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"Just IMPORTED and to be SOLD": Methods of Acquisition and Use of Knives, Forks, and Silver Spoons in Eighteenth-Century Virginia

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**“Just IMPORTED and to be SOLD”: Methods of Acquisition and Use of Knives,
Forks, and Silver Spoons in Eighteenth-Century Virginia**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in History from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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I. Silver Spoons and Fine Utensils

A silver spoon, an ivory handled fork, and a rounded knife said a lot about the wealth and gentility of a planter in eighteenth-century Virginia gentry society. The owner of these utensils not only had the money to buy them, but also the good connections to get the best styles and the understanding to participate in an elaborate dining ritual. A study of the ways and means of obtaining fine utensils provides a wider understanding of Virginia genteel society. It was a culture focused on outward displays of wealth that valued fashionable British goods and required time and mastery of aristocratic ritual. It is important to understand the types of utensils, the tobacco economy, and the genteel dining ritual before making the comparison between importation and local production of fine cutlery in eighteenth-century Virginia. This study will discuss the changing styles and forms of eighteenth-century utensils, the economic ties of Virginia planters to British merchants in the tobacco trade, and the ways the gentry differentiated themselves from their poorer neighbors in the basic act of eating. It will also compare the volume of importation of dining utensils and the influence of the consumer revolution with the products and services of Virginia tradesmen and the opposing influence of the non-importation associations before the American Revolution. The result of this study will show that genteel Virginians needed fashionable knives, forks, and silver spoons to prove their social status and they chose to import them from the mother country.

The Virginia gentry were aware of changing styles of silverware and utensils and used their connections and credit in the tobacco market to import the latest fashionable goods from British merchants. They needed the latest utensils to participate in the

discriminating genteel dining ritual. Although there were many silversmiths in the growing urban centers of Virginia, almost all of the knives, forks, and spoons that graced elite dining tables were imported from Britain. Changing styles, markets, and manners all affected the choice Virginia planters made when purchasing their dining utensils. The planters had a continual connection to Great Britain as their home, even if they were born in Virginia. The mother country was the only available market for Virginian cash crops. It was natural for the important men to look across the Atlantic for their goods, styles, and models for fashionable living. Even the patriotic focus of the American Revolution could not change the overall trend of importing consumer goods. The Virginia elite preferred to have their fine dining utensils delivered to their plantation homes directly from the British marketplace rather than get their supply from local merchants and producers.

One can study the surviving letters, advertisements, inventories, and ledgers of eighteenth-century merchants, silversmiths, and gentlemen to understand the material culture and economic role of genteel knives, forks, and spoons. Merchant records from John Norton and Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia, and Alexander Hamilton, a factor for a Scottish direct trade firm, illustrate the business methods and services of competing tobacco merchants who provided luxury goods and dining utensils to their Virginia clients. A few rare receipts and account books, as well as the numerous published announcements of Virginia silversmiths and jewelers show the wide range of businesses and trades practiced in local trade shops. The life, work, and advertisements of James Geddy provide an example of the social standing and the type of patronage Virginia silversmiths received from their elite customers. Probate inventories of over 250

Virginians who owned fine cutlery list the many different forms and materials of knives, forks, and silver spoons in Virginia households. Finally, George Washington serves as the perfect genteel case study of a man looking to exhibit his social standing through his large collection of fine dining utensils. Most of Washington's business dealings with British merchants and local silversmiths were recorded in his carefully collected letters and ledger books. These records illustrate the dependence of Virginians on British merchants for a constant supply of luxury goods, including knives, forks, and spoons by the dozen.

The trade, whether local or imported, for dining utensils was shaped by the consumer revolution in the eighteenth century. This economic and social movement brought more goods and greater awareness of material presentations of wealth to the British North American colonies. There were more goods available in Virginia shops and more styles available from British merchants. Virginia planters wanted a great number of elite goods to prove their wealth and separate themselves from their poorer neighbors. They remodeled their homes, refined their manners, and imported their utensils to create a separate genteel society of appearances. Elite Virginia shoppers sought out the best items in the latest fashions for their genteel homes. They valued the British fashions even more than the independent spirit that grew throughout the eighteenth century. Genteel Virginians imported fine dining utensils directly from British merchants, and mainly patronized local silversmiths for small repair work.

Styles and Forms

The genteel spoons in this study are made of silver. They are the beautiful, lustrous pieces found in museums and family collections of plate. Most spoons in Virginia at this time were made of more base materials, such as wood, bone, or pewter; only those Virginians attempting gentility could afford to eat from status items like silverware. The terms “silverware” and “plate” are used interchangeably to describe various pieces of household furniture and utensils made of silver. Silver spoons and other forms of plate owned in the American colonies, whether made in the colonies or in the mother country, followed the European styles. The styles of silver spoons changed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as people amassed larger collections of spoons to show off their wealth and their gentility. Styles changed from unembellished and medieval to decorated and classical. Plate designs were simple and austere in the mid-seventeenth century then bright and ornate in the late seventeenth century. Silver designs of more refined and simple forms in the early eighteenth century bloomed into the intricate, natural designs of the rococo at mid-century and adopted a chaste, classical style towards the end of the century.¹ These stylistic adaptations in British and European silver responded to the changing worldviews of the stylish elite and their luxury designers. Changing political power, global understanding, and philosophical or scientific ideas brought about changes in fashion which were displayed in art and luxury decorative items, such as plate.

No matter what design, pieces of plate, such as spoons, were not made of pure silver, which was too soft to create strong containers and utensils. The standard for silver

¹ Kurt M. Semon, “Small But Useful American Silver” in *A Treasury of Old Silver*, ed. Kurt M. Semon, (New York: American Collector, 1947).

was established in the fourteenth century with the creation of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in England. The sterling standard was set at 925 out of 1000 parts pure silver and 75 parts base metal, usually copper, to add strength to the alloy. For a brief period of time at the turn of the eighteenth century, from 1697-1720, the standard was raised to the Britannia standard which required 958/1000 parts pure silver.² This was done to preserve British coins, which were in short supply because silversmiths melted them down for sterling material. As a result, there was a shortage of silver for the mint.³ The sterling standard returned in 1720. Although there was no assay office to certify the silver alloy of new pieces of plate in the British North American colonies, most American silver was at or near the 925/1000 parts silver sterling standard. Since the materials for most American-made pieces were old English-made pieces of plate, the alloy mixture did not change. There were no supplies of raw silver available to colonial silversmiths, so recycling worn, outdated plate was the only way to make a new piece.

British silversmiths who had raw materials used different marks to show the standard of the alloy as well as the place of manufacture, the date a utensil was made, and the silversmith who made it. The first silver mark was ordered by the 1300 English law which established the sterling standard. This law ordered that all silver pieces must be assayed to guarantee the standard and marked with a leopard head to show they were sterling. In 1363, silver and goldsmiths began to add a maker's mark to their work. For several centuries the maker's marks were pictures to represent the smiths, probably because they, and almost everyone else, could not read or write. Silversmiths switched to stamping their initials as their mark after 1697. After 1478, a letter of the alphabet was

² DeWitt Wallace Museum, Mary Jewett Gaiser Silver Gallery.

³ Edward Wenham, *The Practical Book of American Silver*, (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1949), pp. 40-42.

stamped onto every piece of silver to indicate the year it was made. In 1544, the mark for sterling throughout England changed from the leopard head to the lion passant. More assay offices were established around the country and each new city stamped its own mark on pieces produced and assayed there. London kept the leopard head as its location marker. Other location markers included a castle with three towers for Exeter, a cross with five lions passant for York, an anchor for Birmingham, a crown for Sheffield, a thistle for Edinburgh, and a harp for Ireland. During the period of the Britannia standard, assayers stamped the mythic figure of Britannia on all pieces that met the different standard. Finally, in 1784, a stamped image of the monarch's head was applied to show that the taxes were paid on all new pieces of plate.⁴ British-made silver was stamped with all of these indicators to show the alloy standard, maker, location, date, and taxes paid for every piece of silver that made its way to the British North American colonies. Because the colonies lacked assay offices and strict regulations on local production, American silver often only included one maker's mark.

The changing hallmarks on pieces of plate aid in the study of the shifting silver styles over time. British and American silverware in the eighteenth century can be separated into three style periods. The High Standard Period (1697-1720) came about due to the change to the Britannia standard for the silver alloy. This time period was characterized by a social change in the use of plate items. More items were made for domestic use, fewer for ceremonial observances. These items had different styles and forms from their predecessors because they were made with the higher Britannia standard silver alloy. The alloy used less copper to increase the percentage of pure silver and

⁴ John Fleming and Hugh Honour, *The Penguin Dictionary of Decorative Arts* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 363-364.

thereby create a softer metal. Detailed ornamentation was almost impossible with the soft metal, so styles of plate at the beginning of the eighteenth century were smaller, thicker, and nearly plain, without delicate decoration.⁵

With the return of the old sterling standard came the Rococo period (~1725-1770), marked by elaborate ornamentation and French Huguenot influences on silverwork. In the middle of the eighteenth century, new pieces exhibited oriental ornamental forms and lavish decorations. Popular designs for detail work included scrolls, marine objects, shells, gadroon (rope-like twists) borders, masks, flowers, sea monsters, tritons, animal heads, ribbons, and symbolic figures.⁶

Silver in the late eighteenth century, around the years of the American Revolution, through the early years of the American Republic in the early nineteenth century took on the style of the Classic period (~1765-1825). At this time, there was a renaissance of interest in the philosophical ideas, literature, and art of the early democracies in Greece and Rome. Plate designs in this period were inspired by the architectural designs of Robert Adam, who brought aspects of the Roman Empire to the buildings of London. The classical, or neoclassical, style was characterized by simplicity based on symmetry and proper proportion. Pieces had discreet ornamentation featuring medallions, fruit, foliage, rosettes, drapery, laurels, and honey suckle. The classical style was adopted as the new 'American' style of silverwork during the nascent years of the Republic.⁷

While these broad stylistic changes took place throughout the eighteenth century, most of the changes in the form of silver spoons took place early in the century, before

⁵ Wenham, pp. 40-42.

⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

the Virginia gentry class started their large collections of silverware. Silver spoons of the seventeenth century and earlier had the old-fashioned form with a circular, or fig-shaped, bowl and a straight, tubular stem.⁸ Spoon forms in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were made in the Hanoverian pattern. These spoons featured narrower elliptical bowls, flattened stems with wavy-end designs, and the characteristic rattail at the connection of the base of the bowl and the stem⁹ (Figure 1).

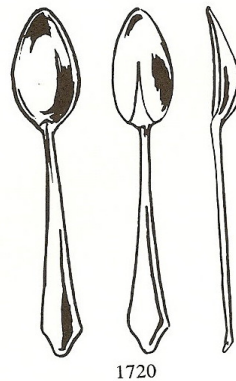


Figure 1 Design of Hanoverian Spoons with rattail and wavy-end.¹⁰

By the third decade of the eighteenth century, the wavy-end evolved into the extremely popular spatulate, rounded handle end. These stems featured a pronounced ridge down the center of the handle with the ends turned up with designed curves coming together at the ridge.¹¹ The 1730s brought the end of the rattail; the pointed shape was replaced with a sculpted, round connection to the handle just below the drop, or the deepest part, of the bowl, known as a “double drop.” Any pronounced ridge down the face of the spoon stem was gone, except for just below the round, turned end¹² (Figure

⁸ Martha Gandy Fales, *Early American Silver* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1973), p. 56.

⁹ Peter Brown, ed., *British Cutlery: An Illustrated History of Design, Evolution and Use* (London: York Civic Trust, 2001), p. 101.; Wenham, p. 139.

¹⁰ Ralph M. Kovel and Terry H. Kovel, *A Directory of American Pewter and Silver Plate* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1961).

¹¹ Fales, p. 58.

¹² Wenham, p. 139.

2). Engraved initials on the backs of many of these spoons, along with the shell designs on the double-drop of such Rococo spoons, indicate that these spoons were laid face down on the table to show off the workmanship.

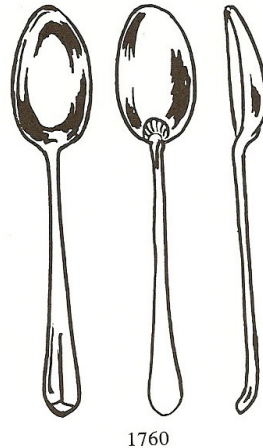


Figure 2 Line design of a spoon with a shell double drop and slight spatulated end with ridge just below the forward curve.¹³

After the mid-eighteenth century, the faces of spoon handles were increasingly decorated with stylish motifs. Spoons with turned-back handles appeared around 1760 and dominated the market by the 1780s. Handles with ends turned backwards left a smooth, open engraving surface on their face (Figure 3). These spoons had initials, fashionable designs, and gadroon borders on the front of the handles, which correspondingly led to a change in the way they were set on the table. Spoons were flipped over and set with their bowls facing up to show off the intricate workmanship of the engraved rococo and classical designs. Right at the end of the century, spoons with turned-back handles and front-side bright-cut engraving featured pointed tips on the ends of the handles.

¹³ Kovel and Kovel.

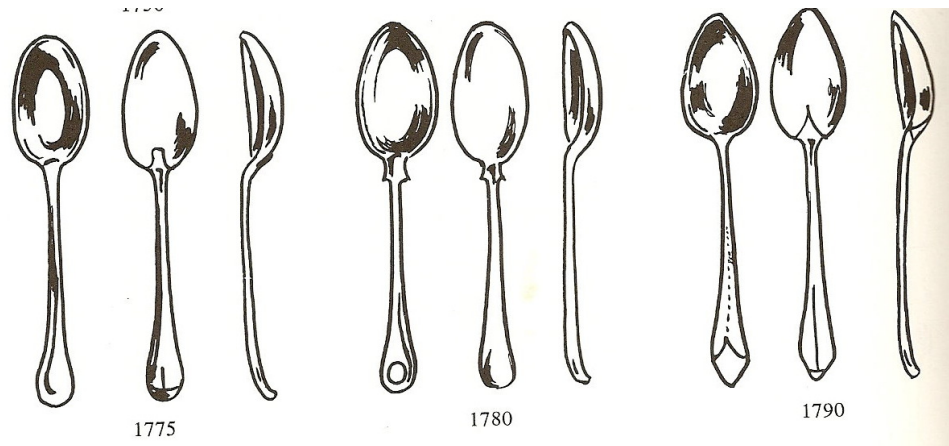


Figure 3 Late-eighteenth-century spoons with handles turned backwards and more decoration on their faces.¹⁴

Spoons of any material or design were common in Virginia for most of its history; the same could not be said for forks and knives specific for dining. The fork was still a new invention when the first English colonists landed at Jamestown. The first fork in America was brought to Boston in 1633 for John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony.¹⁵ Winthrop's fork had two prongs and came in a leather case with a matching knife. Winthrop was a rare Englishman with a fork in the 1630s, and for several decades his was probably the only fork in British North America. The first mention of a fork in Virginia is in an inventory dated 1677 which listed a single fork.¹⁶ Three-pronged forks did not appear on any English tables until the mid-seventeenth century, and forks were still not in wide use in England late in the century.¹⁷ People brought their own knives and forks with them to dinner, if they had them. They carried their utensils around

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Patricia Easterbrook Roberts, *Table settings, Entertaining, and Etiquette*, (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 104.

¹⁶ Alice Morse Earle, "Home Life in Colonial Days" in *Tableware Silver and Silversmiths* ed. Mary R. M. Goodwin, (Colonial Williamsburg Rockefeller Library Research Files, 1934).

¹⁷ Wenham, p. 139.

with them in small cases similar to the one Governor Winthrop had for his fork. It was not up to the seventeenth-century host to own enough utensils for all the guests.

Forks seemed a strange, new-fangled invention for a long time and were not in wide use in England until the early eighteenth century. Most Americans did not have forks until the third quarter of the century. One of the earliest forms of forks in Britain and Virginia was a sucket fork, a utensil with a spoon at one end and a two-tine fork on the other. These utensils were mostly seventeenth-century forms used to eat sucket, a dish of sweet preserved fruit in syrup. Fashionable diners could stab large pieces of sticky fruit with the tines and scoop up the runny syrup with the spoon.¹⁸ Forks for wealthy Virginians in the early eighteenth century were small with three tines. By the mid-eighteenth century, the time when large sets of forks and knives were becoming popular in prosperous Virginia planter homes, there was a distinction between small, three-tined dessert forks and large, heavy, four-tined table forks. In the later years of the eighteenth century, forks and matching knives with thick handles of exotic materials could be up to twelve inches long.¹⁹

The advent of fashionable dining forks brought about a change in the use and form of knives used for eating. English and colonial diners in the seventeenth century used knives with sharp points to cut their food, stab a morsel, and bring it to their mouths. By the end of the seventeenth century, the knives used for dining were separate from the ones used to kill and prepare the meal. Decorative and fashionable eating utensils, such as the new knives and forks for the eighteenth-century dining table, came in a wide variety of materials. Most knives and forks had strong steel blades and tines that would resist

¹⁸ Semon.

¹⁹ Wenham, p. 139.

wear from continuous use attached to decorative handles. Some forks were fashioned entirely from silver, but these were very rare, and were not in fashion until the end of the eighteenth century. For example, Ralph Wormeley, of Middlesex County, Virginia, had two silver forks listed in his probate inventory in 1791.²⁰ There were forks and knives, however, with silver handles through the second half of the century. Other materials for the fashionable handles were ivory, ebony, ceramics, bone, wood, and horn. Ivory handles were especially popular among the Virginia elite in the eighteenth century with the first established style of fine utensils. Knives in the early eighteenth century took on the ‘scimitar’ shape with a wide, spatulated tip and a hefty pistol handle.²¹ Around mid-century, the forks on Virginia dining tables had matching pistol handles (Figure 4).

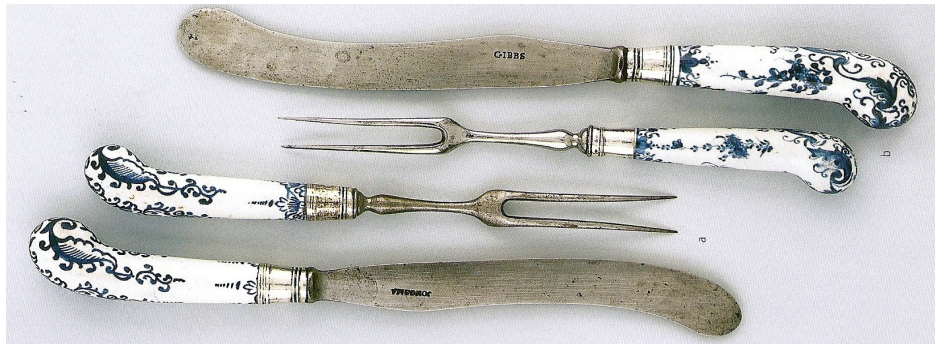


Figure 4 Knives with scimitar blades and two-tined forks with ceramic pistol handles.²²

The change in use and form of dining knives and forks had a physical impact on the dining ritual. James Deetz argued in his historical anthropological treatise *In Small Things Forgotten* that the change in knife shape, along with the later introduction of the fork in the British North American colonies, caused differences in American and British cultures still present today. Once forks became more widespread in England, British

²⁰ Ralph Wormeley, *Middlesex County Will Book G 1787-1793* in “Probing the Past,” Center for History and New Media, George Mason University and Gunston Hall Plantation, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/probateinventory/index.php>.

²¹ Brown, pp. 14-16.

²² Ibid.

diners did not need pointed knives to carry food to their mouths, so rounded blades replaced pointed ones. In an effort to have the most fashionable forms of goods, Virginians and other colonists imported the round-end knives at the beginning of the eighteenth century, before widespread use of forks, which were still seen as unfamiliar and strange, even laughable, utensils. Early eighteenth-century American diners with spoons, rounded knives, and no forks cut their meat with the knife and pushed it into the spoon bowl to carry the food to their mouths. When Americans later adopted forks they used them as they had used their spoons to carry food to the mouth. They held their forks curved down to anchor food while cutting, then turned it over and used it like a spoon to carry food from plate to mouth. The dining process that Deetz described is still the method most Americans use when eating, and explains why many Americans think that the British are the different ones who use their forks upside down. In fact, it was a change in colonial dining utensils and habits that caused a continuing difference in American and British cultures.²³

The spatulate knives with hefty pistol handles that caused this cultural shift remained popular in the British North American colonies through most of the eighteenth century. A new French style was introduced after mid-century with long, spear-shaped blades with pointed tips and straight or pistol handles of ivory with shell inlay and silver caps (Figure 5). This pointed knife form did not prove as popular as the rounded blades, and French spear knives were out of fashion before the end of the century. The next style featured a return of the round blade. Late-century knives had large, parallel-sided, round-tip blades with simplified and standardized straight handles.²⁴

²³ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1977), chapter 6.

²⁴ Brown, p. 14-16.



Figure 5 French spear-point style knife and three-tined fork with silver handles.²⁵

The changing fashions of stylish knives, forks, and spoons required new pieces of furniture for storage and display of large collections. Many Virginia planters ordered large knife boxes or cases to store their dining utensils. The knife boxes themselves were beautiful pieces of joinery to display on a sideboard in the dining room. They were made from expensive hardwoods or covered in fine materials with luxurious patterns and textures. Knife boxes imported to Virginia plantations were made of mahogany, black walnut, or cherry. Many knife boxes were covered in Shagreen, a type of leather made from shark skins, while others were “Japanned,” decorated with oriental designs. Another storage device for fine flatware was a knife basket or tray, a shallow container used to carry dirty utensils back to the scullery to be washed. Knife trays were also used as storage for lesser-quality utensils or in the absence of a better knife box. Knife trays could be made of wood or wicker with a tin lining. Many were decorated with Japanning to make them look more elegant and fashionable.

Virginia planters were acutely aware of the changing fashions of dining spoons, knives, and forks and the furniture to house them. If a planter did not have the right utensils for his table or did not understand their proper use, he had no right to live, eat, and play among the Virginia elite. With each new fashion, an elite planter would have to buy a new set of utensils. Every genteel guest at his dining table would know if the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

knives, forks, and silver spoons were of the latest style or if they were a few years behind the times. Virginia silversmiths copied fashionable styles and forms in their country-made work, but never gained great patronage from the gentry class. Elite Virginians acquired great collections of silverware and fine utensils throughout the eighteenth century, almost universally with British origins.

II. Cash Crops and Credit

Genteel planters would not have been able to acquire all their fine flatware if they had not mastered the major business of Virginia. The Harrison, Lee, Mason, and Washington families who accumulated large numbers of silver spoons and fine knives and forks in the eighteenth century made their money by dominating the tobacco trade. Colonial Virginia was an agrarian society dependent on an export-led economy based mainly on the tobacco staple. Virginia planters grew tobacco to export to Great Britain for sale in British markets or for reexportation to other European markets. Instead of receiving cash or ready money from the sale of their crops, most elite Virginians received credit and manufactured goods from British merchants. The great planters had the land to grow the best tobacco, the resources to grow the most tobacco, and the power to control a large portion of the tobacco trade. These elite planters also had strong connections to consignment merchants in London who sold their tobacco, provided their manufactured goods, and, most importantly, supplied them with credit. This chapter will outline the basics of the cash crop economy and the credit system of the tobacco trade and follow the example of George Washington to understand how great Virginia planters managed their business affairs to get luxury goods.

Cash Crops

Once John Rolfe first produced a tobacco crop that would sell in Europe, tobacco became the major way of making money in the Old Dominion. By the eighteenth century,

elite Virginians had figured out the right formula for making the most money possible from the weed. Prosperous planters had the land and labor to grow the most tobacco and the location and power to control the tobacco trade in their neighborhood. These gentlemen benefitted from the export-led economy of Virginia staples and understood that to make the most money they must provide the staple that European markets needed most, whether it was the addicting weed or basic foodstuffs.

The distinguishing factor of the Virginia gentry was the amount of property they owned. For example, Robert “King” Carter owned estates totaling 300,000 acres across Virginia at his death in 1732.¹ Land was the most important factor for gaining wealth in the agrarian economy of colonial Virginia; without enough acreage, a colonist would have considerable trouble supporting himself and his family. An average family in Virginia required 100-200 acres of real estate to support itself comfortably, although it could not work all of the property at one time. So much land was necessary to support the chosen cash crop of Virginia; tobacco is a debilitating crop and leaches almost all the nutrients from the soil within a few years. After supporting a few crops of tobacco, a patch of earth had to be left fallow for years to renew its healthy growing properties. The anonymous author of the 1775 publication *American Husbandry* explained why so much property was necessary for the great Virginia planters:

First, that the planter may have a sure prospect of increasing his culture on fresh land [cleared as old fields were exhausted]; secondly, that the lumber may be a winter employment for his slaves and afford casks for his crops. Thirdly, that he may be able to keep vast stocks of cattle for raising provisions in plenty, by ranging in the woods; and where the lands are not fresh, the necessity is yet greater, as they must yield much manure for replenishing the worn-out fields. This

¹ Edmund Berkeley, Jr., ed., *The Diary, Correspondence, and Papers of Robert “King” Carter of Virginia, 1701-1732*, <http://etext.virginia.edu/users/berkeley/>.

want of land is such that they reckon a planter should have 50 acres of land for every working hand.²

Wealthy Virginia planters benefitted not only from the amount of land they owned, but also from the location of their great plantations. The elite farmers lived along the major rivers in Tidewater Virginia, the coastal region with the richest soil. Because of the quality of their soil, gentry planters grew a better quality of tobacco. The most expensive tobacco in the London markets was the sweet-scented variety grown along the James and the York Rivers. Elite planters along the Virginia peninsulas grew the best quality leaf and therefore made the most money in the tobacco market.

In addition to the 300,000 acres of land, Robert Carter's will listed that he owned "above 1,000 negroes."³ Owning enough labor was the second most important factor for making money in the tobacco economy. Each free or enslaved laborer could only work four or five acres at a time, so owning thousands of acres of land was useless unless a planter had the labor to work it. Tobacco was a labor-intensive crop and required care all throughout the year. Tobacco hands went through a long process of planting, weeding, de-worming, picking, drying, and packing to create a finished crop. Wealthy planters had the resources to buy slave labor to work their large tracts of land.⁴

The first half of the eighteenth century was a time of increasing labor in the Chesapeake. The number of dependents per household rose by 28% from 1705-1755 largely because of an increase in slave labor.⁵ Whenever a planter had the money, he would invest in more labor. Virginians imported thousands of new slaves from Africa in

² Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 22.

³ Emory G. Evans, *A "Topping People": The Rise and Decline of Virginia's Old Political Elite, 1680-1790* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 91.

⁴ Isaac, p. 22.

⁵ Allan Kulikoff, "The Economic Growth of the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Colonies," *The Journal of Economic History* vol. 39, no. 1 (March 1979), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2118925>.

the first half of the century, but these foreign-born slaves were less productive than the second-generation native-born slaves were. Slaves from Africa were more likely to die quickly from disease, refuse to work, and run away. The productivity of enslaved workers affected the price of tobacco. From 1706-1732, when Virginians increased their labor force by importing over 28,000 African slaves, the tobacco price increased by 1% per year. Between 1732 and 1755, an additional 35,500 slaves were imported to Virginia from Africa, and the price of tobacco only increased by 0.6% a year. The rate of importation slowed after 1740 as the price for slaves increased; it became more economically feasible to encourage slaves to have children than to buy new Africans. By the 1760s, most of the slaves working on Virginia tobacco plantations were born in the Chesapeake. These Virginia-born slaves were more productive than their parents were and from 1755-1774 the price of tobacco rose at a rate of 1.9% per year.⁶ The great planters had enough slaves to compensate for the few who died from disease or ran away and to provide different partners for their slaves to create new generations, thereby increasing the total laborers on the plantation and their productivity.

The great tobacco planters might be better termed tobacco businessmen because most of the tobacco they profited from was not grown on their own land and with their own laborers. They augmented their incomes by acting as merchant, banker, and government for their lesser neighbors. With their large plantations on the banks of the major rivers, the local gentry could control most of the shipments of tobacco and imported goods to and from their neighborhoods. Their estates usually contained, or were close by the main landing points for the area. After the Tobacco Inspection Act of 1730, these landing points became the sites of new tobacco warehouses. Official inspectors

⁶ Ibid.

certified finished crops of tobacco packed into hogsheads, huge casks 4 feet tall and 2.5 feet in diameter that weighed about half a ton, and stored at the warehouses. The inspector issued tobacco notes for each certified hogshead and colonial farmers used these notes as currency to exchange their finished crops for goods, slaves, land, or rent. The last man with the note consigned the hogshead to a merchant or ship captain for export.

Smaller farmers were usually already in debt to larger planters by the time their hogsheads were inspected. The gentry often provided tools and other essential goods from their stores of supplies to lesser farmers in the area. As the major land owners in the area, the gentry were usually also the major landlords as well. They rented portions of the great land holdings to poor farmers, or sharecroppers, for a portion of what ever tobacco the sharecroppers grew. These poor and middling farmers gave their tobacco notes to the great planters to clear the debts for tools, supplies, and rent advanced to them during the growing season.⁷ Thomas Lee, of Stratford Hall on the Potomac River, acted as a merchant for his neighbors along the river. He had specific spaces in his house for storage of wet and dry consumer goods for sale to his neighbors. He even operated a store nearby his wharf to supply goods and materials to ships going up and down the river.⁸

The Virginia gentry were also paid in tobacco, or with tobacco notes, for their work in the local government. Local gentry were the justices of the county court, the representatives to the House of Burgesses, and held almost any other advanced position in the local community. Tobacco from salaries and merchant profits greatly increased the amount of tobacco elite planters had to sell at British markets beyond what was grown on

⁷ Isaac, pp. 27-29.

⁸ Stratford Hall, "Plantation Life," <http://www.stratfordhall.org/learn/plantation.php>.

their own plantations. For example, in the 1720s, “King” Carter produced 110 hogsheads of tobacco annually on his own plantations, but he exported between 800 and 1,000 hogsheads per year. The exchange of tobacco notes as money essentially meant that the great planter shipped his own hogsheads of tobacco as well as his neighbors’ to British merchants and made all of the profit from their sale.⁹

The profits made from gentry planters’ own and their neighbors’ tobacco were subject to the ups and downs of the risky tobacco market. There were many booms and depressions in the tobacco economy in the eighteenth century, and planters’ wealth rose and fell with the economic tide. As colonists of Great Britain, Virginian planters could only sell their staple crops to the mother country. Profits from tobacco agriculture were dependent on the staple thesis of economics: “intensive economic growth in a colony is encouraged by rising metropolitan demand for a colonial staple.”¹⁰ Growth or decline in an export-led economy is caused by a change in either the local supply or the foreign demand. Demand might go up because of a lower price for the staple or because of a change in taste or wealth in the metropolitan market. Better labor productivity and lower costs for transportation would lower the price of tobacco in English markets and thereby increase the demand. On the other hand, a change in the taste, population, or wealth in the European market could also increase the demand for Chesapeake tobacco.¹¹ The English tobacco market grew slowly in the first half of the eighteenth century, but grew more rapidly after 1750. This meant that Virginia planters were growing more tobacco and reaping higher profits after mid-century so that they could then buy more manufactured and luxury goods from England for their plantation homes.

⁹ Evans, pp. 92-93.

¹⁰ Kulikoff.

¹¹ Ibid.

The market for Virginia staples was expanding in the third quarter of the eighteenth century as demand for tobacco and food staples increased across Europe. Years of rainy summers coupled with political unrest caused near-starving conditions across much of Europe in the 1760s. New markets with high demands for imported foodstuffs opened across Great Britain and Western Europe. Virginia planters, especially those on the Northern Neck, began to diversify their crops to provide a supply of wheat to the open European markets.¹² Planters who diversified their crops were less susceptible to the ups and downs of the tobacco market. Increased grain production improved the wealth of Virginia planters as well as their lifestyles. Grain production supported new urban centers for mills and storage warehouses and provided more independence from the tobacco colonial system that had been in place in Virginia for so long.

The great men who imported fine cutlery made their fortunes from the Virginia agricultural system. They owned the most property and slaves in the best locations to grow large quantities of high-quality tobacco. They provided necessities for their neighbors in exchange for control over the local tobacco trade. These planters broadened their economic opportunities in the second half of the eighteenth century by expanding their tobacco production and that of other staples wanted in the foreign markets.

Credit

The profits from their tobacco sales came to planters in the form of manufactured necessities, luxury items, and credit to buy more goods. Credit ran the Virginia tobacco economy; it served instead of money as a promise to barter cash crops for tools and luxury goods. Granting and receiving credit was a contract of trust and optimism in the

¹² Ibid.

tobacco trade. If a Virginian did not have the money at present, he could promise to pay with the profits of his future crops. Virginia planters often went into debt to get the necessities and luxuries to run and furnish their grand plantations. There were two different types of merchants in the tobacco trade: consignment merchants and direct trade merchants. Their services differed in the sale of tobacco, exchange of manufactured goods, and extension of credit. Elite planters worked mostly with consignment merchants who offered personal service and extended large amounts of credit to their high-rolling clientele. Direct trade merchants dealt in smaller quantities of tobacco, goods, and credit. Although this method was the most popular way to sell tobacco in Virginia, it was not the preferred method of the gentry class.

Virginia tobacco growers used credit to invest in local goods and services to expand their housing, land, and slaves. Planters needed the credit from their tobacco sales more than they needed actual money. William Byrd II described his life in 1726 as a “Virginia Idyll”:

I have a large Family of my own, and my Doors are open to Every Body, yet I have no Bills to pay, and half-a-Crown will rest undisturbed in my Pocket for many Moons together. Like one of the Patriarchs, I have my Flocks and my Herds, my Bond-men and Bond-women, and every Soart of trade amongst my own Servants, so that I live in a kind of Independence on every one but Providence. However this Soart of Life is without expence, yet it is attended with a great deal of trouble. I must take care to keep all my people to their Duty, to set all the Springs in motion and to make every one draw his equal Share to carry the Machine forward.¹³

Cash and coin were not necessary for a prominent colonial planter. Their slaves produced all of the food and fuel for their plantation on the estate and they bought all other supplies, tools, and luxuries on credit from British merchants. Credit, not ready money, was the most important financial aspect to a Virginia planter. Without credit, a planter

¹³ Isaac, pp. 39-40.

would not have “the essential accoutrements of his rank” or the necessary supplies for his plantation, he would be unable to support his workforce, and his property would be seized for debt.¹⁴

Because of the widespread use of credit to cover all household expenses, debt was a common occurrence in Virginia society, especially among the gentry class. Planters could keep buying more things on the promise of their future tobacco crops, even when their past and present crops had failed. Thomas Jefferson wrote about the Virginia debt to British merchants in the years before the American Revolution:

Virginia certainly owed two millions sterling to Great Britain... Some have conjectured the debt as high as three millions. I think that the state owed [before the outbreak of the War] near as much as all the rest [of the states] put together... These debts had become hereditary from father to son for many generations, so that the planters were a species of property annexed to certain mercantile houses in London.¹⁵

In the 1760s and 1770s, British merchants offered over £2.6 million sterling in credit to Chesapeake tobacco farmers. Credit from Scottish merchant firms alone increased from £500,000 to £1.1 million from 1766 to 1772. Half the debt owed by Virginians to British merchants in 1776 was less than £100, most of that for under £25, and the average debt per Virginia household in 1776 was £26 sterling. These small debts were mostly accumulated by small farmers for basic necessities, such as tools and clothes. Local merchants owed one tenth of the Virginia debt on credit used to supply for their inventory. Virginia gentlemen, the top 2-3% of society, were responsible for over one third of the total debt for the colony to their British merchants.¹⁶ The great planters owed so much because they used large amounts of credit to expand their land holdings,

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵ Lawrence H. Gipson, “Virginia Planter Debts before the American Revolution,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 69, no. 3 (July 1961), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4246759>.

¹⁶ Kulikoff.

improve their great houses, and import luxury goods far beyond their means. The anonymous author of *American Husbandry* included his opinion of the indebtedness of the Virginia elite in his useful tract on the colony's agricultural society:

In most articles of life, a great Virginia planter makes a greater show, and lives more luxuriantly than a country gentleman in England, on an estate of three or four thousand pounds a year. ... The poverty of the planters here, many of them at least, is much talked of...[but] has little or no reference to their culture [that is, their cultivation of tobacco], but to the general luxury, and extravagant way of living which obtains among the planters ... for men without some rich article of product cannot afford, even with the assistance of credit, to live in such a manner... that will support such luxury, and pay eight per cent. interest on their debts. What common culture in Europe will do this?¹⁷

Only the tobacco economy could support such extravagant lives in debt.

The elite planters of Tidewater Virginia did most of their trade for tobacco, luxuries, and credit through consignment merchants. The planters consigned their hogsheads of tobacco to English merchants, who personally sold the crops in the best markets. The hogsheads remained in the planter's ownership until they sold in London. Planters paid the shipping, storage (often in ships and warehouses owned by the merchant), and insurance costs for their crops from their merchant account. The consignment merchant never owned the hogsheads- they just traded them on behalf of their Virginia clients.¹⁸ The consignment trade was based on close relationships and personal service between planters and merchants. These relationships could last for years through personal correspondence and favors. The merchants looked for the best prices to sell their clients' tobacco, filled orders for manufactured goods and luxuries from London to ship to Virginia, handled political and family matters in England, and extended large

¹⁷ Gipson.

¹⁸ Bruce A. Ragsdale, "George Washington, the British Tobacco Trade, and Economic Opportunity in Prerevolutionary Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 97, no. 2 (April 1989): p. 136, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4249068>.

amounts of private credit to their Virginia friends/clients based on loyalty and personal reputation. Merchants acted as personal bankers for clients, granting credit, cash, bills of sale, and extending debts to their clients who could then increase their wealth, or their appearance of wealth, by buying more land, slaves, and luxury goods.¹⁹

One prominent example of the consignment trade was the business of John Norton & Sons. John Norton ran the merchant house in London while his son, John Hatley Norton, operated the consignment from Yorktown, Virginia during their years of increasing business from the late 1760s to the American Revolution. Norton & Sons' clients consisted of planters along the York River and many of the Williamsburg elite, including Robert Carter Nicholas, Peyton Randolph, and George Wythe.²⁰ A quick study of the firm's finances provides insight into the business of consignment merchants. These merchants made their money from small charges for their services and a commission on tobacco sold for their clients. Norton charged £2 per hogshead shipped to the firm in London, 2.5% on goods purchased for planters and another 2.5% to ship the goods to Virginia, and 3% commission from the sale of a planter's tobacco.²¹ The state of the finances for John Norton & Sons also showed an increasing indebtedness of Virginia planters to their merchants just before the Revolution. In 1769, Virginia planters owed the firm £11,000. In 1770, just a year later, the debt increased to £18,500. By July 1773, their Virginia clients owed Norton & Sons £41,000.²² Even though the Nortons needed

¹⁹ Samuel M. Rosenblatt, "The Significance of Credit in the Tobacco Consignment Trade: A Study of John Norton and Sons, 1768-1775," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, vol. 19, no. 3 (July 1962), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1920089>.

²⁰ Norton & Sons, *John Norton & Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia, Being the Papers from Their Counting House for the Years 1750-1795*, ed. Frances Norton Mason (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1937).

²¹ Rosenblatt.

²² Ibid.

payment for the debts, they continued to issue credit based on their friendships with their clients.

Although the Virginia elite planters traded their tobacco through consignment merchants, that trade was not the most popular, or profitable, trade for Virginia tobacco. Direct trade merchants sent factors to Virginia to buy tobacco directly from the growers to take back and sell in Britain. This trade was usually for the cheaper Oronoco tobacco grown by smaller farmers across the Piedmont region in Virginia for reexportation from Britain to sell in the growing European market.²³ Direct trade encouraged small and middling planters to sell their own tobacco. After the beginning of direct trading in 1730 (and the Tobacco Inspection Act), Virginia tobacco production expanded greatest in the areas with the highest concentration of direct trade factors. Scottish merchant firms replaced the local gentry in buying cheap tobacco and providing supplies and consumer goods to lesser planters to dominate the direct trade market. Both direct trade and Scottish merchants were new phenomena in the eighteenth century. Merchants from Scotland could not trade with British colonies until after the 1707 Act of Union joined Scotland and England under one Parliament. Scottish trade was well-established in Virginia by 1735, just after the introduction of direct trade.²⁴ The Scottish firms from Glasgow led the direct trade because they had the best contacts in the French markets to sell reexported, cheap tobacco. By 1770, Scottish firms controlled half of the Chesapeake tobacco trade and by the American Revolution, direct trade made up four-fifths of the tobacco export trade in the Chesapeake.²⁵

²³ Ragsdale, pp. 149-150.

²⁴ Calvin B. Coulter, Jr., "The Import Trade of Colonial Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, vol. 2, no. 3 (July 1945), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921454>.

²⁵ Ragsdale, p. 150.

The only tobacco growers who did not participate in direct trade were the elite planters because direct trade simply was not their best deal. Direct traders did not offer better prices for the better sweet-scented tobacco available from large Tidewater planters. The factors in Virginia did not offer the same personal service as their consignment merchants in London and did not extend enough credit to support the elite lifestyle. In fact, direct trade firms did not even want to trade with the great planters. William Cunninghame & Co., one of the largest Glasgow firms, instructed Virginia agents to deal with the smaller planters, who were seldom greatly in debt, rather than with the “first crop masters who are continually so;” if they did buy crops from the great planters it was only for cash, not credit.²⁶

Another reason why direct trade did not work for the elite planters was that these merchants could not provide the large quantities of supplies and luxury items for great plantations. Direct trade merchants provided imported manufactured goods for sale at small stores around the Chesapeake. These stores were convenient places for small and middling farmers to sell their crops and get supplies throughout the year on credit or in exchange for tobacco. The merchant companies had agents in the major British manufacturing cities to buy the goods popular in Virginia at the cheapest prices and ship them directly to stores in the colony.²⁷ Because these merchants bought supplies in bulk directly from their source, they could sell them at the same or lower prices in Virginia than what elite planters paid for supplies sent from London warehouses.²⁸ While the merchant stores could not provide the exact items and quantities needed by elite planters

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 150-151.

²⁷ Coulter.

²⁸ Ragsdale, p. 155.

for their grand plantations, the stores did become the major way most Virginia farmers got their supplies and sold their crops by the time of the American Revolution.

George Washington's Cash Crops and Credit

As a young man, just after his military career in the French and Indian War, George Washington wanted to lead the elite lifestyle of the great planters of Tidewater Virginia. To do so, he focused on gaining the land, labor, and local influence to become a major player in the Virginia export economy. In 1758, he owned or leased 4,700 acres and 50 slaves along the Potomac River and was continually adding to his landholdings. In January 1759, Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis and took over her estate, including 18,000 acres of prime tobacco land along the York River.²⁹ Through his marriage into one of the top Virginia families, Washington gained the properties and station to collect great profits from the tobacco trade.

Washington's marriage to the widow Custis brought him better connections with consignment merchants in London to sell his tobacco for the best prices and furnish his home with elite trappings bought on credit. In 1759, Washington took up correspondence with Robert Cary & Co., the same consignment firm that worked for the leading planters on the York River and the Northern Neck, including William Byrd III, Robert Carter, and Philip Ludwell Lee.³⁰ Washington sent most of his tobacco crop from Mount Vernon and his York River estates to Cary & Co. and obtained almost all of his imported goods through the company. He sent a detailed order for imported goods with each consignment of tobacco. An agent of the company, probably John Moorey, bought the goods from

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 138, 144.

tradesmen, artisans, and warehousemen in London. As many as 45 tradesmen contributed to each order for the Washington estates.³¹ Cary & Co. sent an annual ship to the York River to receive consignments and deliver orders. Washington often waited at least ten months from sending his order to receiving what he wanted. Washington sent for an average of £350 of goods per year in the first five years of his dealings with Cary & Co. He imported fine china, silver, fashionable clothes, furniture, books, and paintings to furnish his home as well as all the tools and necessities for the work on his plantations. In 1760, Washington drew two bills of exchange for £699 from the merchant company to buy 2,000 acres of land to expand his Mount Vernon estate. He used other bills of exchange to buy more land and slaves in the same period in the early 1760s.³² By 1764, Washington owed Robert Cary & Co. £1,800 at 5% interest for all of the goods and bills he had received on credit. To pay off the debt, he promised to send all of his tobacco through the company and slow his imports until he was even.³³

Washington's experience with the consignment trade matched the experiences of many other elite planters on the Northern Neck. He recognized the benefits of personal service and large amounts of credit, but believed he was not getting the best deals on his tobacco and imported goods. It was inconvenient for him to ship tobacco from the Potomac River, as most of the consignment trade ships were sent only to the York River. Many of his goods got lost in transit and he was upset by their quality by the time they reached him. Washington wrote many letters to his merchants complaining of the quality of his goods. In one such correspondence, he implied that London tradesmen attempted to fraud their Virginia customers:

³¹ Ibid., p. 142.

³² Ibid., pp. 143-144.

³³ Ibid., p. 148.

It is needless for me to particularize the sorts, quality, or taste I would choose to have them [the wares he ordered] in unless it is observed; 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 have been used by our Forefathers in days of yore. 'Tis a custome, I have some Reason to believe, with many Shop keepers, and Tradesmen when they know goods are bespoke for Exportation to palm sometimes old, and sometimes very slight and indifferent Goods upon Us.³⁴

Washington also resented that the only way for him to pay off his debts and get the imported supplies and luxury goods he needed was by continuing the tobacco trade though the same merchant. He continued to ship the bulk of his crop on consignment to Cary and Co. to pay off his debt, but in the mid-1760s, Washington began to sell his tenants' tobacco to an independent factor in Alexandria, Virginia for direct trade.³⁵

Washington also started to diversify his crops in the mid- and late-1760s to break his dependence on one market and one creditor and to participate in the domestic and West Indies markets. He continued to grow tobacco along the York River, but gave it up at Mount Vernon to produce a variety of crops, including wheat. In 1768, Washington explained his business stance on the tobacco trade to one of his London merchants. He said he would "make no more of that Article [tobacco] than barely serves to furnish me with Goods, this is the Reason therefore why I send it undivided to Messers. Cary & Co. as it is from that House I always get the necessaries wanted for my Family's use."³⁶ He began growing food staples and established a mill and fishery at Mount Vernon to feed the members of his plantation and to make extra money. To further reduce his dependence on British manufactures, Washington bought tools to make his own cloth and

³⁴ Coulter.

³⁵ Ragsdale, p. 154.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 159.

by 1768, his plantation at Mount Vernon produced over 1,200 yards of homespun.³⁷ He sent his last shipment of tobacco to Robert Cary & Co. in 1773. In 1774, he wrote to the merchant “the whole of my Force is in a manner confind to the growth of Wheat and the Manufacturing of it into Flour.”³⁸

George Washington’s experience in the tobacco market of the third quarter of the eighteenth century represents the changes in that market before the American Revolution. The major players of the Virginia export market were still the men with the most land, labor, and influence to grow the most tobacco and export it for sale. Washington did not become one of these players until after his marriage and acquisition of the Custis estates. The elite planters worked with consignment merchants in London to sell their crops and import necessities and luxuries to furnish their plantations, just as Washington worked with Robert Cary & Co. When the sale of their tobacco did not cover the whole price for their imported goods, planters could use credit based on their loyalty and reputation from the merchants to pay for their imports and get large loans to expand their estates. This system of credit from consignment merchants to elite planters meant that the top 2% of Virginia society owed a large portion of the Virginia debt. Washington owed £1,800 to his creditor, over 70 times the average debt for Virginian farmers.

In contrast, direct trade controlled most of the tobacco trade in the Chesapeake colony because merchant factors purchased the crops directly from the growers and established stores to sell basic goods on credit or in exchange for the cash crop. Although most elites dealt only in the consignment trade, Washington sold some of his cheaper tobacco to direct traders in Alexandria. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century,

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 156-157.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

planters grew dissatisfied with the monopoly of the tobacco trade to get imported goods and began to diversify their crops to gain more profits and greater independence from London merchants. Washington and other planters grew grain to feed their own plantations and to sell in growing European markets. All of these changes in the export economy of the Virginia agricultural society, along with the ebbs and flows of the global market, affected the wealth and credit of the elite planters who bought fine utensils.

III. Silver in Gentry Homes and Society

Eighteenth-century planters with land, labor, and power also had the resources and time to improve their status by amassing material objects and mastering genteel skills. These men bought silver flatware as an investment for their wealth, symbols of their status, and tools for their lives of luxury. The people of the British North American colonial world were geographically and socially mobile. Just as a landless laborer, wandering the streets of London, could become an independent farmer in the colonies, a second son of a middling gentleman could move to Virginia and become one of the elite. The new elite bought status items to preserve their new wealth and to show off their station to their unfamiliar neighbors. In the eighteenth century, these items became the necessary tools for the new spaces and etiquette for the genteel dining ritual of Virginia's elite.

Investment in Wealth and Status

In the late seventeenth century, William Fitzhugh of the Northern Neck was ahead of his time when he sought to furnish his house with a substantial silver collection. He famously wrote his reasons for amassing plate to his London merchant in 1688:

I esteem it as well politic as reputable, to furnish myself with an handsom cupboard of plate which gives myself the present use and Credut, is a sure friend att a dead lift, without much loss, or a certain portion for a Child after my decease.¹

Fitzhugh's successors in the Virginia elite in the eighteenth century followed his example of collecting silver as an investment, a way to store their money in a society without

¹ Kathryn C. Buhler, *Mount Vernon Silver* (Mount Vernon, Va.: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1957), p. 9.

banks or ready cash. Silver cutlery came in small pieces of portable wealth that travelers could carry from one country to another and could always sell off for a stable price. Virginia planters in the precarious tobacco economy invested in silver, just as many people today are investing in gold to get through the economic depression. Planters could literally put their money in silverware by melting down their various silver coins to provide the raw material for their plate. When the planters needed cash or coin again, they could melt down their coin silver to create ready money.² As Fitzhugh said, a cupboard of plate was “a sure friend att a dead lift”; silver never decreased in value because its worth was from the weight of the precious metal, not the style or condition of the object. Fitzhugh also wanted silver as “a certain portion for a Child after [his] decease.” Because of their lasting value, pieces of silver were a convenient means of passing wealth from one generation to the next.

The first of Fitzhugh’s “well politic and reputable” reasons for amassing a large collection of silver was that it would give “[him]self the present use and Credut.” Genteel Virginians wanted collections of plate for the practical use as utensils and containers in addition to improving planters’ “Credut,” or status, among their elite neighbors. Silver is universally understood as a symbol of status. By owning silver spoons, forks, and silver-hafted knives, a Virginia planter showed his neighbors that he had a high standard of living, worth, and style. These instant-status goods of personal possession were all the more important in the relatively fluid society in Virginia and the other British North American colonies, where one’s wealth, not birth, determined social rank. An English traveler visiting the colonies in the eighteenth century reported home that “Pride of

² Deborah Dependahl Waters, “From Pure Coin: The Manufacture of American Silver Flatware 1800-1860,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 12 (1997) pp. 19-33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1180578>.

wealth is as ostentatious in the country as ever the pride of birth has been elsewhere.”³

Owning fine silverware showed that a man was wealthy and part of the top class of Virginians: he had the proper connections and credit to get luxury goods, the money to spend on ridiculously-expensive tools for eating, and the space to store and display a large collection of plate.

The Tools of Elite Eighteenth-Century Society

During the eighteenth century, there were many new adaptations of genteel life to increase comfort and create a greater separation between social classes. Life in seventeenth-century Virginia was marked by Indian attacks, restless men, and the rapid scramble for land. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Virginia colonists had pushed back the Indians, switched from indentured servitude to slavery, and taken up all the best land in the Tidewater. Social strata became more static in this century, and opportunities to join the elite members of society dwindled. Those planters already part of the elite were eager to establish their own culture to further separate themselves from the lower levels of colonial society. The difference between gentry life and poor or middling life in eighteenth-century Virginia was most obvious in the eating habits at the different social levels.

The typical seventeenth-century Virginia home was a small wooden structure about sixteen by twenty feet. The wooden frame was built on posts set in holes in the ground and covered with riven clapboards. The roof was made of wooden shingles, the floor of packed earth, and the chimney of wattle and daub. These houses were handmade

³ “The Consumer Revolution,” Colonial Williamsburg *Teacher Gazette* vol. 5, no. 4 (Dec. 2006), http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/december06/consumer_rev.cfm.

by recent immigrants to serve as temporary shelter. Once the nearby land was wasted by tobacco production, the planter would simply move to another part of his acreage and build a new house. It was easier to build a new Virginia house than repair an old one. These houses had just a few rooms with many functions. One or two rooms on the ground floor would share the basic functions of a whole household- bed chamber, workspace, kitchen, sitting room, and dining room- while a loft above served as storage and more sleeping space. Only the wealthiest homes had five rooms or more.⁴

Most of the people of the Chesapeake lived with the bare minimum number of goods, probably not going beyond a bed, a few cooking pots, something to eat from, storage, and a gun. Even many middling planters lived without chairs, tables, sheets, and interior lighting. The seventeenth-century elite had more than their neighbors, but focused on items for comfort and better living than luxury.⁵ In general, there was a limited selection of material household goods, so most households had similar furnishings. There was no great social separation between the wealthy planters and their poorer neighbors. A look at probate inventories from the seventeenth century shows that early Virginians owned few dining utensils. In seventeenth-century Lower Norfolk, Virginia, only 31% of the poorest planters (worth less than £50) owned spoons and none owned knives or forks. In the middling class (£50- £100), 40% had spoons in their probate inventories, and, again, none had knives or forks. Among the wealthy planters (worth more than £250) in Lower Norfolk, only 58% owned spoons, 8.3% had knives,

⁴ James Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 303-306.

⁵ Lorena S. Walsh, "Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643-1777," *Journal of Economic History* vol. 43 (1983). pp. 109-117.

and none included forks.⁶ The typical Virginia meal in the seventeenth century was made in one pot over an open fire and scooped out of a bowl with fingers or a home-made spoon or speared on hunting knife-tips. Dining was brief, communal, and did not require many tools.



Figure 6: The animated state of dining in seventeenth-century Virginia.⁷

Eating rituals became more elaborate across the levels of Virginia society as life became more settled in the eighteenth century. Most Virginians had a stable diet of domesticated beef or pork, and more families could invest in multiple dishes, spoons, and knives by the revolutionary years near the end of the century. As families gained more money and time they invested in individualized sets of dining ware, utensils, and furniture. Mark Wenger notes that the number of drinking vessels at Clifts Plantation in Westmoreland County tripled 1705-1720 and again 1720-1730.⁸ In my study of 257 Virginia probate inventories from 1719-1803 the average number of forks among silverware owners increased from 10.52 forks from 1745-1750 to 17.23 forks from 1775-

⁶ Horn, pp. 310-325.

⁷ Cary Carson, William Pittman, Jonathan Prown, and Anne Estabrooks, *When Virginia Was the Wild West*, (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1999), p. 2.

⁸ Mark R. Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* vol. 3 (1989): p. 149, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3514301>.

1780 (Appendix). New dining tables featured rounded ends to facilitate conversation and ease during formal dining. These fashionable tables required matching dining chairs for individual guests.⁹ According to Cary Carson, individual cups, utensils, and seating provided new social meanings for the dining ritual; “only a certain number of individuals could participate in the event” and “members of that exclusive company could be known by the similar appearance of the artifacts they used.”¹⁰ The elite Virginians sought to differentiate themselves from their poorer neighbors through more elaborate dining rituals requiring more food to prepare, tools to serve, and time to eat. While small planters quickly ate their simple meals from wood or pewter plates and bone spoons in the same room where they cooked and probably slept, the elite colonists took their time to eat several courses from ceramic plates and silver spoons as they sat on chairs arranged around a hardwood table and in a specialized space.¹¹

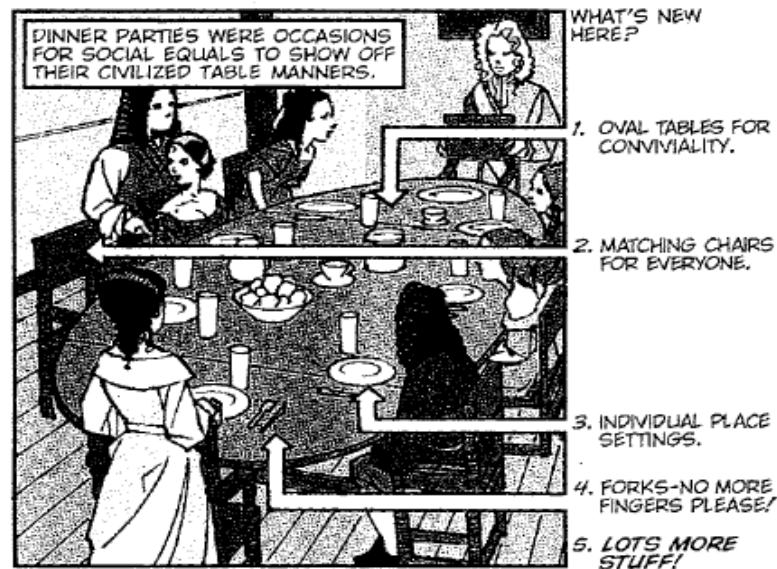


Figure 7: The changes in eighteenth-century dining¹²

⁹ Carson, pp. 590-592.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 505.

¹¹ Wenger, pp. 149-150.

¹² Carson et al., *When Virginia was the Wild West*, p. 17.

The gentry families of eighteenth-century Virginia were set apart by their refined ways of living. They also differentiated themselves from the other levels of society by creating a new standardized genteel architecture. Large plantation mansions were centered on a hall with separate rooms branching off for specialized functions. One of the new specialized rooms was the dining room—a reserved space for genteel ritual.¹³ The dining room grew in importance as the emphasis on elegant living increased in the eighteenth century. A planter's dining room was “the theater of his hospitality,” the place where he displayed his most expensive possessions and his practiced manners.¹⁴ The stage was the large dining table, and the props were the fine dishes, utensils, and the many meats, vegetables, and creative desserts that graced the table. Just as with any production, the elaborate meals served to many guests in these dining rooms took specialized labor and time to prepare. Only the elite planters who had large numbers of slaves could afford to have some enslaved women and girls to work in the kitchen all day to prepare multi-course meals instead of working in the tobacco fields.

The table was set according to precise blocking, as laid out in several cookbooks of the time. (Figure 8) Trained footmen or butlers, often part of the plantation's enslaved populations, laid out the dishes symmetrically in concentric circles with individual settings on the outside edge, and the ring of serving dishes arranged around candles and salt sellers in the center.¹⁵

¹³ Isaac, p. 74.

¹⁴ Wenger, p. 159.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

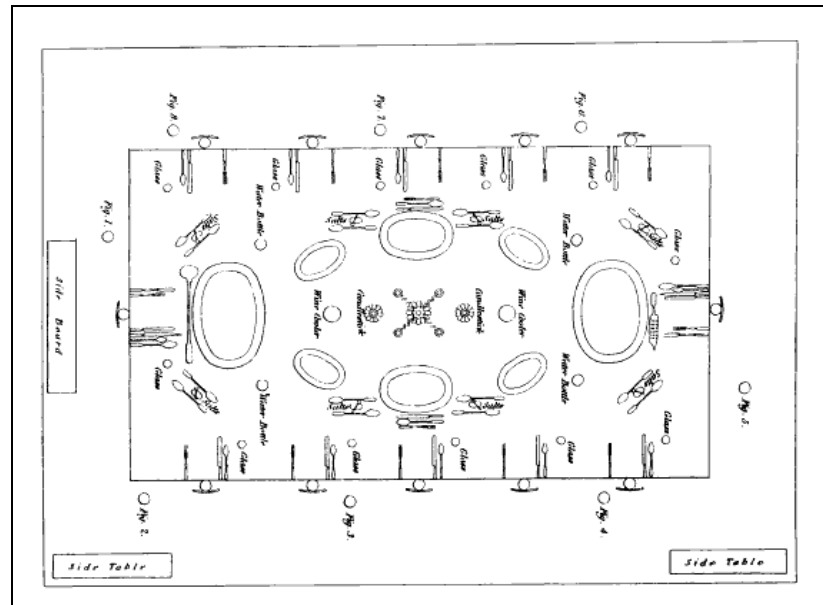


Figure 8: Table Setting Diagram from Thomas Cosnett's *The Footman's Directory and Butler's Remembrancer* (5th ed., 1825)¹

Reverend Ashbel Green provided an in-depth description of George Washington's table as it was set for dinner in the late eighteenth century:

The center of the table contained five or six larger silver or plated waters, those of the ends, circular, or rather oval on one side, so as to make the arrangement correspond with the oval shape of the table. The waiters between the end pieces were in the form of parallelograms, the ends about 1/3 part of the length of the sides; ... On the outside of the oval, formed by the waiters, were placed the various dishes, always without covers; and outside the dishes were the plates. A small roll of bread, enclosed in a napkin, was laid by the side of each plate.¹⁶

For each new dish on the dinner table, there were serving spoons, presented at the corners either crossed or parallel and facing opposite directions.

The number of different types of spoons and other utensils available to the Virginia planters increased dramatically throughout the eighteenth century. Sixteen different types of silver spoons and seven different types of knives and forks made of nine different materials were specifically listed in over 250 probate inventories from the eighteenth century (see Appendix). These different utensils were for specific uses based

¹⁶ Mary A. Stephenson, *Foods, Entertainment and Decorations for the Table* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1948), pp. 8-9.

on the meal or the dishes a planter served. Tea, table, breakfast, and dessert spoons, knives, and forks were the individual pieces of cutlery for different meals throughout the day and elite Virginians owned larger numbers of these items. These utensils shared similar styles and varied only in overall size, ranging from small tea spoons to large table spoons.

Different serving spoons came in a wide variety of sizes and shapes. Mustard and salt spoons were extremely small to measure out suitable amounts of valuable seasonings. Marrow spoons were small and long to reach inside a bone and scoop out the marrow, a delicacy often spread on toast. There were many different shaped ladles to serve different liquids, including ones specific for soup, punch, and even cream. Ladles were the largest forms of silver spoons found in Virginia planter homes. There were fewer types of serving knives and forks. Many Virginians owned large carving utensils to help serve joints of meat. There were also specialized fish knives and oyster knives to serve those Tidewater staples.



17



18



19

Figure 9 Marrow Spoon, Punch Ladle, and Sauce Ladle from the collections of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Tea spoons were the most popular spoons owned in eighteenth-century Virginia.

159 of the 257 owners of fine utensils listed tea spoons in their inventories. These small

¹⁷ Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, eMuseum, Acc. No. 1971-396.

¹⁸ Ibid., Acc. No. 1954-544.

¹⁹ Ibid., Acc. No. 1971-148,1.

spoons were integral to the fashionable tea ritual in the colonial world. Tea was a luxury at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but became a necessity by the third quarter of the century. Every colonist worth a thing had to be able to buy tea and understand its use and ritual. Tea spoons were often the first luxury item a Virginia planter would buy as soon as they had some money to spare. Tea was an integral status item in the first half of the century and by the second half of the century, tea consumption became a necessary habit for any person with any claim to social status, even if they did not understand its proper use. One colonial man in the first half of the century boasted about how quickly he went through tea; as he “spread tea leaves on his bread and butter, and bragged of his having ate half a pound at a meal.”²⁰ Although this man could afford to go through a pound of tea a day, he was not genteel, since he did not understand the proper use of the status item.

Learning the Genteel Dining Ritual

It was just as important to have the training to use status items such as tea spoons and fine cutlery as to actually own them. A table laid with all the various serving and eating utensils would surely put genteel training to the test. Luckily, some families owned training utensils to teach their children how to manage the props of the social ritual. William Pearson of York County owned a silver child’s teaspoon at his death in June 1778, and John Hunter, from Fairfax County, owned a silver child’s spoon worth 7 shillings at his death in 1764. These educational tools illustrate the importance of mastering the dining ritual. Elite children would not be able to join their parents at the

²⁰ T.H. Breen, “Baubles of Britain: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* no. 119 (May, 1988), p. 84.

dining table until they understood the tools and social graces of genteel dining. In some houses they even had separate spaces to practice the dining ritual. In his diary, Philip Vickers Fithian, tutor to the children of Robert Carter III, described the Carter home at Nomini Hall with both a dining room and a “dining-Room for the Children.”²¹ It was important among the Virginia elite to have the proper utensils for their elaborate meals and, most importantly, to understand their proper use.

The actors in the dining room theater were the host and his guests who performed the scripted roles of the social ritual. To be among these players was a symbol of elite status since they had the time to rehearse. Mastering the dining ritual and acquiring the skill and knowledge to use all the new utensils required free time to focus on relatively inconsequential things. The majority of Virginia’s planters who worked all day could not spend the time to learn the distinctions between a table fork and dessert fork or a mustard spoon and a salt spoon.²²

The script for the genteel dining ritual came from manners and etiquette books published only for use in elite society. The word “genteel” comes directly from the French renaissance courtesy books which took on great importance in eighteenth-century Virginia society.²³ These books, along with others imported to and published in the American colonies later in the century, were written for non-aristocrats attempting to look refined. The 1774 posthumous publication of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield’s *Letters...to his Son* was among the bestsellers in revolutionary America because it “describe[d] a world in which gentility was conferred on anyone who could

²¹ Philip Vickers Fithian, *Journal & Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion*, ed. Hunter Dickenson Farish (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1957), p. 80.

²² “The Consumer Revolution.”

²³ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

afford to act the part.”²⁴ Elite planters in Virginia used these books to establish their social etiquette based on deference and perceived aristocracy. The elite rules for social interaction pervaded every aspect of genteel life. As one French courtesy book for young women republished in the early nineteenth century for the American audience stated: “There are Rules for all our Actions, even down to *Sleeping with a good Grace*. Life is a continual Series of Operations, both of Body and Mind, which ought to be regulated and performed with utmost Care.”²⁵

Dining was highly regulated because of its role as a bodily function for nutrition. Everyone needed to eat, but the elite planters created etiquette to raise dining to an ordered ritual. One scholar described dining etiquette as an effort to regulate the body: “bodies were placed before the food with knives and forks in hand separating the person from tactile contact with the food, and on chairs that encouraged people to sit upright in the proper erect posture.”²⁶ They used individual place settings to separate each diner’s food from others’ and specialized utensils to carry food to the mouth without getting anything else dirty. Many of the rules in etiquette books were about proper conduct and use of utensils at the dining table, mostly about what not to do while at a meal. In his 1737 book entitled *The Man of Manners*, Erasmus Jones provided a great list of things not to do at the dining table, including: slouching, showing one’s hunger, saying anything secret in front of the servants, reaching over dishes, hanging over one’s plate, coughing or sneezing, and licking one’s fingers or utensils clean.²⁷ The first American manners

²⁴ C. Dallett Hemphill, “Manners and Class in the Revolutionary Era: A Transatlantic Comparison,” *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 63, no. 2 (April 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877356>.

²⁵ Bushman.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Erasmus Jones, *The Man of Manners*, 3rd edition, orig. printed 1737 London, (Sandy Hook, Ct.: The Hendrickson Group, 1993).

book, *The School of Good Manners* by Eleazar Moody in 1715, warned “Dip not thy knife upright in thy hand, but sloping and lay it down at thy right hand with the blade upon the plate.”²⁸ Young George Washington took most of these rules to heart and copied them out in his *Rules for Civility*:

91st Make no Shew of taking great Delight in your Victuals, Feed not with Greediness; cut your Bread with a Knife, lean not on the Table neither find fault with what you eat

92 Take no Salt or cut Bread with your Knife Grease...

[95]th put not your meat to your Mouth with your Knife in your hand...

100 Cleanse not your teeth with the Table Cloth Napkin Fork or Knife²⁹

These rules forced diners to be more conscious about their actions at the dining table so they could create a genteel atmosphere where everyone has the time, money, and energy to make a fuss over the correct way to do what humans have been doing for millennia—eating.

Leading Virginians used silverware to separate their dining ritual from that of their poorer neighbors. Collections of silver wares were not only investments in money and status; they were the necessary tools for a growing genteel culture. The richest families in Virginia needed several individual settings of knives, forks, and spoons along with the many different types of serving utensils just to get through a simple family meal. They studied cookbooks and manners books to understand the proper placement and use of the various utensils, and some even had training sets for their young children to learn the genteel dining ritual and secure and demonstrate their place at the top of eighteenth-century society.

²⁸ Patricia Easterbrook Roberts, *Table Settings, Entertaining, and Etiquette*, (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 169.

²⁹ George Washington, *George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, ed. Charles Moore (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1926), p. 19.

IV. Importing Goods

On September 12, 1728, the great Virginia planter Robert “King” Carter sent an order to his London merchant William Dawkins asking for fashionable tools for his dining table. Carter wrote to Dawkins “I desire you to Send me in a doz: Strong substantial Silver Spoons to have the two first Letters of my name upon them... also, to send me a Case of a doz: Strong wooden handled fashionable knives and forks.”¹ Carter was known as “King” because it was said that his wealth in Virginia rivaled a king’s in Europe; he needed the best utensils in the latest style and finest materials so that he could eat like a king. The only way Carter could get these tools was to have them bought in London and shipped to him in Virginia. “King” Carter ordered personalized silverware and fashionable utensils because he understood the necessity to display one’s wealth while eating from it. He imported these goods because he felt a colonial connection to the mother country and knew that all Virginia fashions stemmed from the British shops.

“King” Carter may have been one of the greatest of the Virginia planters, but he was not the only one to order his spoons, knives, and forks from London merchants. Almost every tobacco planter with merchant credit was able to get the finest London goods shipped to his plantation in Virginia. The extant records of elite planters and their merchant suppliers give insight into just how much Virginians imported from Britain. The great landowners, townspeople, and tradesmen of fashionable Virginia imported their personal goods and merchandise, including silver spoons and fine utensils by the dozen. Often times, the consumers specified the size, material, and price for their ordered

¹ Edmund Berkeley, Jr., ed., *The Diary, Correspondence, and Papers of Robert “King” Carter of Virginia, 1701-1732*, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/users/berkeley/>.

utensils, but they often left the styling up to the London buyers who kept on top of all the latest fashions. A study of the records of merchants John Norton & Sons, Scottish factor Alexander Henderson, and aristocratic planter George Washington reveals the importance and the volume of the import trade for fine cutlery and silverware.

Major Importers: John Norton & Sons

The published papers of John Norton and Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia begin with a short explanation of the role of these merchants in the colonial world. Frances Norton Mason stated in 1937 that “[The Nortons’] ships sailed, filling moral, political, domestic, and financial needs, of arrogant young colonies in an ever experimenting new world.”² Although this analysis is dated, the genteel Virginians who depended on their London merchants for fashionable goods would not have disagreed with the “moral, political, domestic, and financial” role of the Nortons and their colleagues. John Norton began his merchant career in the mid-eighteenth century as the Virginia agent for the firm of Flowerdewe and Norton at the port at Yorktown. He returned to London in 1764 to take over management of the firm after the death of his partner. His son, John Hatley Norton, took over Norton’s post in Yorktown. Both father and son held public office in Yorktown and created lasting relationships with their neighbors that helped to expand their role in the Virginia tobacco and import trades. Another one of John Norton’s sons, George, served the family firm in many aspects, including as an agent in the West Indies.³ This consignment merchant firm grew in

² John Norton & Sons, *John Norton & Sons Merchants of London and Virginia*, ed. Frances Norton Mason (Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 1937), p. iii.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

importance in the years leading up to the Revolution. The business suffered under the debt of its clients, but continued in operation until the 1797 death of John Hatley Norton.

The published papers of the Norton company are made up of the business letters between father and sons and their many clients in Tidewater Virginia. The correspondence of the company reveals the affairs of more than three hundred Virginia clients, including Governor Norborne Berkeley, Lord Botetourt, Nathaniel Burwell, James Craig, Thomas Everard, Robert Carter Nicholas, John and Mann Page, Edmund, John, and Peyton Randolph, and George Wythe.⁴ These letters serve as interesting sources of consumer behavior in Virginia and the changing opinions of planters and merchants during the revolutionary years of the eighteenth century. They are useful for this study because the records contain lists of imported goods, including fashionable knives, forks, and spoons, as well as providing some explanation for their use and cost to the Virginia buyers.

The merchant relationship was based on business connections and the tobacco trade. Clients who either knew the Nortons personally or by their business reputation could trust the firm to find them the best goods for their houses. Many of the largest orders to John Norton and Sons were from young men looking to start their first elite household. William Reynolds sent three hogsheads of tobacco to Norton & Sons in 1771 and placed an order to start his own large collection of silver. After the 1762 death of his father, Captain Thomas Reynolds, who left twelve silver tea spoons and a silver soup

⁴ Guide to the John Norton and Sons Papers in Library Special Collections Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1990, http://www.nortonfamily.net/images/Norton_Sons_Papers.pdf.

spoon to his widow and young son,⁵ Reynolds' guardians had sent him to London to serve an apprenticeship at the Nortons' counting house. When he returned to Yorktown as a young man in 1771, William Reynolds was "a gentleman of purpose and fashion."⁶ In a letter to George Norton during his first year back in Virginia, Reynolds described his new life in Virginia and included that he

must beg you will buy of Gosling the following Articles for me & send them pr very first Ship 1 doz. Revers'd handle Teaspoons, ½ doz. Tablespoons, 1 soop Lade, 1 punch Ladle, & pr Sugar Tongs, a Cream Bucket & ladle, all wch to be mark'd with my *Crest*, also 1 doz. Ivory handle Table, & 1 doz. Dessert knives & forks in a Mahogany Case with room for 1 doz. Spoons & a Carving knife & fork.⁷

Reynolds was new to Virginia, having been absent for nine years, and was looking to start his own genteel household, complete with a substantial set of fine dining utensils. The old-fashioned spoons left behind by his father were not suitable for the home of a genteel young man, especially one who had lived in London, the center of the fashionable world, for several years. Similarly, John Robinson was also establishing his household when he sent an invoice to John Norton in early 1770. He ordered just one personalized "fashionable silver Soop spoon to be made very strong (& marked J. R. in a Cypher)."⁸ These young men sought to start their collection of dining tools with personalized pieces of silverware to serve as statement pieces of wealth in their new houses.

People who had already established their houses continued to order goods from Norton and Sons to replace old or broken items or to gain new things in the latest styles. Many of these men and women ordered their fashionable knives and forks from their

⁵ "Inventory of Estate of Captain Thomas Reynolds 1762, June 21," *York County Probate Inventories*, Colonial Williamsburg Rockefeller Library Digital Library, <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=Probates\PB00167.xml>.

⁶ Norton, p. 518.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 187-188.

⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

London merchants, presumably because there were few local manufacturers of knives and forks who worked with expensive materials in the newest fashions. It was not uncommon for a woman to have credit and order goods for her household. In 1766, Mary Savage from Northampton, Virginia could not send any tobacco, but still sent an invoice of goods to Mr. John Norton to buy on credit. Included on the short invoice were one dozen ivory-handled knives and forks, one dozen dessert knives and forks, and 2 dozen buck knives and forks.⁹ A few years later, in 1769, Mrs. Martha Jacquelin, a spinster who went by ‘Mrs.’ when she was 50 years old, ordered “2 dozen Ivory handle Knives & Forks,” despite being a member of the non-importation Association that protested against the Townshend Acts. Mrs. Jacquelin even knew how expensive her cutlery should be, adding to the invoice that they should be 26 shillings per dozen, for a total cost of £2. 12s.¹⁰ Both Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Jaquelin needed large amounts of cutlery to maintain the settings for a genteel dining table; their need was so great that they were willing to go into debt and break their boycott oaths to get them. Mann Page sent a lengthy invoice to the Nortons in 1770 of items for his house, his 21- and 16-year-old sons, and himself. Included on his inventory were a dozen ivory-handled knives and forks and a dozen dessert knives and forks in boxes.¹¹ Fashionable knives and forks, especially those made with ivory handles, were important props for the dining table by the third quarter of the eighteenth century. They were used so often that hosts needed them by the dozen to serve all of their guests at their several courses.

The Nortons’ clients were not only Virginians furnishing their private households; colonial retailers also sent invoices to the firm to buy imported items to sell in their trade

⁹ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 511, 103.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 125.

shops. Catherine Rathell, a milliner, started her relationship with the Norton firm in 1771 with high expectations from the merchants and promises for honest business:

I might Expect both them [her orders] and every thing Else I wanted bought in the best & Cheapest Manner, and with all the Speed Posible, you may rely on my being Exact & Punctual in my Payments, and when I fail in this, I shall Expect to be used Accordingly.¹²

Rathell sent in her first order for her shop for “some Goods from Messrs. Flight & Co... not to Exceed £60” including “3 pair of Plaited Soop Ladles” and “4 pair of Silver Sauce Spoons with round Bowls & Crooket handles like the Ladles.”¹³ Rathell was a successful milliner in Williamsburg, where she established a shop near the Raleigh Tavern in 1771. She was known for having items of the latest fashions and even made frequent trips to London to personally buy stock for her store. When she was unable to make the trip across the Atlantic, she had to order her inventory from reliable merchants. She sent several orders to John Norton via his son in Yorktown. She told Mr. Norton about her business practices in her next letter: “As you Must know I Peique myself much on haveg the very best & most fashionable goods in Williamsburg, I left London my self but last July with a very large Cargo.” She assured Norton that she “would be sure to be punctual in her payments.”¹⁴ In fact, she was well-known for only using cash, not credit, for all business transactions.¹⁵ Rathell was optimistic about her new business in Williamsburg “Exactly opposite the Raleigh Tavern, which I look on as the best Situation in Williamsburg, Where I hope to do three times the Business I ever did.”¹⁶ She wrote her reason for using the Nortons to furnish her store was “Mrs. Nortons great Carefulness in

¹² Ibid., p. 211.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁵ Linda Sturtz, *Within her Power: Propertied Women in Colonial America* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 172-173.

¹⁶ Norton, p. 217.

buying & Sending the Neatest and Cheapest goods in, that's sent to Virginia, Makes me so very desirous of getting goods from your House."¹⁷ Ms. Rathell must have been pleased with the selection of goods she received, because in the next year, she ordered one dozen green handled Jubily Pocket knives and forks for her store.¹⁸

It was not uncommon for the shopping skills of a merchant's wife to bring more customers to his consignment firm. Courtenay Norton was well known for her skill in picking out the best items in the latest fashions. English merchant John Norton married Virginia-born Courtenay Walker in Virginia in 1743. When Norton moved back to England, Courtenay was a valuable asset to his merchant headquarters in London. She knew what goods Virginians wanted, since she was one of them, and had the eye to recognize the latest fashions.¹⁹ Other English merchants involved their wives in the consignment process to buy the best goods for their Virginia clients. London merchant William Lee promised each of his customers that "Mrs. Lee will be attentive in the choice of" any fashionable good they desired.²⁰ Often, the items picked by English merchant wives set the standard for the highest fashion in Virginia.

Since most businessmen in Virginia towns and cities did not have plantations to grow tobacco to send on consignment, they had to send cash or other goods in exchange for imported items. James Craig, a silversmith in Williamsburg, sent a box of silver to pay for items along with an order of credit from the merchant company. As a practitioner of the silver trade, Craig specified exactly what styles he wanted and the individual

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁹ Sturtz, p. 152.

²⁰ Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 44.

tradesmen in London as sources for his orders. Although the inventory from his order is lost, the directions remained in the letter:

You will please to get what things I wrote for from Mr Robert Cruickshank Goldsmith in the Old Jewry, he is acquainted wt. my manner of Describing what things I want as I have had things from him, he will give you the highest price for the silver The Box Contains... I dare say Mr. Cruickshank will give that price at least & I hope more please desire him to get ye Jewelers work, Toys & Cutlery from one Mr William Webb, the silver work Mr Cruickshank will make, I had some things Bot. from Mr Webb latly I think was the best things I ever had since I came to Virga.²¹

Many of the Virginia elite, middling planters, and tradesmen and women imported fashionable cutlery and personalized silver through the Norton company because they had strong relations with the family and knowledge of the good reputation of the firm. The Nortons were known to have good business as well as fashion sense and would provide the latest goods with good credit. John Norton's wife and agents in London could find knives and forks of the most expensive materials and get silver spoons engraved with personal initials and arms. The agents would follow the directions of the client regarding what to get and where to get it as best as possible and try to stick to the budget allotted. Their surviving records provide insight into the role of consignment merchants in attaining the sets of tools for Virginia dining.

Scottish Factors

Although consignment merchants like John Norton and Sons were an important presence in the import market throughout the eighteenth century, they steadily lost ground to Scottish merchant firms who ran stores for import goods and tobacco trading in the British North American colonies. John Glassford, Merchant of Glasgow, was one

²¹ Norton., pp. 45-46.

such prominent and prosperous Scottish “tobacco lord” in the mid-eighteenth century. Glassford controlled a major portion of the Chesapeake tobacco trade where he had a system of stores on both the Maryland and Virginia sides of the Potomac River. Glassford’s agents who ran the stores bought tobacco directly from planters, extended credit to Chesapeake consumers, and sold imported goods.²²

Alexander Henderson was one of Glassford’s resident agents in Virginia and ran the Colchester and Occoquan stores in Fairfax County. Henderson managed the stores on the Northern Neck and near the fall line where he purchased cheap tobacco for shipment to Scotland and provided goods or cash in exchange. In the summer of 1759, Henderson reported the business of the Occoquan Store and his orders to restock the inventory:

Inclosed is likewise a Scheme of Goods for the Store next year amounting to about £1080 ... too great a Sum for this Store, considering the Small remittances Yet made from it, but as I expect to come in for a larger share of the Trade next Year, than I yet have had, I think it for the Interest of the Store to have a good and full assortment.²³

Henderson had just taken over the business of the Occoquan Store in 1757. Maybe he was still learning the ropes in 1758 and early 1759, since it seems he had not yet made large profits, but he expected to do better with a larger inventory in the years to come.

Scottish factor stores, such as Henderson’s Occoquan Store, were easily accessible sources of imported goods among the smaller planters along the fall line and on the Northern Neck. Poor and middling planters could go to these stores to trade their tobacco or get credit for their future tobacco crops in exchange for immediate access to imported goods. The stores’ inventories were mostly made up of the basic tools for farming and cloth for clothing, but there were also a few luxury items and utensils for

²² Alexander Henderson, *Virginia Merchants: Alexander Henderson His Letter Book of 1758-1765*, transcribed by Charles & Virginia Hamrick, (Athens, Ga.: Iberian Publishing Co., 1999).

²³ *Ibid.*, F29b.

more refined dining. Henderson's reported "Scheme of Goods for Occoquan store 1759"

included the following:

- 6 doz. Table knives @ 16d	0. 8. 0
- 6 doz. Table knives @ 20d	0.10. 0
- 6 doz. Table Knives @ 2/	0.12. 0
- 6 doz. Table Knives @ 2/6	0.15. 0
- 3 doz. Table Knives @ 3/	0. 9. 0
- 4 doz. Hard Mettal spoons @ 2/2	0. 8. 8
- 4 doz Tea Spoons @ 8d	0. 2. 8 ²⁴

Henderson listed an even larger selection of utensils in the scheme of goods for the

Occoquan Store for the following year:

- 2 doz. Breakfast Knives @ 18d	0. 3.
- 6 doz. Table Knives @ 15d	0. 7. 6
- 12 doz. Table Knives @ 20d	1. 0. 0
- 12 doz. Table Knives @ 2/1	1. 5. 0
- 6 doz. Table Knives @ 2/6	0.15. 0
- 6 doz table knives @ 3/2	0.19. 0
- 6 doz. Table spoons @ 2/	0.12. 0
- 6 doz. Tea spoons @ 8d	0. 4. 0 ²⁵

These utensils were not the fine examples that larger planters ordered from their consignment merchants, but their designation as table knives and tea spoons indicates that they were meant to be used in different parts of a dining ritual that did not include porridge eaten from a communal bowl. The table knives of differing prices might have been made of different inexpensive materials, such as wood or bone. The hard metal spoons and the teaspoons worth only 8 pence a dozen were probably made of pewter.

In 1763, Henderson ordered goods for the Colchester Store on the Northern Neck including:

- 4 doz. Table Spoons @ 2/	
- 4 doz. Tea Spoons @ 8d	

²⁴ Ibid., F4b-F8b.

²⁵ Ibid., F35b-29a.

- 6 doz. Table knives & forks @20d
- 9 doz. Table knives & forks @2/
- 12 doz. Table knives & forks @2/6
- 3 doz. Table knives & forks @3/6 ²⁶

This store was securely in the Tidewater region and provided more complete sets of dining utensils. The spoons listed in this inventory were of the same prices as the tea and table spoons for sale at the Occoquan Store, but the knives and forks were at the upper range of the prices for the utensils at the other business. Henderson must have realized after five years in the business that Virginians were willing to spend more on better-quality cutlery. Henderson was more confident in his business sense and interested in displaying his success. In 1765, he included with the scheme of goods for his stores a list of things he needed for his own home, including “about 500 or 600 Bushels of the best Chamber Coal for the Hous[e]—also 8 Table and 1 soop silver Spoons for A[LEXANDER] H[ENDER]SON if the Trade will afford it.”²⁷

If Virginia planters did not have the quantity of tobacco or the social standing to merit business connections with a London consignment merchant, there were other ways they could obtain imported dining utensils. Scottish merchant stores were scattered around the less successful tobacco areas, such as the Northern Neck and the fall line, to purchase cheap tobacco and trade in imported goods and credit. Alexander Hamilton’s stores in Occoquan and Colchester provided a wide selection of spoons, knives, and some forks of different prices and different low-quality materials for planters who were not members of the gentry.

²⁶ Ibid., F79b-F81b.

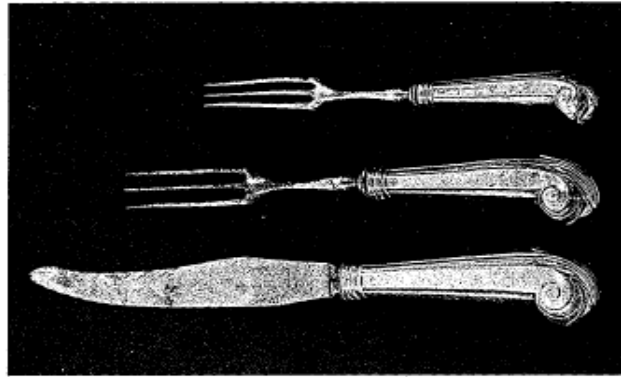
²⁷ Ibid.

George Washington's Imports

Although there were Scottish stores on the Northern Neck near Mount Vernon selling knives, forks, and spoons by the dozen, George Washington definitely did not buy any of his imported dinnerware from them. Washington balanced the affairs of a few plantations and grew several types of cash crops, but he acquired all of his dining utensils from his consignment merchants in the tobacco trade. These merchants could provide the up-and-coming planter with the most fashionable and luxurious cutlery for his dinner table. Washington was extremely concerned with appearing to be among the elite. He mastered the elite “Rules of Civility” and sought to set his table in the perfect way with the proper tools. One of the elite qualities Washington whole-heartedly embraced was hospitality. He served meals to ever-increasing numbers of guests and repeatedly had to replenish his collection of silverware and fine utensils. Washington’s correspondence with his merchants, particularly the fashionable Robert Cary & Company used by other Virginian elites, shows how much money and effort he spent to acquire the best utensils for his table.

Young Colonel Washington started his collection of silverware and fine utensils while he was still a bachelor. He received a large collection of utensils and the furniture to go with them from Richard Washington, a small London consignment merchant of no relation to his Virginia client. The August 1757 invoice from the merchant lists 6 punch ladles for 1 shilling and 9 pence, 12 pairs of “best London round Ivory Case Knives and Boson Forks” for £1 and 4 shillings, 2 sets of “best Silver handle Knives & Forks best London blades” for £11 (Figure 10), and a “Shagreen Case, fitted in the neat Man[ne]r”

to hold four dozen knives, forks, and spoons. The cost for engraving 53 crests on the flatware and other plate was £1, 6 shillings, 6 pence.²⁸



2. Knife and forks, London, 1757

Figure 10 Silver knife and forks from George Washington's 1757 order via Richard Washington still existing in the Mount Vernon collection.²⁹

This was quite the collection of flatware for a young single man. The cheap punch ladles were made of an inexpensive material and were probably used at large parties of lower-class people, such as a militia muster or during the political practice of providing alcohol to the local yeomen in exchange for a place in the House of Burgesses. The ivory and silver knives and forks were for more genteel company. Even when they were not in use on the dining stage, these pieces held an imposing place in the room in their Shagreen, or shark-skin, case displayed on the sideboard. Washington needed all of these fine utensils to show his gentility to his guests, probably as he sought a well-connected future-bride.

From 1759-1772, Washington ordered almost 26 dozen fine knives, forks, and spoons through Robert Cary & Company. It was during this time that the young man married into a powerful Virginia family and sought to solidify his place among the Virginia elite. In the spring of 1759, the newlywed ordered 6 carving knives and forks

²⁸ Invoice from Richard Washington, Aug. 20, 1757, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2007).

<http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/pgwde/dflt.xqy?mode=menu&keys=menu-info-home-scholar>.

²⁹ Buhler, *Mount Vernon Silver*, p. 15.

with stained ivory handles bound with silver.³⁰ Washington needed such expensive carving tools to serve guests at the table of his new rich wife, Martha Custis Washington. These carving tools would have been great statement pieces in his dining room at Mount Vernon. The ivory and silver handles certainly announced that he was among the gentry class. It took special skills to wield great carving tools at the table and the materials of these pieces required extra care and skill in the process.

In March 1761, Washington received from the merchant company a dozen horn spoons from cutler Richard Weale worth 6 and a half shillings and two dozen “Best” spoons for 4 shillings from Richard Cleeve.³¹ Although these are not the best quality or the most fashionable spoons, the order shows that Washington needed at least 36 spoons to serve a larger step-family and an increasing number of guests. In the fall of 1762, Washington placed a large order for fine dining ware made up of

One very full and complt Sett of Table China 2 dozn Table Knives & 2 dozn Forks with China handles to suit ditto 2 dozn small desert Knives, & 2 dozn Forks to Ditto 2 dozn small Desert Silver Spoons with my Crest, as Inclosed 14 Table ditto—with Ditto Note—these 14 is to make up a broken sett, already on hand, 2 doz: therefore let their be conveniences to contain the whole 2 dozn and have the whole knives, Forks, and Spoons (allowing for the 10 here) properly disposed of in a neat Mahogany Cases for decorating a side board.³²

His order was shipped the following spring with “2 dozn pr of neat China handle knives & forks with strong Silver Ferrels” worth £5 and two dozen matching dessert knives and forks worth £4, 4 shillings from Richard Weale. He received his silver plate from John Payne, including 24 polished dessert spoons and 14 polished table spoons worth £11, 5,

³⁰ Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, May 1, 1759, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

³¹ Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, March 31, 1761, in *Ibid*.

³² Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, Nov. 15, 1762, in *Ibid*.

8. The cost for engraving 38 crests was 19 shillings.³³ The full set of china for 24 diners was an expensive addition to Washington's assorted dinner ware.

Planters did not always receive exactly what they listed in their orders. George Washington experienced this set-back in his accumulation of cutlery a few times. In the summer of 1766, Washington ordered another 18 table knives and 18 table forks with stained ivory handles.³⁴ He only received a dozen "green Ivory Tables swelld bosom Forks" and a half dozen pairs of green ivory table knives in the collection of cutlery from Mary Scott & Son sent by Robert Cary & Company later that year.³⁵ The trade for luxury house wares took place across two continents and several months and involved many different people. The average ship's journey eastward across the Atlantic took about two months, it took another month or so to sell off the tobacco and for one of the merchants' agents to find the right tradesmen in London to buy the goods ordered, then another two months to ship them back to America. There were risks with the mode of travel—if the merchant ship sank along the way, the tobacco and orders might not reach the merchant, or the imported goods might not reach the planter. Ships might unload their cargo in the wrong place. It was important to understand the geography of the Virginia Tidewater area, if a ship went up the wrong river, a planter might not see his goods for another couple of months. The planter might also receive the wrong goods in his shipment by accident or because the ones he wanted were not available by the time the merchant's ship left London.

In 1771, Washington must have worn out his old sets of utensils or anticipated hosting more genteel guests at his dining table. He ordered another "2 dozn Green Handd

³³ Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, April 13, 1763, in Ibid.

³⁴ Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, June 23, 1766, in Ibid.

³⁵ Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, Nov. 17, 1766, in Ibid.

Knives [and] 2 dozn Do Do Forks to cost abt £3 in all” to augment his existing collection.³⁶ The merchant company took some liberties with Washington’s order and at the end of the year they shipped a parcel of cutlery from Thomas Squire including a dozen pairs of Chinese green ivory table knives and forks and a dozen matching pairs of dessert knives and forks.³⁷ Washington must have been pleased with the quality and style of the cutlery he received, but not the number. In the next year, Washington requested “2 dozn pr large Chinese green Ivory Table knives & Forks, to suit those sent last year by Thos Squire and charged at 36/ a dozn.”³⁸ His full order was sent by Robert Cary & Company from London by the fall of 1772.³⁹

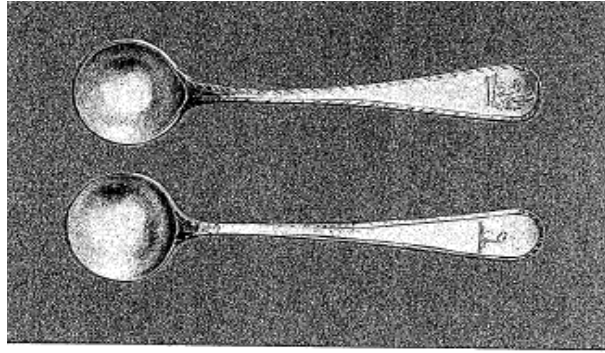
George Washington imported knives and forks with silver, ivory, and china handles by the dozen in the decade and a half after his marriage to Martha Custis. The large number of utensils ordered by Washington suggests that either he planned to serve dinner to over two dozen guests at a time or that he was hosting several guests a night and had to replace worn-out or broken sets of cutlery. Washington ordered the best cutlery in the latest styles, had his crest engraved on every silver piece (Figure 11), and bought expensive, but fashionable, Shagreen cases to store his large collection. He wanted to own the best of everything to show that he was one of the elite Virginia planters. Using china knives and forks and ivory carving tools showed that he had the money and gentility to wield these props at the dining table.

³⁶ Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, July 18, 1771, in Ibid.

³⁷ Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, Dec. 3, 1771, in Ibid.

³⁸ Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, July 17, 1772, in Ibid.

³⁹ Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, Sept. 29, 1772, in Ibid.



11. Salt spoons with Washington and Custis crests

Figure 11 Engraved spoons extant in the Mount Vernon collection.⁴⁰

Why Import?

George Washington's consumer habits regarding fine dining utensils were not atypical among the Virginia gentry. "King" Carter was importing knives and forks by the dozen decades before Washington, and William Fitzhugh had silver spoons from abroad almost a century before the young colonel. The increase in foreign-made silver spoons and fine cutlery was just one example of the general increase of imported consumer goods to the British North American colonies in the eighteenth century. American colonists wanted the best, most stylish goods for their homes and would go to great lengths to get them from fashionable markets and shipped to their homes in the colonies. Britain was not only the mother country in terms of government and economics; most Virginians, even those born and bred in the colony, thought of Britain as 'home.' Virginians maintained close relations with British merchants and family members, they attempted to replicate the English aristocracy, and they filled their homes with London goods. All of these social aspects coincided with the consumer revolution that sparked an increase in both manufacturing and purchasing new consumer goods. Virginians of all

⁴⁰ Buhler, p. 32.

social levels depended on British goods to fill their homes and participate in the new consumer society.

In 1763, Virginia Governor Francis Fauquier commented in a report home that “these imports daily increase... the common planters usually dressing themselves in the manufactures of Great Britain altogether.”⁴¹ Any Virginian who had connections and credit in the mother country used them to get the latest consumer goods. Virginians were all about being fashionable to show off their wealth and gentility. One English traveler to the Chesapeake in 1771 remarked

The quick importation of fashions from the mother country is really astonishing... I am almost inclined to believe that a new fashion is adopted earlier by the polished and affluent American than by many opulent persons in the great metropolis [London].⁴²

Virginians sought the most fashionable items to show off their wealth, and also their knowledge of aristocratic practices and genteel lifestyle. They imported their goods through the best-known consignment merchants with the reputations for stylish buyers. Merchant companies benefited from having agents, or wives, who kept up to date on the latest fashions. As Catherine Rathell noted in her letter to John Norton, the shopping skills of Mrs. Norton were what brought many Virginia customers to the merchant firm.

The gentry were trendsetters in Virginia’s consumer culture. They set the bar high for their lower neighbors to reach when they established their own households. Middling planters and townspeople, such as John Robinson who ordered just one silver spoon from Norton and Sons, were eager to get their own fine utensils. All Virginia planters, great and small, were willing to go beyond their means to get the best goods for their table.

⁴¹ Cary Carson, “The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?,” in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. 515.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 504.

Planters depended on credit, based on their future tobacco crops, to get the goods they wanted. Often, the lower planters would spend their precious money or credit on luxury goods from the genteel society before gaining the basic comforts in their houses. As Cary Carson said in his study of the consumer revolution, “for the privilege of taking tea in the parlor, more than a few families were content to continue pissing in the barn.”⁴³

Buying fine imported goods was all about social climbing. Washington bought ivory knives and forks and a Shagreen box in the years before his marriage into one of the wealthiest families in Virginia. He used his fine utensils to impress upon his guests the station he hoped to achieve. Washington gained access to genteel society by filling his home with fashionable goods such as the ivory- and silver-handled utensils. With such access, he was able to meet and marry Mrs. Martha Dandridge Custis to cement his place among the Virginia elite. English novelist Henry Fielding observed the methods of social climbing:

While the Nobleman will emulate the Grandeur of a Prince; and the Gentleman will aspire to the proper State of the Nobleman; the Tradesman steps from behind his Counter into the vacant place of the Gentleman. Nor doth the Confusion end here: It reaches the very Dregs of the People, who [are] aspiring still to a Degree beyond that which belongs to them.⁴⁴

Every level of society was changed with the introduction of widely-available consumer goods.

There were many people, such as Fielding, who wrote out against lavish spending on imported luxury goods. Most of these authors wanted to prevent the spread of such goods and consumer behaviors among the lower levels of society. Dr. Alexander Hamilton of Annapolis, Maryland wrote that he was not against “extravagant Living in

⁴³ Ibid., p. 505.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 519.

general; I only say that if Luxury was to be confined to the Rich alone, it might prove a great national good, and a Public benefit to Mankind, but for the poor to aim at luxury would only cause mischief and grief.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Samuel Adams, of the Sons of Liberty in Boston, may have wanted liberty for all men, but feared that the availability of consumer goods among the lower levels would erase “every Distinction between the Poor and the Rich.”⁴⁶ These men feared the chaos of a society where social standing was not immediately obvious by a person’s appearance, they wanted to keep the upper classes fashionable and the lower classes at only the most basic level of life.

In Virginia only the largest planters had access to the full range of goods available in the British markets via their consignment merchants, but all Virginians had at least some access to imported goods. The Scottish merchant stores spreading through tobacco country served as a growing marketplace for imported goods accessible to most middling and small Virginia planters. Alexander Henderson’s stores in Occoquan and Colchester were examples of local places to get foreign goods. Even local trades people, such as Catherine Rathell and James Craig, served as suppliers for British goods to the Virginia colonists.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 520.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 520-521.

V. Local Production

Although the elite planters of eighteenth-century Virginia imported knives, forks, and spoons by the dozen via their merchants in London, there were still many ways to buy genteel dining utensils locally in Virginia. Imported cutlery and silverware, as well as “country-made” pieces of plate, were available from local merchants and silversmiths. These local businessmen who dealt in dining luxuries set up their shops and forges in the new towns and near-urban areas developing along the rivers across the agricultural landscape of Virginia. Shopkeepers and tradesmen imported fine utensils in bulk to sell in their stores, sometimes alongside their own crafts. Silversmiths in Virginia were limited by their available materials and their foreign competition and often had to take on other means of supporting their families. Virginia silversmiths mostly made small pieces, and spoons were one of the most popular of the country-made items. But, since the elite bought their silver spoons from England, most of the business of the local silversmiths with their gentry patrons was in the way of repairs on imported pieces. Business for local craftsmen picked up during and after the American Revolution. Virginia artisans benefitted from boycotts of British goods and non-importation associations in response to Parliamentary taxation before the war and then from newly-developed patriotism after the war. Even though business was rough for local tradesmen in the luxury trade, they did not stop producing and attempting to sell their own goods and imported luxuries.

Cities and Silversmiths

There were many ways to get fine dining utensils in Virginia besides direct importation. The gentry, or aspiring-gentry, might inherit their knives forks and spoons, buy newly-imported cutlery from local merchants and shopkeepers, bid on used utensils at auction, or purchase locally-made silver spoons from Virginia silversmiths.

Advertisements for eighteenth-century businesses and tradesmen provide many useful details of what items they sold and the provenance of their goods. Each advertisement often included the name of the merchant or tradesman, the location of his or her shop, the means of gaining their inventory, and a list of items for sale. The advertisements point to the different methods of attaining fine cutlery for the genteel table. Balfour & Barraud, a merchant firm in Norfolk Virginia, advertized on July 25, 1766 that they had a new shipment of goods “Just IMPORTED, and to be SOLD by the subscribers at their store in NORFOLK, The following Articles” including hard metal spoons, beef forks, “knives and forks, and a very complete assortment of cutlery, in the newest taste.”¹ Fashionable knives and forks were not made in the colonies because the expensive materials for their handles, such as ivory, were not widely available for a prosperous local trade. Any person looking to buy cutlery in Virginia had to buy their knives and forks from a merchant with imported stock, such as Balfour & Barraud.

Virginians could also buy knives and forks at private sales or at auctions hosted by merchant firms or by the executors of a planter’s estate to settle debts. An advertisement on January 18, 1770 announced that several items were “To be SOLD at private sale, at William McCaa’s office in Norfolk, for ready money or bills of exchange, on very reasonable terms.” Included in the list of items up for sale were “One dozen of

¹ Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, July 25, 1766, p. 3.

flowered polished silver handled case knives and forks, fitted with fine *London* blades.

One dozen of fine polished silver spoons, one dozen of dessert spoons, and one silver marrow spoon.”² Another advertisement ran a few years later by Samuel Kerr & Co. of Norfolk, Virginia on June 12, 1775:

To be SOLD for ready money, to the highest bidders, on *Friday* the 30th instant (*June*) at the plantation whereon the said *Samuel Long* lately lived, in *Warwick* county, known by the name of *Smith’s* point, near *Newport News*, A VARIETY of household furniture, consisting of silver table spoons, silver tea spoons, a silver soup spoon, two silver salts, one mohogany table, and sundry prints, &c.³

Auctions were among the most accessible ways to obtain fine utensils, since they took place on or near the property of the person whose debts were being settled. Another auction, for example was to take place at the local court house, the closest social center in any county. John Martin announced in February 1755 in Hunter’s *Virginia Gazette* that several expensive items, including a coach, horses, and three dozen silver spoons of different sizes were “To be SOLD, at *King-William* Court-House, on the Court Day in *March*, to the highest Bidder, ... Credit will be allowed of the *May* Court following.”⁴

Merchants, shopkeepers, and luxury tradesmen were located in the few towns and urban areas in the largely-agricultural colony. Alexandria, Virginia was founded in 1749 on the Potomac River on the Northern Neck and chartered in 1779. Alexandria was part of the deferential Virginia society, where the great planters of the area, including George Washington and George Mason, controlled all levels of government, despite not living within the city.⁵ In 1778, shopkeepers Hooe & Harrison announced that they had “IMPORTED in the sloop *Potoemack*, Capt. *Josiah Doxsey*, from *Martinico*, the

² Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, Jan 18, 1770, p. 3.

³ Purdie, *Virginia Gazette*, June 16, 1775, p. 3.

⁴ Hunter, *Virginia Gazette*, February 28, 1755, p. 3.

⁵ Mary Catherine Ferrari, “Artisans of the South” (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1992), pp. 21-26.

following goods, which will be opened and and (sic) sold, for ready money, at our store in this town” including knives and forks.⁶ The city grew in importance at the end of the century, when it was a part of the new District of Columbia, the site of the capital of the new Republic. Alexandria was the home town of George Washington and several of the local silversmiths benefitted from his patronage. The only lasting image of a historic Virginia silversmith shop is of William A. Williams’ King Street shop from the early nineteenth century (Figure 12).



Figure 12 Alexandria, Virginia silversmith shop⁷

This valuable print illustrates the importance of dining utensils to the local silversmith trade. The front window of the silversmith shop was dominated by spoons hanging on display. The silversmithing family of James Adam, based in their King Street shop, led

⁶ Purdie, *Virginia Gazette*, April 3, 1778, page 3.

⁷ George Barton Cutten, *Silversmiths of Virginia* (Richmond: Dietz Press, Inc., 1952), p. 21.

the trade in Alexandria from the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century. They specialized in the classical style that shared their name, and created silver pieces and spoons with architectural designs for the government of the new republic in the District of Columbia. Alexandria, Virginia bridged the gap between the planter elite and the power-houses of the new Republic.

Another urban area for the Virginia utensil trade was Norfolk, Virginia, founded in 1682, at the point where the James and Elizabeth Rivers flow into the Chesapeake Bay, and chartered in 1736. Norfolk was not dominated by the Virginia planter society; instead, power was held by a class of mercantile elite not native to British North America. Norfolk was economically and socially different from the rest of Virginia because of poor soil (no great planters in the area) and a good deep-water port.⁸ There were many merchant firms in Norfolk that sold imported cutlery, such as Balfour & Barraud and F.A. Doeber. In 1770, Doeber advertised that he had

Just imported from *London*, and to be SOLD by the subscriber, at his store, corner of *Church-street, Norfolk*, by wholesale or retail, upon very reasonable terms, for ready money or short credit, A COMPLETE assortment of *India* and *European* GOODS ... green and white *Chinese* ivory and buck horn handled table knives and forks, desert ditto of the same kinds, mahogany knife cases.⁹

Norfolk suffered heavily in the American Revolution. Most of the city was destroyed by fire in 1776, and by the 1780s the city had an increasingly bad reputation. Norfolk became known as a “raucous port town—unhealthy, unplanned and at times ungovernable.”¹⁰ The luxury trades did not prosper among the mercantile elite in Norfolk as well as in other, newer cities and towns, such as Richmond, Petersburg, and Fredericksburg in the late eighteenth century.

⁸ Ferrari, pp. 27-32.

⁹ Rind, *Virginia Gazette*, November 15, 1770, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ferrari, p. 29.

Williamsburg, the capital city, was one of the largest and most important towns in Virginia throughout most of the eighteenth century. It was where members of the gentry met up during sessions of the House of Burgesses and was often the first place to visit to discover the latest news and styles from the mother country. The earliest Virginia silversmith on record was John Broadnax, first of Henrico County and then Middle Plantation (soon to be Williamsburg) in 1694.¹¹ The city of Williamsburg was established at Middle Plantation in 1699, and was the major political and social center of Virginia until the capital moved to Richmond in 1780. Since Williamsburg was the only genteel city in the colony, it was able to support a wider range of luxury craftsmen, including 15 or 16 silversmiths during its years as the capital city. Mary R. M. Goodwin, one of the early researchers at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation compiled the following list of Williamsburg silversmiths based on their advertisements¹²:

Name	Dates	Trades
James Craig	1746-1766	Jeweler, making all sorts of gold and silver work.
John Coke	1740	Goldsmith. Doubtless made silver work also.
John Flournoy	1712	Goldsmith.
James Galt	1766-1771	Clock and watchmaker, gold and silversmith.
Samuel Galt	1757	Clock and watch work, gold and silversmith.
James Geddy, Jr.	1767-1778	Goldsmith, silversmith and jeweler.
Alexander Kerr	1738 (died)	Jeweler, goldsmith & silversmith.
Blovet Pasteur	1767	Choice assortment of Jewelry and silver work.
Anthony Singleton	1771	Jeweler and goldsmith.
William Waddill	1767	Goldsmith and engraver, old gold and silver in exchange for new work.

It is important to note that a silversmith and a goldsmith were the same thing. For example, James Geddy, Jr., a silversmith in Williamsburg, advertized himself as “James Geddy, Goldsmith,” but was recognized in legal documents as a “Silversmith of

¹¹ Cutten, pp. xxi, 187.

¹² Mary R. M. Goodwin, *Tableware Silver and Silversmiths*, Colonial Williamsburg Research Files, 1934.

Williamsburg.” The *Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, published in London in 1754, defined “Goldsmith or as some choose to express it, silversmith, an artist who makes vessels, utensils and ornaments in gold and silver.”¹³ Craftsmen working with gold could also work with silver because the two metals have similar characteristics; the precious metals are indestructible, but subject to wear, have a variety of uses, a fine finish, and can be imitated. The precious metals are distinguished from other metals by their luster, permanence, responsiveness to manipulation, and scarcity. Working with these metals required high start-up expenses and fine craftsmanship, but could yield large profits. Because of their skill, income, and materials, silver and goldsmiths were the most highly respected metal workers.¹⁴

Geddy was the preeminent silversmith in Williamsburg in the third quarter of the eighteenth century and serves as a perfect example of the role of silversmiths in Williamsburg and Virginia society. James Geddy, Jr. was born in 1731 to James and Anne Geddy in either Virginia or Scotland. The Geddy family is thought to have emigrated from Scotland in the early 1730s and settled in Williamsburg by 1733. After Geddy, Sr. died in 1744, Geddy, Jr. was apprenticed to Samuel Galt to learn the silversmith trade. In 1760, “James Geddy of the City of Williamsburgh, Silversmith” bought his family home and its dependencies on Lot 161 from his mother.¹⁵ In 1762, he tore down the original family home and built a new, large, fashionable house on the property. Sometime before 1755, Geddy married Elizabeth Waddill, the sister of William Waddill, engraver and associate in his silversmith shop. Elizabeth and James Geddy had

¹³ Catharine S. Schlesinger, *James Geddy House and Shop: Interpretive Paper* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1980).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mary Marshall Brewer, ed., *York County, Virginia Land Records, 1729-1763* (Lewes, De.: Colonial Roots, 2005) p. 214.

five children: Mary, Anne (Nancy), William Waddill, James, and Elizabeth. Geddy owned at least four slaves and had several apprentices and journeymen; in the 1770s, he paid for nine tithable adults.¹⁶ They all lived and worked on the corner of the Palace Green until 1777, when Geddy was having trouble coming up with the raw materials for his trade. In November of that year, he advertized his shop and his silversmith and watchmaker tools for sale. In 1778, the Geddy family moved to Dinwiddie County and later moved to Petersburg. James Geddy, Jr. and two of his sons were silversmiths in Petersburg in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Geddy worked as a farmer and goldsmith in Dinwiddie County until his death in 1807.¹⁷

Although Geddy worked for his living, he and his family lived a fairly fashionable life in Williamsburg, securing their place in the upper middle class. Geddy made a conscious effort to improve his family's station in society, and knew the value of a good appearance. The new house he built on his family lot was twice the size of a normal house, with classical influences, and fashionable public spaces. He might have traveled around town in his riding chair (for which he got in trouble for not listing on his taxes), and owned several books, framed prints, and musical instruments. He took great care in his personal appearance and paid Williamsburg barber and wigmaker Richard Charlton several times for "Years Savg & dressg." Geddy also bought wigs from Charlton, including "a pair of curls for Miss Nancy" (his daughter) in 1770 and taking his favorite brown bob hairpiece in to be dressed 1772 and 1773.¹⁸

¹⁶ Kevin Peter Kelly, *James Geddy, Junior: A Family History* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Research Files, April 30, 1985).

¹⁷ Colonial Williamsburg, *James Geddy, Jr.*, <http://www.history.org/Almanack/places/geddy/gedbijam.cfm>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

James Geddy held an elevated role among the tradesmen and townspeople of Williamsburg. Because he owned property, Geddy had the full rights of an Englishman and could vote in elections and hold political offices. In 1762 and 1764, Geddy was a member of the York County Grand Jury three times. On December 3, 1767, James Geddy was elected to the Common Council in Williamsburg¹⁹, and on November 9, 1775, he was one of 21 “gentlemen appointed a committee to represent [that] city.”²⁰ As a leading member of the local political community in Williamsburg, James Geddy also served as a witness on many official documents, including wills and land deeds. Geddy was not only one of the top tradesmen in Williamsburg, he was one of the leading townspeople. He lived in a large house with his family and slaves and even a few luxury goods.

Virginia merchants and silversmiths who sold fine cutlery held elevated positions in their communities. In Norfolk, the mercantile elite held most of the power in the port city that lacked local gentry. In Alexandria, luxury tradesmen benefitted from the patronage of the neighboring wealthy planters and helped create the fashionable goods for the new Republic. Through most of the eighteenth century, Williamsburg was the place to visit for fashionable imported and country-made goods. James Geddy, and other Williamsburg silversmiths, rose through the social ranks to live in comfort and represent his fellow tradesmen in the colonial capital. Silversmiths were in the upper ranks of the middle class, but they had to keep working hard to maintain their social position.

¹⁹ Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, December 3, 1767, p. 3.

²⁰ Pinkney, *Virginia Gazette*, November 9, 1775, p. 3.

Country-Made Wares and Other Luxury Trades

Local silversmiths faced considerable competition from imported silverware sold by merchants in Virginia and imported directly to elite homes via London factors.

Virginia silversmiths mostly made smaller pieces, and spoons were among their most popular crafts. Silver spoons and other small items did not generate enough money for even the best silversmiths to survive in Virginia. Smiths took on other trades and businesses to overcome the shortcomings of the Virginia marketplace.

Silversmiths were limited by their materials; since silver is a precious metal, worth a lot of money, it was hard to get in large quantities in the colonies. Silver was never mined in Virginia, so there was no easy source of natural material for local silversmiths; all of their materials had to be imported. It was possible for silversmiths to get metal in bullion by importing bars of silver direct from mines in Mexico and Peru through legal channels laden with taxes, or illegal methods of piracy. Most of their materials, however, were recycled from silver coins or pieces of already-wrought silver. It was not uncommon for customers to bring their own materials to be made into a new piece of plate.²¹ Often, silversmiths had to advertize that they were looking for more materials to work with. They were willing to buy old silver at the market price if the owner was not interested in making his supply into a new piece. James Geddy included in his 1774 advertisement in Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* an announcement that "Old Silver taken in exchange for new work, at 7s. per ounce, and Gold at 51.5s."²² Similarly, in October 1766, James Craig advertized "*A neat Assortment of Jewellery, Plate, & fine*

²¹ William DeMatteo, *The Silversmith in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg, 1956), pp. 14-15.

²² Pinkney, *Virginia Gazette*, October 13, 1774, p. 3.

Cutlery” with a note that he gave “the highest price for old Gold and Silver.”²³ Because of the lack of raw materials, Virginia silversmiths often did not make any items larger than a soup ladle, similar to the ones visible in William A. Williams’ Alexandria shop window (Figure 12).

The best way to discover the types of silver work made and sold by eighteenth-century silversmiths is to look at their advertisements. In 1737, Alexander Kerr, a silversmith in Williamsburg came up with an interesting way to sell off much of his inventory and increase his profits. Kerr took out a full-page advertisement for a lottery for some of his work, which was listed piece by piece in the announcement. These items, along with others advertized by Williamsburg silversmiths show that local silversmiths made and imported a great variety of items that were all small in size. Kerr listed an assortment of plate including small pieces of hollowware, utensils, jewelry, and personal items such as: silver buckles, sugar tongs, teaspoons, toothpick cases, sniff boxes, thimbles, soup and punch ladles, salts, watch chains, cream buckets, and spurs. Of all the items listed for the lottery, soup ladles were the largest.²⁴

Often, because of competition in the local market and from abroad, a Virginia silversmith could not make a living off of only his work making silver items. Silversmiths in Virginia were available to fix or remake broken pieces of imported silver. Many local smiths sold imported pieces of plate alongside their own wares. James Geddy advertized several times that he had just imported several items from London and offered them for sale at his own shop. In 1774, he published the following in Pinkney’s *Virginia Gazette*:

²³ Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, October 10, 1766, p. 3.

²⁴ DeMatteo, p. 4.

James Geddy, Goldsmith, Near the Church, Williamsburg, Has just imported from London a genteel assortment of Plate and Jewellery; he has likewise on hand all sorts of country made Gold and Silverwork, which he will sell at lower rates than usual. ... He repairs his own work, that fails in a reasonable time, without any expence to the purchaser.²⁵

The records of silversmith James Craig's importing business are included in the John Norton & Sons business letters, as discussed in the previous chapter. Craig imported several pieces of plate to sell in his Williamsburg shop. The pieces these silversmiths imported were not large, again no larger than a standard ladle, but they were useful in bringing the latest fashions in form and design to country-made plate.

Many silversmiths who could not get along on the profits from their own work and the pieces they imported took on other luxury trades to augment their purses. It was common for a silversmith to double as a jeweler, engraver, or watchmaker or to offer to clean or repair such small luxury items. Of the ten silversmiths listed in Mary Goodwin's research file, at least two worked with watches and clocks and four sold jewelry. James Geddy, goldsmith, silversmith, and merchant also worked as a watch repairer and jeweler and augmented his services through a partnership with the engraver William Waddill, his brother-in-law. A note attached to Geddy's June 1772 *Virginia Gazette* advertisement stated "Mourning Rings, and all Kinds of Engraving, done at the same Shop by William Waddill."²⁶ Geddy advertized his repair work on March 5, 1767 by noting that "He still continues to clean and repair Watches, and repairs his own work that fails in a reasonable time, without any expense to the purchaser."²⁷ Geddy did not restrict his business opportunities to the elite customers in Williamsburg; he also offered his services to customers and colleagues in the countryside. On May 23, 1771, Geddy advertised: "Just

²⁵ Pinkney, *Virginia Gazette*, October 13, 1774, p. 3.

²⁶ Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, June 4, 1772, p. 3.

²⁷ Purdie and Dixon *Virginia Gazette*, , March 5, 1767, p. 3.

Imported, by the Subscriber in Williamsburg, for Sale, A Good Assortment of Tools and Materials for Goldsmiths, Jewellers, and Watchmakers. Orders from the Country will be as strictly complied with as if the Person was present.”²⁸

Colonial silversmiths would take on any trade to continue their work and make a living in Virginia. While many took on trades related to their own in the luxury business, others held completely separate roles in their communities. For example, Samuel Galt, a silversmith and watchmaker in Elizabeth City and then Williamsburg, and probably the man who taught James Geddy his trade, also served as keeper of the public gaol from 1759-1760. His son, James Galt, was the first silversmith in Richmond in 1766. He moved back to Williamsburg in 1771 and took on the position as superintendent of the hospital for the insane in 1773. James Galt was a Lieutenant in the Williamsburg militia during the American Revolution and returned to work at the public hospital after the war until his death in 1800.²⁹ A surprising number of American silversmiths, including Paul Revere of Boston, doubled as dentists.³⁰ Some silversmiths unable to profit against their competition resorted to extra-legal methods of making money. In 1750, Low Jackson, a silversmith of Nansemond County, along with his brothers John Jackson, a watch-maker, and James Jackson, a blacksmith with some knowledge of the silversmith trade, and Edward Rumney, of “black Complexion” were wanted for literally making their own money. The broadside announcing their escape from custody stated that the Jacksons and Rumney were charged with “coining, counterfeiting, and uttering many base double Double-Loons.” The men were charged by Thomas Lee, Esq., “president of His Majesty's Council, and commander in chief, of the colony and dominion of Virginia” who offered a

²⁸ Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, May 23, 1771, p. 3.

²⁹ Cutten, p. 192.

³⁰ Cutten, p. xxii., DeMatteo, p. 5.

twenty pound reward for each escaped man.³¹ Although silversmiths held the top spot amongst the tradesmen society, apparently they were never happy with the profits from the small pieces of plate they created in their own forges. Most Virginia silversmiths found other related, unrelated, and illegal ways to make money apart from their own crafts.

Silversmith Patrons

Shopping was a new and popular pastime in the eighteenth century. The consumer revolution brought many new items to the shops and homes of the Virginia colonists. Anyone could go browse the goods of the various stores lining Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg. Gentry wives, laboring men, and slaves all frequented Virginia stores to buy the latest imported goods, basic supplies, or pretty ribbons. Silversmith shops were not frequented by the same variety of society as other stores, but they still depended upon the new shopping habits of a society with an increasing interest in previously-unnecessary household goods.

Silversmiths had to be attentive to the business climate in their town, city, or county. British author Daniel Defoe advised all English and colonial shopkeepers to be aware of their surroundings in his 1745 advice book *The Complete English Tradesman: Directing him in the Several Parts and Progression of Trade*. Defoe warned that “a tradesman’s business is to follow where ever the trade leads,” and that one of the ordinary causes for ruined business for tradesmen was “fixing their shops in such places as are

³¹ Thomas Lee, *Virginia, to wit* (Williamsburg: William Hunter, 1750), Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 40572. <http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl>.

improper for their business.”³² James Geddy’s shop was not in the proper location, which he recognized in his June 1772 advertisement:

The Reasonableness of the above Goods, he hopes, will remove that Objection of his Shop’s being too high up Town, as he proposes to sell any Article exceeding twenty Shillings Sterling at the low Advance of sixty two and a Half per Cent. and the Walk may be thought rather an Amusement than a Fatigue.³³

Geddy’s shop was not near the other members of his trade, and was not even in the economic district of Williamsburg. His shop was attached to his large family home in the middle of Duke of Gloucester Street, across the Palace Green from Bruton Parish Church. Most of the Williamsburg shops were at the east end of Duke of Gloucester Street, roughly from Market Square to the Capitol; Geddy’s shop next to the church was out of the way of the regular elite shoppers.

Geddy may have benefitted from his location near the Governor’s Palace; at least one of his customers came from that powerful home. One of the few pieces of confirmed Geddy silver was discovered in an archaeological dig at the Governor’s Palace. A teaspoon marked in relief with Geddy’s “IG” maker’s mark and engraved “CAA” was found near the site of the Governor’s kitchen. The spoon is thought to have been one of a set of twelve teaspoons given by Governor Francis Fauquier as a wedding present to Christopher and Anne Ayscough, his gardener and cook at the palace.³⁴

It is easy to see from the carefully preserved letters of the elite planters and merchant companies who the customers were for direct-imports from Britain; it is more difficult to understand who made up the customer base for local silversmiths. There are few lasting records of the business done by local tradesmen. Only a few pieces of

³² Daniel Defoe, “Chapt. VIII: Of the ordinary Occasions if the Ruin of Tradesmen,” in *The Complete English Tradesman: directing him in the several parts and progressions of trade...*, 5th ed. (London, 1745).

³³ Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, June 4, 1772, p. 3.

³⁴ DeMatteo, p. 9.

colonial silver in Virginia families have lasted through the centuries, and almost none (except for the Ayscough spoon) have been found in archaeological digs. Colonial receipts were saved with about as much interest as modern Americans save receipts. Not many records remain of Geddy's business besides his advertisements and only a few pieces of his silverwork have been identified. One receipt remains from Geddy's business. On May 5, 1772 Col. William Preston paid James Geddy £9.19.3 for pieces bought from the silversmith since 1771 including bobbs, buckles, a ring, a large spoon for his mother, and watch repair.³⁵ Colonel Preston patronized Geddy's establishment several times in the 1770s. Preston contracted Geddy to create a brandy warmer for the Colonel's home, a piece that still exists and is owned by Colonial Williamsburg. The few other pieces associated with James Geddy include three tea spoons excavated on the site of the Geddy House, two with his mark, the Ayscough spoon, and Lord Botetourt's coffin plate, which was engraved by William Waddill when he worked in Geddy's shop.³⁶

Our good friend George Washington was also a patron of local tradesmen. As noted in previous chapters, Washington imported his fine utensils and silverware by the dozen from British merchants, but he turned to local silversmiths for repairs on his small items. According to his personal ledger, Washington visited Williamsburg silversmith and jeweler James Craig several times from 1759 to 1769. Washington patronized James Geddy's shop in Williamsburg on December 7, 1766. On that day, he recorded he spent 3s 9d at Mr. Geddy's for the repair of two fans.³⁷ As one of the local gentry of Northern Virginia, Washington patronized the tradesmen of Alexandria, the closest thing to his

³⁵ Receipted Account, Manuscript #MS 1941.6, (John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

³⁶ Colonial Williamsburg, *James Geddy, Jr.*

³⁷ George Washington, Ledgers A and B, 1750-1775, Library of Congress. M-89.2 (John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

home town. In 1773, Alexandria silversmith Edward Sanford repaired a punch ladle and salt cellar for Washington in addition to making a silver seal for Mrs. Washington and repairing her watch. A couple of years later, Washington took some salt spoons to Charles Turner, another silversmith in Alexandria, to be repaired.³⁸

Repairs seem to have made up most of the business of the local luxury tradesmen. Zachary Lewis, a Virginia jeweler and watchmaker familiar with silversmithing, was one of the few tradesmen who left a lasting account of his business. His 1762-1775 account book reveals the type of business done in such local luxury shops. Lewis' clients were many of the up-and-coming power players of the Revolutionary era and the formative years of the United States of America, including Patrick Henry, James Madison, and John Marshall. Most of Lewis' work was mending old objects. He repaired watches as part of his watchmaking profession and mended all sorts of jewelry and small silver objects. In August 1762, Lewis repaired a stone sleeve button for John Waller's wife. In the next few years, he repaired a watch, altered a ring, mended a stone stay hook, and fixed two buckles for Mr. William Fearson. Zachary Lewis' repair work included fixing pieces of silver used in genteel dining habits. On September 22, 1763, Mr. Thomas Wyatt paid Lewis 1 shilling, 3 pence for mending two silver teaspoons. Lewis' customers were more interested in having their old things fixed rather than buying new pieces from the jeweler. These were men rising up the social and political power ladder in the third quarter of the eighteenth century; men aspiring to be elite by having luxury items and keeping them in good condition.³⁹

³⁸ Cutten, p. 2.

³⁹ Zachary Lewis Account Book, Manuscript MS 86.11, (John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

Local Luxuries During and After the Revolutionary Years

The years leading up to the American Revolution caused a sharp change in the consumer practices of Virginia shoppers. Discontent over taxation without representation just before the Revolution inspired boycotts and associations for non-importation. The Virginia gentry protested Parliament's involvement in their governmental and financial affairs by banding together to quit their dependence on imported goods. Often, fine utensils and silverware were wrapped up in the protests. One intriguing example comes from a set of silver spoons owned by Landon Carter. According to family tradition, when Carter sent his order for fashionable house wares to his London merchants in 1766, including a set of table spoons, he specified that if the Stamp Act were repealed they should be made of silver, but if it lasted, the spoons should be of horn. The Act was repealed, and Carter received a set of silver spoons sporting an engraved inscription on the handle celebrating "After the repeal of the American Stamp Act- 1766"⁴⁰ (Figure 13).



Figure 13 One of Landon Carter's Repeal of the Stamp Act spoons.⁴¹

Further taxation in the 1760s and 1770s sparked even greater reactions among the Virginia elite. In the wake of the 1767 Townshend Acts, many Virginians joined non-importation associations to protest the British government's ability to tax them. The Townshend Acts placed duties on printer's colors, tea, glass, and paper to raise revenue to pay the salaries of royal colonial officers and all but suspended the government in New

⁴⁰ Paul Wiltach, *Tidewater Virginia* (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1945), p. 242.

⁴¹ Virginia Historical Society, "Becoming Americans," *The Story of Virginia: An American Experience*, <http://www.vahistorical.org/sva2003/spoon.htm>.

York because colonists would not provide barracks for British troops. Arthur Lee and John Dickenson led the non-importation movement “to keep the flame of liberty burning in British America” through their published letters in Rind’s *Virginia Gazette*.⁴² Lee and Dickenson suggested a plan for an association to

solemnly promise to prefer on every occasion, the manufactures of *America* to those of every country; and to promote with the utmost of our abilities, *American* manufactures, so far as to furnish ourselves with the necessities of life.⁴³

Lee and Dickenson’s sentiments reverberated across the colony. Virginia was the largest and most profitable of the British North American colonies; British merchants and Parliament would have definitely felt the repercussions of the change in Virginia consumerism based on political leanings. Residents of several counties across Virginia organized petitions and protests against the Townshend Acts and the actions against the New York legislature. They sent petitions to the king stating the House of Burgesses was the only body that could tax them, as they could only be taxed by consent of their representatives; Parliament’s right to tax the colonies violated guarantees in the English Constitution.⁴⁴

The House of Burgesses themselves went against the royal power and declared the Acts unconstitutional. In May 1769, Lord Botetourt, the new governor of Virginia, dissolved the General Assembly just ten days after he called it into session. The Burgesses met at the Raleigh Tavern and passed the “Non-importation resolutions of the Association at Williamsburg,” drawn up by George Mason. According to these resolutions, the Associators would stop buying anything taxed by Parliament after

⁴² Glenn Curtis Smith, “An Era of Non-Importation Associations, 1768-73,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, second series, vol. 20, no. 1 (Jan., 1940). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1920668>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

September 1, 1769 and would stop importing slaves after November 1. The Association encouraged frugality and discouraged importing any British goods.⁴⁵

According to the May 18, 1769 document, the Burgesses created the Association, “being deeply affected with the Grievances and Distresses, with which his Majesty’s *American* Subjects are oppressed, and dreading the Evils which threaten the ruin or ourselves and our Prosperity, by reducing us from a free and happy People to a wretched and miserable State of Slavery.”⁴⁶ They resolved the following:

First, It is UNANIMOUSLY agreed on and resolved this 18th day of *May*, 1769, that the Subscribers, as well by their own Example, as all other legal Ways and Means in their Power, will promote and encourage Industry and Frugality, and discourage all Manner of Luxury and Extravagance. *Secondly*, That they will not at any Time hereafter, directly or indirectly import, or cause to be imported, any Manner of Goods, Merchandise, or Manufactures which are, or shall thereafter be taxed by Act of Parliament... *Thirdly*, That the subscribers will not hereafter directly or indirectly import, or cause to be imported from *Great Britain* or any part of *Europe*...any of the Goods hereinafter enumerated.

Included in the goods the Burgesses resolved not to import were “Trinkets and Jewelry, Plate and Gold, and Silversmith’s Work of all Sorts.”⁴⁷

About 1,000 people in Dinwiddie County signed the Association right away and almost everyone in Fairfax, Prince William, and Loudoun Counties signed within a month. One hundred twenty-five leading merchants of Virginia, including John Hatley Norton, agreed to boycott food, spirits, luxuries, oil, and paint from England after September 1, 1769. In April 1770, Parliament repealed the taxes on all products of the Townshend Acts, except for tea. The Association had not worked; Parliament had not given up its right to tax colonists, and the people in Virginia had not followed the non-

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1766-1769* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1906), p. xl.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. xl-xli.

importation pact. Imports to Virginia were actually higher in 1769, the first year of the Association, than ever before.⁴⁸ Although Parliament had given up on most of the taxes, they did not recognize the motives of the Virginians behind the boycotts. By maintaining the small tax on tea, Parliament made a huge statement about its power in the colonies.

The 1769 Non-importation Association had mixed meanings for local businessmen. Refusing imported goods created more demand for locally-made items, but also cut off a major supply line for silversmiths and other craftsmen in luxury trades. In the end, patriotic impulses overcame mercantile dependence on imported goods for many Virginia silversmiths who participated in the Association. Richard Pickadick, a silversmith in Norfolk, was one of the 145 men from that city who signed as a member of the Non-Importation Association in Virginia.⁴⁹ Williamsburg silversmiths were a little more reluctant about signing up with the Association. The original Non-Importation Association was signed by the patriotic leading men of Virginia in 1769, but Williamsburg silversmiths James Geddy and James Craig did not sign on until 1770 and 1771, respectively. James Geddy did aim to profit from the Association before he became and official member. He advertized in September 1769:

James Geddy, Goldsmith, Next door below the Church, Wmsburg, Has now on hand a neat assortment of country made Gold and Silver Work, which he will sell at the lowest rates for cash, or exchange for old gold or silver. As he has not imported any jewellery this Season, he flatters himself he will meet with encouragement, especially from those Ladies and Gentlemen who are friends to the association.⁵⁰

The sentiments of the Non-Importation Associations did not last long among Virginians. Even George Washington, one of the leading proponents of non-importation

⁴⁸ Smith.

⁴⁹ Cutten, p. 101.

⁵⁰ Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, September 28, 1769, p. 3.

began importing luxury goods again in 1771.⁵¹ In 1772, James Geddy issued an advertisement that he had “Just imported, and to be Sold by the subscriber, near the church in Williamsburg, A Neat Assortment of Plate, Watches, and Jewellery.”⁵² Several Williamsburg tradesmen came together on March 4, 1773 to implement steps to promote manufacturing in Virginia. James Geddy, Samuel Coke, James Craig, and James Galt were among the representative silversmiths at the meeting.⁵³ Whatever they decided did not have a lasting hold on the Virginia local economy. Geddy continued to advertize his imported goods in each consecutive year from 1772 until 1775. Eventually, it was the patriotic spirit and the American Revolution that brought Geddy’s silversmith shop to a close. He ran low on materials to use in his forge, customers to buy his luxury goods, and money to support his family. In his 1775 advertisement, Geddy announced that he had some jewelry on hand that “would sell at an unusual low price for ready money.”⁵⁴ His 1776 advertisement simply stated “I will give 7s. 6d. an ounce for Old Silver, ready money. – James Geddy.”⁵⁵ In November of the following year, Geddy advertized his shop and his silversmith and watchmaker tools for sale. The Geddy family left Williamsburg for Dinwiddie County and Petersburg in 1778.⁵⁶

The local silversmith trade sprang back to life after the American Revolution. The capital of Virginia moved from Williamsburg to Richmond in 1780 and with it went many of the local tradesmen. As a result, Richmond usurped Williamsburg’s role as the center of social life and fashionable goods in Virginia and silversmiths prospered in the

⁵¹ Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, July 18, 1771, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁵² Purdie and Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, June 4, 1772, p. 3.

⁵³ Cutten, p. xviii.

⁵⁴ Pinkney, *Virginia Gazette*, June 1, 1775, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Purdie, *Virginia Gazette*, September 20, 1776, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Colonial Williamsburg, *James Geddy, Jr.*

growing city. For example, Anthony Singleton, a former apprentice and Associator in Norfolk, opened a shop on Duke of Gloucester Street in 1771 and practiced his silversmith trade in Williamsburg for a few years before getting swept up by the War. He served as a Captain of the Continental Artillery in 1777 and moved to Richmond after the victory at Yorktown. On October 9, 1787, Singleton married Lucy Harrison Randolph in Richmond. His new wife was the daughter of Benjamin Harrison, signer of the Declaration of Independence, a widow of the influential Randolph family, and sister of William Henry Harrison, ninth president of the United States. Singleton held many public offices in Richmond in the 1780s and 1790s. In 1791 he was a petitioner for a branch of the new United States Bank in Richmond, served as president of the Amicable Society, a charity in the city, and was an original member of the Society of the Cincinnati of Virginia. Although Singleton married well and gained power and position in Virginia elite society, he stipulated in his 1795 will that “It is my last and most solemn injunction to my wife and executors that all my sons be brought up to some mechanical profession.”⁵⁷ Singleton was still a silversmith, even after assimilating into gentry society.

Singleton and his silversmith colleagues benefitted from the new patriotic spirit and adaptation of the neo-classical as the new American style. Wealthy Americans commissioned a greater number of large pieces of American-made plate at the end of the eighteenth century. Ladles and spoons were no longer the mainstay of the local silversmith. There was a shift in the Virginia luxury trade following the Revolution; northern cities, such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston became new centers of fashionable goods. George Washington began to buy northern silver during his years

⁵⁷ DeMatteo, p. 8., Cutten, p. 205.

traversing New England and the mid-Atlantic as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. In July 1775, Washington was in Cambridge, Massachusetts and “bot of John Andrews: 6 Large, 6 small silver spoons” for £5, 19 shillings, 4 pence.⁵⁸ In 1776, Washington, always the collector of fine utensils, got two cases of knives and forks for £10, 10 shillings from William Hollingshead of Philadelphia. Colonel Clement Biddle bought two dozen table spoons for over £34 from Richard Humphreys of Philadelphia for General Washington in 1780⁵⁹ (Figure 14). Shortly after the end of the war, Washington wrote to his merchant interest “I do not incline to send to England (from whence formerly I had all my goods) for anything I can get upon tolerable terms elsewhere.”

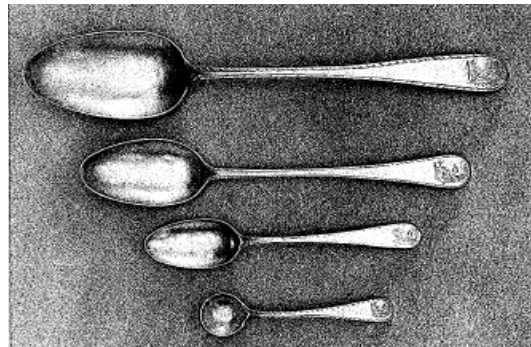


Figure 14 Philadelphia spoons by Richard Humphreys in the Mount Vernon Collection.⁶⁰

Even after the Revolution, Virginia silversmiths continued to face competition from imported goods, now from the northern states. Although larger urban areas supported more local production across the new state, the genteel population continued to import their fashionable dining utensils from abroad. Virginia silversmiths filled the role of secondary tradesmen in the luxury trade, often fixing more items than making new ones.

⁵⁸ Kathryn C Buhler, *Mount Vernon Silver* (Mount Vernon, Va.: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1957), p. 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Conclusion

In the end, Virginia silversmiths were not the chosen prop masters for the genteel theater of dining ritual and hospitality. Elite planters concerned with proving their wealth and gentility wanted their knives, forks, and silver spoons from the fashionable center of the colonial universe, Great Britain. They imported their fine utensils, along with almost all of their other household goods, from the merchants of London and other British manufacturing centers. Virginia silver in the eighteenth century followed the shifting styles and forms of British silver, adapting to changes in the silver alloy and global outlook. Virginians looked to Britain for the latest fashions in behavior, architecture, and status items. Given their colonial relationship to the mother country, most Virginians depended on England and Scotland for all of their goods. Even those people born and bred in the colony saw Britain as their home. There was a close economic relationship between Virginia plantations and London, Scotland, and other merchant centers. In the early eighteenth century, Hugh Jones expressed the view that a gentleman in Virginia could receive goods from “London, Bristol, etc. with less trouble and cost, than to one living five miles in the country in England.”⁶¹ An elite planter, such as George Washington, could send a detailed order of luxury goods and supplies to his merchant in London and receive his order in ten months. Although not always reliable, importing goods via consignment merchants was the best way for a planter to acquire the fashionable cutlery necessary for his genteel dining table.

George Washington would not have been able to get his dozens of imported knives, forks, and spoons if he did not grow tobacco on at least one of his plantations.

⁶¹ James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) p. 308.

Every aspect of genteel Virginia life stemmed from the influence of the tobacco economy. It was important for any great planter to succeed in the tobacco trade to gain access to the fashionable goods necessary for genteel activities. These planters profited from tobacco grown on their own large estates, hogsheads they received in exchange for goods and land from their poorer neighbors, and their salaries in the cash crop for their positions in the local and colony government. They shipped their hogsheads of tobacco to consignment merchants in England who sold the cash crop at the best prices and granted credit for imported supplies and luxury goods.

Credit served as the financial backbone for the Virginia planter society. All of the imported manufactured goods, supplies, and luxuries in plantation homes great and small came from Great Britain. As one Virginian noted shortly before the American Revolution, "Credit is a thing so common here that there is not one person in a hundred who pays the ready money for the goods he takes."⁶² Small farmers could get their imported supplies on credit from their more wealthy neighbors in the first half of the eighteenth century and then from Scottish merchant factors later in the century. The great planters maintained long relationships with their consignment merchants in Britain who sold their tobacco crops and gave them credit to buy whatever they needed or wanted for their plantations. Large planters often overdrew on their credit with consignment merchants and went into debt to increase the size and luxury of their plantation estates.

Virginia planters used their merchant credit to buy more fashionable knives, forks, and silver spoons as the eighteenth century progressed. This trend is explained by the consumer revolution and the growing importance of the dining ritual. The consumer

⁶² Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "Ceramics and the Sotweed Factor: The China Market in a Tobacco Economy," *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Spring, 1984), pp. 7-19.

revolution brought an increase in the availability and awareness of manufactured goods. Virginia planters began buying more items to fill their homes. Virginia homes in the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century were small and sparse. They had few rooms and hardly any belongings extending beyond the very basic supplies for eating, sleeping, and growing tobacco. Even the more wealthy people in the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Virginia had only the basic belongings. One visitor to a prominent Virginian in 1715 recorded that “though rich... [he] has nothing in or about his house but what is necessary.”⁶³ As more fashionable goods became available, and elite planters became more eager to separate themselves from their lesser neighbors, wealthy Virginians sought to furnish their homes with status items in the very latest styles.

The most definitive ritual of genteel status took place in the new dining rooms added into the great plantation houses around Tidewater Virginia. It was extremely important to have all the proper tools and skills for the intricate genteel dining ritual. Abigail Adams’ sentiment during the new Republic had applied to Virginia society for decades; she wrote to her husband that “the manners of our country are so intirely changed from what they were in the days of simplicity...unless you can keep a publick table and equipage you are of but...small consideration.”⁶⁴ Each guest and host at a genteel dining table had to have different utensils for each course and often each dish required its own special serving utensils. It took a great deal of money to set a genteel dining table and many hours of free time to master the skills necessary for inclusion in

⁶³ Cary Carson, “The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?,” in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter Albert (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. 498.

⁶⁴ “Peyton Randolph House” in “Williamsburg Tour,” *The Early Architecture of Tidewater Virginia: A Guidebook for the Twenty-third Annual Vernacular Architecture Forum Conference*, (2002): pp. 10-11.

the dining ritual. A few gentry children had their own training utensils and practice dining rooms to learn the proper dining manners and etiquette before they could participate in a meal at their parents' table. There were many courtesy and etiquette books which outlined the rules for behavior in genteel society, especially at the dining table. A person might own silver spoons and dinner knives and forks, but if he did not know how to use them properly, he could not be counted as genteel.

The utensils for genteel dining were available from Virginia shopkeepers and tradesmen. Many local merchants in Virginia population centers advertized both imported and country-made utensils for sale. Williamsburg was a particularly important urban center for genteel goods, hosting fifteen or sixteen silversmiths during its time as the colonial capital, from 1699-1780. These silversmiths made small items, including many different types and sizes of spoons, but could not make a living off of their crafts alone. Many took up other luxury trades, such as jewelry and watch making or participating in the import trade. It is easy to track the success of a silversmith, such as James Geddy, through his advertisements. Geddy's newspaper notices track his rise as a Williamsburg silversmith, his involvement in the import trade and other luxury practices, his changing political and business practices, and his eventual failure as a result of a lack of resources. Most of the work that local silversmiths did for gentry patrons consisted of repairs on small items, rather than creating new pieces for genteel silver collections.

Even the patriotic anti-importation movements before and after the American Revolution could not sway the market for luxury goods from British merchants to Virginia producers. The Non-Importation Association in response to the Townshend Acts in 1769 and 1770 failed to challenge Parliament's right to tax the colonies and to slow the

importation of luxury goods to Virginian planters. Parliament repealed most of the taxes of the Townshend Acts, but not all; the tax on tea remained. Although many of the leading Virginia gentry backed non-importation, they did not set a strong enough example for their fellow colonists and importation from British markets increased in the years leading to the Revolution. Virginia silversmiths did not benefit from the patriotic impulses after the break from the mother country. After the Revolution, local silversmiths increased in growing Virginia cities, but Philadelphia and other northern cities replaced London, Bristol, and Scotland as the market for fashionable luxury goods, including silver spoons and dining knives and forks.

William Fitzhugh began the trend of importing large collections of dining utensils from British merchants in the late seventeenth century, and Robert “King” Carter continued the practice in the early eighteenth century. George Washington mastered the tobacco economy to gain influence, via his well-connected wife, with the top British consignment merchants to receive the best imported luxuries to illustrate his status among the Virginia gentry. Washington imported ivory-, china-, and silver-handled knives and forks and personalized silver spoons by the dozen to entertain elite guests at his genteel dining table. The various types and materials of fashionable dining utensils imported from Britain to Virginia dining tables serve as examples from material culture of the economic dependency on Great Britain for objects of status and gentility among the Virginia elite.

Appendix

I compiled a database of who owned how many of what types of fashionable knives, forks, and silver spoons from the probate inventories of 257 upper-middling to elite Virginia households. My sources came from the York County Probate Inventories database compiled, transcribed, and digitized by the Colonial Williamsburg Rockefeller Library Digital Library and “Probing the Past,” a collection of Chesapeake probate inventories from 1740-1810 published online as part of a collaborative effort between Gunston Hall Plantation and the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. I searched through the York County Probate Inventories from the eighteenth century (the earliest from 1719) by wealth group, reading through inventories of members of the middling, upper-middling, and upper levels of society. The “Probing the Past” database had a handy search feature, which allowed me to search through the Virginia inventories by key words (“spoon,” “knife,” and “fork,” or variations of those terms).

I faced many problems while compiling my database. One problem came from the currency noted as the total wealth of a person’s estate and each item listed in the inventory. Most of the monetary amounts were listed in the old sterling pound currency, where each pound is made of twenty shillings, and each shilling is twelve pence. This currency was difficult to format in Excel, so I converted it to the modern decimalized pound. Another problem with the currency stemmed from the extreme inflation during the American Revolution. Items listed in probates from 1776-1781 were assigned values as many as ten times their regular worth.

Some of the problems I faced came from the nature of probate inventories. Estates were usually only probated if there was concern over settling the debts of the deceased owner. Court-appointed appraisers, chosen from the community, went through an estate to create a list of all the belongings and an estimate of its worth. Some appraisers were meticulous in their probates, listing individual items with estimated prices by room, others only created a cursory list, grouping items together with vague estimates of their number, type, and worth. Silver spoons were often appraised by weight with the overall collection of silver plate. Knives and forks were often lumped in with other dining tools, not separated by type or material. I often came across “parcels,” “cases,” and “boxes” of “some” or “assorted” knives and forks.

The greatest problem I faced after my probate research was that there was no immediately recognizable trend of fine cutlery ownership. The number of knives, forks, and spoons in Virginia collections increased over the eighteenth century, but the increase was not visible until I calculated the average number of each utensil by each decade. Even the analysis of average utensils by decade faced problems from huge outliers at the end of the century, such as George Hunter of Fairfax County, who owned 500 spoons, 354 knives, and 60 forks, or George Mason, also of Fairfax County, who owned 110 knives and 109 forks.

The following table and graph illustrate the bulk of my inventory research. Table 1 shows the name, location, date, and total wealth listed in the probate inventory and the total number of spoons, knives, and forks, regardless of specific type. Table 2 shows the specific type of silver spoons and the types and materials of knives and forks. The graph illustrates the increase in the average number of utensils in a collection by decade in the eighteenth century.

Table 1: Total number of knives forks and spoons, regardless of specific type.

Name	Place	Date	Total Wealth	Spoons	Knives	Forks
Megary, Martin	York County	7/20/1719	153.41	12		
Davis, Anne	York County	2/16/1730	197.12	24	12	12
Tyler, Henry	York County	2/16/1730	245.8		12	12
Moody, Giles	Williamsburg	2/16/1730	253.77		parcel	Parcel
Stone, William	York County	3/16/1730	112.5		9	11
McKindo, James	Yorktown	7/19/1731	147.4		2	5
Holland, Lewis	Williamsburg	9/20/1731	170.68	34+	parcel	Parcel
Tabb, Elizabeth	York County	1/17/1732	255.49	10	18	18
Samford, James	Richmond County	2/2/1742	267.35		6	6
Fitzhugh, Henry	Stafford	3/8/1742	3646	19	12	
Ball, William, Jr.	Lancaster	7/21/1742		12	14	14
Ball, Sarah	Lancaster	10/8/1742	464.71	23	5	5
Washington, Capt. John	Stafford	7/12/1743		30	12	12
Haddon, Hudson	York County	3/17/1745	137.97		1	1
Trotter, John	York County	8/19/1745	101.02	2		
Sclater, James and Mary	York County	1/19/1746	425.1	27	9	9
Hubard, Mathew	Yorktown	3/16/1746	293.67	19	14	14
Philipson, Robert	York County	3/19/1746	110.34	7	1	1
Burwell, Capt. Nathaniel Bacon	York County	5/19/1746	1669.02	1	21	9
Butterworth, John	Yorktown	8/18/1746	356.08	1		
Ball, Jesse	Lancaster	3/11/1747	3119.32	33 +	78	18
Bryan, John	York County	3/21/1747	467.23	12	12	12
Charlton, George	Williamsburg	11/20/1747	202.52		6	6
Moody, Ishmael	Yorktown	1/1/1748	814.27	2	26	23
McCarty, Dionysius	York County	5/16/1748	229.21		6	6
Roberts, Robert	York County	6/20/1748	263.68		9	12
Goodwin, Peter	York County	7/18/1748	812.93	6	case	case
Goodwin, Rebecca	York County	11/21/1748	341.31	10	some	some
Timson, Samuel	York County	12/12/1748	594.21	15		
Stots, John	Williamsburg	9/18/1749	199.78		5	3
Lewis, Thomas	Fairfax	12/1/1749			6	6
Traverse, Rawleigh	Stafford	12/29/1749	772.27	46	54	54
Hornby, Daniel	Richmond County	4/11/1750		18	11	11
Barbar, Elizabeth	York County	6/18/1750	411.59	12	3	4
Griffin, Leroy	Richmond	8/6/1750		22	48	48
Ball, Jeduthan	King George	9/1/1750		6	20	20
Bennehan, Dudley	Richmond	11/28/1750	782.7	18	6	6
Cosby, John	York County	12/17/1750	204.58	10		
Allen, Ann	York County	3/28/1751	138.71	2	case	case
Burfoot, Thomas	York County	5/20/1751	290.92	6	2	4
Smith, Edmund	York County	9/16/1751	861.83	12	18	18
Washington, John	Stafford	6/6/1752	1425	7	37	38
Rogers, Theodosia	York County	8/17/1752	303.45	19		
Wiggenton, Roger	Fairfax	11/1/1752	335.61	41	17	17
Goosley, Ephraim	York County	11/20/1752	243.51	14	12	12

Collet, Susan	York County	1/15/1753	133.64	22		
Corridon, William	York County	6/18/1753	776.03	12	case	case
Minor, John, Gent.	Fairfax	7/18/1753		7		
Ashley, William	Norfolk	8/4/1753	482.14	5	11	6
Alexander, Phillip	Stafford	8/14/1753	1558.51	20	34	35
Hansford, William	York County	11/19/1753	298.8			3
Shield, Robert	York County	2/18/1754	1853.07	18	case	case
Scarburgh, Edmund	York County	3/18/1754	510.12	18	12	8
Barber, Thomas Capt.	Richmond County	5/6/1754		4	8	9
Wells, George	Williamsburg	5/20/1754		16		
Moss, Edward, Jr	York County	6/17/1754	498.54	12		
Montague, William	Middlesex	7/2/1754	1806.88	16	16	16
Payras, John	Yorktown	7/15/1754	165.22	12	21	21
Ball, James	Lancaster	12/19/1754		23		
West, Hugh	Fairfax	1/29/1755	229.43	18	7	11
Smith, Capt. Arthur	Isle of Wight	2/24/1755	471.76	35	parcel	parcel
Peirce, Matthew	York County	3/17/1755	2702.65	12	8	10
Jackson, Ambrose	York County	9/15/1755	182.63	11		
Chisman, John	York County	12/15/1755	530.1	6		
Jones, Humphrey	York County	1/19/1756	473.52	48	4	3
Colvill, John, Col.	Fairfax	2/6/1756	1440.58	18	43	14
Hay, John	York County	3/15/1756	462.09	2	case	Case
Coulthard, John	Williamsburg	6/21/1756	212.14	16		
Glascock, John	Richmond County	7/5/1756	680.01	13	12	12
Webb, John Spann	Richmond County	7/5/1756		6	6	6
Fontaine, Susanna	York County	11/15/1756	750.1	12		
Timson, William	York County	2/21/1757	364.23		3	4
Crease, Thomas	Williamsburg	3/21/1757	166.21	8		
Roberts, Gerrard	York County	3/21/1757	361.41	12	12	12
Robinson, Anthony	York County	3/21/1757	974.84	18	parcel	Parcel
Mountfort, Thomas	York County	7/18/1757	448.2		some	Some
Sclater, William Sheldon	York County	9/19/1757	1658.97	13		
Armistead, Ellyson	York County	2/20/1758	536.4	15	12	12
Goodwin, James	York County	2/20/1758	1986.47	24	18	19
Fauntleroy, Maj. Moor	Richmond County	3/7/1758	887.28	23	11	11
Burt, Josias	York County	5/15/1758	398.99	8	case	Case
Moss, Edward	York County	5/15/1758	752.55	9	16	16
Cary, Judith	York County	7/17/1758	156.9		6	6
Thurmer, Robert	Yorktown	7/17/1758	386.01	3	24	24
Routh, Anthony	York County	7/17/1758	394.2		36	36
Palmer, William	York County	9/18/1758			3	3
Green, Sarah	Williamsburg	5/21/1759	338.86	6	11	11
Cooke, Traverse	Stafford	6/12/1759	947.72	22	12	12
Allerton, Willoughby	Westmoreland	10/17/1759		12	48	48
Hay, James	York County	11/19/1759	315.64	9	some	Some
Reade, Dr. Alexander	Middlesex	1/3/1760		18	24	24
Crawley, Robert	York County	2/18/1760	588.23	6		
Corbin, Gawen	Westmoreland	4/10/1760		29	21	19
Moss, Elizabeth	York County	1/19/1761	276.36	6		

Wetherburn, Henry	Williamsburg	3/16/1761		49	45	44
Thornton, Anna Maria	York County	5/18/1761	663.68	30		
Bertrand, William	Lancaster	6/19/1761		30	12	20
Griffin, Thomas W.	Richmond County	9/25/1761		19	12	12
Hunter, William	Williamsburg	11/24/1761		32	case	Case
Bailey, Capt. John	Lancaster	4/16/1762	747.06	12	12	12
Reynolds, Capt. Thomas	Yorktown	6/21/1762		13+		
Browne, Henry, Gent.	Surry	12/12/1762		45	42	42
Walker, Maj. William	Stafford	1/1/1763		7+	17	17
Tabb, Edmund	Yorktown	2/21/1763	1214.53	13+	9	10
Moss, James	York County	2/21/1763	1298.04	6	case	Case
Mason, Ann	Stafford	2/28/1763	515.66	19	12	12
Mills, James	Yorktown	7/18/1763	473.11		24	24
				12 + parcel		
Conway, Col. Edwin	Lancaster	10/7/1763			14	14
Cary, John	York County	3/19/1764	378.15	11		
Hubard, Elizabeth	York County	3/19/1764		5	12	8
Crawley, Nathaniel	York County	5/21/1764	637.44	some		
Bond, John	Lancaster	9/1/1764	489.64	6	12	12
Cross, Frances	York County	9/17/1764	803.68		case	Case
Hunter, John	Fairfax	11/30/1764	634.45	15	24	24
Powell, William	York County	2/18/1765	331.72	13	12	12
Morris, Bethea	York County	3/18/1765	262.25	6		
Crandall, James	York County	5/20/1765	180.58		some	Some
Moncure, Rev. John	Stafford	10/12/1765	571.65	14	16	16
Burfoot, Lawson	York County	10/21/1765	533.91	6	4	6
Prentis, William	Williamsburg	10/21/1765		33	17	29
Butler, Lawrence	Westmoreland	1/1/1766	1417.65	29	22	21
					2	2
Royle, Joseph	Williamsburg	6/16/1766	2068.44	2	cases	cases
Dickeson, Arthur	York County	8/18/1766	869.26		8	
Eaton, Pinkethman	York County	9/9/1766	1020.03	6		
Johnston, George	Fairfax	2/11/1767	1554.51	31	23	18
Drewry, Samuel	York County	3/16/1767	145.45	3	1	1
Jones, John	York County	3/16/1767	209.01		1	4
Martin, James	Williamsburg	3/16/1767	292.64	19	21	21
Whitaker, Simon	Williamsburg	5/18/1767	602.66	6	6	6
Goodwin, John	York County	5/18/1767	1465.52	12	11	11
Newton, Willoughby	Westmoreland	5/27/1767	2018.04	24	24	24
Lester, John	York County	6/15/1767	314.3	9	case	Case
Smallwood, Capt. Charles	Norfolk	9/23/1767	399.8	22	6	6
Webb, William	Richmond County	1/1/1768	814.89	6	12	12
Chinn, Thomas	Lancaster	1/29/1768		9	17	18
Coke, John	Williamsburg	2/15/1768	772.9	14	22	48
Ambler, Richard	Yorktown	2/15/1768	1212.39	40	60	60
Tarpley, Traverse	Richmond County	6/6/1768		36	25	25
Tucker, Robert	Norfolk	9/5/1768	8550.67	66	41	43
Gibbons, Anne	Yorktown	11/21/1768	526.65	2	12	12
Bates, James	York County	7/17/1769		14		

Waters, William	Williamsburg	8/21/1769	810.83	48	54	61
Chapman, Ann	York County	1/21/1771	600.59	8		
Hay, Anthony	Williamsburg	2/2/1771	1778.59	56	64	59
Bryan, Fredrick	Williamsburg	3/26/1771	1213	20	24	24
Dudley, William	Yorktown	5/20/1771	409.84	32	20	23
Fauquier, Hon. Francis	Williamsburg	7/20/1771	2947.9		72	72
Cosby, Capt. Stripling	Yorktown	11/18/1771	277.63	6		
Tompkins, Samuel	York County	5/18/1772	183.91		5	6
Moss, John	York County	5/18/1772	662.87	12		
Archer, Edward	Norfolk	5/28/1772	854.28	25	17	14
Mitchell, James	Yorktown	7/20/1772	798	25	61	60
Moss, Amey	York County	8/17/1772	366.25		6	6
Hornsby, Thomas	Williamsburg	8/17/1772	6413.82	42	case	Case
French, Daniel	Fairfax	8/31/1772	6963.99	24	3	3
Scrivener, Joseph	Williamsburg	9/21/1772	1207.33	7		
Lightfoort, Armistead	Yorktown	11/16/1772	396.01	6		
Valentine, Joseph	York County	2/15/1773	604.69	4		
Gibbons, John	Yorktown	3/15/1773	995.53	34	24	24
McCarty, Billington	Richmond County	4/22/1773		12	10	10
Reade, Mary	York County	5/17/1773	539.52	18		4
Howard, Elizabeth	York County	5/17/1773	940.72	12	7	9
Prentis, William II	Williamsburg	7/19/1773	327.54	12		
Rind, William	Williamsburg	10/18/1773	272.28	9	6	6
Drummond, William	York County	11/15/1773		6	10	10
Singleton, Joshua	Richmond County	11/18/1773		7	6	6
Shields, Robert	York County	12/20/1773	2289.86	21	17	16
Camp, John	Williamsburg	3/21/1774	580.49	12		
Jones, Mary	York County	5/16/1774	282.99		8	8
Singleton, Richard Hunt	Williamsburg	5/16/1774	2289.86	30	23	23
Downman, Robert						
Portues	Richmond County	5/26/1774	1088.25	26+	sorted	Sorted
Johnson, Josiah	Williamsburg	7/18/1774	514.35	20	7	5
Potter, Edward	York County	3/20/1775	177.74		7	7
Prentis, John	Williamsburg	12/18/1775	1255.95	31	basket	Basket
Lee, Philip Ludwell	Westmoreland	3/20/1776			32	39
Craig, Alexander	Williamsburg	4/15/1776	680.44		14	14
Randoph, Peyton	Williamsburg	7/15/1776	2883.73		44	42
Digges, Anne	York County	8/19/1776	273		22	17
Flood, Nicholas	Richmond	12/2/1776		58	114	114
Shield, Rebecca	York County	3/17/1777	162.91	10	10	10
Leitch, Andrew	Prince William	6/2/1777			29	25
Timson, John	York County	7/21/1777	151.46		3	5
Laughton, Henry	York County	1/19/1778	63.68	1		
Davenport, Matthew	Williamsburg	1/19/1778	758.19	14		
Cooley, Mary	York County	2/16/1778	381.6	23	7	6
Davis, William	York County	6/15/1778	275.2	6	case	Case
Pearson, William	York County	6/15/1778	2115.84	24	17	17
Sclater, Richard	York County	8/17/1778	2859.8	17	17	18
Presson, Samuel	York County	2/15/1779	679.75		5	5

Smith, Lawrence	York County	4/9/1779	1660.7	11	7	7
Camm, John	York County	6/21/1779	7258.5	23		
Purdie, Alexander	York County	6/21/1779	*11705.7	29	61	60
Charlton, Richard	York County	1/17/1780	*14419.7	28		
Burwell, Anne	York County	1/17/1780	*19583.5	15	17	17
Davis, James	York County	7/17/1780	*26603		5	6
Goosley, Martha	York County	7/17/1780	*4572.5	13		
Thornton, Peter						
Presley	Northumberland	11/4/1780	*4272.42	27	16	20
Carlyle, John	Fairfax	11/13/1780	2810.34	36	14	19
Downman, Rawleigh	Lancaster	7/19/1781	*3974		49	49
Mitchell, Richard	Lancaster	12/20/1781	1462.83	25	7	7
Montague, Col. James	Middlesex	1/28/1782		13	17	18
Custis, John Parke	Fairfax	2/20/1782	3582		24	29
Stewart, James	Fairfax	6/17/1782	451.82	11	81	
Fairfax, Thomas, Lord	Fairfax	7/5/1782	*47837.19		54	30
Gilmour, Robert	Lancaster	11/7/1782	1011.36	43	12	12
Ball, Margaret	Lancaster	10/28/1783		14	6	6
Scott, Rev. Mr. James	Prince William	2/12/1784			29	17
Mills, John Esq.	Fairfax	2/24/1784	801.03	19	33	33
Dangerfield, William	Spotsylvania	5/29/1784			24	24
Hunter, James	Stafford	4/1/1785		23	24	24
Ramsay, William	Fairfax	9/22/1785	530.82		34	23
Pratt, Dr. Shubael	Fairfax	10/1/1785	269.98	10	19	14
Robinson, Joseph	Fairfax	7/4/1786	352.46	21		
Mason, Thomson	Stafford	1/1/1789	1197.58	24		
Craine, Capt. James	Lancaster	1/24/1789		13	22	23
Nelson, Thomas, Jr.	York County	6/2/1789	2790.96	86	50	74
Leland, John	Lancaster	6/15/1789		25	11	13
Fauntleroy, Moore	Richmond	2/7/1791			24	19
Wormeley, Ralph	Middlesex	5/10/1791	4044.13	56	82	84
Gibbons, John	Yorktown	6/17/1793		2		
Gibbons, Mary	York County	6/17/1793		30	24	24
Montgomerie, Thomas	Prince William	10/8/1793	1133.07	24	34	34
Bullitt, Hon. Curthbert	Prince William	10/3/1794	541.78	11	11	11
Lee, Richard	Westmoreland	5/8/1795		41	48	48
Hunter, Capt. John	Elizabeth City	7/8/1795		27	60	60
Gunther, John C.	York County	10/17/1795	406.94	13	13	13
Pope, Betty	York County	6/21/1796		25		
Kerby, John	York County	7/18/1796	1159.85	12	10	12
Chichester, Richard	Fairfax	11/29/1796	4101.93	25	18	18
Mason, George	Fairfax	1/10/1797		61	110	109
Williams, Thaddeus	Richmond	2/5/1798	1108.55	24		
Fauntleroy, John	Richmond	2/5/1798		38	44	52
Hunter, George	Fairfax	3/1/1798	2445.28	500	354	60
Charlton, Frances	York County	9/17/1798	1228.56	27	168	168
Gemmill, James	York County	12/17/1798	190.39	6	parcel	Parcel
Neuman, Thomas	York County	12/17/1798	1080.08	19	18	18

Wagener, Peter	Fairfax	1/10/1799	\$5,938.61	15	24	24
Sclater, John	York County	2/18/1799	2204.58	24		
Curtis, Robert	York County	4/15/1799	42.61		5	5
Drewry, William	York County	6/17/1799	474.39		7	7
Harrison, Benjamin, Jr.	Charles City [of Berkeley]	8/20/1799		51	24	24
Washington, Lawrence	Fairfax	1/20/1800		50	12	12
Fitzgerald, John	Fairfax	1/23/1800	2197.57	35	28	63
Nelson, Hugh	York County	2/17/1800	3148.73	50	59	57
Charles, Lewis	York County	4/21/1800		11	12	12
Hooe, Anne	Prince William	5/5/1800	228.26		17	26
Nicolson, Dr. Robert	York County	7/21/1800			24	24
Baptist, William H.	York County	9/15/1800	522.99	5	2	6
Mason, Thomas	Prince William	10/28/1800	2760.59	174	30	30
Hunt, Thomas	York County	1/19/1801	870.65	6		
Carter, Landon	Prince William	12/7/1801	\$304,999	22	box	Box
Walker, John	York County	1/18/1802	652.62	20	3	5
Stanhope, William	Fairfax	1/23/1802	1324.19	12	12	8
Tomlin, Col. Walker	Richmond	2/15/1802		20	20	20
Taylor, Jesse	Fairfax	11/13/1802	751.83	26	21	21
Triplett, William	Fairfax	3/19/1803	\$8,664.38		34	34
Willoughby, William	Norfolk	4/22/1803	\$4,131.25	20	30	30

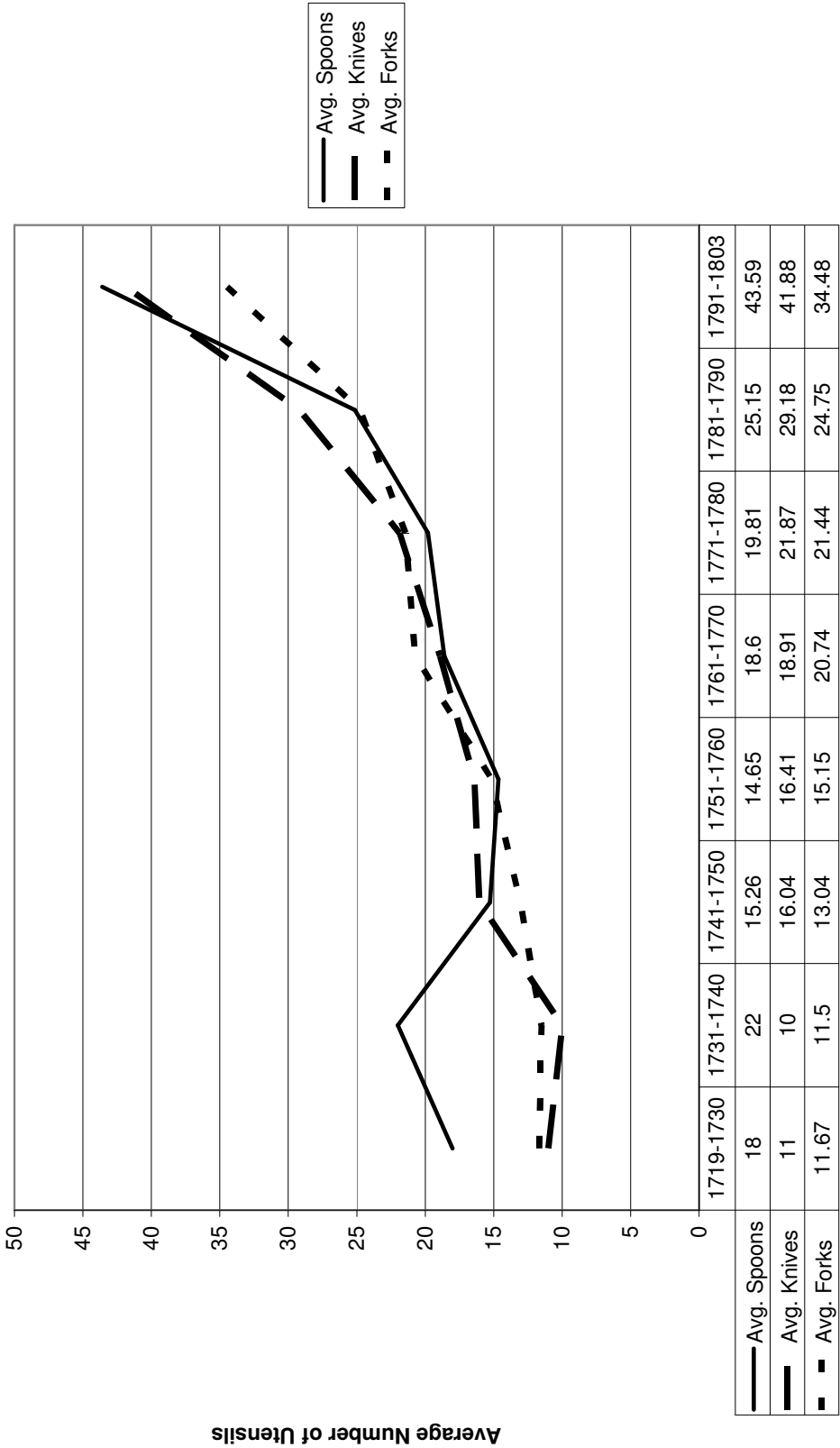
Total wealth converted from sterling pounds (pound, shilling, and pence) to modern decimalized pound.

* These wealth amounts suffer from extreme inflation in the later years of the American Revolution

Table 2: Number of specific types of spoons and knives and forks and materials of knives and forks listed in surveyed probate inventories.

Type of Spoon	Number Listed in Probates	Type of Knife or Fork	Number Listed in Probates	Material of Knives and Forks	Number Listed in Probates
Tea	159	Table	19	Ivory	55
Table	98	Carving	17	Silver	18
Soup	55	Dessert	9	Buck	15
Punch Ladle	42	Breakfast	5	China	6
Soup Ladle	17	Oyster	3	Horn	5
Marrow	14	Common	2	Ebony	3
Ladle	10	Fish	1	Bone	2
Salt	6			Coral	2
Mustard	5			Lignum vitae (wood)	1
Dessert	5				
Gravy	3				
Child's	2				
Cream Ladle	1				
Pap	1				
Sauce	1				
Butter	1				

Average Number of Utensils by Decade



Bibliography

A wide variety of primary, secondary, and visual sources made up the research for this study of how fine utensils made their way onto genteel dining tables in eighteenth-century Virginia. Primary sources from merchant records, planter letters, trade receipts and account books, and probate inventories provided historical evidence of the methods and quantities of acquisitions to genteel collections of dining utensils. Sources and exhibits of many museums, including the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and especially the Dewitt-Wallace Museum and the collections of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, provided visual evidence of silver owned in Virginia. It was helpful to actually see and handle eighteenth-century silverware to understand its use in Virginia society. A myriad of secondary sources were consulted to understand the social and economic aspects of eighteenth-century Virginia life as well as the decorative arts of silverware. Included in the following bibliography are books and articles on the consumer revolution, tobacco economy, Virginia society, silver styles, silversmiths, and one source of historical anthropology.

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