61-62.

228Manuscript master-index to Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, Temple Newsam House, Leeds, hereinafter cited as DEFM Index.
Virginia market, it is quite likely that they were involved in the export trade in cabinetmaking, as Henshaw's trade card prior to 1768 proclaimed that merchants, as well as "Gentlemen, . . . & Others may depend upon being serv'd with the very best Goods, at the most Reasonable Prices." Similarly, Belchier's successor at "the Sun," Thomas Atkinson, advertised "all sorts of Cabinet Work, Chairs, Looking Glasses, Coach Glass, Spring Curtains, Window Blinds, and all Sorts of Upholstry Goods, Made after the Newest fashion, Wholesale and Retail," suggesting that Atkinson maintained an inventory of stock wares that would have been available for exportation.

Not far from St. Paul's Churchyard were the shops of Francis Gilding, and Seddon, Sons & Shackleton, at Nos.

229 There is a certain amount of confusion regarding the change in Bell's address from No. 18 to No. 23 St. Paul's Churchyard, and the possibility exists that Bell actually moved to No. 23 from No. 18, where he was succeeded by Henshaw and Kettle. Heal, London Furniture Makers, 14, 81; Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 62, 422, 510.

230 Heal, London Furniture Makers, 1, 8, pl. 1. A review of other cabinetmakers' and upholsterers' trade cards reveals that the announcement of goods available at wholesale and for "Merchants & Captains of ships" was frequently accompanied by the notice, "for Exportation." See, for example, the trade card of Pierce Hall, c. 1765, Banks Collection, Dept. of Prints and Drawings, British Museum, hereinafter cited as BM.
113 and 150 Aldersgate Street, respectively. Francis Gilding is linked to Virginia furniture importation by a receipt for three looking glasses, valued at £3/6/6, supplied to Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, Virginia, by the London merchants, Edward Hunt & Son, in 1770. Gilding and his apprentice, later partner, Francis Banner, appear in London directories between 1761 and 1796, first at the Aldersgate Street address, then at No. 48 Clerkenwell Close. Seddon, Sons & Shackleton did not locate at 150 Aldersgate Street until 1784, but George Seddon, the firm's founder, and his sons, Thomas and George, had earlier carried on their business at other premises in Aldersgate Street. The firm existed as Seddon, Sons & Shackleton only for a period of ten years, between 1790 and 1800, during which time it supplied bed furniture of £10 value, including "2 Flanders Bed ticks . . . 2 Bolsters & 4 Pillows" and "1 Ticken Mattrass with Leather on one Side" to St. George

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231 Shop note, 13 July 1770, and receipt, 28 July 1770, Robert Carter Accounts 1736-1804, Carter Family Papers

232 Heal, London Furniture Makers, 63; DEFM Index.

233 The firm had previously been located at London House, Aldersgate Street, from circa 1750, at No. 158 Aldersgate between 1763 and 1770, and at No. 150 Aldersgate until 1784. Heal, London Furniture Makers, 161-62.

234 Thomas Shackleton was son-in-law to George Seddon, Sr. Heal, London Furniture Makers, 162.
While no documentation of Seddon's exportation of cabinetware to Virginia has been found, the firm's drawing room furniture is documented to have been as widely scattered as Guernsey, Philadelphia, and Charleston in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while "a very capital billiard table, made by Seddon's" was acquired by William Hickey of Calcutta, India in 1791. These diverse instances suggest that the Seddon firm probably engaged in the export trade with some regularity.

Slightly to the east of St. Paul's Churchyard and Aldersgate Street in the City is Cornhill, where George Kemp carried on his glass-grinding and cabinetmaking trades at "the Easy Chair." Kemp, who rose to the position of Master of the Upholders' Company in 1788, supplied a case of looking glasses, including a "large

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235 Shop note, 10 September 1790, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary.


237 Raleigh Downman to George Kemp, 31 January 1766, Joseph Ball Letterbook. The sign of "the Easy Chair" is a previously unrecorded address for Kemp.

238 Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 504.
Glass in [a] Mahogany & gilt frame" to Raleigh Downman upon the latter's removal from England to Moratticco Hall in Virginia in December of 1765. By 1769, Kemp had removed to "the Golden Ball," No. 64 Cornhill, where he was recorded by the London directories until 1797 (fig. 3). Located directly north, at No. 67 London Wall, was the upholstery and cabinetmaking shop of Kent, Luck, & Kent, who supplied a cargo of goods, including "A Pair large Piere Glasses," to Sir Peyton Skipwith of Mecklenburg County, Virginia, in 1799.

Mention may be made finally of two other cabinetmakers residing in this district and having links to the furniture trade to Virginia. The first, Edward Polhill, is represented in the documents by a single cargo of twelve side and two arm chairs, upholstered in leather, and six green Windsor chairs shipped to George

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239 Raleigh Downman to George Kemp, 31 March 1766, Joseph Ball Letterbook.

240 Kemp is recorded as "glass-grinder and cabinetmaker" at this address in Kent's London Directory for 1769 and Bailey's Complete Guide for 1770 in partnership with a craftsman named Gould. After 1786, he was joined at the Golden Ball by his son. DEFM Index.

Washington at Mount Vernon in 1764. London directories record Polhill as an upholsterer at No. 7 Watling Street between 1768 and 1777. A contemporary, Thomas Rumball, worked from his premises at No. 29, The Minories, between 1773 and 1786, before moving to 36 Wood Street, Cheapside, by 1789. A cashbook of the firm of John Norton & Sons reveals frequent payments to Rumball during his residence in the Minories, between 1770 and 1781, including payments for sea bedding and furniture for Virginia-bound ships.

The proximity of these craftsmen, each of them having a documented involvement with the export trade to Virginia, takes on added significance when viewed in light of Edward Joy’s dissertation at London University on the cabinetmaking trade in eighteenth-century London. Joy’s study included a plotting of cabinetmaking firms to determine areas of greatest

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243 Heal, London Furniture Makers, 141.
244 Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 770.
246 The following discussion of London cabinetmaking locales is derived from Joy, "London Furniture Industry," and the E. T. Joy Archives.
concentration. He isolated three major locales: that around St. Martin's Lane, the Strand, and Long Acre; the neighborhood of Covent Garden, Oxford Street, and Soho; and the area of the City, Holborn, Clerkenwell, and St. Paul's Churchyard. Joy's research also revealed a hierarchy of fashionability inherent in this system of neighborhoods. Thus, while St. Paul's Churchyard had been a fashionable locale for cabinetmakers in the early eighteenth century, the emphasis had shifted to the St. Martin's Lane area by the middle of the century, with the presence of such major firms as Chippendale and Haig, Goodison, Hallett, and Vile and Cobb. The Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road area grew in importance throughout the century, eventually to supersede that of St. Martin's Lane, while the City and St. Paul's Churchyard diminished in fashionability, though not in concentration, after mid-century. By the period under examination, therefore, the above-mentioned firms in the City exporting to Virginia represented a third level within the fashionable London cabinetmaking trade. Confirming such a relationship among these firms is their overwhelming use of trade cards and printed labels, a
practice generally scorned by their more prominent contemporaries in the trade.\textsuperscript{247}

The printed trade devices of other cabinetmakers in the City area lend further support to the existence of a mid-level export cabinetmaking community within eighteenth-century London. Numerous examples survive that specified the availability of a wide variety of goods "Wholesale and Retail . . . for Exportation," promising that "Merchants, Traders, Captains of Ships &c. may be supplied with any Quantity . . . Warranted to stand in any Climate."\textsuperscript{248} Located along such streets in the City as Leadenhall, Fenchurch, and Lombard, the craftsmen advertising these wares and services were undoubtedly taking advantage of the proximity of such

\textsuperscript{247} Gilbert, Chippendale, 25. Of the exporting firms discussed here, only those of Thomas Rumball and Edward Polhill are not documented to have utilized such advertising devices.

\textsuperscript{248} See, for example, the trade cards and labels of City cabinetmakers and upholsterers Samuel Burton, Francis Pyner, Harris & Moseley, John Hatt, and John Speer, in the Banks and Heal Colls., BM. Also linked to the American market is Robert Gammage of "the Crown" in St. Paul's Churchyard, who supplied walnut chairs to James Logan of Philadelphia in 1712. Another well-documented exporter of furniture residing in the area was Giles Grendey in Clerkenwell, near Aldersgate, who is known to have supplied a thriving export market, particularly to Spain. Grendey has not, however, been associated with the export trade to the American colonies. Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 328, 371-72.
pivotal mercantile assembly sites as the East India House, in Leadenhall Street; the Royal Exchange, Cornhill; and the South Sea House, off Bishopsgate. Joined by the manufacturers and purveyors of packing cases and trunks, such as William Overley, who offered "Ruff or Smooth Packing Chests or Cases" to be had at the sign of "the East India House," these cabinetmakers and upholsterers clearly formed a community of wholesalers and exporters that catered to the demands of the international market, with London at its core.249

It is revealing to contrast this group of lesser London cabinetmakers with three other craftsmen who may also be associated with the exportation of furnishing goods to Virginia, each of them having executed commissions for Virginia's royal governors in the 1750s and '60s. Two of these individuals are identified as upholsterers in the Lord Chamberlain's Wardrobe Accounts for the royal governor's chapel in Virginia—the first, John Trotter, in 1755-56 and 1758-59, and the second, William France, in 1767-68. The furnishing of the chapels of the royal governors was clearly regarded as a royal commission, as the Wardrobe accounts contain commissions to the same craftsmen for "His Majesty's"

249 Trade card of William Overley, Heal Coll., BM.
chapels in Barbados, the Bahamas, and Georgia, among other colonies.\textsuperscript{250} Both Trotter and France had premises in the more fashionable London cabinetmaking districts, Trotter in Soho, between 1755 and 1792, and France in St. Martin's Lane until his death, around 1770.\textsuperscript{251} Like Trotter, who was appointed "Upholder" to George II, France received commissions from both the royalty and nobility of England, including work done for Lord Mansfield at Kenwood between 1768 and 1770. Included in this commission were furnishings which reflected the collaborative efforts of France, Thomas Chippendale, and Robert Adam.\textsuperscript{252}

The third craftsman who may be linked to a commission for one of Virginia's royal governors was William Fenton, who received payments between 1768 and 1769 from the Baron de Botetourt's secretary, for work carried out at Botetourt's Grosvenor Street house in

\textsuperscript{250}Lord Chamberlain's Wardrobe Accounts, PRO, L.C. 9/289, 291, 301, 304, 315 (Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilm, Virginia State Library). It is significant to note that these chapels were equally richly furnished with "Crimson Genoa damask" regardless of whether the governor ruled in absentia (the Earl of Loudoun in the 1750s) or was resident in the colony (Lord Norborne Berkeley, Baron de Botetourt, 1768-69).


\textsuperscript{252}Edwards, \textit{Dictionary of English Furniture}, 239.
London, as well as "for Goods sent to Virginia." Fenton, like Trotter and France, was undoubtedly not in the mainstream of London cabinetmakers supplying the export trade. Residing in Suffolk Street, Haymarket in the fashionable Strand and St. Martin’s Lane district, Fenton was directly responsible to Botetourt or his agent, without the intermediary of a London merchant. Nor was Fenton’s account with Botetourt based on the type of credit system which existed between merchants and the Virginia planters, but was satisfied by means of bank drafts on Drummond’s Bank in London.\(^{253}\)

Further insight into the relative role within the London cabinetmaking trade of the known exporters of furniture to Virginia is gained through an examination of documentation concerning the size of their establishments. Of particular value to such an enquiry are insurance valuations of a firm’s stock and premises and

\(^{253}\) Drummonds Bank vouchers, 1768-69, Botetourt Papers, Gloucestershire Record Office (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg); Heal, London Furniture Makers, 57. While Botetourt’s account with Fenton includes detailed descriptions of upholstery and cabinet goods shipped to the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg between 1768 and 1769, these items are not being considered herein as representative of the type and quality of goods available to the Virginia market. It is interesting to note that the account includes charges to the customer for freight and porterage, in contrast to the traditional arrangement existing within the tobacco consignment trade. See notes 68 and 169 above.
various records relating to a craftsman's employees and apprentices. Taken for the exporting firms as a whole, this evidence suggests some variety in the scale of premises and operations.

The earliest information of this nature available for this group of craftsmen is in reference to Jonathan Belchier of St. Paul's Churchyard. While Belchier's 1717 insurance policy covered the "goods and merchandise in his Dwelling-House only and not elsewhere,"254 thus providing little information concerning the size of his business, Belchier is recorded in 1741 as having taken on William Albrook as an apprentice.255 Philip Bell likewise had an apprentice, William King, from 1766 to 1774, as revealed by the Upholders' Company Records, of which Bell was a member. Earlier in his career, between 1758 and 1764, when he was supplying goods to Washington, Bell is recorded as having employed between one and three non-freemen for periods ranging from three months to a year.256 Bell's successor, Kettle, was apparently operating on a somewhat larger scale, as he employed a total

254Sun Insurance Records, Guildhall Library (transcription, DEFM Index).
255Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 59.
256City License Books, Vols. 2 and 4, Corporation of London Record Office (transcription, DEFM Index).
of thirty-two non-freemen between 1757 and 1781 for various periods from six weeks to a year, in addition to having three apprentices.\textsuperscript{257}

Like Kettle, George Kemp of Cornhill also took on three apprentices, including his son, George, although no more than one served at a time.\textsuperscript{258} Kemp’s business also required the services of a number of non-freemen, including ten in 1765 for a period of three months,\textsuperscript{259} although the valuation of his utensils and stock at No. 64 Cornhill were relatively low—just £400 in 1777—while an insurance policy of 1781 records a warehouse at this site valued at £400.\textsuperscript{260} Thomas Rumball’s valuations for utensils and stock were somewhat higher during this period, ranging from £400 in 1776 to a peak of £920 in 1782.\textsuperscript{261}

\textsuperscript{257}City License Books, Vols. 1, 2, and 7; Mortimer’s Universal Director, 1763 (transcription, DEFM Index).

\textsuperscript{258}Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 504.

\textsuperscript{259}Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 504. Note that this is the same year in which Kemp shipped a case of looking glasses to Raleigh Downman of Virginia.

\textsuperscript{260}Beard and Gilbert have suggested that Kemp may have been manufacturing at other locations than Cornhill, accounting in part for his low insurance valuations. Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 504.

\textsuperscript{261}Sun Insurance Records (transcription, DEFM Index).
The firm of Gilding and Banner appears to have operated on a significantly larger scale, as revealed by the employment of thirty non-freemen for a six-week period in 1759, fifty non-freemen for four-and-a-half months in 1778, and another fifty for three months the following year. In addition, Gilding had four apprentices between 1767 and 1792, including his future partner, Banner, apprenticed in 1772, and another youth for whom he paid an apprenticeship fee of £105 in 1792. Gilding's insurance valuations are also substantial, including £2500 in stock and £2500 for additional stock in open yards and sheds in 1790, and £2000 for workshops and warehouses in Long Lane, Smithfield, in 1792.

Far outstripping any of these firms was that of Seddon, which has been characterized as "the largest furniture-making firm in London in the last quarter of the 18th century when it employed more people, held more extensive stocks and produced a wider range of goods than any other furniture-making business." The size and

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262 City License Books, Vols. 2 and 9 (transcription, DEFM Index).
263 Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 339.
264 Sun Insurance Records (transcription, DEFM Index).
265 Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 793.
diversity of the Seddon firm are confirmed by damage estimates of £20,000 in a fire at the firm in 1768, and a visitor to the factory in 1786, Sophie von La Roche, recorded a building of six wings and some 400 employees. Shortly before St. George Tucker's purchase of bed furniture from the firm in 1790, an annual inventory valued the total stock at over £100,000.266

The insurance records of two of those cabinetmakers involved in the Virginia trade, George Kemp and Thomas Rumball, suggest that some of the craftsmen in this group achieved a degree of economic diversification, particularly through the ownership and management of rental properties. Thus, Kemp's policy for 1766 includes a valuation of £1200 on an empty house of five storeys in Cornhill, that of 1777 a house in Oxford Street insured for £500 and another in Kingsland Road, with a stable, for £700. Again in 1781 and 1784, Kemp insured houses for a total of £1000 and £600, respectively.267 Significantly, Kemp is also known to have been letting houses and collecting rents on behalf of his Virginia client and friend, Raleigh Downman, in the mid-1760s, while Downman

266 Edwards, Dictionary of English Furniture, 69; Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 793-98.

267 Sun Insurance Records (transcription, DEFM Index).
advised Kemp in 1768 that he would be unable to consign the cabinetmaker any tobacco in that year, suggesting that Kemp was not merely an anonymous London craftsman supplying the American export market, but an involved participant in the trans-Atlantic economy.268

Like the insurance policies of Kemp, those of Thomas Rumball include valuations for houses owned by Rumball and in the tenure of others in both 1775 and 1779.269 In addition, a cashbook of John Norton & Sons reveals another facet of Rumball's economic interests that closely links him to the Virginia trade. As already noted, Rumball supplied upholstery and furniture to outfit the ship London on her voyages to Virginia. Rumball's involvement clearly extended further, however, as the cashbook records dividend payments to the cabinetmaker for the ship's first and second voyages in 1773 and 1775, then payments from the ship's owners for "his 1/16th Share said Ship" in 1776 and 1777.270 The examples of Kemp and Rumball thus not only indicate economic

268 Raleigh Downman to Stephen Renaud, 20 December 1765 and 14 August 1760; to Edward Athawes, 20 December 1765 and 14 August 1766; and to George Kemp, 31 January 1766 and [?] 1768, Joseph Ball Letterbook.

269 Sun Insurance Records (transcription, DEFM Index).

270 Ledger entries, 29 July 1773, 24 July 1775, 29 April 1776, and 17 March 1777, John Norton & Sons Cashbook.
diversification on the part of these London cabinet-makers, but also demand further inquiry into the nature and extent of the involvement of London craftsmen in the Virginia trade.

This analysis of the cabinetmakers responsible for the exportation of goods to Virginia must also take into account the craftsmen's perceptions of themselves within the larger community of the London furniture trade. It has already been remarked that the usage of trade cards and printed labels was a widespread tactic among the lesser firms in the City, but closer examination of the labels of Philip Bell reveals more clearly the underlying cultural participation inherent in these devices. Bell's earliest known label, only a single example of which exists, is identical to those of his parents in all respects except the cabinetmaker's name. Bell is better known, however, by the body of works on which a second version of label was affixed (fig. 4), which moved radically away from the late Baroque format and style of Elizabeth and Henry Bell's labels into a full-blown

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271 Geoffrey Wills, Craftsman and Cabinetmakers of Classic English Furniture (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), 97, fig. 94. Not surprisingly, this example reflects considerable wear in the engraving plate in comparison to the earlier versions of the same label used by Henry and Elizabeth Bell.
Rococo mode (figs. 5, 6). In fact, Bell's second label was designed by Matthew or Matthias Darly, who was at the forefront of the Rococo movement in English design in the mid-eighteenth century among the artists and craftsmen of the St. Martin's Lane set. Furthermore, Bell's card incorporates furniture designs in a fully-developed English Rococo style that would undoubtedly have been recognized as near quotations from Chippendale's Director, while the form of the white swan device is strikingly similar to an invitation card designed by Chippendale and engraved by Darly for a subscription event at Cesar Crouch's cabinet shop at "the Black Swan" in St. Paul's Churchyard. Not unique for the period in its overall concept and design, Philip Bell's trade card would have identified him as one of a community of fashionable cabinetmakers and upholsterers in


mid-eighteenth-century London. Later in his career, Bell was to adopt yet a third style of label, whose restrained format and simplified type were almost certainly dictated by the decline of the Rococo and the emergence of Neoclassicism in English art and design in the third quarter of the century (fig. 7). Bell's self-styled successor, Henry Kettle, was to adopt a strikingly similar style for his trade label, as well, thereby closely allying himself with the consumer base to which Bell had catered (compare fig. 2).

Other methods of real or implied association with this community engaged in by one or more members of this group of known exporters included subscriptions and memberships. George Seddon was numbered among the subscribers to the first edition (1754) of Chippendale's Director, while both Henry Kettle and William Kent, of Kent, Luck & Kent, subscribed to Thomas Sheraton's Drawing Book in 1793. Kent was also a subscriber to Sheraton's Cabinet Dictionary of 1803, in which the firm was listed among the city's master cabinetmakers.

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275 Compare, for example, the closely related trade cards of John Platt and T. Williams, both of Covent Garden, in Heal, London Furniture Makers, 141, 202.

276 Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 713, 510, 504.
Francis Gilding is linked by an inscription to a copy of Ince and Mayhew's *Universal System* of 1760–62\(^{277}\) and also subscribed in 1778 to *A Compleat Treatise on Perspective* by Thomas Walton. As a member of the Society for Arts and Manufactures in 1790–91, Gilding followed the practice of George Kemp, who had become a Fellow of the Society in 1762.\(^{278}\) These incidences clearly suggest that there were a number of recognized methods to imply fashionability and cultural identity within the London cabinetmaking trade, and that those craftsmen involved in exportation were eager to participate within this larger community.

The identification of specific cabinetmakers and upholsterers concerned in the export market also provides a more complete image of the trans-Atlantic furnishings trade by determining the range of goods and services available to the colonial consumer through these London establishments. In addition to an examination of surviving furniture and invoices for goods shipped to Virginia, a study of the products and commissions

\(^{277}\)The inscription reads "Mr. Russell at Mr. Gildings in Dinsdale Court Ald[ersgate] Street." This copy is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. \textit{DEFM} Index.

\(^{278}\)Beard and Gilbert, \textit{English Furniture Makers}, 339, 504.
executed by these artisans for the home market more nearly achieves a comprehension of the scope of their trade and, of equal significance, identifies those forms, fashions, and services that were rejected or overlooked by Virginia buyers.

Attention must be directed briefly at the descriptive terms used by Virginians to qualify their orders for British goods. The term, "neat," above all, is almost ubiquitous in orders for imported furnishings, such as "a neat plain table" or chairs that were "large neat and fashionable." In modern usage, "neat" has come to be generally synonymous with a lack of ornament, and because of its frequent juxtaposition in eighteenth-century orders with "plain," it has often been assumed by decorative arts scholars to be an indication of simple tastes among Virginians.

Yet equal weight must also be given to references in which "neat" is clearly not being used as a synonym for "without ornament," such as Robert Beverley’s order for a bedstead with posts that were "neat but not carved."  

279 Robert Beverley to John Bland, 1 July 1762, Robert Beverley Letterbook; George Washington to James Gildart, 5 June 1764.

280 Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 16 July 1771, Robert Beverley Letterbook.
The mid-eighteenth-century accounts of William and John Linnell provide additional instances of the usage of "neat," in which the term appears instead to be an indication of quality in materials, execution, and finish. One such reference makes quite obvious the distinction between "neat" and "plain":

For making and carving a pair of half length picture frames very neatly carved with a Venus head and feathers at top and [foliage] on each side, [foliage] at bottom, and a double French shell in the middle[,] drops of old fruit and flowers all down the sides pelmets.281

In fact, the predominant synonym for "neat" in eighteenth-century dictionaries was "elegant, but without dignity or grandeur," while "plain" was defined quite differently as being "void of ornament; simple." As "dignity" was equated with "grandeur of mien" and "elevation of aspect,"282 it becomes apparent that "neatness" in furniture was a designation of quality craftsmanship and seemly fashionability without

281Quoted in Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, William and John Linnell (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 142-43.

ostentation, rather than a reference to specific design or stylistic characteristics.

An understanding of the importance of propriety and decorum in eighteenth-century decorative arts is a crucial element in comprehending the expectations and demands that Virginia planters made on their English agents. Thomas Chippendale’s remarks to his patron, the Earl of Dumfries, in 1757 regarding his furniture commission sets forth this concept quite clearly:

Your furniture . . . must be well considered both as to design and proportion, that a nobleness and propriety suitable to each appartment may be seen through the whole, in fine, I could wish that each piece of furniture may be designed in so proper a manner as to speak the appartment intended for[…] [My] idea My lord is that a drawing room calls for one sort of ornament and a dining room &c for another, and all other rooms suitable to their use intended. [83]

Similarly, questions of social station, as well as issues of urban versus rural and private versus public functions, were all to be carefully considered in the final design decision.

Yet, while Virginians appear to have recognized that overt ostentation would be inappropriate to a lifestyle

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[83] Quoted in Gilbert, Chippendale, 131.
characterized as "republican," they were extremely eager to appear to be in step with the latest metropolitan fashions in London. It is in the context of changing fashions that one should examine the "plainness" of English furniture imported to Virginia in the second half of the eighteenth century, by considering that England in 1750 was on the verge of a stylistic revolt. Plainness or restraint, in surfaces, ornamentation, and form, may thus be viewed as symptoms of an emerging neoclassical taste, rather than merely as an inclination for simplicity of form and ornament. This attitude is reflected in the statement made by Peter Manigault of Charleston, South Carolina in 1771, whose goods to be sent from England were to be "the plainer the better so that they are fashionable."  

The Virginia consumer's reliance on his agent to recognize and select appropriate, yet fashionable goods was clearly considerable. Meriwether Shelton's 1772 order for a dining table included a request for "Carv'd frames if Carving is the taste at present, if not they may be made in any other way that is most genteal," thus

284 Quoted in Fede, Washington Furniture, 8.

285 Peter Manigault to Benjamin Stead, 2 April 1771, Peter Manigault Letterbook (transcription, MESDA files).
firmly placing the burden of the decision as to what constituted gentility on his agent. In this context, it becomes apparent that style was less important than stylishness, and quality was paramount. It is not surprising, then, that English merchants purchasing goods for American clients patronized a small community of London craftsmen, who could be relied upon to provide goods of high quality and fashionable, if consistent, styling.

Perhaps the most important element of the output of these craftsmen is that for which the physical evidence has long since disappeared—the fragile textile and paper goods that they provided in their capacity as upholsterers. A mid-eighteenth century observer noted that the eminent role of the upholsterer was that of "a Connoisseur in every article that belongs to a House,"\textsuperscript{286} and the individuals identified herein certainly recognized the distinction that the title of upholsterer imparted to its bearer, as evidenced by their almost

\textsuperscript{286}Quoted in Peter Thornton, \textit{Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 99. Thornton explores this theme further and traces the professional development of the upholsterer in Chapter IV.
unanimous adoption of the designation. While the exceptionally vast and sophisticated upholstery capabilities of the Seddon firm cannot be assumed to be typical of those involved in the American export trade, even the far smaller operations of such craftsmen as Philip Bell or George Kemp appear to have supported the full range of upholstery-related activities and goods, from damask bed curtains to check mattrasses, and Wilton carpets to paper hangings.

The furnishing of the bedstead and the provision of related goods to make a room "uniformly handsome and genteel" was clearly considered by Virginians to be an indispensable skill of the export upholsterer, judging by the surviving orders and receipts for such goods. The elaboration of these ensembles was considerable and is documented in detail in surviving accounts. As early as 1757, George Washington was shipped a cargo of English goods that included a bedstead and hangings, three pairs of window curtains, an easy chair, six side chairs, and

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287 The only exceptions to this are Jonathan Belchier, although his documented work at Erddig suggests that he had at least some of the skills of an upholsterer, and Thomas Rumball, whose involvement in supplying ship’s furniture suggests the more limited role of a joiner. Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 59-60, 770.

one arm chair, all fitted up in yellow silk and worsted
damask fabric at a cost of more than £45.\textsuperscript{289}

While this assemblage was purchased at auction by
Washington's English agent and, thus, may not be typical
of the goods produced for export, Philip Bell provided
Washington with a similar suite of bed furniture just two
years later, which comprised nearly identical elements,
as well as three window cornices covered in "Chintz Blew
plate cotton" and several yards of additional fabric for
chair bottoms to complete the ensemble. Bell's invoice
reveals the complexity, sophistication, and expense of
this branch of the upholstery trade, enumerating such
elements as "Eighteen yards of Lace, Leads, Owes,
fourteen yards of worsted and thread line, one Tossell
and Two brass Cloke pins" used in the production of a
single festoon window curtain. The same order included a
matching chintz and linen quilt and "2 fine large Check
Mattrasses filld with hair."\textsuperscript{290}

Like Washington, Robert Beverley expected his
English upholstery goods to be of a high level of

\textsuperscript{289} Invoice, August 1757, Invoices and Letters, George
Washington Papers.

\textsuperscript{290} Invoices, August 1759 and March 1760, Invoices and
quality. In a single invoice for July 1771, Beverley ordered two complete bedchamber ensembles of printed cotton, each to include a bedstead and hangings, three window curtains "to draw up to the Top with Pullies & not made in the Festoon Manner," six chairs with matching slip seats, and additional fabric for a coverlet and six spare chair bottoms. Other upholstery goods requested in the same invoice comprised a set of three yellow damask window curtains, twelve chairs with matching yellow worsted slip seats, and case covers of yellow and white checked fabric.\textsuperscript{291} While the craftsman who executed Beverley's order is not known, he was apparently one of some skill, as Beverley later noted in correspondence with his agent that the "Beds . . . exceeded my Expectations so far, that I was surprized when I received them," and he requested that Athawes "direct yr Upholsterer to make out an Estimate" for two additional suites.\textsuperscript{292} As late as 1784, Beverley was still obtaining bed furniture from England, although the purchase in this case...

\textsuperscript{291}Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 16 July 1771, Robert Beverley Letterbook.

\textsuperscript{292}Robert Beverley to Edward Athawes, [c. 1772], Robert Beverley Letterbook.
instance was to be made by his son then traveling in the country rather than by Beverley's English agent.²⁹³

Not all Virginians' orders for upholstery goods were on the magnitude of Beverley's. As previously mentioned, St. George Tucker of Williamsburg purchased bed ticks, pillows, and a leather matrass at a cost of £10 in 1790, and a feather bed, bolster, and pillows were among the goods ordered through John Norton & Sons by Mann Page in 1770.²⁹⁴ In addition to the elaborate beds and furniture supplied to George Washington by Philip Bell in 1759-60, Bell also provided the planter with the more mundane cargo of "4 pair of fine large Blankets" in 1762, while Kent, Luck & Kent's account with Sir Peyton Skipwith included "10 yds 24 In Sattin hair cloth," presumably for use in slip seats.²⁹⁵

Various types of carpeting were also among the typical stock in trade of the London upholsterer, and Virginia consumers appear to have taken full advantage of

²⁹³ Robert Beverley to Samuel Gist, 17 April 1784, Robert Beverley Letterbook.

²⁹⁴ Shop note, 10 September 1790, Tucker-Coleman Papers; Mann Page to John Norton & Sons, 22 February 1770, John Norton & Sons Papers.

²⁹⁵ Invoice, April 1762, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers; invoices, 26 July 1799, Skipwith Papers.
this fact. The trade card of John Phillips, "Upholder to the City of London," in Fenchurch Street, suggests the range of floor coverings available "Wholesale, Retail, & for Exportation," which included "Turkey, Persia, Wilton, Kidderminster, & Scotch Carpets of all Sizes." The firm of Kent, Luck & Kent, who supplied carpeting in a cargo of goods to Sir Peyton Skipwith in 1799, billed themselves as "sole agents for the sale of Axminster Carpets." Painted floor cloths and grass matting were other popular alternatives for the importer of English goods, and both would have been available through the well-stocked shops of most London upholsterers.

Wilton and Scotch carpets reflecting a wide range of costs and sizes appear to have been the most favored varieties of floor coverings amongst Virginia's elite. George Washington imported several Wilton carpets in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, including a fine

296 Trade card of John Phillips, Banks Coll., BM.
297 Invoice, 26 July 1799; Skipwith Papers; Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 508.
298 See Jonathan Clayton's order for two Scotch carpets, one of 15 by 12 feet and one of 14 by 9 feet, and Beverley's request for a Wilton carpet of 15 by 13 feet. Jonathan Clayton to John Norton & Sons, 24 August 1770, John Norton & Sons Papers; Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 16 July 1771, Robert Beverley Letterbook.
example costing over £10 in 1757 and "2 Wilton Ingrain bedside Carpets" supplied by Philip Bell in 1759 for £1/16/-. In the same invoice, Bell charged Washington for "50 Yds of ye best Royal Matting yd wide" at nearly twice the cost of the bedside carpets.299 Painted floor cloths represented a similarly wide range in cost, and examples shipped from Bristol in the 1760s ranged in price from a low of under £2 apiece to an exceptional example worth £13.300

Another enterprise in the upholstery line probably engaged in by the furniture craftsmen supplying the export trade was the sale of paper hangings to complement the buyer's new furnishings, fabrics, and floor coverings. It was relatively common for Virginia planters to include paper hangings in the invoices for furniture and household goods placed with their London agents. Robert Beverley, for example, ordered over 2400 yards of paper of five different patterns with borders in

299 Invoice, August 1759, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers. As defined in the period, bed carpets could refer either to a small bedside carpet or a U-shaped form of three joined strips, designed to fit around the perimeters of a bedstead and maximize visual effect without wasting valuable material where it could not be seen. Christopher Gilbert, James Lomax, and Anthony Wells-Cole, Country House Floors 1660-1850 (Leeds: Leeds City Art Galleries, 1987), 57.

300 PRO, E. 190/1225/5 [1763-64], 1227/3 [1766-67].
July of 1771. London merchants executing such a commission for their clients might have chosen to patronize one of the city's numerous paper hanging warehouses, such as that of Matthias Darly, who offered painted and printed papers "Wholesale & Retail . . . for Exportation" at his "Manufactory for Paper Hangings" in the Strand. George Washington's 1757 order to his agent for paper for six rooms was probably filled at such a warehouse. Comprising over 600 yards of paper of several colors and patterns, including "embost," "India figur'd," and "Chintz," as well as painted and papier mache ceiling ornaments, the invoice for the goods purchased for Washington corresponds closely to the stock offered at "James Wheeleys Paper Hanging Warehouse," where merchants and gentlemen could obtain "all Sorts of Emboss'd Chints, & Common Papers for Rooms, with great variety of Papieé Machee, & other Ornaments for Ceilings, Halls, Stair Cases &c."  

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301 Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 16 July 1771, Robert Beverley Letterbook.


303 Heal, London Tradesmen's Cards, pl. LXIX.
On the other hand, the supply of paper hangings was also considered to be one of the tasks of the eighteenth-century upholsterer in his broader role as decorator. Thomas Sheraton noted that "Paper Hangings are a considerable article in the upholstery branch," requiring "taste and skill" in their choice. While the supply of paper by the known exporters to Virginia cannot be directly confirmed, many of their contemporaries in the City advertised paper hangings in their stocks of cabinetware and upholstery goods. As some of these craftsmen also touted the availability of their wares for exportation, the supply of fashionable paper hangings may probably be considered to have been among the services available to Virginia consumers through the London export cabinetmaking community.

Bridging the gap between upholstery and cabinetware is seating furniture, which partakes of the skills of both the cabinetmaker and upholsterer and which was

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304 Quoted in Gilbert, Chippendale, 48.

305 The sole exception is the Seddon firm, which is known to have patronized at least two London paper stainers. The size and diversity of the Seddon establishment should not be considered to be representative of the London export community, however. Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 795.

306 See, for example, the trade cards of Samuel Burton, Heal Coll., and John Phillips, Banks Coll., BM.
undeniably the most popular form of imported furnishing goods among eighteenth-century Virginians. Robert Beverley and George Washington imported a total of ninety chairs in the third quarter of the century, including thirty-eight ordered by Beverley in a single invoice of 1771. Unfortunately, documentation as to the appearance of these chairs is slim. Few imported examples survive—presumably due to their relative fragility and heavy use—and written documentation provides only slightly more illumination.

Side chairs in sets of six or twelve with one or two matching arm or "elbow" chairs appear to have been in the greatest demand in eighteenth-century Virginia, according to surviving orders and receipts for imported goods. While some of these chairs were clearly being ordered as part of large and elaborate bedchambers and formal room settings, such as Beverley's yellow worsted damask chairs described above, the majority were apparently intended for more utilitarian purposes with seats of sturdy leather or hair cloth. The choice of slip seats or over-the-rail upholstery was usually specified by the consumer.

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in his order. Thus, Washington ordered "12 plain setting [chairs]—The leather to cover the Frames," which Polhill supplied "brass naild" in 1764, while Beverley noted of chairs ordered in 1771 that "the bottoms [are] all to be loose & not nailed with brass Nails, wh[ich] I dislike much."\textsuperscript{308}

Other specifications used by Virginia consumers in their orders for chairs are generally limited to such phrases as "large neat and fashionable," "neat [and] Plain," or "plain [and] strong,"\textsuperscript{309} indicating that the merchant's taste and the availability of patterns in stock probably played the primary role in determining the appearance of the goods selected. Even where a more detailed description is available, as in the invoice for "12 Mahay best gothick Chairs, wt Pincushion Seats stufft in ye best manner & coverd with horse hair" that were shipped to Washington in August 1757, the choice of the chairs appears to have been that of the purchasing agent,


as Washington's order had stipulated only the dimension of the chair seats and the need for superior strength in their construction.\textsuperscript{310}

A small number of English chairs with a history of ownership in Virginia have survived that provide some additional insight into the appearance of imported seating furniture.\textsuperscript{311} Two mahogany examples of the second half of the eighteenth century are probably representative of the simplest and cheapest variety of side chairs imported to Virginia in this period, as reflected in their conservative styling and minimal detailing (figs. 8, 9,).\textsuperscript{312} The survival of an earlier version of


\textsuperscript{311}These examples are unfortunately not supplemented by the evidence of chairs labeled by the known English exporters of cabinetware, suggesting that seating furniture was not commonly labeled by these craftsmen. Documentation of their production of chairs is also slim, despite the claims of their trade cards and labels, although a set of japanned side chairs and stools have been attributed to Jonathan Belchier on the basis of his documented articles for Erddig. Martin Drury, "Early Eighteenth-Century Furniture at Erddig," Apollo 108 (1978): 53, fig. 12.

\textsuperscript{312}These chairs provide an interesting contrast with a roughly contemporary side chair of c. 1770-1775 traditionally owned by the last royal governor of Virginia, the Earl of Dunmore, which has strong neoclassical elements in its styling that are entirely lacking in the more conservative Archer and Seldon-Lloyd.
the form, with a history of ownership by Ralph Wormeley of Rosegill Plantation, however, highlights the danger of overgeneralizing about the stylistic and constructional level of English imports (fig. 10). Incorporating such sophisticated features as carved stiles and splat, a molded and bow-shaped shoe, compass seat, and well-articulated ball-and-claw feet with pierced talons, this chair is indicative of the high standards of style and construction that could be achieved in export wares.

Also among the surviving examples of English seating furniture with a Virginia provenance is a pair of upholstered backstools once owned by Robert Beverley of Blandfield Plantation (fig. 11). These chairs are of particular interest as they are unique instances of this form in Virginia--no written documentation for their purchase exists, nor have other Virginians' orders for this form been discovered.313 Requests for other varieties of fully upholstered seating furniture, including easy chairs and sofas, however, have survived. In

313 Orders do survive for the older and less elaborate versions of the backstool, as, for example, William Beverley's 1738 request for "12 best Russia leather chairs double nail'd [with] broad seats & leather backs." William Beverley to Micajah Perry & Co., 11 July 1738, William Beverley Letterbook 1737-44, New York Public Library (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg).
addition to the yellow damask easy chair shipped to Washington in 1757, John Custis ordered "a large easy chair covered with black leather" for his "poor crazy infirm body to rest in," and both Robert Beverley and Landon Carter requested the shipment of a "Sick Chair to put on a Bed . . . stuff'd with hair & covered with Check," Carter's example to have "Cheeks as in a large Easy Chair." George Kemp's trade card implies that he could supply a wide variety of such upholstered forms, including "easy, French, Settee, & Bed Chairs" (see fig. 3).

One example of an English sofa survives with a history of Virginia ownership by Bishop Madison, the president of Williamsburg's College of William and Mary during the Revolutionary era (fig. 12), but several London cabinetmakers involved in the export trade are known to have produced such large items of seating furniture. Philip Bell was among those supplying these goods, including the "Neat Mahog Marl. Couch with a Roll

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315 Heal, London Furniture Makers, 90.

316 Catalogue of Early Southern Decorative Arts, MESDA.
head & Leathr. Casters to ditto, stufft up in the best mann'r. & covd with black Leathr., quilted, best princes Metal Nails, Boulster & 2 Pillows, fill'd w' Goose Feathrs" that Bell shipped to George Washington in 1759.\textsuperscript{317} English sofas were also available to Virginia consumers in the post-Revolutionary period, as evidenced by the newspaper advertisements of merchants located in the state's growing urban centers.\textsuperscript{318}

Mention should also be made of the importation of windsor chairs from England, including those ordered by Mann Page and Nathaniel Lyttleton Savage through John Norton & Sons in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, as previously mentioned.\textsuperscript{319} While the London cabinetmaker and upholsterer Edward Polhill is documented to have provided a set of six green windsors to George

\textsuperscript{317}Invoice, August 1759, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers. George Kemp is also among those who produced "SOPHA'S," according to his trade card, while Henry Kettle supplied two sofas to an English patron in 1789. Heal, London Furniture Makers, 90; DEFM Index.

\textsuperscript{318}See, for example, James Warrington's 1787 advertisement quoted above (note 103).

\textsuperscript{319}Mann Page to John Norton & Sons, 22 February 1770, John Norton & Sons Papers; Nathaniel Lyttleton Savage to John Norton & Sons, 1769 and 1773, Brock Collection, Norton-Savage-Dixon Papers.
Washington in 1764, it is likely that Polhill did not manufacture the chairs himself, but purchased them from a specialist in the business. A trade card survives in the Banks Collection at the British Museum for such a craftsman, who specifically advertised the availability of Windsor chairs and garden furniture for exportation.

Like chairs, tables of various sizes and forms lent themselves to transportation to overseas markets and formed an important element in the export trade to Virginia. As with chairs, however, the importers of tables left much of the decision as to their appearance in the hands of their English agents, usually specifying only the general type and size of the table to be purchased.

Among the most common form imported were sets of dining tables, usually with one or more leaves and some type of joining bolt or mechanism. One of the most descriptive orders for such a set was that placed by Meriwether Shelton with John Norton & Sons in 1772:

3 very Elegant square Mohogony dineing Tables with Carv'd frames if Carving is the taste at present, if not they may be made in any other

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321 Trade card of William Webb, Banks Coll., BM.
way that is most genteal. I would have one of
the Tables to be of the same height and length
of the others, so as that they be all join'd
together upon occasion, and made of the most
beautifull stuff that can be had, and put into
packing Cases when sent to the ship.322

In 1757, George Washington received such a set,
comprising "two neat Mahagonoy Tables, 4 f[eeet] 6 I[nches]
Square two flaps each & all the feet to move, to join
with hooks &c" and corresponding closely to a surviving
pair of English dining tables said by tradition to have
been purchased by Thomas Jefferson from George Wythe in
the post-Revolutionary era (fig. 13).323

Other popular table forms among Virginia's importers
were tea and card tables, such as the "Neat Mahoy. Card
Table--wch may serve for a dressg one" supplied to
Washington in 1758 and the "neat plain Table for a Tea
Table" ordered by Beverley in 1771.324 While no English
tea tables with a Virginia provenance have been identi-
fied to date, at least two card tables survive with a
history of ownership in the colony and provide another

322 Meriwether Shelton to John Norton & Sons, 18 July 1772,
Brock Collection, Norton-Savage-Dixon Papers.

323 Accession file no. 23-59, Thomas Jefferson Memorial
Foundation, Charlottesville, Va.

324 George Washington to Thomas Knox, January 1758,
Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers; Robert
Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 16 July 1771, Robert Beverley
Letterbook.
illustration of the range of elaboration available to importers of English furnishings (figs. 14, 15). One of these, purchased in the 1830s from Thomas Jefferson's family at Monticello,\textsuperscript{325} is of particular interest for the strong visual relationship it bears to another example of the form retaining its original label by Elizabeth Bell & Son at "the White Swan" in St. Paul's Churchyard (fig. 16). This shared aesthetic reinforces the perception of a prevailing inclination towards stylistic conservatism among suppliers to the export market.\textsuperscript{326}

This concept is further supported by reference to two contemporary writing tables with associations to the London trade in export furnishings. The first of these is one of two tables ordered by Thomas Jefferson on the basis of a like form that he had seen on shipboard (fig. 17). The tables, as described by Jefferson in his order, were to be of two different sizes, of mahogany "with sliding leaves . . ., the legs to be of the same form, viz, square tapered and fluted," and to include "one

\textsuperscript{325}Catalogue of Early Southern Decorative Arts, MESDA.

\textsuperscript{326}The Jefferson and Elizabeth Bell card tables also relate closely to three examples attributed to the Williamsburg cabinetmaking shop of Anthony Hay, suggesting that Virginia cabinetmakers were conforming closely to the aesthetic ideal embodied in English export wares. Gusler, Furniture of Eastern Virginia, 69, 74, figs. 44, 45, 48.
drawer only, as large as the frame will admit," but Jefferson left it to the cabinetmaker "to decide whether best to have the cross pieces, or not, at the end."\textsuperscript{327} The surviving example of the pair bears a strong resemblance to a writing table by Henry Kettle, Philip Bell's successor at No. 23 St. Paul's Churchyard (fig. 18),\textsuperscript{328} sharing such features as beaded drawers, applied molding along the lower edge, and reeded and tapered square legs. The similarities are the more striking as Jefferson's order was exceptionally specific and customized, yet still falls firmly within the stylistic and constructional range of goods typically produced by London's community of exporters.

Mention may be made as well of a table form that appears more rarely in the documents of importation—that of the pier or side table. Two relevant references do survive, however, to "1 Marble Sideboard . . . [and] Bragots" and "a marble Table," both purchased by John Mercer in the late 1740s. Mercer is known to have

\textsuperscript{327}Duplicate memorandum to Captain Colley, 16 November 1789, Thomas Jefferson Papers.

\textsuperscript{328}Heal, \textit{London Furniture Makers}, 255, fig. 41. Kettle also provided writing tables to an English patron, Edward Knight, Jr., in 1780. Knight had earlier been a patron of Thomas Chippendale's firm. Beard and Gilbert, \textit{English Furniture Makers}, 511; Gilbert, \textit{Chippendale}, 151-52.
received "cabinetware" from Jonathan Belchier in 1750,\(^{329}\) and it is worth noting that, while no marble tables by Belchier have been identified, a gilt pier table with a beveled glass top was among the goods that he executed for John Meller at Erddig.\(^{330}\) In addition to Mercer's two marble tables, a pair of neoclassical side tables with marble slabs, previously discussed, survive at Shirley Plantation in Charles City County and retain a history of ownership by Charles Carter of Shirley (fig. 19).

In the area of imported case furniture, the surviving data is strangely skewed. On the one hand, substantial documentation as to the range of styles and forms available to colonial consumers can be interpolated from the large body of documented and labeled products of London's community of exporters. At the same time, little documentary evidence supports the concept of an extensive trade to Virginia in any one form of English case furniture, suggesting that Virginians chose for

\(^{329}\)Ledger entries, December 1748, June 1749, August 1750, John Mercer Ledgers.

\(^{330}\)Drury, "Eighteenth-Century Furniture at Erddig", 48, fig. 3. Belchier is also documented to have provided a "round neat light mahogany folding table with four legs" and an unusual writing or architect's table or desk, which opened "in the two Slitts down the Legs," to the Purefoy family of Shalstone, in Buckinghamshire. G. Eland, ed., Purefoy Letters 1735-1753, 2 vols. (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd, 1931), 1:107-8, 111, pl. 11.
either economic or cultural reasons to turn to local rather than English craftsmen to serve their needs for many of these items.\footnote{331}{Unlike chairs and tables, which could be stacked, folded, or otherwise packed and stowed on shipboard with relative ease, large items of case furniture may well have presented a logistical problem within the regular mechanics of overseas shipping. By taking up considerable space without supplying comparable weight, substantial case furniture probably conflicted with the need to achieve the optimum load on a ship’s return voyage to Virginia to procure the next cargo of tobacco. As John McCusker has recorded, "optimum cargo not only filled up the vessel’s cargo space . . . but also weighted it down so that it floated in the water at its best sailing depth." John J. McCusker, "British Ship Tonnage During the Eighteenth Century," \textit{Research in Economic History} 6 (1981): 87.}

The clothespress form is a case in point. As in England, the high chest on frame was replaced early in the eighteenth century in Virginia as the dominant large case piece by the wardrobe or clothespress. The clothespress form typically had an upper case with doors enclosing sliding trays that sat on a lower closed base of drawers. While this change in fashion clearly suggests Virginians’ awareness of current English modes in cabinetware, as do the shared visual and constructional characteristics of contemporary English and Virginia presses,\footnote{332}{See, for an illustration of this point, Gusler, \textit{Furniture of Eastern Virginia}, 48-52.} not a single order or invoice for a

\footnote{332}{See, for an illustration of this point, Gusler, \textit{Furniture of Eastern Virginia}, 48-52.}
A clothespress or wardrobe has been discovered among the relevant documents, and just one reference in the Bristol Port Books documents the shipment to Virginia of "an Old Press and furniture," costing just four shillings.333

A sole example of an English clothespress with a Virginia history survives at Sir Peyton Skipwith’s Mecklenburg County plantation, Prestwould (figs. 20, 21).334 While Skipwith did not build Prestwould until the 1790s, the press has a history of having been brought to the new house from the Skipwith’s previous home, Elm Hill, placing the object more plausibly within the third quarter of the eighteenth century.335 Significantly, the Prestwould clothespress fits firmly within the stylistic range of contemporary labeled examples of the form by London makers Philip Bell and Henry Kettle (figs. 22–24).336 It is worth noting that the Kettle example (fig. 333 PRO, E. 190/1225/4 [1762-63].

334 A more sophisticated and elaborate example, with gilt-enriched moldings, mirrored doors, and bombe base, survives with a history of ownership by Charles Apthorpe of Boston. Jobe and Kaye, New England Furniture, 22, fig. 1-6.

335 Personal communication with Georgia Pace, administrator, Prestwould Foundation, Clarksville, Va., July 1986.

336 The Skipwith press also bears comparison with contemporary Virginia case pieces, particularly in the indented corners of the door panels, which have been
24) post-dates 1774, according to the label establishing Kettle at No. 23 St. Paul's Churchyard, and must have been considered stylistically conservative for its time, particularly in its quotation of such baroque characteristics of Bell's earlier examples as ogee-shaped door panels and scrolled bracket feet (compare figs. 22, 23). These similarities suggest that Kettle was addressing his wares, after his succession to Bell's business, to his predecessor's clientele, including, perhaps, Bell's Virginia export market.

In addition to the clothespress form, the City's cabinetmakers, including the Bell family, may be associated with several examples of the chest-on-chest or double chest of drawers. At least one version of the form was created by Elizabeth Bell & Son (fig. 25), and two examples bearing Philip Bell's second label survive, differing from the Elizabeth Bell example only in the addition of dentil molding to the cornice and in the use of orientalistizing and "Gothick" blind fret in the identified as a feature of products from the Peter Scott shop of Williamsburg. Gusler, Furniture of Eastern Virginia, 45, 47, figs. 36b, 37c.

Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 510.

Compare also the shaped panels on Bell's medicine chest in figure 51.
chamfered corners of the upper case. Curiously, however, not a single instance has been documented of a Virginian's purchase of this form in the second half of the eighteenth century, nor has an example of an English double chest of drawers been identified that retains a history of early Virginia ownership. As the form is also largely absent from the known production of eighteenth-century Virginia craftsmen, one must speculate that the chest-on-chest failed to meet Virginians' needs or tastes.

Perhaps the most exceptional piece of Virginia-owned English furniture is a massive, three-part, breakfront or library bookcase in the John Marshall House in Richmond (figs. 26, 27). By family tradition, the bookcase was given to John Marshall and his wife, Mary, by her father, Jacquelin Ambler of Jamestown. Also by tradition, the piece has stood in its present location in the primary formal room of the Marshall House since the house was

339 Fortt Studio photos, DEFM Index.

built in 1790. While no documentary evidence of Ambler's purchase of the bookcase exists, Ambler is known to have been traveling in England in the mid-eighteenth century, suggesting that he would have had the opportunity to personally select and purchase the bookcase at that time. Although the Ambler breakfront form is unique among furnishings imported to Virginia, it again relates closely in its overall rectilinearity and restrained ornamentation to other imported case pieces, as well as to the products of London cabinetmakers involved in the export trade (compare figs. 20, 28, and 41).

This shared aesthetic is also apparent in another singular form of English furniture owned in colonial Virginia. This object—probably defined in the period as a library table—is said to have been made for Robert Carter while he was in London having his portrait painted (fig. 28). It is interesting to note that Carter's

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341 Accession file no. 1972.560, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Richmond, Va. These files also indicate that modifications were made to the bookcase after its arrival in Virginia, probably including the addition of the pediment and carved basket finial, which have been associated by Wallace Gusler with contemporary Williamsburg craftsmanship. Compare Gusler, Furniture of Eastern Virginia, figs. 90-91.

342 Compare Chippendale, Director, plate LXXIX.

343 Accession file no. 1944.2, the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, Inc., Stratford Hall Plantation, Stratford,
selection, which presumably reflects his personal input and tastes, allies so closely with the known production of London export cabinetmakers, suggesting that the English agents purchasing goods on commission had gauged well the desires and needs of their Virginia clients.

One form of case furniture imported to Virginia for which no model exists is that outlined in Robert Beverley's invoice to his London agent shortly before the Revolution:

a neat Mahogany Press or Case to hold a Service of China, & what little Plate I have to stand in a dining Room, with Glass Doors above in the Chinese Taste something in the shape of a Cabinet not large—I suppose about 8 or ten Guineas, Price.\textsuperscript{344}

While Beverley's order is exceptionally explicit within the context of contemporary invoices, the form cannot be identified with certainty, although the term cabinet suggests a closed form supported by an open frame.\textsuperscript{345}

With this information, it is tempting to compare Beverley's order with the chinoiserie cabinet depicted on Philip Bell's Rococo-influenced trade label (see fig. 4).

\textsuperscript{344}Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, [c. 1772-74], Robert Beverley Letterbook.

\textsuperscript{345}Compare cabinets illustrated in Chippendale, Director, plates CXX-CXXIII.
As with other large case pieces, little evidence exists to document Virginians' purchases of English desks-and-bookcases. The Bristol Port Books for the third quarter of the century record the shipment of just one desk-and-bookcase, costing less than £10, and no English examples of the form have survived with a history of Virginia ownership. In fact, during a period in which Robert Beverley was purchasing large quantities of English furniture through his London agents, he apparently turned to local craftsmen to supply his needs for book storage forms, as evidenced by three surviving bookcases at Blandfield Plantation that are attributed to the Peter Scott shop of Williamsburg.

Yet a substantial body of labeled examples proves that the desk-and-bookcase form was well within the regular production of London's export cabinetmakers. Jonathan Belchier, Philip Bell, and Henry Kettle are each represented by two to four labeled examples (fig. 29), and a receipt of 1781 also links Kettle to a "very neat rotten wood Bookcase with glass Doors etc.," costing

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346PRO, E. 190/1225/4 [1762-63].
347Gusler, Furniture of Eastern Virginia, 50-53, figs. 40, 42.
£11/11/-.

The desks-and-bookcases of Jonathan Belchier are particularly noteworthy, as they represent contrasting levels of production, from highly sophisticated examples with broken pediments and red or green japanned finishes (figs. 30, 31) to two simpler, walnut-veneered versions of the form that are probably more representative of the level of "cabinetware" supplied by Belchier to John Mercer of Virginia in 1750 (figs. 32, 33).

The evidence is more plentiful supporting the importation of smaller case pieces into Virginia, but it presents some problems in the correlation of period terminology with contemporary furniture forms. For example, the mahogany bureau that Martha Dandridge Custis received from the shop of Philip Bell in 1757 may have been a desk of the slant-front variety, as illustrated by a labeled example by Elizabeth Bell & Son (fig. 34), or of the chest-like form known through an example bearing


349 Ledger entry, August 1750, John Mercer Ledgers.
the label of Philip Bell (fig. 35).\textsuperscript{350} The "Mahay Bureau wt a Cupbd" that Bell supplied Martha Custis two years later, however, is more likely to have been of a "kneehole" form, as seen in another Elizabeth Bell product (fig. 36).\textsuperscript{351} The "Bureau wt a Cupbd" was almost certainly Bell's answer to Mrs. Custis's request the previous year for a "hansome Buroe Dressing Table . . . Mahogney."\textsuperscript{352}

This reference may also help to illuminate the appearance of the "fine neat Mahogany Serpentine dressing Table with Furniture Compl drawer, glass, &c handl Locks & brass work," costing £10/10/-, which was shipped to George Washington in 1757.\textsuperscript{353} This item has been associated with a serpentine chest of drawers with a strong Washington provenance that was recently returned

\textsuperscript{350}Invoice, 1757, Custis Papers. A slant-front bureau labeled by Henry Bell also survives and is illustrated in Symonds, "Labelled London Furniture," pls. VI, VII.

\textsuperscript{351}Invoice, March 1759, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers.

\textsuperscript{352}Martha Custis to Cary & Co., 1758, Martha Custis Accounts 1757-1761, Custis Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{353}Invoice, August 1757, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers.
to Mount Vernon (figs. 37, 38). It is also possible, however, that this chest may be the "fine Mahy Sarpene dressing Chest n’ a Slider" that Philip Bell supplied at a cost of £6/10/- to Washington’s stepdaughter, Martha Parke Custis, in 1765. If it could be firmly identified as such, it would bring to three the number of serpentine chests of drawers for which Bell is known. Like the Mount Vernon chest, the two labeled Bell examples have molded edges to the top, canted and chamfered corners, and beaded drawers (fig. 39). The chamfered corners on the Bell chests, however, are ornamented with blind fretwork, while the more elaborate example of the two also boasts richly carved and canted ogee bracket feet, egg-and-dart moldings, and chased, fire-gilt hardware, illustrating the wide range of production levels available through Bell’s shop.

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356 Geoffrey Wills, English Furniture 1760-1900 (Enfield, Middlesex: Guinness Superlatives Ltd., 1971), pl. 9, fig. 83. Interestingly, this chest is also Philip Bell’s earliest known product, as it bears the earliest version of his label, based on those of Henry and Elizabeth Bell.
Henry Kettle is also associated with a single example of a serpentine chest of drawers that bears his label (fig. 40). While the Kettle chest is similar to the Bell and Washington examples in its overall form, it has a strong visual impact through the use of contrasting woods and inlays that differs sharply from Bell's products and Kettle's own, more conservative output (compare fig. 24). This diversity within the body of Kettle's documented works suggests that the cabinetmaker was moving in the last decades of the eighteenth century towards more stylistically ambitious designs, perhaps in an attempt to appeal to a more elite and selective market than that catered to by his predecessor.  

Certainly not all chests of drawers imported to Virginia were of the quality of the serpentine dressing chest supplied to Martha Parke Custis. Chests of drawers valued at as little as £1 to £2 apiece are recorded in shipments to Virginia in the Bristol Port Books.  

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357 Kettle is known by several country house commissions in addition to his labeled works, including an inlaid pembroke table of satinwood and kingwood made for Saltram House, Devon. Geoffrey Wills, "Some Labelled Furniture at Saltram," Furniture History 2 (1966): 37, pl. XVII. Compare also Kettle's desk-and-bookcase at Saltram (fig. 29) with the more restrained and conservative labeled example by Kettle illustrated in The Antique Collector 44 (Oct./Nov. 1973): xiii.

358 PRO, E. 190/1223/1 [1761-62], 1225/4 [1762-63].
Robert Beverly placed an order in 1763 for a "neat plain Chest of Drawers Mahogany"—a description that corresponds well to a small mahogany chest of drawers bearing Philip Bell's label (fig. 41). Bell is also known to have filled an order for "2 chest of Drawers" for the Oxfordshire country house of Nathaniel Ryder, 1st Earl of Harrowby, at a cost of just £8/14/-.

In contrast to the relative rarity of the importation of English case pieces, ample documentation establishes that looking glasses formed a substantial proportion of English furnishings in Virginia in the second half of the eighteenth century, due, in part, to the importation of looking glasses by Virginia merchants in the pre-Revolutionary era, as previously noted. This availability meant that the range of glasses imported was vast—from the modest examples of less than a shilling carried by William Allason in the 1760s to the pair of pier glasses, "fitted up in handsome gilt, Pillar Moulding Frames," supplied by Kent, Luck & Kent to Sir

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360 DEFM Index.
Peyton Skipwith in 1799 at a cost of £63 (fig. 42), as well as virtually every level of production between.361

Probably most typical of the looking glasses being imported via the consignment system is that described in an invoice of goods to be sent to William Robinson:

1 Mahogany framed looking Glass 30 Inches long by 19 broad, with a narrow gilt rimb next the glass, about an Inch broad, & the head ornamented with gilding, not too high prizd.362

This image relates closely to four eighteenth-century English looking glasses with a history of ownership in New England,363 as well as to a somewhat more modest example shipped to Colonel Adam Lenoir of Virginia in 1791 by MacKinzen & Co., merchants of Glasgow (fig. 43). The "large Glass in [a] Mahogany and gilt frame" supplied by George Kemp to Raleigh Downman in 1765 was probably of this variety, and Kemp is also known by a simple mahogany looking glass that bears his label.364 Similarly, the

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361 Invoice Books, Falmouth Store, 1760-1772, Allason Papers; Invoice, 26 July 1799, Skipwith Family Papers.
364 Raleigh Downman to George Kemp, 31 March 1766, Joseph Ball Letterbook; Charles B. Wood III, "Some labeled English looking glasses," Antiques 93 (1968): 647, fig. 1. The conservatism of this example of Kemp's work contrasts vividly with the elaborate Rococo cartouche.
three glasses purchased from Francis Gilding by Edward Hunt & Son for Robert Carter of Virginia were relatively modest in cost and included "a Looking Glass to Pattern" at fourteen shillings and "2 do. . . 2 [ft] 8½ by 14 In" at £2/10/-.

A number of references in the Bristol Port Books likewise record the shipment of looking glasses, both singly and in large cargos, ranging from about ten to twenty shillings in price.

Somewhat more elaborate were Nathaniel Lyttleton Savage’s "4 handsome looking Glass[es] for a parlour @ £4" and the "pair of handsome & Fashi[onable] Looking Glasses at abt. £5 each, (without Sconces)," which Savage ordered through John Norton & Sons in the late 1760s.

In the same range of goods were the "pr fine carvd and gilt Sconces" sent to Washington at a cost of £7 in 1757 and two "superfine large gilt Sconce" glasses costing

that Kemp chose to use on his trade card (compare fig. 2).

365 Shop note, 23 July 1770, Robert Carter Accounts.

366 See, for example, PRO, E. 190/1221/1 [1760-61], 1223/1 [1761-62], 1227/3 [1767-68], 1229/2 [1772-73].

£6/10/- and £5/5/- that John Mercer recorded in 1748.\textsuperscript{368} As Mercer was to record his receipt of "cabinetware of Mr. Belchier" just two years later,\textsuperscript{369} it is possible that Belchier was also the supplier of Mercer's sconce glasses, particularly in view of his known involvement in the looking glass trade.

According to one version of his trade card, Belchier announced that he "Grinds & Makes-up, all sorts of fine Peer & Chimney Glasses and Glass Sconces," and he is documented to have supplied glass for St. Paul's Cathedral in the mid-1720s. It is also noteworthy that all of Belchier's known case goods incorporate mirror panels in the upper portion, while even the giltwood pier table supplied by Belchier to John Meller of Erddig incorporated a glass top.\textsuperscript{370} Belchier is probably best known, however, for the gilt and silvered pier and sconce glasses that he provided Meller in the early 1720s at costs ranging from £14 to £50.\textsuperscript{371} Based on the carved and gilt elements of these documented pieces, several other

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{368} Invoice, August 1757, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers; ledger entry, 25 December 1748, John Mercer Ledgers.
\item \textsuperscript{369} Ledger entry, August 1750, John Mercer Ledgers.
\item \textsuperscript{370} Beard and Gilbert, English Furniture Makers, 59-60.
\item \textsuperscript{371} Drury, "Eighteenth-Century Furniture at Erddig," 48-52.
\end{itemize}
pier glasses of similar type have been attributed to the cabinetmaker (figs. 44-47). While it is unlikely that many glasses of this elaboration and expense were exported to Virginia, the range of Belchier's known endeavors helps to establish the broader context of the London cabinetmaking industry in which export wares were produced.

Belchier is also known to have supplied to Elizabeth Purefoy of Shalstone in 1735 "a glasse in a gold frame three foot eleven inches & an half long by twenty four inches, the middle glass . . . thirty one inches long," which is thought to correspond to a chimney glass still surviving at the Buckinghamshire house. While no orders for chimney or "landscape" glasses have been discovered in the correspondence of eighteenth-century Virginians, a single exceptional example of the form survives in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, affixed to the woodwork of the Virginia plantation house, Marmion, in which it hung in the eighteenth century (fig. 48). While the Marmion glass has had some extensive restoration work to replace missing pieces of the design,

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372 Eland, Purefoy Letters, 48, pl. 10.
373 Accession file no. 28.49, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.
the original elements are substantial enough to provide evidence that English glasses of this quality and sophistication were available to and selected by at least some portion of Virginia's population. Fragments of similarly ornate carved work, probably originally gessoed and painted or gilt, have also been discovered at Beverley's Northern Neck plantation, Blandfield, and may relate to the looking glass in "a neat white Frame" that Beverley ordered in 1771 or the example that he shipped to England in 1772 to be repaired "& painted a light Stone Colour."  

A final variety of looking glass that appears to have been imported to Virginia with some regularity was that of the dressing glass. The form was sold occasionally through Virginia stores in the pre-Revolutionary era, and several instances also document its purchase through the consignment system, including John Armistead's 1768 order to John Norton & Sons.  

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375Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 16 July 1771; to John Backhouse, 20 July 1772, Robert Beverley Letterbook.

376Invoice Books, Falmouth Store, 1772, Allason Papers; William Anderson to John Norton & Sons, 20 September 1771 and 7 February 1772, John Norton & Sons Papers; John
Dressing glasses were frequently ordered in association with dressing tables, as in an invoice placed by Robert Beverley in 1763, and two examples were consigned by Philip Bell to George Washington for Mrs. Martha Custis and Martha Parke Custis along with the "Bureau wt a Cupbd" and "Sarpene. dressg Chest" discussed above.\(^\text{377}\)

While the Mount Vernon glasses no longer survive, two labeled examples by Bell are known, both of which have the "3 draws" specified in the Washington invoices.\(^\text{378}\)

Furthermore, another English dressing glass with a three-drawer base and a history of ownership in colonial Boston provides additional illumination of the Virginia imports.\(^\text{379}\)

The sophistication of upholstery goods, including bed furniture, provided for the Virginia market has already been explored, but some light may also be shed on the importation of the bedsteads themselves. The evidence for such importation is solely of a written nature,

\(^\text{Armistead to John Norton & Sons, 15 September 1768, Brock Collection, Norton-Savage-Dixon Papers.}\)


\(^\text{379 Jobe and Kaye, New England Furniture, 449, fig. 142.}\)
as no English bedsteads with a provenance in eighteenth-century Virginia have survived,\textsuperscript{380} nor have examples by English export craftsmen been identified.\textsuperscript{381}

Orders and invoices for goods provide a considerable amount of detail regarding the appearance of English bedsteads imported into Virginia after 1750. The earliest such reference is to a bedstead purchased at auction by Richard Washington and shipped to Mount Vernon in 1757, which was described as having "Mahagonie Carvd & fluted pillars for feet Posts, . . . & Carvd Cornishes compleat."\textsuperscript{380} In contrast, the "Tester Bedstead 7½ feet pitch" ordered by Washington two years later and supplied by Philip Bell was considerably less elaborate, being made of "Beech . . . colourd all over," rather than

\textsuperscript{380}A single extraordinary example is known, however, with a New England provenance. It is an object of great elaboration, with hairy paw feet, carved rails, and front posts ornamented with carved baskets of flowers, stop-fluting, spiraling, and acanthus leafage. Jobe and Kaye, \textit{New England Furniture}, 442-44, fig. 140.

\textsuperscript{381}The headboard of the state bed at Erddig has been attributed to Jonathan Belchier, but this is an exceptional example and undoubtedly reflects Belchier's skill as a looking-glass carver rather than a bedstead maker. Drury, "Eighteenth-Century Furniture at Erddig," 51-52, fig. 11.
mahogany, and having "neat plain Mahy. foot Posts, & a neat cut Cornish."\footnote{Invoices, August 1757 and August 1759, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers.}

Robert Beverley apparently also sought simplicity in the bedsteads that he ordered in 1771 and 1784, as he specified that they were all to have "Front Posts of Mahogany, neat but not carvd."\footnote{Robert Beverley to Samuel Athawes, 16 July 1771; to Samuel Gist, 17 April 1784, Robert Beverley Letterbook.} In addition to these instances of the importation of tester or four-posted variety of bedsteads, an order survives for "a neat dark grounded printed Cotton Camp Bed with a Mahogany Bedsted," and "Camp, Tent, [and] Field" beds were among the wares advertised by George Kemp on his trade card.\footnote{Charles Carter to John Bland, May 1760, Carter-Plummer Letterbook; Heal, London Furniture Makers, 90.}

Also among the bed chamber furnishings supplied by Philip Bell to George Washington in 1759 was a "bedscreen" at a cost of just three-and-a-half shillings. While the appearance of this form remains ambiguous, the same invoice includes a thirty-six shilling charge from Bell for "2 Neat Mahog. Pillar & claw fire Screens India
Paper on both Sides."385 The distinctive image thus presented is strikingly similar, moreover, to the device of a pole screen framing an oriental scene that appears on Bell’s Rococo trade card (see fig. 4).

Just one complete example of an imported screen is known and is one of the few surviving objects with a history of ownership by Virginia’s Governor Botetourt (fig. 49).386 Of exceptionally large size (over forty-two inches high), this screen is also unusual in having panels of framed allegorical prints of the seasons. Another variety of the form, surviving only in a fragmentary state, is a pair of screens with painted damask leather panels, which were discovered at Beverley’s Essex County plantation, Blandfield, but for which no order or invoice survives.387

Mention must be made finally of the many small wooden articles that supplemented the primary output of the London cabinetmaker, such as tea chests and boards, portable writing desks and gameboards, and wine coolers

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and cellarettes. While many of these goods were probably purchased by English merchants from specialists in these joinery wares, particularly in the case of large speculative shipments supplied to Virginia traders, surviving invoices also provide ample proof that the production and/or sale of these wares was also undertaken by those more typically known for their upholstery and cabinetwares. Most notable in this range of goods is the infamous bottle chest supplied by Philip Bell to George Washington at the substantial cost of nearly £18, now missing the frame on casters on which it originally stood (fig. 50). Bell is also known by a well-fitted medicine chest that bears his label (figs. 51, 52), which may help to illuminate the appearance of the "Mahogany

388 Examples of such artisans, who frequently advertised themselves as "trunk and plate case makers," were Sarah Rands of St. Paul’s Churchyard; J. & R. Shepherd of Bishopsgate, who sold trunks, medicine chests, and tea chests, as well as "Packing Cases for the . . . American Trade"; and Charles Pryer, in the Strand, who offered "oval tea trays, caddies, dressing boxes, backgammon tables, . . . Cribbage boxes, [and] Tea chests" for wholesale and retail purchase. Trade cards of Sarah Rands, J. & R. Shepherd, and Charles Pryer, Heal and Banks Colls., BM.

Medecine Chest complete" purchased for £12/12/- from A. Maxwell of London for Sir Peyton Skipwith of Prestwould in 1800.\textsuperscript{390}

In addition to these larger chests and cases, Bell also carried a wide range of smaller and cheaper wooden wares, including "a Large Siz’d Baggamon Table Boxes & Men," mahogany salvers ranging from six to twelve inches in diameter, and cutlery cases shipped to Washington in the 1760s.\textsuperscript{391} The same variety of production is reflected in an invoice for goods recorded on the reverse of a surviving trade card of Jonathan Belchier, which includes "a fine tea box ... [and] a Round Board," as well as a "claw Table."\textsuperscript{392} Similarly, Kent, Luck & Kent’s 1799 account with Sir Peyton Skipwith included, in addition to the pier glasses recorded above, a "mahogany handsome Cheese Tray," a "Ditto oblong Cellaret," and an "oval Wine Cooler with a lock."\textsuperscript{393}

\textsuperscript{390} Invoice, 3 July 1800, Skipwith Family Papers.

\textsuperscript{391} Invoices, March 1761, 13 April 1763, Invoices and Letters, George Washington Papers. The salvers and knife cases are designated as "Joynery" on the 1763 invoice.

\textsuperscript{392} Trade card of Jonathan Belchier, Guildhall Library, London (transcription, DEFM Index).

\textsuperscript{393} Invoice, 29 July 1799, Skipwith Family Papers.
In addition to the regular range of cabinetmaking and upholstery production explored herein, imported furnishings also included those objects, such as musical instruments, globes, and timepieces, whose scientific or mechanical elements required the skills of specialist artisans. While the production and distribution of these forms to the export market will not be covered in this paper, a visual survey of a few of these objects with a Virginia provenance supplies a sense of the range and variety available to eighteenth-century American consumers, from fiddles, harpsichords, and tall-case clocks (figs. 53-55) to celestial and terrestrial globes (figs. 56, 57).

Thus, the surviving collection of English furnishings imported by Virginians—while not comprehensive in its representation of available forms or styles—nevertheless represents a compelling body of data when combined with information relating to the products and practices of London’s cabinetmaking community. From this fusion of information, it becomes apparent that the importers of English furniture to Virginia in the second half of the eighteenth century were largely restricted in their purchases to goods that represented a limited design context. It is demonstrable, however, that this
constraint did not arise solely from the exigencies imposed by geographic remoteness upon the physical and economic aspects of the purchasing transaction. Of equal importance were the choices and decisions made by Virginia consumers as to the propriety, desirability, and utility of specific forms and fashions to their lifestyles.

This study has raised additional questions that deserve further exploration, particularly regarding the establishment and nature of affiliations between English merchants and cabinetmakers serving the American export trade, the modification of these associations in the post-Revolutionary era with the resulting elimination of the English middleman and incorporation of Virginia's mercantile class, and the scope and mechanisms of interstate commerce in English goods in the last decades of the eighteenth century. It has also uncovered substantial evidence to demonstrate that the importation of English furniture was a significant factor in the social life of Virginia's governing class, in spite of the innate disadvantages of trans-Atlantic transport and communication. It has verified an active trade in imported furnishings that dictated and achieved a complex system of exchange, a well-defined relationship between
client and supplier, and support for the commercial and manufacturing activities of a distinct body of craftsmen.

Furthermore, this trade not only flourished in the pre-Revolutionary context of a colonial culture dominated by imperial models, but showed little diminishment following the cessation of political dependence, merely adjusting its mechanisms and diversifying its participants. While the importation of English furniture may have initially arisen in response to an early deficiency in Virginia's crafts base, it clearly continued to operate after the need for quality household goods could be satisfied locally, suggesting that the primary motivation for importation by 1750 was one of cultural identity rather than expedience. As this identity was intimately intertwined with Virginia's traditional commercial disposition as a staple crop economy, with marketing and processing centers based largely overseas, radical changes in this economic makeup in the last half of the eighteenth century correspondingly impacted the processes of importation. The decline in English furniture importation in the last years of the eighteenth century confirms, finally, that the vicissitudes of this trade between 1750 and 1800 were emblematic of a contemporaneous process of fundamental cultural
redefinition from which a national American identity would ultimately emerge.
Figure 1

Figure 2

Trade label of Henry Kettle, c. 1774.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation,
Williamsburg, Va.
Figure 3

Trade card of George Kemp, c. 1765.
Courtesy Dover Books, Inc.
Figure 4

Trade label of Philip Bell, c. 1765.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 5

Trade label of Henry Bell, c. 1740.
Courtesy Dover Books, Inc.
Figure 6

Trade label of Elizabeth Bell, c. 1750.
Courtesy James M. Hansen, Santa Barbara, Ca.
Figure 7

Trade label of Philip Bell, c. 1770.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 8

Side chair; mahogany; scots pine; c. 1765-75.
Courtesy the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts,
Winston-Salem, N.C.
Figure 9

Side chair; mahogany; beech, scots pine; c. 1780-90.
Provenance: Archer family, Richmond, Va.
Courtesy the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.
Figure 10

Side chair; walnut; c. 1740.
Courtesy the Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Md.
Figure 11

Backstool (one of a pair); mahogany; oak, beech; c. 1760-70.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 12

Sofa; walnut; beech; c. 1770-80.
Provenance: Bishop James Madison, President of the College of William and Mary, from 1777.
Courtesy the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.
Figure 13

Dining tables, pair; mahogany; oak; c. 1760.
Provenance: Purchased by Thomas Jefferson from George Wythe in 1779 or 1809.
Courtesy the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., Charlottesville, Va.
Figure 14
Card table; mahogany; red or scots pine, white oak; c. 1755.
Provenance: Washington family.
Courtesy the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, Mount Vernon, Va.
Figure 15

Card table; mahogany; oak; c. 1750-60.
Provenance: Purchased from the family of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello circa 1830.
Courtesy the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.
Figure 16

Card table; mahogany; c. 1755.
Labeled by Elizabeth Bell & Son, London.
Courtesy Christie's, London.
Figure 17

Writing table; mahogany, mahogany veneers; oak, pine; c. 1790.
Provenance: Ordered from London in 1789 by Thomas Jefferson.
Courtesy the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc.
Figure 18

Writing table; mahogany, satinwood; c. 1785.
Labeled by Henry Kettle, London.
Courtesy Dover Books, Inc.
Figure 19

Side table (one of a pair): mahogany, pearwood inlays, marble; beech; c. 1790.
Courtesy Mr. Hill Carter, Jr., Shirley Plantation.
Figure 20

Clothespress; mahogany; ash, pine; c. 1765.
Provenance: Brought by Sir Peyton Skipwith from Elm Hill to Prestwould, Mecklenburg Co., Va. after 1790.
Courtesy the Prestwould Foundation, Clarksville, Va.
Figure 21

Detail of clothespress in figure 20. Courtesy the Prestwould Foundation.
Figure 22

Clothespress; mahogany; oak, pine; c. 1760-70.
Labeled by Philip Bell, London.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 23

Clothespress; mahogany; c. 1760-70.
Labeled by Philip Bell, London.
Courtesy Dover Books, Inc.
Figure 24

Clothespress; mahogany, mahogany veneers; oak; c. 1774-80. Labeled by Henry Kettle, London. Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 25

Chest-on-chest; mahogany, mahogany veneers; c. 1750–60. Labeled by Elizabeth Bell & Son, London. Courtesy James M. Hansen.
Figure 26

Bookcase; mahogany; oak; c. 1760-70.
Provenance: Given to John and Mary Ambler Marshall of
Richmond by Jacquelin Ambler of Jamestown, Va.
Courtesy the Association for the Preservation of Virginia
Antiquities, Richmond, Va.
Figure 27

Detail of bookcase in fig. 26. Courtesy the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.
Figure 28

Writing table or desk; mahogany; c. 1755-75.
Figure 29

Desk-and-bookcase; mahogany, boxwood; c. 1790.
Labeled by Henry Kettle, London.
Courtesy Saltram, Devonshire, The National Trust.
Figure 30

Desk-and-bookcase; wood, paint, gilding, gesso, varnish; c. 1725-35.
Labeled by John Belchier, London.
Courtesy Christie's, London.
Figure 31

Desk-and bookcase; wood, paint, gilding, gesso, varnish; c. 1725-35.
Labeled by John Belchier, London.
Courtesy Dover Books, Inc.
Figure 32

Desk-and-bookcase; walnut, walnut veneers; c. 1725-35.
Labeled by John Belchier, London.
Courtesy Christie's, London.

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Figure 33

Figure 34

Bureau; walnut, walnut veneers; c. 1750.
Labeled by Elizabeth Bell & Son.
Courtesy Phillips of Hitchin Ltd., Hitchin, Hertfordshire.
Figure 35

Desk; mahogany; oak; c. 1765-75.
Labeled by Philip Bell.
Courtesy B. G. Burrough, Colyton, Devonshire.
Figure 36

Bureau or dressing table; walnut, walnut veneers; c. 1750.
Labeled by Elizabeth Bell & Son.
Courtesy Christie’s, London.
Figure 37

Figure 38

Detail of chest of drawers in fig. 37.
Courtesy the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union.
Figure 39

Chest of drawers; mahogany; c. 1765-75.
Labeled by Philip Bell, London.
Courtesy Dover Books, Inc.
Figure 40

Figure 41

Chest of drawers; mahogany; pine; c. 1765-70. Labeled by Philip Bell, London. Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 42

Pier glass (one of two): wood, gilding, gesso; c. 1799. Provenance: Probably supplied by Kent, Luck & Kent of London to Sir Peyton Skipwith in 1799. Courtesy the Prestwould Foundation.
Figure 43

Looking glass; mahogany; white pine; c. 1791–93.
Courtesy the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.
Figure 44

Pier glass; wood, gesso, gilding; c. 1725.
Attributed to Jonathan Belchier, London.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 45

Detail of pier glass in figure 44.

Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 46

Pier glass; wood, gesso, gilding; c. 1725.
Attributed to Jonathan Belchier, London.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 47

Detail of pier glass in figure 46.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 48

Chimney glass; red pine, gilding, gesso; c. 1755-65.
Provenance: John Fitzhugh of Marmion, King George Co., Va.
Courtesy the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.
Figure 49

Folding screen; wood, paper; c. 1765-70.
Provenance: Norborne Berkeley, Baron de Botetourt, Governor of Virginia, 1768-70.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 50

Bottle case; mahogany; spruce; c. 1760.
Provenance: Supplied by Philip Bell of London to George Washington in 1761.
Courtesy the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union.
Figure 51

Medicine chest (closed); mahogany; c. 1772-74.
Labeled by Philip Bell, London.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 52

Medicine chest (open); mahogany; c. 1772-74.
Labeled by Philip Bell, London.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 53
Harpsichord; mahogany, satinwood; spruce, white pine; c. 1793.
 Courtesy the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union.
Figure 54

Tall-case clock; mahogany; c. 1770.
By John Jeffray of Glasgow.
Provenance: John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, Governor of Virginia, 1771-75.
Courtesy the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
Figure 55

Tall-case clock; mahogany, mahogany veneers; oak, white pine; c. 1770.
Provenance: Catlett family of Timberneck, Gloucester Co., Va.
Courtesy the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.
Figure 56

Figure 57

Celestial globe (one of a pair); mahogany, mahogany veneers; oak, white pine; c. 1799.
Published by W. & T. M. Burdin, London.
Courtesy the Prestwould Foundation.
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