

12-2016

# Textiles and Trade: Williamsburg's Material Culture, 1699-1815

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## Recommended Citation

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Textiles and Trade: Williamsburg's Material Culture, 1699–1815

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

by

Evelyn Margaret Strobe

Accepted for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Williamsburg, VA  
December 12, 2016

## Introduction

Eighteenth-century Williamsburg served as the colonial capital of Virginia, an influential cultural and economic center that played an important political role in the spark of the American Revolution in the third-quarter of the century. This economic, cultural, and political influence grew from the city's consumer culture, which placed strong emphasis on the role of material objects and imports on social class and agency. These objects distinguished the social classes of the eighteenth century while forming a cultural standard for desired possessions and their proper use. The consumer revolution, an economic shift that brought increased wealth and a greater availability of luxury goods for people in the middling and lower classes, developed an individual economic agency that gave colonists a sense of political power in the shift to a social-based dining, retail, and entertainment culture between the 1730s and 1750s. In the 1760s and 1770s, Williamsburg's material culture morphed to reflect changing attitudes about the British government and then the Revolution itself, adopting a wartime economic outlook. As the American Revolution ended and the Virginian capital moved to Richmond, this fluid material culture adapted again in the early 1780s in order to echo the socio-economic and cultural implications of a post-war city – a city in which Virginia's political power no longer resided. Although the existing historiography on eighteenth-century Williamsburg suggests that the city lost its material cultural influence when Virginia's capital moved to Richmond, its material culture simply underwent evolutionary changes in order to reflect the various social, economic, and political pressures in post-revolutionary Williamsburg.

This thesis explores the changes that Williamsburg's material culture faced in its boom period prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution, throughout the conflict, and in its aftermath, comparing and contrasting these developments in light of their social and political

implications. Divided into three parts to reflect these three distinct periods, *Early Williamsburg*, *Revolutionary Williamsburg*, and *The Aftermath of War*, the thesis traces a narrative of Williamsburg's material cultural history as an invaluable tool in understanding the city's influential sociohistorical role in Virginia politics throughout the eighteenth century. Using a case study of the Margaret Hunter Millinery Shop to illustrate the role of the millinery, mantuamaking, and tailoring trades in Williamsburg in each section, the thesis will draw parallels between the material culture of textiles within the city and its overall economic and consumer histories. As Margaret Hunter's shop survived both the Revolution and the capital's move in 1780, it demonstrates the pervasive nature of Williamsburg's trades and the production and consumption of goods throughout the eighteenth century.

### I. Early Williamsburg, 1699-1775

The first part of the thesis focuses on the pre-revolutionary period in Williamsburg, Virginia. The consumer revolution of the mid-eighteenth century transformed economic culture in the thirteen British colonies. The demand for British imports, fine goods, and luxuries increased at a dramatic rate between the 1740s and the 1770s as a result of technological innovation and advancements in trade. As the quantity of imports increased, so did their quality; goods of many colors, textures, and sizes filled Williamsburg's shops with variety. Previously unimaginable goods appeared on the market, and "items that were once considered luxuries reserved for the highest ranks began to 'trickle down' to common households..." as they became more available and affordable.<sup>1</sup> The American colonies quickly acquired a taste for material culture, one that "divided the haves from the have-nots and the knowledgeable from the know-

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Howell, Emma L. Powers, et al., "The Consumer Revolution," *Colonial Williamsburg*, accessed May 11, 2015, [http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/december06/consumer\\_rev.cfm](http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/december06/consumer_rev.cfm).

nothings.’<sup>2</sup> Ordinary people attempted to transcend status through purchasing power, and an increasing demand for British imports created an economic system reliant on consumer choice. The demand for imports pushed merchants to increase supplies and to continue to diversify their selections in order to make a profit, constantly shifting to reflect social trends in style. Certainly the spike in sales of china and porcelain, required for consuming, serving, and preparing tea, reflected the growing social popularity of tea drinking. This extended to textiles and other goods related to eighteenth-century fashion, for fabric remained one of the most popular imports from Britain. Gentlemen and ladies longed to partake in the rapidly expanding market for textiles of various colors and patterns brought to the colonies from all over the world through trade with the mother country. The individual economic agencies of middling people defined this new consumer marketplace; their ability to affect the local economy through their economic decisions bred a sort of social politics that proved revolutionary in the creation of a distinct material culture.

The early stages of the consumer revolution in Williamsburg followed the growth of the city. Founded in 1699, the city originally encompassed three public buildings: the Wren Building of the College of William & Mary, Bruton Parish Church, and the Capitol. Duke of Gloucester Street connected the College and the Capitol, following designer Francis Nicholson’s plans for the capital to link education and government as a beacon of light for the colony. During the city’s first two decades, officials constructed other public buildings like the Powder Magazine and the Governor’s Palace, but private residences and businesses remained few. With full-time residency still low in the late 1730s, Williamsburg merchants developed a “commercial district in the vicinity of the capitol, where the throngs of people present during sessions of the General

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Assembly required food, lodging, and diversion” to draw in a more permanent population.<sup>3</sup>

While this commercial district was comprised originally of taverns that offered such services to travelers, it expanded to provide more market and entertainment opportunities to the public and encouraged settlement within the city. During the rest of the decade and into the mid-eighteenth century, a market formed in the capital to accommodate these new residents, one that focused greatly on consumer participation.

In the 1750s and 1760s, after the decision to maintain the colonial capital in Williamsburg, the city’s economy experienced a true consumer revolution. With this newfound assurance as to the permanency of the capital’s location as a center for commerce and sociability, local trades and businesses became more diverse and more established. Artisans, furniture makers, milliners, wigmakers, shopkeepers, printers, market vendors, coffeehouse owners, and tavern keepers provided Williamsburg residents with a variety of services and commercial opportunities. The development of a social scene in the city led to an increase in the number of coffeehouses, entertainment spaces, and additions to local taverns, but it also led to an expansion of the variety of goods sold in city establishments, as is evidenced by the probate inventories and memorandum books of local residents and prominent citizens who visited the city. In early 1768, Thomas Jefferson’s commercial business in Williamsburg was rare and often limited to his farming needs, specifically fodder, oats, and seed for his plantation at Monticello.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the next year, his purchases became much more frequent and included postage, fiddlestrings, candles, coffee, foodstuffs, slippers, gloves, books, plates, a Ratten cane, feathers, a microscope,

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<sup>3</sup> Mark R. Wenger, “Boomtown: Williamsburg in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Williamsburg, Virginia: A City Before the State; An Illustrated History*, eds. Robert P. Maccubbin and Martha Hamilton-Phillips (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson’s Memorandum Books: Accounts, with Legal Records and Miscellany, 1767-1826; Volume 1*, eds. James A. Bear, Jr. and Lucia Stanton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 42.

and cotton stockings, to name a few.<sup>5</sup> Jefferson's purchases reflect the rising material culture that comprised the local economy, for the Williamsburg market had grown to meet the demands of a larger population.

Williamsburg's shopkeepers and tradesmen played a role in this developing consumer culture by furnishing an ever-increasing supply of goods. Wigmakers like Edward Charlton provided both goods and services to the public, making and mending wigs to address the fashion necessities of the local material culture. Between 1769 and 1776, Charlton listed Thomas Jefferson, Dr. John M. Galt, Speaker Peyton Randolph, Reverend Bland, Landon Carter, Patrick Henry, and William Prentis as patrons,<sup>6</sup> but his customers ranged across socioeconomic groups. Between 1769 and 1773, Charlton sold Jefferson several containers of powder, pairs of curls, and other sundry items, an account totaling £11.17s.9d.<sup>7</sup> In this same four-year period between 1769 and 1773, Dr. Galt, local physician and apothecary owner, purchased brown dress wigs and yearly contracts in shaving and dressing from Charlton adding up to £27.14s.<sup>8</sup> The market industry in Williamsburg experienced dramatic changes as the city's population and political significance increased, and local merchants and tradesmen developed a special relationship with consumers that reflected the importance of supply and demand.

While local goods and services did influence the mid-century material culture, the steady stream of imports flowing into Williamsburg's shops from the mother country had the greatest impact on the city's consumer revolution. The new consumer marketplace of imports "introduced dynamic categories of comfort and taste into the lives of middling sorts of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 151-152.

<sup>6</sup> Charlton Account Book, Galt Papers (I), Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2.

people....”<sup>9</sup> Ordinary people desired the luxury and quality of British commodities, and the wide selection of goods now available that met those requirements allowed consumer choices to have a significant impact on the local economy and on everyday life. Williamsburg merchants often publicized new shipments in the *Virginia Gazette*, advertising goods “lately imported” from overseas. In October of 1767, J. Eilbeck boasted “Irish linen, white and brown sheeting, diaper table cloths, printed cottons, women’s bonnets and cloaks, handkerchiefs, check linen, striped holland, ofnabrugs, men and women’s shoes, Negro cottons, kerseys, and plains... &c.” at his store near the Post Office, sold “at the lowest prices, for ready money.”<sup>10</sup>

In order to best understand the impact of the consumer revolution in Williamsburg, it is important to consider the role of artisans in the creation of this material cultural relationship between individual producers and consumers, particularly the milliners, tailors, and mantuamakers that controlled the textile trades. Milliner Margaret Hunter presents an interesting example of the development of a material culture influenced by trades in Williamsburg. Hunter moved to Virginia from England in 1767 with her sister Jane, and the two ran a millinery business together in the city. They offered “a genteel assortment of millinery, consisting of fashionable ribands, suits of blond lace, caps, fillets, stomachers and sleeve knots, tippetts, breast flowers, egrets, *India* pearl, *French* bead, and jet necklaces...” among their first products.<sup>11</sup> The two sisters worked together until Jane’s marriage to Edward Charlton, the wigmaker, and then Margaret continued to run the shop on her own as a feme sole. She still boasted desirable products, including “Ladies Hats, Bonnets, Cloaks, and Cardinals...”<sup>12</sup> The root of the word

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<sup>9</sup> T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), PDF e-book, xvii.

<sup>10</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 22 Oct. 1767 [Purdie & Dixon].

<sup>11</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 1 Oct. 1767 [Purdie & Dixon].

<sup>12</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 20 June 1771 [Purdie & Dixon].

‘milliner,’ the Latin ‘mille,’ meaning a thousand, suggests that milliners sold at least a thousand different things, including snuff, dolls, and aprons. Her shop advertisements emphasize this definition, selling “a great Variety of Millinery, Toys... Rappee, *Weston’s*, and *Scotch* Snuff, &c. &c. &c.”<sup>13</sup> Hunter, however, was not alone in her trade; her sister worked as a chamber milliner, or a milliner working privately from home, and fellow competitor Mary Dickinson advertised her latest shipment in 1772, “just imported from London,” with an inventory of more than 50 items.<sup>14</sup> The breadth and variety of their products as detailed here clearly reflect consumer demand for the latest in British fashion and represent an overall desire for the luxury and quality of foreign goods. By advertising in the *Gazette*, these tradeswomen and merchants could reach more clients, stimulating desire and supporting an economy ruled by consumer choice.

## II. Revolutionary Williamsburg, 1774-1781

Building on this basis of material culture in Williamsburg, the second part of the thesis explores the continued development of this culture under the influence of the American Revolution. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the consumer marketplace had revolutionized the Williamsburg economy. Purchasing power gave everyday individuals the opportunity to make economic decisions that shaped themselves and their local economies, creating a viable instrument of social and economic influence for Williamsburg’s consumers. That instrument became political in light of changes in the relationship between the colonies and the mother country. In the mid-1760s, Great Britain rejected its historic policy of salutary neglect in favor of more direct methods of colonial management. After the Seven Year’s War ended in 1763, the British government needed to levy taxes to repay accumulated war debts; the mother

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 7 May 1772 [Purdie & Dixon].

country saw her under-taxed colonies as the perfect venue to raise revenue, and decided to impose taxes without the approval of the colonial legislatures. The Sugar Act of 1764 modified import duties indirectly, and proved “destructive to the normal flow of trade” in the heavily consumer-driven economy.<sup>15</sup> The Stamp Act of 1765 took this disruption of trade a step further by imposing a direct tax on print materials and all paper goods, an obvious and intentional symbol of Parliamentary authority.

In an attempt to address the grievances that developed as a result of Parliamentary acts in the 1760s and early 1770s, colonial consumers exercised their economic powers of preference through the nonimportation and nonconsumption movements. Nonimportation consisted of a boycott all goods entering the colonies, which were subject to these Parliamentary taxes, and nonconsumption concerned the purchase of these goods within the colonies. People in Williamsburg perceived British imports, once in high demand, as tangible evidence of the crown’s taxation efforts, and this view compelled them to “probe connections between parliamentary oppression and the consumption of British goods.”<sup>16</sup> In protest, the colonists stopped introducing and buying many British commodities, around which they had built a consumer culture only a few years before. The nonimportation and nonconsumption movements were enforced by a social system in which each merchant or consumer had to answer to the rest of the community, “[taking] oaths before their neighbours swearing not to purchase certain items until parliament repealed the obnoxious taxes.”<sup>17</sup> Parliament responded to colonial protests against the Stamp Act by repealing its duties, a sign that the individual economic agencies developed by the colonists’ consumer and material cultures had political power.

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<sup>15</sup> Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988): 95.

Although the British legislative body bent to economic pressures in the case of the Stamp Act, the issues of taxation and importation were far from over. The Townshend Duties went into effect in 1767, expanding taxes on imports and driving colonists to again invoke the power of consumer choice to demonstrate their grievances. The Stamp Act protests acted as precursors for demonstrations against the Townshend Acts, for the colonists received evidence that they could affect political change through “enthusiastic participation in a new Anglo-American marketplace.”<sup>18</sup> In 1769, former burgesses met at Raleigh Tavern to form the Association, a group designed to enforce nonimportation within the colony, which Williamsburg residents later joined. After the Townshend Acts were repealed in 1770, colonists in Williamsburg had only greater proof that “patterns of consumption provided them with an effective language of political protest.”<sup>19</sup> The nonimportation and nonconsumption movements culminated with the Tea Act of 1773, despite the resurgence in the consumption of previously banned goods after the repeal of the Townshend Duties.

Although the Tea Act imposed no new taxes, it represented the colonists’ final straw in regards to parliamentary legislation. The statute addressed perhaps the most popular British import to the colonies: tea. Tea was well-liked for both social and dietary reasons, and the consumer revolution rendered it a necessity; “the [Tea Act] affected an item of popular consumption found in almost every colonial household.”<sup>20</sup> In light of the Boston Tea Party and the Coercive Acts that punished Boston’s residents, the Virginia House of Burgesses declared in 1774 that the importation of tea into the colony would cease,<sup>21</sup> and here the power of consumer choice is clear, as the Virginia Association of 1774 served as the model for the Continental

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<sup>18</sup> Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Breen, ““Baubles of Britain””: 90.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 84; *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

Association of 1774. By choosing neither to import nor to consume tea, colonists in Williamsburg made a political statement about the nature of parliamentary taxation.

As a result, the effects of nonimportation, legislation, and military demands necessitated a change in the established material culture in Williamsburg during the American Revolution. Different material objects gained cultural importance in light of the wartime economy, for availability, quantity, quality, and variety determined the items bought and sold in the city. Boycotts and rationing prevented earlier staples like tea from remaining readily available; other objects like militia uniforms and weaponry gained new material value in the conflict. Williamsburg's tradesmen and merchants adapted their goods and services to reflect the social, political, and inflationary economic climate in the revolutionary period, evolving the city's existing material culture to meet its needs.

In particular, the milliners, tailors, and mantuamakers in Williamsburg found themselves tasked with outfitting Williamsburg's militia. Available textiles and materials reflected the wartime economy and differed from the fashionable variety available before the Revolution and affected the trades' material productions. Williamsburg's Public Store and its network sold these textile goods along with other tools and arms to local citizens and their suppliers, creating a market for Williamsburg's revolutionary material culture. Despite the necessity of this clothing market for soldiers, the textile trades did experience difficulty throughout the political and economic events of the American Revolution. Margaret Hunter intended to depart for England in March of 1775, calling for patrons to settle their accounts so that she could "accomplish [her] Intention," but instead, her shop survived the Revolution.<sup>22</sup> Consumer behavior reflected purchasing power, and with high inflation throughout the American Revolution, it became

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<sup>22</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 4 Mar. 1775 [Purdie & Dixon].

difficult for some consumers to participate in Williamsburg's market; this in turn affected tradespeople and trade shops. The change in the objects produced within the city and the change in economic activities characterized the material culture of the revolutionary period.

### III. The Aftermath of War, 1780-1815

The final part of the thesis examines the material culture of post-revolutionary and post-colonial Williamsburg. On April 18, 1780, a year and a half before the Battle of Yorktown and nine years prior to ratification of the U.S. Constitution, Governor Thomas Jefferson moved the Virginia capital to Richmond. This transfer of political power from the city of Williamsburg to Richmond, the future site of Confederate power and Virginia state rights, is often viewed historiographically as the death of the colonial capital. Historians of the American Revolution in Virginia tend to paint the capital's move as a unilateral transfer of cultural, economic, and political influence, implying that Williamsburg generated little to no material culture between 1780 and its liberation by John D. Rockefeller and Reverend W.A.R. Goodwin in the early twentieth century. Even though Williamsburg was no longer the center of government, it still was an important economic and cultural center for the state. Although Williamsburg's post-war material culture was different from its pre-war counterparts, it represented the continued evolution of consumer purchasing power in new and different social and political environments.

Even though the seat of government moved in 1780, it took time for businesses and families to relocate, and all aspects of capital society did not immediately follow them. A substantial population remained in Williamsburg to foster a continued consumer culture of goods and services, as evidenced by census records. Trade shops, taverns, and stores remained open and altered their material goods to serve the residents of a post-war Williamsburg and contributed to the city's post-revolutionary society. In some cases, the effects of the war were

visually apparent. Several women were left to take over the businesses and households of husbands and sons who died in the fight, and they helped to redefine Williamsburg's post-colonial economy. Other changes revealed the complex nature of supply and demand in a city that had once relied on the patronage of visiting burgesses and businessmen and, in the wake of the Revolution and the state's new seat of government, now relied much more heavily on its current residents.

Tradespeople in textiles provide a strong representation of the remaining material culture in the city of Williamsburg. In February of 1780, Margaret Hunter marketed "an elegant assortment of the most beautiful calico ... patterns, black and white gauze," and other goods, announcing that she intended to "carry on" the milliner's trade in Williamsburg.<sup>23</sup> Her shop remained open after the capital's move in 1780, highlighting a continued need for fashion and the necessary complements to the wardrobe within the city. Consumers in the area were in need of these products, and their demand kept Hunter's trade alive. Although the capital moved to Richmond, Williamsburg itself was not erased; it remained a cultural and economic center with significant historical influence, an influence that rendered the city a prime target for Rockefeller's later vision for a glorified American past.

#### A Narrative of Material Culture

These three sections of the thesis together will seek to argue that a material culture existed in Williamsburg throughout the eighteenth century, influenced by political and social events like the consumer revolution, the American Revolution, and the move of the capital to Richmond. This culture drew from social and economic practices in the area, centered on craftsmanship, the relationship between local consumers and merchants, and the dining and

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<sup>23</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 5 Feb. 1780 [Dixon & Nicolson].

entertainment culture of the gentry and growing middle class. The American Revolution complicated this culture, affecting economic activity and the availability and the accessibility of goods and services. After the Revolution and the capital's relocation, this culture transformed again to reflect the post-war social structures, but it did not disappear. Tracing the textile trades throughout the century, the thesis will demonstrate the ways in which one aspect of the city's material culture adapted to meet the population's consumer needs in order to extrapolate on Williamsburg's material culture as a whole. Williamsburg remained an important center of economic, social, and cultural activity within the state of Virginia after 1780, for it retained a distinct material culture that adapted to its changing environments.

## Early Williamsburg, 1699-1775

### Williamsburg and the Consumer Revolution

Established in 1699 and reaching its peak influence around the mid-eighteenth century, the city of Williamsburg experienced its growth into a center of economic and political power parallel to the growth of colonial material culture and consumer power. Permanent settlement, the growth of the dining and entertainment culture in the city, the expansion of markets and the retail trade, and the progression of the artisanal trades created the proper conditions for the development of a distinct material culture in Williamsburg through the larger economic lens of the consumer revolution. The consumer revolution, which defined the economics of the second quarter of the eighteenth century, played a vital role in redistributing wealth and allocating individual and independent consumer power to a wider range of classes. Consumerism, defined by Ann Smart Martin as “the cultural relationship between humans and consumer goods and services,”<sup>24</sup> allowed eighteenth-century American colonists to acquire and emulate the culture and sensibilities of the British mainland. In this way, the consumer revolution was a movement of economic and social change that increased access to funds for those of the lower and middling classes and generated a greater availability and quality of genteel goods that they could purchase with these higher wages, creating a sense of mobility in the colonial social structure.

By moving goods and services through the economy in a system of consumption, defined by affordability, availability, and desirability, the colonists created a value system of cultural and symbolic rank through “an Anglo-American ‘empire of goods’ linking the British colonial

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<sup>24</sup> Ann Smart Martin, “Buying Into the World of Goods: Eighteenth-Century Consumerism and the Retail Trade from London to the Virginia Frontier” (dissertation, College of William & Mary, 1993), 17.

empire to the metropolitan core of London with bonds far tighter than the customs collector.”<sup>25</sup> A desire for fashionable goods, understood in terms of “ritualized behavior, differentiation of social rank, formation of social group, and how meaning is conferred circumscribed, and changed” in a society,<sup>26</sup> stood at the center of this “empire of goods.” Richard L. Bushman solidifies these valued behaviors as a desire for gentility, where “a system of personal culture, as well as wealth and taste...set apart some of the population as refined, polite, and learned, leaving the rest to be vulgar, coarse, and ignorant,” commanding social and monetary value.<sup>27</sup> This genteel desirability required the balance of both availability and affordability, which was provided by the changing nature of the consumer economy in the eighteenth century.

As the consumer revolution increased the availability and circulation of material goods throughout England and her colonies, Ann Smart Martin argues that economic and material cultural changes in the eighteenth century, including “greater prosperity, improvements in manufacturing and distribution, and a new willingness to spend combined to bring to a greater quantity, quality, and variety of objects into the lives of the Anglo-American middling ranks.”<sup>28</sup> These goods made the genteel culture, valued and desired in both England and the American colonies, more accessible to the middling and lower classes, particularly through the expansion of the British import industry into the colonies. In fact, nearly half of British exports went to the American colonies between 1772 and 1774, and those colonies experienced a per capita wealth increase of 50 to 100 percent, which provided colonists with the means to participate in the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>27</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 25.

<sup>28</sup> Martin, “Buying Into the World of Goods,” 92.

import economy.<sup>29</sup> This mercantilist relationship between the mother country and the American colonies had been established formally a century earlier, and it emphasized British control of both production and consumption. The Navigation Act of 1651 and its subsequent reiterations, aimed primarily at the Dutch international trade, “provided that all goods traded between England and its colonies and between foreign countries and English colonies had to be carried in English or colonial ships of which the master and a majority of the seamen were English.”<sup>30</sup> Reinforced more rigorously after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, these Navigation Acts “consistently disallow[ed] colonial laws in conflict with those of the mother country” in order to protect English manufacturing by stifling colonial efforts at material cultural production.<sup>31</sup> Despite Parliamentary efforts to control colonial purchasing habits and trade, individual consumers found power in consumption through this consumer revolution.

As Lorena S. Walsh observes, these acts did make it more difficult for Virginia planters and small farmers to deal with fluctuations in the tobacco economy and pushed rural colonists to import replacement as an attempt to address losses in profits by compensating for a lack of funds with which to buy essentials.<sup>32</sup> They encouraged more varied agriculture, tanning, shoemaking, smithing, spinning, weaving, soapmaking, and candlemaking, employing free white women and assigning enslaved black women to cloth production.<sup>33</sup> In Virginia’s cultural centers like Williamsburg, however, due to access to retail stores and marketplaces coupled with a large number of merchant and artisan occupations, and therefore middling amounts of wealth, import

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 96; Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Lorena S. Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 122.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 198; Ibid., 249; Ibid., 606.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

replacement was not necessary. Williamsburg's residents indulged and nurtured this import economy of desired, fashionable goods and built a distinct material culture within the city around them in terms of production, consumption, and distribution. This material culture was unique within the southern colonies because Williamsburg, as the center of power for one of the most influential southern colonies in the period leading up to the American Revolution, held a great deal of cultural, social, and political influence, which set a precedent for the consumption of material goods in the South that later played a role in the politicization of consumption for all thirteen colonies.

#### Economic and Political Growth: Steps Towards Cultural Refinement

In Williamsburg, the first half of the eighteenth century represented a period of exponential growth that allowed for economic and political distinction. As the capital of the Virginia colony, Williamsburg housed the seat of government at the Capitol; additionally, the meetings of the General Court in April and October and the Oyer and Terminer Court in June and December brought a large group of officeholders and their families from throughout the colony into the city. As Williamsburg's economic importance relied heavily upon its political significance,<sup>34</sup> the city's role as the symbolic heart of the Virginian way of life served as the primary catalyst for its growth, influenced by the members of the gentry and other prominent families like the Randolphs who had sought permanent residence in the city during court times between the 1720s and 1740s. In order to incite a desire for permanent residence, however, Williamsburg had to offer a desirable, genteel lifestyle fit for those with class and status.

William Byrd II of Westover's secret diaries provide valuable insight into the manifestations of these efforts to incite a genteel culture in Williamsburg in the early-eighteenth

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<sup>34</sup> James H. Soltow, "The Role of the Williamsburg Economy, 1750-1775," *William and Mary Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1958): 470.

century. In 1709, Byrd's business in Williamsburg centered, for the most part, on his work with the College of William & Mary and at the Capitol, church services at Bruton Parish Church, dinner at unnamed taverns, and a few trips to the coffeehouse.<sup>35</sup> By 1740, his activities in the city had expanded to include balls, sociable events like tea and cards with Lady Randolph and Colonel Spotswood, birthday celebrations for the Governor, and elaborate dinners at Wetherburn's tavern, including calf's head.<sup>36</sup> On November 4 alone, Byrd called on six different fashionable people, including the Governor, Dr. Mollet, and Lady Randolph.<sup>37</sup> Noticeably, economic changes in Williamsburg between 1709 and 1740 allowed for this expansion in genteel cultural diversions, particularly in terms of dining, entertainment, architecture, retail, and the artisan trades.

The rotating and ever-expanding nature of tavern businesses in Williamsburg accounts for a significant portion of the dining and entertainment culture. Taverns provided meals, entertainment, social spaces, and lodging for both visitors and local residents. Originally popular as impermanent housing solutions for those attending court, taverns grew to represent a symbol of social interaction in the city. In taverns, "paying customers and gentlemen travellers could gather for convivial conversations and share social activity," but places like Wetherburn's also offered private rooms for business between gentry members.<sup>38</sup> By breaking bread with other members of Williamsburg's society, customers could partake in expressions of gentility and

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<sup>35</sup> William Byrd II, *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, eds. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling (Richmond, Virginia: Dietz Press, Inc., 1941), 9-116.

<sup>36</sup> William Byrd II, *Another Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1739-1741: With Letters & Literary Exercises, 1696-1726*, ed. Maude H. Woodfin, trans. Marion Tinling (Richmond, Virginia: Dietz Press, Inc., 1942), 56-119.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Leath, "Wetherburn's Refurbished: Re-creating an Eighteenth-Century Virginia Tavern," *The Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2001-2002): 2.

sociability through display and conversation while forging cultural relationships that gave definition to the demographic make-up of the city.

While Thomas Jefferson's accounts suggest that taverns did provide entertainment in the form of sideshows like great hog viewings,<sup>39</sup> the population, brought in by the court and encouraged to stay by tavern keepers, required richer sources of entertainment. The theatre proved a "popular gathering place in the evenings for legislators, government officials, and others during public times when the General Court and House of Burgesses adjourned for the day,"<sup>40</sup> attracting prominent guests like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson as well as a middling population. Balls served as arenas for both display and sociability, allowing residents to mingle with each other while showing off the latest fashions through "the genteel presence created by bearing and graceful motion."<sup>41</sup> By offering valued cultural experiences that demonstrated gentility and created venues for social interaction, the development of the dining and entertainment culture in Williamsburg helped to stimulate a desire for permanent residence in the city, providing an opportunity for a distinct economic and material culture.

In terms of permanent residence, expansions in housing and city planning accounted for the demographic implications of an expanding population in Williamsburg. Culminating at a population of around 1800 at the eve of the American Revolution, about equally divided between white and black,<sup>42</sup> the people of Williamsburg developed their landscape through the construction of brick and frame houses, public buildings, retail stores, and taverns to serve both

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<sup>39</sup> Jefferson, *Jefferson's Memorandum Books*, 152.

<sup>40</sup> Carl R. Lounsbury, "'To Emulate the British Stage': The Research and Design of the Douglass Theatre, Williamsburg, Virginia," (report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2015), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 69.

<sup>42</sup> James H. Soltow, "The Occupational Structure of Williamsburg in 1775" (report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1956), 1-2.

residential and commercial needs. By investing in brick houses, which represented a large proportion of material wealth available as a result of the consumer revolution, the colonists sought to increase status and gentility.<sup>43</sup> Gentry houses, and middling houses supported by the availability and affordability of goods at mid-century, “represented a system of personal culture, as well as wealth and taste, giving the mansions the power to set apart some of population as refined, polite, and learned, leaving the rest to be vulgar, coarse, and ignorant.”<sup>44</sup> Throughout the commercial centers of the American colonies, including Philadelphia, Charleston, and Williamsburg, colonial homes served as symbols of wealth, arenas of display for freshly affordable genteel goods in the consumer revolution.

#### Material Culture in Early Williamsburg

Material goods like upholstery, furniture, kitchen utensils, and decorative objects “began to make their way into the lives of more and more people even as the very pace of household life was undergoing a transformation.”<sup>45</sup> As the prosperity and economic and cultural influence of the city of Williamsburg grew throughout the first half the eighteenth century, encouraged by a more permanent population and its political symbolism as the seat of government, the desirability for a genteel lifestyle became more and more common among the middling classes. The quickest way to a genteel disposition was to participate in the genteel “world of goods,” and retail stores offered a varied selection of material goods all in one place to purchase at the consumer’s convenience. By creating more permanent locations for trade beyond established markets and peddlers, retail stores helped to catalyze the availability of goods. Retail store buildings were larger than the houses of the period, typically two-room, square structures with

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<sup>43</sup> Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Martin, “Buying Into the World of Goods,” 37.

divisions between the store itself and its office or counting room.<sup>46</sup> With shelves lining the walls, show cases and boxes to hold goods, and counters and tables where shopkeepers could entertain customers with tea and sweets,<sup>47</sup> retail stores demonstrated both genteel display and sociability.

In Williamsburg, popular retail stores like Tarpley's and Pitt's provided local residents with opportunities for gentility, selling fashionable imports from England including "handsome painted Table-Cloths...painted Sugar and Coffee Canisters, Window Glass, Paints, Gardens Seeds, Saddlery..." and more.<sup>48</sup> Ann Smart Martin emphasizes that the relationship between merchant and consumer had a powerful impact on the economic and cultural importance of the store. In addition to the flattery involved in sales, "the merchant also passed on information about changes in behavior among the elite, and gave the customer a means to join in the new social custom by buying appropriate clothing," but the consumer still had "a huge range of choice and the ultimate power of the purse."<sup>49</sup> As consumers were able to gain desirable goods through the supply of local shopkeepers while maintaining their powers of demand, they held individual autonomy in the material economy.

While British imports represented a significant amount of retail goods in Williamsburg in the early 1770s, the products of local artisans who adapted English cultural precedents to Virginia society heavily influenced the city's distinct material culture. For eighteenth-century builders, this meant adapting seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English constructions to the Virginia climate, generating a less permanent framing system for the unpredictability of the tobacco economy. Such buildings could be easily destructed if the farmer needed to relocate and were cost-effective in the unreliable economy, which allowed for farmers to remain relatively

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<sup>46</sup> Martin, "Buying Into the World of Goods," 200.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>48</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 16 Dec. 1775 [Dixon & Hunter].

<sup>49</sup> Martin, "Buying Into the World of Goods," 213.

mobile in case the year's crop was unsuccessful or the fields in the area became arid. For silversmiths and blacksmiths, adaptation meant crafting material goods like spoons, hinges, and jewelry in competition with British imports, and for milliners and mantuamakers, it meant turning imported textiles into locally produced clothing. Artisans accounted for the largest group of the approximately 150 to 200 "heads of household" in Williamsburg in 1775, with about half of all artisans working in construction, clothing, and transportation.<sup>50</sup> James H. Soltow argues that the significant proportion of Williamsburg heads of household "engaged in the retail and service trades was considerably larger than in most other urban communities in this period" due to the population draw during court times and "luxury goods and services which were not provided elsewhere in the province were available there."<sup>51</sup> Some artisans operated both retail stores and artisanal shops in the same space in order to participate in both aspects of Williamsburg's material culture; in 1775, three Williamsburg merchants served as both artisans and store owners, likely milliners or apothecaries, as those trades required specialization.<sup>52</sup> In addition to eight coachmakers and wheelwrights, two saddlers, seven silversmiths and jewelers, seven cabinetmakers, and three printers, six wigmakers, six milliners, six tailors, three shoemakers, one stocking manufacturer, one mantua-maker, and one stay-maker operated artisanal businesses in Williamsburg in that year.<sup>53</sup> Based on the number of artisans involved in the textile trades as listed above, Williamsburg's material culture focused greatly on the production of a particular type of genteel goods: those of or relating to fashion.

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<sup>50</sup> Soltow, "The Occupational Structure of Williamsburg in 1775," 2; Soltow, "The Role of the Williamsburg Economy, 1750-1775": 469.

<sup>51</sup> Soltow, "The Occupational Structure of Williamsburg in 1775," 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

*The Textile Trades in Early Williamsburg: A Material Cultural Case Study*

History of the Textile Trades

The textile trades, focusing on the manufacture and distribution of textiles and their consumption in the form of finished goods in the world of fashion, were a vital part of the eighteenth-century colonial economy, gaining importance several centuries earlier at the height of trade expansion between Europe and the Far East. Textiles had been traded between Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe primarily over land until the mid-fifteenth century, but the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire signaled the end of the vast Silk Road.<sup>54</sup> To circumvent this obstacle, Europeans sought sea routes that would connect Europe directly with the rest of the world, particularly India and China – two areas well-known for their high-quality silks and cottons. The Europeans found that textiles could be used as currency for other goods, including African slaves, due to economic demand and their material quality, thereby expanding the scope of the textile trade.<sup>55</sup> Through European trade with India and China, textiles “influenced the visual culture of the locations where they were marketed as well as produced,” creating a common visual language of design through the interchange of motifs and patterns from all over the world.<sup>56</sup> The textile trades developed a system of economic value through fabric and clothing that created commonalities between Europe, Asia, Africa, and later, England and her American colonies.

In India, the transit trade, in which Indian Ocean goods like spices, aromatics, dyes, Indian silk, and cotton textiles were sent to the Mediterranean and paid for in gold and silver, provided a quantity of exchange for spices that linked Southeast Asia to Africa and the Arabic

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<sup>54</sup> Amelia Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

world.<sup>57</sup> Resist-dyed blue cotton calicoes and Indian chintzes, named after the port at Calicut and the Hindi word “chit,” meaning “spotted” or “speckled,”<sup>58</sup> introduced new methods of manufacture in dye processes. All colors were achieved through dye immersion baths rather than block printing, starting by sizing the cloth to prevent the mordants from bleeding, transferring the design to the cloth by pouncing charcoal dust through perforated paper patterns, and connecting those charcoal dots with painted lines of iron-rich mordant.<sup>59</sup> Indigo specialists then painted areas not intended to be dyed blue with a barrier material such as wax to prevent the dye from setting, later boiling the fabric to remove the wax; they painted alum and iron mordants within the outlined shapes to create shades of pink, red, and lavender within the fabric.<sup>60</sup> After spreading the cloth in the sun to bleach leftover, unmordanted dye, the specialists then added yellow dye mixed with mordant to the fabric before applying a final layer of glaze.<sup>61</sup> The care taken to produce Indian chintzes made them extremely valuable and placed them in high demand in European markets.

In China, another major textile-producing region, the Chinese found a way to foster trade through foreign relations with the Portuguese despite barriers to private maritime trade, focusing on raw materials and finished products, including cloth yardage sent to Portugal to be cut and assembled according to Western styles.<sup>62</sup> Through an interweaving of European and Chinese material, technical, and visual influences, Amelia Peck argues that “Chinese silks figured as feasible alternatives to European textiles in the creation of clothing, vestments, and hangings,”

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>58</sup> Susan W. Greene, *Wearable Prints, 1760-1860: History, Materials, and Mechanics* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2014), 25.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe*, 47-48.

especially popular Chinese damasks.<sup>63</sup> The desire for Chinese damasks and Indian chintzes, sometimes called “chinoserie,” became domesticated as such textiles were “so completely incorporated into European textile design as to be unremarkable, while still retaining their fashionable charm.”<sup>64</sup> National trading companies like the East India Company greatly expanded and increased the circulation of goods around the globe and brought greater consumption of Middle and Far Eastern goods to Europe,<sup>65</sup> with a large portion of the textile trade surrounding raw materials and supplies for the industry.

Through the mercantilist relationship between Great Britain and her colonies in the subsequent centuries, these textiles, and their economic and social importance through the language of fashion, were introduced to the American colonies and played a powerful role in the consumer revolution and the development of a distinct material culture in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Although British legislation heavily regulated the calico-printing industry in order to promote British-made linen or fustian and wool, those restrictions were lifted in 1774 and they affected colonial trade very little.<sup>66</sup> Textiles were one of the largest imports into the American colonies and an integral part of regional and urban economies because the colonists were “unable to transplant or reproduce centuries-old textile manufacturing and mercantile systems on new shores to supply their long-established textile needs and demands, so they imported everything from silk brocade to woolen broadcloth to fine muslins, including cheap goods like coarse linens and sacking.”<sup>67</sup> While the Navigation Acts limited colonial trade to trade with the mother country, the newfound wealth and social fluidity brought by the consumer revolution allowed

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 43.

more individuals of the middling and lower classes to invest in fashionable wardrobes.

According to Linda L. Sturtz, textiles made up more than half of British exports to the colonies, and “colonists spent about 9 percent of their per capita income on textile products imported from Great Britain and another 1 percent on related haberdashery items and accessories.”<sup>68</sup> In Southside Virginia, fabrics and textile-related goods accounted for 40 percent of total sales in the 1750s and 65 percent of those sales in the 1760s.<sup>69</sup> In terms of material and economic culture, textiles “functioned as the primary category of object that engendered widespread ideas of what was desirable and fashionable in dress and household decoration,”<sup>70</sup> for they served as status symbols while stimulating markets and production. Fashion represented not only a system of valued wealth and social standards, but the relationship between imported goods and their manufactured role in the colonial economy, particularly because imported textiles were assembled into fashionable goods like gowns, petticoats, waistcoats, and breeches in the colonies themselves. Considering their vital economic role in the colonies’ economy as a whole, and by extension, the Williamsburg community, the sale and production of finished textiles provides an important case study of the political and social importance of the city’s material culture.

In Williamsburg, the many men and women who worked in the textile trades contributed heavily to local material culture by adapting fashionable British textiles and British styles to the local environment, balancing the mercantilist economic relationship between Britain and her colonies and the local relationship between merchant-artisan and consumer. By taking the roots of British fashion in imported textiles from around the world and reformulating them into fashionable suits and gowns for Williamsburg’s residents, the town’s milliners, tailors, and

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<sup>68</sup> Linda L. Sturtz, “‘Madam & Co.’: Gender, Family, and Trade Enterprises,” in *Within Her Power: Propertied Women in Colonial Virginia* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2002), 164-165.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>70</sup> Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe*, 1.

mantua-makers helped to define a distinct material culture for the economically and politically influential city in the period leading up to the American Revolution.

#### Milliners and Mantua-makers in Early Williamsburg

In Williamsburg, artisans and merchants like milliners, tailors, and mantuamakers oversaw the fashion and textile trades. Turning imported wools, linens, silks, cottons, and various blends thereof into finished products, they encouraged local consumers to participate in the economy in terms of a socially acceptable language of fashionable goods. Influenced by political, social, and cultural changes in eighteenth-century America, fashion presented a clear visual representation of local material culture. While the fashion industry did emphasize ties between the American colonies and the rest of the world through transatlantic commerce, local artisans held power in the trades through their expertise, experience, and ability to influence consumer preference, even in the height of the consumer revolution. Furthermore, as the textile trades of millinery and mantua-making were dominated almost entirely by women, they emphasize the significant role that women played in defining material culture in Williamsburg through the overwhelming number of consumer goods found in fashion.

While tailors produced fitted clothing for men, namely coats, waistcoats, and breeches, through patterning and measurement, mantua-makers constructed fitted clothing for women, specifically gowns and jackets, through a technique known as “cutting to the body.” Mantua-makers would wrap, pin, baste, and cut a woman’s chosen fabric to her body while she wore her stays, the eighteenth-century female support garment, essentially shaping the gown to the body. Milliners helped to complete the wardrobe by producing millinery, or the ornaments to the wardrobe, in order to create variety and distinction in fashion, for “a clever lady could turn a

small wardrobe into a varied one by the judicious use of aprons, kerchiefs, caps and petticoats.”<sup>71</sup> Often made with fine white linens or cotton muslins, millinery was intended to add a sense of gentility to both the male and female wardrobes through a vast number of additions to the gown and suit, including shirts, shifts, petticoats, stocks, cravats, aprons, caps, kerchiefs, and neck, sleeve, and skirt ruffles. Millinery and mantua-making were natural choices for women who earned their living, as sewing was “an important part of every girl’s education.”<sup>72</sup> In order to learn these trades, young girls around the ages of 11 and 12 would be apprenticed to a local milliner or mantua-maker and taught geography, geometry, and to “read, write and ‘cypher’ in order to order goods and keep accounts, as well as to have good sewing skills and a talent for design,”<sup>73</sup> sometimes learning both trades at once in order to offer more complete services to customers.

While some merchants sold imported millinery as untrained sellers, other milliners and mantuamakers operated or shared storefronts with which to display and sell their goods to the public. As it took approximately 100 pounds to open a shop, women tended to start as apprentices or journeywomen first, but millinery shops offered a unified location for the sale of fashionable goods; “a millinery shop could vary from the front room of a lady’s house where she did some sewing and had a few goods for sale, to a large elegant establishment of two or more floors with many articles for sale, and a number of needleworkers.”<sup>74</sup> A combination of merchants, merchant-milliners, milliners, and mantua-makers provided fashionable goods to the citizens of Williamsburg in the height of the consumer revolution before the outbreak of the

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<sup>71</sup> Eleanor Kelley Cabell, “Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg” (report, Colonial Williamsburg Foudation, 1988), 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Revolution. Their efforts to shape consumer preference and behavior through the adaptation of English styles and refinement of global textiles in the construction process highlight the formation of a distinct material culture in the city, influenced heavily by the tradesmen and women of the middling classes and the economic and political influence of the capital as established by the early 1770s.

The earliest known milliners in Williamsburg are actually suspected to have been merchants who sold various millinery goods, particularly Alice Ives, whose probate inventory at her death in 1722 listed a wide variety of fabrics, thread, buttons, ruffles, handkerchiefs, mittens, gloves, caps, and petticoats common in a storefront.<sup>75</sup> Sarah Packe Green's business followed a similar pattern, with accounts running from 1731 to 1752. Advertising "Bombazeens, Crapes, and Sorts of Mourning, for Ladies; also Hatbands, and Gloves, for Gentlemen," on March 1, 1738, Green's offerings foreshadow the wide variety of goods available during the consumer revolution.<sup>76</sup> The first known milliner who sold her own work in Williamsburg, Frances Webb, incorporated her talents at mounting fans into her business, in which she partnered with her husband.<sup>77</sup> In June of 1745, she advertised a variety of millinery goods, including those "Just imported in the Ship Restoration, Capt. John Wilcox, from London," including fine textiles like "Holland Calicoes, Chintz's printed Linnens" alongside finished "Velvet Caps and Hoods, Women's Gloves, [and] Silk Shoes," all sold from her house.<sup>78</sup> By 1752, Webb's available goods grew to include "a choice Assortment of Silks, consisting of India Damasks, Grogroons, China Taffety...white and printed Calicoes, Muslins...Velvet and Silk laced Bonnets, Hair Hats,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 18-27.

<sup>76</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 1 Mar. 1738 [Parks].

<sup>77</sup> Cabell, "Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg," 42.

<sup>78</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 20 June 1745 [Parks].

Womens Calimanco” and other goods “of the best Kind,”<sup>79</sup> following the pattern of increased variety and availability of genteel goods in the consumer revolution of the 1750s.

The most active, successful, and influential milliners in early Williamsburg, however, were competitors Catherine Rathell, Jane Hunter Charlton, and Margaret Hunter. Catherine Rathell, a widow who came to Virginia from London, traveled with her business across the colony, but she stayed in Williamsburg between April and October for court, when the city was at its greatest economic and political influence.<sup>80</sup> In 1769, her shop was located near the Capitol building, the center of activity in Williamsburg, and after voyages to Annapolis and back to England, she returned to the city in 1771 and reopened her shop opposite the Raleigh Tavern, a location with cultural significance.<sup>81</sup> Rathell sought to outfit her customers from head to toe, employing mantua-maker Margaret Brodie in her shop between 1771 and 1775, who advertised “in the newest Taste, Sacks and Coats, Gowns and Petticoats...”<sup>82</sup> As a businesswoman, Rathell was particular in ensuring the quality and quantity of the goods that she imported from England, “a genteel Assortment of Mercery, Millinery, Jewellery, &c.” including “White Satins and Lustrings, with Trimmings suitable, Satin Cloaks and Bonnets wove in Imitation of Lace, plain and trimmed Silk Cloaks and Hats, the greatest Variety of Caps, Egrets, Plumes, and Filets...” in her generous stock.<sup>83</sup>

Rathell ordered these goods through John Norton & Son, a trade firm operating on transatlantic contact through which local merchants could purchase English goods indirectly via their Virginia agent based in Yorktown through private bills of exchange. In November of 1771,

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<sup>79</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 10 July 1752 [Hunter].

<sup>80</sup> Eleanor Kelley Cabell, “Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg” (report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 50.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>82</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 24 Oct. 1771 [Purdie & Dixon].

<sup>83</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 10 Oct. 1771 [Purdie & Dixon].

Rathell requested John Norton & Son to supply her with goods if she remained punctual with her payments, requesting that Norton be “so Obliging as to Send & Hurry them, as Our Assembly meets in March,” anticipating the business that would accompany the upcoming court session.<sup>84</sup> Ordering a broad range of goods, from “18 pair of Plaited Carved Shoe Buckles from 30/ to 50/ a pair” to “36 yards of White flannell, the thickest & Best that Can be got for 13 or 14d p yd... very White as its for Gentlemens Jackets,”<sup>85</sup> Catherine Rathell used her trade contacts to address consumer behavior in Williamsburg at the height of the consumer revolution. Being so bold as to address Norton in London directly and not through his son in Yorktown, Rathell expected her orders to be fulfilled in a timely fashion and to her satisfaction, expressing distress over the quality of goods when necessary; in early January of 1772, “a great Disappointment” over “fifty Pounds worth of Shoes,” which threatened the profit margins of her business in Williamsburg, drove Rathell to complain directly to Mr. Norton.<sup>86</sup> Her diligence to her customers as a shrewd businesswoman extended to her cash-only policy, which she argued allowed her to sell her millinery goods at more reasonable prices with an exchange rate at the benefit of the consumer, a strikingly different business tone from those of fellow tradesmen and tradeswomen who relied heavily on credit, but one supported by her quality and quantity of merchandise.<sup>87</sup> Rathell died tragically in a shipwreck in 1775,<sup>88</sup> and therefore, her influence in Williamsburg died with her, despite her numerous advertisements and continued accounts in England.

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<sup>84</sup> Frances Norton Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons: Merchants of London and Virginia* (Exeter, UK: David & Charles, 1968), 205-206.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-212.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-215.

<sup>87</sup> Linda L. Sturtz, “‘Madam & Co.’: Gender, Family, and Trade Enterprises,” in *Within Her Power: Propertied Women in Colonial Virginia* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2002), 172-173.

<sup>88</sup> Eleanor Kelley Cabell, “Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg” (report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 63.

Rathell's greatest competition in the capital rested with sisters Margaret and Jane Hunter, who came to the city subsequently in 1766 and 1767 from London.<sup>89</sup> Both were trained milliners and operated a shop together on Lot 52 near the Raleigh Tavern, which was later purchased by Margaret when Jane left the business after her marriage to Edward Charlton, local barber and wigmaker, in 1771.<sup>90</sup> As the Charltons purchased the house next to Wetherburn's, across from the old shop, in April of 1772, where Jane began to work as a chamber milliner,<sup>91</sup> both the sisters and Catherine Rathell operated their businesses in close proximity, vying for the same customers. Jane and Margaret, in particular, boasted similar advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette* between 1771 and 1774, "listing imported goods, including materials, trimmings, accessories, jewelry and other small articles, and occasionally reminding their customers that they still made hats, cloaks and other millinery, as well as mounting fans."<sup>92</sup> In fact, the two often advertised on the same day, as shown on October 24, 1771, where both Jane and Margaret boast new imported goods from the *Nancy*, an English trade ship headed for the colonies. Between Margaret Hunter's "fresh Assortment of Millinery,"<sup>93</sup> and Jane Charlton's "great Variety of necklaces, Earrings, Sprigs, Locketts, Buckles, and Combs...",<sup>94</sup> the Williamsburg consumer met with a wide range of luxury items to suit their cultural and social appetites. Although a break in advertisements between 1775 and 1778 suggests that Jane Charlton's trip to England with her husband affected her business in Williamsburg,<sup>95</sup> Margaret Hunter's influence in the textile trades in early Williamsburg carried into the revolutionary period and beyond. By

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>93</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 24 Oct. 1771 [Purdie & Dixon].

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Cabell, "Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg," 101-103.

supplying local residents with desired British imports and producing cloaks, bonnets, and other millinery goods of her own with her learned skills in the trade, Hunter influenced both consumer and material culture in the city of Williamsburg. A merchant and a tradeswoman, Hunter understood the social importance of fashion and its cultural meaning, as well as the stronger relationship between consumer and goods shaped by the consumer revolution.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, the case study of the textile trades in pre-revolutionary Williamsburg, highlighted by descriptions of the businesses of milliners Catherine Rathell, Jane Hunter Charlton, and Margaret Hunter, emphasizes the significance of material culture in the economic and political world of Virginia's capital. As the textile trades played a prominent role in both local and colonial trade with Great Britain, representing a large proportion of imports and artisanal trade occupations, they provide valuable insight into the effects of the consumer revolution in Williamsburg, especially in the early 1770s. Williamsburg's material culture in its boom period consisted of a combination of the goods associated with its dining and entertainment culture, its architecture, and its fashions. From this perspective, Williamsburg remained in competition with southern cities like Charleston, but also with major colonial cities like Philadelphia and Boston, for its material culture sought to sustain the needs of an economically and politically influential colonial capital.

The Williamsburg economy provided the necessary fashionable goods, like silverware, furniture, gowns, and petticoats, to middling sorts in manners both desirable and affordable in the wake of expanding global trade and in light of the essential mercantilist relationship between Britain and her colonies. Many such goods were manufactured or finished by local tradesmen and tradeswomen and purchased by women, slaves, and the lower classes in addition to the

middling classes and the gentry, giving a measure of economic and social autonomy to disenfranchised and oppressed groups, even employing them. This power of local producers and consumers to shape the economy and its goods helped to solidify a distinct and unique material culture in Williamsburg, adapted from British precedents. While sometimes different from its northern counterparts in style, such as in the case of the Virginia suit or Chesapeake building construction, its importance to colonial culture remained intact. In the American Revolution, this material culture would again adapt to its environment, reflecting a wartime economy and its social and political implications.

## Revolutionary Williamsburg, 1774-1781

### Changes in the Political and Economic Environment in the British Colonies

As the American Revolution approached, the material culture that Williamsburg residents had developed in the previous quarter of the eighteenth century experienced a shock to its system. The changing culture of political unrest in the early 1770s forced the consumer marketplace to adapt to a wartime economy as the conflict unfolded throughout the American colonies. Despite the backlash in the form of protests that came as a result of the Sugar, Stamp, and Townshend Acts in the 1760s, Parliament continued to enact legislation to create enough revenue to offset the costs of the Seven Years' War, particularly with the Tea Act of 1773. The Tea Act fed directly off of the culture of gentility formed during the consumer revolution, for it levied a tax on a material good that held a great weight in terms of social rank. Lower import duties and larger ships designed to carry consumer goods made tea and teaware more widely available and created a language of wealth and sociability through the desirable acts of tea drinking and setting the tea table.<sup>96</sup> By attacking this system of social and cultural display, the Tea Act emphasized the disparity between the gentility to which the colonists had been exposed during the consumer revolution and the British attempts to limit their access to it. The colonists were forced to reconcile “the demands of a new consumer marketplace that inundated the homes of free men and women with alluring imported manufactures” with Parliamentary acts “that threatened to destroy a delicate commercial system that made it possible for Americans to pay for these goods.”<sup>97</sup> If the colonists did not protest these economic changes, they “could surrender their dreams of the good life, in other words, their just expectations of sharing the splendid

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<sup>96</sup> Mark Howell, ed., “Buying Respectability: The Consumer Revolution in Virginia” (resource manual, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2000), H-1.

<sup>97</sup> Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 17.

material culture of Britain.”<sup>98</sup> This option proved unsatisfactory for the colonists in the Boston area, and the resulting Boston Tea Party highlighted the extent to which these colonists refused to accept regulated access to the goods that they had grown to rely on. By throwing quality British tea into the harbor, Bostonians made a socially valuable material good a symbol of political protest that differed from that of previous decade.

#### Consumer Protest in Nonimportation, Nonconsumption, and Nonexportation

The displeasure with Parliament’s economic decisions spread throughout the colonies, and by August of 1774, the colonists “had discovered that however great their current distress, Boston would not stand alone against the empire.”<sup>99</sup> The popular comparison between slavery and mercantilism in the period, which stressed the injustice of the subservient economic role that the colonies took in their relationship with the mother country, impacted the colonists’ vehement objections to parliamentary taxes, and they “knew that the only way they could ever enjoy the fruits of free trade would be to declare Independence from Britain,” but the climate in 1774 did not yet show a true desire on the part of the majority of the colonists to go to war.<sup>100</sup> To avoid the threat of military conflict, the colonists turned once again to economic protest to address their grievances. In Congress, Virginians instituted a ban on imports through an Association, to be enforced by local committees of safety, which later served as the model for the Continental Association. In order to “devise quickly a plan capable of sustaining and strengthening American resistance to parliamentary oppression,”<sup>101</sup> the Association created specific terms for boycotting British imports through nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation. Although

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>100</sup> Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 47-49.

<sup>101</sup> T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010), 165.

colonists had been spending approximately one-third of their incomes on British imports at the eve of the revolution,<sup>102</sup> they were required to halt both the importation and consumption of those goods. These systems of boycotting British goods took the some of the control of the mercantilist relationship away from British merchants and politicians across the ocean and allowed the colonists to attain a sense of agency in their economic decisions.

While outlining the timeline in which the boycotts would go into effect, the Association set regulations for the terms of the organized protest, including rules about the millinery to be available for consumers, but it also set instructions for the formulation of the committees of safety that would “police the movement of imports and exports.”<sup>103</sup> On a local level, the committees “encouraged individuals to adopt cruder, more violent means to silence oppression,”<sup>104</sup> and focusing at first almost solely on nonimportation, members of the Association sought to punish shopkeepers suspected of violating its terms. The addition of nonconsumption practices, which placed pressure on consumer themselves to control their purchasing behaviors, encouraged individual members of the community to hold each other accountable and created a sense of unity among the protesters.

By preventing large numbers of British imports from reaching the colonies and refusing to purchase any that did, the colonists formed a “complex discourse about rights and liberties, virtue and power, within a familiar material culture,”<sup>105</sup> giving political charge to an economic revolution. T. H. Breen aptly describes the shift in consumer behavior that gave political power to the colonial material culture as a powerful effort that “shifted the basis of political participation, not in legislative elections or in choosing town officials but rather in the extra-legal

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>105</sup> Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 23.

structures established through-out America to discourage the purchase of British manufactures.”<sup>106</sup> The value of British imports fell from almost £3,000,000 in 1774 to just over £220,000 in 1775, and in the Chesapeake, this decline in the importation of British manufactures reflected a drop from £690,000 in imports in 1774 to just £2000 in 1775.<sup>107</sup> These statistics point to a significant amount of local participation in nonimportation and nonconsumption, an effort that created a linkage between various areas in the colonies in the pursuit of the condemnation of a common grievance, but did not translate into the desired response from Parliament. Although Breen overemphasizes the role of national unity in the consumer protests of American colonists in the early 1770s, particularly in terms of a single “language of goods” that did not account for regional differences among consumers, nonimportation and nonconsumption did create a common goal of defiance to which colonists devote themselves, using their economic decisions to stress a political grievance.

#### *Nonexportation Efforts in Virginia*

As the Association specified that the colonies would move to nonexportation if grievances were not addressed by September 10 of 1775, and as Parliament did not repeal the Tea or Coercive Acts by that time, the nonexportation movement took full swing. In Virginia, this movement focused heavily on halting the shipping of tobacco to the mother country, depriving British merchants of one of the major cash crops in all of the thirteen colonies. Colonial tobacco planters were motivated to participate in these boycotts from an economic perspective; they had experienced recent economic depression and wanted greater control over the industry. Previously, tobacco planters had joined crop-withholding associations to manage the price of the crop, but as this failed to help tobacco fetch a higher price by May of 1774, they

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>107</sup> Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 169; Holton, *Forced Founders*, 102.

moved to strengthen the enforcement of the system and provide protection to debtors and then turned to nonexportation to Great Britain.<sup>108</sup> By closing the courts under a false pretense of protesting the closure of Boston Harbor, the Virginians enabled indebted planters to refuse to export without repercussions from their creditors, expanding the range of participants in the movement. Virginians decided to postpone the export of half of the 1774 crop for another year in order to push Britain into driving up the price of tobacco, which would allow planters to reap the economic benefits of the crop earlier and pay off their debts; they chose not even to plant a 1775 crop, further withholding the mercantilist benefits of tobacco from the British.<sup>109</sup> This pushed a diversification of agriculture in Virginia in 1775, with many farmers turning to grain, cotton, hemp, and flax instead of tobacco.

The nonexportation movement did help to ameliorate the effects of the tobacco glut on local farmers in Virginia, with prices nearly doubling between 1774 and 1775, and the Virginia Association became the model for the Continental Association established on October 18, 1774, which added a ban on grain trade to the British West Indies.<sup>110</sup> Due to crop-withholding, Britain did not feel the effects of the movement until the tobacco and sugar crops would have reached them in 1776, once the war had already begun and the colonies had already declared independence.<sup>111</sup> In *Forced Founders*, Woody Holton argues that the nonexportation movement had the desired economic result, but not the desired political result; it did not resolve the economic and political issues between Britain and her colonies outside of the confines of martial conflict. Although Holton's conclusion that the nonexportation movement was unsuccessful in preventing war with Britain holds true, these movements remain important, as they signal a shift

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<sup>108</sup> Holton, *Forced Founders*, 113-114.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 107; *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

in the economic and political independence of the American colonists. The nonexportation, nonimportation, and nonconsumption movements gave political value to material goods and allowed consumers to have a direct impact on the Anglo-American economic relationship. On a local level, these movements affected the material goods available to consumers, thereby pushing the local material culture to reflect the political unrest in the colonies. As the colonies moved into the American Revolution, these economic, political, and cultural changes shifted further to reflect the pressures of war, and in Williamsburg, those changes altered the distinct material culture that the city had developed in the first half of the eighteenth century.

#### The Effects of the Association and the Revolution in Williamsburg

The nonimportation and nonconsumption movements limited the availability of goods made popular in the consumer revolution for Williamsburg residents at the eve of the American Revolution. After the conflict took hold in 1775 and Independence was declared in 1776, the Virginians were presented with another problem – how to reconcile an already restricted consumer marketplace with the material needs of a colony at war. War with Britain significantly impacted the trade between the colonies and the mother country, but it did not end the desire for genteel goods. In January of 1776, William Pitt still advertised desirable goods “just come to hand” like broadcloths, necklaces, gloves, cutlery, pewter, copper, and iron.<sup>112</sup> The cost of the war and the shortage of materials needed to equip and outfit the Virginian military regiments impacted the availability of goods for local consumers, but that cost did not prevent merchants like William Pitt from providing products to the public. To keep their businesses alive, the merchants who sold luxury goods and the artisans who transformed raw materials into finished

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<sup>112</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 6 Jan. 1776 [Dixon & Hunter].

products merely adapted to the changing environment in the revolutionary city. Williamsburg's material culture did not disappear during the Revolution; it simply gained a new perspective.

The presence of local militias and military regiments greatly impacted Williamsburg in the early years of the Revolution. Williamsburg had established an independent company by the fall of 1774, for "even if few gentlemen in Virginia expected or desired armed conflict with Britain, many agreed that at least an appearance of martial readiness was required."<sup>113</sup> After the events in Lexington and Concord in the spring of 1775, the tide of indecision on the conflict began to shift in Virginia. War engulfed Williamsburg after Governor Dunmore seized the gunpowder and weapons stored in the Magazine on Market Square on April 20, 1775, and after the city's "volunteer company stayed throughout the crisis and kept a vigilant – and mischievously provoking – watch on Dunmore and his household," the reality of conflict could no longer be ignored.<sup>114</sup> As a result, Dunmore stationed marines and sailors in the city to prevent the situation from getting too out of hand,<sup>115</sup> and Williamsburg experienced its first taste of military occupation. By July of 1775, "Williamsburg had become an armed camp with more than two hundred independent militiamen stationed in and around the city."<sup>116</sup> After the burning of Norfolk in January of 1776, the connection between Williamsburg and war increased, and patriot leaders moved to address the economic and political situation in the colony, particularly as the "Insolence and abuse" found in the behavior of the soldiers in Williamsburg plagued the city

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<sup>113</sup> Mary R. M. Goodwin, "Clothing and Accoutrements of the Officers and Soldiers of the Virginia Forces, 1775-1780; From the Records of the Public Store at Williamsburg" (report, Colonial Williamsburg, 1962), vii; McDonnell, 37.

<sup>114</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, & Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>116</sup> Kevin Kelly, "The World Turned Upside Down: Williamsburg During the War for Independence," in *Williamsburg, Virginia: A City Before the State, 1699-1999*, edited by Robert P. Maccubbin and Martha Hamilton-Phillips (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 63.

streets.<sup>117</sup> The patriot leaders were “aware that farmers in Virginia were suffering from shortages, anxious to find a market for their wasting crops, and mindful that fighting a major war with Britain would require supplies of all kinds,” and so they “moved to establish free trade” in the colony.<sup>118</sup> In this way, these leaders signified that the special economic arrangement between Britain and the American colonies “and the basis for their colonial relationship” was over.<sup>119</sup> The capital of Virginia became a revolutionary one, and with that independent economic distinction, its leaders turned to the pressing issue of addressing the funding and equipage necessary to build a martial company that could rival that of the British.

The Committee of Safety formed in 1774 to police the boycotts in Virginia gained a new purpose; its members decided that Virginia needed “a Plan for the Embodying, Arming, and Disciplining such a Number of Men as may be sufficient” for defending the colony against its oppressors.<sup>120</sup> To achieve this goal, they established a number of public works in Williamsburg to be managed by the Commissary of Stores, including a public store and a gun manufactory.<sup>121</sup> At the Virginia Convention of Delegates in July and August 1775, “which concerned the raising of two regiments of regulars and of minute-men, and the regulating of the county militia,” the Commissary of Stores appointed William Aylett to manage the provision of arms and accoutrements, clothes, wagons, linen tents, and bedding for Virginia’s soldiers.<sup>122</sup> With the help of blacksmith James Anderson’s Public Armoury, the Public Store in Williamsburg supplied

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<sup>117</sup> Second Virginia Orderly Book, 28 October 1775, Brock Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

<sup>118</sup> McDonnell, *The Politics of War*, 173.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Mary R. M. Goodwin, “Clothing and Accoutrements of the Officers and Soldiers of the Virginia Forces, 1775-1780; From the Records of the Public Store at Williamsburg,” (report, Colonial Williamsburg, 1962), 3.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

clothing and accoutrements to the two Virginia regiments for the first several years of the war.<sup>123</sup> To accommodate even the second and sixth regiments of the Virginia Militia stationed at the College Camp between September 1775 and April 1776 alone, the workers at the Public Store needed additional help from local artisans to be able to supply boots, shirts, and leggings to the soldiers.<sup>124</sup> In order to best understand the ways in which the American Revolution impacted the city of Williamsburg and forced its material culture to adapt to the changing times without compromising its integrity, the case study of the textile trades in Williamsburg and the behaviors of the milliners, tailors, and mantua-makers who controlled them must be revisited.

*The Textile Trades in Revolutionary Williamsburg: A Material Cultural Case Study*

One of the earliest examples in Williamsburg of fashion as a political tool occurred on December 13, 1769, the aptly named “Homespun Ball,” in which “the Gentlemen and Ladies of this city, who were chiefly dressed in Virginia cloth... made a genteel appearance,” particularly as “the Ladies on this occasion, who, to the number of near one hundred, appeared in homespun gowns.”<sup>125</sup> The *Virginia Gazette* described the attendees of the event as exhibiting “the same patriotic spirit which gave rise to the association of the Gentlemen,” which was “a lively and striking instance of their acquiescence and concurrence in whatever may be the true and essential interest of their country.”<sup>126</sup> Complying with early efforts at nonimportation by wearing domestically produced clothing, these women stressed a connection between textile consumerism and politics that would continue well into the early 1770s. By 1774, nonimportation and nonconsumption had not quelled the colonial appetite for fashion, but as the colonies moved closer to revolution, fashion gained an increasingly political motive. The “world

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>125</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 14 Dec. 1769 [Purdie & Dixon]; *Virginia Gazette*, 14 Dec. 1769 [Rind].

<sup>126</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 14 Dec. 1769 [Rind].

of fashion was not... segregated from other arenas of power but intersected with transatlantic commerce and even politics.”<sup>127</sup> Kate Haulman argues that “fashion in dress became a political tool precisely because it remained a powerful marker of status in an intellectual climate that increasingly regarded gentility as a behavioral commodity – that is to say, not really a commodity at all.”<sup>128</sup> In this way, the boycotts on imported textiles in 1774 and 1775 held a lot of political value for colonial consumers, but unlike several other artisanal trades, the textile trades did not experience a collapse as the American Revolution took hold. The milliners, tailors, and mantua-makers that worked in the fashion trades “were increasing their economic and political clout in an era of ‘conspicuous consumption.’”<sup>129</sup> In Williamsburg, the labor and resources required to equip the soldiers in the Virginia regiments gave these tradesmen and tradeswomen a new focus for their trades that allowed the material culture that they had helped to develop continue to influence the economic, political, and social decisions within the community.

In order to ensure that the colonists presented themselves as serious adversaries to the British, the military clothing that the Public Store would provide for the regiments needed to represent the perfect link between fashion and politics, highlighting both the masculine and the domestic elements of the Continental Army. The independent company in Williamsburg had already established a set of uniforms by the fall of 1774, which equipped the minutemen and volunteers in “military garb” – hunting shirts, trousers, buckstails, and cockades, with “Liberty or Death” affixed to their breasts.<sup>130</sup> On November 1, 1775, the Continental Congress adopted

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<sup>127</sup> Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 79.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>130</sup> Goodwin, “Clothing and Accoutrements,” vii.

the first of the universal regulations for Continental uniforms, which stressed the use of the color brown on jackets with different facing colors to distinguish regiments, with dark blue more popular for officers.<sup>131</sup> The infantry, artillery, and cavalymen in the Virginia regiments “wore blue uniforms faced with red,” and the regimentals typically wore “suits of clothes” that included coats, breeches, and waistcoats, vests, or jackets.<sup>132</sup> The uniform requirements for minutemen were less strict, and simply specified that they needed one pair of leggings, one hunting shirt, and one good rifle or other weapon.<sup>133</sup> In terms of accoutrements, the other soldiers were to be supplied at public expense with “one good musket and bayonet, cartouch box, or pouch, and canteen,” with a tent for every six privates; the clothing was deducted out of pay if the individual could not purchase the uniform himself.<sup>134</sup>

The officers of the regiments themselves, who wanted greater control over their troops and who wanted to present a more unified front against the enemy, created many of these stipulations. Lieutenant Governor Dudley Digges, Esq. directed the Commissary of Stores in April 1778 “to furnish those Gentlemen of the city of Williamsburg who have engaged to serve as Volunteer Cavalry agreeable to the recommendation of Congress, with such necessary Clothing as they may want not exceeding Cloth sufficient to make a Horsemans Cloak, Coat & Waistcoat; Linen for two Shirts & two pair of Stockings for each Voluntier – they paying for the same.”<sup>135</sup> While the clothing items listed above were probably never fully uniform, even after

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, ix-x.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>135</sup> H. R. McIlwaine and Virginia State Library, “Dudley Digges Esqr Lieutenant Governor,” 28 Apr. 1778, *Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia* (Richmond: D. Bottom, Superintendent of public printing, 1926), 267.

1775,<sup>136</sup> they represent the attempt to present a unified front in Virginia against the British. The responsibility for supplying the clothing and accoutrements described here fell on Williamsburg's Public Armoury, its Public Store, and the artisans that worked there.

#### The Williamsburg Public Store

The Public Store was responsible for supplying the six regiments in Virginia between 1775 and 1780 and opened on October 12, 1775. The records of the Public Store “illustrate Williamsburg’s connection with a growing Atlantic economy amidst the war, demonstrating how goods flowed to and from Williamsburg through connection in Martinique, St. Croix, St. Eustatia, and Nantes just as easily as from Fredericksburg, Baltimore, and Charlestown.”<sup>137</sup> Slaves helped to operate the store, responsible for the freightage of raw and finished goods throughout the city.<sup>138</sup> These individuals and their masters represented both the “physical location” of the Public Store, as well as the “network of sites operating up and down the Duke of Gloucester Street” that assisted in its efforts, especially the Public Armoury, which supplied weaponry for the war effort.<sup>139</sup> A well-connected merchant, Commissary William Aylett, used his contacts to supply the store, advertising in the *Virginia Gazette* and traveling to obtain goods while William Armistead served as “Keeper of the Public Store.”<sup>140</sup> For example, on March 8, 1776, Aylett placed an advertisement calling for “a large number of shoes” for the army, to be supplied by anyone who was able, and the following year on November 7, he requested “workmen to make up a large Quantity of Leather into Soldiers Shoes,” highlighting the support

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<sup>136</sup> Goodwin, “Clothing and Accoutrements,” ix-x.

<sup>137</sup> Kate Egner Gruber, “For the Use of the Public: An Introduction to the Records of the Williamsburg Public Store, 1775-1780” (unpublished paper, 2012), 3.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

needed from the community to fulfill the wants of the Virginia regiments.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, his partner William Armistead placed an advertisement in March of 1778 for soldiers' clothes of quality made by members of the public to be sold at the store,<sup>142</sup> stressing their continuous need for both supplies and skilled workers.

Centered in the capital of Virginia, the Williamsburg Public Store did have contact with a wide variety of tradesmen and shops that could and did, "if the need arose, be encouraged to enter (or, at least support) public service."<sup>143</sup> The trade shops "that ordinarily produced goods for civilians began churning out shoes, watch coats, and other uniform requirements for the members of the six Virginia Regiments that were beginning to take shape;" the textile trades were in wartime production and milliners and tailors took on new material cultural roles.<sup>144</sup> While Margaret Hunter and Jane Hunter Charlton did not advertise their businesses often during the war years, many other tradespeople in textiles used their commercial businesses to support the public good. Robert Nicolson and his son were paid to deliver buttons, thread, and twenty-one completed watch coats for the use of the army in 1775, Beverly Dickinson became the State Clothier and contracted with Archibald Diddep and James Slate, who worked as public tailors, and shoemaker Matthew Anderson made shoes for the army while managing the Public Shoe Shop until 1780.<sup>145</sup> These tradesmen and tradeswomen used their skills to serve the public in the throes of conflict.

Many unskilled women contributed to the war effort as well, and "on August 13, 1779, William Armistead recorded the names of women who completed shirts for the use of the army

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<sup>141</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 8 Mar. 1776 [Dixon & Hunter].; *Virginia Gazette*, 7 Nov. 1777 [Dixon & Hunter].

<sup>142</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 6 Mar. 1778 [Dixon & Hunter].

<sup>143</sup> Gruber, "For the Use of the Public," 4.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

and how many shirts they brought in, and paid them for their labor,” including “51 women, who delivered between seven and 130 shirts each, for a total of 1649 shirts.”<sup>146</sup> In addition, Robert Prentis sold excess goods to the public as a whole at his store, becoming “Manager of the Publick Store for selling Goods to the People at Large” in 1778 and “helped to disseminate goods to Williamsburg’s civilian population, who might otherwise have struggled to procure food and other necessities during the last years of the war.”<sup>147</sup> In this way, the merchants, tradesmen, tradeswomen, and civilians in the city were able to adapt their economic consumer culture to that of a revolutionary city in which its artisans produced the goods necessary to defend the public. While this did not erase the systems of supply and demand that the city had developed in the pre-revolutionary period, it adapted them to meet changing times and changing attitudes in Virginia, ones that needed the political and material support of the textile trades.

#### The Williamsburg Manufactory

As the nonimportation movements had limited colonial access to British textiles and overseas trade in fashion, a segment of the Williamsburg population turned to local manufacturing as a way to provide the raw materials needed to make both civilian and military clothing in the American Revolution. While many women, both free and enslaved, had been spinning and weaving on plantations in the southern colonies for most of the century, especially with shortages that required homespun production of coarse cloth for slaves’ clothing,<sup>148</sup> weaving had generally stayed out of the town center. Imported cloth was of better quality, and with so many tradespeople in textiles to manage the production of finished goods, the market for homespun cloth in Williamsburg was relatively small prior to the Revolution. In contrast, the

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>148</sup> Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit*, 421.

period of production in the city during the American Revolution presented a market for a more organized production of domestic textiles, manifesting in the Williamsburg Manufactory at the height of the conflict.

Located near the Capitol Landing, the manufactory serviced the counties of York, Gloucester, and the Eastern Shore, as well as the city itself, and was “easily conveyed by water” for the transport of goods.<sup>149</sup> Turning “flax to dress,” the manufactory oversaw the production of cloth in Williamsburg during the Revolution, while looking to purchase raw materials for manufacturing “with ready money” from planters and farmers in Virginia, specifically hemp, flax, cotton, and wool.<sup>150</sup> Like the Public Store, the Williamsburg Manufactory also advertised for local employment for artisans such as spinners and wool combers, including a mistress spinner who had completed her apprenticeship and served her time as a journeywoman, and placed notices in the *Virginia Gazette* many times throughout the war.<sup>151</sup> The desire for cloth during the Revolution led to a need for production within the city that mirrored that shown at the Public Armoury and the Public Store, which enhanced the material culture in Williamsburg, stimulated the economy through job creation and public participation, and helped the city adapt to the pressures of wartime.

### Conclusion

As the example of the textile trades illustrates, revolution in Williamsburg impacted the consumer economy and its resulting material culture without degrading it. Milliners, tailors, shoemakers, and the like did not lose access to their crafts amidst restrictions on the trade of the genteel goods that defined the consumer behavior of the previous half-century. Instead, they

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<sup>149</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 6 May 1777 [Purdie].

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

approached the turmoil of the 1770s as an opportunity to expand beyond the merchant-consumer relationship that characterized peacetime to meet the needs of the wartime economy. Working with the Public Store, the Public Armoury, and the Williamsburg Manufactory, the city's artisans used their skills to furnish the clothing and accoutrements required to properly equip an army fit to challenge that of the British Empire. The politicization of goods on the eve of the American Revolution through nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation showed consumers that the purchasing power that they had gained in the consumer revolution could be used to affect change. The tradespeople that participated in the manufacture of military commodities in the city took that knowledge and used it to produce goods that reflected the pride found in domesticity in the newly independent state. In this way, the distinct material culture that had distinguished the economic and political power of Williamsburg as the capital of one of the foremost southern colonies, and by extension, the thirteen colonies as whole, was not lost in the American Revolution. Rather, it became a direct representation of the city's ability to adapt to its circumstances and to use its economic and material skills to further the political and military efforts of the patriot leaders in Virginia.

## **The Aftermath of War, 1780-1815**

### **Williamsburg After the Move to Richmond**

After the capital of Virginia moved to Richmond on April 18, 1780, the political and economic climate in Williamsburg no longer represented the seat of government. Believing Richmond to be situated more centrally in the state and therefore more accessible to government officials, Governor Thomas Jefferson saw the move as a way to prevent the capital from vulnerability to enemy attack while minimizing location barriers for those who had business there.<sup>152</sup> As the war ended and as Richmond took on the diplomatic responsibilities of the state, Williamsburg residents had to adapt to an economy that did not revolve around visitors to the city in court times as a center of trade and political influence. While these changes did affect the lives of the men and women living in the city at the end of the long eighteenth century, they did not entirely erase the rich material culture that had developed in Williamsburg throughout the century. Consumers continued to impact the supply of goods in the city through their purchasing decisions, and artisans and merchants remained to supply those goods. The nature of the city's economy may have changed in the post-war world, but a desire for goods had not, and Williamsburg's tradesmen and tradeswomen sought to fill that desire. In this way, the city still played a role in impacting the state's overall economic culture in its continued adherence to a language of consumer goods that was understood by those in Richmond, for the time in which Williamsburg stood as the seat of government was not far from memory. The citizens of Williamsburg and their material culture sustained their influence on the consumption of fashionable goods, helping the city to remain relevant after losing its pre-conflict political power.

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<sup>152</sup> M. Michelle Jarrett, "An Independent Domesticity: Single Women in Post-Revolutionary Williamsburg" (honors thesis, College of William & Mary, 1995), 9-10.

## Demography and Landscape in Post-Revolutionary Williamsburg

### *Williamsburg's Built Landscape and Social Climate*

In order to understand the ways in which the move to Richmond impacted society in Williamsburg, it is best to first examine the demography of the post-war population in the city and the effects of war on its infrastructure. Williamsburg sustained “relatively light damage” to its buildings in the American Revolution, particularly in terms of friendly occupation by the French rather than invasion by the British; the Governor’s Palace, the Capitol Building, and the buildings at the College were used as hospitals during the fall of 1781 and the winter of 1782.<sup>153</sup> While the College buildings were repaired and reopened, the east wing of the Capitol Building was torn down in 1793 due to fire and other damage. As a result, the College and the Public Hospital became newly dominant institutions in the city landscape, even though college enrollment dropped to about 50 students in 1782 and did not increase much throughout the rest of the century.<sup>154</sup> Students, who were now required to lodge with other families in town, brought disorder, drunkenness, and even violence to the recovering community, adding stress to an already difficult economic, political, and social situation.<sup>155</sup> Despite these negative changes to the landscape, “when St. George Tucker wrote a description of Williamsburg in 1796, he emphasized the peace and concord of the town rather than student unrest or a hospital that was ‘not well regulated.’”<sup>156</sup> Tucker, a prominent Virginian who chose to stay in Williamsburg after the capital moved to Richmond, clearly saw something leftover of value in the city that drove him to settle there.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 18.

St. George Tucker described Williamsburg as a city that had “a mixture of courtesy and ease, of frankness and politeness, of simplicity and delicacy, which partly resulted from its having been the former metropolis of the state,” governed by a “delicate balance between urban and rural living.”<sup>157</sup> Although the Tucker family experienced difficulties while attempting to navigate the social climate created by the new American government, particularly as St. George himself “saw Virginia’s gentry class dangerously teeter in its position of power,” they sought to embrace “new strategies and principles that [they] believed would bring prosperity to Virginia, stability to its government, and security to [their] kin.”<sup>158</sup> For Tucker, limiting his previous investments in property and relocating permanently to Williamsburg, even though it was no longer the seat of power, held promise, for he believed that a level of society and cultural influence remained in the city worthy of a gentleman of his stature remained in the city.

#### Williamsburg’s Post-Revolutionary Population

*Population Demographics.* St. George Tucker was not the only Virginian who chose to stay in Williamsburg. Although many historians have described the decline in the city’s population after the capital moved to Richmond as devastating, its demographic effects on Williamsburg are not quite as economically and socially catastrophic as previously presented. The 1790 Virginia Census shows nine cities in the state holding 19,139 people out of total population of 747,610, meaning only three percent of Virginians were living in cities at the close of the eighteenth century.<sup>159</sup> In these terms, the fact that Williamsburg held even the population it did as an urban center in such a rural post-war climate is significant. In fact, “although Williamsburg’s population did decline substantially in the years between 1775 and 1790, the loss

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<sup>157</sup> Qtd. in Jarrett, “An Independent Domesticity,” 19.

<sup>158</sup> Phillip Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family: The Tuckers of Virginia, 1752-1830* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 71-78.

<sup>159</sup> Jarrett, “An Independent Domesticity,” 3.

was less than one half; the actual figure is between one quarter and one third;” the Williamsburg population was 1880 in 1775, 1424 in 1782, and 1344 in 1790.<sup>160</sup> The bulk of this out-migration to other areas occurred in 1782, 24.3% to be exact,<sup>161</sup> a time relatively close to the capital’s move to Richmond. Over the next eight years, the total population of Williamsburg dropped by only 5.6%.<sup>162</sup> These figures present an important picture of the once capital of Virginia – there was something about Williamsburg that gave those who chose not to leave for Richmond immediately a valuable reason to stay. Those people helped to sustain a significant population that could continue to participate in the city’s distinct material culture and carry it forward into the nineteenth century.

*Race and Gender.* The racial and gender composition of this population gives further insight into the consumers in post-revolutionary Williamsburg whose choices impacted its economic climate. As recorded in the 1782 Census, taken the year before the Treaty of Paris officially ended the American Revolution, Williamsburg had 182 established households that year, and of those, 50 (27.5%) were headed by women, some as feme soles and others as widows and spinsters.<sup>163</sup> This can be explained both by the death of many men in the war and by their out-migration in its wake, for as M. Michelle Jarrett indicates, “men generally had both greater incentive and financial means to leave Williamsburg after the capital moved in 1780.”<sup>164</sup> In addition, the employment opportunities available in the city “may have made town living especially attractive to widows;” for example, women like Jane Vobe highlight tavernkeeping as “a female-dominated profession in Williamsburg after the Revolution” in addition to other

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 41-44.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

domestic trades.<sup>165</sup> These women, who also worked as tradeswomen and shopkeepers, took advantage of vacancies in the workforce in post-revolutionary Williamsburg and created a market for themselves, their skills, and their goods.

These opportunities were not strictly bound by race. Ann Ashby Jones, a freed slave who worked as a laundress and a seamstress to support her family, provides clues to this community of independent women in Williamsburg, especially as she was listed as one of the heads of household in the 1782 Census.<sup>166</sup> Williamsburg's population was 49% black in 1782, and like their white counterparts, more black women resided in Williamsburg than black men.<sup>167</sup> Michael L. Nicholls provides a similar explanation for this discrepancy as M. Michelle Jarrett, that "the domestic service enjoyed in urban households and required in public taverns dictated the larger numbers of black women within the Williamsburg black population and this in turn contributed to a larger proportion of slave children in the group."<sup>168</sup> With 642 slaves recorded in Williamsburg in 1783, 350 of which were tithable and 292 of which were children, these demographic figures suggest, "along with the growing proportions of women, an even more dominant domestic service for Williamsburg slaves following the loss of the town's provincial political role."<sup>169</sup>

Despite high slave turnover in Williamsburg in the 1780s, Nicholls argues that "the core of stable, solvent white slave owners resident in these towns contributed, however inadvertently, to structuring a slave population that, as we shall see, seized the opportunity to fashion and sustain something resembling family life in the midst of the uncertainty and anxiety that went

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>166</sup> Chris Hansen, "Ann Ashby Jones" (unpublished paper, 2010), 6.

<sup>167</sup> Michael L. Nicholls, "Aspects of the African American Experience in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg and Norfolk" (report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1990), 3-4.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

with being treated as property.”<sup>170</sup> While black women commonly worked as laundresses and seamstresses in the domestic trades, in an urban environment of public markets that “brought a greater mobility than most African American women enjoyed in the countryside,” black men worked in more skilled trades outside of the domestic sphere.<sup>171</sup> As Ann Smart Martin stresses, “gaining knowledge of and practice in vending produce, poultry, and home production in turn allowed many slaves to become petty entrepreneurs,” which “brought them the cash necessary to purchase consumer goods and in some instances property.”<sup>172</sup> The money that slaves and free blacks earned from such occupations in Williamsburg after the Revolution helped them to participate in the consumer culture in the city at local stores and at the market, giving black consumers a voice in the material economy.

#### Consumer Culture in Williamsburg After the Revolution

As demonstrated, the post-Revolutionary population in Williamsburg was significant enough in number to support the existing material culture in the city, for those citizens continued to have a desire for both luxurious and necessary goods. With the war over, the adaptations to the city’s consumer culture that relied heavily upon supporting the military effort shifted to reflect pre-revolutionary material wants once more while upholding the social divisions of the new republic. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the next, the “industrious” and continuous consumer revolution was “achieved primarily at the level of the household, where it [could] be identified as a simultaneous rise in the percentage of household production sold to others and a

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>172</sup> Ann Smart Martin, “Suckey’s Looking Glass: African Americans as Consumers,” in *Buying Into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 176.

rise in the percentage of household consumption purchased from others.”<sup>173</sup> While this definition of the role of consumers in the economy holds true throughout the period, it is important to recognize that the aftermath of war and the capital’s move to Richmond did have an effect on Williamsburg’s material environment.

As Cary Carson observes, “variations in the practice of the gentle arts and localism in the design of American-made artifacts should therefore not be taken as evidence of fashion’s impeded progress, as so often they have been.”<sup>174</sup> Although Carson labels the “excessively materialistic values that attached to social status” in the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a “visible, tangible, and inescapable” attempt to sharpen class differences,<sup>175</sup> these variations in American-made goods should be viewed as an attempt to push the material world of the 1770s into the 1790s and early 1800s. By highlighting the importance of the individual producer and consumer in defining the nature of the American economy, the emphasis on regional distinctions helped to solidify the uniqueness of local goods, ones that distinguished Williamsburg from Philadelphia and Charleston from New York but that emphasized the important role that each played in creating a new, truly “American” material culture. While representing distinct areas in the United States, these goods stressed the goals of economic and cultural unity for which the nation strived under the Constitution in order to effectively compete in the world market. As a piece of this material puzzle, Williamsburg’s material culture after the Revolution had a valuable impact on the new republic.

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<sup>173</sup> Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>174</sup> Cary Carson, “The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?” in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 651.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 682-683.

*Williamsburg's Shops: The Anderson-Low Store*

In order to examine the effects of the post-Revolutionary climate in Williamsburg, it is best to first focus on the goods sold in the city during the period. J. E. Whitney's analysis of the transactions made at the Anderson-Low Store between 1784 and 1785 offers a clear perspective in the material goods in demand in the city. David Low and Matthew Anderson began their joint business in November of 1784, and their "store accounts, such as those left by Matthew Anderson and David Low, which name customers, indicate how individuals paid their debts and list the dozens of articles sold on credit, reveal much about the people and economy of an area."<sup>176</sup> As Whitney stresses, these records reveal "the extent to which Virginians returned to their British suppliers and resumed their dependence upon British credit after the Revolutionary War," particularly in terms of the "consumer's reliance upon storekeepers to provide them with such articles as sugar, tea and spices which they could not produce in Virginia."<sup>177</sup> These consumers kept the interest in luxury goods that had intrigued them before the Revolution even after the capital's move to Richmond. The Anderson-Low Store accounts show consumers who purchased goods that they could have produced at home, indicating that they "valued conservation of time and effort more than the economy of home production" and had a level of economic comfort that allowed them to avoid producing butter, candles, and soap for themselves.<sup>178</sup> In addition, "purchases of luxury consumer articles, such as expensive textiles, tea sets and books, may mark persons of high economic standing,"<sup>179</sup> but they also stress that consumer desire in Williamsburg had not been lost as a result of the Revolution or as a result of

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<sup>176</sup> Jeanne E. Whitney, "Clues to a Community: Transactions at the Anderson-Low Store, 1784-1785" (master's thesis, College of William & Mary, 1983), 2.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

the shift in the seat of government. Williamsburg's residents still wanted to lead comfortable and genteel lives, and their purchases reflect that desire.

While the number of merchants in the city dropped from 31 in 1770 to 21 in 1785,<sup>180</sup> evidenced by a drop in the number of advertisements for goods in the *Virginia Gazette* compared to the number in the early 1770s, there were still a sufficient number to respond to consumer demand in the area. Merchants who stayed in the city, like John Greenhow and John Carter, were met with newcomers in the 1780s like George Jackson, John Druitz, and James Davis, who believed "as Matthew Anderson did that business prospects were not so dim."<sup>181</sup> Although the American Revolution freed American merchants from monopolized trade, unequal trade agreements and heavy post-war debt brought economic depression to Virginia; a lack of specie proved difficult in business and commercial transactions, but Anderson and Low "carried on business as if the war changed nothing."<sup>182</sup> One-fifth of the value of all sales during this period in the Anderson-Low store can be attributed to textiles, as in the previous periods of Williamsburg's history, followed by white and brown sugar and tea; one hundred and forty patrons purchased linen between 1784 and 1785 alone.<sup>183</sup> Overall, the Anderson-Low records demonstrate that not only did a consumer population exist in Williamsburg after 1780 that required luxury and necessary goods in its material culture of the caliber to which they had been exposed in the 1760s and 1770s, but there was a merchant population willing and able to fill its requests.

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-46; 78.

*Post-Revolutionary Trades in Williamsburg*

Just as they had done prior to the American Revolution and the move to Richmond, tradesmen and tradeswomen held an invaluable position in the material cultural productions in Williamsburg. As producers and vendors, these men and women provided necessary and luxury goods to consumers in two ways: they fashioned them from raw and finished materials and also presented them to the public in marketable ways that stressed their gentility and utility. While many tradespeople did migrate to Richmond when the capital relocated in an attempt to follow the business of the many consumers who ventured to the city during court times, others stayed in Williamsburg and continued to produce goods and sell them to local consumers. Williamsburg coachmaker Charles Taliaferro advertised his commodities, other artisans imported goods for sale, and even local printers “advertised a variety of articles such as paper, quills, ink, spectacles, music and musical instruments, available at their office.”<sup>184</sup> As St. George Tucker had chosen to stay in Williamsburg due to a belief in its existing gentility and sociability, these tradesmen and tradeswomen felt that the population in the city continued to have an influence on the market that would create a profitable relationship between merchant and consumer. The citizens in post-1780 Williamsburg still required access to the world of goods to which they had been exposed in the preceding half-century, and the class of artisans who remained in the city sought to fulfill their material needs.

*The Cabinetmaking Trade*

Williamsburg’s cabinetmakers provide an important example of the role that this group of artisans played in preserving and advancing the city’s material culture after it was retired as the seat of government. Despite the social and political change that its inhabitants experienced

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

during the 1780s and 1790s, “Williamsburg remained renowned for its fine and genteel society,” and the widespread nature of the furniture produced by its cabinetmakers “demonstrates that these craftsmen were not catering solely to local patrons, but were considered capable of producing the most fashionable goods to found at that time in Virginia.”<sup>185</sup> Linda A. Hildreth maintains that “while Williamsburg was no longer bustling with the same kind of activity found there in the pre-Revolutionary period, it still retained a sense of its own importance,” for “while trade diminished, it was not eliminated, and craftspeople and merchants continued to supply goods to the townspeople.”<sup>186</sup> As “the end of the eighteenth century witnessed an increase in the number of artisan advertisements in which less mention was made of foreign imports and greater emphasis was placed on American manufactures,”<sup>187</sup> Williamsburg’s cabinetmakers took on even greater responsibility in their production of goods for the community, especially as many became shop owners in order to sell their craft.

Although competition with increasingly industrialized furniture manufacturers in the North created difficulties for southern cabinetmakers, men in the trade in Williamsburg were still able to make a living within their environment of consumption. In particular, Hildreth cites James Hockaday as a Williamsburg cabinetmaker who did not change his occupation for financial stability, but rather supported himself in the trade starting in 1800 and became successful enough by 1806 to support journeymen.<sup>188</sup> Though several of his competitors were unsuccessful in maintaining their business in the city after the capital moved, Hockaday continued to produce goods of quality for the population living in Williamsburg. By responding

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<sup>185</sup> Linda A. Hildreth, “The Fate of the Cabinetmaking Trade in Williamsburg, Virginia in the Post-Revolutionary Period” (master’s thesis, College of William & Mary, 1988), 3-15.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

to the genteel needs of consumers who wanted furniture that displayed social mobility and wealth while adhering to new American standards of production according to its regional variations, Hockaday's enterprise represents a timely response to the changes in Williamsburg's distinct material culture that does not invalidate its existence. Rather, it reflects adaptations to the new social and political climate in the United States, emphasizing continuity in the desire for genteel goods even as the methods to meet that desire developed to reflect changing times.

#### The Apothecary and Medical Trades

Dr. John Minson Galt also chose to remain in Williamsburg after the capital moved to Richmond in order to conduct his apothecary business and medical visits to patients. In one of his ledgers, which details transactions made for his services between 1782 and 1798, more information about Williamsburg's residents in the 1780s and 1790s can be gleaned, particularly in terms of their social importance. While previous demographic examinations reveal that the population left in Williamsburg post-Revolution did include middling and lower class individuals, it also included more individuals of prominence than simply St. George Tucker. Galt's ledger lists accounts with George Wythe, Bishop James Madison, John Blair, Robert Nicholson, and St. George Tucker himself.<sup>189</sup> In addition, he held accounts with other tradesmen and merchants in the city, including William Pasteur, William Pitt, Severinus Durfey, Matthew Anderson, and Edward Charlton, as well as public institutions like the Public Hospital and the College of William & Mary.<sup>190</sup> While most of these debits and credits coincide with medical visits rather than purchases of apothecary goods, they paint an important picture of the population living in Williamsburg in the 1780s and 1790s. That population did include

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<sup>189</sup> Galt-Barraud Account Book, 1782-1798, Galt Papers (I), Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

prominent and wealthy men like George Wythe and St. George Tucker, as well as merchants who acted as both consumers and producers of goods, and it needed the manufactures of many different trades, from cabinetmaking to apothecary to coachmaking, in order to function properly in the social and economic climate.

*The Textile Trades in Post-Revolutionary Williamsburg: A Material Cultural Case Study*

To solidify this image of Williamsburg's material culture after the Revolution as not unlike its predecessor, the case study of the textile trades in the city traced in the previous chapters shall again be examined. Kate Haulman describes post-Revolutionary fashion as “a form of power politics with consequences for the relationship between state and society, linking the personal and the political in ways that characterized the debates of the 1780s.”<sup>191</sup> With Americans “observing that independence had not resulted in a clean break” culturally, some argued that political transformation through an independence in dress could create balances between fashion and taste and between social station and republican displays of freedom and equality that were necessary for the validation of the new republic.<sup>192</sup> Similar to the changes in the regional production of goods in the states, which emphasized a distinctly American view of material culture, an American spin on fashionable forms began to develop in the 1780s and 1790s and into the early nineteenth century. Short gowns in bright colors, polonaise gowns, and the false rump combined the rural and urban elements of American culture and everyday lifestyle, although these changes “appeared ungentle to foreign observers” who sought to challenge the new country's sovereignty.<sup>193</sup> Despite the increasing regionalism in fashion in the United States, “American desire for and dependence on imported manufactures meant that

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<sup>191</sup> Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion*, 180.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

Britain could set whatever terms it wanted for the commercial relationship, shutting its own ports to American products while exporting great quantities of goods.”<sup>194</sup> Americans had to juggle their desires for luxury textiles with their need to display an economically independent America through the politics of fashion. In particular, fashion still represented the political choices of consumers as it had done a decade before, for clothing choices made by Federalists and Antifederalists showed that “domestic goods could be fashionable;” George Washington wore a domestic suit to his inauguration in 1789.<sup>195</sup> By attempting to discourage consumer habits that overstressed the importance of foreign goods, the textile trades and the import duties instated with Tariff of 1789 encouraged labor and industry in the late eighteenth century, especially as the quality of homespun textiles needed to improve in order to compete with their foreign counterparts. As Haulman concludes, “fashion was citizenship’s corset: a hidden but foundational device that underpinned the figurative garb of democracy and equality.”<sup>196</sup> From a material cultural perspective, the desire for fashionable goods to represent social status, economic stability, and political stance was not dead at the end of the long eighteenth century in the once-capital of Virginia.

Milliners, tailors, and mantuamakers maintained the responsibility for managing the textile and fashion trades in Williamsburg after the Revolution. Both Margaret Hunter and her sister Jane Hunter Charlton carried their businesses into the new republic. Although Jane no longer advertised in the *Virginia Gazette* after 1775, when she intended to leave for London at the eve of the American Revolution, her accounts suggest she was in business between 1778 and

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 225.

1799 with Edward as her partner.<sup>197</sup> Margaret, on the other hand, did not advertise again until 1780, expressing that she still practiced millinery on commission and had “an elegant assortment of the most beautiful calico and chintz patterns, black and white gauze, [and a] small quantity of the best soap” at her store.<sup>198</sup> Her last advertisement appeared in the *Gazette* on March 8, 1787, in which she declared that she was selling a “valuable negro woman” who was “a good washer, ironer and clear starcher, an excellent pastry cook, and is capable of all kinds of household business” and her daughter.<sup>199</sup> This advertisement stresses the role that enslaved women played in the textile trades, as discussed previously in terms of the race and gender demographics in Williamsburg, but it also highlights the relative economic success that Margaret Hunter had in her lifetime to own slaves even after the Revolution as a tradeswoman.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to examine her continued impact on the Williamsburg community, as she died only a few months after the advertisement was placed. On October 8, 1787, Edward Charlton announced in the paper that he would serve as the executor of her will, selling the brick house on her property that had served as her millinery shop as well as two enslaved women and their six children, one of whom was the same woman advertised for sale only months before.<sup>200</sup> The number of slaves listed here amplifies the previous assertion, indicating that Margaret continued to maintain a business that was able to support a comfortable lifestyle even after the capital moved to Richmond with the high demand still present for textiles and fashionable goods. After Edward’s death in 1792, Margaret’s goods and property transferred to Jane, who bought her sister’s house in 1795.<sup>201</sup> She carried on her millinery business until her

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<sup>197</sup> Cabell, “Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg,” 103.

<sup>198</sup> Qtd. in Cabell, “Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg,” 108.

<sup>199</sup> *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, 28 Feb. 1787 [Nicolson].

<sup>200</sup> *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, 8 Oct. 1787 [Nicolson].

<sup>201</sup> Cabell, “Women Merchants and Milliners in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg,” 111.

death in 1802, and with an estate valued at \$6955.59,<sup>202</sup> she, too, clearly experienced economic stability in the trade in the post-war period and into the early nineteenth century. In her will, Jane left relatively large monetary gifts to the members of her and Edward's families, and freed several of her slaves, further emphasizing the continued success she found in the trade.<sup>203</sup> Although the *Gazette* advertisements for these milliners dwindle in the 1780s and 1790s, their influence on the material culture of Williamsburg did not, particularly as the textile trades remained an important language of goods in the city after the capital moved to Richmond. Williamsburg residents still wanted to present themselves as fashionable and genteel members of society in the new republic, and the Hunter sisters sought to meet that quotient, and this case study of the textile trades reveals the continuity in consumer desire that linked pre-Revolutionary, Revolutionary, and post-Revolutionary Williamsburg.

### Conclusion

Although the study of the history of Williamsburg has often stopped with the Virginia capital's transference to Richmond in April of 1780, the consumers and producers in the former capital helped to sustain the distinct material culture that had developed in the consumer revolution and extend it into the next century. This did require adaptation, as new American preferences of economic independence from Western Europe required the development of a larger manufacturing industry in the United States. Williamsburg's material culture did not, however, differ so greatly as to reject the consumer choices that necessitated a preponderance of luxury and genteel goods in the area. A significant population remained in the city to manufacture and purchase furniture, medicine, household items, and textiles, with both men and

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>203</sup> Will of Jane Charlton, Robinson Family Papers, 1732-1921, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

women, enslaved and free, participating in the market. The artisans that had helped to develop a regional distinctiveness to Williamsburg's material culture in the preceding decades, a culture that had been based mainly on Williamsburg's economic, social, and political influence as the capital of a powerful Southern colony, still remained at the forefront as the preservers of that culture after the city lost its status as a capital. Williamsburg still held onto its influence as a genteel center, and these tradesmen, tradeswomen, and shopkeepers used their skills to provide goods that kept the city full of life. As American material culture became more distinct from that of its European counterparts, Williamsburg's individual interpretation of gentility through consumption continued to hold weight long after it lost its political title.

## Conclusion

“Some Observers have held that, with the Passing of the War, Williamsburg fell into a Sleep; while Others have protested that it was not a Sleep, but a Soliloquy (which is a Talking to one’s Self). The Population fell away; for many of the Tradesmen now followed the Government to Richmond.”<sup>204</sup>

The assertion espoused by Reverend Dr. William Archer Rutherford Goodwin and presented above has remained the general consensus in scholarship of post-Revolutionary Williamsburg for much of the last century. Scholars have continued to perpetuate a narrative of Williamsburg that denies any political, social, economic, or material cultural influence after the period in which served as the capital of Virginia. In particular, this view of the eighteenth-century city is one that supports the idea of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, of which Goodwin helped to found with John D. Rockefeller, Jr., as the savior of this historical place and historical moment. After its completion, Goodwin describes this mission to create Colonial Williamsburg after its completion as an endeavor that allowed a “City which in the Year 1926 looked forward to a Future of little Promise” to instead shift backward “into the Protection of a Past which in the Annals of American History is unexcelled.”<sup>205</sup> While Colonial Williamsburg has without question encouraged foundational scholarship of the eighteenth-century city, its efforts to freeze Williamsburg in the 1770s as the “Revolutionary City” seek to validate the concept of the “sleeping” or “disappeared” city with few events or cultural productions of importance between April 18, 1780 and late 1927.

This thesis has argued that this presentation neglects the persistent material cultural efforts in Williamsburg at the end of the long eighteenth century and extending well into the

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<sup>204</sup> William A. R. Goodwin, *A Brief & True Report Concerning Williamsburg in Virginia: Being an Account of the most important Occurrences in that Place from its first Beginning to the present Time* (Richmond, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940), 83.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

nineteenth century, denying the existence of its growth reaching beyond that of the colonial period, a growth that gives the city greater importance in the American historical narrative. Instead, it has proposed a study of Williamsburg that traces its material cultural developments before, during, and after the American Revolution in order to stress adaptation rather than stagnation of its growth, beginning with the consumer revolution and ending with economic changes that characterized the new republic at the turn of the nineteenth century. Following a case study of the textile trades in each chapter in order to emphasize consumer continuity, this thesis seeks to identify the city of Williamsburg as an influential cultural center even after the loss of the capital.

The development of the city of Williamsburg from its founding in 1699 to the eve of the American Revolution involves the growth of an entertainment and dining culture through the consumer revolution that necessitated vast numbers of luxury goods; this created social mobility and gentility for colonial Virginians. As textiles comprised the largest proportion of these goods, the case study of these goods and the tradesmen and tradeswomen that handled them in the city emphasized the cultural and social power of Williamsburg as represented through its economic culture at the eve of the Revolution. These elements created a distinct material culture that distinguished Williamsburg as an influential colonial capital in the South, and by the extension of its political power, the colonies as a whole. After the Revolution began, this material culture adapted to reflect the needs of a colony at war, with tradespeople shifting their focus from commercial work to public work in order to clothe and arm colonial soldiers, but the culture did not dissipate with the conflict.

Once the Virginian capital moved to Richmond in 1780 and the war ended, Williamsburg and its residents faced the challenge of maintaining the city's material cultural influence without

the benefits of consumption from visitors to the colonial capital that the city had once received. With the help of population that remained in the city to support cultural and economic endeavors, which included both prominent and middling citizens, Williamsburg held on to its genteel status. Tradesmen and tradeswomen in the city kept up their businesses in order to meet the consumer demands of the new state, returning to a regional perspective on materialism that represented both the history and future of the sociability found in Williamsburg. As textiles remained the most popular good at the close of the eighteenth century in Williamsburg, the post-1780 material culture in Williamsburg represents an extension of its pre-Revolutionary counterpart, one in which fashionability and gentility are both important and achievable in social and economic terms.

In conclusion, Williamsburg's social, cultural, economic, and material influence did not disappear with its political power in 1780. As a city with a rich history of influence in the colonial world, Williamsburg remained in cultural memory as a center of gentility and sociability. Its residents continued to produce, provide, and purchase raw and finished goods that connected the community with the rest of the new republic and its ideals of economic independence from Western Europe, and in particular, Great Britain. As a result, Williamsburg should be studied in its full historical context from its founding in 1699 to the present day as a city with a layered social, cultural, and economic culture, rather than solely in terms of its period as the "Revolutionary City" or its role as an influential research institution and history museum under the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Its complex material cultural narrative, constructed throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, warrants a second look.

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