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## Southern routes: Family migration and the eighteenth-century southern backcountry

Creston S. Long  
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**SOUTHERN ROUTES: FAMILY MIGRATION AND  
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY**

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**A Dissertation**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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**by**


**Creston S. Long III**

**2002**

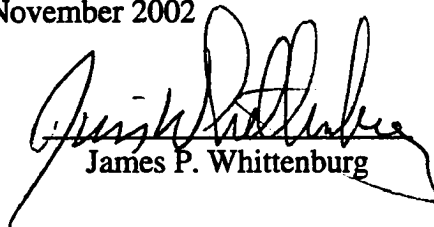
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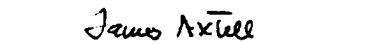
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the requirements for the degree of


Doctor of Philosophy


  
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**For Caroline, Thomas, and Anna**  
*My family*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ABSTRACT	ix
INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER I. MIGRATION TO THE SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY: THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE REGION	6
CHAPTER II. EXPERIENCES ON THE ROAD	21
CHAPTER III. SCOUTING OUT THE LAND: THE JOURNEY OF JAMES AULD	61
CHAPTER IV. LAND AND MIGRATION	99
CHAPTER V. ACROSS THE MILES: NETWORKS OF KITH AND KIN	145
CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE: THE EXPANSION OF THE SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY	180
APPENDIX. THE SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY: THEMES FROM THE RECENT LITERATURE	191
BIBLIOGRAPHY	210
VITA	222

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While traveling to these various repositories a number of friends graciously opened up their homes to me. Doug and Sheila Sweeney in Bryn Mawr, Page Turney in Alexandria, and Bryan Newman in Richmond all gave me a place to rest and more importantly they provided hours of enjoyable de-stressing time as I traced the steps of my subject migrants. When I was outside of my network of kith and kin, money from several William and Mary summer research grants greatly helped me during my visits to the North Carolina backcountry. On the issue of funding, without the generous support from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in the form of apprenticeships and assistantships, my graduate experience would have been virtually impossible.

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think in new ways. My graduate experience would have not have been as rich without the contact I had with these fellow students.

Jim Whittenburg has been my mentor, advocate, and friend throughout the years on this project. Although we shared an interest in the North Carolina Regulators, he suggested I pursue a study of the migration to the backcountry when I first arrived at William and Mary. His suggestions about possible sources and avenues of inquiry informed virtually every aspect of this work. I did not get to spend as much time in Williamsburg working with Professor Whittenburg as I would have liked. But I will always be grateful for his willingness to direct this project from afar, and I truly appreciate our many meetings over coffee and Indian food as I swept through town on numerous research trips.

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Migrants from Augusta County, Virginia: Land Transactions and Destinations	117
2. Migrants from Brunswick County, Virginia: Landownership and Destinations within North Carolina	135

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Map of Valley of Virginia	14
2. Map of river systems of North Carolina	19
3. Fry-Jefferson Map	31
4. Map of James Auld's route from Maryland to North Carolina	68
5. Pungoteague Tavern	74
6. Davidson's Creek and Fourth Creek settlements in the Catawba River valley	122
7. Map of Rowan and Mecklenburg counties in North Carolina	125
8. Patents in the Yadkin River valley section of the Granville District	142

## ABSTRACT

In the early 1730s, small groups of settlers started moving into the Valley of Virginia, beginning the movement into the southern backcountry. By the late 1740s Scots-Irish, English, and German settlers pressed into North Carolina's western Piedmont, and the small trickle of migrants quickly turned into a flood which persisted for the next three decades. This is a study of mid-eighteenth-century migration to the backcountry South.

The purpose of this study is to describe the process of eighteenth-century southern backcountry migration and to determine migrants' underlying motivations and considerations as they went about this process. It explores the experiences of settlers who migrated to the Valley of Virginia and North Carolina's western Piedmont from the late 1740s through the early 1770s.

To describe the process of migration, including means of transportation, routes of travel, and the practices of provisioning and seeking accommodations, this study relies on travel accounts written by migrants, as well as the journals of merchants, missionaries, and itinerant ministers. All of these travelers went through approximately the same process of visiting ordinaries, seeking meals, and encountering others along the way. For migrant families, the journey required considerable planning. Families with ample financial resources often sent someone ahead to investigate opportunities to acquire land and determine a safe, convenient route. Along the way, travelers encountered numerous public houses, but they also relied on roadside residents who opened up their private homes, offering shelter and food.

For many migrants, the opportunity to acquire more land was a primary motive for moving. An analysis of land records from several source areas indicates several patterns involving the migrants. Landowners and non-landowners alike moved to the North Carolina backcountry from southeastern Pennsylvania, Southside Virginia, and the Valley of Virginia. Migrants tended to settle in areas where there were other people from similar backgrounds, and in some cases, from the same former neighborhoods. Settling near relatives and associates provided migrants a sense of stability and familiarity as they attempted to recast their lives in the backcountry South.

**SOUTHERN ROUTES: FAMILY MIGRATION  
AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY**

## INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the early decades of the eighteenth century, settlers started moving to the lands of the southern backcountry. In the first years of this migration, people settled in the Virginia Piedmont and in central Maryland. By the 1730s, the focus had switched to the rich lands of the Valley of Virginia, and as the mid-century mark approached, focus had once again shifted to the Piedmont of North Carolina. By the beginning of the American Revolution, there were approximately 81,000 people in the backcountry counties of North Carolina, while there were about 35,000 people in the Valley of Virginia. These numbers are much smaller than the 250,000 to 500,000 people that migrated to the Pacific coast between the 1840s and the 1870s. Yet the people who journeyed to the eighteenth-century backcountry South undertook the first large overland migration in American history. <sup>1</sup>

This is a study of the process involved in the various steps of the migration.

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<sup>1</sup> Stella Sutherland, *Population Distribution in Colonial America* (New York: AMS Press, 1966 [1936]), 212; Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 238; John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 11.

Since the eighteenth-century migration to the southern backcountry was primarily a movement of families, I focus on the daily challenges families encountered when traveling through the colonial backcountry and attempt to explain how these families built new lives. Underlying the entire work is the question of motivation: Why did migrants decide to abandon their former homes and neighborhoods for lives in the southern backcountry, and was this an easy decision to make? To answer these questions, I examine a number of factors, including economic conditions in the source areas of the migration and the efforts that prospective migrants took to understand what the backcountry might have to offer. I also provide an extended analysis of the human relationships that facilitated the migration for many settlers.

Chapter One provides a brief overview of the geography of the southern backcountry, introducing the backcountry insofar as eighteenth-century migrants experienced the region. The next two chapters, “Experiences on the Road” and “Scouting out the Land: The Journey of James Auld,” examine the physical experience of traveling to the backcountry South. The first of these chapters provides an overview of the challenges that migrants faced on an everyday basis. It describes a number of routes that southern backcountry migrants traveled to their destinations, and it addresses the problems they encountered along the way. It was a daunting task to transport a family across hundreds of miles, worrying about shelter, food, encounters with other people, and the general uncertainty of the route. This chapter is an attempt to capture the experience in general terms. Chapter Three, on the other hand, takes an in-depth look at the journey of one backcountry migrant who was exceptional only because he recorded his experiences in a journal. James Auld, a Dorchester County,

Maryland official, chronicled his many encounters with ordinary keepers and fellow travelers as he made his way to Halifax, North Carolina. This chapter assesses Auld's daily interactions, his perceptions of the landscape, and the relationships that he relied upon to facilitate his family's migration to the backcountry.

Chapter Four focuses on the economic conditions in three primary source areas for the migration: southeastern Pennsylvania, the Valley of Virginia, and Virginia's Southside. It includes an evaluation of the quantity of land that some migrants owned in their old homes, and it assesses possible motivations behind the migrants' decision to move. In many cases, migrants to the southern backcountry disposed of considerable tracts of land in their old communities or neighborhoods before and after they migrated. As these settlers perceived an opportunity to improve their lives by migrating elsewhere, the issue of motivation becomes more complicated because many of them appear to have enjoyed economic stability in their former homes.

The fifth chapter relies on evidence from correspondence between family members in southeastern Pennsylvania, Frederick County, Virginia, and Rowan County, North Carolina. These letters convey the extent to which families relied on the help of others who had preceded them. Families did their best to re-create and perpetuate networks of friendship and extended family in their new backcountry homes. To do this they maintained as much contact with their distant relatives as was possible, and they actively encouraged others to follow in their tracks. By the time some families migrated to the backcountry, many of their associates had already settled there.

In this study, I assess an event that was life-altering for thousands of early American families. Most migrants moved because of economic reasons; the perceived opportunity of acquiring more land and building better lives was central to the decision-making process. Once settlers decided to move into the western reaches of Virginia and North Carolina and later into Kentucky and Tennessee, they selected and transplanted elements of the societies they had abandoned. During this process of selection, migrants determined where they wanted to migrate and how they wanted to structure their lives there. More often than not, the structure that migrants chose was provided by the contours of networks of friends and relatives who shared a common background. As the first phase of American expansion, the migration to the eighteenth-century southern backcountry represented an opportunity for families to seek more social and economic stability, while maintaining the familiarity of their former lives.



## CHAPTER I

### MIGRATION TO THE SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY: THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE REGION

A precise definition of the southern backcountry, one encapsulating its geographic extent as well as its social composition, has eluded historians. Part of the reason for the lack of a coherent definition is the dynamic nature of the place itself. The southern backcountry comprised different areas during different phases of the colonial period. As one portion of the backcountry became more densely settled and grew closer in economic and social terms to the areas of earlier settlement, it became transformed into an extension of the older society. For instance, by the middle of the eighteenth century, portions of the Virginia Piedmont, with its growing slave population and its adoption of tobacco cultivation, closely resembled the older Tidewater area.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, regions such as the Valley of Virginia or the North

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<sup>1</sup> See Philip Morgan, "Slave Life in Piedmont Virginia, 1720-1800," in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, ed. Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 433-84; Allen Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 52-54. The term backcountry has a number of interpretational biases in its own right. Turk McCleskey points out that "backcountry...is strongly ethnocentric: South Carolina's backcountry was Cherokee frontcountry." "Across the First Divide

Carolina Piedmont exhibited a number of characteristics that clearly distinguished these areas as “backcountry.” Distance from the colonial seats of power and from the principal economic centers of the coastal regions kept both of the regions relatively isolated through much of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Geography is a key factor in the definition and description of the region. At the beginning of Rachel Klein’s study of the transformation of South Carolina’s backcountry elite in the revolutionary and federal periods, she defined the backcountry as a combination of political and geographical characteristics. For Klein the backcountry included the inland parishes that endured under-representation in the South Carolina Assembly until the Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Daniel Thorp accords geographic

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Frontiers of Settlement and Culture in Augusta County Virginia, 1738-1770” (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1990), 28 n. 34. See also, Robert Mitchell, “The Southern Backcountry: A Geographical House Divided,” in *The Southern Colonial Backcountry: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Frontier Communities*, ed. David Colin Crass et al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> A key term here is *relative*. The Valley of Virginia and the region comprising the North Carolina Piedmont counties had strong ties with the coastal economies of their respective colonies. A developing, albeit crude, transportation network allowed farmers to market staple crops to eastern population centers and, in turn, enabled the flow of consumer goods to backcountry taverns and stores. Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier, Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 189-93; Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 143-45. See Daniel Thorp, “Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 48 (July 1991), 387-408; Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 58-60.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 7.

dispersion a vital role in the social dynamics of Rowan County, North Carolina.

Communities in Rowan lived far enough away from each other that they were able to maintain a degree of their own identity, but at the same time the distance did not impose barriers to economic interaction. <sup>4</sup> Thorp describes a situation in which geographical dispersal profoundly influenced backcountry society. Because of the importance of geography in understanding what the backcountry was, what follows is an overview of the physical and social geography of the region as it pertains to this study.

The southern backcountry in terms of political geography extends from western Maryland southward to the upcountry of South Carolina, incorporating the area that Carl Bridenbaugh defined as a distinct region in his 1953 study of the South, *Myths and Realities*. Bridenbaugh's contention that the region exhibited a unified and cohesive set of social, economic, and political characteristics has been challenged by more recent studies of backcountry areas. It is now fair to say that a number of historians have revealed that different sections of the backcountry exhibited diverse political and social characteristics. Along with Daniel Thorp and his observations about the Moravians, others have demonstrated that diversity itself, rather than any particular political or social characteristics, distinguished and "unified" the backcountry as a region.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Thorp, *The Moravian Community in Colonial North Carolina: Pluralism on the Southern Frontier* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 178-201.

The physical geography of the region varies greatly from central Maryland to Virginia's Southside and on southwards to the Carolina Piedmont. Migrants following the interwoven system of trails that came to be called the Great Wagon Road, passed through a landscape that alternated between rolling plains and mountain peaks, all divided by hundreds of creeks and a dozen or so significant rivers. Setting out from the vicinity of Philadelphia, migrants crossed over the relatively gentle hills of Chester and Lancaster counties toward South Mountain, the northern extension of the Blue Ridge Mountain range to the south in Maryland and Virginia. The major river that migrants or traders forded as they crossed southern Pennsylvania was the Susquehanna, about seventy-five miles west of Philadelphia. Unlike many rivers in the middle colonies, the Susquehanna provided Pennsylvania and Maryland settlers little in the way of opportunity for transportation or trade. Although a handful of backcountry towns such as Wright's Ferry grew up along its banks by the mid-eighteenth century, it was not until the last quarter of the century that flatboat pilots began to navigate the lower river with any success.<sup>5</sup> Considering the exceptional width of the Susquehanna, almost five miles near its mouth, and that it emptied into the northern Chesapeake Bay rather than the Delaware Bay near the Philadelphia markets, the Susquehanna presented more of a challenge than an opportunity to most eighteenth-century travelers and merchants.

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<sup>5</sup> Willis L. Shirk Jr., "Wright's Ferry: A Glimpse into the Susquehanna Backcountry," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 120 (Jan/April 1996): 61-87; John F. Walzer, "Colonial Philadelphia and Its Backcountry," *Winterthur Portfolio* No. 7 (1971): 166; Amos W. Long, "An Overview of Travel and Transportation in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Folklife* 39 (1989): 2.

As migrants crossed from Pennsylvania into central or western Maryland the topography hardly changed. Indeed the boundary between the two colonies was political rather than topographical, and it would remain a source of contention between the two colonies until the eve of the Revolution. East of the Blue Ridge, the Maryland hill country increased in altitude from the fall line town of Baltimore, which was only in its infant stage of development in the mid-eighteenth century, to the westernmost county of Frederick, which was established in 1748 out of older Prince George's County. In the region between the fall-line in Baltimore County and the Monocacy River was an area commonly referred to as the Barren Hills or Barren Mountains, or simply as the Barrens. As the name suggests, this part of Maryland displayed sparse forest cover, attracting some settlers while deterring others who associated the Barrens with poor prospects for agricultural production.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the overland route that backcountry migrants traveled from Pennsylvania through Maryland, when they entered Virginia they faced the challenge of crossing the Potomac River at one of the established ferry crossings or, for those who were more daring or simply lost, at any shallow ford. There were a number of ferries in operation on the Potomac in the mid-eighteenth century, some sanctioned by the colonial legislature in Williamsburg as vital transportation links and countless others that operated unofficially. Above Alexandria, or Belle Haven as it was called by its Scottish founders, the Potomac's falls marked a significant narrowing of the river. Most migrants traveling from points in central and northeastern Maryland and

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<sup>6</sup> Frank W. Porter III, "From Backcountry to County: The Delayed Settlement of Western Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 70 (Winter 1975): 336-37.

from southeastern Pennsylvania crossed the Potomac at points above Alexandria. Despite the magnitude of the Potomac there is no indication in travel accounts that it presented too great of an obstacle to migrants, travelers, or merchants.<sup>7</sup>

The upper Piedmont of Virginia, much like central Maryland and southeastern Pennsylvania, had a gentle, rolling landscape of hills and rivers, punctuated by occasional rapids. The northern Piedmont counties of Fairfax, Loudon, and Spotsylvania rather quickly were linked to the Tidewater economy, yet their geographic distance from Chesapeake Bay and their later settlement phase prevented a full integration into the tobacco economy of the coastal towns. This region fell within the Northern Neck proprietary of Lord Thomas Fairfax. Since the late 1720s, Fairfax's land agent Robert "King" Carter oversaw patents of land in the Northern Neck. Carter's tendency to convey lands to friends and relatives from the coastal area enhanced the upper Piedmont's ties with the Tidewater's economy and society. At the same time, a number of entanglements with the colonial government in Williamsburg regarding title to land within the proprietary led to a degree of confusion among settlers. As a result, settlement in the northern Piedmont's rolling hill country did not proceed as quickly as it might have.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For accounts of easy Potomac crossings, see Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements of in North America in the Years 1759-1760* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), 46; "Travel Diary of Bishop Reichel, Mrs. Reichel, and their Company from Lititz, Pa., to Salem, N.C., 1780," in Newton D. Mereness, ed. *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1961), 591.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 29-31.

The Valley of Virginia, a portion of the Great Valley of the Appalachians extending southwestward from Pennsylvania, offered the primary avenue for settlers and travelers heading toward western North Carolina or southwest Virginia. From the Potomac River to the Natural Bridge, about eleven miles south of present-day Lexington, the Valley is about 180 miles long. Its width varies from almost thirty miles in the northern or lower Valley to fewer than ten miles at Lexington, where it begins tapering rapidly to a point where it loses its definition as a valley about twelve miles to the southwest.<sup>9</sup> The Blue Ridge Mountains, stretching from central Pennsylvania through western North Carolina, form the eastern wall of the Valley. On the western side of the Valley run several ridges, most notably Great North Mountain and Little North Mountain, which constitute the easternmost portion of the Allegheny Mountain range. A smaller ridge, Massanutten Mountain, stretching about fifty miles in length, divides the upper-central portion of the Valley. The height of the Blue Ridge increases from approximately 3,000 feet above sea level in the northern portion of the Valley to almost 4,000 feet near its southern terminus. The mountains to the west rise from 2,000 feet above sea level in the northern Valley to about 3,000 feet in the south.<sup>10</sup>

Three river systems drain the Valley of Virginia: the Potomac, the Shenandoah, and the James. Back and Opequon creeks, both tributaries of the

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<sup>9</sup> Because the Shenandoah River flows in a northerly direction, the northern end of the Valley is referred to as the lower section, while southern end is the upper Valley.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 8, 21, 25. See also Freeman H. Hart, *The Valley of Virginia in the American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1971 [1942]), 3-5.

Potomac, extend approximately forty five miles south into the northernmost portion of the Valley. The Shenandoah River flows into the Potomac at present-day Harper's Ferry. Before this point of confluence, the Shenandoah splits into two branches at the northern end of Massanutten Mountain. Its primary tributaries, Cedar, Linville, Mossy, and Smith's creeks, along with the North and Middle rivers, drain the northern two-thirds of the Valley. The primary river toward the southern end of the Valley of Virginia is the James. Over two hundred miles from its mouth in Chesapeake Bay, the James originates from several smaller rivers and creeks in the upper Valley. The Calfpasture River, along with the North and South rivers and Buffalo Creek, join together in the James River at the western base of the Blue Ridge less than ten miles southeast of Lexington. The James River gap allows the waters to escape to Virginia's Piedmont and Tidewater regions.<sup>11</sup> (See map below.)

The vegetation of the Valley consisted of varied stretches of hardwoods and pines to areas of grassland. The most prominent type of tree was the white oak, followed by smaller numbers of red and black oaks, hickories, chestnuts, and walnuts. Settlers found significant stands of pine along the slopes of Massanutten and the Blue Ridge. The growing season in the lower Valley was about 180 days long, while in the higher elevations in the upper Valley the growing season was only some 165 days. Early settlers in the upper Valley adopted crops that were suitable to the shorter growing seasons and the soil types. Wheat, rye, corn, and flax were the predominant

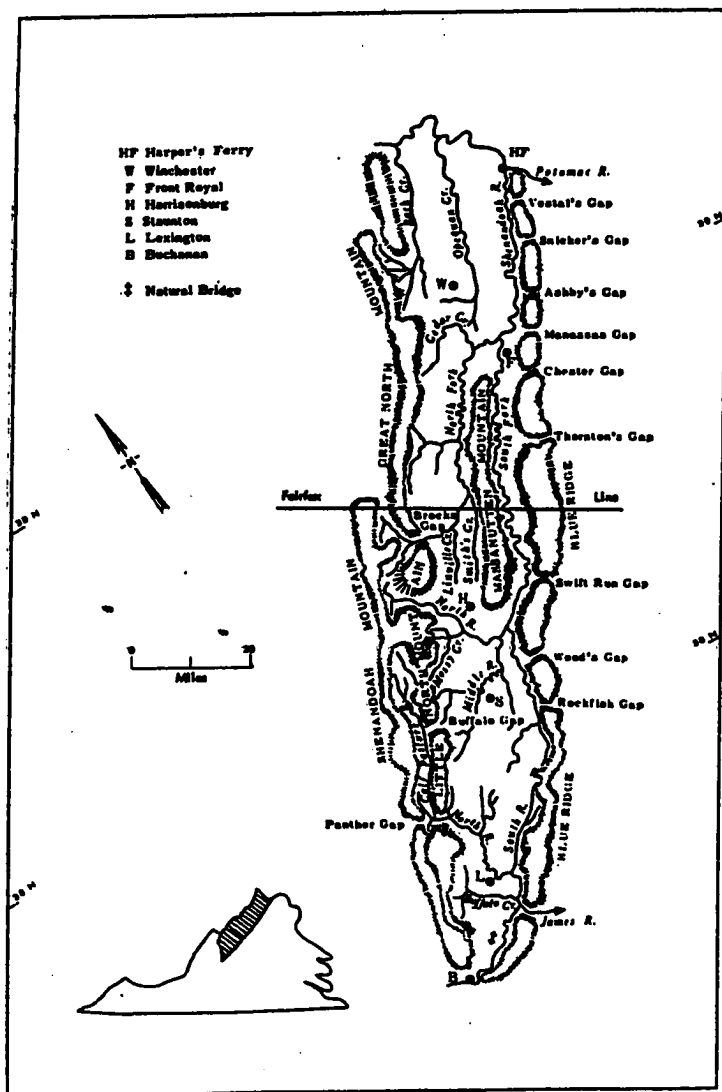
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<sup>11</sup> See map in Robert Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 20.



FIGURE 1.

VALLEY OF VIRGINIA



Reprinted from Robert Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 20.

Crops, while a smaller number of planters grew oats, barley, and tobacco. By the 1760s hemp production had also become one of the primary Valley commodities.<sup>12</sup>

East of the Blue Ridge Mountains was the Virginia Piedmont, with its southern portion comprising the south side of the James River, a region known simply as the “Southside.” The Southside covered about 8,000 square miles of mostly rolling hills and gentle topographical relief. In the eastern section, in the vicinity of Brunswick and Amelia counties, the elevation was a slight 150 feet above sea level along the streams and creeks, while the highest hills peaked around 270 feet. Migrants, merchants or wagoners heading due west across the Southside found a steadily increasing elevation ranging between 300 and 600 feet in the central counties of Lunenburg to around 600-900 feet in the foothills of the Blue Ridge.<sup>13</sup>

The Southside was drained by a series of rivers, most of which flowed south to the colony of North Carolina. The Dan and Staunton rivers flow together in the central portion of the Southside to form the Roanoke River, which flows southeastward toward the fall-line town of Halifax, North Carolina. The Roanoke then proceeds to North Carolina’s Albemarle Sound, parallel to the Chowan River which comprises the confluent currents of the Meherrin and Nottoway Rivers. All of these waterways, along with the Blackwater River, drain the southern portions of the Southside. In the

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 22-24; Turk McCleskey, “Across the First Divide,” 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> Charles J. Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns: Settlement and Country Trade in Southside Virginia, 1730-1800*, Geographical Perspectives on the Human Past (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), 11-12.

more northerly sections of the region, the Appomattox River flows into the James slightly east of the fall-line town of Petersburg, Virginia.

Although settlers throughout Virginia's Southside had access to these rivers and their tributaries, the locations of the falls hindered the development of the region. Because the fall zone was located in the eastern portion of the region, much of the Southside experienced a greater sense of isolation from the Tidewater Virginia economy, and it was more time consuming and expensive to transport commodities past the fall line towns to the markets of Chesapeake Bay. That the major river system in the southern part of the region, the Roanoke, drained into the shallow North Carolina sounds further divided the region, leading to a landscape of sparse, poorly connected settlements.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the Southside was attractive to many settlers from Tidewater because of a perception that its soils were generally rich and its population thin. Soil testing in the Southside indicates that the area in the eighteenth century was probably less fertile than other portions of the southern backcountry. However, comparing the worn-out soils of the Chesapeake watershed, depleted by decades of tobacco and corn production, newcomers thought the soils of the Southside would be exceptionally productive. The process of crop rotation for the sake of repairing depleted fields had driven many smaller land-holders from the Tidewater to seek new land elsewhere.

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<sup>14</sup> Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns*, 29.

With a long two hundred-day growing season, mild winters, and ample rainfall, the Southside was appealing to many.<sup>15</sup>

South of the Southside and the Valley of Virginia was Piedmont North Carolina, the destination for thousands of settlers in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. The region extended from the fall-line towns of Halifax, Cambelltown, and Cross Creek to the foothills below the Blue Ridge Mountains. The elevations of the Piedmont rise between five hundred and one thousand feet above sea level. A migrant passing across the border from Virginia's Southside would not have perceived any major topographical differences between the two regions. Most of the Piedmont is distinguished by a gently rolling surface punctuated by several small and ancient mountain ranges closer to the Blue Ridge. In the foothills of the Blue Ridge, Virginia pine is predominant, while shortleaf pines provided the canopy over much of the central Piedmont. The rich bottomlands of the region were lined with a mixture of hardwoods, including oaks and hickories. Travelers, government officials, and naturalists in the eighteenth century almost universally recognized the superior resources of the interior sections of North Carolina. Compared with the swampy expanses of the eastern coast plain, the Piedmont appeared to offer the best prospects

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<sup>15</sup> Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns*, 31-32; the movement of settlers from the Tidewater to the Southside was part of the process identified and outlined by Darrett B. and Anita H Rutman in *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 185, 238-40.

for new settlers looking for land with sufficient resources to establish farms and new lives.<sup>16</sup>

Six rivers provide primary drainage for the North Carolina Piedmont. (See map below.) The westernmost Catawba originates near the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains and flows in an easterly direction before heading almost due south, near the site of present-day Charlotte, and on into South Carolina. The Yadkin River flows southeasterly just west of the early Moravian settlements of Bethabara and Bethania, and it continues to meander east of Salisbury towards its point of confluence with the smaller Uwharrie River. As the Yadkin descends into South Carolina, its name changes to Pee Dee. Further east, draining the central Piedmont is the Cape Fear River, named for the geographic location where it empties into the Atlantic near the border between North and South Carolina. The Neuse and Tar rivers proceed in a more easterly direction, with their headwaters in the vicinity of Chapel Hill, Raleigh, and Durham. It was along the forks of the Catawba and Yadkin in the west that the earliest backcountry settlers established their new households.<sup>17</sup>

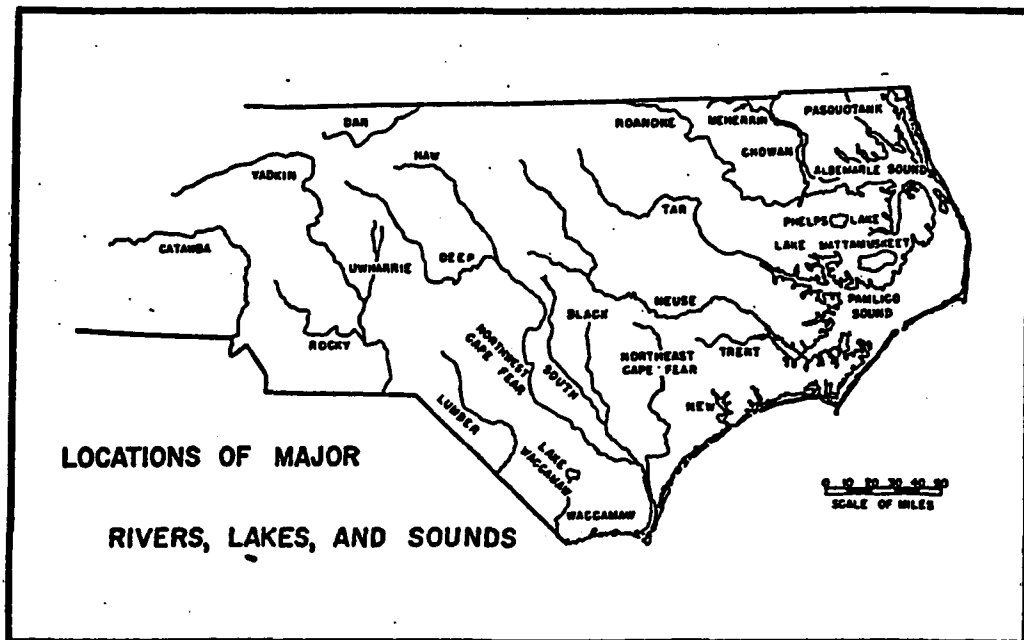
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<sup>16</sup> Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 41, 47-48.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 32, 36, 45 See also Christopher Hendricks, "Town Development in the Colonial Backcountry-Virginia and North Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1991), 21.

FIGURE 2.

## RIVER SYSTEMS OF NORTH CAROLINA



Several major rivers drained the North Carolina Piedmont. As early backcountry settlers began to occupy the land in the late 1740s, they often sought tracts along the smaller tributaries of rivers. Map reprinted from Harry R. Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 20.

Of the thousands of migrants who traversed some stretch of this region in the mid-eighteenth century on their way to establish new homes, few recorded their thoughts about their journey or observations about the land. Topographical features that some perceived as challenges may have appeared to others as potential sources to exploit for their own fortune. For instance, a wide river on the edge of the Piedmont may have represented an unwelcome obstacle to one family heading southwest, while the head of another family might have seen in the same river a valuable waterway to transport the new crops that he would grow on his new land or the opportunity to establish a lucrative ferry site. In the thousands of cases of migrant families, there were probably as many perceptions of how the features of the land would influence their future. At the same time, each family that migrated through this landscape expected to improve its prospects in some way.

## CHAPTER II

### EXPERIENCES ON THE ROAD

For eighteenth-century families attempting to settle in the southern backcountry, the migration experience comprised daily challenges, constant uncertainty, and a degree of risk. Traveling backcountry roads was rigorous and often confusing; migrants usually faced sloppy and poorly defined roads on a daily basis. Once the travel day was over, families faced the task of setting up camp or seeking out other shelter in a private home, an ordinary, or even alongside the road. While camping near an ordinary or someone's home, migrants took advantage of the opportunity to purchase food or arrange for repairs. All of the people who migrated to the southern backcountry in the mid-eighteenth century shared these experiences. The only real variation in the travel experience was for migrants with above-average wealth. The common, everyday challenges that migrants faced as they made their journey to the southern backcountry defined their experiences on the road.

Few families left behind extensive evidence describing their migration experience. Considering the challenges of such a journey, it is hardly surprising that those settlers who were literate found no time to put quill to paper at the end of the day to record the day's events. Other than a handful of allusions in family correspondence



and several observations by ministers, merchants, military officers, and other officials, there is very little material that directly describes their migration experience. Particular sorts of travelers, however, have left a rich record of their experiences moving through the backcountry. A significant number of Quaker itinerants, land speculators, Moravian missionaries, and soldiers kept journals along their excursions through the Piedmont of Virginia and North Carolina and into the mountains farther to the west.

Although these people, with only a few exceptions, did not intend to settle in the backcountry, their experiences on the road were largely similar to any family that was making the journey for the purpose of settling on new land. Because the reasons behind these travelers' excursions were varied and diverse, their perceptions of their travel may have been significantly different than those of men, women, and children who had abandoned their former homes. The sense of anticipation and perhaps anxiety that the latter group had about building a new life in an unfamiliar place almost certainly colored their perception of the migration experience in a way that individual travel accounts fail to convey. At the same time, these people all traveled the same roads, faced the same uncertainties of which houses to approach for lodging and which to avoid, and came in contact with many of the same people who sold supplies or provided provender for livestock. While individual travel accounts may not reveal what migrating families thought as they traveled, they do offer details about the daily routine of the journey to the backcountry.

Whether a family migrated to Loudon County, Virginia or to Orange County, North Carolina or any of hundreds of points in between, the backcountry migration experience was essentially the same. Regardless of their destination, families faced the

same uncertainties throughout the southern backcountry. The term “backcountry” or “southern backcountry,” then, refers to that region that Carl Bridenbaugh defined in *Myths and Realities*, his classic study of the colonial south. According to Bridenbaugh, the backcountry included Maryland west of Frederick, Virginia west from the upper Piedmont, and the Piedmont of North and South Carolina. This was the same area that Frederick Jackson Turner decades earlier had defined as the southern portion of the Old West, “the interior or upland portion of the South, lying between the Alleghenies and the head of navigation of the Atlantic Rivers marked by the ‘fall line’.” Both historians described the southern backcountry as a region in which political geography mattered very little. Turner claimed, it was a region, “that can be appreciated only by obliterating the state boundaries which conceal its unity...”<sup>1</sup> Since Jackson and Bridenbaugh identified this region a number of historians have identified key differences in the backcountry regions of the southern colonies. In terms of politics, ethnicity and land holding, the eighteenth-century southern backcountry comprised a patchwork of societal and cultural patterns. For instance the political order of Augusta County, Virginia was much more stable than that of the North Carolina Piedmont counties throughout much of the pre-Revolutionary period.<sup>2</sup> As for ethnic diversity, within the Valley of Virginia

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities, Societies of the Colonial South* (New York: Atheneum, 1965 [1952]), 120; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986 [1908]), 68.

<sup>2</sup> For studies of the political, social, and economic institutions in various portions of the backcountry see, Richard Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry, A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); N. Turk McCleskey, “Across the First Divide: Frontiers of Settlement and Culture in Augusta, County, Virginia, 1738-1770” (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1990); Albert Tillson Jr., *Gentry and Commonfolk*,

there were portions that were mostly German while others were predominantly English or Scots-Irish. The North Carolina backcountry also had a blend of predominantly English settlers in Granville County and the eastern portion of Orange County, mostly Scots-Irish in the southwestern district of Rowan and later Mecklenburg Counties, and large areas of German concentrations including the Moravians of Bethabara and Salem.

Despite their social, religious, and ethnic differences, settlers migrating from Pennsylvania, Maryland, or from other portions of the backcountry *experienced* the migration to their new homes in essentially the same fashion. For most if not all settlers, migration to the backcountry represented an opportunity to improve their lives in some way. Migrant families may have had different reasons for moving to one portion of the backcountry rather than to a different region. Some families wished to settle near other families who shared their religion, while others wanted to settle in a place with ample land and natural resources. A family moving from Chester County, Pennsylvania to Winchester, Virginia or one leaving Alexandria, Virginia for Salisbury, North Carolina, both faced similar challenges. Families heading to any part of the backcountry had to obtain provisions, slept in or near ordinaries, and in many cases even traveled the same roads. In this specific sense, it is appropriate to consider the backcountry as a region. It was a region comprising thousands of people who shared a similar migration experience, even though they may have had different reasons for migrating.

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*Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740-1789* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991); Rachel Klein, *Unification of a Slave State, The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

### Preparation for the Journey

Before departing to the southern backcountry, migrants from southeastern Pennsylvania or northeastern Maryland faced the task of planning their journey and packing their belongings. Little has survived in the way of direct evidence from migrants to indicate what exactly this process entailed. There is no extant checklist of items that migrants brought along with them. Most probably packed what they could from their own households or, in the case of landless migrants, their personal belongings onto wagons, horses or other pack animals and set off on one of the many roads to the southwest. As daunting as this task must have been, thousands of migrants who made the 300-400 mile journey from the Philadelphia area to Rowan, Anson, or Mecklenburg counties in North Carolina between the late 1740s and 1775 repeated essentially the same process.

Many families had the advantage of foreknowledge about their destination as they prepared for and anticipated their migration. Most prospective migrants knew at least something about their potential destinations through correspondence with people who had already moved or through word-of-mouth information about the backcountry.<sup>3</sup> There are also numerous examples of family members, usually fathers, making preliminary trip to the backcountry to see what prospects existed before bringing the rest of the family. William Few, a native of Baltimore County, Maryland, remembered his father making such a scouting trip with two of his neighbors. After several crop failures in Baltimore County, the elder Few and his accompanying neighbors traveled about 300

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<sup>3</sup> This sort of information will be examined in detail in chapter five.

miles to Orange County, North Carolina where “they halted in order to explore the country.” Finding the area along the Eno River to be quite pleasing, the Marylanders purchased land there. Few then “employed a man to build a house on his lands, and returned to remove his family.”<sup>4</sup>

For the Few family the process of moving involved disposing of property and goods that were difficult to move and then packing up the rest. In the fall of 1758 they loaded their remaining possessions on “wagon drawn by four horses and ...a cart drawn by two horses.”<sup>5</sup> Also along for the journey were four servants. Among the thousands of backcountry migrants from the period, the Fews represented families of above average financial means. Many settlers who decided to migrate had little or no land to sell before leaving, and not all families were able to spend the money required to send ahead a “scout” such as William Few’s father. At the same time, however, the Fews’ experience suggests some details of preparation that were probably common among most migrants. While it is not certain that most families owned either wagons or carts, it was probably an item that families waited to acquire before they moved. Moving without some sort of vehicle and relying instead on pack horses or simply carrying possessions would have dissuaded many families from migrating.

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<sup>4</sup> “Autobiography of Col. William Few of Georgia, From the Original MS. In the Possession of William Few Christie,” *Magazine of American History* 7 (July-Dec., 1881), 343. William Few Sr. built a mill shortly after he arrived in Orange County in 1758, Orange County Deeds, Book 3, 373, microfilm. William Few later ran into some economic trouble and another one of his sons, James, was one of a handful of the North Carolina Regulators executed by the order of the royal governor, William Tryon. William mentioned the former information but not the latter in his autobiography.

<sup>5</sup> “Autobiography of William Few,” 343.

There were several types of wagons and carts that were prevalent during the mid-eighteenth century. As soon as roads were wide enough and capable of bearing heavy weights, carts and then larger, stronger wagons replaced the use of pack horse trains for moving goods or crops from the hinterland to markets in the Philadelphia area or along the Chesapeake Bay. The early carts and wagons had solid wooden wheels which rotated on wooden axles. The side boards of most wagons rose between six and eight inches above the bed. With the evolution of the famed Conestoga wagon in the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania area, travel loads increased, enabling farmers to carry more crops to market and migrant families to transport more of their goods to new homes. Conestogas were longer and heavier than the earlier wagons, with beds often extending sixteen feet or more. These wagons also had beds that curved upward at the ends and on the sides. This curvature ensured that loads shifted toward the center portion of the wagon, enabling these wagons to cross fairly rugged terrain and making the transportation of goods and people relatively safer. Rising several feet above the bed, six to twelve bows of hickory provided a shell around which travelers fastened a canvas cloth to shelter the contents. The weight of a Conestoga, due to its construction from white oak, required a team of at least four horses.<sup>6</sup> Heavy wagons, however, were not always advantageous. In 1753 when a group of eleven Moravians began their journey to settle the Wachovia tract in North Carolina, they considered leaving behind

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<sup>6</sup> Amos W. Long, "Overview of Travel and Transportation in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Folklife* 39 (1989): 13-14; Michael J. Herrick, "The Conestoga Wagon of Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 51 (1968): 156-15.

their heavy wagon because it was so difficult to manage.<sup>7</sup> Many families would not have been able to be choosy about their transportation, making do with whatever was available to them.

Given the number of horses Few described pulling his family's possessions, the Fewes must have carried a substantial number of items. But it is uncertain what exactly the Fewes or any other migrant family carried with them on their journey. Essentials included clothing, an amount of food that would last for at least a few days and a similar amount of feed for any livestock and some form of shelter. While migrants may have known what to expect during the first few days of the journey when they were still relatively close to home, they often did not know the details of where they would be able to buy feed for their animals or provisions for the family. As for food, cured meat and bread traveled well and could be supplemented with wild game. For shelter, the best item most families could bring along was a canvas tarp that could be made into a tent of sorts.<sup>8</sup> Once these items were assembled, it was a matter of choosing other items that they would need in their new homes, items such as tools, farming implements and cloth. Whatever migrant families selected, they had to be discriminating because the journey ahead usually proved to be a difficult one.

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<sup>7</sup> William J. Hinke and Charles E. Kemper eds., "Diary of the Journey of the First Colony of Single Brethren to North Carolina, October 8- November 17, 1753," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 12 (Oct. 1904): 137.

<sup>8</sup> The Moravians traveling to North Carolina in 1753 were given meat and bread to carry by another Moravian family when they were still in Pennsylvania. They also carried a tent with them which they used on many nights during their journey. "Diary of the Journey of the First Colony of Single Brethren," 136, 139.

### Backcountry Routes and Roads

The most trying experience for any eighteenth-century traveler, whether an itinerant minister or a mother migrating with her young children and elderly parents, was the daily routine on the colonial roads. For people making any leg of the journey to the southern backcountry, road conditions were poor, often treacherous. Travelers experienced varying degrees of difficulty navigating roads from southern Pennsylvania through the Valley and Piedmont of Virginia into western North Carolina. Because the colonies left the maintenance of roads, even the “intercolonial” routes, to individual counties, conditions fluctuated greatly from locality to locality. Poorly marked colonial roads often caused lost migrants to lose hours and even days of valuable travel time.

Several primary routes and dozens of lesser roads allowed people to move throughout the hinterlands of the southern colonies. The most famous of these routes was the Wagon Road from Philadelphia, often called the Great Wagon Road. In 1751 Joshua Fry, a mathematics professor at the College of William and Mary, and Peter Jefferson, a surveyor perhaps better known as the father of the third President, produced the “Map of the most inhabited parts of Virginia.”<sup>9</sup> The original 1751 Fry-Jefferson map delineated the major tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay, outlined colonial boundaries, and represented significant physical features, such as the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountains. Absent from their map, however, were major roads. With the

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Graham Roberts, “The Roads of Virginia, 1607-1840” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1950), 130. The Fry-Jefferson map is one of the most reproduced maps from the late colonial period, and it served as a fundamental guide to Virginia cartography for several decades.



impending military clash between the English and the French in the Ohio Valley, three years later John Dalrymple, a Scottish officer attached to a quartermaster outfit in Virginia, augmented and refined Fry and Jefferson's map for the purpose of demarcating possible passages to the western frontier of English settlement.<sup>10</sup> The revised map of Virginia featured numerous routes, most prominently the Wagon Road to Philadelphia.

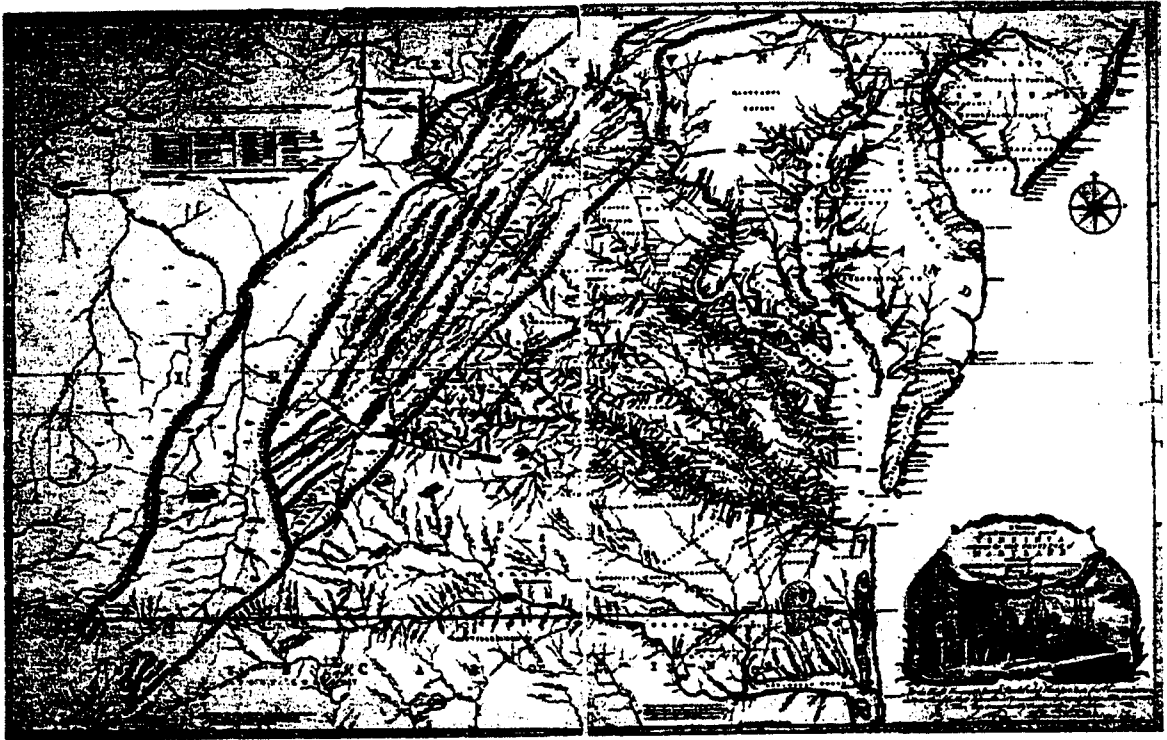
As outlined on Dalrymple's map, the Wagon Road headed from the west bank of the Schuylkill River across from Philadelphia almost due west through Chester and Lancaster counties until it reached the banks of the Susquehanna River. There the road hooked in a gentle southwesterly arc to the headwaters of the Monocacy River and the Blue Mountains. Once in the Great Valley, the road swept further to the southwest and into Maryland, where it led to the Potomac River. After ferrying over the river into Virginia, a traveler could reach the new town of Winchester after a day and a half of progress. According to Dalrymple's edition of the Fry-Jefferson Map, the road headed southwest between the Allegheny Mountains to the west and Massanutten Mountain, which runs up the center of the Valley. The Wagon Road met the North Branch

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<sup>10</sup> For an excellent copy of the Fry-Jefferson Map, see Richard W. Stephenson and Marianne M. McKee eds. *Virginia in Maps, Four Centuries of Settlement, Growth, and Development* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 2000), 83-7. For a popular study of the Wagon Road see Parke Rouse, *The Great Wagon Road: From Philadelphia to the South* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973).

FIGURE 3.

## FRY-JEFFERSON MAP



Source: Richard W. Stephenson and Marianne M. McKee, eds., *Virginia in Maps: Four Centuries of Settlement, Growth and Development* (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 2000), 83.

of the Shenandoah at the present-day town of New Market and then proceeded toward Augusta Court House, which would be renamed Staunton in 1761. South from Staunton, the Road's course continued to the southwest until it crossed the James River, where it swung south and went through the Staunton River Gap of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Once in the southern Virginia Piedmont the road meandered across an eighty-mile stretch to the border with North Carolina. At the time of Dalrymple's edition of the map, the road ended in the still young Moravian settlement at Bethabara near present-day Winston-Salem.

Dalrymple and his predecessor cartographers Fry and Jefferson apparently took some liberties in defining a single road that wound its way through the length of the Valley. More accurately, the Great Wagon Road, at least in the mid-eighteenth century, was more of a series of roads and paths that headed in a generally north-south course: Like nineteenth-century emigrants traveling on the Overland Trail, settlers migrating to the southern backcountry traveled more than one road running through the Valley. Although migrants moving to the West Coast in the 1830s and 1840s referred to the Oregon Trail or to the Overland Trail, they actually traveled on a series of roughly parallel paths that enabled large numbers to reach a common destination.<sup>11</sup> The Great

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<sup>11</sup> John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 5-9. According to Elliot West, the thousands of nineteenth-century migrants to the west had a destructive impact on the numerous Indian roads throughout the plains and further to the south. West, *The Way to the West, Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 30-32. During the late eighteenth-century migration to the Ohio Valley, migrants based their choice of a route on factors such as their financial resources and security from Indian attacks, Elizabeth Perkins, *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 60.

Wagon Road should also be understood in a similar way. It constituted a collective set of routes which paralleled a primary “highway.” When travelers recorded in their journals that they had walked or rode along the Wagon Road, they may have been on one of several trails close by. This tendency to conflate various paths into one Wagon Road is apparent from a number of discrepancies in several travel accounts from the period.

By 1753, the Wagon Road system made up a significant portion of the route that many migrant families took to the backcountry of Virginia and North Carolina. It has long been assumed that the initial group of eleven male Moravians migrating to Wachovia, traveled the Wagon Road. Yet in the journal that the Moravians kept of the journey to North Carolina, the term “great road” appears only once. The Moravian diarist mentions this “great road” when the group is a day and a half south of the Valley town of Winchester. Until that point it appears that the Brethren (as they referred to themselves) traveled along a series of roads extending west from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.<sup>12</sup>

One example of the Moravians’ divergence from the Wagon Road was at their crossing of the Potomac River.<sup>13</sup> The Fry-Jefferson map delineates several Potomac River ferriage points and specifically indicates that the Wagon Road crossed the Potomac at Williams’ Ferry. In addition to Williams’ Ferry the colony of Virginia

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this sort of confusion on the southern end of the wagon road in North Carolina, see T. H. Breen, “The Great Wagon Road,” *Southern Cultures* 3 (1997): 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> “Diary of the Journey of the First Colony of Single Brethren to North Carolina,” 143.

required that a ferry operate from a point on the land of Evan Watkins in Frederick County. In 1744 the Virginia Assembly set a price for the use of the ferry at three pence per person and per horse.<sup>14</sup> Watkins undoubtedly saw a brisk business at his ferry, but the eleven Moravians were not among his clientele in 1753. Instead of taking advantage of Watkins' service or using the Williams' Ferry, the brethren located a shallow portion of the river and simply waded across. Although they made it safely to the Virginia side, they apparently experienced a lot of difficulty ascending the far bank of the river.<sup>15</sup> Because their journey to establish a settlement in Wachovia was a well-financed enterprise, they certainly were not avoiding the ferry to escape payment. The travelers probably were unaware of the existence of the ferries that serviced the upper portion of the Potomac River. Had they actually traveled a primary Wagon Road, they would have crossed the Potomac at one of these points.

Once the Moravian diarist mentioned the "great road" by name, it is likely that the Brethren remained on a primary route that progressed south through the Valley. Until that point, however, they traveled a number of parallel trails, a confusing network of paths that cost them considerable time. As migration began to increase in the 1760s and the Valley's best roads became more defined, the Wagon Road may very well have become *the* Great Road. In the early years, however, this appellation was more myth than reality.

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<sup>14</sup> William Walter Hening ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, From the First Session of the Legislature, in the year 1619*, 13 vols. (Richmond: William Walter Hening, 1819), 5: 250; see also Rouse, *Great Wagon Road*, 69. Rouse, however, incorrectly identifies Williams' Ferry as Watkins'.

A number of routes enabled settlers to migrate into the backcountry besides the roads that went through the Valley of Virginia. Another primary route that has received less attention was the Carolina Road, which extended from Maryland near the Monocacy River throughout the Virginia Piedmont, crossing the James River in Goochland and proceeding southward. The Carolina Road had originally been an Indian route linking northern groups with trading allies in North Carolina. Its path skirted the foothills and crossed the major waterways above the falls at shallow fords. It offered perhaps the most convenient passage, least obstructed by major river crossings and high foothills, through backcountry Virginia east of the Blue Ridge. <sup>16</sup>

Large numbers of families made the Carolina Road their path of choice when fleeing the exposed English frontier during the Seven Years' War. James Maury, an Anglican parson in Louisa, Virginia reported that over three hundred people in one week's time fled along the Carolina Road toward North Carolina. Maury also estimated that five thousand people crossed the Goochland ferry on the Carolina Road within a period of a few months. Here his observation may have been an exaggeration, but it certainly indicated that travel on the road was heavy and that it provided a viable option to the Valley roads to the south and west. It was also through this area where another minister, Robert Rose, spoke with a number of "families traveling from Chenandoa to

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<sup>15</sup> Hinke and Kemper, "Moravian Travels," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (Oct. 1904): 141.

<sup>16</sup> Fairfax Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William* (Berryville, Va: Chesapeake Book Company, 1964 [1924]), 457-58.

the Atking River in Carolina.”<sup>17</sup> The settlers Rose met migrating to the Yadkin Valley evidently saw advantages to traveling on this Piedmont route well before the violence of the Seven Years’ War forced others to shy away from the Valley roads.

In addition to the Valley thoroughfares and the Carolina Road there was a third route that was attractive to migrants from southeastern Pennsylvania, the northeast region of Maryland, and the Delaware counties. For settlers leaving these areas, the most direct route to Virginia’s Southside or to the North Carolina backcountry stretched the length of the peninsula comprising Delaware and the eastern shores of Maryland and Virginia. Even with its extensive system of rivers and creeks, the terrain of the peninsula was easier to cross than many portions of the Piedmont and the mountain areas. The first group of Moravians from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania who traveled to North Carolina to explore the region of the Wachovia tract traveled this route. Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenburg, one of the principal Moravian leaders in North America, praised this route in his diary. He wrote that the roads “along the east shore of the Chesapeake...{were} like a floor, so smooth and free of stones.” When the Brethren reached the southern tip of the eastern Shore of Virginia, they boarded a ferry to cross the Chesapeake Bay to Norfolk, from whence they proceeded to Edenton, North Carolina, where they met the surveyor appointed to guide them to the western portion of the colony.<sup>18</sup> James Auld, an official from Dorchester County, Maryland, also traveled

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<sup>17</sup> Ann Murray, *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1973 [1853]), 432. Robert Rose, *Diary*, October 13, 1748, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

<sup>18</sup> Adelaide Fries, ed. *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1922-1969), 1: 30-62.

much of this route on his way to Halifax County, North Carolina in 1765.<sup>19</sup>

Waightstill Avery, a young lawyer from Snow Hill, Maryland migrating to western North Carolina, also traveled south on the roads of Maryland and Virginia's eastern shore.<sup>20</sup>

For many settlers moving from eastern Chester County, Pennsylvania, Cecil County, Maryland or from the counties of New Jersey, this route through eastern Maryland was probably the most direct and quickest way to reach the North Carolina backcountry. The roads along this route were in no worse condition than the roads of the Valley of Virginia or in the Piedmont, and it was not difficult to find accommodations. Yet the traffic along this route was lighter than that on the other routes. Spangenburg recorded that they had to take only one ferry during the entire journey south along the peninsula, the ferry across Chesapeake Bay from Cheristone in Northampton County to the town of Norfolk. While Spangenburg apparently saw this ferry ride as only a minor impediment, one that was exceptional considering the rest of the journey, some migrants probably anticipated that the sixty-mile ferry ride was too costly in terms of money and time. The ferry across the bay ran on a schedule determined by tides and unpredictable winds. If a family were delayed for several days

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<sup>19</sup> *Diary of James Auld*, William Alexander Smith Papers, 1765-1749, Box 32, Manuscripts Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>20</sup> *Diary of Waightstill Avery*, Collection of Draper Manuscripts, North Carolina Papers, microfilm, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.



waiting to cross the Chesapeake it could readily dampen morale.<sup>21</sup> If enough families, with their loaded wagons and livestock in tow, arrived at the ferry in rapid succession, there would have been no guarantee of sufficient enough room on the ferry to cross.

Although this route was the most expedient for small groups of travelers or migrants, it was probably regarded as impractical for larger groups because of this bottleneck effect involved in crossing the bay. Wright's Ferry, one of the ferries that crossed the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, had a reputation for causing delays of the same sort. Occasionally, families would wait for several days before they could cross the Susquehanna and recommence their journeys.<sup>22</sup> If waiting to cross the relatively narrow Susquehanna caused such a disruption, families would have anticipated a significantly greater delay while waiting to cross the Chesapeake at one of its widest points. As such, this third route to the backcountry attracted specific types of migrants, usually people who were on scouting trips for larger groups that would follow later.<sup>23</sup>

The final element of the mid-eighteenth-century road system in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, was the network of roads that grew out of the need to mobilize troops in the Seven Years' War. The effects of the war effort were most prevalent in the

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<sup>21</sup> Auld's three-day delay at the Cheristone certainly frustrated him and the other travelers who waited with him. The delay also cost him several days of fees at the ordinary adjacent to the ferry, Auld, *Diary*.

<sup>22</sup> Willis L. Shirk, Jr., "Wright's Ferry: A Glimpse into the Susquehanna Backcountry," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 120 (Jan/Apr 1996): 76.

<sup>23</sup> Both Spangenburg and James Auld, whose journey will be discussed in great detail in the subsequent chapter, fall into this category of scouting migrant. Avery was moving on his own when he made the journey.

far backcountry of Maryland and Virginia, reaching westward to the Ohio Valley. After George Washington's disaster at Fort Necessity in 1754, the British Army mounted yet another expedition to force the French out of their strong position in the Ohio Valley. Indeed, John Dalrymple's primary purpose in editing the Fry-Jefferson Map was to delineate roads that the British Army and colonial militias could use on their journey to the Ohio Valley. Of primary interest was Dalrymple's representation of several roads leading from the Northern Tidewater region to the Valley and beyond. At the time, Dalrymple was interested in the paths that could withstand the transportation of large bodies of soldiers and heavy supply trains. Hence, he left out a number of secondary roads and paths that migrant families could have taken. For instance, one of the roads that Dalrymple shows running from Alexandria appears actually to have originated in the town of Colchester; the section that Dalrymple connected to Alexandria was probably the famed Braddock's Road that was never actually used in the war effort.<sup>24</sup>

Charlotte Brown, a nurse who traveled with the Virginia troops under the command of her brother, left a detailed record of her journey to the Ohio Valley in June 1755. Brown recorded some of the best description of the roads that extended west from the primary arteries of the Tidewater, Piedmont, and Valley. The picture she paints of eighteenth-century travel to the far backcountry is one of discomfort and travail. Brown's days sometimes commenced at two in the morning when she began preparing for a march that would often last until the early evening hours. Only one day's travel from Alexandria, Brown wrote in her journal that "the roads are so bad that I am

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<sup>24</sup> Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William*, 479.

almost disjointed.” Once the wagon train crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains, conditions only worsened. West of Winchester the roads that were meant to transport troops quickly to the French-held lands proved almost impassable. The horses struggled so much on the steep hills that everyone had to walk alongside the wagons instead of riding, and eventually the “poor horses no longer regard[ed] the smack of the whip or the beat of the drum.” The wagons, also falling victim to the poor conditions of the roads, required constant repair.<sup>25</sup>

Brown’s diary makes it painfully clear that travel to the west, even with the support of the British Army, was an exhausting enterprise. The roads to the south and west often resembled trails or sophisticated paths instead of orderly, well-kept transportation routes. Because there were numerous components of the mid-eighteenth-century network of roads, people migrating from the Tidewater and coastal regions had countless alternatives to follow on their journey. Even in areas where there were primary routes such as the Wagon Road, the Carolina Road, or the route east of the Chesapeake, directions could be confusing if they were available at all. Such an element of uncertainty made the journey all the more difficult.

### Backcountry Lodging

The roads to the south and west were simply the paths that funneled people into new lands; the actual experience of those people who traveled these roads was

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<sup>25</sup> Charlotte Brown, *Diary*, Manuscripts Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

determined in part by the topography of the land, but also by the people they encountered on the way. When undertaking a journey of any distance, whether from Pennsylvania to Winchester or Cecil County to the Yadkin River in western North Carolina, families, in almost all cases, relied on people along the way to provide them shelter, sustenance, and services. While it is possible that a handful of hardy individuals may have possessed the skills to survive off the land on a four-hundred-mile journey, most travelers did not have such pioneering prowess. Instead, migrants and travelers turned to several sources for food and shelter.

Often when individuals traveled along the trails and roads that led through the backcountry, they took advantage of the growing number of taverns or ordinaries that dotted the countryside. For instance, in Augusta County alone, during the thirty years before the Revolution, the county court issued at least one hundred licenses to Valley residents to operate ordinaries. Many of these were in the vicinity of the county seat of Staunton and other locations along the main Valley roads. As the number of migrants moving through the Valley increased in the late 1760s, the court issued a growing number of licenses to serve the traffic.<sup>26</sup> Laws passed in Williamsburg by the Virginia Assembly established vague guidelines for regulating the operation of ordinaries, but the colonial government left it to the county governments to enforce the regulations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier, Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 46.

<sup>27</sup> For various Virginia Laws regulating ordinaries see Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large*, 2: 268-69, 3: 396, 4: 428, 5: 103, 9: 225. Paton Yoder, "Tavern Regulation in Virginia, Rationale and Reality," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 87 (July 1979): 259-61. North Carolina had the same system of governance for its

Although the regulations were meant to ensure a basic level of decency and security at ordinaries, colonial travelers reported a wide variation in quality.

On a number of occasions, travelers commented on the appropriateness of the term “ordinary.” When John Saunders, a merchant from Suffolk, Virginia, made his way across Granville County, North Carolina in 1753, he observed that the two ordinaries he visited in mid-September were “both rightly named for Ordinary they were.”<sup>28</sup> Even in the more developed coastal, areas ordinaries were often unsophisticated establishments. Nicholas Cresswell, a young Englishman with an eye for land speculation, traveled through the colonies of the upper south in the years before the Revolution. When Cresswell took his breakfast just outside Annapolis, he commented that ordinaries, “indeed...have not their name for nothing, for they are ordinary enough.”<sup>29</sup>

Most backcountry ordinaries provided room for lodging and meals, but the quality varied dramatically throughout the region. In the vicinity of county seats, travelers could sometimes find clean and ample bedding along with good food. As Saunders approached the small town of Hillsborough, the seat of government in Orange County, North Carolina, he found “good beds & clean sheets and got good tea and toast and butter in the morning for breakfast.” In addition, Saunders purchased good oats and

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ordinaries, see Alan D. Watson, “Ordinaries in Colonial Eastern North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 45 (1969), 67.

<sup>28</sup> John Saunders, Notebook, 1750-1755, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>29</sup> *Journal of Nicholas Cresswell* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968), 20.

corn for his horse.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, as James Auld made his way to his new home in Granville County, North Carolina, he complained of a lodging house on his way south on Virginia's eastern shore. Auld dined on "fryed meat & hominy for supper...the like for breakfast." He was unable to feed his horse well, and his final observation of the establishment summed up his experience there, "very dirty & badly managed."<sup>31</sup> Although ordinaries provided vital services to travelers and migrants, there was no standard for insuring the quality of these services.

People who sought licenses to operate ordinaries or larger taverns often lived at strategic points on primary routes where many travelers were likely to pass. Often people who operated ferries also maintained ordinaries or taverns adjacent to the ferry landings. When the currents were too strong or when weather prohibited crossings, it was convenient for migrants or travelers to take a room or simply a meal at the adjoining ordinary. A number of ordinaries on the way from Alexandria to the Blue Ridge allowed travelers or migrants a respite from their travel. West's and Neavill's ordinaries became fixtures in the northern Virginia foothills in the mid-eighteenth century; Fry and Jefferson even denoted them on their map of the colony.<sup>32</sup> Farther

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<sup>30</sup> Saunders, *Notebook*.

<sup>31</sup> Auld, *Diary*.

<sup>32</sup> George Washington as a young surveyor in March of 1748 stopped at George Neavil's ordinary in Prince William County after a forty-mile journey from just outside of Alexandria, and on the way back he stopped at West's Ordinary; Andrew Burnaby also visited Neavil's ordinary on his tour of northern Virginia. Because of their location on primary routes leading from the Potomac, Neavil's and West's ordinaries became institutions in this part of the backcountry. John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799* (New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1971 [1925]) 1: 3-4, 12.

south in the vicinity of Charlottesville Virginia, Boswell's Tavern was equally well known.<sup>33</sup>

While the ordinaries of the northern Virginia Piedmont were by no means the only source of shelter and provision on backcountry roads, they offered a reasonably reliable resting spot for travelers. When John Mercer, a lawyer and land speculator from Prince William County, took a seven-day trip through the Piedmont and Valley, he twice relied on Neavill's ordinary on the Fredericksburg-Winchester road.<sup>34</sup> Leaving his home in Dumfries, Mercer traveled first to Fredericksburg before proceeding to Neavill's the following day. From there he went through Ashby's Gap and then to Winchester, where he attended the Frederick Ccounty elections and witnessed the victory of his son George Mercer and George Washington as burgesses to the Assembly. On the fifth and sixth days of his journey, he visited associates in the northern Valley before re-crossing the Blue Ridge, this time at Snickers, formerly William's Gap, and stopped again at Neavill's before returning to Dumfries by way of Falmouth on the last day of the trek.<sup>35</sup> Over the course of six days of actual travel, Mercer journeyed 244 miles, averaging just over forty miles a day; the most he traveled in one day was sixty miles over the Blue Ridge to Neavill's ordinary. Considering the mountainous and hilly

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<sup>33</sup> Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782*, ed. and trans. Howard C. Rice Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 2: 388-89.

<sup>34</sup> For life of John Mercer, see Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William*, 369.

<sup>35</sup> *Journal of John Mercer*, Alexandria Public Library, Lloyd House Collection, microfilm, # 00051, Alexandria, Virginia.

terrain, this was certainly a respectable rate, and it is not hard to imagine the relief that Mercer must have felt when he arrived at Neavill's on the road to Falmouth.

Travelers frequenting ordinaries and taverns anywhere in the colonies would have found various forms of social interaction in these establishments, but the farther migrants or travelers journeyed into the backcountry, the more public houses became centers of vital social and community activity. Once migrants arrived in the backcountry counties of North Carolina, ordinaries and taverns provided more than space for people to rest and have a meal. Especially early in the migration period, settlers who recently arrived found in taverns and ordinaries a number of meetings that would have been held in other places in their former neighborhoods. For instance, it was not uncommon to find merchants haggling over prices with potential consumers or lively discussions of political issues. Charles Woodmason, the irascible itinerant Anglican minister who traveled through the backcountry of South Carolina in the 1760s, complained that taverns drew large numbers of men for all purposes of business. Along with the shooting, cockfighting, dancing, and heavy drinking that went on inside and around the taverns, militia officers mustered their companies and magistrates conducted official court business. At the heart of Woodmason's complaint about this activity was that musters and business or court transactions usually occurred on Saturdays. After conducting business, whether financial, military, or judicial, most of these men, according to Woodmason, went home intoxicated and were unable to attend religious services the next morning. Furthermore, the condition of these men also prevented their



families from attending his sermons.<sup>36</sup> While some of Woodmason's suspicions concerning ordinaries were shared by colonial officials, ordinaries nevertheless dotted the landscape of the backcountry, in many cases offering the best opportunity for migrants to purchase provisions, send mail either ahead or back to the communities they had left behind, or simply to obtain directions to continue their journey.

Like the ordinaries that migrants passed by in the Valley or in the Piedmont of Virginia, those in North Carolina enabled recently-arrived settlers to purchase provisions they needed while they established their new homes. It is difficult to say just how many ordinaries and taverns existed in the backcountry South, but in Rowan County, North Carolina the county courts granted 129 licenses to men and women to operate public houses between 1753 and 1775. After migrants passed under the shadow of Pilot Mountain in the northwestern part of the county, one of the most prominent public houses they encountered was the one at the Moravian village of Bethabara. Although the Moravians were exceedingly particular about letting non-

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<sup>36</sup> Woodmason generally held tavernkeepers in low regard. After one of his sermons, a tavern keeper who was also the chief justice of the district accosted Woodmason because he thought the minister's exhortations against immorality were directed against him. Woodmason described him as a "a Rich fellow... Who has made an Estate by encouraging Vice and Idleness." Richard J. Hooker, ed. *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution, The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1953), 12, 96-7. See also Daniel B. Thorp, "Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier: Rowan County, North Carolina, 1753-1776," *The Journal of Southern History* 62 (Nov. 1996): 662-63. The Marquis de Chastellux, a Frenchman traveling throughout the new states in the early 1780s, found cockfighting to be the main attraction at a small, secluded public house in the Virginia Piedmont called Willis' Ordinary. Commenting on the enthusiasm of the audience, he explained he knew "not which is most astonishing, the insipidity of such diversion, or the stupid interest with which it animates the parties." Chastellux went on to attribute their fascination to their strong English heritage. Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years*, 2: 386-87.

Moravians, or “Strangers” as the Moravians dubbed them, into their community, the members of this sect had a keen eye for making money. The tavern at Bethabara was set apart from the actual Moravian settlement by about 150 yards to ensure that visiting Strangers did not interact extensively with the settlers. It was a one-and-a-half-story structure measuring about fifteen feet by twenty; there were two rooms upstairs and down. The larger room downstairs, holding several benches, a large table with plates and utensils, and a common handbasin, was for dining guests. The smaller room was the kitchen, equipped with numerous pots and pans and a bench for “washing up.” Upstairs one room had three double-sized beds and two small tables, while the second room had only one bed and a writing table. This smaller room may have been for guests who were able to pay somewhat more for a night’s rest. All guests, however, had access to only one foot-washing tub in the establishment.<sup>37</sup>

The Moravian tavern was probably one of the most upscale establishments in backcountry North Carolina. The financial backing that supported practically all of the Moravians’ efforts was also behind the tavern operation. Because the Moravians had access to wares produced in Bethabara, patrons always ate from decent plates and drank from sturdy tankards. Because of the growing trade networks that the Moravians strove to develop and perpetuate, the tavern keeper also obtained good, albeit not fine, eating utensils. By the mid-1760s, all of the tin spoons had been replaced by brass or pewter, and upstairs in the sleeping quarters, feather bedding began to take the place of straw.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Thorp, “Taverns in Colonial Rowan,” 670-73.

<sup>38</sup> Thorp, “Taverns in Colonial Rowan,” 682-83.

While the Moravian tavern was probably at the high end of backcountry ordinaries and taverns, it nevertheless resembled dozens of other public houses in the backcountry. Southwest of Bethabara another public house operated by the Lowrance family offered the same services expected at any tavern, including meals and drinks, but it also served as a center of retail activity. Like the tavern at Bethabara, the Lowrance Tavern was a place where settlers, travelers, and migrants came to buy supplies and an increasing number of consumer luxury items.<sup>39</sup>

The advantage of staying at an ordinary was that unless it was already overcrowded, the ordinary keeper would usually accept patrons. That was not always the case with the other primary source of shelter. It was a common practice for travelers to approach private homes for lodging or to buy food for themselves or their livestock. In numerous instances, migrants and travelers recorded staying in the houses of total strangers. Daniel Stanton, a Quaker itinerant, traveled from eastern Pennsylvania to western North Carolina in 1760. He attended Friends meetings in Winchester, Virginia and at several other places in the Valley before he crossed over the Blue Ridge into the southwestern Piedmont. After a hard day's travel, he complained, "we were hard set to get entertainment and lodging; late at night some of us reached a small house, in which was a great family, who were gone to bed. We were let into the house, which was an open cold place and the people were as kind as we could expect, endeavoring to provide

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel B. Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 48 (July 1991), 390-93.

us with lodging.”<sup>40</sup> In this case, even though the family probably lacked sufficient resources to have guests, it willingly took in Stanton and his cohort.

Andrew Burnaby, an Anglican minister and noted colonial traveler, encountered similar although less pleasant conditions as he traveled through the upper Piedmont of Virginia in 1759. After touring the lower part of the Valley of Virginia, Burnaby recrossed the Blue Ridge at Williams’ Gap and sought shelter in a private home. After traveling the better part of a rainy day, he found little comfort:

At the miserable plantation in which I had taken shelter, I could get no fire; nothing to eat or drink but pure water; and not even a blanket to cover me. I threw myself down upon my mattress, but suffered so much from cold, and was so infested with insects and vermin, that I could not close my eyes. I rose early in the morning, and proceeded upon my journey.<sup>41</sup>

Judging from Burnaby’s detail, it is probable that his other accommodations in northern Virginia or in the Valley were significantly better. At the same time, Burnaby did not complain that the family hesitated to let him into its home. In fact, throughout his tour of backcountry Virginia, Burnaby never alluded to any difficulties in finding lodging of some sort. It is evident that backcountry settlers often readily accepted guests, and in turn that backcountry migrants commonly took advantage of this opportunity for lodging and purchasing provisions. In a sense, these roadside residents operated an underground system of ordinaries, unlicensed but vital to migrants and travelers.

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<sup>40</sup> “Life of Daniel Stanton,” *The Friends’ Library* (Philadelphia: Jack Rakestraw, 1842), 5: 169.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North-America, in the years 1759 and 1760* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960 [1775]), 44-45.

If the flow of backcountry migrants was an annoyance for some families that lived along primary migration routes, it may well have proven a profitable opportunity for many. Only in a handful of journals or accounts does a traveler mention the fees that he paid to stay in someone's private home. The vast majority of travelers who wrote anything about their road experiences simply recorded that they stopped at a house for a meal or they slept overnight at a stranger's home. Yet there is no doubt that the travelers exchanged some form of money for the services they received at roadside houses, public or private. As the Moravians made their way up the Valley of Virginia in the fall of 1753, they stopped at numerous plantations to buy food for themselves and their horses. South of Winchester the Brethren "bought several bushels of oats, but had to wait several hours till it had been threshed." The next day they heard of a man "from whom oats can be bought at all times."<sup>42</sup> The fact that the Moravian diarist failed to record the prices that they paid for these provisions suggests that the cost probably was not exorbitant.

Even though John Saunders traveled through a different part of the southern backcountry, his expenses indicate how roadside hosts charged migrants and travelers. In early September 1753, Saunders paid as little as 3 shillings, 9 pence to lodge at a private home about eighteen miles north of Granville Court House, North Carolina. The next night, when Saunders stayed at an ordinary at Granville Court House, he paid 18 shillings 9 pence for dinner, lodging, breakfast, and corn and pasturage for his horse.

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<sup>42</sup> William Hinke and Charles Kemper eds., "Moravian Diaries of Travels Through Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 12 (Oct. 1904): 143-44.

Two nights later, Saunders paid 9 shillings 6 pence for lodging, breakfast, and corn for his horse. Saunders' experience indicates that people who opened up their homes to travelers observed no standard schedule of fees. When travelers departed from someone's private home after staying the night or taking a meal or two, they simply paid the owner of the ordinary for his or her services. By the end of his nineteen-day round trip between Suffolk, Virginia, and southern Orange County, North Carolina, Saunders spent a total of just over nine pounds.<sup>43</sup> As a man of some means, he probably spent more on his journey than most migrant families would have. At the same time, his account indicates that for those people who were willing to open their homes and offer reliable supplies of provisions, the colonial traffic certainly presented an opportunity to make some extra money.

Historians who have devoted considerable attention to migration in the nineteenth century have identified a number of similarities in the ways later migrants dealt with seeking shelter at night. In *A Family Venture*, Joan Cashin described the migration experience to the old Southwestern frontier. Cashin included in this region all of the territory west of Georgia's border with Alabama, as well as the frontier areas of Florida, Tennessee, and Kentucky.<sup>44</sup> John Mack Faragher focused his attention on the migration to the Northwest in *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*. While these migrations occurred at fundamentally different points in American history, a number of

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<sup>43</sup> John Saunders, *Notebook*.

<sup>44</sup> Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men & Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 7-8.

similarities in the migration experiences suggest a great degree of continuity in the general westward movement.<sup>45</sup>

The first leg of the journey to the northwest closely resembled the mid-eighteenth-century migration experience in the southern backcountry. Heading to Missouri and eastern Kansas for one of the “jumping-off” towns along Missouri River, families eased their way into the westward journey. To get to a town like Independence, Missouri, families traveled through parts of the upper south and Midwest where the roads were, by that time, fairly well established, and where inns and private homes provided reliable accommodations. Often families passed by the homes of friends or family that had moved on before them.<sup>46</sup> These conditions closely resembled those that John Saunders, Daniel Stanton, and the Moravian migrants experienced in backcountry Virginia and North Carolina in the 1750s and 1760s. All reported seeing friends or acquaintances along the road, and none complained of the absence of shelter.

Part of the similarity in experience between the westward migrations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a function of geographical space. Families migrating to the early southern backcountry remained relatively close to older areas of settlement. For instance, Salisbury, North Carolina was more isolated than towns

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<sup>45</sup> This continuity was also present for the phase of westward migration that occurred after the revolution. See Perkins, *Border Life*; and Stephen Aron, *How The West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). These migrations will be discussed further in the Epilogue. The historical record for the later migration is, in many ways, richer than that of the eighteenth-century movement. In particular, women from the nineteenth century left far more descriptions of their travel experiences.

<sup>46</sup> John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 24.

farther to the east, but families quickly filed into the area in the 1750s, establishing a network of settlement that facilitated the influx of subsequent families. Newcomers sought out provisions and sometimes shelter from the very people who preceded them. It was the same situation for families beginning their trek across the continent in the mid-nineteenth century; as they moved through some of the older, settled areas of the Midwest, they were supported, directly or indirectly, by thousands who had moved ahead of them. Once nineteenth-century migrants left the areas of heavy settlement, their experiences resembled yet another aspect of the eighteenth-century movement, as they consistently resorted to camping alongside the paths and trails they followed during the day.

Because of their relative wealth, men such as John Saunders were often able to avoid the option of seeking shelter outside. But it is not difficult to imagine that most families following the Wagon Road network from Pennsylvania into Maryland and Virginia or the Carolina Road through the Piedmont into North Carolina spent many nights huddled under or near their wagons. Either because darkness overtook them on the road before they could reach an ordinary or a private home, or because they could not afford these alternatives, camping out was a regular part of the migration experience.

Joseph Oxley, a sixty-year-old Quaker itinerant from Philadelphia, traveled to backcountry South Carolina in October 1775. Throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland, and parts of the Valley of Virginia, he found ample lodging at public houses. Even though he complained of “middling entertainment” and the scarcity of good drink at these ordinaries, he did not indicate any problems actually locating the establishments. After



he reached the southern portion of the Valley and then crossed the Blue Ridge into the Piedmont, Oxley increasingly stayed at private homes. He proceeded into North Carolina and entered into the PeeDee River watershed, and there he and his cohort resorted to sleeping in the woods. Building a canopy of pine branches, they made beds of leaves and a warm fire and “went to rest very contentedly.” Perhaps because sleeping out was an exception rather than the norm, Oxley complained less about this experience than he did about most of the nights he spent inside.<sup>47</sup>

The masters of camping along the roadside were the Moravians. As the first Brethren proceeded up the Valley of Virginia on their way to Wachovia, they camped out most of the time. Night after night, the eleven sought an appropriate campsite and erected a large tent. As the journey proceeded, the Moravian diarist mostly reported that the Brethren’s outdoor skills improved on the road. However, two days south of Staunton, where the Valley begins to lose its clear definition, the Moravians made a mistake in choosing a campsite. “It began to rain and continued almost all night, and as our tent was on a hill the water ran through it and we were all soaked through and through.”<sup>48</sup> Most nights were not so unfortunate; the traveling Brethren usually chose more wisely when it came to picking campsites. In good, clear weather the Moravian migrant group simply slept without cover. By the time they reached their destination at the Wachovia tract, they had making and breaking camp down to an art.

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Oxley, *Diary*, 366-87, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>48</sup> “Moravian Diary,” 26 Oct., 1753.

Almost thirty years later, another company of Moravians, led by Bishop Reichel, traveled from the town of Lititz in eastern Pennsylvania to the growing town of Salem, North Carolina. The party of five women and five men traveled through Virginia east of the Blue Ridge, most likely on the old Carolina Road. They began their journey on May 22 and arrived in Salem on June 15, 1780. Shortly into their trip, the Moravians grew accustomed to sleeping outside. The unnamed diarist commented, "That we should have slept well this first time in our unaccustomed quarter was not to be expected, but as time wore on we wished for nothing better."<sup>49</sup> Of the twenty-three or so days this group spent on the road, they camped out all but one night. On this exceptional occasion, just south of the Rappahannock River, the group had been soaked the night before and then traveled through torrential rains until the midday. It is no surprise that they "were glad to be under a roof, and to sleep in the dry."<sup>50</sup>

Eighteenth-century migrant groups, such as the Moravians in 1753 and 1780, slept outside even when they were close to ordinaries or private homes. On many nights one or two from the group would go to the local public house to get food, provender, or directions. Meanwhile, the rest of the party remained in camp nearby. There are several reasons for this practice. One possibility has to do with the size of the group. In many cases, ordinaries would have been unable to handle groups of almost a dozen people coming in all at once. Ordinary keepers might even have resented a sudden influx of travelers they could not accommodate. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the

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<sup>49</sup> "Travel Diary of Bishop and Mrs. Reichel and Their Company from Lititz to Salem in the Wachau from May 22 to June 15, 1780," in Newton D. Mereness, ed., *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1961 [1916]), 587.

actual migrant status of these two groups influenced them to camp out. In both cases, the Moravian groups consisted of people who were traveling to North Carolina to establish homes. As migrants instead of simply as travelers, they carried significantly more baggage with them. Traveling with wagons or carts loaded with supplies for the trip and household items, migrants would have been more likely to remain with their gear overnight. Saving money for the actual settlement in their new homes would have been a priority for most migrants. Purchasing food and provender was costly enough without adding the expense of lodging.

Nineteenth-century migrants who had left their chosen “jumping-off” sites and began the trek to California or Oregon often lacked the option of staying in or even near public houses. Without the taverns or inns that sometimes accommodated migrants in the early southern backcountry, northwestern immigrants relied on their outdoors skills practically every night. Each person in a family carried at least two blankets for warmth on the cool nights, and in most cases these blankets provided a family’s only “shelter.” When it was safe, some family members probably slept under their wagons, using the underside as a roof of sorts, and about one third of all families carried tents with them to house younger children and older adults. According to Faragher, husbands and wives often had the privilege of sleeping in the wagon on a mattress.<sup>51</sup>

Considering that most eighteenth-century settlers camped on the way to their destinations in the southern backcountry, the nightly experience on the overland trails to

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<sup>50</sup> Reichel “Travel Diary,” 593.

the Northwest was remarkably similar. The two primary differences between the migration experiences involved this absence of accommodations on the trails to the Northwest. First of all, eighteenth-century migrant families with financial resources had the option of spending a night or two in an ordinary. For instance, the Moravians traveling from Lititz to Salem in 1780 rested at an ordinary after their miserable night in pouring rain. While most of the eighteenth-century migrants probably did not have the resources for such a respite, overland trail migrants virtually never had that option.

Secondly, southern backcountry migrants used ordinaries and private homes as provisioning stations, even when they were unable to actually spend the night. Travelers regularly purchased bread for their families or corn for their horses at roadside establishments or homes. By contrast, migrants heading to Oregon or California packed their wagons to capacity at about 2,500 pounds.<sup>52</sup> Without the opportunity to purchase items, food, or drink for vast stretches of the journey, these migrants were forced to carry everything with them. In some ways, packing along everything may have provided a sense of security, a bulwark against the uncertainties of the trail. On the other hand, carrying so much material must have proven a physical and psychological burden. The constant reminder that they had left their former homes for good was certainly difficult for many migrants.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 69; Elizabeth Perkins, *Border Life*, 61 describes a similar situation of isolation for Kentucky and Ohio Valley migrants later in the eighteenth century.

<sup>52</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 22-23.

<sup>53</sup> Cashin emphasizes the psychological impact particularly on women migrants, *A Family Venture*, 57-58; see also Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 48-52. Elliot West, however,

In either the eighteenth or nineteenth-century migrations, the daily effort to make progress toward the destination was a trying experience. Anticipating the uncertainties involved in knowing where to travel, where to sleep, and where to buy food may have discouraged prospective migrants from actually making the journey. But thousands of families undertook the migration and faced these daily challenges. Each family hoped that the lives they would establish at the end of the migration would be better than their lives in their former communities. There was no guarantee that this hope would be realized, but it was probably what enabled most migrants to endure the uncertainties of the road.

In the early days of December, 1775 two families traveling through the Valley of Virginia on their way to North Carolina stopped at a small tavern just south of the village of Woodstock. The two families consisted of two older men, their wives, and twelve children. All of the children were under the age of fourteen, and one of the mothers was nursing the two youngest, a set of four-month-old twins. Proceeding “without any previous Provision for a Settlement,” their only apparent intention was to make their way to Carolina.<sup>54</sup> It is almost impossible to conceptualize how difficult it

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points out that in most instances in the nineteenth-century western migrations, families moved together and often attempted to transplant their old social networks, thus easing or eliminating the tribulations of separation. West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 95.

<sup>54</sup> Philip Vickers Fithian, *Journal, 1775-1776 Written on the Virginia-Pennsylvania Frontier and in the Army around New York*, ed. Robert Greenhalgh Albion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934), 137-38.

must have been for these people to re-arrange their lives on an almost daily basis during their journey, only to be uncertain of where they would eventually settle.

Phillip Vickers Fithian, a twenty-eight-year-old Presbyterian minister from New Jersey, traveled extensively through backcountry Maryland and the Valley of Virginia in the early years of the Revolution. He had observed this scene with these “two families flitting to Carolina” on one of his tours of the northern Valley of Virginia. That he knew the ages of the children suggests that Fithian engaged these travelers in conversation and became acquainted with their situation. The young itinerant was practically appalled by the condition of the families, and most perplexing for him was the fact that they did not really know where they were going. A 1771 graduate of Princeton and the erstwhile tutor of Robert Carter’s children at Nomini Hall in Virginia’s Tidewater, Fithian was accustomed to a more regulated life; that he was shocked by situation of these travelers is not surprising. Had Fithian spent more time traveling the Valley roads during the decades preceding the Revolution, he would have seen numerous other families in the same situation.

The migration to the southern backcountry was primarily a movement of families. Although there were instances of individuals moving to the southwest and building new lives for themselves, in most cases those who migrated did so as families or even groups of families. Considering the effort required to clear land and establish a homestead in western Virginia or North Carolina, it is apparent that the job required the labor of more than just one person. The case of the poor families that Philip Fithian observed probably represented the drastic end of the spectrum of families making this migration to the backcountry.

At the same time, thousands of the other families, including many of substantial means, migrated during this period in circumstances that guaranteed similar levels of discomfort. Unfortunately, nothing else is known about the family that Fithian encountered; like those of so many families, their experiences were not recorded. The next chapter, however, examines in detail the experiences of one migrant as he traveled to the backcountry South to test the prospects for him and his family to have a better life there.

CHAPTER III  
SCOUTING OUT THE LAND:  
THE JOURNEY OF JAMES AULD

James Auld left his home on Fishing Creek in Dorchester County, Maryland in February of 1765. While others owned more land and held higher offices than Auld, life in this Eastern Shore county had treated him well. Before his departure he had been a commissary for the county and a prominent attorney. When he set out from his home, Auld's initial destination was the town of Halifax, North Carolina, where he would operate a store and hold the county court clerkship for several years. In the early 1770s, as Auld perceived his opportunities in Halifax to be diminishing, he moved his family once more, farther into the North Carolina backcountry.<sup>1</sup>

The Auld family story is substantially the same as those of the thousands of migrants who made their way to the southern backcountry. James and Rosannah Auld, along with their six children, made a journey totaling several hundred miles. The oldest daughter, Ann, was fifteen and the youngest child, Betsey, was all of eight

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<sup>1</sup> James Auld Diary, William Alexander Smith Papers (photocopy), Rare Book, Manuscript & Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. There are also two transcribed versions of Auld's diary: "The Journal of James Auld, 1765-1770," *Publications of the Southern History Association* 4 (July 1904): 253-68; "Diary & Notebook of James Auld (1765-1789)" transcribed by Ransom McBride, *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* (Nov. 1984): 223-26.



months old when the family made its trek to North Carolina. Once they arrived at their new home, they established a household in the fall-line town of Halifax. Just over a year after the Aulds arrived there, Rosannah had one more child, a little boy named after his father. James Jr. lived for only two months, dying in January 1767. A month or so later, only a year and a half after migrating to Halifax, the Aulds bought a house and about 650 acres seven miles outside the small town.<sup>2</sup>

One thing that sets this family apart from other migrant families is that James Auld kept a diary of his preliminary excursion to Halifax in the months before he moved with Rosannah and their children. His journal reveals the texture of the experience on the road to the southern backcountry. He often described in detail the daily challenges that he faced as he traveled south down the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia, then across the Southside. For reasons that Auld never made clear, he recorded information about where he stayed, what he ate, and which routes he took to his destination. The landscape before Auld occupied much of his attention; throughout parts of his journey, he wrote brief descriptions of rivers, forests, and fields, and the commodities that settlers were able to extract from them. Auld also traveled through a number of towns that were the centers of local economic, social, and political activity. Whether he realized it or not, in many of the places where he dined or stayed the night, he was surrounded by people who knew the local landscape, geographical, political, and social. A number of colorful characters emerge from Auld's journal. He encountered a dozen or so ordinary keepers, ferry operators, and roadside settlers along the way. In cataloging his brief interactions with these people

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<sup>2</sup> James Auld, *Diary*.

and with other travelers, Auld left evidence of how he interpreted not just the landscape but the people. His journey involved a constant process of interpreting or *reading* people he encountered to determine, first, whether they were willing to help him on his journey, and secondly, as he drew closer to his destination, whether they would become valuable neighbors. Perhaps Auld wished to keep a record of establishments and people to avoid when he moved his family. Regardless of Auld's reasons for keeping his journal, he bequeathed to historians a prime opportunity for examining the experience and mindset of an eighteenth-century backcountry migrant.

James Auld's date of birth is uncertain. Based on his 1747 marriage to Rosannah, however, Auld was probably born sometime in the 1720s. James' parents John and Mary Auld lived just north of their son in Talbot County, Maryland. James apparently moved south to Dorchester County when he married Rosannah. When he made his trip to North Carolina in 1765, James was most likely in his early-to-mid-forties.

Robert Ramsay, the historian of settlement in western North Carolina, suggested in *Carolina Cradle* that many mid-century migrants abandoned their former homes at major turning points in a family's history, most notably at the death of a father.<sup>3</sup> James Auld, however, began searching out new land for his family before his father penned his will. In April 1765, when James was already in Halifax town beginning his new occupation as a store keeper and court clerk, his father wrote his

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<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Ramsay, *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 21-22.

last will and testament. Mary Auld filed her husband's will with the Talbot County court in October 1766, when James and his family awaited the delivery of Rosannah's baby in Halifax. John Auld named James as his primary heir in the event that Mary died or remarried, but he stipulated one provision on James' inheritance. John wanted his son to return to Talbot County in person to take possession of his property. If James failed to comply with John's wishes, his estate would fall to James's son John, who was all of fourteen years old at the time and presumably with his parents in North Carolina. A simple note scribbled at the end of the court record of John's will confirmed James's absence, "James Auld heir at law to the testator is said to be out of the Province."<sup>4</sup>

James evidently left behind a supportive and loving family on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It appears that his father wished to preserve his family insofar as he wanted to keep all of his children close to home. In addition to James, John and Mary Auld had at least four other sons, all of whom remained in Talbot County and served in the Revolution.<sup>5</sup> Yet John mentioned in his will the only son who had moved away. It is true that James was the oldest of John's sons and John may have been observing the old tradition of primogeniture by leaving his estate to James' first son John. At the same time, John's will reads as though he was genuinely troubled by James's absence.

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<sup>4</sup> F. Edward Wright compiler, *Maryland Calendar of Wills, 1764-1767* (Westminster, Md.: Family Line Publications, 1992), 13: 132. Maryland Prerogative Court, Wills, 34, 382-84 (microfilm), Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture, Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD. (hereafter cited at Nabb Research Center)

<sup>5</sup> Henry C. Peden, *Revolutionary Patriots of Talbot County, Maryland, 1775-1783* (Westminster, Md.: Family Line Publications, 1998), 6-7.

He probably saw offering the estate to James's son as a way to lure back a portion of his family. At the same time, it does not appear as though John Auld wanted to control his son's destiny in an ultimately restrictive manner. Had the family patriarch wanted to, he could have restricted James's ability to sell the land unless he returned to Dorchester County. John Auld apparently did not want to go that far.

In any case John Auld's declining health failed to keep James close to home. The son set out from his own plantation on February 10, 1765. James and Rosannah lived on Fishing Creek, a tributary of the Little Choptank River just southwest of the county seat of Cambridge. In the first entry of his journal, Auld rather unceremoniously wrote, "I left a wife and six children." His six children were Ann 15, John 13, Rosannah 10, Michael Piper 8, Mary 4, and Betsey 3 months. While James was on his journey, the burden of caring for the family and tending the household fell squarely on Rosannah. His journal betrays no doubt about her ability to carry out this responsibility.

Starting out from the northern part of the county Auld made it to the southern border of Dorchester in a day's travel. As he rode his horse across Dorchester County's poorly maintained roads the weather was "Rainey and Cold."<sup>6</sup> While it is easy to question Auld's decision to embark on his journey on that particular day, leaving on such a journey in the middle of winter was hardly unusual for eighteenth-century travelers. Patience Brayton, a Quaker itinerant from Swansea, Massachusetts, toured the colonies as far south as Savannah, Georgia between 1771 and 1772. At the beginning of December in 1771, Brayton made her way through the

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<sup>6</sup> James Auld, *Diary*.

Piedmont of Virginia toward western North Carolina. When Brayton and her party reached the James River, they first had to break ice so their ferry boat could carry them across.<sup>7</sup> John Griffith, another Quaker itinerant also began his journey from northern Virginia to visit several Friends' meetings in western North Carolina, at the beginning of December 1765.<sup>8</sup> Andrew Burnaby, on the other hand, suspended his travels through Virginia between November and May, restricting his excursions to the area surrounding Williamsburg.<sup>9</sup> So as Auld began his scouting trip to the southern backcountry in the cold winter months, he may well have encountered others heading in the same direction.

When James dismounted at the end of his first day on the road, he lodged "at one Beard's 34 miles" from Auld's home on Fishing Creek. Although the topography of most of Maryland's Eastern Shore is virtually flat, covering thirty four miles in one day was an admirable feat. The exact location of the Beard home is uncertain other than Auld's indication that it was adjacent to or near the Nanticoke River. There he dined on pork and hominy, a menu he would encounter several other times on the road south. The next morning Auld arose and crossed the Nanticoke River at Bozley's Ferry. There were several ferries that crossed the Nanticoke River into Somerset County in the mid-eighteenth century. The primary ferry was at the small

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<sup>7</sup> Patience Brayton, *Diary*, typescript extracts from *Life and Religious Labours of Patience Brayton, late of Swansey, In the State of Massachusetts* (New York: Isaac Collins and Sons, 1801), North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>8</sup> "Life of John Griffith," *The Friends Library*, 14 vols. (Philadelphia: Joseph Rakestraw, 1842), 5: 423-25.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North-America in the Years 1759 and 1760* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), 36-37.

village of Vienna, while another ferry ran across a northern fork of the River.<sup>10</sup>

Bozley's Ferry, however, does not show up in any of the public records of Dorchester County or in the proceedings of the Maryland provincial assembly, which licensed ferries. In all likelihood, Auld crossed the river on a privately-operated ferry that consisted of nothing more than a small flat boat capable of transporting a small number of livestock. While there was nothing actually illegal about operating a ferry such as this, unofficial ferrymen did not have to maintain their boats to standards specified by the colonial government and did not necessarily provide reliable service.<sup>11</sup> A migrant or migrant family probably would not have cared about the official or unofficial status of a ferry so long as somebody was available to ferry them over a river or creek when they arrived at the crossing.

Once across the Nanticoke, Auld faced another long day of travel under cold, cloudy skies. Early on the 11th of February, Auld must have begun to wonder if all the roads he would travel would prove as bad as the ones he had experienced so far. For the second day in a row he used the term "Rotten" to describe his route, but this time the roads proved so bad that he actually lost track of his route and rode out of

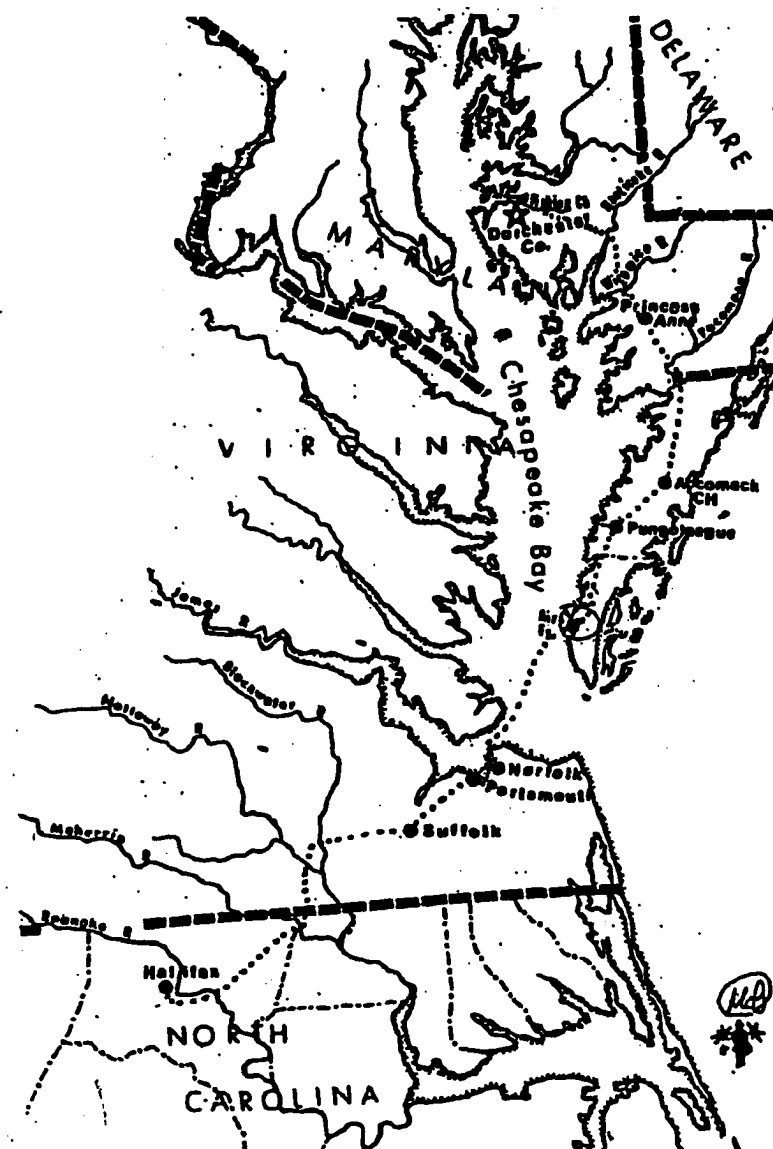
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<sup>10</sup>Joseph Brown Thomas, "Settlement, Community, and Economy: The Development of Towns on Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore, 1660-1775" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1994), 193-94.

<sup>11</sup>A similar situation prevailed in North Carolina, Alan D. Watson, "The Ferry in Colonial North Carolina: A Vital Link in Transportation," *North Carolina Historical Review* 51 (1974): 247-60.

FIGURE 4.

JAMES AULD'S ROUTE FROM MARYLAND TO  
NORTH CAROLINA



Reprinted from Ransom McBride, trans., "Diary & Notebook of James Auld,"  
*North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* (November 1984): 223.

the way by about ten miles. After finding the right route again, Auld “proceeded to lower Ferry Wicomico.”<sup>12</sup> After crossing the Wicomico River, Auld’s horse, “being fatigued with the heavy Roads,” forced him to stop long enough to purchase some feed and have some dinner for himself. After buying some “Corn husks at a French house for my horse,” Auld made a meal of a boiled egg, and he tucked a biscuit in his pocket for the road.<sup>13</sup>

As Auld crossed the central portion of Somerset County, Maryland, he either grew accustomed to “Rotten” roads or his route improved; in any case he stopped complaining about the quality of the road as he continued his trek southward down the peninsula. As night began to fall, Auld “passed by Princess Ann Town ...& lodged at one Jessee Kings 3 miles beyond Town.” It would seem that staying in Princess Ann might have been preferable to staying in the private home of a stranger. Out of the eight tavern licenses granted by Somerset County Court in 1763, at least two went to men who owned property in Princess Anne. Robert Geddes and John Done operated ordinaries side by side in the town, and their location almost guaranteed Geddes and Done that they would see a brisk business when the county

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<sup>12</sup> This ferry began running in the late seventeenth century and is still in operation at the hamlet of Whitehaven. In the early nineteenth century, this ferry was called the Whitehaven ferry as opposed to the “lower ferry.” Thomas, “The Development of Towns on Maryland’s Lower Eastern Shore,” 211-17.

<sup>13</sup> James Auld, *Diary*. What Auld meant by “French” house is not clear. Although Huguenots abounded in the middle south, this area of Maryland was predominantly English in ethnic composition. In any case, Auld appeared to have felt comfortable dealing with the residents of this French house.



court met in March, June, August, and November.<sup>14</sup> For some reason, Auld passed by these opportunities for lodging. Because it was a full month before the next court would meet, both ordinaries probably had ample space for travelers. Auld may have anticipated a higher price tag for a night's stay in town, but considering that he was a man of some means, the cost differential was probably not a factor. Auld mentions nothing else about Princess Anne, suggesting that the county seat of government had not yet become an important commercial or social hub.

The King family, who lived about three miles south of Princess Anne, welcomed Auld kindly on his second night away from his family. Auld, however, described the King family as *Itchified*. Auld would use the same term later to describe other hosts along the way. By this description Auld might have meant they were dirty or perhaps malnourished or underdressed or even that their house was infested with insects or vermin. Yet Jesse King was a member of the vestry of Somerset Parish, and he owned land and slaves at the time.<sup>15</sup> As some of the more privileged residents of the county, it is unlikely that the Kings appeared destitute. In any case, *Itchified* or otherwise, the Kings took Auld into their household and offered him a place to rest before the next day's travel. By Auld's count, he had traveled twenty-nine miles for the day.

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<sup>14</sup> Somerset County Judicial Record, Aug. 1763 (microfilm) CR 50, 297; Somerset County Land Records, 24, 132 (microfilm) C (0 24); Somerset County Land Records, 24, 156 (microfilm) C (0 24) all at Nabb Research Center.

<sup>15</sup> Somerset County Wills, EB 5, 55 (microfilm) CR 43,742, Nabb Research Center.

Over the next couple of days Auld continued his journey down the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia toward the mouth of Chesapeake Bay. After leaving the King household on Tuesday morning, February 12th, James rode eighteen miles to the Pocomoke River. He crossed the deep Pocomoke to Worcester County at Stevens's Ferry. By 1765 Mary Stevens operated the "lower ferry," as it was designated in Worcester County court records. Stevens received support from the county in the amount of £2,500 of tobacco for one year of operation. While this support was actually quite modest, it nevertheless supplemented the fees that Stevens collected at the ferry. When Mary's husband William died in 1759, he had left his land along with the ferry to his wife until she remarried. Mary Stevens evidently saw a number of economic advantages to remaining a widow; at least since 1763, Stevens enhanced her income by operating an ordinary adjacent to her ferry.<sup>16</sup> While it is uncertain that James Auld actually came into contact with Stevens, he crossed the Pocomoke River at her ferry and ordinary at about one in the afternoon and proceeded to Virginia.

That evening Auld encountered his first difficulty in finding lodging. Southern Worcester County proved to be less hospitable than either Dorchester or Somerset counties. "Having been refused lodging in that neighborhood," Auld finally rested at the Warrington household near the border with Accomac County, Virginia. Dining on pork and hominy again for his supper, Auld grumbled that he

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<sup>16</sup> J. Hall Pleasants, *Archives of Maryland, Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1944), 61: 510; Maryland Prerogative Court Records, Wills, 30. 658 (microfilm) SR 4424; Somerset County Judicial Record, Aug. 1763 (microfilm) CR 50, 297, all at Nabb Research Center.

was “used kindly but poor.” The day’s entry ended with a note: “N/B called on the Verge of Accomack Coty at a Widow Tayloress on the Road Side who fed my horse with husks...In the whole 82 miles to here.” He left the Warrington’s house early the next morning. The weather was probably relatively clear, otherwise Auld would have noted bad conditions, as he had done on the previous days.<sup>17</sup>

On Wednesday the 13th of February, Auld went through the small town of Accomac. Even though this was the seat of government of Accomack County, Auld was hardly impressed; he “past it about one o’Clock without calling.” Down the road he “Stopp’d at Roadside & got Straw for horse of a poor man [and] proceeded to Pungoteague Church 11 miles & lodged at a small Lodged house on roadside 3 miles from thence.” From the Warrington’s house in Maryland to Pungoteague Church to the roadside ordinary, Auld traveled a total of forty-one miles, one of the longest single-day treks of his journey to North Carolina. Pungoteague Church as a center of social activity had been in existence since the late seventeenth century. The church that Auld passed by, however, was relatively new, dating to about 1738; in that year the Accomac County Court authorized the building of a new church at Pungoteague.<sup>18</sup>

Just a few miles beyond Pungoteague Church was the Pungoteague Tavern also known as Groten’s Tavern.<sup>19</sup> Auld did not record this tavern by name, but it was the most prominent public house in the vicinity and where he most likely rested for the night. For dinner, Auld yet again dined on fried pork and hominy, but he also

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<sup>17</sup> James Auld, *Diary*.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph T. Whitelaw, *Virginia’s Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomack Counties* (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1989 [1951]), 1: 700-01.

<sup>19</sup> Ralph T. Whitelaw, *Virginia’s Eastern Shore*, 1: 708-09.

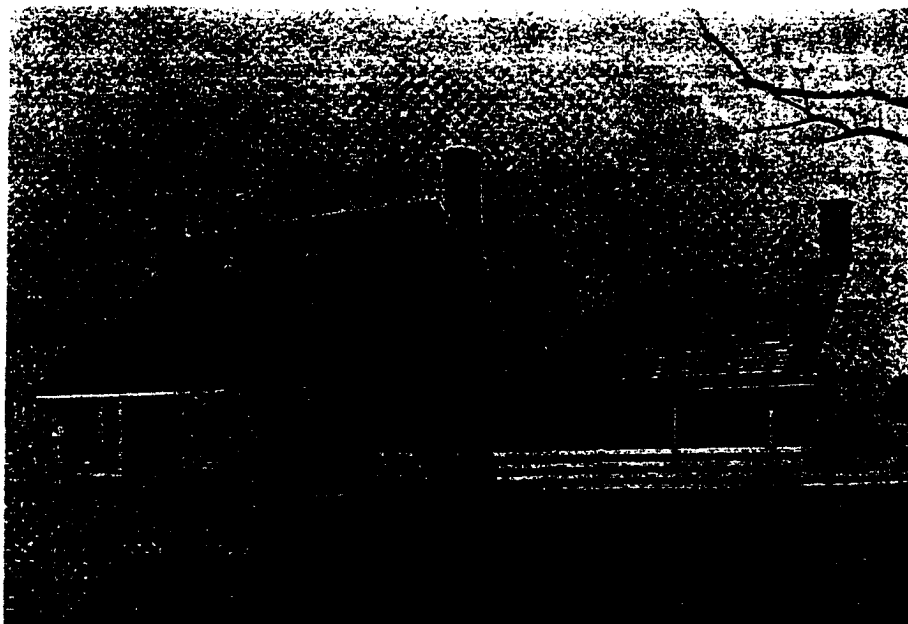
sampled some “Sea Side Oysters” as a side dish. Considering that James ate pork and hominy every night he had been on the road, the oysters probably constituted a treat. Here Auld’s host and hostess fared better under his inspection. He observed that the proprietors “were young beginners extremely poor but clean.” The lady of the house must have given Auld special treatment for he described her “a very Pheenicking dame..., & very obliging....”<sup>20</sup>

Although he had passed by a number of taverns earlier in Princess Anne and on the Pocomoke River at Mary Stevens’ house, this was the first occasion on which he had actually stayed at a public house. His meal was essentially the same as it had been the other nights, plus of course the shellfish, but he found his treatment to be somewhat better than at the private homes where he had stayed. The other families had been generous enough to Auld, but it was only at this ordinary that Auld included more complimentary description of the hostess. It also helped that the tavern was clean and neither proprietor “itchified.” Of all the places he stayed on his journey, both in private and public houses, Auld was most comfortable at this establishment. His generally good experience at this ordinary probably led Auld to seek similar lodging on subsequent nights; from that point on, he rarely slept in private homes until he reached a friend’s house in Virginia. The next morning, he arose and had breakfast. The “sort of Liquid they called Coffee” was obviously bad, but altogether his experience at Groton’s tavern was pleasant.

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<sup>20</sup> James Auld, *Diary*.

FIGURE 5.  
PUNGOTEAGUE TAVERN



*Pungoteague Tavern*

GRIFFIN C. CALLAHAN COLLECTION  
COURTESY DORAN S. CALLAHAN

Pungoteague Tavern was also called Cole's Tavern and Groten's Tavern during the colonial period. James Auld stopped at Pungoteague Tavern on his journey to North Carolina. Reprinted from Ralph T. Whitelaw, *Virginia's Eastern Shore*, 1: 708.

The next two days were frustrating for Auld. He was ready to speed his journey along by attempting to cross Chesapeake Bay. After leaving Groton's Tavern, he rode six miles to a "New England" man to arrange for passage across the bay. The ship captain, however, was not ready to sail but offered Auld a noontime meal of salt pork and Irish potatoes upon his ship. After returning to his starting point for the day, Auld traveled another ten miles to a different ordinary run by a blacksmith. Unfortunately for Auld, the quality of service fell far below the standard he encountered the previous night. The "people much Itchified," Auld was so disgusted with his accommodations that he spent the night in his clothing and his great coat. For dinner and breakfast he had fried meat (probably pork) and hominy. By now James was certainly tired of the same fare every night, but to have the same for breakfast completed his already dim view of the service at the ordinary.

Friday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, turned out to be little better than the previous day. After quitting the unpleasant ordinary he "proceeded to Hungar's Church in Northampton about 10 miles & from thence to Severn Air's ferry in order to cross the Bay near Cherry Stone about 12 miles more...." Hungar's church, like Pungoteague church in Accomack County, was relatively new when Auld passed it. Dating to the early 1740s, it was the principal place of worship for Northampton County residents. Along with the courthouse and jail in Eastville, the nearby county seat, Hungar's church was the focal point of most of the social activity in the region.<sup>21</sup> Auld says nothing of the people at or near Hungar's church. At this point in his journey, Auld was not apt to record observations about the population beyond his judgments

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<sup>21</sup> Whitelaw, *Virginia's Eastern Shore*, 1: 391-93.

regarding their hospitality. Had he passed by the church two days later, on Sunday, *and* if he had wanted to settle on the lower Eastern Shore of Virginia, he surely would have paid keen attention to the activity around the church.

The ferry across the Chesapeake was a busy place, with the potential to frustrate any migrant or traveler. In October 1748, the Virginia Assembly enacted a law that established a ferry across Chesapeake Bay from Littleton Eyre's plantation on the Hungar River to the towns of York, Hampton, and Norfolk, making it the only legal ferry across the bay to the mainland of Virginia.<sup>22</sup> Twelve years later, the operation of the ferry passed to Eyre's son Severn. The Northhampton County Court required Severn to have at least two hands to operate the ferry boat across the bay.<sup>23</sup> Considering that the ferry served three Tidewater towns, it is hardly surprising that the trip to Virginia and back required at least a day or two. Apparently when Auld reached Severn Eyre's ferry, the boat was away or the operators had to wait for sufficient winds to make it across the bay. Auld reached the crossing point about noon on Friday, but he spent the next two days at the worst ordinary he would encounter on his journey.

The ordinary was apparently owned by Severn Eyre, but according to Auld it was operated "by a poor Dirty pair..a Taylor & his wife." There was "nothing for Man or horse but stinking Rum & and as bad Wine...no meat & little bread ground at

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<sup>22</sup> William Waller Henings, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the year 1619*, 13 vols. (Richmond: for editor, 1819), 6: 19-20. Unlike other unofficial ferries in many of the colonies that operated without license *and* without harassment from officials, ferries across the Chesapeake that sailed from points other than at Eyre's were prohibited by Virginia law.

<sup>23</sup> Northhampton County Court Minute Book 25: 231 (microfilm), Nabb Research Center.

a hand mill and backed in a dirty manner at the fire.” Auld was not a lone traveler during his stay near Eyre’s ferry; “several other travelers and Passengers that fell in there” shared his unpleasant experience. To complement the bad bread, Auld and his involuntary companions scrounged around in the bay for some oysters and cockles.<sup>24</sup> Procuring these shellfish was no easy feat for the anxious travelers. It was the middle of February, and even though temperatures in the bay area are relatively moderate during the winter months, the water temperature was close to its coldest point of the year. The tide was low that day, so they most likely collected some shellfish from the water’s edge; a daring soul might have waded into the bay far enough to scrounge for a few more. The next morning they had the same meal “except a sort of hot water of Clay Col. which the dirty Queen Called Coffee & some butter of Various Colours.” James may well have yearned for some fried pork and hominy.

Auld’s experience with lodging on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia had its ups and downs. If his observations were accurate, his accommodations in private homes were generally better, on the whole, than his lodging at public houses. Except for his prolonged search for a place to sleep in lower Worcester County, he recorded no trouble finding people who would let him into their homes. Although the families were poor, they appear to have treated him as well as their resources would allow. His first night in an ordinary worked out well enough, with the doting hostess and her young husband apparently catering to Auld’s needs. The last three nights, however, were increasingly distasteful. The ordinaries

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<sup>24</sup> The term cockle has fallen out of use. Auld probably referred to clams, which would have been plentiful right up on the shore line or within a very short wading distance into the bay.



that Auld passed by in Princess Anne may have been just as bad as the last two in Northampton County. While waiting for the ferry Auld and other travelers had the option of seeking accommodations in private homes; however, their anticipation of the ferry's arrival probably influenced them to stay close by at the ordinary.

Crossing rivers by ferry was rarely a pleasant undertaking. Especially when a traveler came to a substantial body such as the lower portions of the James or Potomac Rivers or any portion of Chesapeake Bay, crossing actually involved several steps. At smaller rivers, such as the upper Rappahannock or the river Auld had already crossed, the Pocomoke, ferry boats were usually rather small flat-boats that glided virtually up to the dry banks. On Virginia's Southside, a flat-boat ferry across the Meherrin River measured 16 feet long by 5 wide. At even smaller rivers and creeks, some crossings featured ferries that were essentially dugout canoes, capable of holding only two or three people. These small ferries required only the efforts of the ferry attendant to either paddle or pole the craft across the water.<sup>25</sup>

Larger bodies of water, however, required larger vessels that were powered by sail. The attendant or an assistant would usually ferry travelers out to the larger ferry boat on a flat boat, and then they would set sail for the other side. While this system worked rather well for foot passengers, those who were on horseback faced the difficult task of making this transfer from the flat boat to the actual ferry. As late as the 1790s, the ferries in Virginia rated very low. Isaac Weld, an Irishman traveling throughout the newly independent eastern states, complained about the danger

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<sup>25</sup> Alan D. Watson, "The Ferry in Colonial North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 51 (July 1974): 250.

involved in taking a horse on a ferry. In his travels he reported hearing “of numberless recent instances of horses being drowned, killed, and having their legs broken, by getting in and out of the boats.” Beyond the danger of crossing, Weld also had little good to say about the reliability of ferry service in Virginia, complaining, “there is not one in six where the boats are good and well manned.”<sup>26</sup>

Passage across the bay to Norfolk took about ten hours. Before Auld and the passengers boarded the ferry, he had sent “out into the neighborhood for oats to feed” his horse. Auld expected a long day because someone at the ordinary had told him that the journey to Norfolk was about sixty miles. The party clamored aboard and settled in for a day’s sail. They departed the Eastern Shore at ten in the morning and arrived at the Norfolk wharves about eight o’clock that evening. After all of the horses “were hoisted out at the wharf,” Auld, and probably some of his companions, found lodging at Wrensburch’s Tavern. For the first time on his journey, Auld encountered somebody that he knew; the proprietor of the tavern was an old acquaintance. Auld took advantage of this meeting to send word of his condition back home. It was Auld’s understanding that the tavern keeper would send his letters on the first ship to Annapolis, and in turn a carrier would take them to Dorchester County across the bay.<sup>27</sup>

Sending letters back home during a journey was a common practice for many backcountry migrants. John Wall, migrating with his family from Chester County,

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<sup>26</sup> Isaac Weld, *Travels Through the States of North American and Provinces of Upper & Lower Canada, During the Years 1795, 1796, & 1797*, 2 vols. (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1970 [1807]), 1: 369-70.

<sup>27</sup> James Auld, *Diary*.

Pennsylvania to Orange County, North Carolina, reported to a relative about the progress his family had made while they were passing through Loudon County, Virginia. Although they had traveled about 200 miles and were in good health, they had been hindered by heavy rains and high waters as they made their way south through the Piedmont of Virginia, probably on the Carolina Road.<sup>28</sup> The Moravians also anxiously sent word to Bethlehem at various points on their journey. Whenever they were in the company of a fellow Moravian settler, the Moravians sent word of their whereabouts and their experience back to their family and associates in Bethlehem. Five days into their journey from Pennsylvania to Wachovia, the first party of Moravians heading to North Carolina sent a packet of letters back to Bethlehem. On this occasion the group was still relatively close to home, having just crossed the Susquehanna. Distance, however, provided only a temporary obstacle to communicating with people back home. Sixteen days later, the Brethren sent another packet of letters, this time with a man they had met only a day or so before. In Augusta County, south of present-day Lexington, a man named Mr. Illsen, who had sold them their most recent batch of corn, approached the Brethren for assistance with shoeing his horse. Illsen was on his way to Philadelphia, and if they “had

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<sup>28</sup> John Wade to Phebe Hadly, 13 June 1766, Buffington Family Mss, item 787, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania. Unlike Auld and the Moravians, Wall apparently entrusted his correspondence to the hands of a stranger rather than someone with whom he shared some ethnic or religious connection.

anything to deliver he would gladly take it along.” The Brethren quickly took him up on his offer.<sup>29</sup> Auld seemed equally eager to send home a report of his experiences.

Writing to family members who had remained behind allowed migrants to remain connected to a network of family and friends even while they were in transit. Maintaining correspondence with family and friends probably served as a means of coping with the daily uncertainties of travel. By writing home and reporting on their progress and their health, migrants were able to reassure loved one of their own well-being. At the same time, letters sent back home also allowed migrants to remain focused on a vital element of their ultimate purpose in migration, which was maintaining social networks of family and associates as they sought better lives by settling in the southern backcountry. Even as migrants were assuring relatives, and themselves for that matter, of their own progress, they were at the same time preparing the others to make the journey themselves. As Auld continued on his own journey, he kept in mind how he would move the rest of his family on a subsequent trip. By writing home and describing his journey, he in some way probably made the whole undertaking of migration appear to be somewhat less difficult to his wife Rosannah, preparing her expectations for the family’s upcoming journey.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> “Diary of the Journey of the First Colony of Single Brethren to North Carolina, October 8-November 17, 1753,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 11 (Oct. 1904): 138, 151.

<sup>30</sup> For more on how families corresponded with each other after settling and how backcountry settlers encouraged other family members and friends to follow them, see chapter five below.

On Monday February 18, just over a week after the beginning of his journey, Auld set out rather late from Wrensburch's tavern. After all, he arrived in Norfolk the night before only a couple of hours before midnight. At noon on the 18<sup>th</sup>, he departed from Norfolk and took a "Small Ferry that crosses Elizabeth River." It was rainy enough that day to force Auld to curtail his day's journey; he stopped early at "a tavern on the Road about 4 o'Clock in afternoon." Four hours of travel is the shortest time Auld spent on the road on any given day. Most of his travel days consisted of a full eight-to-ten hours on the road. He left no indication that he was ill or that his horse was exhausted; in all likelihood the weather, coupled with the uncertainty of accommodations ahead, led him to call it short for the day.

From this point on, Auld became more concerned with his surroundings. Until he left Norfolk, he primarily recorded in his diary observations (and complaints) about his effort to cross the land. As he began his journey across the eastern portion of Virginia's Southside, however, he wrote relatively detailed accounts of the landscape. His entries read much like the accounts of sundry other speculators, surveyors, and scientific explorers who traveled through the backcountry or frontier regions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dr. Thomas Walker, for instance, kept a detailed account of his extended journey to present-day West Virginia. As he left Albemarle County on March 7, 1749/50, he and a company of five other men headed "Westward in order to discover a proper Place for a Settlement." His journal reads like a catalog of plants, trees, and wild game.<sup>31</sup> Auld's purpose differed from Walker's only in matters of scale and geography.

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Walker, *Journal, 1750* (microfilm), Manuscripts Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

While Walker sought out resource-rich land in the far backcountry for the sake of speculation and settlement, Auld sought out opportunity for his family. Both men saw the value of appraising the land. <sup>32</sup>

On the way to Suffolk, before he reached a roadside tavern on Monday the 18th, Auld described what he saw around him: "Lands midling good, but Plantations old & small Indian Corn Tobo & Tarr the produce very little Wheat."<sup>33</sup> This sentence alone indicates Auld's interests. He saw around him a landscape of moderate potential, which perhaps suffered from a degree of overdevelopment and overuse. Tobacco and corn remained in wide production back in his old neighborhood on the Eastern Shore, but he evidently expected to see more in the way of wheat. By the 1760s most Eastern Shore counties produced significant wheat crops along with corn and a decreasing amount of tobacco. <sup>34</sup> In North Carolina, wheat production was

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<sup>32</sup> What both men were taking part in was the process of constructing and defining the landscape, a process that necessarily involved each man's perception of what to expect out of the land. While Walker and Auld would both ultimately be concerned with quantifying their land by purchasing a number of acres in the case of Auld and seeking to validate a huge land grant in the case of Walker, on their initial journeys anyway they were concerned with the landscape, a qualitative object of perception and social reproduction. For discussion of this concept, see Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25 (1993): 153-55; David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80 (1990): 419; Elizabeth Perkins, *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 42-44. For similar discussion of travel and perception, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988 [1982]), 53-56.

<sup>33</sup> James Auld, *Diary*.

<sup>34</sup> Lois Green Carr, "Diversification in the Colonial Chesapeake: Somerset County, Maryland, in Comparative Perspective," in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, eds. Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 358-61; Paul Clemens, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 22-23, 183-98.

increasing especially in the backcountry counties. While the counties in the northern section of eastern North Carolina produced wheat commercially, all of the backcountry counties produced this crop, and the popularity of growing wheat increased throughout the 1760s.<sup>35</sup>

Auld's comparative framework indicates that he judged this new landscape by the opportunities he anticipated. Although a lawyer and businessman by trade instead of a farmer, Auld evidently appraised the land by what a settler could produce from it. His thoughts also indicate that he was open to the prospect of relying on farming instead of office-holding to sustain his family. Most of the thousands of other migrants in the mid-eighteenth century would have gone through the same exercise that Auld did as he made his way to his backcountry destination.

Auld reached the small town of Suffolk on February 19 an hour before noon, entering the town by crossing a bridge over the Nansemond River. James judged that Suffolk was about eleven navigable miles up the Nansemond from the James River, and he continued his assessment of the commercial potential of the town. Auld speculated that most of the "Trade & Chief exports" from North Carolina passed through Suffolk on the way to the Chesapeake. He witnessed the transport of pork, butter, flour, and naval stores such as tar and turpentine. Auld's observations were all in line with his anticipation about his new prospects in North Carolina. As he continued to draw closer to his destination, he realized that the wagoners he observed and the commodities they carried represented a vital element of his future economic

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<sup>35</sup> Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 113-15.

opportunities. Along with the commercial functions of the town, Auld also found Suffolk the site of “a beautiful Court house a good Church and a School house...” Auld’s admiration of Suffolk suggested his hopes for a similarly appointed town in Halifax.

Auld interrupted his journey just outside Suffolk. He arrived at the house of his friend, a physician, late in the early afternoon of the 19th of February, and he remained at the doctor’s house for almost two weeks until March 5, 1765. His stay at this house must have been a scheduled element of his journey, although Auld never alluded to it in earlier journal entries. If his meeting was prearranged with the unnamed doctor, it appears that the doctor provided only limited information to James before his journey. Auld knew little about the lands he crossed except for what he observed. During his stay there he surveyed the surrounding countryside and again found “fine Lands in this neighborhood & a Fine River.” It is probable that his associate had reported to Auld the general conditions of the area, but because James sought out a new home with potential for a new economic life, he still found it necessary to confirm any assessments the doctor had forwarded to him.

After this extended respite at his friend’s house near the banks of the Nansemond River, Auld and the doctor departed for the Blackwater River which divided Nansemond from Southampton County. Even though he was traveling for the first time with a planned companion, he nevertheless paid close attention to the landscape. They took a road in a southwesterly direction through an “extremely poor & Sandy” stretch of land. Their route was not the only nor even the primary road into North Carolina from the Suffolk area. John Dalrymple’s 1755 edition of the Fry-



Jefferson map clearly delineates a route from the town of Suffolk to the vicinity of Halifax. When John Saunders made his trip from Suffolk to Hillsborough in 1753, he took this route. On Saunders' first day of travel he crossed the border with North Carolina, stopping shortly for dinner at a plantation in Summerton, just inside Virginia.<sup>36</sup> The route that Saunders took provided a number of advantages, the greatest of which were river crossings. By taking a route that swung more to the south than the southwest, Saunders only had to cross the Chowan and Roanoke rivers. Auld and the doctor, on the other hand, crossed the Blackwater, Nottoway, and Meherrin rivers above the point of confluence where they formed the Chowan.

On their way to the South Key Bridge over the Blackwater, Auld took particular interest in forest lands and milling operations. Because the land was sandy and "Over run with a sort of short Sedge" grass, Auld saw little agricultural potential in the land. The woods, however, held plenty of Pine, some Red Oaks and a few White oaks. He also saw "numbers of Tarr kilns." Again, Auld was not familiar with the production of naval stores, but the area he crossed was one of southeastern Virginia's primary tar production regions. The many pines he saw provided "plenty of Lightwood," the resinous wood of the yellow pine. When William Byrd crossed just south of this area in March 1728, he had also taken note of the ample pines. He noticed that "The inhabitants hereabouts pick up knots of lightwood in abundance, which they burn into tar and then carry it to Norfolk or Nansemond."<sup>37</sup> Even though

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<sup>36</sup> John Saunders, *Notebook and Journal*, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC.

Virginia would never overtake North Carolina in the production of tar, pitch, and turpentine in the colonial era, the colony was the second leading producer of naval stores, thanks mostly to the region that Auld traversed.<sup>38</sup>

Auld also noticed the prevalence of grist mills situated along creeks and the Blackwater. As he headed farther south and west he would have seen a growing number of gristmills as grain production increased. There were so many gristmills along the Nottoway and Meherrin rivers by the early 1760s that they interfered with the passage of fish to counties farther to the west. To remedy the situation, the colonial assembly enacted a law requiring mill owners to place slopes or openings in their mill-dams to allow fish to swim upstream.<sup>39</sup> As Auld approached the bridge across the Black Water River, however, his mind was not on Virginia's fish population. Instead, he probably wondered which of the commodities he observed would play a role in his future prosperity.

Auld and his doctor friend "Arrived at South Kay [sic] that afternoon." The South Key Bridge across the Blackwater was one of the primary crossing points on the river. That night James stayed at the home of Thomas and Mary Fisher. The Fishers occupied a house adjacent to the South Key Bridge. Along with their house

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<sup>37</sup> William Byrd, *History of the Dividing Line*, in Louis B. Wright, ed. *The Prose Works of William Byrd of Westover: Narratives of a Colonial Virginian* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), 203-04.

<sup>38</sup> Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonist and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 122-23.

<sup>39</sup> Henings, *Statutes at Large*, 7: 409-10.

they had a storehouse and two 30' x 20' warehouses with plenty of shed storage. To Auld, the South Key Bridge, along with the Fisher's plantation, probably resembled a small town area. The warehouses next to the Bridge stood along a wharf in nine feet of water, making the site an ideal location for backcountry trade. The Blackwater eventually empties into the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina, but for farmers or traders who wished to market their produce in Virginia, it was only a twenty-mile stretch from the South Key Bridge to reach the Nansemond River and its Chesapeake Bay outlets.<sup>40</sup> All of this information was very important to Auld as he made his way across the Southside. As he took note of the landscape's bounty, it was equally important to become aware of principal trade routes and storage facilities. Auld's journey from Maryland was too far and too arduous to set up a new life and new business without having gathered as much knowledge as possible about economic opportunities.

Leaving South Key Bridge, Auld and the doctor proceeded to the Nottoway River about fifteen miles and then continued another twelve to the Meherrin River. This stretch of land presented to Auld more tar and tar kilns. Both rivers seemed very manageable to Auld. Both contained "Plenty of Fresh Water Fish," and he heard that neither tended to overflow even in seasons of heavy rain. After crossing the Meherrin in a ferry operated by Henry Hill, Auld and his companion spent two evenings at Hill's house because of rain. On Friday, March 8, they departed at about nine in the morning and reached the Roanoke River in the late afternoon after about thirty miles of travel. As Auld took the ferry across the Roanoke, his anticipation

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<sup>40</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, Feb. 9, 1769, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

grew. Auld was more impressed with the Roanoke than he was with Chesapeake Bay; he noted that it was a “River of first Magnitude,” with both of its high banks possessing “Rich large Quantities” of various timber. By this point, Auld was within a day’s travel of his destination in Halifax. His heightened interest in the Roanoke and its resources was no mere happenstance. For the first time on his journey, Auld saw with his own eyes the resources that he hoped would enrich him and his family.

The fact that the Roanoke was infamous for overflowing its banks failed to diminish Auld’s interest in its resources. Someone, perhaps the ferry keeper, informed him that the Roanoke at times rose thirty to sixty feet over its normal level. Such floods apparently occurred with some frequency. Almost twenty years later, when J.F.D. Smyth traveled through the town of Halifax, he too heard of the famed “freshets” on the Roanoke. Smyth reported “trees, fences, corn, tobacco, horses, cattle and even houses are all swept away by the torrent and carried down stream.” These floods usually occurred a day or two following a heavy rain, after the waters from deeper in the backcountry flowed down toward the coast.<sup>41</sup> The report that Auld heard may have been an exaggeration, but it did not dissuade him from settling in the neighborhood.

Auld actually crossed the Roanoke at some distance from the town of Halifax. According to his journal, after taking the ferry he and the doctor traveled another eight miles “to a little Tavern on the Road side,” and then rode another twelve miles the next day to the house of the doctor’s son-in-law, Malachi Murden. Murden expected James and the doctor to arrive in the mid-morning. They left the tavern

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<sup>41</sup> John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America* (New York: Arno Press, 1968 [1784]), 1: 85-87.

about six in the morning and the doctor sent advance word of their arrival to his son-in-law. James remained at Murden's house for five days. He reported that he "received great kindness" and that he was "amongst friends." While it is possible that he met other acquaintances at Murden's house, he probably would have mentioned them by name had they been associates or friends from his home in Dorchester County. Rather, Auld felt comfortable among the doctor's family as he made his final plans for riding to Halifax to find a position.

The doctor and Murden recommended to Auld that he seek out the assistance of one of Halifax's most prominent residents, Joseph Montfort. On March 14, 1765, Auld departed Malachi Murden's house and rode about fifteen miles to Halifax, where his journey ended for the time being. As his hosts for the previous nights suggested, Auld "put up at the house of Jos. Montfort Esqr." Montfort was Halifax's wealthiest man; he represented the town in the colonial assembly throughout most of the 1760s, and he had also been the first clerk of court for the county.<sup>42</sup> The only allusion that Auld made to Montfort's status, however, was in relation to the positions that Montfort arranged for him. Following the entry about lodging at Montfort's house, Auld wrote "& afterwards settled in Town and took the county clerkship of him and kept a store." His stay with Montfort evidently paid off.

That Auld arranged his position with Montfort *after* his arrival in North Carolina indicates that his plans were only half formed when he set out on this scouting journey. He evidently had made some contact with his physician friend

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<sup>42</sup>W. C. Allen, *History of Halifax County* (Greenville, S.C.: Southern Historical Press, 1993 reprint edition), 149-51.

about potential opportunities, but he probably had no solid prospects before meeting Montfort. Other prospective backcountry migrants followed a pattern similar to Auld's. For instance, in 1769 George Glascock wrote from Halifax County, Virginia to his merchant friend Richard Bennehan in Orange County, North Carolina to ascertain if there were any opportunities for him. Earlier in the decade, Bennehan had worked for George Glascock's father, William Glascock, in Richmond County Virginia. In 1762, when Bennehan wished to travel "to the Remoter parts of this Colony," William Glascock and his partners wrote Bennehan a letter of introduction vouching for his honesty and his work ethic. By 1769 Bennehan had become well established with a Scottish trading group in Orange County, and he was well positioned to be aware of opportunities for friends. In particular, George Glascock asked Bennehan "if a school Master might get employment in those parts...or if you could get me into the business of store keeping or any other such as you think."<sup>43</sup> Evidently Glascock's vision of what the backcountry might hold in store for him had

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<sup>43</sup> Letter, John Woodbridge, William Glascock, LeRoy Hammond, March 20, 1762; George Glascock to Richard Bennehan, Sept. 21, 1769, Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For more on Bennehan and the business that Glascock was interested in, see Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 62-64; and Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 162-63. Examples of people contacting backcountry residents to inquire about opportunities extend across the Atlantic. Colin Shaw was a well established merchant in Cumberland County, North Carolina. In 1770 Donald Campbell, Shaw's uncle, wrote to him from Scotland, asking assistance for his daughter and son-in-law who were attempting to settle in the North Carolina backcountry. Campbell explained to Shaw that their ill fortune in Scotland had not been due to their own shortcomings, and he asked that Shaw "may give them...advice & assistance in having them put on some footing." Campbell put Shaw on the spot with this request, because his son-in-law, presumably with his family in tow, was the bearer of the letter. Letterbook, Colin Shaw Collection, North Carolina Division of History and Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

a degree of flexibility, and he placed a significant degree of confidence in Richard Bennehan's judgment. Like James Auld, Glascock clearly expected to settle in the backcountry, but he relied on friends and their associates to help clarify which opportunities might prove fruitful.

By early spring of 1765 Auld had a strong foothold in his new home, but the job of moving his family to North Carolina remained. During his entire journey, Rosannah Auld remained on Fishing Creek in Maryland. Rosannah left no record of her efforts with the children or with managing any financial business in James's absence, but it is safe to say that preparing her family of young children for the move to North Carolina occupied much of her time and thoughts. Historians of later migrations have identified a distinct difference between how men and women perceived the experience of moving. Men tended to view the journey and the settlement process as an opportunity for improvement. Women, on the other hand, often looked forward with apprehension and even dread in some cases.<sup>44</sup> The evidence yields nothing about Rosannah's position on the migration. If she thought like many of the women of the nineteenth-century migrations, however, she probably wished to remain in Maryland. When James returned to Dorchester County in the summer of 1765, Rosannah may well have hoped that his scouting trip to Halifax had proven futile.

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<sup>44</sup> Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture*, 32-49. See also John Mack Farragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 163-64. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 42-47, on the other hand, points to a number of examples in which women displayed a sense of adventure and an interest in seeking a better life for themselves and their families. It is possible that Rosannah Auld and other colonial women were not as reluctant to migrate as the majority of their nineteenth-century counterparts, yet there is little or no evidence suggesting a major difference.

Auld returned to Maryland in June and remained there for about three weeks. On this brief visit home, he took care of the business of preparing his family to move. They had already sold land that he and his wife had owned during the previous two years. In 1763 they had sold one hundred acres and the following year another 265-acre tract in Dorchester County.<sup>45</sup> During the summer of 1765, Auld was still officially a part of the county land commission, charged with surveying lands and validating property lines.<sup>46</sup> Discharging any of his responsibilities which were involved in the land commission and in his position as the county commissary, Auld was ready to continue the process of migration. After resolving remaining business and telling the rest of his family to begin preparing to move, Auld traveled back to Halifax to resume his duties as the clerk of court and as Montfort's storekeeper.

In August James returned again to Maryland, this time to remove his family. He wrote nothing about their trek except that "we arrived on the 25th Day of Sept. 1765."<sup>47</sup> Although portions of his first journey were arduous, re-tracing his steps with six children in tow, including a nine-month-old infant, certainly made every aspect of the trip more difficult. The family most likely took the same route that he had, down the Eastern Shore, then across the Southside. James had lost his way enough times on his first trip that he probably hoped to avoid the uncertainties of a new route with his

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<sup>45</sup> Dorchester County Court, Land Records, Old 18: 409; Old 157, (microfilm) Nabb Research Center. There are no other records of the Aulds selling land in Dorchester County through the early 1770s.

<sup>46</sup> Dorchester County Court, Land Records, Old 20:237, (microfilm), Nabb Research Center.

<sup>47</sup> By this point in Auld's diary he was obviously writing from memory, as though he thought to record some memorable milestones a few years after they occurred. He appears to have made his last daily entry on his first day in Halifax when he met Joseph Montfort.



family. Judging from their arrival date in Halifax, it appears that the journey took somewhat longer than his first journey. If they left Dorchester County shortly after James's arrival in August, the journey took at least three weeks.

They settled in Halifax for about two years. Just over a year later on November 30, 1766, Rosannah gave birth to James Jr., the little child who would die as an infant only three months later. By that time James was ready to move on to other opportunities in the countryside. According to his diary, the Aulds moved about seven miles outside the town of Halifax, to a 650-acre farm with "a large Orchard & house." Between 1767 and 1771 James remained active in Halifax town, making almost daily trips from his home while a number of overseers managed his farm operations. Furthermore, in 1769 James pledged £3 for the building of a Masonic temple in Halifax. His former benefactor Joseph Montfort donated a lot and a house in Halifax and received a charter from the Grand Master of England. Auld was one of twelve other men who pledged support for the lodge.<sup>48</sup>

By 1771, however, Auld's agricultural enterprise began to fail. Two overseers in 1769 and 1770 produced poor crops of wheat and corn, and in 1771 Auld decided to take on no hired help to assist his two aging slaves. In January of that year Auld once

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<sup>48</sup> W.C. Allen, *History of Halifax County*, 92-94. By supporting the local Masonic Lodge, Auld was attempting to associate further with the county's elite. Although freemasonry in America had undergone a process of democratization since 1750, many men saw joining a Masonic lodge as a means of asserting their social and political importance. For a man like Auld, someone still struggling to secure his status in a new community, supporting the building of the Masonic lodge offered him another way to bind himself to men like Joseph Montfort. See Steven C. Bullock, "The Revolutionary Transformation of American Freemasonry, 1752-1792," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 47 (Jul., 1990): 349-50; For a thorough discussion of the divisions in American Masonry before the Revolution, see Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 85-108.

again looked for brighter opportunities deeper in the backcountry. He “Travelled up to Anson County about 200 miles contracted with Colo. Saml. Spencer for the Clkship of that County,” and his “first Court Commenced Jany 1771.” Repeating an almost identical process, Auld left his family behind while he pressed ahead to determine his prospects for the future. This time, he exercised more caution before relocating his family. He rode the Anson County circuit for over a year before he decided to settle in the county. Part of this time he spent traveling through Anson with his two sons Michael and John, who were fourteen and nineteen respectively. John began following in his father’s footsteps in January 1772; he gained a position at a store in Chatham County and also became the deputy clerk for a judge in that county. After the Anson County Court ended its April 1772 session, James returned to Halifax to remove his family. He hoped to re-settle before the July court began.

Although Auld’s diary ends with his entry regarding settling in Anson County, several pieces of evidence indicate how he and his family fared as they headed to western North Carolina. At the end of 1772, Auld attempted to sell his house in Halifax and at least part of his property. Despite Auld’s poor results from his last harvests, he nevertheless touted the richness of his property. The ad that appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in December 1772 read as follows:

The said land lies about six miles above Halifax Town is well wooded and watered, the soil good for corn, wheat, &c and affords as good Range, for Stock of all Kinds, as any Land in the County, There is remarkable fine Apple Orchard on the place, a good Dwelling House and sundry Outhouses. For terms apply to Mr. William Hendric who lives near the Premises or to James Auld <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, December 3, 1772, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

The Aulds evidently had moved on by the time this ad ran in Williamsburg, otherwise it would not have instructed potential buyers to forward enquiries to a neighbor.

The following May, Auld began taking up land in Anson County, mostly in the form of grants from the colonial government. On the 24th of the month, James recorded patents for three tracts of land of 200, 400, and 640 acres. Two of the properties were on the north side of the Pee Dee River, while the third was located on Buffalo Creek, "near Smiths Mill at the Great Road." A year later in July 1774, Auld patented an additional 640 acres, bringing his total land holdings to almost 1900 acres.<sup>50</sup> Despite their setbacks towards the end of their stay in Halifax, the Aulds had accumulated a sizable amount of land by the outset of the revolutionary war.

James Auld died in 1780 and Rosannah about ten years later. His will was filed in Anson County, although he apparently died at a new residence in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. Rosannah, his son William, and his son-in-law William Harrington served as the executors of his estate.<sup>51</sup> A family tradition holds that Auld merely died in Mecklenburg, Virginia on a journey to or from Maryland, while others believe that Auld died in Maryland.<sup>52</sup> Whichever is true, James apparently never became satisfied with his situation. Of course, it is impossible to know for certain what his intentions were later in his life. Had he continued maintaining his journal throughout the

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Hoffman, ed., *Colony of North Carolina, Land Patents* (Weldon, N.C.: Roanoke News Company, 1984), 2: 346, 350, 351, 642.

<sup>51</sup> Brent H. Holcomb, ed., *Anson County North Carolina, Deed Abstracts, 1749-1766, Abstracts of Wills & Estates, 1749-1795* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), 128.

<sup>52</sup> R.T. Bennett "Introduction: The Journal of James Auld, 1765-1770," *Publications of the Southern History Association* 4 (July 1904): 253-55.

revolutionary war years, he probably would have betrayed again his continual search for a better opportunity. James Auld appears to have associated geographic mobility with social mobility. By moving from place to place, Auld hoped to improve his family's economic well being. Of all of the factors that motivated families to migrate in the eighteenth century, the impulse to build a better life and seek economic stability was certainly among the most important. Yet this impulse was tempered by the desire, and possibly the need, to build a better life in an area where there were familiar people and a familiar landscape.

The Aulds' experience from 1765 through the Revolution represents the experience of hundreds, even thousands, of other families of the same era. As an attorney and county clerk, James Auld had achieved rank higher than the majority of people who would leave their homes to settle in the backcountry South. Yet James Auld's status only separated him from the average migrant insofar as it allowed him a greater chance of cultivating opportunities once he arrived in the backcountry. His social advantages carried him only so far. His position as the clerk of the Halifax court failed to shield him from the vagaries of agricultural production. When leaner times came, Auld devised a plan to re-settle farther in the backcountry, a plan that countless others developed.

Auld's initial journey to the backcountry also represented the daily travails of migrants during the mid-eighteenth century. As one man traveling alone, he probably covered more territory in a typical day than during his later journey with his family. One person on horseback could, after all, cover ground much more quickly than a group of people with a wagon or cart of possessions. He also enjoyed regular stays in

houses or ordinaries, although his descriptions of these establishments indicate that camping outside, as he almost certainly did with his family, probably proved to be just as comfortable for him. On the whole, Auld's encounters on his journey reflect a typical migration experience. The challenges posed to James by poorly marked routes, unpredictable opportunities for buying provisions, and inconsistent service in public houses were the same challenges that all migrants faced. Dealing with these difficulties was the price to be paid for building a new life.

## CHAPTER IV

### LAND AND MIGRATION

Settlers migrating to the southern backcountry in the mid-eighteenth century moved for a variety of reasons. A profile of the economic and social conditions that prevailed in several points of origin for the migration and an analysis of evidence from land records and county tax lists reveals a number of factors that motivated people to migrate. This chapter focuses on the movement to western North Carolina from Brunswick County, Virginia, located on the Southside of the James River in the western Piedmont, Augusta County in the Valley of Virginia, and the Philadelphia hinterland region. While most settlers moved to the southern backcountry because they perceived an opportunity to improve their situation, definitions of improvement varied and often extended beyond the individuals to include extended families and small social networks.

Southeastern Pennsylvania has long been recognized as a primary area of origination for settlers who moved farther into western Pennsylvania and to the Valley of Virginia. Chester County in particular, as well as adjacent Lancaster County and Cecil County, Maryland, were primary settlement areas, often by way of Philadelphia, for immigrants to the colonies from the British Isles as well as from the German states.

After immigrants arrived from Ulster or elsewhere in Great Britain, they faced the choice of making their living in the urban center of Philadelphia, settling in the Pennsylvania hinterland, or moving farther to the west or south into Virginia or North Carolina. Since the chartering of the colony by William Penn in 1681, Pennsylvania consisted largely of small farmsteads and milling operations, which in turn fueled the growth of the largest colonial seaport city, Philadelphia. Over the past thirty years, historians have developed a growing body of literature on southeastern Pennsylvania and its economic and social conditions. To grasp why a family would move its household over three hundred miles to take up a claim in western North Carolina, it is necessary to understand the conditions they faced in their former homes or, in the case of recent immigrants, the conditions they met when they arrived in colonial Pennsylvania.

From the colony's founding through the early decades of the eighteenth century, most of Pennsylvania's population growth was readily accommodated by westward movement *within* the southeastern counties. For instance, in Chester County's Marple township, families throughout the 1710s bequeathed to their children unimproved holdings outside the settled areas of the township. So long as lands remained in the western reaches of the southeastern counties, families did not have to divide their cleared or improved lands. In the 1720s, however, the population began to increase dramatically as more immigrants entered the colony and as families grew in size. From the 1690s through the 1710s, the number of taxable settlers in Marple Township hovered between fifteen and eighteen, but in 1720 that number jumped to

twenty-five and then to thirty-three by 1730. Between the 1730s and 1760s, the population continued to grow but at a more moderate rate.<sup>1</sup>

While the availability of land gave Pennsylvania a stable society and economy throughout the first two thirds of the eighteenth century, it is vital to examine more closely the rate of land ownership. At first glance, settlers who constituted Pennsylvania's colonial population appeared to bear the characteristics that would distinguish later middle-class Americans. Many of the immigrants to the colony comprised settlers from the middling classes of England and Europe, and they seem to have displayed a keen eye for opportunities to improve their economic situations. These apparently acquisitive individualists saw settling in Pennsylvania as a way to establish and improve themselves and their families in the New World.<sup>2</sup> The image of profit-maximizing, proto-middle class farmers easily leads to the assumption that land ownership in early Pennsylvania was fairly widespread. Compared to areas such as the Tidewater Chesapeake, where large landowners concentrated holdings as the seventeenth century proceeded, land distribution Lancaster and Chester counties was widespread. In numerous cases, however, settlers in southeastern Pennsylvania held land that they did not necessarily own. A major alternative to land owning was the institution of land tenancy.

Tenants in Chester County, Pennsylvania constituted a subset of landholders. On tax lists from the mid-eighteenth century, tenants were indistinguishable from

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 43 (Oct. 1986): 554.

<sup>2</sup> James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976 [1972]), 1-3.



landowners, suggesting that holding land by lease entitled a tenant to nearly all of the rights that landowners enjoyed. Tenants by definition only leased their land, but they held it as their own and benefited from the crops that they grew in the soil or from any other economic activity that occurred on the land, such as milling or operating craft shops.<sup>3</sup> In short, tenancy proved to be a means by which early Pennsylvanians could have access to the land even if they could not afford the outright purchase of a tract. Tenants who were frugal could work their leases and then purchase a parcel of land or move on to the hinterland of the region. While late seventeenth-century Pennsylvanians were often able to move directly from non-landholding status directly to landownership, the opportunity for such a dramatic rise diminished as settlement increased. Throughout the middle two quarters of the eighteenth century, tenants made up about a quarter of the population in Chester County.

By the end of the colonial era, however, tenancy rates were beginning to drop. Between 1766 and 1774, the number of tenants in Chester County decreased from 923 to 732. In the same year the number of land *owners* increased by only fifty to one hundred. While some of the former tenants had made the climb into the landowning class, there was an overall loss of opportunity for nonlandholders hoping to either buy or lease land.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Simler, "Tenancy in Pennsylvania," 546-50. Occasionally tenants were called upon to provide some service to the landowners. In 1765 George Smedley's will charged his executor with securing a tenant who would help his widow by keeping a horse and a cow for her. See Lisa Wilson Waciega, "A 'Man of Business': The Widow of Means in Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1750-1850," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., 44 (January 1987): 48.

<sup>4</sup> Simler, "Tenancy in Pennsylvania," 552.

While opportunities for holding land were decreasing, another class of Pennsylvanians was proliferating. The role of the contractual laborer in Pennsylvania in the late colonial and early national periods was a vital element of the regional economy.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the rich agricultural output of southeastern Pennsylvania, a growing rural industrial economy contributed to the overall economic health of the region. Consisting of distilleries, tanneries, and milling operations including sawmills, gristmills, and fulling mills, this growing group of industries enhanced the range of opportunities for landowners and at the same time required the growing use of hired or bound labor.<sup>6</sup>

While slaves and indentured servants met some of the labor requirements, people who sold their labor constituted the largest source of workers. Because they listed unmarried laborers on tax lists as *freemen* while they defined married free laborers as *inmates*, tax assessors have provided a means by which to assess the lives of the people who constituted this class during the period. Until the 1740s, most *inmates* and *freemen* lived in the same houses with the families who purchased their labor. By the mid-century, however, the growing need for laborers and increasing land rents made it impossible for landowners to provide shelter and food for their

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<sup>5</sup> Paul G.E. Clemens and Lucy Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 109.

<sup>6</sup> Duane E. Ball, "Dynamics of Population and Wealth in Eighteenth-Century Chester County, Pennsylvania," in *Interdisciplinary Studies of the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Pauline Maier (Beverly Hills/London: Sage Publications, 1976), 93. Ball points out that as these opportunities increased, some of the pressure on land availability was alleviated. For an analysis of textile production in Chester County, see Adrienne Hood, "The Material World of Cloth: Production and Use in Eighteenth-Century Rural Pennsylvania," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., 53 (Jan. 1996): 43-66.

laborers. This set of circumstances resulted in the growth of the cottager class of laborers. Cottagers, including most of the *inmate* population, rented small houses, cottages, on the farms or near the mills or other businesses where they worked. Paying a small fee, they lived in private quarters and usually had a number of acres to grow food or surplus crops that they could sell on the market.<sup>7</sup>

For cottagers the benefits of such an arrangement included the freedom of living outside of the direct supervision of their employers and the possibility of generating an income. Residing in a cottage apart from the living quarters of the main employer undoubtedly increased the cottagers' sense of independence. Even though they held no land that was legally their own, cottagers must have derived a sense of satisfaction that came with imposing their own order upon their living quarters. On the level of income, wages and money from the sale of surplus produce enhanced a cottager's prospect of stepping up into the landholding classes. If a cottager remained fully employed throughout the year, he could make close to thirty pounds annually. At the same time, it was usually not feasible to work throughout the year because of seasonal labor schedules. Taking into account the opportunities to perform additional work for neighboring landholders, most cottagers could make in the range of five pounds per year.<sup>8</sup> While cottagers had the opportunity to accumulate some wealth over time, it is evident that this opportunity had its limits. Saving the maximum amount of five pounds a year may have allowed a cottager to step into the tenant class

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<sup>7</sup> Clemens and Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household," 111-13.

<sup>8</sup> Clemens and Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household," 117.

after several years of toil, but that rate would have all but precluded most cottagers from becoming landowners by the mid-eighteenth century.

Although Chester and Lancaster as well as the other counties of southeastern Pennsylvania constituted a region occupied by small farmers and rural tradesmen and one which was characterized by several opportunities for individual economic improvement, the distribution of wealth became increasingly unequal as the eighteenth century progressed. People who owned land represented the top tier of society and those near the bottom comprised landless laborers who had only a potential opportunity to gain a foothold in the landholding classes. As the Revolutionary era unfolded, it became more difficult to make the step from cottager to tenant, let alone cottager to landholder. In 1760 taxpayers in the top 10 percent of Chester County population owned almost 30 percent of the wealth and by the end of the Revolution in 1782, the same cohort controlled a full third of the land. Including the next 30 percent of the population for the same years, the top 40 percent of the population controlled 73.2 percent of the wealth in 1760 and then 78.1 percent in 1782.<sup>9</sup>

While such numbers hardly represent a climate of drastic inequality, they portray a society in which opportunity had a number of limitations. Cottagers and tenants faced an increasingly difficult set of economic and social circumstances in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. When families faced daunting situations such

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<sup>9</sup> Lemon, *Best Poor Man's Country*, 11, Table 1; James Henretta "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (Jan. 1978): 8-9. See also, James T. Lemon and Gary B. Nash, "The Distribution of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century America: A Century of Changes in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1693-1802," *Journal of Social History* 2 (Fall 1968): 11, Table I.

as the prospect of remaining in the landless class or *slipping back* into that class, they faced a number of options. First, Pennsylvanians could have chosen to remain in that class. Indeed, there is no real hard evidence that all cottagers strove to climb out of their status.<sup>10</sup> Other options included struggling to save enough through their labors to make the transition to landholder or owner, a prospect that was evidently more and more difficult, or migrating out of the older settled counties to the Pennsylvania frontier or farther south to Virginia or North Carolina.<sup>11</sup>

Settlers who chose to move either to the Valley of Virginia or farther south into the Piedmont of North Carolina came from various classes in Lancaster and Chester counties.<sup>12</sup> While some migrants from southeastern Pennsylvania had owned sufficient land to maintain a family, many appear to have had no land at all. For instance, William Bogan lived in Concord Township in Chester County as late as 1750. During the next decade he migrated to Rowan County, North Carolina, where he bought 305 acres of land on Middle Creek. When Bogan left Concord Township

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<sup>10</sup> Rather, historians have usually assumed that all cottagers or laborers must have been dissatisfied with their condition. James Lemon, *Best Poor Man's Country*, 2, carries this assumption of individualistic opportunism the furthest. At the same time, however, even his most vehement critic, James Henretta, made this assumption even as he tried to distance himself from Lemon. "Families and Farms," 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> The situation in New Jersey throughout the revolutionary period was similar to that of southeastern Pennsylvania, except that the economy of Pennsylvania was generally stronger than the smaller colony to the east. For a comparison, see Dennis P. Ryan, "Landholding, Opportunity, and Mobility in Revolutionary New Jersey," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 36 (Oct. 1979): 571-92.

<sup>12</sup> In his 1964 work on the settlement of backcountry North Carolina, Robert W. Ramsey provided extensive coverage of the origins of migrants who settled in North Carolina. Robert W. Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964).

he apparently owned no land in Chester County.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, John Bunting, a weaver from Fallowfield Township, Chester County, owned no land in the county when he made the decision to migrate in the 1750s. As a successful tradesman Bunting certainly was not impoverished, and he probably did not need land to sustain himself and his family. But when he arrived in Rowan County, he purchased 640 acres.<sup>14</sup> John Kirkpatrick was also among the cohort of landless Pennsylvanians who migrated to North Carolina in the middle of the century. Kirkpatrick left West Nottingham Township, located on Octoraro Creek separating Chester from Lancaster County, sometime after 1750 and purchased 300 acres along Buffalo Creek in the Granville portion of Rowan County in 1756.<sup>15</sup> Bogan, Bunting, and Kirkpatrick, as well as their families, along with hundreds of other settlers from southeastern Pennsylvania, dramatically improved their landholding status by migrating out of the area where

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<sup>13</sup> Chester County Tax List 1750, 1760; Carol Bryant, ed., *Abstracts of Chester County, Pennsylvania Land Records*, vols. 2-5 (Westminster, Md.: Willow Bend Books, 1999); Jo White Linn, compiler, *Rowan County North Carolina Deed Abstracts, Vol. 1 1753-1762 Abstracts of Books 1-4* (Salisbury, N.C.: Stahle Linn, n.d.), 44.

<sup>14</sup> Considering that Bunting paid 61 pounds for his land in Rowan, he must have enjoyed some success as a weaver in Pennsylvania. Ironically, he also paid considerably more to settle on this land than he would have paid had he simply patented land either in the Carteret proprietary or on the crown lands of the colony. Chester County Tax Lists 1750, 1760; *Abstracts of Chester County Land Records*, Vols. 2-5; Linn, *Rowan County Deeds Abstracts*, 1: 77.

<sup>15</sup> Chester County Tax Lists 1750, 1760; Linn, *Rowan County Deed Abstracts*, 1: 14. Kirkpatrick paid the modest sum of 10 shillings sterling for this sizable tract. See also Margaret Hoffman, compiler, *The Granville District of North Carolina, 1748-1763, Abstracts of Land Grants* (Weldon, N.C.: Roanoke News Company), 3: 76.

landholding was becoming increasingly restrictive to a portion of the southern backcountry where land remained widely accessible.

Along the migration route, however, landless Pennsylvanians traveled with many settlers who had come from the landholding or landowning classes of the region, although many of the people from this group appear to have been at the point of falling into the ranks of the landless. Of the landowning migrants from southeastern Pennsylvania, most held relatively small tracts in either Chester or Lancaster counties. Francis Johnston owned land near the Great Concord Road in Chester County as late as 1753. By that time, Johnston had probably already migrated out of the county. Later in the 1750s, Johnston purchased 280 acres on Crane Creek in Rowan County near Alexander Dobbins, another Pennsylvanian originally from Lancaster County.<sup>16</sup> Another example of a small landowner was John Poston (Postin) from West Fallowfield Township in Chester County. For twelve pounds proclamation currency, Poston purchased 101 acres in Rowan County in April 1763.<sup>17</sup> In the cases of both men, it is clear through allusions in conveyances of adjacent properties that they owned land in Pennsylvania, but what is not certain is how much land they actually owned. There is also no record of the conveyance of their land in Pennsylvania either before or after they migrated. This evidence, or lack thereof, suggests that both

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<sup>16</sup> Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County Land Records*, 3: 181, 188 (Johnston had probably already moved out of the county by 1750 because he does not appear on the 1750 tax list for Chester County); Linn, *Rowan County Deed Abstracts*, 1: 42. For more information on Dobbins, see Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, 44, 159-60.

<sup>17</sup> Chester County Tax Lists, 1750, 1760; Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County Land Records*, 3: 88; Jo White Linn, *Rowan County North Carolina Deed Abstracts, Vol. II: 1762-1772, Abstracts of Books 5, 6, 7* (Salisbury, N.C.: Stahle Linn, 1972), 33.

Johnston and Poston held tracts of only modest size, probably as co-owners with other settlers. If this was the case, either man might have made a private arrangement with the other parties to dispose of their property.<sup>18</sup>

In most cases, Pennsylvanians who migrated to the backcountry appear to have been either landless or among the class of landowners who had owned only small pieces of property. This pattern also holds true for the significant number of Quakers who transferred their memberships from Pennsylvania meetings to North Carolina meetings.<sup>19</sup> Given the climate of declining opportunity in southeastern Pennsylvania, it appears that many migrants probably made the decision to move because of their inability to improve their situations by acquiring land in the settled areas of the region. With the widely publicized availability of land in the southern backcountry, many Pennsylvanians perceived an opportunity to increase independence. As we will see, however, many migrants looked beyond the opportunity that migration represented for

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<sup>18</sup> Evidence of both Poston and Johnston's land ownership comes in indirect references to their properties in the deeds concerning other tracts. A deed dated September 1761 conveying land to John Beeson described a ten-acre tract that Johnston along with another man named James Shelley (and both of their wives) conveyed to Beeson in 1754. If this was the only land owned by Johnston, he was only one step better off than the landless migrants from the county. Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County Land Records*, 5: 151. Another example of this phenomenon is William Reynolds, a Quaker in East Nottingham Township. He, along with his wife and children, migrated to North Carolina in 1751, but the only reference to his land in Chester County was through a deed describing other property. Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County Land Records*, 3: 18; 4: 92.

<sup>19</sup> This is based on a study of migrants who entered the Cane Creek and New Garden meetings. The sample of settlers (173 and 103 respectively) who presented certificates of removal from other meetings in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania was taken from William Wade Hinshaw, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brother, Inc. 1936-1950) 4: 343-431, 487-585. See also Larry Dale Gragg, *Migration in Early America: The Virginia Quaker Experience* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 49-51.



themselves as individuals and perceived the chance to make better lives for their extended families and friends.

Farther to the south and west, the Valley of Virginia, comprising Augusta County (1745) and Frederick County (1752), represented one of the most attractive backcountry regions of the early-to-mid-eighteenth century. Since the late 1720s, migrants from Pennsylvania and Maryland had made their way into the Valley and settled on its fertile lands. Large numbers of Scots-Irish, some migrating directly from Ulster, German, as well as English settlers populated the Valley during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. In 1749 the white male population of the Augusta County portion of the Valley consisted of 1,423 individuals. This number jumped to 2,273 only six years later, and by 1773 the total number of taxable persons in Augusta reached 4,800, including slaves.<sup>20</sup> In 1760 the Virginia assembly partitioned the western portion of the extensive Augusta County into Botetourt County and further divided the region into Fincastle County in 1772. By mid-century, much of the best land in the Valley had already been patented. Early settlers either took advantage of the ever-increasing demand for land and sold their properties at a profit, or they remained on their land, with some fortifying their social and political positions among the growing Valley elite.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Albert Tillson, *Gentry and Commonfolk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740-1789* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 53-54; Gail Terry, "Family Empires: A Frontier Elite in Virginia and Kentucky, 1740-1815"

Somewhat like southeastern Pennsylvania, the Valley appeared to have offered a number of opportunities especially, for settlers who arrived early in the 1730s and were able to patent good land. Approximately 78 percent of the landholders in Augusta County in the early 1760s owned or occupied tracts ranging in size from one hundred to five hundred acres.<sup>22</sup> Despite the ample size of these holdings, which would have allowed many to produce surpluses, most settlers participated in subsistence agriculture. By the middle of the century, some settlers expanded their operations to include other economic activity, such as keeping taverns or maintaining a crafts trade, but most residents throughout the colonial period confined their activity to the farm. Because of this tendency to remain within the confines of a world of subsistence agriculture, many settlers had to use only a small percentage of their land. Robert Mitchell has estimated that settlers in the Valley often cleared less than ten percent of their land.<sup>23</sup>

On that small parcel of cleared land, families raised their food and produced a handful of products for the local Valley economy. While the northern Valley more closely resembled the economy and society of the Tidewater, with increased tobacco cultivation and a reliance on slave labor, the southern Valley area of Augusta County produced wheat, flax, and hemp. In a number of ways, Frederick County's economy was more advanced than that of the southern portion of the Valley. An evolving

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(Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1992); Tillson, *Gentry and Commonfolk*, 19-21.

<sup>22</sup> Tillson, *Gentry and Commonfolk*, 9; Robert Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 68, Table 3.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 234.

system of roads linking the town of Winchester with Potomac River towns such as Alexandria, Colchester, and Dumfries enhanced opportunities for northern Valley residents, and the growth of Winchester itself enabled some residents to specialize in occupations outside of agriculture.<sup>24</sup>

Farther to the south, however, in Augusta County, opportunity was more restricted. In the case of landholding, several barriers stood in the way of settlers who wished to purchase or patent land. A tightly knit network of elites in Augusta held strict control over the acquisition of land, placing a number of obstacles in front of settlers who sought opportunity in the upper Valley. In Augusta County, opportunities for landless young men depended largely on their status. Turk McCleskey has identified a number of patterns in Augusta County land records. On the lower end of the social spectrum, newly freed indentured servants stood only a slim chance of obtaining land. Only 7.4 percent of the former servants whose terms expired during or before 1770 were able to acquire land in the county. On the other hand, most people who purchased land during this same period already owned other parcels of land within the county.<sup>25</sup> Newcomers to the county and those who had lived there for some time *without* obtaining land faced many obstacles to climbing into the landed class.

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<sup>24</sup> Warren Hofstra and Robert D. Mitchell "How Do Settlement Systems Evolve?: The Virginia Backcountry during the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Geography* 21 (1995): 133; Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 150-51, 233. See also Christopher Hendricks, "Town Development in the Colonial Backcountry-Virginia and North Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> N. Turk McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects, Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (July 1990): 452.

Tenancy in Augusta County quickly became an institution within the framework of Valley landholding. Much like the tenancy system that prevailed in southeastern Pennsylvania, tenancy in Augusta allowed non-landowners the opportunity to hold land in many ways as a land owner would. Renters who leased land some distance away from the primary residence of the landlord retained a great deal of autonomy and independence; those who rented land near or on the main property of the landlord enjoyed much less.<sup>26</sup> Those who found themselves in a situation where they were unable to exercise the level of independence that others enjoyed, or the level they had *anticipated* when they migrated into the colony, may have moved deeper into the backcountry.

In any case, it was difficult for renters to acquire land of their own in Augusta, unless they were in some way connected to the landholding elite. For instance, sons of freeholders stood a much greater chance of acquiring their own parcel of land in the county than did newcomers to the Valley. Yet, even settlers with a direct relation to landowners faced a number of obstacles. In many cases fathers hesitated to divide their own land among their children because they needed the labor their family provided. This arrangement, which kept children on or near their parents' property until they were in their late twenties or early thirties, posed a severe limitation on perceived opportunity.<sup>27</sup> Even though this condition of prolonged dependence, or

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<sup>26</sup> McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects," 454.

<sup>27</sup> McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects," 454-55. McCleskey has identified this pattern of preferential treatment for existing freeholders continuing as settlement spread further to the southern end of the Valley: "Shadow Land: Provisional Real Estate Claims and Anglo-American Settlement in Southwestern Virginia," in *The Southern Colonial Backcountry: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on*

deferred independence, was hardly different from social conditions elsewhere in rural America, Augusta's geographic juxtaposition with the deeper backcountry in the western reaches of the colony and southward to the Piedmont of North Carolina enabled many settlers who envisioned a different level of independence to try their fortune elsewhere. <sup>28</sup>

While the restrictive land situation in Augusta propelled many people to migrate, a number of settlers who abandoned Augusta County for North Carolina or other portions of the Virginia backcountry in the 1760s and early 1770s left behind a relatively stable economic situation in the Valley of Virginia. Between 1763 and 1772, there were 87 land conveyances involving people who migrated from Augusta County to other backcountry counties. Migrants from Augusta certainly included members of the non-landholding and non-landowning segment of society, men and women who had little to lose by moving from a circumscribed situation to one of perceived opportunity farther to the south. At the same time, evidence from the Augusta County land records indicates that many migrants had been landowners in Valley. <sup>29</sup>

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*Frontier Communities*, ed. David Colin Crass et al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 60-62.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see Philip Greven, "Family Structure in Seventeenth-Century Andover, Massachusetts," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 23 (April 1966): 234-56; and Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 75-77.

<sup>29</sup> This sample is taken from Augusta County deeds, which indicated that the conveyor had moved to North Carolina or to another portion of the Virginia backcountry such as Frederick County. It is drawn from the abstracts of the Augusta County deeds in Lyman Chalkley, comp., *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia Extracted from the Original Court Records of Augusta County, 1745-1800*, 3

A handful of the land sales involved relatively small amounts of land. For instance, Thomas Hill, who relocated to Rowan County, North Carolina, disposed of 70 acres in Augusta in 1763 for twenty pounds. In the same year, Hill acquired a 243 acre parcel in Rowan County from Henry McCulloh, a London merchant with vast claims in the North Carolina backcountry.<sup>30</sup> One of Hill's neighbors in Augusta County, Elisha (Elijah) Isaac, had migrated to Rowan County several years earlier.<sup>31</sup> Any communication between Hill and Isaac in the form of correspondence or face-to-face visits may have convinced Hill that it was time to try his fortune elsewhere. As another example, Rowan County settler Paul Garrison sold his 68-acre share of a tract of land he had patented with another Augusta settler, John Donnaly.<sup>32</sup> In both cases, Hill and Garrison traded away relatively little in the way of landed wealth in Augusta, possibly indicating that their decision to migrate was rather easy to make. Although both men faced the uncertainty of what the Carolina backcountry had to offer, their

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vols. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1974 [1912]). Assuming that some people sold their land before migrating, this sample admittedly reflects a smaller number of landowners who migrated than in reality made the migration. Additionally, this method likely excludes large numbers of non-landowners who also migrated.

<sup>30</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 437; Linn, *Rowan County Deed Abstracts*, 2: 29.

<sup>31</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 423; Jo White Linn, comp., *Abstracts of Wills and Estates Records of Rowan County, North Carolina 1753-1805 and Tax Lists of 1759 and 1778* (Salisbury, N.C.: published by author, 1980), 114. Isaac appeared on the 1759 tax list for the county with two tithables.

<sup>32</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 401. While a number of Garrisons were present in the Rowan and Mecklenburg Counties during the period, no Paul Garrison appears in the land records of the county. He was either landless or leased his land from an owner. The deed in the Augusta County land records identified Paul Garrison as residing in Rowan County. There is evidence in a court case that Garrison at an earlier time had owned some more land with Donnaly, but there is no record of his selling any of that land either before or after his departure to North Carolina. Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 1: 308.

stake in Augusta appears to have been small relative to other landowning settlers who emigrated from Augusta.

Many landowners who left Augusta to resettle in some portion of the North Carolina or Virginia backcountry sold off considerable holdings within the county. The average size of property sold by North Carolina migrants was about 250 acres. Sixteen transactions involved parcels of 400 acres and more, while there were eight conveyances between 300 and 400 acres. The parcel size in the vast majority of land sales fell between 100 and 300 acres (See Table 1). This sample then represents migrants of some economic means, who left behind measurable landed wealth to settle in yet another area of the southern backcountry. As such, these migrants fall outside the image of the stereotypical backcountry settler who presumably had little in the way of economic stability or social connection in his place of origin. Without the circumstances that might suggest economic determinism, this sample raises a number of questions about the motivation for migrating to another portion of the backcountry.

There are several possible explanations for why these migrants left one area where they enjoyed some degree of stability. First, *perceived* opportunity played a vital role in many settlers' decisions. Even though all of these migrants were landowners, some substantial, the perception that they might obtain even greater wealth elsewhere was probably a powerful force in making the decision to move. Families of great wealth looked to lands in the southern backcountry and the Ohio River Valley as an opportunity to increase wealth beyond their current holdings. Certainly the elites of Virginia's Tidewater saw the backcountry as a means to

TABLE 1.

<b>Migrants from Augusta County</b>		
<b>Land Transactions</b>		
<b>Number of Acres</b>	<b>Number of Sales</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
0-99	6	7%
100-199	23	26.4%
200-299	29	33.3%
300-399	8	9.2%
400+	16	18.4%

<b>Destinations of Migrants from Augusta</b>	
<b>County</b>	<b>Number of Migrants</b>
Anson Co., N. Carolina	6
Mecklenburg Co., N. Carolina	10
Orange Co., N. Carolina	13
Rowan Co., N. Carolina	11
Other in North Carolina	16
South Carolina	3

Source: Chalkley, *Chronicles*, vols. 1,3.



accumulate vast wealth even when they already owned considerable plantations along the banks of the Chesapeake Bay's tributaries. For example, Robert Carter, the Virginia planter appointed by Thomas Lord Fairfax to administer his proprietary lands in the Northern Neck, saw opportunity in the backcountry to strengthen his position as a member of the Tidewater gentry. Even more than the eastern-based land speculators, elites who actually resided in the backcountry served as clearer exemplars of the opportunism that motivated some backcountry settlers to seek greater economic and social opportunities elsewhere in the backcountry. Families such as the Prestons and the Breckinridges, as well as the Hites and McKays, all resided in the Valley of Virginia, and they used their positions as large landowners and political leaders to capitalize on their social and economic status. These were some of the very same families that helped maintain the elite's tight control over land distribution in Augusta County; as such they were uniquely positioned to understand opportunity and the value of access to new land. Furthermore, members of the Preston, Breckinridge, and Hite families pressed on even deeper into the southern backcountry late in the colonial period and during the revolutionary period.<sup>33</sup> As though their rank and position in the Valley was not enough, these families encouraged and participated in the migration farther to the areas encompassed by present-day Tennessee and Kentucky. Considering the social environment of elite control of the land and the corresponding level of independence that accompanied such power, it is understandable that people

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<sup>33</sup> For extended discussion of these families, see Terry, "Family Empires;" Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 107.

of more modest means might have desired to accumulate similar levels of prestige and independence elsewhere in the backcountry.

At the same time, other factors influenced landowners in Augusta County to migrate to North Carolina. Religion almost certainly played an important role as a unifying factor. As people in Augusta County found themselves either in circumscribed economic positions or hoped to improve upon their own stability, they tended to move to areas where there were already settlers who had been members of their former churches. Settlers from Augusta migrated to areas where they were able to connect with familiar networks of friends and relatives, or at the very least to live among people who shared a common religious and cultural heritage.

The Presbyterian Church in the southern Valley provided a center around which many Scots-Irish developed social ties and community networks. As many as one-third of Augusta County's freeholders were Presbyterians, the largest denomination in the area.<sup>34</sup> Many of the upper Valley elites who maintained tight control over the political establishment in Augusta were also leaders of the Presbyterian congregation of the Tinkling Spring Church. Although the Anglican Church was the established church of the colony and thus had official vestries in all Virginia counties, many of the Valley leaders circumvented this system by joining the Anglican Church nominally even while they served as lay leaders of their Presbyterian congregations. Even though there were occasional attempts on the part of the

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<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, less than 2 percent of the freeholders were Anglican. N. Turk McCleskey, "Across the First Divide: Frontiers of Settlement and Culture in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1990), 174, Table 15.

Presbyterian congregations to restrict the power of lay leaders, the Presbyterian churches usually provided another means by which elites consolidated and demonstrated their authority. For non-elite congregants, the meetinghouses provided another venue for settling disputes and administering justice, essentially constituting a secondary and parallel court system.<sup>35</sup> As such, the church served as a center of social, religious, and judicial activity, drawing settlers together in a network that emphasized their commonality over their differences.

Among the rank and file members of the upper Valley congregations were significant numbers of people who migrated from the Valley to the same destinations in North Carolina. For instance, the Givens, Leeper, and Steavenson (also Stephenson) families were all members of the Tinkling Spring or the Augusta Stone Meeting House congregations who migrated from the Valley to Rowan and Mecklenburg counties in the 1750s and 1760s.<sup>36</sup> Samuel Givins Sr., along with his wife and nine children, entered the Valley in the late 1730s, but he died a couple of years later when some of his children were still very young. His son Samuel acquired a tract of land in Mecklenburg County as early as 1762 from Edward Givins, and in 1768 he bought land in Rowan County from his brother John, who had arrived in the county as early as 1757. The same year, 1768, Samuel also sold a tract of land in

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<sup>35</sup> Tillson, *Gentry and Commonfolk*, 35-37.

<sup>36</sup> Howard McKnight Wilson, *The Tinkling Spring, Headwater of Freedom: A Study of the Church and People, 1732-1952* (Fisherville, Va.: The Tinkling Spring and Hermitage Presbyterian Churches, 1954), 426-28.

Augusta that he had purchased the year he appeared in Mecklenburg County.<sup>37</sup>

Joining Samuel and Edward Givins in Mecklenburg was the Leeper family from Augusta. James and Nicholas Leeper had entered the Valley with their father James, the same year that the Givins family arrived. In 1761 Nicholas bought land in Anson County from Robert and Catharine Leeper, who were probably his cousins. Five years later, James and Nicholas, on the same day, bought land in Mecklenburg County.<sup>38</sup> David, John, and Thomas Steavenson arrived in the upper Valley between February 1739 and May 1740. Twenty-eight years later, David Steavenson and his son James were in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, while one of David's other sons, William had patented land in the Granville district of Rowan County in April 1761.<sup>39</sup> These three families represent a multitude of Presbyterian families that moved from the upper Valley to the North Carolina backcountry. Although it is unclear whether these families knew each other, they certainly had in common a past within a specific congregation, and they undoubtedly were conscious that many others would share this association in their new homes.

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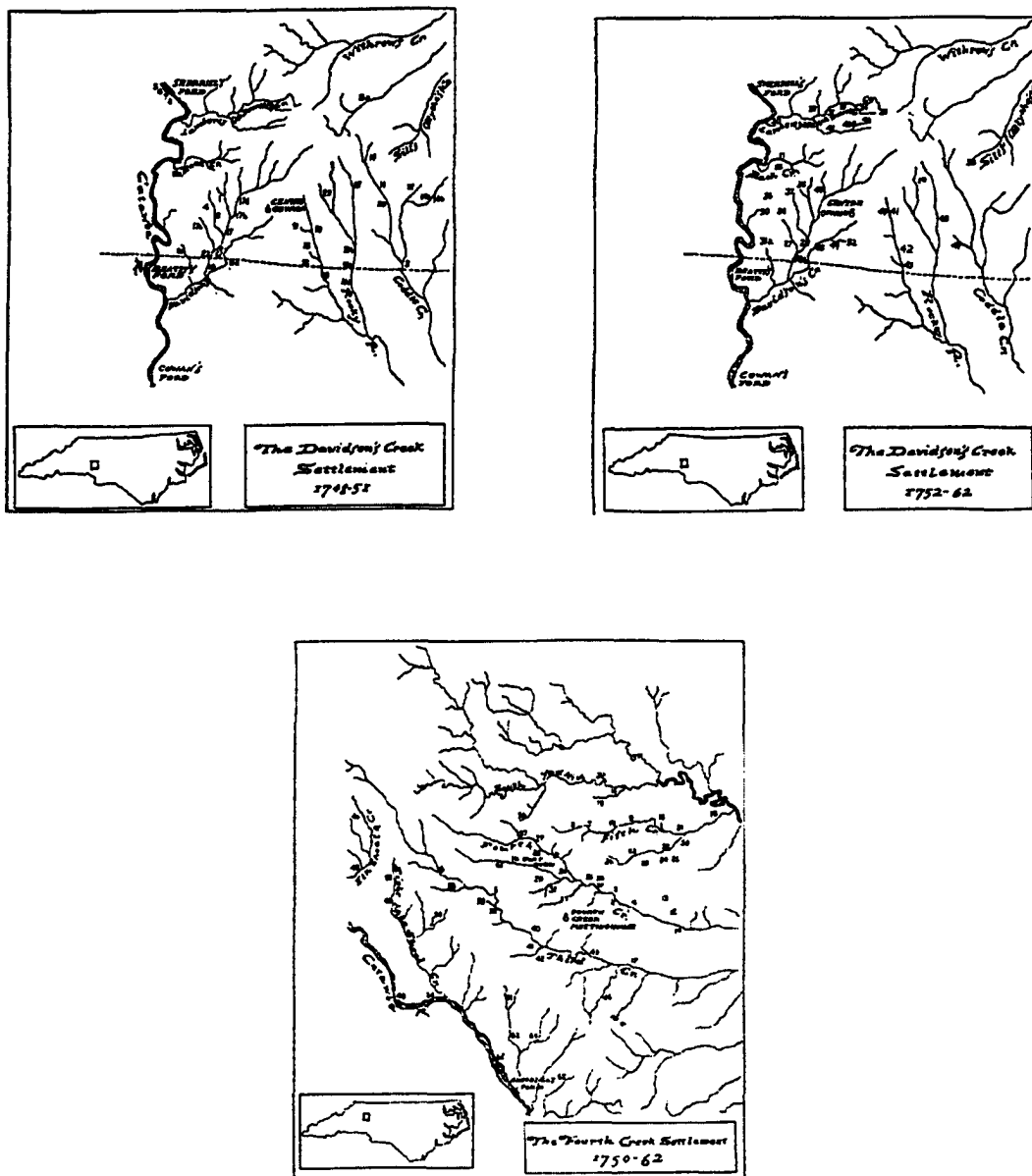
<sup>37</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 1: 316; Linn, *Rowan County Deed Abstracts*, 1: 21, 2: 111. Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 505. Samuel may have returned to the Valley later in the 1770s as indicated by a deed dated in 1775 identifying his and Martha's county of residence as Botetourt County; additionally, he did not appear on the 1778 tax list for Rowan County. The relationship between Samuel and Edward is not clear. Robert W. Ramsey speculated that they may have been brothers, but Edward is not listed as one of Samuel Givins Sr.'s sons. He might have been a cousin or an uncle. Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, 50.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *Tinkling Spring*, 427; Holcomb, comp., *Anson County Deeds*, 64; Brent H. Holcomb, comp., *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts, 1763-1779* (Easley, S.C.: Southern Historical Press, 1979), 7.

<sup>39</sup> Holcomb, *Mecklenburg County Deed Abstracts*, 59, 74, 104. Linn, *Rowan County Deed Abstracts*, 1: 65.

FIGURE 6.

EARLY SETTLEMENT PATTERNS ALONG  
DAVIDSON'S AND FOURTH CREEKS



The Davidson's Creek and Fourth Creek settlements attracted over one hundred Scots-Irish settlers between 1748 and 1762. Maps reprinted from Robert Ramsay, *Carolina Cradle*, 45, 95, 102.

The Davidson's Creek and Fourth Creek settlements drew substantial numbers of Presbyterians from the late 1740s through the 1760s. (See map 5.) Between 1748 and 1762, over fifty Presbyterians, many from the Valley of Virginia, settled in the area near Davidson's Creek, a tributary of the Catawba River. By the early 1750s, this settlement around the Centre Church included about 23 settlers. Ten years later, it had more than doubled in size. Between 1750 and 1762 the Fourth Creek settlement, located a few miles north of the Davidson's Creek, attracted over sixty predominantly Scots-Irish settlers.<sup>40</sup> Although these settlers took up tracts that were dispersed over many miles, they remained within easy travel distance to their church meeting houses.

Presbyterians from the Valley did not necessarily migrate to form or preserve tightly knit communities in which congregants relied on each other for daily aid and mutual support. Although there were almost certainly cases in which Presbyterian neighborhoods resembled communities in this narrow definition, in general Presbyterians from the upper Valley simply migrated to the portion of the North Carolina backcountry where there were other settlers who shared their faith and often a Scots-Irish cultural heritage.<sup>41</sup> The general area of settlement for Presbyterians from

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<sup>40</sup> Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, 44-46, 94-103.

<sup>41</sup> For a concise description of the Scots-Irish migration, see H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood Jr., *From Ulster to Carolina: The Migration of the Scotch-Irish to Southwestern North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1998.) For a more detailed treatment of Ulster migration to North America, see Patrick Griffin, *The People with No Name: Ireland's Ulster Scots, America's Scots Irish, and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689-1764* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Specifically for Scots-Irish identity, see Patrick Griffin, "The People with No Name: Ulster's Migrants and Identity Formation in Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 58 (July 2001): 592-604.

the Valley of Virginia and from Pennsylvania was the region drained by the Yadkin River in western Rowan and Mecklenburg Counties. (See map below.) Although there were other groups in this region, the area from the Rowan County seat of Salisbury to the growing town of Charlotte in Mecklenburg County, was a bastion of Presbyterianism.<sup>42</sup> The prevalence of this faith and the consolidated authority of the gentry and clergy connected to the Presbyterian congregations served as a unifying force during the turbulent years of the Regulator movement in North Carolina. When the political and social elites of Mecklenburg and western Rowan counties decided to cast their lot with Governor William Tryon, and the Presbyterian ministers preached the importance of deference to the colonial authorities, the revolt of backcountry farmers was contained to a relatively small region in the central backcountry areas of eastern Rowan and Orange counties.<sup>43</sup> That social and religious leaders were able to exert such influence upon the ordinary inhabitants of the area indicates the extent to which settlers there shared elements of a common world view that revolved around religion and culture.

This impulse among Scots-Irish Presbyterians to settle near each other was strong elsewhere in the backcountry. In the northern Valley of Virginia on Opequon Creek, a settlement of Scots-Irish maintained its strong ethnic identity throughout the

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<sup>42</sup> Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 24-26.

<sup>43</sup> James Whittenburg, "The North Carolina Regulator Zone," 15, 25-27.

FIGURE 7.

## AREA OF SCOTS-IRISH CONCENTRATION



Rowan and Anson counties attracted large numbers of Scot-Irish Presbyterians starting in the 1740s. Mecklenburg, formed out of Anson County in 1762, had the highest concentration of Presbyterians in all of backcountry North Carolina. North Carolina Division of Archives and History.



colonial period.<sup>44</sup> But perhaps the most pronounced example anywhere of a tightly-knit settlement among the Scots-Irish and within a Presbyterian congregation occurred in the portion of Lunenburg County, Virginia that would later become Charlotte County. About 200 settlers, many of whom had arrived in Pennsylvania in 1726, came under the leadership and guidance of John Caldwell. After remaining in Pennsylvania for about thirteen years, Caldwell led this group as a community to the vicinity of Cub Creek, a tributary of the Staunton River in 1739.<sup>45</sup>

Caldwell's group represented a community effort at settlement that fell outside the norm for Presbyterian settlers. Migrants from Augusta who resettled in Rowan or Mecklenburg counties did not make a deliberate decision to migrate *en masse* as did Caldwell's group. Nevertheless, the North Carolina settlers migrated to a region where they knew other people who shared their religion, their cultural heritage, and in many cases their immediate past associations with Valley congregations. Although these connections do not necessarily indicate a strong sense of communal commitment to mutual security and success, they do suggest a strong desire among Presbyterian migrants from Augusta County to settle among people with whom they identified in religious and cultural terms. This impulse was similar to the one which led the Moravians to undertake the settlement of the Wachovia tract. While the Moravians

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<sup>44</sup> Warren Hofstra, "Land, Ethnicity, and Community at the Opequon Settlement, Virginia, 1730-1800," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (July 1990): 424-39.

<sup>45</sup> Caldwell was the grandfather of the southern politician and partisan, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Richard Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 56-57, 213.

represent another pronounced example of a religiously and ethnically homogenous group attempting to create a community in the backcountry, the tendency of the Scots-Irish to settle near each other in new lands was a less extreme manifestation of the desire that motivated the Moravians.

A number of other patterns emerge from the evidence in Augusta County records. For instance, some settlers conveyed parcels of land they had owned in their former Augusta County homes for years after having migrated out of the county. One example is Samuel Wilkins. Wilkins acquired a three hundred-acre parcel on the south side of the Pee Dee River in Anson County, North Carolina in April 1752.<sup>46</sup> Almost eleven years later, Wilkins sold a relatively small seventy-acre parcel of land in Augusta County for 15 pounds, one of several land sales he made in the county during his period of nonresidency.<sup>47</sup> Wilkins had bought a 1,265-acre tract of land in Augusta from Robert McKay in June 1744.<sup>48</sup> McKay, along with several other immigrants to Virginia, namely Jost Hite, a former Pennsylvanian, acquired tens of thousands of acres in the northern Valley in the 1730s. Both McKay and Hite were required to settle families on their grants for every one thousand acres they claimed.<sup>49</sup> Wilkins's tract fell outside the grants conveyed to McKay, but he bought the land

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<sup>46</sup> Brent H. Holcomb, comp., *Anson County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts, 1749-1766, Abstracts of Wills and Estates, 1749-1795* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1980), 24.

<sup>47</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 395.

<sup>48</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 256.

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 29-30.

during the same period in which other immigrants to the colony were taking up lands patented to McKay and Hite.

Samuel Wilkins's sale of the seventy acres in 1763 appears to have been the last one that he made while he lived in North Carolina before his death. Sometime between 1749 and 1752, Wilkins moved to North Carolina. He probably contemplated migrating sometime around 1749 when he began parceling off sections of the tract he had bought from McKay three years earlier. In February of that year, he sold 190 acres along Cook's Creek, a tributary of the Shenandoah River, to Daniel Harris. Three years later, in 1752, after Wilkins had already moved to Anson County, he conveyed another portion of his property in Augusta to Edward and Robert Shankland. This tract, also on Cook's Creek, represented almost a third of his original land and constituted the portion on which he had actually resided and presumably had built a home.<sup>50</sup>

If Wilkins had been uncertain about how long he wished to stay in North Carolina when he sold off the first portion of his tract in 1749, his decision to convey his primary residence in Augusta signified that his move was permanent. There are a couple of possible explanations for Wilkins' cautious disposal of his land. First, he may have viewed his migration to North Carolina as a strictly experimental enterprise. When he first made the decision to move to Anson County, the backcountry of North Carolina was still relatively sparsely populated. Rowan County was carved from Anson in 1752 mainly because the population was growing rapidly and it was difficult to extend the services of the court system to all inhabitants of the county. It appears,

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<sup>50</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 301.

however, that Wilkins migrated to the area that remained under the jurisdiction of Anson County and which later became Mecklenburg County in 1762. With the tide of migrants moving toward Anson and Rowan on the rise, Wilkins may simply have thought it prudent to scout the conditions in North Carolina before severing all of his substantial ties with his former home. <sup>51</sup>

This uncertainty, however, appears to have remained throughout his life. Even in 1752, when Wilkins made the decision in Anson to sell the portion of his Augusta land where his primary residence had been, he still maintained a large number of acres; even after his death, he still owned land there. After the 1752 sale, Wilkins sold another 133 acres in January 1754, and his final sale occurred in 1763, eleven years after his arrival in backcountry North Carolina. By the time of his death sometime before 1766, he had conveyed the majority of his land in Augusta.

Security for his son may have been another reason why Samuel refused to relinquish some of his land in Augusta County. Samuel's son John Wilkins, who also lived in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, conveyed yet another four hundred-acre parcel that had been a part of Samuel's original 1,264-acre tract in 1766. <sup>52</sup> Perhaps Samuel wished to keep open the option of returning to Augusta for himself and for his son. Although many migrants resettling in the southern backcountry from Augusta did not have as much land at their disposal as did Wilkins, his case is but one example of a settler moving on before selling his old land. The same was true for

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<sup>51</sup> Wilkins' "scouting" process was similar to that of James Auld, although Auld decided that his family's migration was a permanent one in a relatively short time. Additionally, Auld sold off all of his land *before* migrating.

<sup>52</sup> Chalkley, *Chronicles*, 3: 447.

approximately eighty other migrants who left Augusta, as it was for migrants from other parts of Virginia.

Augusta County, then, represented a transition area in the greater migration to the backcountry South. As a southern backcountry county, Augusta had been a primary destination for settlers throughout the mid-eighteenth century. The initial availability of land in Augusta and in the Valley in general attracted thousands of settlers from Pennsylvania and Maryland as well as directly from Britain and Europe. As the amount of available land shrank during the middle decades of the century, however, Augusta County became a source area for migrants who desired to settle deeper in the backcountry of Virginia and south in the Piedmont of North Carolina. When families like the Givins, Leepers, and Steavensons made the decision to leave their homes in Augusta, they chose to migrate to a part of North Carolina where they would be close to people with whom they had previously associated. For those migrants who had enjoyed the privileges of owning land in Augusta, many such as Samuel Wilkins chose to hold onto their lands in the Valley at least until they were well established on their new land.

South of the James River and on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Southside region of Virginia also sent large numbers of migrants further into the backcountry. While the term Southside geographically refers to all of the land south of the James River from the region of Hampton Roads west to the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, politically and socially it comprised the more remote counties lying west of fall line. This area formed the third large source of migrants who moved

farther into the southern backcountry in the mid-eighteenth century. While some Southsiders moved into the counties in the Valley of Virginia or the western counties of Rowan and Anson in North Carolina, most headed more directly south to Granville, Johnson, and Cumberland counties situated on the eastern edge of the Carolina backcountry. Over this relatively short migration route, settlers from the Southside transplanted many elements of the economy and society that they had known in Virginia. Echoing Carl Bridenbaugh's description of western North Carolina as Greater Pennsylvania, James Whittenburg has described this eastern section of the Carolina backcountry as the Greater Southside because of its social and economic similarities to that part of Virginia.<sup>53</sup>

Several economic and social patterns distinguished the Southside from the other areas that contributed significantly to the mid-eighteenth-century migration. Foremost among these characteristics was the growth in the slave population that occurred from the 1750s through the end of the eighteenth century. During that time the population of the Southside moved from subsistence agriculture to a staple-based economy. By the mid-1760s the economy of the Southside became more closely integrated with the economy of the Tidewater counties to the east. The shift in the Southside economy was intertwined with simultaneous growth of the slave population. During the second half of the century, the slave population not only grew in absolute numbers, but slave *holding* also became more widespread. With the growth of the

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<sup>53</sup> James P. Whittenburg, "The North Carolina Regulator Zone," paper presented at the Wake Forest University Graduate History Speaker Series, Feb. 1997, 11; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South* (New York: Atheneum, 1985 [1963]), 127.

slave labor force, farmers in the Southside turned to producing tobacco and, in turn, wealthier settlers began to create a hierarchy that bore some resemblance to the social structure that prevailed in the older eastern counties.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the growing reliance on slave labor, landholding appears to have been somewhat more equitable in the Southside than it was in the Valley of Virginia or in southeastern Pennsylvania. In Lunenburg County in 1750, only four years after its establishment, the average size of land parcels that were conveyed in deeds was approximately 330 acres. The average size of land bought and sold decreased throughout the 1760s and 1770s, and prices continued to rise. At first glance, these patterns would usually suggest that land was becoming scarcer and in turn that opportunity was waning. The median size of land conveyed by deed, however, was 205 acres as late as 1769, an amount that was higher than in many other regions of the North American British colonies.<sup>55</sup>

Brunswick County, established in 1732, was the Southside parent county, extending from the fall line westward to the Blue Ridge. In 1746 when the colonial assembly established Lunenburg County, Brunswick lost about 90 percent of its land mass, maintaining only the small area extending south from the Nottoway River to the North Carolina border. The western boundary of Brunswick County was set at the

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<sup>54</sup> Beeman, *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*, 63-64.

<sup>55</sup> Beeman, *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*, 66.

point where the Roanoake River enters North Carolina, its eastern boundary only about twenty-five miles to the east.<sup>56</sup>

Migrants from Brunswick faced essentially the same decision as did migrants from the Valley, but they carried with them a cultural and ethnic background that was significantly different. Brunswick County, like most of the Southside, had a predominantly English population, as opposed to the Presbyterian Scots-Irish, German, and English make-up of the Valley. As Southsiders migrated across the Roanoke River into the North Carolina backcountry, they attempted in many ways to replicate the Virginia society they had left behind. A vital element of this society was the reliance on slave labor for the production of tobacco. By the end of the 1760s, the slave population in Granville County had grown to the point at which it made up over 40 percent of the tithable population, while about 40 percent of all households owned slaves. Additionally, the Southsiders were more tolerant of Anglican efforts to establish the church than were settlers elsewhere in the North Carolina backcountry.<sup>57</sup> One similarity between migrants from the Valley and the Southside, however, was the pattern of leaving behind land, often sizable parcels, after they migrated to their new homes in North Carolina.

Between the late 1740s, just after Lunenburg County was established in the western reaches of Brunswick, and the mid-1770s, there were at least eighty-seven

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<sup>56</sup> See map in Charles Farmer, *In the Absence of Towns: Settlement and Country Trade in Southside Virginia, 1730-1800* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century, A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 78-79; Whittenburg, "The North Carolina Regulator Zone," 8.



transactions involving people who moved to North Carolina's backcountry. The average size of the tracts conveyed by migrants was 245 acres. The smallest tract sold by a migrant from Brunswick County was 25 acres, while the largest sale involved 966 acres. Almost a third of the sales involved tracts between 100 and 200 acres, while over 70 percent of the sales involved tracts smaller than 300 acres.<sup>58</sup> (See Table 2.) It is clear that many Brunswick County settlers moved on even though they had a degree of landed wealth that placed them in the middling ranks of society.

The Southside counties were generally characterized by high rates of mobility. Settlers there tended to remain in one place for relatively brief periods before migrating, often deeper into the Virginia backcountry or to the Carolina Piedmont. For example, in the last five years of the 1760s, almost forty percent of the heads of household in Lunenburg County disappeared from the tax lists, indicating out-migration from the area. Many who left the Southside comprised settlers from the lower economic ranks. Historian Richard Beeman has argued that Lunenburg County settlers who failed to obtain or maintain a freehold moved out of the county at accelerated rates because they were surrounded by so many who were able to carve out a life of independence. At the same time, a number of migrants from the area were landowners of relative prosperity.

Like immigrants from Pennsylvania and the Valley of Virginia, landowners from Brunswick left behind varying amounts of land. For instance, West Harris and

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<sup>58</sup> This sample was derived from Brunswick County land records. Stephen E. Bradley Jr., comp., *Brunswick County, Virginia Deed Books*, vols. 1-5 (Lawrenceville, Va.: by the author, 1997-98). Specifically, conveyances indicating that a seller had moved to a backcountry county of North Carolina were included in the sample. At least 114 individuals were involved with the sale of land. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2.

<b>Landownership by Brunswick County</b>		
<b>Migrants</b>		
	<b>Number of Transactions</b>	<b>Percentage of Conveyances</b>
0-99 Acres	12	13.8
100-199	28	32.2
200-299	22	25.3
300-399	9	10.3
400-499	9	10.3
500+	7	8.0

<b>Destination within North Carolina</b>	
	<b>Number of Migrants</b>
Granville	18
(Bute established 1764)	8
Halifax	10
Orange	17
Johnston	14
Others	38

Source: Bradley, *Brunswick County Deeds*, vols. 1-5.

Joseph Green sold for £40 their 300-acre tract in Brunswick County in 1748. That same year, Harris paid £20 for a 300-acre tract in Granville County, North Carolina. A couple of years before, Green had purchased 250 acres in Granville for £23.<sup>59</sup> Another set of couples, William and John Stroud and their wives Rose and Sarah, conveyed a 226-acre tract of land in Brunswick after moving to Orange County, North Carolina sometime before 1760. While it is unclear exactly when they took up land in Orange County, after the American Revolution John Stroud sold over 550 acres in one transaction. His brother William was still close by as indicated by his signature as a witness.<sup>60</sup>

The Blalacks provide an example of a family that disposed of a significantly larger piece of land. In 1767, David and Anne Blalack sold 600 acres in Brunswick County for £60. The year before, David Blalack purchased 105 acres in Orange County, North Carolina for £22. Then by March 1770, Blalack sold this same tract at a considerable profit for £50. David's brother Millington had sold a much smaller tract, 163 acres, in Brunswick in 1748 and migrated to Johnston County, North Carolina. He must have been relatively close by, however, because he witnessed his brother's land purchase in Orange, almost twenty years later. It first appears that

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<sup>59</sup> Harris and Green were brothers-in-law. They had married Mary and Anne Bradford, respectively, sometime before the move to Granville County. The precise time of migration is uncertain; Harris witnessed the 1746 conveyance of land to Green. *Brunswick County, Virginia Deeds, 1745-1749* (Miami Beach: TLC Genealogy, 1991), 42; Zae Hargett Gwynn, *Abstracts of the Early Deeds of Granville County, North Carolina, 1746-1765* (Rocky Mount, N.C.: Joseph W. Watson, 1974), 1, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Brunswick County Deeds, Book 7: 221. William D. Bennett, ed., *Orange County Records, Vol. III Deed Book 3 Abstracts* (Raleigh, N.C.: William Bennett, 1990), 3.

David Blalack took a step down economically because his overall landholdings diminished, but he did manage to make a considerable amount of money on his land conveyances. Perhaps Blalack saw the potential to turn a profit on land as being at least as important as simply acquiring land. In any case, there are no other records of his purchasing land in Orange County in the colonial period. Blalack, however, turned up again in Tryon County in 1777 when he purchased 150 acres.<sup>61</sup>

It is probable that in many instances migrant families who had owned land in Brunswick had only recently migrated to the Southside area. For those who sought to improve their situations even further or to join family in other backcountry areas, heading south a hundred or so miles seemed to be a manageable risk to take. For those who had traveled long distances to settle the first time in the Southside, the decision to uproot families once again may have been considerably easier to make. Considering the reputation that North Carolina had among colonists elsewhere for being a place of abundant land, it is hardly surprising that Southsiders looked south to improve their prospects.<sup>62</sup>

The North Carolina backcountry in the 1740s and 1750s provided migrants and recent settlers limited opportunities, but economic conditions there rapidly evolved in subsequent decades. The economy of backcountry North Carolina developed along several lines. While farmers constituted the greatest part of the population of Rowan

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<sup>61</sup> Brunswick County Deeds, Book 8; Bennett, *Orange County Deeds* 2: 119, 3: 108; Holcomb, Brent comp., *Deed Abstracts of Tryon, Lincoln & Rutherford Counties North Carolina 1769-1786, Tryon County Wills & Estates* (Easley, S.C.: Southern Historical Press, 1977), 86-87.

<sup>62</sup> Beeman, *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*, 67-68.

and Anson counties, a large number of more specialized tradespeople and artisans quickly populated the regions. At first farmers participated mostly in subsistence agriculture; but because they were unable to produce all that was necessary to live from their own efforts, they quickly sought to establish trading ties beyond their localities.<sup>63</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, a handful of roads linked the growing western settlements on the Yadkin River with the trading towns in the central portion of the colony, which in turn connected to the coastal trade centers in North Carolina as well as those in southeastern Virginia and the ports of South Carolina.<sup>64</sup> These roads were essential to the growing mercantile trade within the backcountry which increasingly enhanced the number opportunities for artisans, small merchants, and farmers.<sup>65</sup>

The widespread belief that it was easy to acquire land in North Carolina and the growing opportunities in the backcountry made the area attractive to many colonial settlers. Reports throughout the colonies suggested the great magnitude of the settlers who were pouring into the backcountry of North Carolina throughout the 1750s and 1760s. Observers as diverse as Benjamin Franklin and James Maury, a minister in Virginia, speculated that tens of thousands of settlers had left their respective colonies for the North Carolina backcountry. A report that originated in Williamsburg, Virginia but circulated throughout the colonial presses, proclaimed:

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<sup>63</sup> Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*, 50-51.

<sup>64</sup> Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 144, 155-56.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel B. Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 48 (July 1991): 390-93.

There is scarce any history, either antient or modern, which affords an account of such a rapid and sudden increase of inhabitants in a back frontier country, as that of North Carolina. To justify the truth of this observation we need only to inform our readers, that twenty years ago there were not twenty taxable persons within the limits of the above mentioned County of Orange; in which there are now four thousand taxables. The increase of inhabitants, and flourishing state of the other adjoining back counties, are no less surprising and astonishing.<sup>66</sup>

An ad in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* emphasized the richness of the land and the new transportation links which enhanced the appeal of the area:

To be SOLD in small Tracts, ABOUT 30,000 acres of land, in Orange County North Carolina, commonly called the Haw fields; the quality of these lands is so generally known, that it is needless to say anything in recommendation of them, only this may be proper to mention, that they produce as good wheat as any in Pennsylvania, and being a strong soil, will bear extraordinary hemp, flax, and tobacco; there is navigation within 70 miles, several reputable merchants having lately established stores at Cross creek, the want of which formerly obliged the inhabitants of Orange county to carry their flour sometimes 180 miles by land; this inconvenience being obviated by the settlement at Cross creek above mentioned, and the peace of the country being now happily restored, and settled upon a solid foundation, there is no doubt but this part of it will shortly become as flourishing as any in America.<sup>67</sup>

Personal accounts also reinforced the perception that large numbers of settlers were taking advantage of the opportunity for settlement in the North Carolina backcountry.

Letters from settlers already in the backcountry often encouraged family members to join them.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Connecticut Courant*, November 30, 1767, quoted in Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina*, 54.

<sup>67</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 5, 1771, CD-ROM, Swem Library, The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

<sup>68</sup> William Millikan to Humphrey Marshall, 10 June 1765, item 744, Buffington Family Mss., Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

The opportunity to acquire land in the North Carolina backcountry was greater than virtually anywhere else in the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. Between the late 1740s and the early 1760s, migrants entered the western portion of the colony and purchased large tracts for very little money. Unpatented land in the southern portion of the backcountry, the area comprising Anson, Cumberland, Johnston, and later Mecklenburg counties, remained under the administration of the English crown through the royal government of the colony. There recently-arrived immigrants from Britain or from elsewhere in the colonies could achieve a title to 640 acres of land — one square mile— for about £30. For many migrants leaving Pennsylvania, Maryland, or Virginia, such a price was rather high, especially for those who had no land to sell in their former homes. In the northern area of the province, however, land was appreciably more affordable. This part of the colony, including land reaching from the coastal counties of Perquimans and Pasquotank westward toward Rowan, fell within the Granville District, the proprietary of Lord John Carteret. While Carteret had no political authority in his proprietary, he retained the most important function of government in an area of unsettled land: the issuance of property titles. Once Carteret began issuing patents to his land in 1748, his land agents handled more than half of the requests for backcountry land. Although Carteret's land agents were inconsistent, inept, and in some cases corrupt administrators, they issued almost five thousand patents.<sup>69</sup> Even though it could take years to establish title to the land through the chaotic Carteret land office, it was often worth the hassle in financial terms. Settlers

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<sup>69</sup> Whittenburg, "The North Carolina Regulator Zone," 15-16; Margaret Hoffman, ed., *The Granville District of North Carolina, Abstracts of Land Grants*, 3 vols. (Weldon, N.C.: The Roanoke News Company, 1986-1989), 1: v.

could patent a 640-acre tract for as little as £7-8, including all fees for surveying the tract and processing the requisite paper work to establish title.<sup>70</sup> Settlement in backcountry North Carolina proceeded along the tributaries of the major rivers that drained the region. From the late 1740s through the early 1760s a number of settlement areas in Rowan Counties increased at a steady rate. For instance, in the northern Yadkin River Valley, the areas that Robert Ramsay referred to as the Irish and Trading Camp settlements grew dramatically during this period. Immigrants patented land or purchased tracts along approximately twelve creeks that emptied into the Yadkin River. Settlers who took up land in this area did not live in closely-knit neighborhoods. Instead the arrangement of the tracts entailed neighborhoods that were dispersed over miles of land. (See map below.) Although this settlement pattern indicates that families and associates were often divided by substantial distances, it does not signify that backcountry settlers gave up their social connections.<sup>71</sup> Instead families often took up land near or adjacent to other relatives and associates. As they sought out land, they did their best to secure tracts that allowed them to build secure lives and maintain their networks of family and associates.

Given the widely recognized availability and quality of the land, it is no surprise that the region attracted thousands of settlers from the colonies to the north. Pennsylvania cottagers, who had rented for a number of years and were able to save

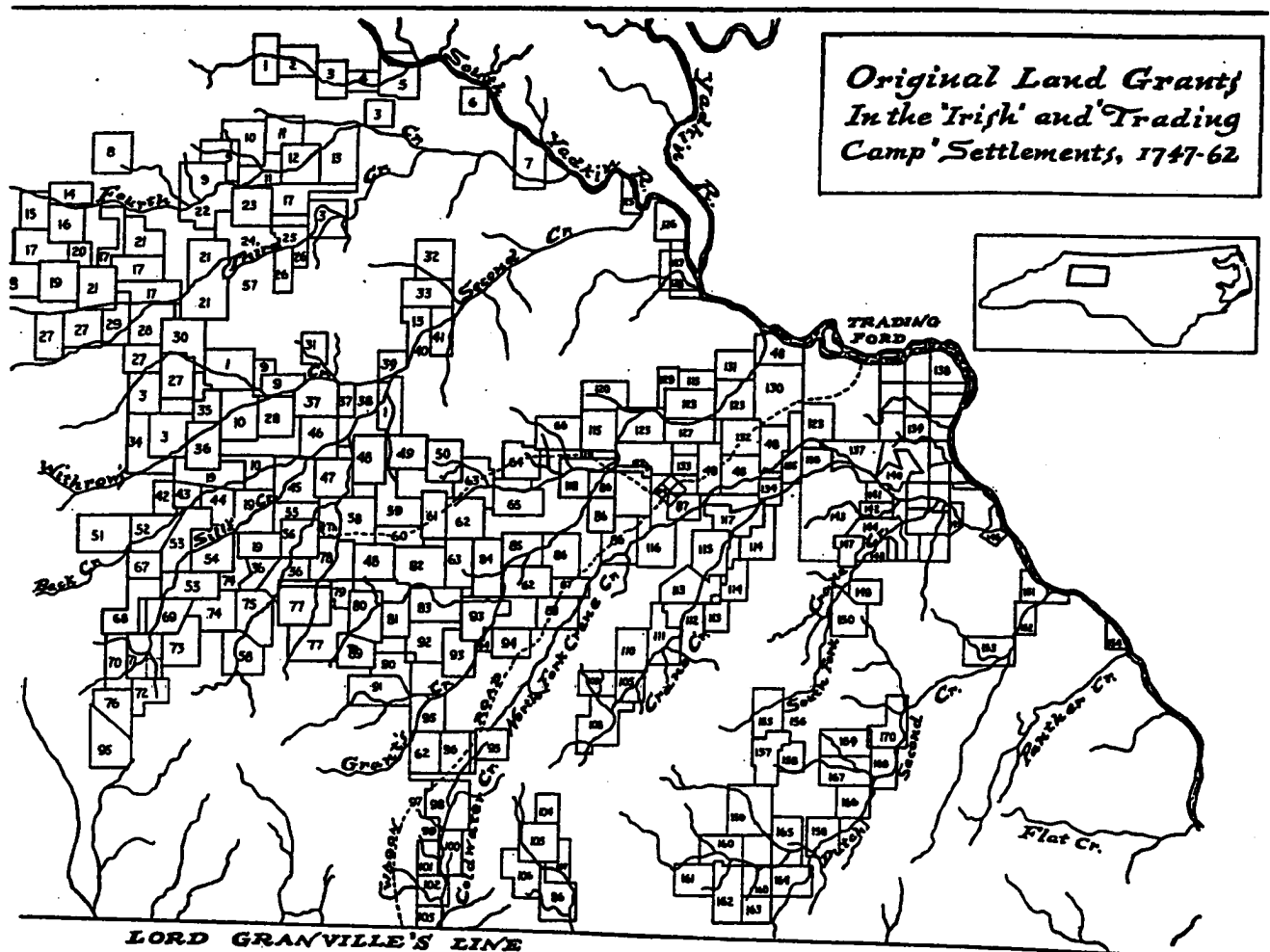
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<sup>70</sup> Hoffman, *The Granville District*, 1: i-viii.

<sup>71</sup> For another example of this type of dispersed settlement, see Robert D. Mitchell and Warren R. Hofstra, "How Do Settlement Systems Evolve?: The Virginia Backcountry during the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Geography* 21, no. 2 (1995): 133-34; Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "Staple Crops and Urban Development in the Eighteenth-Century South," *Perspectives in American History* 10 (1976): 51-55.



FIGURE 8.  
PATENTS IN THE YADKIN RIVER VALLEY



Patentees often sought land falling on or near the many creeks that drained the backcountry region. Each polygon represents a land grant; duplicate numbers indicate a settler had patented additional tracts. By the early 1760s settlers occupied much of the land in the Yadkin River Valley. Map reprinted from Robert Ramsay, *Carolina Cradle*, 108.

up 5-7 pounds per year, could rather easily buy a piece of their own land in the North Carolina backcountry. Residents of Augusta County, Virginia who had either been restricted from obtaining land in the Valley or wished to accumulate greater holdings in the south, could likewise migrate, albeit over a much shorter distance, east across the Blue Ridge Mountains and then southward past Pilot Mountain to take up land along the Yadkin River. Finally, Brunswick County residents, along with hundreds of others from the Southside counties, also took advantage of the availability of land in the backcountry. In each of these regions of origination, there are numerous cases of families moving to the North Carolina backcountry and taking up new tracts of land.<sup>72</sup>

The availability of land, however, was not the only factor that motivated colonists from Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia to migrate deep into the southern backcountry. When families decided to abandon their former communities, leaving behind land of varying size or no land at all, they often moved to an area where they could, to some extent, replicate their communities. To do this, families and individuals had to migrate to an area that had land enough not only to accommodate their own families, but to allow extended family and other associates to settle near them.

Throughout the North Carolina backcountry in the mid-eighteenth century, there were dozens of networks of families and relatives living close to each other that

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<sup>72</sup> For example, John Long of Earl Township in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, left behind about 24 acres in 1757 and the same year obtained over 600 acres near Crane Creek in Rowan County, North Carolina. Over the next few years he accumulated several thousand acres. Lancaster County Tax Lists, Earl Township, 1756, 1757; Linn, *Rowan County Deed, Abstracts*, 1: 18, 24, 43. See also, Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, 111.

had remained virtually intact throughout the migration process. Various underlying factors pulled these groups of families together across the hundreds of miles which constituted the migration route. Chief among them were religion, culture, and ethnicity. Southsiders readily set about establishing an essentially English society in the eastern backcountry of North Carolina, a society that rather quickly resembled Tidewater areas of Virginia. From Augusta County, hundreds of Scots-Irish who were unable to establish themselves to the degree they envisioned in the Valley, migrated to an area of North Carolina where they were able to settle adjacent to or near their former neighbors from Virginia. In Rowan and Mecklenburg counties these Scots-Irish were able to replicate many of their social networks and certainly practice their Presbyterian religion, but they were able to do so where many of them could own more land than they had before. The same was true for similar groups of families throughout the North Carolina backcountry.

## CHAPTER V

### ACROSS THE MILES: NETWORKS OF KITH AND KIN

Many families moving to the southern frontier left behind relatives in their former homes and communities. For those settlers who migrated from the Philadelphia hinterland to the Western Carolina frontier, over three hundred miles separated them from families and friends. In many cases, sons and daughters moved south while their parents stayed behind. At the same time, a number of fathers actually preceded their grown children to new homes in the southern backcountry. However families were divided, separation did not necessarily mean that families lost all contact with each other. In the later migrations of the nineteenth century, when thousands rather than hundreds of miles separated relatives, good-byes were often final.<sup>1</sup> During the eighteenth-century migration, the ability to communicate across long distances by letter allowed backcountry settlers to rely on their distant relatives for support, both

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<sup>1</sup> Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12-13. John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 34. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 30. On the other hand, Elliot West claims that images of nineteenth-century settlers "breaking bonds with their relatives as they moved west is easily exaggerated." *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 95.

emotional and practical, and provided a means by which settlers attempted to replicate portions of their former homes and communities.

Well after families established their new homes in the backcountry, individuals reported to relatives who remained in their former homes. Settlers wrote about sundry topics, ranging from local ecological conditions to political events. Another primary purpose for backcountry settlers corresponding with family members was to ask for specific items or general supplies. These requests reveal that settlers quickly adapted to their new homes, in part by relying on habits and items from their former lives. The links that settlers maintained with neighbors and friends in their old homes enabled them to establish familiar lives in the backcountry. When they traded family news or reported on politics or agriculture, new backcountry settlers and those friends and relatives they left behind tried to remain connected. By writing home for items or money, new backcountry settlers acknowledged that they needed assistance or help as they tried to build new lives.

In that sense, the migration to the southern backcountry revealed a tension that underlay colonial society on the eve of the Revolution. On the one hand, the relative scarcity of land in older, settled areas led some people to look to the west and southwest, the colonial backcountry, to establish new homes. At first glance these people appear to have acted out of a self-interest, largely motivated by the search for economic opportunity. Indeed, an entire school of history starting with the early twentieth-century Progressives saw the search for opportunity, whether economic,

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political, or social, as the primary determinant of history.<sup>2</sup> The evidence is often compelling. From the late seventeenth century, land near the eastern population centers became increasingly scarce. When settlers left an area in which economic conditions were tightening and moved to an area where land was abundant, it appears as though economics must have motivated them to migrate in the first place. This impression is accentuated when the amount of land a migrant could obtain in the backcountry dwarfed that of his former holdings. Indeed, it appears as though the question of motivation is readily answered: migrants moved on because they perceived better opportunity to advance themselves socially and economically.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the correspondence between settlers on the southern frontier and family and friends who remained in the older settled areas reveals a strong reluctance to sever old ties and an apprehension about meeting the challenges of building new lives without the familiar support networks that existed in their former homes. When settlers wrote home expressing their sadness about the distance between or they eagerly sought news about their former neighborhoods, they revealed an emotional

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner articulated the framework for this interpretation in his 1893 seminal essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." As farmers wore out their old lands, the call of cheap land in the west lured individualistic and opportunistic American settlers in a perpetual wave of settlement. For Turner, the movement west represented the key force that made America unique. With each successive push to the west, Americans shed some element of their European heritage and developed into a people of their own identity. Despite the ethocentrism of his thesis, Turner set the terms for historical discussion about the west and westward migration for the next century. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986 [1920]), 16-23.

<sup>3</sup> In 1976 James Lemon championed this interpretation in *Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (New York: W. W.

attachment to their old homes. Such an attachment hardly disproves the notion that economic considerations led settlers to move to the backcountry. But it certainly tempers the image of maximizing opportunists that emerges from numerical data. While many settlers established better economic situations for themselves once they were in their new backcountry homes, it is clear from their letters and messages to relatives that they often sought something more than simple economic advancement.

Families, friends, and associates corresponded with each other over vastly varying distances. Some travelers scribbled quick notes on their journeys to their new homes while they were still relatively close to their former homes. Others reached even farther back to friends on the other side of the Atlantic. By corresponding, new backcountry migrants kept associates apprised of a number of things. Backcountry settlers were in the position to offer first-hand accounts of conditions in their new homes and they were best suited to explain what the long journey entailed. In this sense, letters from recent settlers at times served a promotional purpose by describing the resources of their new neighborhoods. At other times, when agricultural conditions took a turn for the worse or when political strife threatened the security of backcountry society, letters sent back to old friends and family may have discouraged them from migrating. No matter what the distance, settlers eagerly reported on events and conditions to their family and friends.

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Norton & Company, 1976 [1972]). Lemon portrays southeastern Pennsylvania settlers as prototypes of the quintessential American middle-class individualists.

The correspondence of one group of families offers a window into the experience of backcountry settlers and their efforts to remain connected in some fashion with their former home. The Buffington, Beeson, and Hadley families of southeastern Pennsylvania represent many of the thousands of families that faced the crucial decision of whether to migrate to the backcountry in the mid-eighteenth century. By the 1750s certain members of these families had migrated to Rowan and Orange counties in North Carolina. Like many of the other migrant families, those who moved to the backcountry from these families represented more than one generation, and they settled close to each other when they arrived in their new frontier homes.

The Beesons, Hadleys, and Buffingtons were all Quaker families. Those who migrated to the North Carolina backcountry counties of Rowan and Orange were part of a larger Quaker migration stream that flowed toward Virginia and accelerated throughout the 1750s and 1760s. In turn this movement was a component of the greater migration to the southern backcountry that occurred during the same period. That these families were Friends bears some influence on their migration experience and possibly even their motivation for migrating. As a religious group that had spread out from its central stronghold in southeastern Pennsylvania, the Quakers had significant communities in northern Virginia, the western Piedmont of Virginia, and increasingly in the central North Carolina Piedmont counties of Rowan and Orange. When Quakers migrated to an area where there were well-established monthly meetings, such as the New Garden and Cane Creek meetings in Orange County, they entered existing communities that often included people they had known in other



areas.<sup>4</sup> Considering how these communities offered newly arrived settlers a familiar setting consisting of associates and often family members, it probably made the decision to migrate relatively easy for many Friends. At the same time, non-Quaker migrants often chose to migrate to areas where they knew somebody who had preceded them, somebody they relied on for information about the land, weather, and the local economy.<sup>5</sup> The Quakers, then, are different from other backcountry settlers because they had a more formalized set of associations in the highly organized and well-documented monthly meetings. While other non-Quaker migrants had less formal associations, the effect such associations had of making it easier to migrate was essentially the same.

Over twenty years ago, Larry Dale Gragg argued that Quakers moved from Pennsylvania to the southern backcountry for a number of reasons, including declining economic opportunity in Pennsylvania, the desire to preserve or create a family, the effort to retain traditional Quaker practices, and repulsion at the expansion of slavery.<sup>6</sup> In his 1988 book, *Quakers and the American Family*, Barry Levy downplayed Gragg's argument for declining economic opportunity as a motivating factor. Rather, Levy

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Dale Gragg, *Migration in Early America: The Virginia Quaker Experience* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980) 39, Table 21. Migrants entered the North Carolina meetings from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Fairfax Virginia, Hopewell Virginia, and other points in Maryland. For a comprehensive abstract of North Carolina Quaker meeting records including death and birth announcements, marriage records and certificates of removal, see William Wade Hinshaw ed., *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*, Vol. 4 (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1936).

<sup>5</sup> James Auld's doctor friend, along with Malachi Murden and George Glascock's associate Richard Bennehan, are examples of such people.

<sup>6</sup> Gragg, *Migration in Early America*, 53, 62-65, 69-72, 75.

attributed the migration of a relatively small number of Quakers to the southern frontier to Pennsylvania's emerging consumerist political economy that threatened to transform traditional Quaker family relationships.<sup>7</sup>

There is room for portions of both Levy's and Gragg's conclusions about influences that motivated Quakers to migrate to the southern backcountry. At the same time, neither author makes an effort to place the Quaker migration in the context of the greater movement to the southern backcountry. Settlers of other faiths and backgrounds moved for some of the same reasons that the Quakers did, and the migration process experienced by non-Quakers differed very little from that of other backcountry migrants during the mid-eighteenth century.

The correspondence of the Buffington family spans two generations of Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Virginia settlers. Beginning in the early 1750s, one member of the family tested his capacity to leave his parents' home in New Castle County. In a pattern seen in other families who eventually migrated to different sections of the backcountry, Isaac Buffington struck out ahead of his family and settled for a time in Winchester, Virginia. His move in many ways was more of an experiment in a new community, an attempt to see if he could forge his own life on the frontier. But like so many of his contemporary migrants, Isaac moved to an area already settled by associates of his family.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 241.

<sup>8</sup> Buffington Family Manuscripts, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

By 1755 Winchester was a well-established backcountry town that served as the seat of government for Frederick County and as a vital cross-roads link along the Great Wagon Road network. Thousands of settlers traveled through or near Winchester as they migrated from Maryland and Pennsylvania to the Valley of Virginia or North Carolina. By 1757 merchants had established at least five stores in Winchester, and the town was the site of several craft shops, as well as four ordinaries and three taverns.<sup>9</sup> Ten years earlier, two Moravian missionaries stopped in Winchester and rested at the home of a shoemaker on their way back to Pennsylvania after almost two months of travel through Virginia. Although these early Moravians left no details about the size of Winchester, the town already served as a provisioning center for backcountry travelers and migrants; after a brief respite from their journey, they “bought some provisions” and continued on their way.<sup>10</sup>

Winchester also served as a vital link between the eastern Tidewater economy and the growing settlements of the Valley region and beyond in the Allegheny Mountains. By the time Isaac Buffington moved to Winchester in 1755, at least three main transportation arteries connected the northern Valley with the northern Piedmont and Tidewater. In particular, three roads led from the vicinity of Winchester to the general area of Alexandria about eight miles south of the falls on the Potomac River. These roads crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains at three wind gaps: Snicker’s, Ashby’s

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<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Mitchell and Warren R. Hofstra, “How Do Settlement Systems Evolve?: The Virginia Backcountry during the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 21, no. 2 (1995): 135-36.

and Gregory's. Two of the roads took travelers and traders directly to Alexandria, while the third hooked farther to the south to the smaller tobacco trading towns of Colchester and Dumfries. Winchester provided a centralized location for the local population to buy consumer goods and sell commodities, and storekeepers from the surrounding area also bought stocks for their own establishments in Winchester.<sup>11</sup> Because Winchester was the site of such economic and social activity, migrants heading south or west through the town found Winchester to be one of the busiest urban hubs in the southern backcountry. As such, Winchester presented a number of opportunities to men such as Isaac Buffington.

A mason by trade, Buffington was probably attracted to Winchester's growth spurt that came on as a result of the war effort in the early days of the Seven Years' War. When the first contingent of Moravians from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania bound for the Wachovia tract in North Carolina traveled through Winchester in 1753, they noted the town comprised "about sixty houses, which are rather poorly built."<sup>12</sup> As relatively affluent travelers, the Moravians' opinion of Winchester's early architecture was probably somewhat condescending, but their observation about the number of houses provides a baseline for judging the community's rapid growth. Only six years later the Virginia legislature passed a law providing for the enlargement of Winchester

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<sup>10</sup> William J. Hinke and Charles E. Kemper, eds., "Moravian Diaries Travels Through Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 12, no. 1 (July 1904), 61.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 151-52, 156.

<sup>12</sup> "Moravian Diaries," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (Oct. 1904), 141.

by some 173 additional lots surveyed by Lord Fairfax, the English peer who was the proprietor of the great Northern Neck land grant.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the Revolution, Winchester was home to over 2,100 people and clearly stood as the dominant urban space in the Valley of Virginia.<sup>14</sup>

Isaac Buffington was among the people building houses in Winchester in this period of the town's expansion. At least that is what his mother, Phebe Hadly, suspected of her son. His plan to move to Winchester from his former New Castle County home 150 miles to the east probably contradicted his parents' wishes for him. It appears that Isaac made his move to the backcountry without fully informing his parents of his intent. Phebe Hadly wrote to a friend, Isaac Perckins, in Winchester in August 1755 when she wanted to locate her son and know of his condition. While it is uncertain how long Isaac had been away from his parents' home, his parents anxiously awaited some news about his well-being. His brother Joseph Buffington's journeyman, Rawbrick Lewis, had left Joseph's service before his term had expired, and Phebe suspected that he had headed toward Winchester. Phebe's interest in Lewis may have been genuine, but her concern for her son's welfare constituted the primary cause for her correspondence.<sup>15</sup> Only a couple of weeks earlier, Phebe had received word from another acquaintance in Winchester, Charity Beeson, that her son

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<sup>13</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia From the First Session of the Legislature in the year 1619*, 13 vols. (Richmond: 1809-1823), 7: 315.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell and Hofstra, "How Do Settlement Systems Evolve?" 139-40.

<sup>15</sup> Phebe Hadly to Isaac Perckens, 21 August 1755, Buffington Family Mss., item 390, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Isaac was indeed in the area, “building a stone house not very far from us,” and just as importantly, that he had not joined up with the British troops and colonials who had met defeat at Fort Duquesne.<sup>16</sup>

The circumstances of Isaac Buffington’s self-imposed moratorium on communication with his parents remain unclear. If he hoped to establish his independence before reporting home, Isaac may simply have been delaying contact. Indeed, when his plans went awry late in the summer of 1755, he quickly sought to re-establish a connection with his parents. While building his house in Winchester, Isaac’s scaffold collapsed, throwing him to the ground on his back. The accident left him virtually paralyzed for almost a week, but fortunately he had only broken a rib. Several weeks after the accident, Isaac reported to his parents that he had stayed with Henry Haith at first, but afterwards rested at the home of Isaac Beeson, an old friend of the family. Isaac intended to visit “the warm Springs” as part of his recovery and therapy for his traumatized back.<sup>17</sup> After his planned trip to take in the perceived health benefits of the springs, Isaac made it clear to his parents that he wished “with the help of God to return home again in a few weeks.” Finally, before the end of his

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<sup>16</sup> Charity Beeson to Phebe Hadly, Buffington Family Mss., item 371.

<sup>17</sup> The warm springs that Isaac intended to visit were probably the thermal springs west of Winchester in Hampshire County. These springs would later be called Berkeley Springs. Isaac almost certainly was not referring to the town of Warm Springs in what would become Bath County, west of the town Staunton; that location was approximately 75 miles from Winchester, while the Berkeley Springs were about half that distance.

letter, Isaac reported that he had heard news from his “aunt and uncle and our Relations in Carolina.”<sup>18</sup>

This exchange between Isaac Buffington, the backcountry settler, and his parents in New Castle County reveals a number of characteristics about the migration experience to the greater southern backcountry. As an artisan, Isaac possessed the skills that could help him to gain independence in Winchester. According to Charity Beeson’s earlier correspondence with Phebe Hadley, Isaac was building a house. While it appears that the house was for Isaac himself, his skills as a mason would certainly have been in high demand in the growing town. He undoubtedly perceived an opportunity to establish himself in the backcountry town, and his earlier reluctance to make contact with his parents suggests that Isaac was convinced that he had to become independent on his own.

In his 1985 essay, “Independence, Improvement, and Authority,” Jack Greene identified *independence* as “the most powerful drive in the British-American colonizing process from the seventeenth century through much of the nineteenth century, and from the eastern to the western coasts of North America.” Greene went on to define independence as “freedom from the will of others.”<sup>19</sup> At first glance, this

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<sup>18</sup> Isaac Buffington to his parents, Buffington Family Mss., Item 391.

<sup>19</sup> Jack P. Green, “Independence, Improvement, and Authority: Toward a Framework for Understanding the Histories of the Southern Backcountry during the Era of the American Revolution,” in *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 12-36. Greene also dwelt on the extent to which backcountry settlers attempted to replicate settled societies of the eastern seaboard. According to Greene, settlers struggled to *improve* their new

notion appears to have applied to Isaac Buffington's decision to move to Winchester and carry on with his life for some time beyond the purview of his parents. While Greene's definition of independence may be broad, considering that it is, after all, difficult to conceptualize a society in which anyone is truly free *from the will of others*, the basic idea has some validity.

Isaac's age is uncertain, but he was certainly young when he first moved away from New Castle. In none of his correspondence does Isaac mention having a wife or children, and his mother in turn never asked about any family members.<sup>20</sup> While his situation did not necessarily signify that he was young, the tone of Phebe's inquiries about her son indicates that Isaac was a young man. Indeed, it may have been this tone of parental concern that Isaac perceived as what he needed to escape in order to establish his independence. If Isaac believed that living near his parents and under their scrutiny was tantamount to submitting to their will, his flight to the backcountry appears to be something of a youthful rebellion against authority. His interest in breaking free from the will of others resulted in an attempt to establish independence in Winchester.

Isaac's effort to establish his independence in the backcountry amounted to a half-measure. Although his desire to forge his own life probably motivated him to move to Winchester, he settled in an area that was virtually saturated with former associates and friends of his family, especially of his mother and father. Phebe and her

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backcountry societies to the point at which they were removed from the "wilds" that surrounded them.



son refer to at least three and possibly four individuals or families with whom they had prior associations. First, Phebe's plea for information about her son went to Isaac Perkins. She also offered her affections to Isaac's wife and family, indicating that she knew them all well.<sup>21</sup> Next, Phebe inquired of another Pennsylvania associate, Isaac Holinsworth, and his family. And finally, when Isaac wrote to his parents about his fall from the scaffold, he mentioned that Isaac Beeson and his family were taking care of him.<sup>22</sup> It may not have been as though Isaac Buffington was in the care of his parents or immediate family, but this network of friends and relatives provided support to Isaac when he needed it most, that is, when he was injured and unable to take care of himself. Furthermore, it is apparent from the correspondence that this extended network of support reached back towards Isaac's parents in eastern Pennsylvania. Although neither of his parents settled in the backcountry, at least at that point, they kept track of their son through this web of relatives and friends who had moved to the frontier.

Considering the extent of this network of kith and kin and others like it that supported and sustained many recent backcountry settlers, the notion of independence, and indeed even the concept of individualism, come into question. If we accept Greene's definition of independence as the striving to escape the will of other people,

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<sup>20</sup> Because most family correspondence ended with questions regarding the health of specific family members, it is reasonable to make this assertion.

<sup>21</sup> Buffington Family Mss., items 390-391.

<sup>22</sup> The fourth possibility is Henry Haith. Isaac mentions that he had stayed with Haith, but there is not a clear connection between Haith and Isaac Buffington's family.

it is difficult to see how Isaac's move represented a true attempt to break free of any parental restrictions or expectations that he may have perceived. He settled in a town that was comfortably removed from his former home in eastern Pennsylvania, but, at the same time, many elements of his former home and neighborhood were present in Winchester in the form of his and his parents' friends.

In a later period and an area farther to the south, the eagerness to establish personal independence motivated many young men about the age of Isaac Buffington to move alone or with their young families to the old Southwest. According to historian Joan Cashin, young men who came of age in the 1820s and 1830s feared that their chances of achieving independence, the sort of independence that Greene identified, were slipping away in the eastern seaboard states. The young men whom Cashin profiled believed they would have faced only circumscribed opportunities had they remained in the paternalistic, traditional societies of their fathers. Instead, this generation of young men, who would be grandfathers by the time of the Civil War, struck out for their independence along the nineteenth-century southern frontier. For that group of men, family relations signified a hindrance to independence. But as their settlement experience evolved, they came to realize that family and friends could provide support and assistance essential to survival in a new region. Acting upon this realization may have forced southwestern men to compromise their notion of manly independence, but it often insured a degree of success that would have been virtually unachievable without this network of support.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cashin, *A Family Venture*, 32-33, 86-87.

Isaac Buffington's decision to settle in Winchester among old friends and some relatives indicates much about his understanding of what achieving independence meant. He perceived an opportunity to conduct his building trade in a location promising a degree of growth that probably did not exist in his old home. Without wasting much time considering the wishes of his parents, who later apparently desired his return to eastern Pennsylvania, Isaac grabbed this opportunity to leave his home for a place where he could seek economic and social independence. Yet, he also chose a location that provided a network of friends and relatives in place. The network probably allowed Isaac to gain a better footing in the town's masonry business, but when bad luck hit and Isaac found himself injured and presumably unable to generate any income for over a month, nearby friends and relatives proved their true importance by housing Isaac and helping him through his pain.

Networks like the one that supported Isaac Buffington existed throughout the backcountry. While few examples are as clear as the one of Isaac literally receiving physical aid and care from old family friends, there are many instances of families helping each other in the backcountry and family members even requesting the assistance of relatives who remained behind. Often settlers wrote home making simple requests for material items that they might have left behind at their former homes. In some instances, however, settlers sent urgent pleas back to their relatives that involved more serious matters, such as settling long-standing debts or encouraging reluctant spouses or siblings to join them in the backcountry. That settlers frequently made such contact with their old homes suggests that the movement to the backcountry represented something much different from a monumental thrust for

independence in colonial society. The desire to improve one's situation in life by acquiring new land in the backcountry was a fundamental theme of the migration. At the same time, there existed a strong tendency among migrants to attempt to transplant or re-create as many connections from their former social networks as possible. New settlers looked back to former associates and to relatives for comfort, assistance, and financial support, while they also took advantage of the aid provided by familiar neighbors.

### Extended Family Networks

At the end of Isaac Buffington's letter to his mother in which he reported his accident, he mentioned that he had heard news of their relatives in North Carolina. They apparently were doing well in their new homes; furthermore, they evidently remained in frequent contact with their relatives who had remained in Pennsylvania and with those who had only migrated as far as western Virginia. The distance between southeastern Pennsylvania and the area of Rowan and Orange counties North Carolina exceeded three hundred miles. Yet the distance alone appears to have posed no real obstacle to remaining in touch with family and in turn relying on the assistance of family far away when need arose. This need manifested itself in a number of ways, including requests for material items, financial assistance, and more abstract emotive needs such as expressions of affection and longings to see relatives and former neighbors.

Writing from Orange County, North Carolina in 1756, Hannah Stanfield, Isaac Buffington's sister, explained to her mother that her family was in good health and also that "all our friends here is Reasonable well." Hannah had recently seen her uncle, Richard Beeson, Phebe Hadley's brother; he and his wife and children were also doing well. Sadly, Hannah also acknowledged that she had received her mother's letter of a month earlier informing her of the death of her father. By virtue of the distance involved, news of dying relatives necessarily passed slowly between backcountry settlers and their former communities. Hannah's correspondence probably does not convey her true reaction to the news of her father's death. While Hannah only mentions "a true Account of my Respected Father's sudden Death," it is difficult to imagine that word of his passing failed to have some emotional impact on her. This assumption is based on the extent to which the family's correspondence expressed concern about family members and friends. It is unlikely that the numerous requests about news regarding the health and welfare of relatives and friends constituted mere formalities. Rather, family members had a strong desire to maintain awareness of family members, and this desire signified migrants' unwillingness to sever ties with their old communities.<sup>24</sup>

The Buffingtons were by no means the only family to maintain communications over long distances when a family member died. In 1774 Nicholas Massey, a settler in Rowan County, North Carolina, wrote to his brother Elijah in Kent County on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Nicholas had moved to Rowan County about

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<sup>24</sup> Hannah Stanfield to Phebe Hadly, 24 July 1756, Buffington Family Mss., item 409.

seven years earlier when he purchased a plot of 310 acres for 45 pounds sterling.<sup>25</sup> After Nicholas reported to his brother about the general health of his children and himself, he wrote of his wife's death.<sup>26</sup> The details Nicholas provided about Henrietta's death indicate that it had been some time since he had written to Elijah. Henrietta died of some form of cancer which "began to show itself in August 1772," over two years before her death. During those two years, Henrietta apparently experienced a prolonged "languishing condition until her departure."<sup>27</sup>

Nicholas also used this letter to inform Elijah of several other developments in the Massey family. First, Nicholas' two oldest daughters Hannah and Sarah had married men the he saw as appropriate matches. Their removal from his household left him to care for three sons and five younger daughters. He also described a severe frost that had struck the region late in the springtime; according to Nicholas, it was the "severest frost known in the memory of man." Presumably, the impact of this event on the Massey family approached devastation because the frost had "destroyed the winter grain and fruit." Considering the extent to which North Carolina settlers

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<sup>25</sup> Jo White Linn, *Rowan County, North Carolina Deed Abstracts, Vol. II 1762-1772, Abstracts of Books 5, 6, 7* (Salisbury, N.C.: Stahle Linn, 1972), 85.

<sup>26</sup> For a brief discussion of the prevalence of discussions about health in the diaries of migrants in the nineteenth century, see John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 12-13. Faragher notes that entries about health were as prevalent as entries about work for migrants who kept diaries. He suggests this was because of their uncertain surroundings, lowered resistance, and the extraordinarily rigorous tasks of each day. The frequent mention of health issues in family letters may have been an extension of the uncertainties of the migration experience and of backcountry living in general.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Massey to Elijah Massey, 4 June 1774, Nicholas Massey Paper, North Carolina Office of History and Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

marketed their grain products across the colony and beyond, the loss of a year's crop would have caused serious instability for most households. By the early 1770s, wheat had increasingly become a desirable crop to grow and market in the North Carolina backcountry. Wheat exports from North Carolina ports exceeded 13,000 bushels in 1772. This number reflects a tripling of the exports from the late 1760s and excludes any wheat that had already been milled into flour as well as grain that farmers sold out of the colony on overland routes. While North Carolina was not the largest wheat-producing colony, its settlers increasingly turned to the crop by the end of the century. Hence, when Nicholas wrote to his brother of the cold weather, his primary emphasis was on the economic devastation that had met backcountry settlers that year. <sup>28</sup>

Nicholas was not as avid a letter writer as were the Buffingtons, but his correspondence with his brother Elijah conveyed the same types of news, and his desire to remain in touch with his geographically distant relatives signified a yearning to cling to some elements of his pre-migration life. Like the Buffingtons, Nicholas corresponded with his brother to soften the pain of being so far apart. Also, like other backcountry settlers, Nicholas reached out to his brother in Maryland to ask for a material item. In the postscript of his letter to Elijah, Nicholas wrote, "I should be glad you would send me a Common Prayer Book." While the *Book of Common Prayer* may not have been vital to Nicholas's physical survival, he evidently attached some emotional value to possessing a copy, and furthermore, Nicholas assigned an even greater value to receiving the book from his brother. It would not have been that

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difficult to locate a copy of the *Book of Common Prayer* in the North Carolina backcountry. The record reveals little else about Nicholas Massey, but it appears as if his wife's death led him to reach out to his relatives and to seek his brother's assistance in the form of asking for an item of some emotional and spiritual import.

In most instances, however, settlers wrote home to friends or relatives for material items of practical importance. Writing from as close by as Lancaster County to his mother Phebe Hadly, who lived in West Bradford Township, New Jersey, in September 1757, Joseph Buffington, another brother of Isaac and Hannah, sent an urgent plea for "one pair of pumps and one pair of pig skin shoes made on a punch toed lath." He punctuated his request by claiming, "I am bear footed almost."<sup>29</sup> Joseph's request was very particular and somewhat unusual considering that shoes were readily available in Lancaster at that late period.<sup>30</sup> His note again suggests that he attached special value to receiving items from his relatives and that he may have needed their financial assistance.

The backcountry of Virginia and North Carolina by this time also had a growing retail trade. Merchants operated a number of stores throughout the region, and ordinaries and taverns often doubled as retail outlets. Settlers could have obtained

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<sup>28</sup> Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 113-19.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Buffington to Phebe Hadly, 25 September 1757, Buffington Family Mss, item 432.

<sup>30</sup> By the mid-1750s, Lancaster had a developing retail trade. It should have been easy for someone to purchase basic items in the county. For a brief look at the pursuits of one Lancaster retailer, see Alan Tully, "Books for the Backcountry: Patrick Orr's Inventory, Lancaster, 1754," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 79 (1975): 167-69.



many of the items they wrote home to request from many of these establishments.<sup>31</sup> Backcountry wagoners also carried on a significant trade, carrying items on behalf of store owners, but also purchasing items specifically for friends and associates. On one of William Alexander's treks to the Philadelphia area to make purchases and sell furs he had collected from Rowan County settlers, he carried an extensive list of items to buy for people he knew as well as his family.<sup>32</sup> In short, there were ample opportunities to purchase supplies in the backcountry. Prices may have led some people to wait the several months that it took to receive items from their families.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, new settlers probably viewed the opportunity to write to relatives with a specific request as simply another way to maintain some connection to their families.

Sundry examples of such material requests illustrate the degree to which backcountry settlers depended on their relatives and associates both in their former homes and in their new neighborhoods. Yet another Buffington, Peter in Orange County, North Carolina, wrote to his brother John in Chester, Pennsylvania on several occasions to request items such as his gun and a cutting knife. It appears that Peter

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<sup>31</sup> On retail trade in the backcountry, see Ann Smart Martin, "Buying Into the World of Goods: Eighteenth-Century Consumerism and the Retail Trade from London to the Virginia Frontier" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1993); Daniel Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan, County, North Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 48 (July 1991): 389-91; Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 154-56.

<sup>32</sup> Memorandum Book of William Alexander, typescript, Rufus Barringer Collection, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>33</sup> Prices set by backcountry merchants fluctuated throughout the year. Daniel Thorp has found that retailers built a number of costs into their prices. These added expenses included transportation costs, margins to cover bad debts, and profits. "Doing Business in the Backcountry," 403-07. It is not clear whether items purchased in the backcountry were more expensive than items shipped from home.

may have gone without his request being fulfilled because he made a trip back to Chester County sometime during the next year and brought back with him several items; presumably Peter retrieved what he needed, but he also brought back several items for his nephew John. Later Peter also asked his brother John to send him a stick of sealing wax so that he could maintain his long distance correspondence with his family.<sup>34</sup>

Requests for material goods were not limited to tools and guns, nor were such requests made solely by men. Priscilla White arrived in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina early in 1771. Her experience on the migration journey was most likely rather difficult, although words for a description of the journey eluded her. She wrote to her sister in Baltimore County, Maryland, "I cannot give you an account of our proceeding on the Road except I was with you."<sup>35</sup> Priscilla went on to say, "I am as well satisfied here as I can be any where in the circumstance I am in [,] our friends are all kind to us." It is safe to assume that Priscilla was actually less than happy with her "circumstance," whatever that may have entailed. She requested that her sister send her "as much purple calico as will make a gown for Hannah and a little camrick ...just what sort you please." Priscilla's request of her sister revealed her longing to re-create a small part of the world that she had left behind in the form of a dress for Hannah, presumably her daughter. At the same time, the request for fabric of her sister's

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Buffington to John Buffington, 23 August 1767, Buffington Family Mss., item 826.

<sup>35</sup> Priscilla White to her sister, 23 October 1771, Priscilla White Paper, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

choosing also probably represented Priscilla's attempt to feel closer to her sister, in a sense to have an item that reflected her sister's taste and represented her sister's influence. Because Priscilla failed to address her sister by name, it is impossible to know whether or not the sister ever migrated to western North Carolina to join Priscilla or not. For the period of Priscilla and her family's early settlement in Mecklenburg County, requesting items or commodities from their former home offered hope for a material connection with their distant relatives.

Another form of association that survived long distances and had the effect of maintaining distant relationships falls more in the realm of business transactions. In some cases, relatives worked for each other trying to collect debts from former associates who had also settled in the backcountry. In other instances, relatives wrote about business prospects and opportunities for investment. These contacts, some of which ended with disappointment and unresolved issues, bound recent migrants together with their former neighbors.

Once again the Buffingtons and their associates offer a number of examples. In a short note to Phebe Hadly, the family matriarch, William Vestal wrote in September 1760 regarding his efforts to collect some debts for her. Vestal failed to mention specific names of debtors, only that he was "like to get nothing of what was owed to Jeremiah Buffington"<sup>36</sup> Evidently, Vestal had instructions from Phebe to collect some old debts owed by associates who had moved from Pennsylvania to

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<sup>36</sup> William Vestal to Phebe Hadly, 8 September 1760, Buffington Family Mss, item 514.

Rowan County. Interestingly, Phebe did not instruct her son or her sister and brother-in-law, Charity and Richard Beeson, to collect these debts. Rather, she chose someone from outside the family perhaps to prevent the expression of any animosity toward her relatives in their new lands. Nevertheless, Phebe did rely on someone she knew pretty well; William Vestal owned a tract of land immediately adjacent to the land of Joseph Buffington in Chester County in the late 1740s.<sup>37</sup> As a neighbor of the Buffingtons in Pennsylvania, Vestal established a relationship, albeit a business one, with the family that would continue on the Carolina frontier.

It was certainly not uncommon for migrants to have left behind unsettled accounts in their former communities as they headed to the backcountry. William Millikan wrote to James Marshall, yet another associate of the Buffington family, several times over the course of the mid-to-late-1760s to acknowledge a debt that he continued to owe Marshall. A surveyor by trade, Millikan had owned a joint share in a small plot of land in Chester County as late as 1761; subsequently he migrated to North Carolina to take advantage of the brisk land-patenting process that had gone on for over a decade. Millikan first conveyed his apologies to Marshall in April 1764 when he wrote, “these are to Inform thee that I can not send thee the Mony now for the compass but I expect I shall Before long.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Carol Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County, Pennsylvania Land Records, Volume 3 1758-1765* (Westminster, Md.: Family Line Publications, 1997), 79.

<sup>38</sup> William Millikan to James Marshall, 25 April 1764, Buffington Family Mss, item 683. Carol Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County, Pennsylvania Land Records, Volume 5 1758-1765* (Westminster, Md.: Family Line Publications, 1998), 250.

Millikan failed to disclose the amount of money he owed Marshall or how long the debt had stood, but it appears that the lapsed time was not too great because Millikan included sundry bits of information along with his regrets, indicating a closeness or at least a perceived trust between the two men. As a surveyor in mid-eighteenth-century North Carolina, Millikan would have been able to keep a keen eye toward good prospects for himself and for others. In fact, he explained that he had sold land to a John Rich from Nottingham a year earlier in 1763. Rich, however, had not yet arrived to settle on the land because the “noise of the indian War mad[e] him decline.”<sup>39</sup> Millikan assured Marshall that as soon as Rich arrived, presumably to settle there *and* pay Millikan for the land, he would discharge his debt.<sup>40</sup>

Millikan also provided another reason why he had not settled this debt. As it turned out, soon after Millikan had received his compass, the surveying business had dropped off precipitously. He briefly described a dilemma that affected thousands of settlers and eventually caused enough confusion in the backcountry of North Carolina

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<sup>39</sup> Buffington Family Mss., item 683. Of the letters and personal papers examined in this study, this is one of two items mentioning Indians in relation to settlement; the other was James Maury’s observation of migrants fleeing south on the Carolina Road during the Seven Years’ War. James Merrell has pointed out in his study of the Catawbas that Indians were in constant contact with white settlers in the colonial period. For contacts in North Carolina, see James H. Merrell, *The Indians’ New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 157-58, 161, 185. As far as its impact on the whites’ migration process, contact with Indians appears to have been a factor mainly during times of hostilities. By the time many of the backcountry settlers moved into the North Carolina Piedmont, most Indian groups had already relocated west and south of the region.

<sup>40</sup> There was a John Riche in Chester County as least as late as 1762. He witnessed the conveyance of a power of attorney for a Philadelphia lawyer to dispose

to drive some settlers to arms. Millikan explained to Marshall: “about the time I got the Instrument the Office was shut and has not yet been opened I mean the Death of the Earl of Granville who was proprietor of one Eight part of the province and in his part I live which had made surveying very Dull.” Approximately the northern half of the colony remained under the control of the Earl of Granville. When the other seven proprietors of the Carolinas relinquished their titles to the lands of both colonies, Granville refused to follow suit and instead opted to maintain his own system for patenting and settling the land in the form of a land office. The office, consisting of land commissioners, surveyors, and attorneys, oversaw the distribution of land to thousands of settlers in the same situation as the Buffingtons, the Beesons, and Nicholas Massey. Processing a patent through Granville’s office secured title to a tract of land and established the quit rent that settlers would pay in perpetuity. The Granville proprietary operated much in the same way as did Lord Fairfax’s Northern Neck proprietary in the northern Virginia Piedmont and Valley. When Granville died in 1763, the land office closed apparently temporarily. When Millikan wrote to his associate and creditor James Marshal in 1764, it was still reasonable to expect the land office to reopen. Unfortunately for surveyor Millikan, and countless others who relied on the security provided by the office, it did not. Because of a number of legal entanglements in London, the land office remained closed and in fact never

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of the land of Caleb Lownes in Chester County. He apparently owned no other land there. Carol Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County Land Records*, 5: 199.

reopened.<sup>41</sup> By the end of the 1760s, the confusion this event caused contributed to the climate of rebellion underlying the Regulator movement. On a personal level, the closing of the office meant that Millikan was unable to fulfill his obligation to his former associate in Pennsylvania. While Millikan owed money to his associate Marshall, again his correspondence conveyed a sense of optimism about future prospects, an optimism that he wished to share with Marshall.

Millikan's description of conditions in the backcountry represent yet another theme that ran through much of the correspondence between backcountry settlers and their friends and families who remained in their former communities. In the majority of the letters that passed between family members and friends, backcountry settlers attempted to reconstruct through words the conditions that prevailed. Recent backcountry migrants wrote extensively about the physical environment, such as when Nicholas Massey described for his brother Elijah the harsh frosts that had damaged the region's wheat crops. Migrants also described political or economic news when it was important. Although William Millikan offered his assessment of the closing of the Granville land office as a reason for his personal failure to resolve an old debt, he hinted at the confusion such an event would cause for society at large, even before he knew how permanent the closure would be. At the same time that settlers conveyed their descriptions of the backcountry, they were often engaged in an attempt to convince their relatives or friends to follow their example and migrate to the backcountry. This strain of "salesmanship" constituted the final and perhaps most

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<sup>41</sup> Margaret Hoffman, ed., *The Granville District of North Carolina, Abstracts of Land Grants* (Weldon, N.C.: The Roanoke News Company, 1986-1989), 1: i-x.

obvious element of backcountry settlers' efforts to recreate elements of their former lives in their new homes.

More than a year after his first note to James Marshall in June 1765, Millikan had yet to settle his debt, but his enthusiasm for his prospects in the backcountry remained strong. He wrote to Humphrey Marshall, one of James's kinsmen, about a number of issues, including basic news about his family's welfare. The thrust of his letter, however, focused on the natural resources of the North Carolina backcountry and the prospects for success there. The details of Millikan's description read like a list of selling points that would rival some of the promotional literature that circulated in the other colonies and abroad. Although Millikan had recently made it through "the smartes Winter by far, then any I have seen," he reported that there had been "Wery Litle snow or Rain." Millikan went on to assert that a "Willing person Might work out any fair Day Moderatly."<sup>42</sup>

Alongside descriptions of the climate, work was an important theme throughout much of Millikan's correspondence. He emphasized how rich the land was for someone willing to work hard. He encapsulated this notion in one particular observation: "It is a fine Country for poor people that are Industerous." Coupled with his observations about the cold winters, this description indicates that Millikan by no means saw the Carolina backcountry as the land of proverbial milk and honey. But he

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<sup>42</sup> William Millikan to Humphry Marshall, 10 June 1765, Buffington Family Mss., item 744. It is unclear what exactly the relationship was between James and Humphry Marshall. Millikan, however, mentions to both men a third person, Abraham Woodward, who was a nephew of James.



believed that there were ample opportunities for settlers who were willing to exert some effort on the land. For this reason, Millikan speculated that, "Except the New Florida Provinces Draws people that Way this Will be a popular Province."<sup>43</sup> It also is possible that Millikan saw some advantage in portraying his life in his new home as industrious so that he might allay James Marshall's fears that he would not repay his old debt. If this is the case, it only further proves the extent to which Millikan was conscious of his reliance on his former associates. This dependence may have bothered Millikan, who would be in apparent economic trouble by the late 1760s.<sup>44</sup> For the time being, he was hopeful about his prospects and was eager to demonstrate his understanding of backcountry opportunities.

The subtext of Millikan's correspondence and that of others conveyed a sense of desire to be joined by relatives and associates. That one had to work hard to derive a living in the backcountry was not a problem for Millikan, but rather presented something of an attraction. Peter Buffington made this point in even more specific terms when he wrote to his brother John in March 1767. Just as Millikan had reported a couple of years earlier, Buffington wrote that the winter had brought only small snowfalls, only one of which remained on the ground for more than a day. In December of the previous year, Buffington began to clear some sixteen acres of land. Until the first of December he had been busy with his mason trade, but when that work slowed it allowed him to devote time to his land. As for Buffington's opinion of the

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<sup>43</sup> Buffington Family Mss., item 744.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Buffington to John Buffington, 2 March 1767, Buffington Family Manuscripts, item 809.

land he and his family had settled, he thought it “equal to the very best [sic] at Conestoga.” Buffington added that “there is nothing you have that is good but your sydor”. For good measure Peter declared that “wee have three times as good peaches.” Like Millikan, Peter also speculated that the land would be thickly settled in short order, and he hinted that land prices were rising.

Peter Buffington probably hoped that all of these attractions, including his speculation that the land in backcountry North Carolina was being bought up rather quickly, would convince his brother John to move his family to join him and their other relatives. Having relatives nearby had certainly enabled him to establish himself in the backcountry. The presence of his uncle, Richard Beeson, lent a degree of security and continuity. Beeson, however, was not the only person in Rowan who supported Peter. The Mendenhalls also represented stability and a semblance of Peter’s former community. James Mendenhall was the man who had housed Peter for some time before the arrival of his wife and children in Rowan. James and Hannah Mendenhall last appear in the Chester County records in 1750 when they signed a release of the interest in the estate of Hannah’s father, Richard Thomas.<sup>45</sup> After that date, almost a dozen years passed before the couple arrived in Rowan to take advantage of the availability of land. It was fortunate for them that they arrived just before the closure of the Granville land office and the resulting confusion over land title. James and Hannah Mendenhall patented a total of 829 acres near the Deep River in Rowan County in 1762 alone. One tract was situated next to Richard Beeson, while

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another was adjacent to Mordecai Mendenhall, one of James's kinsmen.<sup>46</sup> Richard Beeson had been a member of the New Garden monthly meeting since 1754, while Mordecai Mendenhall had been a member of the neighboring Cane Creek meeting since 1752. When James and Hannah Mendenhall arrived in 1762, they joined the Cane Creek meeting and became a part of the Quaker community that had welcomed them upon their arrival.<sup>47</sup>

When Peter Buffington arrived in Rowan County, he entered this network which offered him some security and familiarity; in turn, he and his family became part of the network and invited other family members to join them. John Buffington, Peter's nephew, resided with him for some time when he first moved to the county, working alongside Peter as a mason. It was fortunate for John that he had the support of his uncle, because he apparently lacked the direct support of his parents, who remained in Pennsylvania. In a series of letters that John wrote to his father in the late 1760s, he directly addressed the tension that possibly had led John to move to Rowan County in the first place. That his uncle and a number of other relatives and friends were already in the North Carolina backcountry made it all the easier for John to leave behind his immediate family. What might at first appear to be a strong assertion of independence upon closer inspection looks more like a flight to familiar surroundings. John Buffington's migration was much like that of another uncle, Isaac Buffington.

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<sup>45</sup> Carol Bryant, *Abstracts of Chester County, Pennsylvania Land Records, Vol. 3 1745-1753* (Westminster, Md.: Willow Bend Books, 2000), 108.

<sup>46</sup> Linn, *Rowan County Land Abstracts*, 2: 5.

<sup>47</sup> Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*, 4: 408, 526.

When he moved away from his parents to Winchester in the previous decade, Isaac may have sought an escape from his family; but at the same time, his choice of destination indicated that he was interested in making a move to a place where there were friends and relatives who could readily provide aid.<sup>48</sup>

The economic and emotional aid that established settlers provided their recently-arrived relatives also worked in the other direction. As settlers welcomed and encouraged friends and relatives to migrate to the backcountry, they offered newcomers a sense of security and familiarity, but at the same time, they helped themselves by recreating their former social connections. This impulse to encourage friends and relatives to settle nearby is borne out by family correspondence and by land records. While there were certainly emotional and affective reasons for desiring to have relatives nearby, there was also an economic advantage to having family members arrive in the backcountry.

In the case of John Wall, the son-in-law of Phebe Hadly and brother-in-law of Peter Buffington, he made a direct appeal to his mother to encourage his son John Wall Jr. to join the rest of the family in the backcountry.<sup>49</sup> In a pattern that is exactly

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<sup>48</sup> Elliott West has identified a similar pattern of families settling near other relatives in Oklahoma and Kansas. He describes a pattern consisting of three concentric rings. The inner ring consisted of the nuclear family. The second ring was a network of relatives' households within a day's travel. Finally, the outermost ring consisted of family contacts that were spread out over hundreds, even thousands, of miles. This extended network of relatives, both nearby and distant, enabled settlers to rely on each other for economic and social support and in turn facilitated the rapid settlement of western plains, *The Way to the West*, 94-98.

<sup>49</sup> In his correspondence with Phebe, he refers to her as "mother" and "loving mother." But it is clear that he was a son-in-law; he married Phebe's daughter, also named Phebe, and in turn they had a daughter named Phebe. A particular letter from

the opposite of what is generally accepted as a normal migration sequence, John Wall Sr. had moved on to the backcountry in advance of his adult son. For unspecified reasons, John Jr. had decided to remain in Pennsylvania when his father and his brothers and sisters joined the other relatives in the North Carolina backcountry in June 1766. By April of the following year, however, John Wall Sr. expressed a strong need for the extra help that his son could provide. He reported to his mother that he had recently bought the land where William Beeson had lived from Beeson's widow and that he had acquired a mill formerly operated by one of the Mendenhalls.<sup>50</sup> He was thankful for the opportunity to buy land from a friend because he "could not get a parcel of good land to seatol [settle] on without going to an outskirt of the province." But with his new acquisitions, the land and the mill, he wrote, "I could wish my son John was hear with us as we could have more work abroad than we can do." John Wall Sr. also included some words that might have enticed his son to join the rest of the family in Rowan County. Just like other assessments of the backcountry, John Wall Sr.'s described a moderate climate, fertile land, and "provisions plenty." More convincing, however, was his assertion that "eavery thing we do prospers and gives good satisfaction."<sup>51</sup>

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Phebe Hadley to her sister and brother-in-law Charity and Richard Beeson, helps clear up this matter when she referred to Wall as "my son in law." Phebe Hadly to Richard and Charity Beeson, 9 September 1758, Buffington Family Manuscripts, item 452.

<sup>50</sup> John Wall also joined the New Garden meeting, while William Beeson had been a member of the Cane Creek meeting. There were Mendenhalls in both meetings.

<sup>51</sup> If this tacit promise of fortune was not enough to entice John Wall Jr. to Rowan County, perhaps some additional encouragement from his grandmother, Phebe Hadly, may have convinced him to join his family. She evidently forwarded the note

The people who were part of the Buffington family's extended network were interconnected in such a way that they were able to assist each other even when they were spread out over hundreds of miles. As one part of the family moved away from Pennsylvania, it was able to link with another part of this network of friends and relatives. By knowing that familiar faces or names were waiting at the destination, migrating across several hundred miles seemed more appealing and bearable. Families within the backcountry end of these networks relied on each other for support as they settled in their new homes, but they also relied on relatives who had remained behind. In drawing these various components of familiarity together, migrants tried to replicate the portions of their former lives that meant the most to them. These backcountry migrants all sought to improve their lives in some way by moving to the region. But as the Buffingtons and their associates sought this improvement, they did so as connected families who were eager to assist each other and to perpetuate the ties that had enabled them to seek out better lives in the first place.

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from her son to her grandson and penned in the margin, "Since it is thy Fatheres Request and greatly to is advantag in his business for thee to go there it is likewise my desire that thou should submit and go try fortune with him while." It is not clear whether or not John Jr. listened to his father and grandmother.

## CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE:

### THE EXPANSION OF THE SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY

The process of migration to backcountry Virginia and North Carolina continued in a steady stream from 1750 until about 1775, interrupted by the fighting of the Seven Years' War and then slowed by the outbreak of fighting in the American Revolution. The first waves of settlers in the migration to the southern backcountry had settled in areas that filled up within a generation, and by the mid-1770s families began looking farther west and south to lands that speculators and land companies had eyed for years.<sup>1</sup> With the perception of open land to the west and farther to the south, those that saw shrinking opportunities for their families in the early backcountry areas evaluated their options. The experiences from the first leg of the migration to Frederick and Augusta counties in Virginia, and Anson, Rowan, Orange, and Mecklenburg counties in North Carolina had perhaps made the very notion of further migration more palatable to people who lived in the backcountry.

The mid-eighteenth-century backcountry settlers had all endured a grueling migration, no matter where they started their journeys. There were numerous routes

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<sup>1</sup> For a concise discussion of the efforts to establish Transylvania in the west, see Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 536-40.

connecting different parts of the backcountry with the eastern portions of the colonies, but all bore essentially the same characteristics. Whether a family traveled through the Valley of Virginia or chose to remain on the Carolina Road east of the Blue Ridge, it encountered paths dotted with ordinaries or taverns, river crossings, and scattered settlements. Migrants traveling from the area of southeastern Pennsylvania to the area near the town of Charlotte, North Carolina traveled almost four hundred miles. On the other hand, settlers from the Southside who resettled in the northeastern portion of the North Carolina backcountry traveled in many cases less than a hundred miles. All migrants faced the uncertainties entailed in long-distance travel as they moved with their families. Most migrants did not know where they would sleep night to night, nor did they know when or where they could secure provisions. If families could travel twelve to fifteen miles in one day, they had made significant progress.

During the journey, migrant families and lone travelers encountered dozens of people who lived near backcountry roads or paths, as well as numerous ordinary keepers and ferry operators. In these interactions, migrants tried to gather information about the road ahead, including physical conditions, but also about people they would meet later. Migrants also used the services of the people they encountered. They purchased provisions from people in the surrounding countryside, and those migrants who could afford to sometimes availed themselves of the opportunity to sleep inside an ordinary. Many travelers looked upon these experiences as distasteful, especially when they encountered ordinaries that provided poor food and shabby sleeping arrangements. However, lodging on the way to a backcountry destination, whether in or beside an ordinary or tavern, provided migrants an opportunity to determine where



they were going and to gain some understanding of the country through which they were passing.

Migrants also took a strong interest in their surroundings as they traveled to the southern backcountry. Many migrants already had some idea of what to expect once they reached their destinations. Before their respective journeys, James Auld and the Wachovia-bound Moravians had communicated with people who were already established in the backcountry or had explored the area. Each had some idea of what the country had to offer in the way of natural resources and its potential for agricultural production. At the same time, they recorded relatively detailed descriptions of the land as they drew closer to their destinations. This process of taking inventory of the countryside suggests that migrants faced considerable uncertainty about their future, even when they possessed some sort of pre-knowledge about their destination. Even armed with the observations of people who had traveled before them, many settlers had to see for themselves just what their new homes had in store. Simultaneously, the process of interpreting the landscape helped prepare migrants for the process of settlement as they saw for the first time which crops they would be able to grow and which grains they would process in their mills. As families settled on their new lands, they tried to maintain communication with family members and friends that they had left behind in their former neighborhoods. There were a number of reasons why backcountry settlers tried to remain in touch with their relatives. Settlers often left behind items that they discovered they needed once they relocated. They relied on others in the family to ship these items when the need arose. Unfinished business transactions also required the attention of many backcountry

settlers. They wrote to relatives and associates in their old homes to sell land or settle old debts. In turn, people who stayed behind called on their backcountry relatives to resolve business with other backcountry settlers.

Backcountry settlers also tried to convey vital family news to friends and family in their former homes. Most letters home contained some bit of family news, usually relating to the family's health, as well as news of births and deaths. In writing about these topics, backcountry families attempted to bridge the hundreds of miles that separated them from their relatives and former neighbors. Their correspondence betrays a desire to remain a part of the lives of their family even though they had made the decision to migrate. In many instances, this tendency to convey news about family members extended to others outside the family. Because migrants often settled near people they had been associated with in their old homes, they could easily keep former neighbors apprised of the well-being of many of their relatives, associates, and friends.

Finally, families encouraged others to follow them to the backcountry. As backcountry settlers built their lives, they tried to replicate portions of their social networks. By urging relatives who had theretofore remained behind to migrate, settlers carried the process of replication even further. Emphasizing the region's climate and the generally low cost of land were two ways that settlers tried to convince relatives to migrate. Because recent backcountry settlers wanted to attract more friends and relatives to join them, they appealed to their sense of opportunity as well as feelings of familial affection.

While migrants often came from areas in which opportunity was shrinking rather than expanding, many left behind considerable land holdings. In many cases,

migrants moved from their former homes while they still owned hundreds of acres. Sometimes settlers held land in their former homes for years after they had established new homes elsewhere in the backcountry, incrementally disposing of parcels. While economic factors probably were significant in motivating many to migrate, it is apparent that other factors were as important in determining when people migrated and where they settled. Land records indicate that settlers usually migrated to areas where there were people of similar ethnic and religious backgrounds. Scots-Irish Presbyterians from the Valley of Virginia tended to migrate to Mecklenburg County and portions of Rowan County where there were other Scots-Irish. Similarly, Quakers from southeastern Pennsylvania generally settled in eastern Rowan County and Orange County. Settlers who had lived in Virginia Southside tended to migrate to Granville County and other eastern backcountry areas.

Beyond the broad categories of ethnicity and religion, people migrating to the backcountry often settled in dispersed neighborhoods comprising people they had known in their former homes. Throughout the backcountry, there existed numerous networks and groups of families that had lived alongside each other throughout several phases of migration. As they established and re-established their homes in different parts of the backcountry, they relied on each other's assistance and attempted to preserve what was familiar.

Several of the processes and patterns that were evident in the first phase of the peopling of the southern backcountry were also evident in the subsequent movement farther west into Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio. While some people continued to migrate into the Valley of Virginia and western North Carolina during the American

Revolution, the volume was but a fraction of the number that peaked in the late 1760s. Towards the end of hostilities in the early 1780s, settlers began in earnest the next leg of the westward movement. As settlers headed into the new lands to the west, they continued the pattern of settling with people they already knew. Like the earlier period of the backcountry migration, the next phase comprised a movement of families.<sup>2</sup>

James Auld, the lawyer originally from Dorchester County, Maryland, and William Few Sr., the farmer from Baltimore County, both had similar experiences after their initial settlement in the North Carolina backcountry. After a couple of years in their first homes in North Carolina, each man uprooted his family and moved deeper into the backcountry. Auld moved from Halifax, on the eastern edge of the backcountry, to a part of Anson County almost two hundred miles to the west. Auld's reason for moving on involved a number of crop failures in Halifax County.<sup>3</sup> Few, on the other hand, had run a successful mill operation in Orange County for a number of years before he found himself involved in a number of court cases and serious financial problems. When matters became unmanageable for him, he decided to

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<sup>2</sup> For a study of the subsequent western migration, see Elizabeth Perkins *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 54-60, 111-15. For an examination of the ecological, cultural, and socio-economic impact of this leg of western expansion, see Stephen Aron, *How the West was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> James Auld Diary, William Alexander Smith Papers, Rare Book, Manuscripts & Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

migrate to Georgia.<sup>4</sup> Both men migrated because conditions had worsened, for them at least, in their initial backcountry homes, and they sought out new opportunity by looking farther to the west and the south. Auld and Few did not record anything of significance about their second journey to the deep backcountry, suggesting that after the first departure from their Maryland homes they undertook their subsequent migrations with less apprehension and uncertainty. In moving farther into the backcountry, Auld and Few were not alone; this pattern was repeated by thousands of settlers after the revolutionary war.

Revolutionary war pension applications indicate a number of patterns which characterized this subsequent backcountry movement.<sup>5</sup> Families who had settled in the early backcountry were not averse to moving several times. In numerous cases, families settled in one backcountry county only to search out a new area of settlement time and time again. For instance, John Brimmage, who was born in Queen Anne's County, Maryland in 1760, moved with his father to Anson County in 1771. On subsequent migrations Brimmage wound up in Georgia in 1782, South Carolina in

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<sup>4</sup> "Autobiography of Col. William Few of Georgia," *Magazine of American History* 7 (July-Dec. 1881): 345; see also John Heath to Richard Bennehan, 20 October 1769, Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This letter alludes to a court summons for William Few regarding an old debt.

<sup>5</sup> Most of these pension applications were filed in the 1830s by aged war veterans or widows and children of soldiers. To help determine the eligibility of an applicant for a pension, one portion of the pensions required a description of where the veteran was born and where his family had resided before and after the war. The applications also contain information about where veterans served and for how long. For a work that relied on the pensions to examine *pre-Revolutionary* migration, see Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 145-48.

1786, another location in that state in 1789, and then two locations in Tennessee before he moved to Graves County, Tennessee in 1832, where he filed his pension application as a seventy two-year-old veteran.<sup>6</sup> David Caldwell, a native of New Castle, Pennsylvania, moved with his parents to Caswell County, North Carolina when he was very young and then again to Mecklenburg County, where his family remained until 1795. Then Caldwell moved twice in Tennessee, before he settled in Wilson.<sup>7</sup>

In some cases, settlers remained in one spot for years before migrating to another area. Hugh McVay was born near the Chesapeake Bay in Richmond County, Virginia in 1741. His parents migrated to the vicinity of the Roanoke River in Lunenburg County when he was very young, and then they moved to Halifax County, Virginia. By the time the war started, McVay was in his mid-thirties and lived in Caswell County, North Carolina in the north-central Piedmont. After the war, McVay moved his family to South Carolina where they remained for some twenty-three years. Once prospects in South Carolina changed, McVay then settled in Tennessee briefly before migrating to Caldwell County, Kentucky, where he lived for twenty years before filing for his veteran's pension.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Connor Dowd was born in 1757 in Ireland and migrated with his parents to Philadelphia when he was six years old. His family soon migrated to Chatham County, North Carolina, formed from Orange County in 1770. Dowd was drafted in Chatham in 1779 but returned there after the war to live until 1800. From Chatham County Dowd and his family moved to Ohio

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<sup>6</sup> John Brimmage pension application (S38568), microfilm, National Archives and Records General Service Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>7</sup> David Caldwell pension application (S21104).

<sup>8</sup> Hugh McVay pension application (S15286).

where they lived for thirty two years.<sup>9</sup> Neither McVay nor Dowd indicated why they migrated when they did. Both men, however, remained in one area for relatively long periods during the middle years of their lives when they were at the peak of their economic productivity. During Dowd's time in Chatham, he was between the ages of twenty-two and forty-three, the time when he was raising a family and trying to support it. After his move to Ohio, he was still at an age where he was economically and socially productive.<sup>10</sup>

Like their parents, the sons and daughters of the mid-eighteenth-century migrants also tended to migrate in groups or networks of people that they had been associated with in their former homes. This pattern, which had been so prevalent in the earlier phase of the migration to the southern backcountry, repeated itself as families migrated to Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio. For instance, James Cole, as a one-year-old child, moved with his parents from Bedford County, Virginia to Anson County, North Carolina in 1756. His brother Stephen Cole was born while their parents lived in Anson, but migrated to Tennessee after the revolution. At the age of seventy-six when James Cole filed for his revolutionary pension, his brother and Samuel Watkins, a former neighbor from Anson County who also had migrated to

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<sup>9</sup> Connor Dowd pension application (W3664). Dowd and his family were probably among the Scots-Irish who were pouring into Philadelphia in the 1760s rather than immigrants for Ireland proper.

<sup>10</sup> For more examples of these patterns, see Lawrence A. Peskin, "A Restless Generation: Migration of Maryland Veterans in the Early Republic," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 91 (Fall 1996): 316-18. For a later time period but a similar pattern, see John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 50-52, 58-60, 145.

Tennessee, provided depositions vouching for James's past.<sup>11</sup> In a similar pattern, George Uselton and Thomas Garner had known each other throughout their subsequent settlements in Tennessee and Kentucky. There is also ample evidence of brothers and their families migrating together farther west.<sup>12</sup> As these families vacated the older regions of the backcountry for newer lands in and beyond the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains, they continued to depend on each other and to build settlements and social connections that resembled the ones they had abandoned.

The cohort of migrants who first populated the early southern backcountry were the vanguard of a greater westward expansion that continued for more than a century. In physical terms, the migration experience itself never got any easier. Yet many of these people moved several times during their lifetime, usually to seek out better prospects for their families and often for their friends. In each wave of the migration to the West, families relied on each other for support and assistance and exercised judgment in determining when and where they would migrate. In deciding these issues, families chose places where they believed they could somehow better themselves and where they could re-create as much of their former lives as they desired. To do the latter, families chose places where other relatives or people with whom they were somehow associated already lived. They also usually remained

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<sup>11</sup> James Cole pension application (S3174).

<sup>12</sup> Peskin, "A Restless Generation," 316, 326. Perkins, *Border Life*, 112-13. Stephen Aron points out that many Kentucky migrants sought enough land to settle their entire families, "Pioneers and Profiteers: Land Speculation and the Homestead Ethic in Frontier Kentucky," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (May 1992): 189-90.



hopeful that they might be able to attract friends and relatives who had stayed behind. The movement to the eighteenth-century backcountry South, then, represented more than the first leg of American expansion. It constituted a great effort on the part of early American families to recast their lives, including their social networks, when circumstances led them to abandon their homes.

APPENDIX  
THE SOUTHERN BACKCOUNTRY:  
THEMES FROM THE RECENT LITERATURE

In the half-century before the American Revolution, the thousands of settlers who left their homes in the eastern portions of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia were setting out on the first leg of the westward movement. Many of these migrants left behind established homes, while others had only recently arrived in the colonies from German states or parts of Ireland, Scotland, and England. For a variety of reasons these people hoped they could establish new lives in the backcountry regions of the upper south.

As a term, “backcountry” is dynamic. For this study the term refers to both a region defined by a process of migration and settlement. The region extends from Frederick County, Maryland south through Virginia’s Piedmont and Valley into the western Piedmont section of North Carolina. The area closely resembles the region outlined by Carl Bridenbaugh in his historical tour of the colonial south *Myths and Realities*.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the boundaries of the backcountry, Bridenbaugh also highlighted a number of geographical characteristics that distinguished the

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities, Societies of the Colonial South* (New York: Atheneum, 1985 [1963]), 120. Bridenbaugh also rightly included the Piedmont of South Carolina and upcountry Georgia as part of the backcountry region.

backcountry from the coast. Painting an idealized picture of “many hills, of fertile limestone or stiff clay soils, of many varieties of trees and towering forests, and of a vastly superior climate,” Bridenbaugh demonstrated a strong sense that the southern backcountry was different from the Lowland of the Carolinas and the shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

The backcountry certainly was distinct from the coastal regions of the respective colonies. Lying behind the fall line of all the significant rivers from the Susquehanna to the Cape Fear in North Carolina, the backcountry was removed from the immediate sphere of Atlantic trade networks. Additionally, the topography of much of the backcountry allowed for (and in some cases necessitated) the cultivation of crops that distinguished the region from the coast. More central to the scope of this study, however, were the political and cultural differences connoted by the term backcountry.<sup>2</sup>

The other traditional description of the southern backcountry settler is Wilbur J. Cash’s World War II-era sketch of the upcountry Carolina Irish immigrant. In rich detail, Cash traces the progress of “a stout young Irishman” transforming his crude log cabin set in a frontier clearing into a quintessential Old Southern big house. After a year or two of scratching a subsistence out of his upcountry claim, the Irish settler made a trip to Charleston to dispose of homemade whiskey and homespun cloth. There he purchased some cotton seed which he brought to his wife back home to plant as a flower. Almost by accident this flower transformed the settler’s life as his wife

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<sup>2</sup> Rachel Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 7-9.

and then thousands of others learned to spin its cotton into cloth. This backcountryman quickly realized the benefit of clearing his land and adding to his holdings; on subsequent trips to Charlestown the Irishman enhanced his profits and began acquiring slaves. By the time that Cash's hypothetical Carolinian reached middle age, he counted himself among the leaders of the county. Cash made it clear, however, that this man was wealthy in a rough-hewn style and that he was by no means an aristocrat. In short, the backcountry was the crucible in which the true southern planter was amalgamated. Furthermore, Cash emphasized that it was this backcountry settler's culture, not that of the oft-touted Virginia Cavalier or Lowcountry aristocrat, that spread across the Lower South and established the Antebellum political hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

The first wave of white settlement in the southern backcountry has long captured the attention of popular and professional historians. In many ways Americans in general have assumed that the westward movement was something of a natural occurrence without a true beginning, only a legendary culmination in the waning years of the nineteenth century. For all of the images of settlers moving en masse across the continent, it is ironic that the American memory generally excludes images of earliest westward movement, save for a few heroic characters such as Daniel Boone. At the same time, historians have built a considerable body of literature on the role of the peopling of the southern backcountry in greater American history and regarding the social patterns that characterized various portions of the backcountry.

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<sup>3</sup> Wilbur J. Cash, *Mind of the South* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954 [1941]), 28-30.

For a sweeping albeit flawed description and analysis of the culture of the southern backcountry, David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* provides broad coverage of the subject. Fischer described a stereotypical backcountry replete with lewd women, hard drinking eye gougers, and illiterate children. Of primary interest to Fischer is the origin of the backcountry's culture ways. As he did with the other regions of the American colonies, Fischer traced all of these backcountry characteristics to a specific region of Britain. In the case of the southern backcountry, the exceptionally uncivilized life style of its settlers was brought from the borderlands region of northwest England and southern Scotland. In many ways his characterizations of backcountry settlers echoed the stereotypes of the Scots-Irish that James Leyburn outlined in the early 1960s.<sup>4</sup> At first glance Fischer's interpretation of culture is appealing; a group of people picked up their traditional ways of doing things and moved them across the Atlantic and overland to the southern frontier where they simply transplanted their culture.

The very neatness of Fischer's formula hints at its actual weakness. Fischer fails on two counts. First, his interpretations require one to believe that culture can be encapsulated and transported without really adapting to environment. Throughout his book, Fischer continually pointed to cultural patterns in one part of England, matched them with culture ways in the colonies, and concluded that the new colonists simply used their old culture to conceptualize their New World surroundings. Out of this transplantation grew an English-dominant American culture that exerted its influence even throughout much of the twentieth century. The other major flaw in Fischer's

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<sup>4</sup> James Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962.)

analysis involves his failure to allow for other non-British cultural influences in the colonial backcountry and in later in the United States. Other than a brief acknowledgement of such influences, Fischer almost totally neglects the presence of German, African-American, or even Scots-Irish settlers.<sup>5</sup>

In another attempt to explain the origins of southern culture and the role the backcountry played in this evolution, Allan Kulikoff put forth one of the most sweeping explanations of the importance of the migration to the southern backcountry in his work on Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, *Tobacco and Slaves*.<sup>6</sup> For Kulikoff the migration to Southside Virginia and the subsequent movement to western Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee represented the perpetuation and replication of a southern culture born in the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland. Kulikoff described a process in which men from the Tidewater sought economic opportunity in the Virginia Piedmont and thus packed off their families to rebuild the societies that they left behind in the Chesapeake. With them they brought their material belongings but also their Chesapeake-grown perception of how the world should operate. These predominantly English settlers envisioned a patriarchal society based on slave labor and all of the racist assumptions that underlie such a society. As opportunity began to evaporate in the older frontier regions, those settlers who had not established solid footholds simply moved south and westward and reproduced newer versions of the society they had abandoned. Kulikoff pushed his interpretation further by suggesting

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<sup>5</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 605-782.

<sup>6</sup> Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 149-61, 428-30.

that this process repeated itself across the South throughout the early nineteenth century, thus extending a culture rooted in the social dynamics of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Chesapeake.

While Kulikoff's analysis is compelling, especially in its identification of perpetual migration and the replication of cultural expectations, it neglects key elements of the peopling of southern backcountry. At the core of Kulikoff's misinterpretation of the movement to the southern frontier was his assumption that the movement from the Chesapeake Tidewater to the Southside of the James River was the model for subsequent migration and cultural perpetuation. The settlement of Virginia's Southside was certainly an important aspect of the early westward movement, but Kulikoff's conclusions about the results of this migration neglect the other important migration streams that ran in a north-south rather than an east-west direction. By focusing on the Chesapeake as a source area of migration, it is hardly surprising that Kulikoff found similar cultural and societal dynamics in an adjacent geographical region. In his rush to identify southern cultural origins, however, he failed to allow for the influence of the large numbers of people migrating to the south from Pennsylvania, northern Maryland, and Western Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

Along the same line as Kulikoff's *Tobacco and Slaves* is Richard Beeman's more nuanced *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*. Sprawling across most of the Virginia Southside, Lunenburg County was the primary subject of Beeman's study. There he identified the pattern that Kulikoff would later identify: a tendency of settlers in Lunenburg to mimic the society of the Chesapeake. Beeman, however, took his

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<sup>7</sup> Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 148-61.

analysis much further by accounting for cultural differences such as the rejection of the established Church of England and the influx of settlers from the Valley of Virginia. Out of the social and religious disturbances before and after the Revolution, Lunenburg society came to resemble the counties of the Tidewater, and as Beeman argued, it foreshadowed the society of much of the rest of the South in later decades.<sup>8</sup>

Rounding out the major colonial literature that bears important implications for backcountry studies is Jack Greene's *Pursuits of Happiness*. Greene's primary objective was to assert the preeminence of the colonial Chesapeake in the development of American culture. Arguing that the seventeenth-century New England town was more of an anomaly than a model of English community life, Greene asserted quite compellingly that the Chesapeake represented a number of social forces that eventually progressed across the south and came to define American culture. After decades of high mortality and relative social instability in the seventeenth century, Chesapeake society became more cohesive as a political hierarchy emerged and communities became self-sustaining.<sup>9</sup>

For Greene the backcountry represented just another step in a process of social elaboration that began in the Chesapeake. People who migrated to the backcountry,

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Beeman, *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County Virginia, 1746-1832* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 88, 197-98. Greene articulates this position more specifically in his introductory essay, "Independence, Improvement, and Authority: Towards a Framework for Understanding the Histories of the Southern Backcountry during the Era of the American Revolution," in *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 12-17.



according to Greene, settled there not to escape the societal confines of the coastal settlements. Rather, backcountry settlers sought to replicate eastern society as soon as possible after establishing their new homes. The operative concept in Greene's developmental model is *improvement*. Looking back at contemporary Britain as a model of social progress and improvement, British colonists sought to make their societies in the image of the mother country. Greene argued that this process extended into the backcountry, as all settlers sought to make a society in which they could actively pursue or defend their own independence.<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Bernard Bailyn portrayed the backcountry as the outer fringe of a civilized society. For Bailyn, however, the core of this society was to be found not in the Atlantic coastal cities but in London. The eastern portions of the American colonies represented concerted efforts to replicate the civilization of the Old World, while the backcountry settlements were at best outposts in the wilderness.<sup>11</sup>

While Greene and Bailyn's analyses are persuasive on a number of points, they fail to capture the real texture of the southern backcountry. Other historians have pointed out that in many cases migrants to the backcountry sought to escape some of the institutions of the mature societies in the east. James Whittenburg has argued that backcountry settlers left behind specific elements of the social structure in their former homes, while maintaining those which were desirable. In Whittenburg's words, "The

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<sup>10</sup> Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 197-98.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 114-19. Bailyn provided a slightly more positive portrayal of the backcountry in his sketch of the effort of James Hogg to transplant a group of Scots to North Carolina in the 1770s. *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 534-44.

people of the backcountry...borrowed selectively from the models of the 'improved' societies from which they had come." <sup>12</sup>

When eighteenth-century settlers made the decision to set up a household in the backcountry of the southern colonies, they did not simply migrate on a whim. The process of scouting out land and then making arrangements to move a family usually took months, and the actual journey often lasted more than a month. On the road or path, migrants were challenged by the lack of reliable shelter, by the uncertainty of their next meal, and finally by the possibility of confronting the undesirable company of fellow travelers on the wrong side of the law.

Considering the daunting, even threatening, prospect of travel through the hinterlands of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, the question of motivation is fundamental to an understanding of the settlement of the southern backcountry. There are several strains of thought that pervade the literature on the subject of motivation. Among the top motivations for migrating to the southern frontier were the search for economic opportunity, the desire to establish religiously focused communities, and the intention of preserving family cohesion. In many cases these three causes were woven together in a way that makes the historian's attempt to isolate and rank them futile. Indeed, it is a fundamental point of this study that families made the decision to migrate based on multiple factors, and that in this tangle of causation the settlement of the backcountry itself defies strict deterministic interpretation.

Historians have regularly identified the search for economic opportunity as a primary, if not the chief, guiding influence that led settlers to push on toward the

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<sup>12</sup> James P. Whittenburg, "The Regulator Zone," paper presented to the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1986, 34.

frontier. In most cases the insistence upon economic motivation is grounded in a belief in the primacy of the individual. Forsaking any semblance of community or family, opportunistic individuals abandoned their old stagnant societies and pressed on to the fertile lands along the frontier. James Lemon's classic study of southeastern Pennsylvania, *The Best Poor Man's Country*, includes a characterization of the stereotypical individualistic migrant. Although Lemon devoted most of his attention to the conditions within Chester and Lancaster Counties, his conclusions about the farming families that occupied the region have direct implications regarding the movement to the southwest. Lemon's Lancaster and Chester County settlers were, as he describes them, the original middle-class Americans. Drawn to the colony from neither the top nor the bottom ranks of European societies, these settlers were "the kind of people who sought individual satisfaction." When the well of opportunity showed signs of running dry in Chester County, those settlers from the lower-middle ranks of society continued their search for "satisfaction" in the western reaches of the county, then in Lancaster County to the west, and finally in the hinterlands of the southern colonies.<sup>13</sup>

The desire to achieve economic security for oneself and one's family is readily understandable today. In many ways images of the entrepreneurial individual seeking a living in the West have been etched into Americans' memory of their national history. It is easy to see in Lemon's characterizations of the Chester County populace hints of the twentieth-century suburban impulse. At the same time, it appears that Lemon exaggerated the extent to which southeastern Pennsylvanians looked out for

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<sup>13</sup> James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Southeastern Pennsylvania* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976 [1972]), 2-6, 85.

themselves as they made the decision to migrate. Several years after the publication of Lemon's work on southeastern Pennsylvania, James Henretta provided a strong counterweight to Lemon's portrayal of individualism in colonial America. Instead of displaying purely individualistic interests, many colonial Americans demonstrated a devotion to the well-being of their extended families and to the greater benefit of their communities.<sup>14</sup> Migrants in the world that Henretta described looked not exclusively at their own situation, but at how they might create an advantage for the network of people who constituted their extended family and their neighbors. Henretta and Lemon have defined a tension, one between individualistic and communal interest, that has pervaded much of the discussion of the backcountry and colonial history in general ever since.

Outside the larger colonial interpretations that address the role of the backcountry, a growing number of historical and geographic studies of backcountry institutions and settlement have created a broad understanding of the region and the people who migrated there. Looking at various portions of the southern backcountry in its own terms, backcountry scholars have pieced together a mosaic of the region. Focusing on issues as diverse as political structure, the entertainments enjoyed at backcountry taverns, and the causes of backwoods rebellion, backcountry scholars

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<sup>14</sup> James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (Jan. 1978), 3-32.

have made great strides in the past three decades in understanding what set the backcountry apart from the coastal regions. <sup>15</sup>

Two generations of historians have examined and dissected the most notable of backcountry events in the pre-revolutionary period, the Regulator movement. Before historians put forward a number of new interpretations in the late 1960s, the standard explanation of the North Carolina Regulator movement rested on the premise of sectionalism. According to the proponents of the sectional conflict interpretation, western settlers rebelled against the excesses of the royal government, dominated by elites from the eastern portion of the colony. This interpretation, although it had some plausibility, drastically oversimplified the causes of the uprising and simultaneously enhanced the perception of the backcountry as a place where rabble-rousers and malcontents settled. From the late 1960s onward historians refocused attention on the Regulation, but they routinely discarded the sectional interpretation, concentrating instead on class, religion, and ideology. Marvin Michael Kay, Roger Ekirch, James Whittenburg, and most recently Marjoleine Kars have all developed different perspectives on the origins of the dispute, even while basing their research on the same vast body of sources on the Regulators. <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive survey of the backcountry literature through the late 1980s, see Gregory Nobles, "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., 46 (Oct. 1989): 641-70.

<sup>16</sup> John Spencer Bassett set the early sectional interpretation in "The Regulators of North Carolina, 1765-1771," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1894* (Washington D.C.: 1894); see also, M. L. Michael Kay, "The North Carolina Regulation: A Class Conflict," in *The American Revolution, Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1976); A. Roger Ekirch, *Poor Carolina: Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981);

While the attention to the Regulator Movement, which ended in 1771 in a brief military engagement at Alamance Creek, has in some ways perpetuated the perception of the backcountry as a greater battleground of various interests, some of these studies have taken a close look at the settlement patterns and how backcountry residents divided themselves by ethnicity and religion. James Whittenburg has pointed out that settlers in the North Carolina backcountry often patented or purchased lands in areas where they could be near people of a similar background.<sup>17</sup> In identifying these patterns, Whittenburg underscored the order that backcountry residents tried to create, an order that had its foundation in religious cohesion and ethnic identity.

Daniel Thorp identified even stronger elements of communal and religious identity by closely examining the composition of the Moravian settlement in the Wachovia tract. The Moravians had acquired the 100,000-acre tract by patent through the Carteret land agency. Thorp examined how the Moravians operated within larger backcountry society in spite of their inclination to isolate themselves from other

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James P. Whittenburg, "Planters, Merchants, and Lawyers: Social Change and the Origins of the North Carolina Regulation," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 34 (April 1977); also, "The Regulator Zone,"; Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For the South Carolina Regulators, see Richard M. Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963); and Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*.

<sup>17</sup> Johanna Miller Lewis has pointed out that several collections on the backcountry during and after the Revolution have also accentuated the violent history of the region, making it appear as though violence and conflict was endemic to life there. In addition to the collection in *An Uncivil War*, see also Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, eds., *The Southern Experience During the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 12. As the Regulator movement unfolded in the 1760s, the most radical agitation occurred in an area with a heavy Quaker and Baptist influence. James Whittenburg, "The North Carolina Regulator Zone," 24-30.

settlers. While the Moravians migrated to North Carolina to establish a satellite community that would allow those of their growing faith to have an opportunity to thrive, they nevertheless had to intermingle with other settlers who migrated there during the same era.<sup>18</sup> Warren Hofstra found a similar pattern of interaction in Frederick County in his study of the Scots-Irish community on Opequon Creek. While the settlers at Opequon were much more open to interaction with other people than were the Moravians, they also maintained a tightly-knit community throughout the colonial period.<sup>19</sup>

One of the reasons historians have been able to assess the Moravians is because this group left a massive collection of records documenting their migration experience and the early years after the establishment of the towns of Bethabara (1753), Bethania (1759), and Salem (1766). *The Records of the Moravians*, edited by Adelaide Fries, contains thousands of pages describing the process of exploration, migration and settlement. Moreover, these records have given historians strong insights into the Moravian world view. While it is apparent that the Moravian vision of the world was very different from that of most American colonists, their records

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel Thorp, *The Moravian Community in Colonial North Carolina: Pluralism on the Southern Frontier* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989). While Thorp does an excellent job of examining the Moravians and their interaction in the backcountry, the peculiarity of the Moravian community certainly colors his assessment of pluralism in the region. The Moravian effort at Wachovia was not unique insofar as it was an attempt to establish a religious community in the Carolina wilderness. However, the lengths to which Moravians went to set themselves apart from their neighbors were exceptional.

<sup>19</sup> Warren Hofstra, "Land, Ethnicity, and Community at the Opequon Settlement, Virginia, 1730-1800," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (July 1990): 423-48.

also allow historians to extrapolate a great deal of information about how other peoples experienced settling in the southern backcountry.<sup>20</sup>

Several works by geographers have added multi-disciplinary depth to the understanding of migration to the backcountry South. Most notably, Robert Mitchell on the Valley of Virginia and Harry Roy Merrens on the colony of North Carolina have identified a number of settlement patterns and outlined the contours, topographical as well as social and political, that settlers faced upon completing their migration. Both scholars clearly established that the backcountry regions of each colony were tied into the markets of the eastern port regions, putting to rest notions of radical isolation. They also discuss the ethnic composition of their regions.<sup>21</sup>

Dealing more directly with the issue of migration, several historians have contributed to the corpus of colonial backcountry literature. Robert Ramsay's *Carolina Cradle* represented his painstaking efforts to trace the origins of hundreds of settlers in Rowan County, North Carolina. Focusing on the chronological progression of settlements along the Yadkin River from the late 1740s through the mid-1760s, Ramsay identified the approximate times of settlement for dozens of settlers and a number of settler networks that existed before migration to the area. Ramsay strived

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<sup>20</sup> Adelaide Fries, ed. *The Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, 11 vols. (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1922-1969); other Moravian documents, some of which later appeared in Fries's compilation, were published elsewhere. For example, the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* published a series of Moravian travel narratives edited by William Hinke and Charles Kemper; see vols. 11-12 (Oct. 1902-Jan. 1905).

<sup>21</sup> Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1964) 55-66, 142-45, 162-67; Robert Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 43-45, 104-07, 150-52, 189-93.



to identify social connections between settlers and attempted to represent the location of specific settlements with a series of invaluable maps. *Carolina Cradle* has proven to be a staple for any student of the early years of settlement in North Carolina's backcountry counties.<sup>22</sup>

For family cohesion and the process of developing structures of social and political power, Gail Terry's study of the Preston, Breckinridge, and Christian families provides a detailed examination of how these backcountry elites perpetuated their status and positions. These families as well as others developed networks of support that enabled them to acquire land and to gain political office. While these networks flourished in the Virginia backcountry, they had actually existed in Ulster and then Philadelphia before the families migrated to the Valley of Virginia.<sup>23</sup>

There have also been several migration studies that deal specifically with the history of the Quaker community. Larry Dale Gragg's 1980 study of Quaker migration in Virginia took into account a number of variables in the movement of people within the Society of Friends communities in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina. Along with economic factors, Quaker migrants,

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<sup>22</sup> Robert W. Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964). Although Ramsay poured through thousands of records to trace the origins of the North Carolina settlers, he in a number of cases misidentified settlers, especially in cases in which the settler in question had a very common name. Nevertheless, *Carolina Cradle* is undeniably valuable as a starting point for studying the migration.

<sup>23</sup> Gail S. Terry, "Family Empires: A Frontier Elite in Virginia and Kentucky, 1740-1815" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1992). For an expansion of the discussion of these families to incorporate the story of their slaves on the later migration to Tennessee and Kentucky, see Gail Terry, "Sustaining the Bond of Kinship in a Trans-Appalachian Migration, 1790-1811: The Cabell-Breckinridge Slaves Move West," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (Oct. 1994): 455-76.

according to Gragg, also moved out of concern for familial cohesion and preservation of religious ideals.<sup>24</sup> Covering a later time period, Neva Specht in her 1997 dissertation studied the next phase of the Quaker migration *from* North Carolina and Pennsylvania toward the Ohio Valley. Specht argued that this later phase of westward migration drew Quakers closer together and toward a stronger embrace of their religion. The movement over the Appalachians, with its initial conditions of isolation, was primarily responsible for this strengthening of community ties.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond this handful of migration studies, there are numerous related articles focusing on backcountry communities, institutions, and events. Daniel Thorp's research on taverns and tavern trade in the North Carolina backcountry, as well as Ann Smart Martin's research on retail trade in Virginia explain how goods followed the migrants shortly after the population of an area was sufficient to sustain business. In the same vein, Johanna Miller Lewis' study *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* assesses the rapid growth of the artisan class as the peopling of the backcountry increased throughout the 1750s and 1760s. Covering the "northern" southern backcountry, Warren Hofstra has addressed a number of issues, including

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<sup>24</sup> Larry Dale Gragg, *Migration in Early America: The Virginia Quaker Experience*, Studies in American History and Culture, No. 13 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980). Since the publication of Gragg's work on migration, Barry Levy in his study on Quaker families has argued that the economic motivation for Quakers migrating was probably minimal. *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 240-41.

<sup>25</sup> Neva Jean Specht, "Mixed Blessing: Trans-Appalachian Settlement and the Society of Friends, 1780-1813 (North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio)" (Ph.D. diss. University of Delaware, 1997).

settlement patterns and the role of ethnicity in the area surrounding Winchester, Virginia.<sup>26</sup>

All of these historians have added to our understanding of how people settled and lived in the backcountry region of the south, yet none of their works deals directly with the actual process of migration to the region. For the western expansion of later periods, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, several monographs explore the process of migration and settlement. Elizabeth Perkins' *Border Life* explores the process of migration into Ohio River Valley. Relying on interviews recorded in the 1840s by Presbyterian minister John Dabney Shane, Perkins offers a detailed analysis of westward migration in the years after the Revolution.<sup>27</sup> John Mack Faragher's study of the movement of settlers to the Pacific Northwest, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, synthesizes hundreds of letters and travel diaries into a cogent description and analysis of the nineteenth-century migration experience. For the Lower South, or the Old Southwest, Joan Cashin's *A Family Venture* describes both

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., 48 (July 1991): 387-408; and "Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier: Rowan County, North Carolina, 1753-1776," *Journal of Southern History* 62 (Nov. 1996): 661-88; Ann Smart Martin, "Buying in the World of Goods: Eighteenth-Century Consumerism and the Retail Trade from London to the Virginia Frontier" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1993); Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*; Warren Hofstra, "Land, Ethnicity, and Community at the Opequon Settlement, Virginia, 1730-1800," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (July 1990): 423-48; Robert D. Mitchell and Warren Hofstra, "How Do Settlement Systems Evolve?: The Virginia Backcountry during the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Geography* 21 (1995): 123-47.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth A. Perkins, *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). For a study of the settlement of early Kentucky, see Stephen Aron, *How the West was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

the experience of migration and the process by which southern migrants selected elements of the old east-coast economy and society in building their new communities. Along with Perkins' research, these works draw from a vast body of correspondence and travel literature to capture effectively the observations and motivations of settlers on the subsequent phases of the westward expansion.<sup>28</sup>

A detailed examination of the process involved in the eighteenth-century migration to the backcountry south is the object of this study. The steps that families took before moving, the actual journey itself, and the subsequent attempts to establish new households while maintaining some sort of connection to family and friends who remained in their old neighborhoods constitute a process that transformed thousands of lives. Although migrants moved to different sections of the southern backcountry, the effort involved in transporting families and possessions was essentially the same. It was a process that migrants repeated thousands of times as the westward movement that began in earnest in the mid-eighteenth century reached completion over a century later.

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<sup>28</sup> John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For studies of migrant women and environmental impact, see also Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998) and Elliot West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

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