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**Economic development and political authority: Norfolk,
Virginia, merchant-magistrates, 1736-1800**

Costa, Thomas Michael, Ph.D.

The College of William and Mary, 1991

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY:
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, MERCHANT-MAGISTRATES, 1736-1800

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

by

Thomas M. Costa

1991

APPROVAL SHEET


This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



Author


Approved, August 1991




John E. Selby



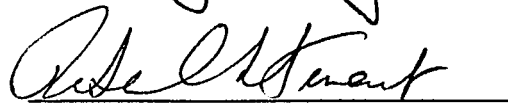
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To Mary, with love and affection

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor John Selby, director of this dissertation. His patient guidance penetrated much of my fuzzy thinking and provided me with direction as the outlines of this study began finally to emerge. In addition, Professor Selby's editorial touch has done much to smooth the rough edges of my prose. Professor Thad Tate's immense knowledge of colonial Virginia helped me place this local study in the context of wider provincial developments. Professor James Whittenburg will remain a model of teaching and professionalism for the remainder of my career. Professor M. Boyd Coyner also gave his time and effort to make this a better work.

Peter Stewart of Old Dominion University merits special mention as scholar and friend. It was he who first piqued my interest in the history of my home community. Our friendship and collaboration over the years has been a constant source of interest and pride.

Others aided in the completion of this project. Mary Ferrari contributed her knowledge of colonial Norfolk, as did Elizabeth Wingo. Fran Jacobson helped with some knotty software problems.

Another scholar and friend, although not directly concerned in this dissertation, deserves thanks. Mark Fernandez was an important reason that graduate school was such an enjoyable experience.

Finally, I owe most of all to my wife, Mary E. Martin, to whom this work is affectionately dedicated. Her patient coping with the many challenges of living with someone engaged in a long-term research project well-illustrates that hackneyed phrase, "For better or for worse." She's earned all the credit in the world.

ABSTRACT

Colonial Norfolk, Virginia, developed a more diversified economy than much of the rest of the tobacco-growing Chesapeake. Through a vigorous trade to the West Indies in agricultural products, local merchants prospered, and in 1736 a group of the leading local traders received a charter incorporating Norfolk town as a borough. From that time until the Revolution, through the offices of mayor and aldermen, who corresponded to county magistrates elsewhere in Virginia, the founding merchants and their hand-picked successors governed the town.

Norfolk's merchant-magistrates retained their grip on the town's political and economic life until after the Revolution, despite competition from new arrivals who came to Norfolk after 1750. This influx of new men resulted from economic developments in the wider Atlantic trading world which fueled significant local commercial expansion and created tensions resulting in violence in Norfolk in the 1760s.

The turbulence of the 1760s played a role in determining how Norfolk's merchant-magistrates reacted to the growing imperial crisis. While the established leaders formed the core of the area's patriot group during the Revolution, many of the newer arrivals remained loyal to Great Britain. At the beginning of the conflict, Norfolk Borough was almost totally destroyed, and its merchants, patriot and loyalist, became dispersed.

Norfolk's patriot merchants provided much-needed aid in supplying Virginia during the Revolution, and their wartime careers placed them in a favorable position to resume leadership of the borough after the war. In the post-war years, while the merchant-magistrates lost their oligarchic hold on local government with the revision of the borough charter in 1787, Norfolk's commercial vitality resumed. By 1800, Norfolk's leading merchants' saw their economic pre-eminence confirmed through the establishment of the Norfolk branch of the Bank of the United States and the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce in 1800.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY:
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, MERCHANT-MAGISTRATES, 1736-1800

Introduction

Historians of the colonial Chesapeake have rightly stressed the pervasiveness of tobacco in the early societies of Maryland and Virginia. Virginia's dependence on the cultivation of tobacco helps to explain the development by the eighteenth century of a system of black slave labor, the rise of a planter aristocracy exhibiting a predominantly agrarian ethos, and even the growth of that self-governing instinct among Virginia's leaders which some historians maintain was so significant in bringing on the Revolution.

The reliance on tobacco also had profound economic effects. The method of marketing the staple, especially in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, fostered a dependence on British credit which prevented the development of a native Virginia commercial class and inhibited the growth of urban centers where such a group usually congregated.

While tobacco cultivation spread from Jamestown to cover land along all of Virginia's major rivers, there were areas in the colony where, because of unsuitable soils, tobacco growing proved less profitable. The most important of these non-tobacco regions was Norfolk County, south of the Chesapeake Bay and east of the James River. First settled in 1637, Norfolk County eventually grew to feature a

more diversified, commercial economy than the rest of the colony. This economy centered on Norfolk town, founded in 1682 as part of a legislative attempt to force the development of urban centers in the Chesapeake.

By virtue of their involvement in the trade of local corn, pork, and lumber products to the West Indies, a small group of merchants based in Norfolk prospered, gaining a measure of independence from British credit. In 1736 they successfully petitioned the Virginia legislature for a charter of incorporation for Norfolk town. In subsequent years, the town's commercial development continued, and its leading merchants grew in wealth and status. By the Revolution, Norfolk Borough had risen to rival all but the largest northern seaports of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.

Apart from its growth after 1736, the most remarkable characteristic of Norfolk Borough was the closed, corporate nature of the town's leadership. The borough charter created a self-perpetuating court of mayor and eight aldermen, serving for life and corresponding to county justices elsewhere in colonial Virginia. The mayor and aldermen comprised the magistracy of the borough, exercising executive and judicial authority within the town. The other organ of local government in Norfolk Borough was the common council, a larger body of lesser leaders who assisted the aldermen and formed the group from which new aldermen were chosen when vacancies occurred.

Norfolk Borough's nine original magistrates named in the charter were all merchants in the Caribbean trade whose

ancestors had only recently arrived in Virginia. This merchant oligarchy remained a remarkably closed group. In the years from 1736 to the Revolution, the established leaders generally chose new magistrates from among those allied to them by marriage, birth, or business. Because of their emphasis on such connections, their parallel involvement in county or provincial office, and their relatively large landholdings, some of these founding members of the borough hierarchy can be equated with county elites elsewhere in the province.

Despite these similarities to the landed gentry, there remained a close connection between the borough magistracy and commercial activity. During Norfolk's commercial expansion after 1736, the merchant-magistrates imported and exported nearly one-quarter of all the major products entering and clearing the Lower James River Customs District, an area which encompassed not only Norfolk, but also Princess Anne County, Nansemond County, and Elizabeth City County. Moreover, in addition to their local leadership, the two most active merchants among Norfolk Borough's founding magistrates held provincial office, serving in the Virginia House of Burgesses.

With Norfolk's economic growth and development after mid-century, the comfortable corporate world of the borough oligarchs began to exhibit signs of strain. Economic changes within the wider Atlantic trading world formed the main catalyst for tensions which plagued Norfolk's commercial elite during the 1760s. The most important of these mid-century economic trends included the expansion of

the overseas market for Virginia grain. Norfolk's merchant-magistrates reacted to this development by capturing a large share of the increase in Virginia grain shipments.

At the same time, the influx of new merchants into Virginia, many of whom hailed from Scotland, proved a source of trouble in Norfolk after 1750. The borough founders had included several Scots among the first aldermen, but these earlier immigrants from North Britain had assimilated easily into the commercial elite, who were themselves relatively new arrivals to Virginia. After mid-century, however, newly arriving Scots and immigrants from England who encountered the established elite found it more difficult to gain a place in the local hierarchy. The result was an increase of tension within the mercantile elite which culminated in a decade of violence in the 1760s.

There were other problems stemming from Norfolk's commercial development after mid-century. The new arrivals after mid-century brought a heightened commercial consciousness to the area. As Norfolk grew, the borough magistrates began to push for increased authority for their chartered government. The Virginia legislature generally complied, and most of the augmentation of borough authority came at the expense of the county justices. Commercial borough and agrarian county began to grow apart. Virtually identical up to 1750, as many of the borough magistrates served concurrently as county justices, local town and county leadership began to separate after mid-century.

In the 1760s these developments led to several incidents of violence within the borough. While each

outbreak resulted from a different set of circumstances-- there was an attack on Spanish prisoners-of-war by British seamen, an incident connected with protest against the Stamp Act, a violent confrontation over British impressment, and mob activity aimed at halting inoculation--the outbreaks had a common result. Each episode of violence in Norfolk during the 1760s served to erode faith in the ability of the borough magistrates to maintain order. Confusion over conflicting borough and county jurisdictions only added to the problem.

The inoculation riots, which climaxed the crescendo of violence of the decade, created a deep schism within Norfolk's elite. Factionalism also appeared in business, as new industries and specialized commercial organizations began to show signs of the split in ruling class. This division, between descendants of the founding magistrates and a group of newer arrivals, helped to determine loyalties in the coming imperial conflict.

Paradoxically, as Norfolk's mercantile elite seemed to splinter, Virginia merchants as a whole began a movement toward increased cooperation in the 1770s. The Virginia Merchants' Association, formed in 1769 in part as a reaction to British imperial regulations, but also to regularize business in the province, was an attempt to bring together the commercial men of the entire province. Its president was Andrew Sprowle, a local merchant who had established a considerable wharfage and ship repair facility across the Elizabeth River from Norfolk at Gosport.

Despite their efforts, the Virginia merchants

ultimately failed to keep their association together. The group's failure resulted partly from the insistence that meetings be held at Williamsburg, a recognition of the capital's political significance, but a denial of Norfolk's commercial importance. Economic tremors of the 1770s which exacerbated relations between debtor and creditor also played a role in the failure of the Merchants' Association.

Locally, the economic problems of the 1770s aggravated pre-existing tensions. Norfolk's creditors, including a large number of merchants already dissatisfied with the behavior of the established magistrates, grew increasingly concerned over the possibility that some of those same magistrates, because of their judicial function and their anti-Parliamentary sympathies, could delay debt-collection.

The violence of the 1760s and the economic crises of the 1770s combined to throw established political and judicial authority in Norfolk into doubt. This questioning of local authority lay at the heart of Norfolk's responses in the imperial crisis. In the summer of 1775, the arrival at Norfolk of John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, Virginia's last royal governor and the embodiment of imperial political authority, eventually forced local inhabitants to choose sides. The leading merchants equivocated for as long as they could. Many of them, including a large number who had arrived since mid-century and had lost faith in the local establishment, supported Dunmore and swore allegiance to the king. Most of these loyalists represented creditors who feared the stoppage of business ordered by ad hoc committees formed mainly of men they did not trust anyway. Another

group of Norfolk merchants, who were for the most part descendants or allies of the borough founders, initially hostile to the governor, reluctantly professed their loyalty when Dunmore gained the upper hand, then cast their lot with the Virginia patriot leaders after his defeat.

Dunmore's presence at Norfolk throughout the summer and fall of 1775 made such equivocation necessary. But questions of personal allegiance lost significance early in 1776, when fires set by British troops and Virginia soldiers destroyed the borough. Wherever their sympathies lay, all of the town's residents suffered in the conflagration. Most loyalists left the area with Dunmore, never to return. Norfolk's patriot leaders, because of their background in Caribbean commerce and a desire to prove their patriotism, found themselves aiding in procuring desperately needed supplies for the state during the war. Their Revolutionary War service placed these pre-war leaders in an favorable position to resume leadership in Norfolk after the war.

The rebuilding of the town and revitalization of its commerce formed the main preoccupation of those who returned to Norfolk following the Revolution. A nucleus of pre-war leaders joined a number of merchants from other areas who arrived after the war. Norfolk's inhabitants, with a few exceptions, also generally welcomed back returning loyalists and their descendants. Norfolk's commercial potential and the prospect of purchasing confiscated property brought in many newcomers, and post-war property-holders in the borough speeded reconstruction by offering favorable terms to renters. The area underwent a remarkable recovery in the

Confederation period.

Norfolk Borough's merchant elite maintained their chartered corporation government after the Revolution. New members of the ruling group generally conformed to the pre-war pattern of securing family and commercial connections with established leaders as a means of gaining access into the closed group. By the end of the Confederation period, however, the Norfolk oligarchs lost their privileged government. In 1787, in line with similar grants of local government to other Virginia towns, the Virginia House of Delegates amended Norfolk's charter to allow for election of councilmen by popular vote. More important, the new charter gave the council the sole authority to make laws respecting levying and spending public funds. The mayor and aldermen, shorn of their control of the purse, retained their local judicial role.

Norfolk's oligarchs, most of whom had opposed any change, reacted in different ways. Some successfully ran for the common council, resigning their seats on the aldermen's bench to do so, and continued political leadership. Others remained satisfied with the judicial function. Many concentrated on commerce, finding increased opportunities in the West Indies trade in which they had always excelled. Sparked by the outbreak of war between France and Britain in 1792, the growth of American participation in the West Indies trade was one of the key factors in the nation's commercial prosperity of the 1790s. Norfolk's merchants continued their heavy involvement in this commerce.

Commercial concerns remained uppermost in the minds of Norfolk's leading merchants, even as the Anglo-French conflict continued and exacerbated political divisions elsewhere. While local traders joined both political parties, the majority adhered to the pro-British Federalist persuasion, but criticized any attacks on their commerce. By 1800 the prosperity of the previous decade resulted in the establishment of a branch of the Bank of the United States at Norfolk and the founding of the town's first chamber of commerce, two institutions for which Norfolk's merchants exhibited near unanimous support.

The late 1790s and early 1800s therefore represented a golden period for Norfolk's commerce, marked by the founding of the bank and chamber. But the Norfolk's commercial vitality did not last long. The Embargo Act of 1807 marked the first break in Norfolk's post-Revolutionary prosperity. In subsequent years, the decline of the West Indies trade spelled the end of Norfolk's wider commercial significance. It was this West Indies trade which had proved so crucial to Norfolk town's early commercial development.

Chapter I

Norfolk County and Town, 1637-1736: Foundations of a Commercial Community

Lower Norfolk County was formed in 1637 from a portion of Elizabeth City County, one of the four original "boroughs" which, with the settled area of the Eastern Shore, comprised the colony of Virginia in 1618. Separated from its parent county by Hampton Roads, the wide harbor formed by the confluence of the James, Nansemond and Elizabeth Rivers, Lower Norfolk County was bounded on the north by the Chesapeake Bay, and stretched south to the Great Dismal Swamp and the North Carolina. This new county south of the James River initially encompassed all the land from several miles east of the Nansemond River to the Atlantic Ocean. Within ten years of its founding, Lower Norfolk County became simply Norfolk County, when the original Upper Norfolk County, situated west of the Nansemond River, was renamed Nansemond County.¹

The land of Norfolk County which borders the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay consists of low sandy beaches and salt marsh. Further inland, away from the creek banks and

¹Rogers Dey Whichard, *The History of Lower Tidewater Virginia*, 3 vols., (New York, 1959), I, 5, 219; George Carrington Mason, *Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia*, (Richmond, Va., 1945), 151.

estuarine areas, the beaches and marshes give way to higher, but still sandy ground.

Numerous tidal creeks and rivers penetrated the sandy marshes of colonial Norfolk County. From Cape Henry at the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay, the first landfall of seafarers entering the Bay, a beach curved gently southwest several miles to the semi-protected anchorage at the mouth of the Lynnhaven River. Further west appeared the entrances to Little Creek, Mason's Creek, and Boush's Creek. Colonial mariners then made their way around a headland named Sewell's Point to enter the harbor of Hampton Roads.²

From the anchorage of Hampton Roads, the earliest English settlers in Virginia had sailed up the James River to establish their first habitation at Jamestown in 1607. From Jamestown, they branched out along the James and its tributaries. At the southern end of the James were the watercourses of Norfolk County: the Elizabeth River and its three branches, and Broad Creek, Deep Creek, and the North Landing River, which fed the Elizabeth from the east and south. Another tributary, Tanner's Creek, flowed into the Elizabeth River near its mouth at Hampton Roads and bisected Norfolk County. Together with the Nansemond River and its branches to the west and the Lynnhaven River and tributaries to the north, the Elizabeth River system formed the network of commerce and communication for the lower James River basin.³

²Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater*, I, 5.

³William Stewart, ed., *History of Norfolk County, Virginia and Representative Citizens*, (Chicago, 1902), 22.

The first land grants in Norfolk County, made to inhabitants of Elizabeth City County in the mid-1620s, predated the actual establishment of the county to the southeast of the James River. Initially settling around 1635, Norfolk County's earliest inhabitants took up land adjacent to one of the many watercourses. The banks of the western branch of the Elizabeth River were seated first, then settlers took up tracts along the eastern branch and in the Lynnhaven River area. Finally settlement spread along the southern branch of the Elizabeth River.⁴

The Act of Assembly which established the county also created the parish of Elizabeth River corresponding to the county. As early as 1640, however, the original parish was divided, and a second parish, Lynnhaven, was formed east of Little Creek for the inhabitants who had settled along the banks of the Lynnhaven River. Elizabeth River parish continued as the church for inhabitants west of Lynnhaven into the eighteenth century. In 1691 the religious division of Norfolk County was given political significance when the area roughly corresponding to Lynnhaven parish was given its own court as Princess Anne County.⁵

The area which remained Norfolk County consisted of about 550 square miles. From the Chesapeake Bay in the north, the county stretched south approximately thirty-two miles to the reaches of the Dismal Swamp. Hampton Roads and the western branch of the Elizabeth River formed the western

⁴Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater*, I, 221, 224.

⁵Mason, *Colonial Churches*, 151-2.

limit, nearly seventeen miles from the eastern border at the Princess Anne County line.⁶

The early settlers in Norfolk County, like those in the rest of the colony, were farmers, growing corn and raising livestock for local consumption and cultivating tobacco for export. Inventories of Norfolk County residents from the mid-seventeenth century list holdings of corn, hogs, cattle, horses, and sheep.⁷

But it was tobacco which eclipsed all other agricultural products in the colonial Chesapeake, and the crop governed the rhythms of Virginia's economy throughout the period. Changes in price and demand of the staple dictated the colony's economic development, and any analysis of colonial Virginia's economy, including that of Norfolk County, must begin with an examination of the tobacco trade.⁸

⁶*Ibid.*, 152; Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater*, I, 243; Stewart, *Norfolk County*, 22.

⁷Norfolk County Wills and Deeds, *passim*. [microfilm, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.]; Philip Alexander Bruce, *Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*, reprint ed., 2 vols., (New York, 1935), I, 333, 334, 372, 374-5, 482, 486.

⁸James O'Mara, *An Historical Geography of Urban System Development: Tidewater Virginia in the 18th Century*, Geographical Monographs, No. 13 [York University, Ontario, Canada], (1983), 65, 83; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985), 119; Calvin B. Coulter, "The Virginia Merchant," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1944), i. There are many valuable examinations of colonial Virginia's tobacco economy. A sampling of the most important would include Bruce, *Economic History*; Arthur Pierce Middleton, *Tobacco Coast: A Maritime History of Chesapeake Bay in the Colonial Era*, (Baltimore, Md., 1984); works of Jacob Price, including *Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), "The Economic Growth of the

Cultivation of the staple in Virginia began soon after the colony's founding at the beginning of the seventeenth century. After an initial boom period in the 1620s, Virginia's tobacco economy underwent a long period of slow growth which lasted until the 1680s. Expanded production within the context of falling prices characterized this period of tobacco cultivation and marketing.⁹

Up to the mid-seventeenth century the Dutch handled much of Virginia's tobacco trade to the Continent. In their rivalry with English merchants, Holland's commercial men possessed several advantages. The favorable geographic position of the Low Countries, the relatively superior commercial organization and technique of Dutch merchants, and England's preoccupation with domestic troubles during the period of the Civil War all served to garner for The Netherlands a large share of Virginia's tobacco trade. The Dutch possessed other advantages: their ships had more cargo space and required smaller crews, thus freight charges were lower. Moreover, Holland at this period produced more

Chesapeake and European Market, 1697-1775," *Journal of Economic History*, XXIV (1964), 496-511, *France and the Chesapeake: A History of the French Tobacco Monopoly, 1674-1791 and of its Relationship to the British and American Tobacco Trades*, 2 vols., (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1973), esp. vol. I, Ch. 25, and "The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707-1775," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XI (1954), 179-199; James Soltow, *The Economic Role of Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, Va., 1965). A recent survey of the fluctuations of the Chesapeake tobacco-based economy after 1680 which concentrates on the growth of a powerful social and political elite is Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986). Because he deems it outside his tobacco economy-impelled model, Kulikoff virtually ignores Norfolk.

⁹McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 122-3.

desirable manufactured goods and could sell them at lower prices than the English.¹⁰

From an early period, Norfolk County was home to several commercial men who served as middlemen in this commerce with the Dutch. In 1655, for example, in an agreement with an English merchant to furnish one hundred hogsheads of tobacco, an inhabitant of the Lynnhaven area listed Holland as an alternative market to Plymouth or London. An Elizabeth River resident, Matthew Phillips, who served as Norfolk County justice, collected and stored tobacco for Dutch merchants, bartering imported goods for the crop. Dutch merchants who dealt with other denizens of Norfolk County included John de Potter, and Simon Overzee. Overzee, who employed Thomas Lambert as his local factor, eventually settled in Norfolk County, and successively married daughters of the two most prominent men in the county. Another Rotterdam merchant who settled in Norfolk County was William Moseley.¹¹

The result of widespread Dutch participation in Virginia's lucrative tobacco commerce was the English Navigation Acts, first passed in 1651 during the Interregnum, then re-enacted following the Restoration of

¹⁰Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, (New York, 1975), 147, 196-7; Bruce, *Economic History*, II, 376; John R. Pagan, "Dutch Maritime and Commercial Activity in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XC (1984), 485-501.

¹¹Bruce, *Economic History*, I, 352-3, n. 4, II, 311; Beverley Fleet, ed., *Virginia Colonial Abstracts*, reprint ed., 3 vols., (Baltimore, Md., 1988), III, 421, 435; Pagan, "Dutch Maritime Activity," 490.

Charles II in 1660. These statutes, designed to give English shipping a monopoly of the colonial carrying trade, had the desired effect of eliminating the Dutch from Virginia's waters.¹²

Following the exclusion of Dutch traders from Virginia's rivers, the Virginia planter was forced to market his crop exclusively through England, using English credit and shipping. During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Virginians shipped tobacco to the mother country under the consignment system, by which the planter consigned his tobacco to the English merchant, who sold it for him for a commission. The English merchant supervised the unloading of the crop, paid the required duties, and stored the tobacco if necessary. The planter, who had to bear all costs and responsibility for shipping, was dependent upon the English merchant for the ultimate sale price and usually required extensive credit for the English products he ordered. The larger planters also acted as local middlemen, providing imported goods for smaller planters and farmers.¹³

Virginia's tobacco production increased during most of the seventeenth century, and despite falling prices and periodic depressions in the trade planters generally profited. After 1680, however, as tobacco prices continued to fall and the effects of the Navigation Acts began to be felt, production slackened. Wars between the English and

¹²Coulter, "Virginia Merchant," 2; Pagan, "Dutch Maritime Activity," 499.

¹³James H. Soltow, "Scottish Traders in Virginia, 1750-1775," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., XII (1959), 84; Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 116-7.

French, beginning in 1689, further dislocated Virginia's tobacco commerce, and as a result, Virginia's economy stagnated.¹⁴

Contemporaries, seeking to explain Virginia's economic ills, noted a connection between the pervasiveness of tobacco and the colony's economic health. Local officials and outside observers recognized that tobacco monoculture had produced a number of inter-connected side-effects harmful to the colony's economy. The absence of a native artisan group and consequent lack of home manufacturing were often noted. But perhaps the most frequently cited effect of the tobacco monoculture was the region's lack of towns. Early modern towns, populated by numbers of merchants and artisans, served as foci for commerce, and offered signs of a vigorous, diverse economy. Their absence was the most prominent physical feature of the colonial Chesapeake landscape.¹⁵

¹⁴Price, *France and the Chesapeake*, I, 509; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 123.

¹⁵For a discussion of the problems the historian faces in dealing with urbanization in the Chesapeake region see Lois Green Carr, "'The Metropolis of Maryland': A Comment on Town Development along the Tobacco Coast," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, LXIX (1974), 124-145; Carville V. Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "Staple Crops and Urban Development in the Eighteenth-Century South," *Perspectives in American History*, X (1976), 5-78; Joseph A. Ernst and H. Roy Merrens, "'Camden's Turrets Pierce the Skies!' The Urban Process in the Southern Colonies during the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXX (1973), 549-574; Jacob Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," *Perspectives in American History*, VIII (1974), 121-186; and John C. Rainbolt, "The Absence of Towns in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXV (1969), 343-360, and *From Prescription to Persuasion: Manipulation of Seventeenth-Century Virginia Economy*, (Port Washington, N.Y.), 1974. Contemporary observers who commented on the

The tobacco economy featured a decentralized commerce as each of the planters, with access to the great rivers that flow into Chesapeake Bay, was able to ship his crop from his doorstep. Tobacco had few of the important "forward linkages" so important in fostering urban growth. It had relatively little bulk compared to value; transport and storage requirements were uncomplicated; and the structure of its marketing--strict imperial regulation with consequent heavy English involvement in capitalization--inhibited the development of a native colonial merchant group, one of the key factors in influencing urban development. In addition, seventeenth-century Virginia planters were reluctant to diversify their agriculture, while crown officials feared the competition to English manufacturing which would result from town growth.¹⁶

Both crown and provincial government recognized this effect of Virginia's single-crop economy, and there were attempts during the seventeenth century to foster the growth of urban centers in Virginia by statute. From the 1660s, Virginia's Assembly sponsored a series of town acts designed

lack of urban development in the colonial Chesapeake include "Anthony Langston on Towns and Corporations . . .," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd ser., I (1921), 100-102; Francis Makemie, "A Plain and Friendly Persuasive . . .," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, IV (1897), 262-3; Hugh Jones, *The Present State of Virginia*, reprint ed., ed. Richard L. Morton, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1956), 73-4; Henry Hartwell, James Blair and Edward Chilton, *The Present State of Virginia and the College*, reprint ed., ed. Hunter Dickenson Farish, (Williamsburg, Va., 1940), 4-5, 9-13; Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America . . .*, reprint ed., (New York, 1960), 33, 45; and Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, reprint ed., (New York, 1964), 103.

¹⁶McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 132-3; Rainbolt, "Absence of Towns," 352.

to redirect Virginia's economy through the development of towns. None of these official blueprints, however, achieved their desired goals. Because the English administration and Virginia burgesses usually worked at cross-purposes, the official attempts to create towns in Virginia, from Governor Berkeley's ambitious program in 1660 to the town acts of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, fostered no immediate economic development. Most of the towns founded under the impetus of the colonial town statutes never grew large enough to fulfill their purposes as commercial centers.¹⁷

Some of the statutory towns, however, managed to survive and eventually prospered. Among these was the town of Norfolk, established by the Virginia Assembly in 1680 in Norfolk County "on Nicholas Wise his land on the Easterne Branch on Elizabeth river at the entrance of the branch." The following year, Norfolk County surveyor John Ferebee laid out fifty-one lots along a two-pronged peninsula on the north side of the Elizabeth River.¹⁸

The town was slow to grow in the immediate years after its founding. The first recorded sales of the half-acre lots were in 1683, but by 1691 only ten had been sold. The

¹⁷Sister Joan de Lourdes Leonard, "Operation Checkmate: The Birth and Death of a Virginia Blueprint for Progress, 1660-1676," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXIV (1967), 44-74; Edward M. Riley, "The Town Acts of Colonial Virginia," *Journal of Southern History*, XVI (1950), 306-323; Rainbolt, "Absence of Towns," 349, 352.

¹⁸W.W. Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia . . .*, 13 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1819-23), II, 472; Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*, 2nd ed., ed. Marvin W. Schlegel, (Durham, N.C., 1962), 5.

Act for Ports of that year, another of the seventeenth-century town acts, re-confirmed Norfolk as a town site and stimulated interest, and the separation of Princess Anne County the same year meant a new county courthouse was needed. This was constructed within town limits by 1694, and a church was erected in the town in 1698. By 1702 twenty-nine more lots had been sold, and within three years, only ten of the original fifty-one lots remained untaken.¹⁹

The area's unhealthful environment hindered growth. In 1700, for example, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Francis Nicholson, echoing a prevailing belief that Norfolk's climate was less than salubrious, determined to remove several hundred Huguenot refugees, who had landed at the mouth of the James River, to the interior of the colony. Norfolk town's climate and the health of its inhabitants remained major concerns for many years.²⁰

The town's founding had little initial effect on the county's population, which remained fairly constant during the three decades up to 1715. Enumerations listed 694 Norfolk County tithables in 1682; by 1705 the number had reached only 714. Then the population began to grow significantly: between 1714 and 1731 the number of tithables rose from 891 to 1,423, an increase of almost sixty percent, nearly double the rate of growth of the fifteen years before

¹⁹John W. Reys, *Tidewater Towns: City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland*, (Williamsburg, Va., 1972), 71-5.

²⁰Lieutenant Governor Francis Nicholson to the Lords of Trade, 12 Aug., 1700, in *Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, new series, VI, Miscellaneous Papers, (Richmond, Va., 1887), 63.

1714.²¹

The marked growth of Norfolk County's population after 1714 can be attributed to the commercial development of Norfolk town. As early as 1705 there were signs that the Elizabeth River town possessed commercial potential. That year, a visiting clergyman, Reverend Francis Makemie, providing a palliative for Virginia's struggling economy, singled out Norfolk as an example of the advantages to trade towns would produce:

for want of towns, strangers eat the bread out of our mouths, as the common saying is; for by towns, all Plantations far or near, would have some Trade and frequent trade and traffic would soon grow and arise between the several rivers and towns, by carrying and transporting passengers and goods. . . something of this we have some experience of already, and particularly in Norfolk-town at Elizabeth River, who carry on a small trade with the whole Bay.²²

Other eighteenth-century visitors commented on Norfolk's subsequent growth. By 1728, on his surveying expedition to North Carolina, William Byrd offered a detailed description of the town and its trade:

Norfolk has the most ayr of a Town of any in Virginia. There were then near 20 Brigantines and sloops riding at the Wharves, and oftentimes they have more. It has all the advantages of a Situation requisite for Trade and Navigation. There is a Secure Harbour for a good Number of Ships of any Burthen. . . . The Town is so near the sea, that its Vessels may Sail in and out in a few Hours. Their Trade is Chiefly to the West-Indies, whither they export an abundance of Beef, Pork, Flour, and Lumber.²³

²¹Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790*, (New York, 1932), 147-151; Norfolk County Will and Order Books, 1704-1731. [microfilm, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.].

²²Makemie, "A Plain and Friendly Persuasive . . . ," 263.

In 1736 another visitor commented on the towns of Virginia in general. An anonymous Englishman landed at Yorktown, which like Norfolk had been established under the terms of the 1680 act. In a back-handed compliment, the visitor described the appearance of the York River town, of which he wrote "tho' but stragglingly built, [it] yet makes no inconsiderable Figure." He continued that the town contained several houses, "equal in magnificence to many of our superb ones at St. James [a fashionable square in London]." Gloucester, Hampton, and Norfolk were all similar, except the latter, where

a Spirit of Trade reigns, far surpassing that of any other part of Virginia. A great number of vessels are fitted out from thence, to trade to the Northward and the West Indies; and the inhabitants are, from their great intercourse with strangers, abundantly more refined.²⁴

None of these accounts mentions tobacco, for Norfolk's prosperity did not rest on a base of smoke, and the town managed to escape most of the problems associated with the staple economy. Norfolk County's soil differed from that of the rest of Virginia, being a sandy, ground-water and half-bog soil which contained less clay than the soils of the area north of the James River and west of the Nansemond River. Tobacco cultivation was thus less profitable in this area, and Norfolk and Princess Anne County farmers had long since given it up as their staple. Living on the periphery

²³William Byrd, *History of the Dividing Line*, in John Spencer Basset, ed., *The Writings of Colonel William Byrd of Westover in Virginia, Esq.* reprint ed., (New York, 1970), 28.

²⁴"Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America in the Year 1736," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., XV (1906-7), 222-223.

of Virginia's tobacco economy, by the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the Elizabeth River inhabitants had developed a more diversified agriculture and commercial economy than the rest of Virginia. By the 1720s, the locale had become the seat of an active commercial class, centered in Norfolk town.²⁵

It was the area's diversified agriculture, the ability of local merchants to draw as well on the adjacent lands of North Carolina for products, and the marketing of these commodities to the West Indies, which provided the key to Norfolk's growth in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The town came to command the produce of a large hinterland, which included not only the lands of the Elizabeth River system, but also a good portion of northeastern North Carolina.²⁶

Local farmers grew corn, which proved the most significant commodity exported from the area throughout the colonial period. Although Naval Office records for the lower James River Customs District, which included the Elizabeth River system, are spotty until the mid-1720s, extant cargo lists show that shippers freighted Indian corn from the district to the Caribbean as early as 1699. By 1726 vessels carried a total of 53,135 bushels of corn from the lower James River. Norfolk merchants George and Nathaniel Newton, Solomon Wilson, John Phripp, Samuel Boush,

²⁵A.W. Drinkard, "Agriculture," in Virginia Academy of Science (James River Project Committee), comps., *The James River Basin: Past, Present and Future*, (Richmond, Va., 1950), 350.

²⁶Earle and Hoffman, "Staple Crops," 27, 43-4.

John Tucker, Samuel Smith, John Saunders, and Cornelius Calvert all shipped corn to the West Indies.²⁷

Livestock also furnished products for outgoing cargoes. Norfolk County farmers kept quantities of cattle, sheep, and especially hogs. The area's beef was considered inferior, and most was consumed locally. Sheep furnished mutton and wool largely for local consumption, and also provided tallow which was shipped abroad in large quantities for lamps. It was the area's hogs, however, both wild and domestic, which provided Norfolk's most frequently exported meats, as well as lard. The county was renowned for its hog production from the mid-seventeenth century, and Norfolk's shippers included quantities of pork and lard in their cargoes to the Caribbean from the earliest voyages. Skins and hides also went outward from the Elizabeth River, and beans and peas appeared in many cargoes.²⁸

In addition to such agricultural goods, Norfolk shippers exported large quantities of lumber products. The area was long known for its forests. As early as 1620, a shipbuilder, citing the abundant supply of lumber for building vessels, applied for a grant of land on the Elizabeth River. Following settlement of Norfolk County,

²⁷Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1443, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1726. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²⁸Bruce, *Economic History*, I, 372, 482, 486; Malcolm Cameron Clark, "The Coastwise and Caribbean Trade of the Chesapeake Bay, 1696-1776," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1970), 100; Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441, 1443, 1444, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1699-1715 and *passim*. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

local inhabitants took advantage of the timber-rich acreage of the Dismal Swamp, which made the Elizabeth River the logical transshipment point for an "almost inexhaustible" supply of timber and wood products.²⁹

During the early eighteenth century, the primary market for lumber products shipped from the lower James River was the West Indies; because the Caribbean islands were closer to Virginia than to New England, freight charges were lower. In the second quarter of the century, other markets for local lumber opened, and Norfolk's increasing trade became part of a general advance in lumber shipments from Virginia. By the 1730s the needs of the Royal Navy meant ever greater lumber shipments went to Great Britain, and tobacco vessels often completed their cargoes with lumber products. In the century's second quarter Virginia's lumber exports grew steadily, and shippers began sending cargoes of staves and headings to Madeira and the other Wine Islands, as well as to other North American colonies. By the middle of the eighteenth century, "almost every vessel that cleared for the West Indies, the Azores and Madeira, and many that cleared for Great Britain carried a partial cargo of lumber." Norfolk, "lumber port of the Old Dominion," led all other Virginia ports in shipments of lumber in the eighteenth century.³⁰

²⁹John Anthony Eisterhold, "Lumber and Trade in the Seaboard Cities of the Old South: 1607-1860," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Mississippi, 1970), 97; Wertebaker, *Norfolk*, 29; Whichard, *Lower Tidewater*, I, 7.

³⁰Eisterhold, "Lumber and Trade," 3-4, 97; Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 184; Clark, "Coastwise Trade," 2.

Most of the lumber shipments from Virginia consisted of planks, staves and headings. Such items were needed to manufacture the barrels and hogsheads in which West Indian products such as sugar and molasses were stored and shipped. Wine from Madeira, Lisbon, and the Canary Islands also required wooden barrels, pipes, and tierces. Other Virginia lumber products included large quantities of shingles and planks used for construction, and smaller numbers of spars, masts, and booms for shipbuilding.

Much of the lumber shipped from Norfolk in the eighteenth century came from northeastern North Carolina. In 1728 William Byrd commented that most of the shingles and boards exported from the Tar Heel province went to neighboring Norfolk. Indeed, North Carolina furnished much of the corn and pork exported from the lower James River as well, and the tapping of the North Carolina hinterland was an important factor in Norfolk's growth.³¹

Foodstuffs and lumber products from North Carolina were brought overland through or around the Dismal Swamp to the Blackwater or Northwest Rivers, then floated downstream to the Elizabeth or Nansemond Rivers. North Carolina cargoes occasionally arrived by sea, the vessels braving the treacherous Outer Banks, and sailing north to the Virginia Capes.³²

³¹Byrd, *History of the Dividing Line*, 28.

³²Entries for the lower James River for March-July, 1701, list a twenty-five ton sloop from North Carolina with a cargo of beef, pork, and Indian corn. Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]

The Tar Heel province also served as a major source for turpentine and the turpentine-derived products--tar and pitch--which formed a large portion of Elizabeth River exports and on which local shipbuilders relied for their trades. Widely used as a lubricant and an essential item in preserving rope, tar was the most important of the three. Pitch was employed mainly in painting boat bottoms to seal them against leaks and corrosion.³³

Tar was never produced in any great quantity in Britain, and from earliest settlement Virginia, with its large pine forests, was a source of this basic commodity for the mother country. By 1704 Parliament placed a bounty on production of tar, and this official incentive was gradually modified and extended. Pitch received a lesser bounty. Virginia's major tar and pitch producing area was Princess Anne County, adjacent to Norfolk, and local merchants regularly shipped tar and pitch manufactured there and in areas to the south. Some Norfolk merchants manufactured tar and pitch themselves in addition to their imports from North Carolina, and pitch kettles appear prominently in the several estates inventories. By 1743 Virginia annually produced 10,000 barrels of tar, and exported 8,000 to England, and on the eve of the Revolution annual exports had reached 30,000 barrels.³⁴

³³Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 183; Sinclair Snow, "Naval Stores in Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXII (1964), 75.

³⁴Snow, "Naval Stores," 92-3. Merchants who owned pitch kettles included Samuel Boush, Sr., one of the major inhabitants of Norfolk town, and John Tucker. Norfolk County Will and Deed Book H, Norfolk County Appraisements, Book 1.

Hemp, necessary for ships' rigging and cables, was produced mainly for use in local vessel construction until the 1760s when planters lost confidence in profits from indigo and began switching to hemp. By the time of the Revolution, Virginia was producing 5000 tons of hemp per year, most of which was used in local ropeworks, but some of which was exported.³⁵

The locally produced naval stores--tar, pitch, turpentine, and hemp--which were not exported abroad went to supply area shipwrights. Ship construction in Virginia in the seventeenth century was not a substantial industry, and local ship carpenters generally confined themselves to the construction of small coasting vessels suitable for voyages in the Chesapeake or to the Caribbean. After about 1730, with the growth of Norfolk town as a commercial entrepot, area shipbuilding and ship repair greatly expanded, and several merchants supplemented their earnings from trade with investments in construction of vessels. By the Revolution the Chesapeake had become a major area of shipbuilding in America.³⁶

Throughout the eighteenth century, the primary market for commodities shipped from Norfolk was the British West Indies and Bermuda. In turn, Bermuda and the Caribbean islands furnished many of the products imported into the

[microfilm, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.].

³⁵Snow, "Naval Stores," 181-3.

³⁶Joseph A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America*, (Charlottesville, Va., 1976), 23-25, 117; Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 250-254.

lower James River. Norfolk possessed several advantages in this Caribbean trade. Foodstuffs produced locally suited the West Indian markets where every available acre was given over to sugar cultivation. The variety of local products also attracted West Indian merchants and planters. Everything from corn and peas, pork, lard, tallow and beef, lumber products and some naval stores, formed cargoes on vessels sailing from Norfolk to Barbados, Bermuda, St. Kitts, Jamaica, or other islands. By the mid-eighteenth century, wheat, too, appeared with greater frequency in local cargoes.³⁷

Because of the proximity of the Caribbean, Norfolk's West Indies commerce was combined with trade to the Wine Islands, Madeira and the Canaries. Most of these voyages were two-way only, with vessels carrying local foodstuffs to the Wine Islands, returning with wine, then carrying corn or pork to the West Indies. The types of products shipped to the West Indies also favored such multiple voyages. Wheat was normally exported before corn or pork was ready for shipment, and vessels returning from Madeira or the Canaries too late to take on wheat could load corn or pork instead. Depending on local or island markets, vessels occasionally cleared Norfolk for Madeira, then stopped in the West Indies before returning to the Elizabeth River.³⁸

³⁷Clark, "Coastwise Trade," 100.

³⁸Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 202-3; For an example of a triangular voyage, see Charles Steuart to Richard Smith and Company, 5 July 1751, Charles Steuart Letterbooks. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Norfolk's central location on the Atlantic seaboard gave its merchants an additional advantage in the trade to the Caribbean, where short voyages and early intelligence of prices and markets were crucial to profit or loss. Because vessels employed in the West Indies trade were smaller and less expensive than trans-Atlantic shipping, local merchants also found it easier to enter the Caribbean trade than to venture cargoes across the Atlantic. Caribbean cargoes were smaller as well, an actual advantage in the West Indies where the islands' limited markets were easily glutted.³⁹

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries merchants from England or New England carried much of Virginia's trade with the West Indies. But as early as 1699, Norfolk County merchants Willis Wilson and Samuel Boush freighted local products to the West Indies in return for cargoes of Caribbean goods. These voyages were often ventured in combination with English merchants such as the great tobacco merchant Micajah Perry. Occasionally Virginia merchant-planters from upriver, such as Benjamin Harrison or William Byrd, engaged in West Indian commerce with Norfolk-area merchants. Norfolkian Samuel Boush, however, shipped and received goods on his own in vessels as small as twenty-five tons. The advantages Norfolk enjoyed in the Caribbean commerce allowed Boush to operate independently of English or northern investors and carriers. This classic pattern of

³⁹Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 202; Earle and Hoffman, "Staple Crops," 42; Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 107-8, 116.

the colonial West Indies commerce, in which local merchants ventured small cargoes in ships owned in whole or in partnership with other local traders, thus provided an important avenue in which Norfolk merchants were able to operate independently of English capital.⁴⁰

In return for their shipments of local produce, area merchants imported a variety of West Indian products, including rum, sugar, molasses, and salt. Occasionally a vessel entered the lower James River District carrying small groups of black slaves to be sold in Virginia. Merchants also imported limited quantities of other West Indian products such as indigo, coffee, pimento, garlic, and ginger into the district.⁴¹

This commerce with the West Indies was crucial to Norfolk's development. By furnishing credits to purchase tobacco or English manufactured goods, the Caribbean trade allowed Norfolk merchants to develop independently of English or northern merchants. The trade of the entire Chesapeake with the West Indies eventually amounted to one-sixth of the total North American trade with the Indies, and by 1772, seventy to eighty percent of the Chesapeake commerce passed through Norfolk. By 1772 the commerce of

⁴⁰Earle and Hoffman, "Staple Crops," 42; Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 201; Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441, Entries and Clearances for the Lower James River Customs District, 1699-1702. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. The phrase, "classic pattern" applied to the West Indies commerce comes from Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, 108.

⁴¹Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 202; Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441-1447, Entries, Lower James River Customs District, 1699-1705, 1726-1770. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

the combined Chesapeake region to the West Indies exceeded that of any single American port, and Norfolk ranked fourth among American ports in the Caribbean trade.⁴²

While the British West Indies remained the area's most important trading partner through the Revolution, from the second quarter of the eighteenth century, Norfolk merchants found growing markets in other areas. This development formed part of a general expansion of Virginia's commerce. The tobacco trade, which had been depressed since the 1680s, began to revive about 1715. Virginia's coastwise trade with other continental colonies also increased. Local merchants joined other Virginians in freighting cargoes with increasing regularity to New England, New York, and Philadelphia. Finally, toward mid-century, Virginia farmers and planters turned to wheat in an effort to diversify their agriculture. Virginia's increased wheat production tapped a growing demand for grain and flour in the West Indies, the Wine Islands, southern Europe, and even Great Britain.⁴³

⁴²Middleton, *Tobacco Coast*, 201-2; Clark, "Coastwise Trade," 2, 85-6, 93; Robert P. Thomson, "The Merchant in Virginia, 1700-1775," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1955), 4; Earle and Hoffman, "Staple Crops," 42.

⁴³Changes in Virginia's economy in the eighteenth century with an emphasis on the expansion of wheat cultivation are delineated in Clark, "Coastwise and Caribbean Trade"; Paul G.E. Clemens, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980); David C. Klingaman, *Colonial Virginia's Coastwise and Grain Trade*, (New York, 1975), [Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967]; Klingaman, "The Significance of Grain in the Development of the Tobacco Colonies," *Journal of Economic History*, XXIX (1969), 268-278; and Gaspare John Saladino, "The Maryland and Virginia Wheat Trade from Its Beginnings to the American Revolution," (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1960). See also Peter V. Bergstrom, "Markets and Merchants: Economic

The trade of Norfolk's merchants, already significant by the 1730s, paralleled Virginia's commercial development in the eighteenth century. By the third decade of the century, a small group of Norfolk County merchants, based in Norfolk town on the Elizabeth River and engaged primarily in trade with the West Indies, had risen to positions of power and influence within the county. In 1735, as an indication of Norfolk's commercial status, a group of local merchants and shipowners petitioned the governor to have the customs house for the lower James River district moved to Norfolk town from its location across Hampton Roads at Hampton. Hampton's shipping, once fairly considerable, had dwindled significantly because a shallow bar of sand across the anchorage obstructed all but the smallest vessels.

The Norfolk petitioners argued that Hampton merchants owned no more than three vessels, and no British ships for many years past had loaded tobacco at the official port. On the other hand, the petitioners attested, the south side of Hampton Roads, including Lynnhaven inlet and the Elizabeth River, was home to more than thirty Virginia-owned vessels. In addition, the location of the customs house at Hampton worked a hardship on the merchants and shipowners of neighboring Princess Anne and Nansemond Counties.⁴⁴

Diversification in Colonial Virginia, 1700-1775," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1980).

⁴⁴"petition to Lieutenant Governor Gooch of Merchants . . . of Norfolk," 2 April, 1735, Virginia Colonial Records. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. Among the thirty-one signatures were the names of many of Norfolk's foremost merchants, including Samuel Boush, Jr. and Sr., Cornelius Calvert, Alexander Campbell, John Ellegood, John Hutchings, George Newton,

British ship captains who operated in the lower James River also submitted a petition favoring relocating the customs house to Norfolk. These professional seafarers contended that they did little or no business at Hampton except to enter their vessels and then had to cross the harbor to Norfolk for provisions, whether lumber, rum, or victuals. The extra trip entailed a loss of time and a great deal of trouble.⁴⁵

The Norfolk area merchants and shipowners and the British sea captains did not prevail in their bid to have the customs house moved. The location remained at Hampton until the eve of the Revolution and proved a bone of contention for many years.⁴⁶

The attempt to relocate the lower James River customs house, although unsuccessful, provides one indication of Norfolk's commercial development since the town's shaky beginnings in 1680. In 1736 Norfolk merchants proved more successful in attaining official recognition of the town's commercial status when they successfully petitioned the legislature for a town charter. This grant, establishing Norfolk as an incorporated borough, gave the town a government consisting of mayor, recorder, eight aldermen, and a common council of sixteen. Norfolk's charter set the

Edward Pugh, John Saunders, John Tucker, Jr. and Sr., Robert Tucker, and Solomon Wilson.

⁴⁵"petition of Masters and Commanders . . . of British Ships," May, 1735, Virginia Colonial Records. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁴⁶Joseph R. Frese, "The Royal Customs Service in the Chesapeake, 1770: The Reports of John Williams, Inspector General," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXI (1973), 280-318.

borough apart from Norfolk County and gave its inhabitants certain privileges. Only the provincial capital at Williamsburg, incorporated in 1722, possessed similar status in Virginia. Jamestown, the original capital of Virginia, had long been a backwater by the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

Norfolk Borough's first mayor, recorder and aldermen, named in the original charter, were all prominent merchants. They alone had the privilege of electing common councilmen, and the aldermen filled vacancies in their own ranks by elevating common councilmen. Norfolk's new government, semi-independent of the county court, thus comprised a closed corporation.⁴⁸

The charter gave mayor, recorder and aldermen the status of justices of the peace of the borough. They therefore constituted a local court and exercised functions similar to those of county commissioners, including the right to appoint constables, surveyors of roads and other functionaries. Mayor, recorder, aldermen and council also possessed the authority to build work-houses, houses of correction and prisons within the borough, and to regulate the borough's trade.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Reps, *Tidewater Towns*, 179, 213; Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 35-41, reprints the original charter from the earliest known copy published in Norfolk in 1797. Norfolk's first mayor was Samuel Boush, Sr., and among the original aldermen who signed the previous year's petition were Samuel Boush, Jr., Alexander Campbell, George Newton, John Hutchings, Samuel Smith, Jr., and Robert Tucker.

⁴⁸Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 36-7.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 37-38.

Included in the regulation of trade was the right to hold three markets a week and two fairs a year within the borough. Persons attending the fairs were exempt from prosecution except by court of *piepoudre*, a medieval survival dealing with conflicts at such fairs. Any three among the mayor, recorder or aldermen, one of whom had to be the mayor or recorder, constituted the court of *piepoudre*.

Finally, any four of the above officials, one of whom had to be either mayor, recorder, or senior alderman (usually the previous mayor), formed the hustings, or corporation court. This body exercised jurisdiction over cases of trespass, ejectment and dower and personal cases involving property valued at less than £20 Virginia currency within the borough. Cases of above twenty pounds in value remained under the purview of the county court. Conflict between borough and county over the limits of jurisdiction proved a problem in pre- and post-Revolutionary Norfolk.⁵⁰

In addition to the grant of local government, borough inhabitants received the privilege of electing a burgess to represent them in the colonial legislature in Williamsburg. All freeholders who owned half a lot of land with a house or who resided in the borough and possessed at least £50 Virginia currency in visible estate had the right to vote for this provincial representative. Apprentices who had served terms of at least five years and afterwards resided in the borough could also vote for the burgess, without any property requirement. The property qualifications for

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 7, 39-40.

election as burgess, an estate of £200 sterling if a resident, £500 if not, were much higher than the property qualifications for voting.⁵¹

Norfolk's inhabitants received other privileges. The original charter granted borough residents exemptions from service in the county militia. Working sailors received the same immunity two years later.⁵²

The incorporation of Norfolk Borough in 1736 represents the definition of the town as a commercial community distinct from Norfolk County. The first phase of the town's growth had seen significant advance after 1714. By the 1720s, a small group of local merchants had become active in the West Indies trade. In 1736 they received an official *imprimatur* as a commercial center through the grant of a borough charter. In subsequent years, as the town and its trade grew, the wealth and importance of the borough's merchant-magistrates grew as well. Through the offices of mayor and alderman, Norfolk's prominent mercantile families maintained a strong hold on the local politics and commerce.

In the 1750s, as the local economy developed in response to wider changes in the Atlantic trading world, the borough grew in population and area, and its magistrates increased their authority at the expense of the county justices. This development created a certain amount of tension between borough and county leaders. At the same time, economic development brought new men into the local

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 38-9.

⁵²O'Mara, *Historical Geography*, 180; Hening, ed., *Statutes*, IV, 541-2.

commercial community who competed with the established leaders for the limited positions among the commercial and political elite. The consequent stresses resulted in both an erosion of faith in the established leadership and sporadic outbreaks of violence during the 1760s. Norfolk's pre-Revolutionary conflict in turn played an important role in determining allegiances during the struggle with Britain.

Chapter II
Norfolk Merchant-Magistrates, 1736-1750:
Establishment of a Commercial Oligarchy

The creation of Norfolk Borough in 1736 defined the town on the Elizabeth River as a commercial community. The borough's first mayor and aldermen, all merchants involved in the West Indies trade, formed a self-perpetuating corporation which supervised the town's affairs. For the most part, the earliest borough leaders were relative newcomers to the colony. Their forebears had only recently arrived in Virginia, quickly establishing themselves among the county elite by marrying into leading local families. Some of them invested in lots in Norfolk town after its establishment in 1682. These newly acquired ties to local land and office, along with English or West Indian contacts, placed them in a favorable position to participate in the growth of Norfolk's trade beginning at the end of the seventeenth century. By the third decade of the next century their descendants possessed means sufficient to impel their lead in the formation of a chartered government for the town.¹

¹Bernard Bailyn traces a similar pattern of success for later seventeenth-century arrivals in Virginia in "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," in James Morton Smith, ed., *Seventeenth Century America: Essays in Colonial History*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1959), 90-115. See also Martin Quitt, "Immigrant Origins of the Virginia Gentry: A Study of

Through the posts of mayor and aldermen, which corresponded to county magistrates, the borough founders controlled the town's local government with the assistance of the less powerful common council. This borough government was a self-perpetuating, closed group. Mayor and aldermen chose members of the common council, and when vacancies occurred in their own ranks, the mayor and aldermen elevated councilmen to fill them. In the years from the establishment of the borough to the outbreak of the Revolution, in addition to the original eight named in the charter, twenty-two aldermen served on Norfolk's bench. During the same period eighty-nine men served on Norfolk's sixteen-member common council.²

These borough founders maintained a strong grip on Norfolk's political life and dominated the area's commerce through the 1750s when changes in the Atlantic economy affected the commerce of the Elizabeth River. Mid-century economic developments greatly expanded Norfolk's commercial position in Virginia and enhanced the status of leading local merchants, but the economic changes also brought new men into the area who competed with the established leaders for places in the commercial and political hierarchy.

Four men formed the core of Norfolk Borough's founding fathers: Samuel Boush, George Newton, John Hutchings, and Robert Tucker. By the 1720s all were merchants in the West

Cultural Transmission and Innovation," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XLV (1988), 629-655.

²Brent Tarter, ed. *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 6-7, 36-37.

Indies trade, justices of Norfolk County, and each was named borough alderman in 1736. Closely connected with each other through marriage, they and their descendants were among the most active citizens in the area's commercial, political, and social life up to the Revolution.³

The Boush name figures prominently in local affairs from the time Norfolk town was founded in the seventeenth century. Four generations of the family played important professional and commercial roles in colonial Norfolk. The family's origins are unclear, but the first Boush to arrive in Virginia came ashore sometime after 1670. By the early eighteenth century, Maximilian Boush, of the second generation and educated in the law, was serving as Queen's and King's Counsel for the counties of Norfolk, Princess Anne, and Nansemond, a post he held until just prior to his death in 1728. The family's imperial connection was reinforced in the person of Maximilian's wife, Sarah Woodhouse, granddaughter of the governor of Bermuda. By the 1690s, their son Samuel, actively engaged in trade with the Caribbean, ordered a silver chalice from London for the communion service of Norfolk town's new church, an indication that he was one of the town's men of means.⁴

Some of Samuel Boush's early commercial activities consisted of joint ventures with Virginia planters such as

³*Ibid.*, 36, 57, 127, 134, 152, 205.

⁴Charles B. Cross, Jr., *The County Court, 1637-1904: Norfolk County, Virginia*, (Portsmouth, Va., 1964), 145; Rogers Dey Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater, Virginia*, 3 vols., (New York, 1959), I, 356; Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*, 2nd ed., ed. Marvin W. Schlegel, (Durham, N.C., 1962), 6.

William Byrd II of Henrico County and the English tobacco merchant Micajah Low. In these enterprises the partners usually traded with the West Indies, but they sent at least one shipment of tobacco and staves to London. By the 1720s, Samuel Boush was also exporting and importing independently, and owned at least one sloop, the forty-ton *Samuel*.⁵

Land formed an important component of the Boush family's wealth. Samuel Boush was one of the earliest investors in Norfolk town in 1682, purchasing a valuable waterfront lot, and the Boush property along the main road leading north out of town became Norfolk's first suburb when subdivided in the 1730s. Other property came into the family through Samuel's marriage to Alice Mason Porten, descendant of one of the original patentees of Sewell's Point in the 1630s and widow of former county clerk William Porten. Quitrent rolls for Norfolk County for 1704 show Boush with 1,628 acres in Norfolk County holdings.⁶

As one of the county's leading men of property, Samuel Boush naturally held important offices. Appointed county justice in 1697, Boush was colonel of the militia by 1720, sat on the parish vestry, and was elected member of the House of Burgesses in 1734. As a burgess, Boush was

⁵Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1700-1702. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁶Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater*, I, 356; "Virginia Quit Rent Rolls, 1704," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXX (1922), 22. Among the Porten property which passed to Boush was a copy of Michael Dalton's *The Countrey Justice*, the basic handbook for Virginia's magistrates originally published in London in 1622.

instrumental in Norfolk's acquisition of the borough charter in 1736. He served on the committee which drafted the charter and became the borough's first mayor. But he died in the autumn of 1736, before the first meeting of the Common Hall in November, and never presided over the corporation.⁷

Boush's will and the inventory of his estate illustrate the extent of his interests. Although his commercial activities did not match those of some of the other Norfolk merchants, the presence of a quantity of English manufactured goods in his inventory show Boush to be one of the more important commercial men of the area. Comprising a limited assortment--cloth, a quantity of paper, books, buttons, cutlery, and some tools--these goods amounted to just £60 of the total value of Boush's estate, but were meant for resale rather than personal consumption.⁸

Imported products from other areas made up a greater proportion of Boush's personal estate. The inventory lists wine from Madeira worth £186, and West Indian goods, including rum, sugar, and molasses totaling more than £40 in value. Exports also comprised a large portion of Boush's estate. Such local products as pork, tallow, beeswax, tar,

⁷Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater*, I, 372; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 8; Norfolk County Court Orders, Appraisements, and Wills, 1719-1722. [microfilm, Virginia State Library, Archives, Richmond, Va.]. The Norfolk Borough charter, similar to that granted Williamsburg in 1722, came from the pen of Virginia Attorney General John Clayton. Williamsburg and Norfolk remained Virginia's only two chartered towns until after the Revolution.

⁸Norfolk County Wills and Deeds, Book H. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

lumber, beef, salt, and corn appear in the inventory. Among the more valuable single items enumerated was a kettle for boiling pitch worth £15, an indication that Boush manufactured pitch and tar. The total of Boush's personal property amounted to just under £1,000 in value.⁹

There is no doubt that Samuel Boush considered land his most important asset. To ensure that the real property was not broken up, Samuel entailed the land to his grandson, Samuel Boush III. It was the express wish of the deceased merchant that his son and heir, Samuel Boush II, "pay all debts without any lawsuits," but sell no land to satisfy the estate's creditors. Instead, interest was to be paid on the debts until the money could be raised, presumably through mercantile ventures.¹⁰

Samuel Boush II inherited his father's attitude toward land as well as the more tangible property. In addition to his large holdings in Norfolk County, the younger Boush also acquired land elsewhere in Virginia. There was at least one lot in Williamsburg which Boush sold to gunsmith James Geddy in 1738, and a tract in James City County on the Chickahominy River. At his death in 1759, Samuel Boush II's estate included a plantation on Sewell's Point, which included sixty slaves, forty head of cattle, thirty sheep and some hogs, along with several small boats. Boush owned three lots in Norfolk Borough, including the prime waterfront wharf with the store that his father had

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

purchased in the previous century. The property included a 600-acre tract "adjoining Bear Quarter," and a small parcel near Great Bridge (both in Norfolk County, south of the southern Branch along the main road to North Carolina).¹¹

Until his own demise in 1759, Samuel Boush II engaged in intermittent trade with the West Indies. Customs lists for the lower James River from 1736 reveal that he imported and exported the typical products of this commerce. In early 1737, for example, Boush shipped pork, beef, corn and some candles to St. Kitts. Two years later he imported molasses, sugar and a slave from Jamaica. But Boush also occasionally re-exported West Indian products to Maryland, on one occasion in 1743 sending rum, sugar, lime juice and cotton up the Chesapeake in return for five-and-a-half tons of bar iron. The cotton and lime juice were later returned unsold, indicating that there was not a market for such items in Maryland in this period.¹²

Norfolk was a growing market for the major West Indian products of rum and sugar for Boush as well as the other major Norfolk merchants. In one shipment in 1746, for example, Boush and Norfolk merchant John Tucker imported 5,500 gallons of rum and 6,000 pounds of sugar from Barbados. The customs records indicate that in the years from 1737 to 1750 Samuel Boush shipped 724 barrels of pork

¹¹"Gunsmiths in Williamsburg," *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, III (1922), 299; Norfolk County Will Book I. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

¹²Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1743. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

and 600 bushels of corn to the West Indies. In the same period his imports, including the 1746 venture with John Tucker, totaled 17,040 gallons of rum, 431 gallons of molasses and 24,600 pounds of sugar.¹³

Samuel Boush II continued the family's involvement in public office. Like his father, he was one of the borough's original eight aldermen, and became burgess for Norfolk County in the 1740s. He also served as clerk of the borough after his father's death, collecting a fee for the execution of official documents such as probates, protests, and council orders. He occupied the office of clerk for only two years, resigning the post in favor of Alexander McPherson, and the manner of his resignation provides a glimpse at how the borough leaders maintained their control in this period. In taking the clerkship, McPherson resigned as common councilman to make room for the appointment to the council of Samuel Boush III, son of Samuel II and already a militia colonel.¹⁴

Like his father, Samuel Boush II placed explicit instructions in his will regarding the disposition of his property. He specified that he be buried privately without a sermon to save the cost of an Anglican ceremony, and included a clause in his will that the crop from his Sewell's Point plantation be harvested before his slaves were divided among his heirs. He did not, however, obey the

¹³Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1737-1750. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

¹⁴Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 51.

spirit of his father's will that the entire landed holdings be passed to his eldest son, Samuel Boush III. The original landed bequest passed intact, but Samuel II divided real estate which he had acquired among all his sons.¹⁵

Most of Samuel II's sons served the area in some official capacity or other. Arthur Boush became town surveyor. Another son, Charles Sayer (Sawyer), inherited his father's Norfolk County land, including the Sewell's Point property and died in the service of the Virginia navy during the Revolution. Goodrich Boush, a Norfolk ship captain and merchant, received the Chickahominy plantation in James City County. Beginning in 1750 Goodrich, who remained in Norfolk, regularly sent cargoes to the West Indies and served as borough councilman from 1761 until 1774.¹⁶

Samuel Boush II's eldest son, Samuel Boush III, inherited the bulk of the family property, and became the most successful of his generation. Samuel III received the valuable waterfront lots in Norfolk Borough and assumed his grandfather's and father's commercial interests. He eschewed the highest position in the borough government, preferring the lucrative post of borough clerk, to which he was appointed in 1749. Samuel III acted as clerk until several years before the Revolution when his son John took over. By the eve of the Revolution Samuel III's multifarious interests in land, commerce and office made

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 127, 150, 179, 180.

him, in the opinion of one observer, "without doubt the richest man in town."¹⁷

Closely allied to the Boush family, and just as important in local affairs, was the Newton family. George Newton was born in the mid-seventeenth century, possibly in Bermuda, to a family originally from Lancashire, England. By the 1670s he was living in Norfolk County, where he married Frances Mason, sister of Alice Mason Porten who had married Samuel Boush I.

In 1677 George Newton was appointed to the county court, and his eldest son, George II, born the following year and educated in England, became member of that body in 1705. George Newton II engaged in the West Indian trade, shipping the usual local products--pork, corn, beef, peas, lumber and candles--to the British Caribbean in return for cargoes of rum and sugar. Like his kinsman Samuel Boush I, Newton was an early investor in Norfolk town as well as owner of sizable county tracts. The 1704 quitrent roll shows Newton with 1,119 acres in the county, about five hundred fewer acres than Boush. First elected burgess for Norfolk County in 1711, George Newton II served in that capacity until 1726. With the establishment of the borough in 1736, he was named one of the original aldermen and succeeded Samuel Boush I as mayor when the latter died before taking office.¹⁸

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 171-3; Henry Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 8 July 1772, Papers of Henry Fleming. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

¹⁸"Newton Family of Norfolk," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXIX (1921), 516-17, 519; Naval

The Boush and Newton families were closely connected from their earliest years in Norfolk County, and subsequent generations of Newtons allied themselves with Norfolk's other leading families. Of George Newton II's children, Thomas, the third son, survived and prospered, marrying Amy Hutchings, daughter of John Hutchings, another of the borough's original aldermen. Another son, Wilson, married Rebecca Ellegood, daughter of John Ellegood, also a first-generation leader. George Newton II's daughter Frances married Paul Loyall, who during the 1750s became one of the town's rising young captain-merchants.¹⁹

George Newton II resigned as alderman in 1751, retired from business and public life, and died in 1760. His property included several lots within the borough as well as at least two tracts totalling over five hundred acres in Norfolk County. One of the borough lots, however, was situated adjacent to the market house, and the town corporation claimed that it was public land. In 1757, the Common Hall ordered him to give up his claim to the land, but Newton believed his title was valid and refused. After Newton's death his son and heir Thomas agreed to have the

Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, 22 vols., (New York, 1962), VII, 477; Whichard, *History of Lower Norfolk County*, I, 356-7; Cross, *County Court*, 144.

¹⁹"Newton Family of Norfolk," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXX (1922), 85-6. The fates of Thomas Newton's two elder brothers illustrate the hazards attendant upon a seafaring career in the early eighteenth century. One, born in 1722, was lost at sea, and the other, four years younger, was impressed into the Royal Navy and never heard from again.

matter settled by arbitration, and the land was conveyed to the borough in exchange for another lot.²⁰

Like his father, Thomas Newton (1713-1794) began his commercial career as a ship captain in the West Indies trade. His progress from captain to captain-merchant and then to independent merchant illustrates the pattern often repeated by Norfolk's successful men of commerce. Indeed, progression from shipmaster to merchant was characteristic of the formation of mercantile groups in the northern ports.²¹

During the 1730s Thomas Newton was employed by his father as captain of vessels carrying local produce to Barbados for rum, sugar, and, less often, molasses. By 1739, he was sending cargoes to the West Indies on his own account, but remained in command of the voyages. By the following decade Newton had left the sea for good, and, in addition to his Caribbean commerce, he had discovered new avenues of trade. He freighted flour and wheat to Teneriffe and Lisbon for wine, and during the 1740s became active in the continental coastwise trade, re-exporting West Indies products to Maryland for return cargoes of bread and tallow, sending vessels to North Carolina for corn and peas, and on at least one occasion, importing salt from Pennsylvania.²²

²⁰Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 118, 119, 121.

²¹See for example Benjamin W. Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815*, (New York, 1975), 4-5; Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 50.

²²Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1443-1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1731-1749. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Wilson Newton (1718-1763), Thomas Newton's brother, also participated in the West Indies trade and Norfolk's public life. Like his elder brother, Wilson began as a ship captain. By 1745 he was shipping on his own, sending the customary pork and corn to Barbados for rum and sugar and local products to Madeira and Teneriffe for wine. In 1746 Wilson Newton gained a seat on the borough bench alongside his father and brother, and he served as mayor of Norfolk in 1751 and again in 1760. Although the size of his personal estate at his death in 1763 is not known, Wilson Newton left two lots in the borough, another lot adjacent to the main road leading out of town, and a plantation on the southern branch of the Elizabeth River.²³

A third and fourth generation of the family, in the person of Thomas Newton's son, Thomas II (1742-1807), and grandson, Thomas III (1768-1847), also played important roles in Norfolk's commercial and political life. Thomas II attained the rank of alderman in 1775, after serving on the common council for eleven years. Thomas II also served as member of the Virginia House of Burgesses for county and borough. After the Revolution Thomas Newton III sat in the Virginia legislature, and was elected United States Congressman in 1801. A Republican, Thomas Newton III served in Congress, with one interruption, from 1801 to 1834.²⁴

²³*Ibid.*; Norfolk County Will Book 1. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²⁴Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 59, 191; Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, VII, 477; "Newton Family," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXX (1922), 85-6; Cross, *County Court*, 145.

Thomas Newton I, through his marriage to Amy Hutchings, was allied to another of the borough founders. John Hutchings, Sr., Amy's father, was perhaps the most important of colonial Norfolk's commercial and political leaders. His father, Daniel, a ship captain from Bermuda, settled in Norfolk County in the 1680s and married Amy Godfrey, daughter of a prominent county family. Their son John, first elected to the county court in 1733, was also one of Norfolk Borough's original aldermen, and became the borough's first burgess, a seat which he held intermittently until his death in 1768.²⁵

Hutchings, whose active mercantile and political career spanned five decades, was Norfolk's most enterprising merchant. He began his career in the 1720s as ship captain for Samuel Boush I, carrying local products to Barbados for rum, sugar, and molasses, and occasionally European goods re-exported from the West Indies. By 1727, Hutchings was exporting and importing on his own account, and the extent of his trade was prodigious. In the years from 1736 to 1750 Hutchings shipped a total of 3,989 barrels of pork and 44,960 bushels of corn to the West Indies, almost 19% of the pork and 24% of the corn exported by Norfolk merchants during the period. The volume of his imports from the Caribbean is even more striking. During the same period Hutchings imported 138,842 gallons of rum and 339,067 pounds of sugar, 23% and 34%, respectively, of total imports of

²⁵Cross, *County Court*, 145; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 59.

Norfolk merchants during the same period.²⁶

Like other leading Norfolk merchants, Hutchings extended his commerce to other areas. In 1740 he shipped some rum and 6,000 bushels of wheat to Lisbon. He also freighted wheat to Madeira for wine, and re-exported West Indian goods, including slaves, to Maryland for wheat, which he re-exported to Madeira or Lisbon, and bar iron which was shipped to England.²⁷

Hutchings' pre-eminent position among Norfolk merchants is attested by his forays into the tobacco trade, unusual for an independent Norfolk merchant in this period. In this he competed with upriver planter-merchants and a growing number of Scottish factors in Virginia, but shipping tobacco directly to England enabled Hutchings to import return cargoes of much desired English goods. In 1742 Hutchings imported manufactured items from Bristol which he paid for in two shipments totalling 396 hogsheads of tobacco to London in the spring of 1745.²⁸

Hutchings also diversified his interests by investment in the local shipbuilding industry, an important subsidiary to Norfolk's commerce. Early in 1737 he advertised the *Industry*, "lately built at Norfolk," to load tobacco at Bermuda Hundred on the upper James. Hutchings announced that his vessel would convey cargo to any house in London

²⁶Data compiled from Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1443-1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1726-1749. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*

the shipper desired, and he proposed that the ship could stop at Madeira to freight wine on its return voyage for any gentlemen who wished a cargo.²⁹

In addition to his private business, Hutchings profited from official contracts, facilitated no doubt by his status as borough burgess. In the early 1740s, during the preparations for King George's War, Hutchings obtained the contract for supplying the troops gathered at Norfolk for the Cartagena campaign. Governor Gooch had originally intended to procure transport from Philadelphia, but Hutchings, Samuel Boush II, and Anthony Walke, all local burgesses informed governor and council that suitable vessels and supplies could be had at Norfolk. After some wrangling Hutchings agreed to furnish 350 tons of shipping along with "hearths and coopers sufficient for dressing victuals," and water, candles, and fuel for the expedition. In 1741, in response to a petition of the local merchants complaining of Spanish privateers, Gooch appointed Hutchings to a three-man committee to procure and fit out two sloops to patrol the Virginia coast.³⁰

In the following decade, the Seven Years' War brought additional opportunity for Hutchings to profit from privateering. In September 1756, he announced his intentions of having his vessel *Industry* fitted with twenty carriage and twenty swivel guns and modified to carry

²⁹*Virginia Gazette* (Parks), 14 January 1737, 3 November 1738; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 36.

³⁰"Extracts from the Virginia Council Journals," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XV (1907-8), 127-8, XVII (1909-10), 351-2.

additional crewmen as a privateer. Needing £4,000-£5,000 in order to pay for the conversion and extra crew, Hutchings subscribed the initial £500, and advertised for interested investors. Exactly how much Hutchings profited from his official contracts is not known, but there is no doubt that he was one of Norfolk's most active merchants.³¹

Hutchings' closest rival in Norfolk's commercial and official life after 1736 was Robert Tucker II. Tucker's father and uncle, Robert Tucker I and John Tucker, natives of Barbados, were merchants in Norfolk County by the early years of the eighteenth century. A county justice from 1711 until his death in 1723, Robert I left a sizable fortune. His personal effects included a quantity of silver plate, three looking glasses, four maps, and no less than forty-six pictures. There were several sloops and flats, £450 worth of West India products, £1,368 worth of "Uropean goods now on sayle," cash amounting to £4,917 Virginia currency, as well as £1,756 sterling in the hands of the London firm of John Hyde and Company. Other items listed in the inventory of Robert Tucker I included beeswax, myrtle wax, feathers, cottonwood, salt, several anchors, and nineteen slaves.³²

John Tucker, brother of Robert Tucker I, was also a prominent merchant. As early as 1701, customs records show John Tucker and a Colonel William Wilkinson importing beef, pork and corn from North Carolina into the lower James River. John Tucker also imported European goods into

³¹*Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), 3 September, 1756.

³²"Charges Against Spotswood," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, IV (1897), 360.

Virginia, selling them in three local stores. His partners in the retail business included local merchants John Ellegood and John Phripp, two of the borough's original aldermen. The presence of £368 worth of manufactured goods in the inventory taken at John Tucker's death in 1736, is ample testimony to his commercial standing. The enumeration includes a large assortment of woolens and other fabrics, haberdashery, upholstery, cutlery, blankets, books (including a number of Bibles as well as prayer books, horn books and primers), rugs, pewter, iron ware, and brassware.³³

European goods comprised only a portion of John Tucker's mercantile interests. Like the other Norfolk merchants, Tucker engaged extensively in West Indies commerce, exporting pork, corn, and peas, with the odd barrel of tobacco, to the British islands for rum, sugar, and occasionally molasses. Among the West Indian firms with which Tucker dealt were Depeyster and Moore of Jamaica, Osmond of Barbados, and Fairchild and Company and Bishop and Denny, of unspecified islands. He owned four vessels on which he made shipments to the Caribbean: the sloops *Phoenix* and *Robert*, the shallop *Hope*, and an unnamed forty-foot sloop. The number though not the total tonnage of John Tucker's vessels compares favorably with vessel ownership

³³Norfolk County Wills and Deeds, Book H. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.], lists John Tucker's personal property. see also Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441, 1443, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1701-1736. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

among native New York merchants as late as 1764, where one firm owned thirteen vessels, but most possessed from three to six. In Philadelphia in 1769 only eleven percent of the mercantile firms owned three ships or more.³⁴

It was the next generation of the Tucker family, in the person of Robert Tucker II, son of Robert I and nephew of John Tucker, who attained a position of local prominence paralleled only by that of John Hutchings. Inheriting from both father and uncle, Robert Tucker II became not only one of Norfolk's leading merchant-magistrates, but also gained significant provincial ties through his marriage to Joanna Corbin, daughter of Gawin Corbin of King and Queen County, a member of the Virginia Council. Governor Dinwiddie himself stood as godfather to the couple's eldest son, Robert III, born in 1741. Of all the local merchants it was Tucker and Hutchings who came closest to the status of the planter aristocrats who occupied the summit of colonial Virginia's society.³⁵

Like the other Norfolk merchant-magistrates, Robert Tucker II began his mercantile career by shipping local produce to the Caribbean in return for the ubiquitous rum, sugar, and molasses. His inheritance from both father and uncle meant that Tucker did not have to serve an

³⁴Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441, Entries, Lower James River Customs District, 1701, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1442, Entries, York River Customs District, 1725-1726. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Virginia D. Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, reprint ed., (Gloucester Mass., 1964), 52; Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, 100.

³⁵"Charges Against Spotswood," 361-2.

apprenticeship at sea, and he expanded the family business considerably to become Norfolk's second-ranking man of commerce. In the years from 1736 to 1750, he served as principal for exports totalling 3,557 barrels of pork and 42,870 bushels of corn, second only to Hutchings' totals of 3,989 and 44,960. Together, the two merchants exported 36% of the pork and 46% of the corn shipped by Norfolk merchants during the fourteen years after the town became a borough.

During the same period, Tucker imported 114,415 gallons of rum and 143,167 pounds of sugar, again second in volume only to Hutchings. Together, Hutchings and Tucker brought in 42% of the rum and almost half of the sugar imported by Norfolk merchants from 1736 to 1750, telling evidence of the domination the two men exercised in Norfolk's commercial life.³⁶

During the late 1740s, Tucker, like Hutchings and other Norfolk merchants, shipped local produce to Madeira for wine. He also re-exported wine, West Indian products, and European goods to Maryland, and, diversifying in a manner similar to Hutchings' involvement in shipbuilding and repair, Tucker became owner and operator of a grist mill across the Elizabeth River from Norfolk Borough which furnished much of the shipbread for area vessels.³⁷

³⁶*Ibid.*; Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1736-1749. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

³⁷Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1736-1749. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Despite his considerable business interests, Tucker died in debt. In 1766 a fire destroyed his warehouses on the Elizabeth, and soon after, the failure of the British firm of Criss and Warren with whom he dealt made Tucker's recovery impossible. The aged merchant died shortly after the catastrophe, and his eldest son, Robert III, never recovered the family fortune.³⁸

Through his marriage to Joanna Corbin, Robert Tucker II had allied himself with one of the most important families of colonial Virginia. Of his three daughters, one married her cousin Gawin Corbin, another married Thomas Newton II, and a third married a younger Norfolk merchant Preeson Bowdoin, who arrived in the area shortly before the Revolution.³⁹

These four founding families--Boush, Newton, Hutchings, and Tucker--shared a number of characteristics. None of the four was active in local affairs before the 1670s. The founders' forebears first arrived in Virginia from Bermuda, Barbados or England around that time or later. Boush and Newton were among the initial property holders in Norfolk town after its establishment in 1682, and landed property remained the most important component of their wealth. Hutchings and Tucker probably arrived early in the eighteenth century. All became active in the West Indies trade, and were related through marriage or commerce. Samuel Boush I and George Newton married sisters; John

³⁸*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 5 September 1766, 12 September 1766, 9 July 1767.

³⁹"Charges Against Spotswood," 360-61.

Hutchings began as a ship captain for Boush, and his daughter married Thomas Newton I. Thomas Newton II married the daughter of Robert Tucker II.

The other aldermen named in the original charter, Samuel Smith, Jr., James Ivy, and Alexander Campbell, as well as four aldermen appointed before 1740--John Taylor, John Ellegood, John Phripp, and Josiah Smith--can also be counted among Norfolk Borough's original leaders. In addition, two other merchants, Cornelius Calvert, Sr., and Alexander Mackenzie, although they never attained the rank of alderman, were among the borough's leading merchants from the 1730s to mid-century. All traded extensively with the West Indies and the Wine Islands of Madeira and Teneriffe.

Like the four core families, these other first-generation borough leaders, with the possible exception of John Ellegood, were relatively recent arrivals to the Elizabeth River. Samuel Smith, Jr., an original alderman, and his kinsman Josiah Smith, appointed to the borough bench in 1739, were among Norfolk's early leaders with English connections. Samuel Smith, Sr., Samuel Jr.'s adoptive father and cousin of Josiah, had arrived in Norfolk County around 1708 from London where his father and brother were linen drapers. By the 1720s the elder Smith was shipping local produce on his own account to the Caribbean. He died in 1739, leaving land, two slaves, cash, and "£150 in European goods at prime cost" to his cousin Josiah. Another lot in Norfolk town, with storehouse and kitchen, as well as land on the southern branch of the Elizabeth and at Great Bridge he left to "my truly and well-beloved friend Samuel

Smith alias Coverley." Smith had adopted Coverley, who was perhaps related to Anne Coverley, a local tavern keeper. With the advantages bestowed upon him by the elder Smith, the younger man became borough alderman in 1736. He made several shipments of local products to the West Indies in 1740 and remained active in Norfolk's public and commercial affairs until he retired to England in 1742.⁴⁰

Samuel Smith's kinsman Josiah Smith served on both county and borough bench until his death in 1761. By that time he had risen to considerable status, possessing large property holdings in the county and borough. In 1745 he sold a large tract of land on the southern branch of the Elizabeth River. Real property listed in his inventory included a fifty-six-acre plot near the borough which Smith desired be laid off in half-acre lots, and a tract called the "old glebe land" which included two windmills for grinding grain and a bakery. Other signs that Smith had diversified his commercial involvements by the time of his death included reference to a shoemaker's shop adjoining his storehouse.⁴¹

The names of the original aldermen James Ivy and John Phripp also do not appear among area leaders until the eighteenth century. Ivy began in the 1720s as a ship

⁴⁰Norfolk County Will Book I. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Whichard, *History of Lower Tidewater*, I, 346, 363; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 36, 59.

⁴¹Norfolk County Will Book 1. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Norfolk County Deed Book 17. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

captain in the Caribbean trade. By 1736, he had left the sea and employed his brother Joseph as ship captain in voyages to the West Indies. In the years from 1736 until his death in 1752, Ivy, together with his brother Joseph and nephew William, exported a total of 1,178 barrels of pork and 39,860 bushels of corn from the lower James. Imports totalled 55,459 gallons of rum and 54,596 pounds of sugar. The Ivys also shipped quantities of wheat to Lisbon and Madeira in return for wine.⁴²

In 1738 Captain James Ivy, already alderman of the borough, gained a seat on the county bench. His brother William became a county justice in 1749. The Ivys, however, never achieved the eminence of the Boush, Newton, Hutchings, or Tucker families. At his death in 1752, James Ivy left a lot in the borough, a plantation in Norfolk County with a quantity of livestock, including hogs, cattle, and sheep, and a tract in Princess Anne County. The estate also included fifteen slaves.⁴³

Little is known about John Phripp. First appearing in the customs list in the mid-1720s, Phripp, like James Ivy, was a captain-merchant who freighted pork and corn to the West Indies. By 1736, he had come ashore and was employing others, including son John, as ship captains in the Caribbean trade. An original borough alderman, the elder

⁴²Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446-1447, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1736-1752. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁴³Norfolk County Will Book I. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Phripp was named to the county bench in 1743. His son became alderman in 1744, and Matthew Phripp, a second son or grandson, remained active commercially and politically until the Revolution.⁴⁴

Original alderman John Ellegood was of French extraction. Family tradition maintains that he was a descendant of Elias La Guard, one of the professional vintners who came to Elizabeth City County in 1633 to grow grapes and mulberries for wine and silk production. Another possibility, however--one that fits more closely the pattern of the other founding members of the borough elite--places the family's arrival at a later date, as a reaction to Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. At any rate, John's father, William Ellegood, purchased one hundred acres of land in Princess Anne County in 1704. By the time of his son John's death in 1740, the Ellegood estate amounted to three sizable county tracts as well as four town lots. There was also a sloop and a variety of smaller craft. Other personal property included a quantity of rum, and some dry goods still en route from Whitehaven at the time of his demise. Through the marriage of his daughter Rebecca to Wilson Newton, John Ellegood established one important connection. Other daughters married merchants who arrived in Norfolk in a new wave of immigration after the 1740s.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 8; Cross, *County Court*, 145.

⁴⁵"Jamieson--Ellegood--Parker," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., XIII (1904-05), 289; Jack Robinson, "The Ellegood Family," unpublished MS lent to author; Norfolk County Wills and Deeds Book I. [microfilm, Research

Three of the borough founders were of Scottish origin. The Act of Union of 1707, which joined the kingdoms of England and Scotland into Great Britain, permitted Scottish merchants, previously barred by the terms of the English Navigation Acts, to engage in trade with the colonies. There is evidence that many Scots had illegally participated in Virginia's tobacco trade before 1707, but it was not until after the Act that the major Scottish presence began to be felt on Virginia's rivers. Among the Scots who arrived in Norfolk early in the eighteenth century and found no obstacle to their becoming founding members of the borough hierarchy were John Taylor and Alexander Campbell. Another local merchant who may have come from Scotland, Alexander Mackenzie, although never a member of the borough government, must be placed among the first generation of town leaders because of his extensive commercial activities.⁴⁶

John Taylor was appointed alderman in 1736 after the death of Samuel Boush I, and served as mayor in 1739 and 1744. Together with his brother Archibald, Taylor had emigrated from Scotland sometime before the incorporation of the borough. The two jointly made regular shipments to the Caribbean during the 1740s, importing large numbers of slaves in addition to the usual cargoes of West Indian commodities. Because they maintained close ties to Scottish firms, the Taylors also participated in the tobacco trade.

Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]

⁴⁶Jacob Price, "The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707-1775," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XI (1954), 182.

Early in 1745, the brothers shipped 145 hogsheads of tobacco and some staves to London in order to pay for a quantity of dry goods imported two years earlier from London merchant James Buchanan, a partner of a Glasgow tobacco house.⁴⁷

The Taylor-Buchanan connection provided the Norfolk merchants with access to credit from other British exporters, and the Taylor brothers were Norfolk's biggest dealers in manufactured goods in the 1730s. John Taylor died in 1744, and his inventory includes a larger assortment of dry goods--from broadcloth and buttons to tools and hardware--than that of any other Norfolk merchant up to the 1750s. In addition to their sales of cloth and other household items, the Taylor brothers owned a third share in a ship chandlery in Norfolk, the remaining shares of which were divided equally between James Buchanan of London and Thomas Hartley of Whitehaven. The firm also dealt with London merchant Robert Christie.⁴⁸

The Taylors sold their valuable stock locally at both wholesale and retail, for the book credits listed in John's inventory--more than four hundred separate transactions--included sums ranging from eight pence to £62. John's total estate, including the dry goods, amounted to more than £2,200 sterling in value. The two Scottish brothers were undoubtedly Norfolk's largest dealers in manufactured goods

⁴⁷Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1745. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Norfolk County Will Book H. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁴⁸Norfolk County Will Book H. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

before 1750, and their apprentice, another Scot named George Logan, eventually established his own extensive business.⁴⁹

John Taylor's two sons, James and John, also became important business and professional men in colonial Norfolk. James, a merchant like his father, in 1761 married Alice Smith, daughter of Reverend Charles Smith, the pastor of Elizabeth River parish. John, educated in Scotland, returned to Norfolk as a physician, but also engaged in commerce. He and his brother became partners for a time with Matthew Phripp, son or grandson of borough founder John Phripp.

Another Scot whose name appears among Norfolk Borough's earliest leaders was Alexander Campbell. Little is known about Campbell, but he may have been a relation of Archibald Campbell, a Scottish physician who arrived in Norfolk in the 1750s and became active commercially and politically. Archibald Campbell's commercial activities were undoubtedly facilitated by his marriage to a sister of Henry Tucker, a prominent Bermuda merchant.

Alexander Mackenzie was another merchant-magistrate in Norfolk in the 1730s and 1740s whose origins are obscure, but who probably hailed from Scotland. Mackenzie's shipping interests were extensive in both scope and volume. In the years from the chartering of the borough until he moved to Liverpool in 1751 Mackenzie exported 638 barrels of pork and 15,917 bushels of corn. His major imports during the same period totaled 45,685 gallons of rum and more than 25,700

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

pounds of sugar.⁵⁰

Mackenzie also conducted a considerable business with the Wine Islands and Lisbon during the 1740s, shipping local foodstuffs, including substantial quantities of wheat, as well as lumber, for return cargoes of wine. On occasion he re-exported madeira and Caribbean products to Maryland, although in these ventures he sometimes encountered a sluggish market. In 1741 he shipped 5,400 bushels of wheat to Ireland.⁵¹

Associated with Mackenzie as apprentice, clerk, or partner, was the Scot Andrew Sprowle. Sprowle, who arrived in Norfolk sometime before 1733, became an independent merchant in the mid-1740s and, although he never attained any local office, became one of the area's most prominent commercial men in the years before the Revolution. Another Scot, Charles Steuart, joined Mackenzie in 1750, assuming control of the firm when Mackenzie departed, and became an independent merchant in 1754.

Another family which played an active role in Norfolk's commercial and political life was the Calverts. They, too, conformed to the pattern of origin of most of the other borough leaders. Hailing originally from Lancashire, England, the first Virginia Calvert settled in Princess Anne County in the late seventeenth century. In 1719, Captain Cornelius Calvert, the first of the line to distinguish

⁵⁰Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1445-1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1737-1744. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]

⁵¹*Ibid.*

himself locally, married Mary Saunders of Princess Anne.⁵²

Cornelius Calvert first appears in the Naval Office lists in 1726, importing sugar, rum and molasses from Antigua and exporting corn, pork, peas, candles, tar and pitch. Like many of the other Norfolk merchants of the 1720s, Cornelius acted as merchant-captain in these early shipments.⁵³

By the late 1720s, however, Cornelius, "an active, industrious man. . . [had] made a clever little estate and was enabled to leave off going to sea--though he still did business about vessels and had some concern in them." Calvert's shipments to the Caribbean during the 1740s do not equal those of either Hutchings or Tucker, but were nonetheless extensive. In the years from 1737 to 1744, Cornelius, together with his eldest son and namesake, shipped 1,015 barrels of pork and 11,003 bushels of corn to the West Indies and the Wine Islands. In return shipments father and son imported 27,455 gallons of rum, 10,596 gallons of molasses and 56,800 pounds of sugar, as well as several slaves from the West Indies and a quantity of Madeira wine.⁵⁴

⁵²"Families of Lower Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties--Calvert Family," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, V (1898), 436-7.

⁵³Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1443, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1726. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵⁴Charles B. Cross, Jr., ed., *Memoirs of Helen Calvert Maxwell Read*, (Chesapeake, Va., 1970), 23; Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1445-1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1737-1744. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

In 1729 Cornelius Calvert I was appointed Norfolk County magistrate, and he later became a member of the borough common council. When he died in 1747, his property included a dwelling house "at the upper end of Norfolk Borough and nearest to the public landing," and other lots with buildings in or just outside the borough. In addition to household furniture, the estate included ten slaves, and among the fifty books were such titles as *Pool's Annotations, History of the Bible,* and *The Whole Duty of Man.*⁵⁵

Cornelius I had eleven sons, "ten of whom lived to grow up and to become masters of ships," Jonathan, Maximilian, Cornelius, Thomas, Saunders, Joseph, William, Christopher, John, and Samuel. In addition to their mercantile involvements, like the other prominent merchants, many of the Calvert clan became active in local affairs. Maximilian and Cornelius II became aldermen in the 1760s after long service on the common council, and Saunders was chosen councilman, although he may not actually have taken a seat. Because of the size of the family, however, and the fact that Cornelius I divided his estate among all his twelve children, the Calverts did not receive the comfortable start to which some of the other second- or third-generation founders fell heir.

While the two oldest Calvert sons, Cornelius and Maximilian, were among the most important of Norfolk's pre-Revolutionary leaders, most of the others remained ship

⁵⁵Norfolk County Wills and Deeds, Book H. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]

captains throughout their mercantile career and never achieved the status of their elder brothers. Captain Jonathan Calvert, for example, died in 1744, leaving an estate of only £100. The inventory included sums for rum and wine sold to local inhabitants as well as his captain's wages of £5 per month. The will of Saunders Calvert, proved in September 1763, provided a little more for his heirs. There were four lots in Norfolk Borough, three of which had houses, some land "in Juniper Swamp," twelve slaves, two flats, and the sloop *Industry* with cargo, daily expected from Jamaica at the time of probate.⁵⁶

The careers of the first borough elite show clearly the pattern of success of the founders. Possessed of local land and/or West Indian or British commercial contacts, the ancestors of most--Boush, Newton, Hutchings, Tucker, Calvert, and perhaps Ellegood, Ivy, and Phripp--entered the Caribbean trade in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Their sons often served mercantile apprenticeships as ship captains or supercargoes in the Caribbean commerce.

Other borough founders--Smith, Campbell, Mackenzie, and Taylor--came directly from England or Scotland in the early eighteenth century with capital and a commercial network sufficient to allow their entry into the charmed circle of local commercial leadership. Success in commerce led naturally to prominence in local political affairs, and by 1736 Norfolk's leading merchants were able to define

⁵⁶Cross, ed., *Memoirs of Helen Read*, 23; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 57, 127, 133; Norfolk County Will Books H, 1. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

themselves as a commercial community possessing privileges and status distinct from Norfolk County. The charter incorporating Norfolk Borough gave the founders and their successors a near monopoly of authority in the form of the self-perpetuating offices of mayor and aldermen.

In addition, most of the borough founders held commissions as county justices. Among borough aldermen appointed before 1750, only Alexander Campbell, John Ellegood, and Edward Pugh, a kinsman of Nansemond County merchant-planter Theophilus Pugh who moved to Norfolk Borough in the 1730s, did not serve as county justices. In addition to their county authority, the borough's core families also captured important provincial offices. Samuel Boush I, Robert Tucker II, Thomas Newton I, II, and III, and John and Joseph Hutchings virtually monopolized the office of burgess for borough and county.

Concomitant with their domination of local politics, the borough merchant-magistrates, led by John Hutchings and Robert Tucker II, played the pre-eminent role in the local commerce in the years after 1736. During the 1740s, Norfolk magistrates shipped approximately twenty-three percent of the pork, twenty-two percent of the corn, and nearly half of the wheat which cleared the Capes from the lower James River district. The borough magistrates imported close to thirty percent of the rum and sugar entering the district during the same period.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Data compiled from Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446-7, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1740-1749. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

The decade of the 1740s also saw the increase of the non-Caribbean trade of Norfolk's merchant-magistrates. John Hutchings, Robert Tucker II, James and William Ivy, Cornelius Calvert I and II, Alexander Campbell, and Alexander Mackenzie all traded with the Wine Islands and southern Europe in the 1740s. In addition, they engaged in the coastwise trade, re-exporting goods from Norfolk to Maryland or North Carolina. Norfolk's leading merchants also imported quantities of valuable manufactured goods from Britain.

Unlike their counterparts in the more commercially developed Philadelphia, who tended to specialize in one geographic area, Norfolk's leading merchants maintained their varied pattern of trade throughout the colonial period. This diversity, already evident before 1750, allowed Norfolk's foremost traders to play a prominent role in the great transformation of the Atlantic economy which began after mid-century.⁵⁸

But the economic changes after mid-century also subjected the corporate, commercial oligarchy which the borough founders had created in 1736 to stresses and strains. Norfolk's population increased, with the borough growing faster than the county, and borough and county leadership, virtually identical before 1750, began to separate as commercial town and agricultural county grew apart. In addition, the borough leadership itself fell prey to a bitter dispute in which the merchant-magistrates and

⁵⁸For Philadelphia, see Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, 77.

other commercial leaders separated into two fairly well-defined hostile factions.

Changes in the Atlantic economy lay at the heart of these developments. As Virginia's non-tobacco economy grew in response to new markets for American foodstuffs, Norfolk merchants, already active in shipping such products, played a major role in the expansion. The growth of the area's commerce after 1750 saw an influx of new commercial men into the borough. Some of these new arrivals duplicated the earlier pattern of success of the borough founding families. Possessing capital and contacts similar to those of the first generation of borough leaders, these commercial *nouveaux* easily assimilated into Norfolk's higher ranks. Others, however, because they lacked the necessary ties to the founders, found it more difficult to gain positions in the borough hierarchy. As a result, there arose a group of merchants outside the established group of oligarchs who had controlled borough affairs since the 1730s.

In the face of this influx of new, aggressive merchants after 1750, the borough magistrates remained a closed group, and their control of the local commerce did not diminish. While new merchants in Norfolk captured a large portion of the growth of the local trade, the magistrates actually increased their percentage of total exports and imports from the lower James River. The years after mid-century saw fissures appear in the community of Norfolk's merchant elite as the new arrivals who were not assimilated into the ruling group grew increasingly dissatisfied with the established leaders. In the decade and a half before the Revolution--a

period of sporadic violence in Norfolk--the cracks in the structure of Norfolk's commercial and political leadership grew into full-blown rifts. These divisions played a major role in influencing loyalties in the crisis with Britain.

Chapter III
New Measures, New Men:
Commercial Expansion and Norfolk Magistrates, 1750-1770

On 24 June 1755, the day Norfolk's aldermen met to select one of their number mayor, several young men of the borough held a meeting of their own at the tavern of Richard Scott. The group, which included Archibald and James Campbell, John Ellegood, William Aitchison, Lewis Hansford, George Logan, and John Hunter, held a mock election in which they chaired one of Scott's slaves as mayor. For this blatant affront to the real mayor, Richard Kelsick, the perpetrators were made publicly to apologize, but their action marks a symbolic protest against the established elite and the methods used to perpetuate the oligarchy.¹

The career of Kelsick, the target of the mock ceremony, provides a clue to understanding the activities at Scott's tavern. Kelsick was one of several new men who appeared in the ranks of Norfolk Borough's merchant-magistrates during the 1750s. Member of a Whitehaven mercantile family associated with the firm of Peter How, Kelsick was a descendant of merchants who had captained vessels bringing European goods to the Chesapeake as early as 1701. In the

¹Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 101.

1740s Captain Richard Kelsick, the second or third of that name to trade in Virginia, established a permanent residence in Norfolk Borough. Soon after his arrival he married Elizabeth Hutchings, daughter of Norfolk's foremost merchant John Hutchings. He further cemented his local connections by forming a partnership with local magnate Thomas Newton who furnished the bills of exchange for goods imported from the Whitehaven firms of Peter How and Matthew Gale. Kelsick thus assured his entry into the charmed circle of Norfolk Borough's oligarchy. Member of the borough council by 1748, he became alderman in 1751, the final step toward his election as mayor in 1755.²

Kelsick's rise to prominence, dependent as it was on local and British trading connections as well as the crucial marriage to Elizabeth Hutchings, was perhaps too rapid for some of the newer members of the borough mercantile community, hence their activities at Scott's tavern. The only member of the dissident group who can be considered part of the established leadership was John Ellegood, son of the borough founder of that name, and he was brother-in-law of William Aitchison.

There was another dimension to the insult to Mayor Kelsick, for Aitchison, the Campbells, Logan, and Hunter were Scots, as were many of the merchants who arrived in

²Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1441, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1701. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 71, 81, 99; "Journals of the Council of Virginia in Executive Sessions, 1737-1763," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XV (1907-8), 380; Norfolk County Audit Book 1. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Norfolk in the 1740s and 1750s. Some of these new arrivals represented powerful Scottish tobacco-buying firms; others began their commercial careers as associates of the Scots among the borough founders, but, except for Aitchison, most lacked significant familial connections to the borough founders. Scottish merchants who arrived in Norfolk after 1750 therefore found it difficult to enter the charmed circle of the borough elite. They reacted by forming their own close-knit clique which clashed with the established group and their allies in the 1760s.

The entrance of new men into Norfolk's commercial ranks in the 1750s was one of a number of significant changes local merchants witnessed after mid-century. The most visible change was a growth in population and area of Norfolk Borough. This increase was accompanied by advances in the authority of the borough magistrates. Another manifestation of Norfolk's expansion was the establishment of the town of Portsmouth across the Elizabeth River from the borough, as local merchants filled the limited borough waterfront and spread along both banks of the river.

All these changes--the influx of new merchants, population growth, the physical expansion of the borough and the increase in authority of its magistrates, and the founding of Portsmouth--had their roots in an important economic transformation. The decade and a half after 1750 saw a fundamental change in Virginia's economy. While tobacco remained the staple crop of the province and continued to generate most of Virginia's economic activity, many Virginia and Maryland planters began to grow more

grain. This development, accelerating in the 1760s, had by the time of the Revolution elevated wheat and corn near the status of "second staple." This development possessed important consequences for the development of Norfolk, where the leading merchants had participated in the grain trade for many years.³

There were a number of reasons for the growth of the Chesapeake grain trade after 1750. Tobacco plants consumed large amounts of nitrogen and potash, and Chesapeake farmers had long faced the problem of soil exhaustion caused by extensive planting of tobacco. Other soil disorders, such as root-rot, fungi, and similar harmful micro-organisms, also flourished under continued replantings of the staple.⁴

The tobacco farmer's normal response to the playing out of the soil from which he drew his livelihood was to move on, and move again, in search of more productive farmland to the west. By the 1740s and 1750s this westward movement,

³The expansion of wheat cultivation in colonial Virginia and Maryland is delineated in Malcolm Cameron Clark, "The Coastwise and Caribbean Trade of the Chesapeake Bay, 1696-1776," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1970); Paul G. E. Clemens, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980); David C. Klingaman, *Colonial Virginia's Coastwise and Grain Trade*, (New York, 1975) [Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967]; Klingaman, "The Significance of Grain in the Development of the Tobacco Colonies," *Journal of Economic History*, XXIX (1969), 268-278; and Gaspare John Saladino, "The Maryland and Virginia Wheat Trade from Its Beginnings to the American Revolution," (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1960). See also Peter V. Bergstrom, "Markets and Merchants: Economic Diversification in Colonial Virginia, 1700-1775," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1980).

⁴Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860*, (Urbana, Ill., 1926), 32.

fairly steady since the early years of the eighteenth century, had grown to flood proportions, as "such numbers of people transplanted themselves as would seem almost incredible to any except such as have had opportunity of knowing it from observation or credible information."⁵

As tobacco cultivation moved westward with the spread of settlement, the worn-out lands in the tidewater were given over to other crops. Most common in the early period was corn, mainstay of domestic food consumption throughout the colonial period. But wheat, beef, and pork were also produced in increasing quantities in many eastern fields where tobacco could no longer be farmed profitably. Farmers in Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties, where tobacco cultivation never reached great proportions, had grown corn from earliest settlement, and local merchants had shipped more corn than tobacco from the beginning of the area's commerce in the seventeenth century.⁶

Despite its long-term significance for Virginia's agriculture, soil exhaustion proved less important in the eighteenth-century expansion of Virginia's grain trade than the growth of overseas markets. By mid-century, advances in population and economic specialization in the Atlantic world, combined with European crop shortages, increased the demand for American grain. In the West Indies, planters

⁵*Ibid.*, 63, quoting Ann Maury, *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family*, (New York, 1872), 431.

⁶Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 35, 66; Carville V. Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "Staple Crops and Urban Development in the Eighteenth-Century South," *Perspectives in American History*, X (1976), 27.

began importing more slaves in an effort to expand sugar production. More slaves growing more sugar meant more mouths to feed and fewer island foodstuffs to feed them. In Europe, beginning in the 1750s, population growth and short harvests also created a demand for American wheat and flour. Poland, known as Europe's granary in the seventeenth century, began a long struggle with Russia in the 1730s which disrupted its agriculture. Poor harvests plagued Spain and Portugal, making southern Europe a regular market for American grain. England too, although still a net exporter of grain in this period, stood poised at the beginning of the industrial revolution, and by the 1760s had begun to import wheat and corn from its American colonies to supply shortfalls in its exports.⁷

By late in that decade, exports of Virginia wheat, although far behind those of Pennsylvania, the leading wheat exporting colony, were approaching New York's. Pennsylvania on the average shipped the equivalent of one and a half million bushels per year in combined wheat and flour exports during the years from 1768-72. Comparable figures for New York were 529,000 bushels; Virginia exported 403,300

⁷Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, reprint ed., 2 vols., (Gloucester, Mass., 1958), I, 164-5; Saladino, "Maryland and Virginia Wheat Trade," 91-101, 123-133; Earle and Hoffman, "Staple Crops," 28-9. For a corrective to Craven's emphasis of the importance of soil exhaustion in the eighteenth century Chesapeake, see Carville Earle, *The Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System: All Hallow's Parish, Maryland, 1650-1783*, (Chicago, 1975), 216-7. Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 99-100, also maintains that market conditions formed the most important factor in determining whether a planter grew tobacco or switched to another crop.

bushels. In Indian corn, however, Virginia clearly led the field. Corn exports from the Old Dominion averaged 566,600 bushels a year for the same period, while combined average annual corn exports for New York and Pennsylvania amounted to a little less than 150,000.⁸

Norfolk shippers, exporting quantities of grain from their earliest commercial activities, captured the largest portion of the increase in Virginia's grain trade. During the 1760s and 1770s the Elizabeth River became the principal grain exporting site of Virginia. Governor Fauquier noted in 1763 that Norfolk had "almost wholly [sic] engrossed [Virginia's] West-India and Grain Trade." Neil Jamieson, the Scottish merchant whom contemporaries recognized as the "complete master of trade in the bay," and who engaged heavily in the wheat trade, wrote in the 1770s, "the greatest portion of the wheat and corn as well as some of the tobacco and naval stores" loaded at Norfolk. During the Revolution, when Jamieson remained loyal to Britain but was suspected of selling wheat to Americans, he wrote from New York that the location of the town on the Elizabeth was responsible for the growth of local grain cultivation. Demand for grain by Norfolk's shippers provided the key to the production of the wheat along the James River.⁹

⁸Klingaman, *Coastwise and Grain Trade*, 31-2.

⁹Saladino, "Maryland and Virginia Wheat Trade," 30; Enclosure to Lieutenant Governor Francis Fauquier to the Board of Trade, 30 January 1763, in George Reese, ed., *The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, 1758-1768*, 3 vols., (Charlottesville, Va., 1980), II, 1012; Neil Jamieson to [?], n.d., Neil Jamieson to Robert Alexander, 11 May 1781, Neil Jamieson Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg,

Grain was particularly important to Norfolk's growth because of the differences from tobacco in processing and marketing. Because of its greater bulk, grain required more transport and storage facilities than tobacco. Storing and shipping wheat and flour also required greater care than tobacco. If improperly stored or loaded, wheat had a tendency to "heat" and spoil. Norfolk merchant John Riddell, shipping wheat to his New York cousin John Watts, was chided for neglecting its loading. The wheat, if left damp, would spoil or overheat, and on one occasion Watts charged that "the shipping [was] too little attended to, to preserve it during the course of a long voyage."¹⁰

Wheat and corn also demanded more shipping--up to ten times more tonnage than tobacco. It is thus no surprise that John Hutchings, Norfolk's most enterprising merchant of the 1740s who shipped much of the wheat and corn from the lower James River, was also involved in shipbuilding. Milling was another subsidiary activity associated with grain cultivation, and Robert Tucker II, the area's second ranking merchant of the 1740s, owned several local mills, one of which included a sizable bakery. Although wheat grown around Norfolk was generally judged to be of poor quality, Tucker's mill and bakery furnished much of the shipbread which went to provision local vessels, and shippers began exporting greater quantities of flour and

Williamsburg, Va.]; O'Mara, *Historical Geography*, 105.

¹⁰Saladino, "Maryland and Virginia Wheat Trade," 34-5; Virginia D. Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, reprint ed., (Gloucester, Mass., 1964), 208, quoting *Letter Book of John Watts*, New York Historical Society Collections, LXI (1928), 322.

bread in the 1750s.¹¹

Much of the wheat which Norfolk merchants exported was purchased from Maryland or Eastern Shore farmers. Local merchant-magistrates such as John Hutchings, James Ivy, Alexander Mackenzie, and Thomas Newton, occasionally imported wheat from Maryland during the 1740s. It was corn, however, which formed the bulk of exports from Norfolk from the earliest period. Total exports of corn from the lower James River district during the 1740s amounted to well over half a million bushels while total wheat exports during the same period came to less than 60,000 bushels, or the approximate yearly average for corn.¹²

Beginning in 1750, exports of corn from the lower James River increased immensely. Although there are some gaps in the data, a rough analysis of the customs lists for the district reveals that more than one and a quarter million bushels of corn cleared the district in the years from 1750 to 1760. During the following decade, for which the data is less consistent, the volume of corn that cleared the lower

¹¹Saladino, "Maryland and Virginia Wheat Trade," 19; Earle and Hoffman, "Staple Crops," 44; Norfolk County Will Book, 1, Will of Joseph Johnson, baker, proved January, 1756. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. Johnson left most of his estate (probably consisting in the main of debts) to Robert Tucker of Norfolk Borough, "my friend, merchant."

¹²Data compiled from Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1442-1446, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1740-1749. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. Data for some years is incomplete, and the figures for wheat do not include exports of flour which amounted only to a small percentage of total grain exported before 1750.

James was similar.¹³

Exports of wheat also increased after 1750. Shipped in its unrefined form, wheat exports amounted to almost 100,000 bushels for the decade, almost double the figure for the previous ten years. The figures for wheat tell only part of the story, however, for merchants began increasingly to ship bread and flour from the district in the 1750s.¹⁴

Although the Caribbean continued as Norfolk's most significant trading partner up to the Revolution, an increasing volume of the corn, wheat, and flour shipped in the 1750s and 1760s went to the island of Madeira or Lisbon. Merchant-burgess Robert Tucker II was particularly fond of this trade. After 1750, while most local merchants who traded with the Wine Islands or southern Europe sent only occasional cargoes, nearly one-third of Tucker's clearances from the district went to Madeira or Lisbon.¹⁵

The expansion of Virginia's grain trade thus influenced Norfolk's development by providing important linkages in storing, shipping, and processing the new staples. Norfolk's population growth as well as the expansion of the borough's boundaries and authority can all be associated with the growth of the Virginia grain trade.¹⁶

¹³*Ibid.*, figures collated by Peter C. Stewart.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1750-1759. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. Late in 1757, for example, of thirty-seven total clearances, eleven vessels carried a quantity of bread and or flour.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Earle and Hoffmann, "Staple Crops, 35-6, 39-44.

The number of inhabitants in both borough and county had grown slowly since the grant of the borough charter in 1736. In 1735 county tithables totaled 1,584, with growth in the previous four years averaging just under three percent per year. By 1749, there were 2,007 tithables reported at the vestry meeting. This figure represents an increase over 1735 of 423, or 26.7 percent growth over the fourteen years (an average of less than two percent per year). The actual population, however, undoubtedly grew at a greater rate, for in 1738 the Virginia legislature exempted employed mariners from public, county, and parish levies, and Norfolk was home to increasing numbers of seamen.¹⁷

In the years from 1749 to 1761, when the original Elizabeth River parish was divided (itself a mark of the increase in the area's population), the number of tithables grew from 2,007 to 3,031. This advance represents an increase of more than fifty percent, or an average of four and a quarter percent per year. By 1765, the combined total

¹⁷Elizabeth River Parish Vestry Book, 1749-1761. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. Norfolk population figures in this and the following paragraph based on Elizabeth B. and W. Bruce Wingo, comps., *Norfolk County, Virginia Tithables, 1730-1750*, (Chesapeake, Va., 1979), Elizabeth B. Wingo, comp., *Norfolk County, Virginia Tithables, 1751-1765*, (Chesapeake, Va., 1981), and Elizabeth B. and W. Bruce Wingo, comps., *Norfolk County, Virginia Tithables, 1766-1780*, (Chesapeake, Va., 1985); W. W. Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia . . .*, 13 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1819-1823), V, 36. Evarts B. Greene and Virginia Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790*, (New York, 1932), estimate that tithables represented about one-third of the total population in the southern colonies. Norfolk, with its large population of seamen, probably contained more inhabitants per tithable than the average.

for borough and county had reached 3,631, a growth of eighty percent from 1749 (an average of over five percent per year), and in 1771, the last year for which a complete list exists, the number of Norfolk County tithables was 4,238, an increase of seventeen percent or about three and a half percent per year for the previous five years. Growth continued to the Revolution. By the outbreak of the war with Britain, Thomas Jefferson estimated that the borough alone contained 6,000 inhabitants.¹⁸

As Jefferson's estimate illustrates, most of the area's population growth was concentrated in the borough. Because local enumerators employed different geographic divisions in preparing the lists over the years, it is impossible to determine exactly what proportion of county residents inhabited the borough, but in 1771 almost twenty-five percent of the county's tithables lived in Norfolk Borough, which had itself been divided into two precincts in 1765, a further sign of town growth.¹⁹

Norfolk's growth after 1750 also saw the gradual divergence of borough and county leadership. From the establishment of the borough in 1736 to mid-century, most of the borough magistrates held corresponding offices in the county. Sixteen of the nineteen borough aldermen appointed

¹⁸Vestry Book, 1749-1761, Wingo and Wingo, comps., *Norfolk County Tithables, 1730-1750*, Wingo, comp., *Norfolk County Tithables, 1751-1765*, and Wingo and Wingo, comps., *Norfolk County Tithables, 1766-1780*; Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, reprint ed., (New York, 1964), 103.

¹⁹Wingo and Wingo, comps., *Norfolk County Tithables, 1766-1780*.

before 1750 were also county magistrates. But as the town's growth produced a different set of concerns--problems associated with a growing commercial community--fewer of the borough leaders held dual posts. Of the eleven aldermen appointed in the borough after 1750, only four served as justices for Norfolk County.²⁰

As the borough grew so did the authority of its magistrates, and most of the increase in the jurisdiction of the borough corporation came at the expense of the county bench. Before the 1750s the borough leaders had found it difficult to achieve any aggrandizement of their authority. In 1742, for example, they asked the House of Burgesses to grant them the same authority as the Hustings Court of Williamsburg, which exercised jurisdiction over a wider range of cases. They also desired the repeal of the statute exempting mariners from local levies, believing that seamen, "being housekeepers in this colony," should be obliged to pay public, county, and parish levies. The committee to which the petition was assigned found it reasonable, but the House disagreed, and tabled the motion.²¹

The borough corporation continued efforts to enlarge its powers. In 1749 the mayor, recorder, and aldermen presented another petition to the House of Burgesses to increase their authority. Again the legislature rejected their request, after receiving a counter petition from the

²⁰Brent Tarter, ed. *Order Book, passim*; Charles B. Cross, Jr., *The County Court, 1637-1904: Norfolk County, Virginia*, (Portsmouth, Va., 1964), 145.

²¹H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journal of the House of Burgesses, 1742-9*, (Richmond, Va., 1909), 18-19.

county justices, who were beginning to express their resentment of the borough magistrates.²²

In the following decade borough leaders were more successful in augmenting their powers at the expense of the county. One of the most important functions of local government in colonial Virginia was the licensing and regulation of taverns. Along with the courthouse, taverns were the communal loci of colonial town and county, serving as centers for gossip, exchange of news, and places transaction of business. Norfolk's ordinaries also provided strong drink for the increasing numbers of laborers and seamen, and borough and county leaders saw tavern regulation as crucial to the maintenance of local order. Until mid-century the county court possessed the sole authority to license ordinaries both within and outside town limits. Borough leaders contented themselves with ordinances controlling the movements of laborers and apprentices.

In 1736, for example, the Common Hall resolved "that no Publick House keeper suffer any day Labourer any person under Age or Apprentice to Game in their house." Underlining the correlation of taverns and local order, the borough leaders also inserted a clause "for the discovering of all Vagrants and Idle persons and the better restraining them."²³

This law, one of the first the borough government enacted, was apparently not enough to eliminate the problems

²²*Ibid.*, 364-5, 373.

²³Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 47.

associated with the local taverns, and in 1738, still troubled by sales of liquor "to the meaner Sort of People[,] Servants and Slaves without license," the common council prohibited sales of less than a gallon of rum or other liquor at a time. In 1746, the council required borough rum retailers to purchase a license from the mayor. But taverns already licensed by the county court were exempt. Not until 1752 did the assembly finally give the borough magistrates sole power to grant licenses for ordinaries within borough limits. The statute took from the county justices not only a portion of their authority, but a lucrative source of income.²⁴

Another major concern of local government, closely related to tavern regulation, was the maintenance of public order. Norfolk's growing numbers of black and white seamen and laborers caused disturbances which elicited consternation among borough leaders. An ordinance of 1740 provided a fine for owners of slaves found on the streets after ten o'clock at night. The following year, the authorities charged, "great Abuses daily arise from the frequent Practice of Sundry Inhabitants Selling and Retailing of Rum in this Borough. . . Not only to Indolent and Idle Persons, but also to Negro's [sic], [such that] the Negro's are become incourigible [sic]." The town re-instituted a watch, which had fallen into disuse, and raised the penalty for allowing a slave to roam unauthorized.²⁵

²⁴*Ibid.*, 51, 68.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 52-3, 55-7.

In 1742 borough leaders enacted an ordinance "for the preventing the Unlawful and Tumultuous meeting of Negro's upon Sundays, Holydays, etc." And in 1744, with "Sundry Robberys, Insults and Disturbances frequently happening," the town again revived the watch which had apparently lapsed a second time, and enjoined the town constable to pay particular attention "to dispose or apprehend any Negro's that shall Assemble or be tumultuous."²⁶

On the latter occasion, the provincial government, responding to an incident involving a Royal Navy vessel, intervened to help promote peace in the borough. The Virginia Council ordered borough magistrates to appoint a constable to direct the watch, and further enjoined Norfolk's aldermen to discharge their duty to preserve the peace and to render all necessary assistance to ships of the Royal Navy stationed in the Elizabeth River.²⁷

The major problem Norfolk's leaders faced in their attempts to preserve order was a lack of funds to pay for the night watch. Repeatedly they instituted a watch, only to see it cease operations when the watchmen were not paid. It was not until 1763 that the Virginia Assembly granted the corporation the power to assess a tax on the borough freeholders to defray the costs of a watch and to erect lamps on the town streets.²⁸

²⁶*Ibid.*, 59, 62-3.

²⁷Benjamin J. Hillman, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 6 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1966), V, 161, quoted in Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 63, n. 7.

²⁸Hening, ed., *Statutes*, VII, 654-5, reprinted in Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 135-6.

The assembly further increased the jurisdiction of the corporation court in 1765, and again the additional powers came at the expense of the county court. By its charter the borough court held jurisdiction only in civil cases involving less than £20; the county justices retained judgement in all criminal cases and civil suits of more than £20. By the 1760s, however, the county court was proving too slow in deciding the growing number of cases before it, and borough magistrates complained to the assembly of the clogged court. Chief among borough leaders' concerns was their inability to regulate servants and apprentices and prosecute breaches of the peace within the borough. The legislature responded by granting the aldermen jurisdiction over all suits in chancery, all personal suits, and empowered them to hear complaints of masters, servants, and apprentices within the borough. From 1761 until the Revolution, Norfolk's Hustings court saw a steady increase in the number of cases brought before it.²⁹

Borough and county continued to grow apart. The Act of Assembly of 1752, while expanding the authority of the borough government, had also empowered county and borough leaders to establish a school and hire a schoolmaster. The school was built, but the rival magistrates could not agree on anything else. In 1762, therefore, because "of the variety of opinions frequently happening between the justices of courts and the mayor, etc. of the borough," the

²⁹Hening, ed., *Statutes*, VIII, 153-4; Norfolk Borough Hustings Court Order Books, 1-3. [microfilm, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.].

assembly gave the borough officials the sole right to choose the teacher and set the laws governing the school.³⁰

Another important function of the town government was its regulation of the local economy, and, as an indication of Norfolk's maturing economy, by the late 1750s the borough magistrates had received additional powers to control local business. The 1736 charter had given the borough government authority to hold three markets each week, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Accordingly, at one of the first meetings of the new corporation, the Common Hall ordered the erection of a town market house. The statute required that no meat--beef, pork, veal, mutton, or lamb--be sold anywhere else within the borough. The corporation also fixed a tax on every portion of meat sold at the market house, and subsequent ordinances set the assize, or weight, of a loaf of bread, and regulated prices of beef, veal, mutton, lamb, shoat, geese, turkey, fowl, duck eggs, and butter. By 1757 the town had grown to the extent that additional market days were necessary, and the assembly granted Norfolk's corporation the power to hold markets at any time and "to set such toll on all such cattle, goods, wares and merchandizes, and other commodities as shall be sold in the said markets, as they shall think reasonable."³¹

The borough expanded geographically in this period, a growth which also came at the county's expense. In 1761 the town's limits were extended, as "people living adjacent to

³⁰Hening, ed., *Statutes*, VII, 510-11.

³¹*Ibid.*, VII, 136-7; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 46-8, 62, 78, 106-108, 137.

the borough have laid out their property into lots and streets and many people [were] daily going to live there." The borough magistrates--mayor, recorder and aldermen--had asked for and received the right to annex the area. As another mark of the borough's commercial advance, the 1761 act which provided for the expansion of the borough also empowered a group of local merchants called the Town Point Company to collect subscriptions for building a public wharf and storage facilities on the "Fort land" just west of the town.³² Further indication of growth came in the same year in an act dividing the Elizabeth River parish. Two chapels which had previously served the far-flung county residents now became full-fledged parishes, along with the original parish in the town, to accommodate the growing population of borough and county.³³

The establishment of the town of Portsmouth, site of one of the new parishes, was perhaps the greatest indication of the effects of the commercial changes of mid-century. The founder was merchant William Crawford, who, though not a member of the borough elite, was a vestryman of the Elizabeth River parish and one of the county's most important landholders. In 1752 he divided a sixty-five acre parcel of land on the south side of the Elizabeth River into 122 lots, allowing space for streets, a courthouse, market, and public landings. The Virginia assembly recognized the

³²Hening, ed., *Statutes*, VII, 433-7.

³³Hening, ed., *Statutes*, VII, 416-8; Elizabeth River Parish Vestry Book, 1749-1761. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

tract as the town of Portsmouth. Crawford sold most of the property in the next several years.³⁴

Portsmouth was never granted the independent status of city like Norfolk and Williamsburg. The county courthouse remained in the borough across the river until after the Revolution. Nonetheless, Portsmouth long before grew to rival Norfolk as a commercial center. Its location on the south side of the Elizabeth River featured most of the same advantages for trade and commerce as the borough possessed. As an added attraction, in the years immediately following its founding, rents in Portsmouth generally amounted to less than half those in the borough. Portsmouth became an important destination for the overland trade in pork, corn and wheat from North Carolina. Soon stores and warehouses lined both banks of the Elizabeth River.³⁵

Many established borough merchants invested in Portsmouth lots, including such members of first-generation families as Robert Tucker and Wilson Newton. The latter opened a store in Portsmouth operated by Alexander Bruce, a borough "grocer and retailer." Other merchants among the early Portsmouth lot-holders included Christopher Perkins, Francis Miller, Andrew Duche, Edward Hack Moseley, and Charles Steuart. Edward Archer, Edward Champion Travis, and

³⁴Hening, ed., *Statutes*, VI, 265-6.

³⁵*Ibid.*, VI, 266; John W. Reys, *Tidewater Towns: City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland*, (Charlottesville, Va., 1972), 216, 218; Norfolk County Deed Book 17. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Alexander Ross also possessed establishments in the town.³⁶

As Norfolk Borough grew and trade developed on the Elizabeth River from the 1750s to the Revolution, there was an influx of young, aggressive merchants, bent on making a profit.³⁷ One newcomer, Scottish merchant Charles Steuart, described the area's advantages in the early 1750s to a West Indian merchant who was pondering relocation. Town and county were healthy "and free from those epidemical distempers which formerly prevailed." Taxes remained moderate, the assessment in 1750 amounting to about twenty-five shillings per tithable. There was a duty of five percent on imported slaves for sale, but bondsmen and women brought in for one's own use were exempt from any impost. Land could be purchased by the acre on easy terms, and although there was a shortage of housing and rents were high within Norfolk Borough, Steuart himself occupied a commodious eight-room house with large cellars and a sizable garden. His establishment included offices, a wharf, a cooper's shop, and warehouses.

The chief burden which the local merchant faced, according to Steuart, was a "most severe iniquitous" duty on rum. The four-shilling per gallon charge was bad enough; what bothered Steuart more was the recent removal of the twenty-five percent allowance for leakage, necessitated by the need for funds to rebuild the provincial capitol in Williamsburg which had recently burned. All in all,

³⁶Norfolk County Deed Book 16. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

³⁷Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 11-12.

however, Steuart concluded that Norfolk was a good place for an aspiring merchant to locate in.³⁸

Steuart was himself a recent arrival to the Elizabeth River, having immigrated from Scotland around 1750. In that year he joined the commercial firm of borough founder Alexander Mackenzie as partner and took over sole operation when Mackenzie retired to England in 1752. By 1754 the two had dissolved the firm and Steuart went into business on his own.

Charles Steuart was one of the more enterprising of the new arrivals to Norfolk's commercial community after mid-century. In addition to engaging in the normal Caribbean trade, in 1751 Steuart joined twenty-seven of Virginia's leading merchants and planters in an ambitious attempt to promote the whaling industry in Virginia. Dubbing themselves the Cape Cod Company, the group included local merchants John Hutchings and Robert Tucker, as well as David Meade, a merchant-planter and burgess from Nansemond County, and John Blair, burgess from Williamsburg and later president of the governor's council. The Virginians contracted with the Boston firm Mackay and Company to fit out a whaling vessel, aptly dubbed the *Experiment*.

On its maiden voyage the *Experiment* captured "a valuable whale," and three more were "struck but lost." The *Virginia Gazette* exuberantly reported the result of the voyage, and the editor went on to express the hope that the

³⁸Charles Steuart to Walter Tullideph, 23 September 1751, Charles Steuart Letterbooks. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

success of the *Experiment* would inspire others to attempt further "profitable undertakings hitherto neglected." The Virginia whaler made a second voyage in June, and on this occasion returned to the Chesapeake with three whales and part of a fourth which the ship had taken in company with another vessel.³⁹

By early the following year, the Virginians in the vessel's crew had apparently become sufficiently proficient for the Cape Cod whalers to return to the north. Steuart, along with his local partners, recognized an opportunity to do some independent business with Massachusetts and wrote to Mackay proposing to ship some Virginia goods north in the vessel carrying the New Englanders home. For the return cargo, Steuart asked Mackay to purchase molasses, "it being now in great demand here." If molasses was too expensive at Boston, Steuart told Mackay to purchase the cargo at Rhode Island. He concluded his proposal by emphasizing the separate status of this venture: "We act in this as a private company and not as a committee of the Cape Company, therefore please make a separate account of this." As for the whaler, the *Experiment* continued to ply the waters off Virginia, bringing in three more whales in early 1752. By the middle years of the decade, however, the whaling venture had folded.⁴⁰

³⁹*Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), 9 May, 13 June, 1751.

⁴⁰Charles Steuart, et al., to Mackay and Company, 10 July 1751, Charles Steuart Letterbooks. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; *Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), 24 April 1752; "Diary of John Blair," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., VIII (1899-1900), 5.

Charles Steuart was only one of many merchants who came to Norfolk during the expansion of the 1750s. Several of these new arrivals were almost immediately successful in attaining positions on the borough bench. In addition to Richard Kelsick, other new arrivals George Abyvon, Durham Hall, and Christopher Perkins all became aldermen by the late 1740s or early 1750s. Other merchants who rose to prominence after mid-century, such as William Aitchison, Paul Loyall, Charles Thomas, and Lewis Hansford, gained seats on the borough bench about a decade after their entry in Norfolk's commercial life. Scottish merchants James Parker, Neil Jamieson, John Hunter, and Andrew Sprowle became substantial men of business in the 1750s but never attained the position of alderman. These men and others joined the second generation of the borough's leading families, scions of the Boush, Newton, Calvert, Phripp, Hutchings, Ivy, and Tucker families, who began their commercial careers in the late 1740s and rose to varying degrees of prominence.

George Abyvon was one of the new arrivals who attained the rank of alderman around mid-century. Abyvon hailed from Barbados, one of the favorite destinations of Norfolk's West Indian shippers. His mother, born Elizabeth Emperor, came from one of Norfolk County's early families of distinction; in the 1650s a Richard Emperor had served as county sheriff. In the early 1740s, Elizabeth Emperor, by this time a widow living in Barbados, deeded her Norfolk County property with all the adjoining land and buildings to her son George, who arrived in Norfolk in 1741 or 1742. Abyvon's local and West

Indian connection made him suitable for public office, and he was chosen to the borough common council in 1747. The following year he began exporting local products to the Caribbean and was named alderman in 1751. Despite his quick rise to borough office, Abyvon's commercial activities never approached those of the most important merchant-magistrates of the earlier decade.⁴¹

Durham Hall was another merchant who came to the area in the 1740s and reached the highest rank in the borough by the end of the decade. Hailing from Bermuda, where he served as factor for John Butterfield "of the Pembroke Tribe" of that island, Hall emigrated to Virginia in the early 1740s, staked with a bond of £1,000 sterling from his employer. John Hutchings, whose family also had been of the "Pembroke Tribe," undoubtedly facilitated Hall's entry into Norfolk's commercial community.⁴²

Hall's name first appears in the 1742 customs lists as partner in a company exporting pork and corn to the West Indies. Like founding merchant-magistrates of the borough such as John Hutchings, Alexander Mackenzie, and James Ivy, Hall recognized the possibilities of freighting wine from Madeira. In 1745 he served as principal Norfolk participant in a shared venture to the Wine Island. He and his partners

⁴¹Norfolk County Deed Book 13. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 70, 80; Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446-1447, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1748-1762. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁴²Norfolk County Wills and Deeds Book H. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

advertised the ship *Friendship*, "a prime sailer, well-manned and fitted, at Norfolk," commanded by Captain Joseph Ivy, to sail for Madeira. Others involved in the voyage were Colonel Nathaniel Harrison of Brandon on the upper James River and James Mitchell of Yorktown.⁴³

Hall's mercantile connections undoubtedly facilitated his rapid rise to a position among the elite of both borough and county. Elected common councilman in 1744, by 1749 he had attained a seat on both borough and county bench. The following year Hall was chosen mayor of the borough.⁴⁴

Although enjoying political success, Hall proved unfortunate in business. In May 1748, during the War of the Austrian Succession, a Spanish privateer in the Chesapeake Bay boldly attacked one of Hall's vessels. The Norfolk merchant had recently imported a sizable quantity of rum from the West Indies, most of which he had conveyed to the Rappahannock River to be sold. As his vessel returned to the Elizabeth River, the Spaniard struck, taking the proceeds of the sale of the rum, which were not insured, and some of the vessel's rigging. The loss amounted to more than £900, and Hall no doubt took small comfort from the cancelling of the bond he had given for the duty on the rum.⁴⁵

⁴³Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1742. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), 12 December, 1745.

⁴⁴Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 61, 75, 77.

⁴⁵H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journal of the House of Burgesses 1748*, (Richmond, Va., 1909), 323-4, 329.

Mayor Hall enjoyed scant time at the pinnacle of Norfolk's elite. He died in 1751, leaving among his property several vessels, only one of which, the "new brig *William*," he owned outright. Hall's executors, Robert Tucker and Christopher Perkins, offered the sloop *Harry*, in which Hall maintained a five-twelfths interest, for freight to the West Indies or elsewhere. Another sloop, the 65-ton *Molly*, in which Hall possessed a two-thirds share, was sold at public auction in Norfolk, along with the hull of a new 35-ton sloop on the stocks. Real property included a lot in Norfolk Borough as well as a 300-acre tract in Lunenburg County. The estate also included the usual quantities of wine and West India products. The total of Hall's property was £2,776, and the list of credits on the books, amounting to over £2,000, included a veritable who's who of the Norfolk merchant community. Hall had participated in ventures with or sold goods to many of Norfolk's established merchants such as Samuel Boush Sr., John Hutchings, John Phripp, and Wilson Newton. Among the younger merchants with whom he dealt were Christopher Perkins, Richard Kelsick, John and Paul Loyall, Charles Steuart, and the firm of Boyd and Aitchison.⁴⁶

Christopher Perkins, one of the executors of Durham Hall's will, was another relatively new arrival to the Elizabeth River mercantile community. Perkins was a member of an English mercantile family, probably from Durham

⁴⁶*Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), 7 February, 9 May, 22 June, 1751; Norfolk County Will Book I. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

County, England. His name first appears on the customs lists in 1747, as principal owner of a cargo of prize sugar and molasses taken in a French vessel. Chosen councilman in 1748, Perkins became an alderman and county magistrate two years later and served as borough mayor in 1752 and again in 1761. In 1764, however, Perkins moved to London.⁴⁷

Like Perkins, merchants Charles Thomas and Lewis Hansford, both of whom became aldermen in the early 1760s, probably came from England. Thomas possessed ties to an English mercantile house, for his initial appearance on the customs lists for the lower James River in the early 1750s shows him importing European goods from Whitehaven and London. Thomas gained a seat on the borough bench in 1761 and served until his death after the Revolution. Hansford may have been related to a London banking family of that name who handled the army payroll in Virginia during the Seven Years' War. He undoubtedly owed a portion of his success in Norfolk to his marriage to Ann Taylor, daughter of the borough founding family of that name. Although one of the leaders of the insult to the mayor in 1755, Hansford himself became alderman in 1762 and served as mayor in 1764-1765.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries, Lower James River Customs District, 1747. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 71, 79, 87, 129, 139; Norfolk County Deed Book 24. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁴⁸Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1754. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Rogers Dey Whichard, *The History of Lower Tidewater, Virginia*, 3 vols., (New York, 1959), I, 40; Norfolk County

There were other native English merchants who arrived in the area after mid-century. One of these was William Orange, "bred to the sea," who had joined the Royal Navy in 1740. When his duties brought him to Virginia he married in 1743 and settled in Norfolk, where commercial success elevated him to the position of borough common councilman by 1750. Although by the Revolution Orange's holdings had grown to twenty-one dwellings, eleven warehouses, three sheds, and "a very large and valuable wharf," the former naval man never attained the rank of alderman.⁴⁹

Ship captain Humphrey Roberts was another native Englishman who entered the lower James River in 1755 with a cargo of English goods and settled down to establish a store in Portsmouth. Roberts attained a seat on the county bench by the eve of the Revolution. Brothers Matthew and Daniel Rothery were also natives of England who became active traders in Norfolk by the late 1740s. Matthew married Mary, daughter of transplanted Englishman William Orange, and Daniel joined the common council in 1758.⁵⁰

Other new arrivals from England came from English outports which had long maintained trading ties with the

Deed Book 24. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 122, 140, 145.

⁴⁹"Transcript of the MS Books and Papers of the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses. . . " P.R.O., T.O. 1/549. [Loyalist Transcripts, New York Public Library]. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Virginia Legislative Petitions (Norfolk Borough), Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

⁵⁰Loyalist Transcripts. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

lower James River. Following the earlier example of Richard Kelsick, brothers John and Jonathan Eilbeck came to Norfolk from Whitehaven in 1767, bringing £2,000 worth of manufactured goods. The Eilbecks maintained close ties with Kelsick as well as dealing with firms from their home country. In 1771 they advertised the ship *Industry*, "belonging to Whitehaven," which lay at Norfolk, and offered the vessel *Brothers of Whitehaven* then in the Nansemond River.⁵¹

Eventually the Eilbecks formed a partnership with David Ross, a James River fall-line merchant whom one historian has described as the richest man in Virginia in the immediate post-Revolutionary period. Based in Portsmouth, Eilbeck, Ross, and Company dealt in the usual import-export trade, with an occasional foray into other areas. In 1773 the firm advertised the arrival from Limerick, Ireland, of the ship *Jenny*, carrying seventy indentured servants. The cargo included several laborers whose service could be purchased for payment of their passage and the clothes and other provisions which the captain had furnished them.⁵²

Another merchant who came to Norfolk from Whitehaven was Henry Fleming, who arrived in 1770. Factor of the English firm Fisher and Bragg, Fleming carried on a commission business in imported manufactures in addition to operating a saddlery manufactory. Another Whitehaven

⁵¹*Ibid.*; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 3 January 1771.

⁵²Jackson Turner Main, "The One Hundred," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XI (1954), 354-384; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 1 April 1773.

immigrant, John Greenwood, arrived in the mid-1760s, and from Liverpool came John Sparling and John Lawrence, who established a local trading house in the 1750s. Sparling returned to Liverpool in 1763 where his success was crowned in 1771 when he was chosen mayor. Lawrence remained in Norfolk through the Revolution and continued his association with Sparling. None of these outport merchants attained rank within the Norfolk Borough corporation.

Like Charles Steuart, many of the merchants who were active in Norfolk after mid-century were Scots. Scottish factors had traded on Virginia's rivers in increasing numbers since the Act of Union in 1707, and three of the borough's original aldermen--Alexander Campbell, Alexander Mackenzie, and John Taylor--were of Scottish extraction. With the expansion and diversification of Virginia's economy after mid-century, the influx of Scots rose to flood proportions, and the Norfolk area attracted a large share of these Scottish merchants and factors. Scots who arrived in Norfolk during the 1740s and after generally found it more difficult than their English counterparts to attain a place in the borough corporation.

William Aitchison was one Scot who did manage to gain the rank of borough alderman, but his ascent lacked the ease of Richard Kelsick's. He and his first partner, Robert Boyd, rented a storehouse from George Newton, a borough founder and one of the earliest investors in town property. The firm of Aitchison and Boyd first appears in the customs lists of 1754 as principal owners of a shipment of corn to Halifax. Eventually, with his second partner, fellow Scot

James Parker, Aitchison commanded a considerable business, operating in addition to Norfolk and Portsmouth concerns, stores in North Carolina and on Virginia's Eastern Shore.⁵³

Through his marriage to Rebecca Ellegood, daughter of borough founding alderman John Ellegood, Aitchison allied himself with one of the borough's elite families. Elected burgess for the borough in the 1758-61 session, Aitchison gained a seat on the county bench in 1759, and the following year he was elected to the borough common council. He did not become an alderman until 1768, when he replaced the venerable John Hutchings who died that year. After his retirement from active participation in business, Aitchison settled at his country home several miles from Norfolk Borough in Princess Anne County.⁵⁴

Aitchison's second partner, James Parker, was also Scottish. Parker, born in Port Glasgow in 1729, had arrived in Norfolk about 1750 as a factor for the Glasgow tobacco firm of Alexander Spiers. Soon after, he married Margaret Ellegood, Aitchison's sister-in-law. Formed in 1758 with a capital stock of £6,000, the firm of the brothers-in-law prospered, and they maintained connections on Virginia's rivers as well as the store in North Carolina and the Eastern Shore. Parker became a common councilman in 1763, and built a fine two-story brick home in the borough, but he

⁵³Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1754. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵⁴Tarter, ed. *Order Book*, 120, 154; *Cross, County Court*, Appendix D, 145.

never attained the rank of alderman.⁵⁵

Another Scottish-born Norfolk merchant who became prominent in the 1750s was Neil Jamieson. Jamieson arrived on the Elizabeth River in 1760 as factor and partner in the Glasgow tobacco firm of Glassford, Gordon Monteath and Company. In addition to his business for the Scottish firm, Jamieson engaged in a considerable independent trade, and ranked as one of the area's most important merchants in the years before the Revolution. Jamieson operated on all of Virginia's rivers, buying grain and tobacco from farmers of the tidewater and piedmont. He also operated stores in North Carolina, where he employed Matthias Ellegood as factor to purchase wheat, corn, pork, lumber, and naval stores for the Norfolk market. Although well-known for his extensive business engagements, Jamieson never held any borough office.⁵⁶

John Hunter was yet another Scot who entered Norfolk's economic community around 1750. Hunter engaged in a variety of commercial ventures, occasionally shipping tobacco to London or Liverpool in addition to the usual West Indies trade. Like the other established merchants John Hutchings and Robert Tucker, Hunter also shipped wheat to Madeira for return cargoes of wine, and the volume of Hunter's commerce

⁵⁵Tarter, ed. *Order Book*, 136; Introduction, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; *Loyalist Transcripts*. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵⁶Saladino, "Maryland and Virginia Wheat Trade," 30-31; Matthias Ellegood to Neil Jamieson, 2 February, 1765, Neil Jamieson Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

during the 1750s approached that of Hutchings and Tucker. In 1761 Hunter attained the rank of borough councilman, serving until 1767 when he became ill and returned to Scotland.⁵⁷

Archibald Campbell, a physician by trade, arrived in Norfolk in 1744 where he practiced his craft until the lure of commerce drew him into trade in the mid-1760s. Campbell freighted the usual products to the West Indies, and by the Revolution he owned a large storehouse and several smaller warehouses which he rented out. Like Aitchison, Campbell, who may have been related to borough founder Alexander Campbell and who himself married into a prominent trading family of Bermuda, eventually held office in the borough, attaining a seat on the bench in 1760.⁵⁸

Scottish merchant James Ingram settled in Norfolk in 1753. He traded extensively on his own account and maintained stores at Great Bridge in Norfolk County and in Pasquotank County, North Carolina, where he employed three vessels and several flats. Despite his extensive business interests, however, Ingram never attained any borough office.⁵⁹

Andrew Sprowle, an earlier arrival from Scotland, literally inhabited a domain apart from other local

⁵⁷Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1750-1759. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 127, 151.

⁵⁸Loyalist Transcripts. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

merchants. Sprowle, who had come to Norfolk in 1726 at the age of fifteen, joined neither borough nor county government, yet his career illustrates the opportunities for diversity in the commercial expansion of mid-century Norfolk. The young Sprowle apprenticed himself as clerk to original borough magistrate Alexander Campbell, and by the 1740s he had become an independent merchant. As Sprowle's business grew, the volume of his imports and exports for the years after 1750 compares to the trade of Norfolk's foremost merchants of those years, John Hutchings and Robert Tucker, Maximilian Calvert, and John Hunter.⁶⁰

Like William Aitchison, Sprowle lacked property within the borough and initially rented from George Newton. In the early 1750s, he moved across the Elizabeth River and established a shipbuilding and repair facility at Gosport, adjacent to Portsmouth. The growth of Portsmouth provided a boost to Sprowle's business, and his yard and warehouses at Gosport grew into one of the largest complexes of its kind in the South. With profits from shipbuilding and repair as well as the traditional ventures to the Caribbean and Wine Islands, Sprowle eventually grew to be called "one of the richest men in Virginia."⁶¹

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹Wingo and Wingo, comps., *Norfolk County Tithables, 1730-1750*, 100, 113, 145, list Sprowle as one of Alexander Campbell's tithables in 1733-35. By 1750, the date of next extant list with Sprowle's name, he is listed first for his precinct, with partners Alexander Scott, and John Hunter, and six tithable slaves, *ibid.*, 197; Clark, "Coastwise," 12, quoting Isaac Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia: Chapters in the Economic History of the Revolution*, (Philadelphia, 1926), 44-5; *Virginia Gazette (Hunter)*, 25 April 1755. See also *Loyalist Transcripts*. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial

Sprowle's ownership of the shipyard on the Elizabeth enabled him to command much of the shipwork in the colony. Acting as local representative for British or northern merchants, Sprowle regularly supervised the refitting of vessels putting into the Chesapeake Bay in distress or needing repair. In the fall of 1761, for example, the London ship *Fishburn*, Captain John Evington, carrying tobacco to London, ran into a storm off the Capes and limped into the Elizabeth River. Sprowle undertook to repair the vessel for its owners, but his responsibilities went beyond mere refitting. He reimbursed the ship's captain, who was responsible for feeding and paying the crew while the ship was laid up, for funds the captain paid out to the crew for cargo handling, cooperage and storage of the tobacco while the ship was being repaired. Sprowle's account with the captain also included outlays for supplying the ship's hands with that seaman's staple, rum, as well as food for the crew and materials used in repairing the vessel. He received a commission for such services and possessed an option to purchase damaged cargoes.⁶²

British naval vessels often wintered at Gosport, and Sprowle profited from official business in addition to private contracts. The Gosport merchant also capitalized on local shipwrecks, serving as one of the primary local dealers in salvage. In October 1766, for example, he

Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]

⁶²Norfolk Borough Register, 1756-66, MS volume in records room, Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court. The Register is an account of circumstances and dispositions of vessels putting into the Elizabeth in distress.

advertised the sale of the materials saved from the wreck of the ship *Rogers*--anchors, cable, sails, standing and running rigging, longboat, yawl, compasses--the vessel's entire equipment.⁶³

The outbreak of the Seven Years' War in the mid-1750s presented Sprowle with further opportunities, and the Gosport merchant became one of the area's most enterprising dealers in captured cargoes. In April 1757, Sprowle advertised for sale at public auction in Williamsburg thirty hogsheads of claret, twenty boxes of salad oil, and twenty boxes of castile soap, all part of the cargo of a Spanish prize.⁶⁴

Sprowle was active enough in his sponsorship of privateers to attract the attention of British officials. Because Britain and Spain were not technically at war until 1762, American seizures of Spanish ships before that date were subject to reversal. In December 1760, because the Spanish Ambassador in London had complained of illegal captures, Lieutenant Governor Fauquier enclosed accounts of the legal proceedings on all captures of Spanish ships in his report to the Lords of Trade. Fauquier had granted a letter of marque to Sprowle, whose privateer had captured two Spanish coasting vessels. Sprowle released one of the vessels to avoid a possible compensation decree in Admiralty Court for wrongful seizure, but he failed to compensate its captain.

⁶³*Virginia Gazette* (Hunter) [?] October, 1766.

⁶⁴*Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), 22 April, 1757.

When Sprowle brought the other Spanish vessel to court for carrying contraband, it was cleared. He refused to compensate its captain as well, filing an appeal to the decision instead. When the Spanish captain, delayed in Virginia because of Sprowle's appeal, fell sick and died, Lieutenant Governor Fauquier exploded, calling Sprowle's behavior "so scandalous" that the governor threatened to initiate a suit for the bond Sprowle had given when granted his letter of marque. Although Virginia's Attorney General responded that Sprowle could be prosecuted, the outcome of the affair remains unknown. Sprowle continued to prosper in shipbuilding and repair as well as importing and exporting, and by 1769 he had become Virginia's foremost merchant, chosen to preside over the association of merchants formed that year to boycott British imports in protest to Parliamentary taxation.⁶⁵

The late 1750s and 1760s saw a flood of Scottish merchants coming to the Elizabeth River. Robert Shedden arrived in 1759 as clerk to another firm and eventually established an independent business in Portsmouth. Other Scots who established businesses at Portsmouth included brothers John and William Brown, who arrived in 1762 with their capital invested in a cargo of British manufactured goods, James and Francis Miller, who arrived in 1764, and Roger and Robert Stewart, who arrived in 1768 and 1771

⁶⁵Fauquier to Lords of Trade, 15 December, 1760, in J. P. Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1760*, (Richmond, Va., 1913), Appendix, 292, 296, 297.

respectively.⁶⁶

Like some of the English merchants who arrived after 1750, the Scots found it difficult to attain positions in the borough hierarchy. Several, such as William Aitchison, John Hunter, George Logan, and Archibald and James Campbell, expressed their resentment as early as 1755 with their election of Richard Scott's slave as mayor. Their scorn was perhaps directed at the borough founders and their descendants--the Hutchings, Newtons, and Calverts--but they also resented new arrivals such as Richard Kelsick who rapidly ascended to the rank of alderman, while merchants such as Aitchison and Archibald Campbell had to wait for more than a decade to join the borough bench.

The aldermen's domination of the commerce of the lower James River reinforced the status of such positions. Borough aldermen, led by John Hutchings and Robert Tucker, who had exported about twenty-three percent of all pork and corn from the lower James during the 1740s, saw their share of exports of those products drop only about one percent in the following decade, and they actually increased their percentage of the district's wheat exports during the same period.⁶⁷

The importance of family and business connections in attaining a seat in the borough corporation--connections

⁶⁶Loyalist Transcripts. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁶⁷Data from Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446-1447, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1750-1759. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]

most of the Scots lacked--is well-illustrated by the career of Paul Loyall, one of the few native American ship captains from outside the area who rose to commercial and political success in Norfolk after 1750. Paul Loyall and his brother John, originally from Elizabeth City County across Hampton Roads from Norfolk, began trading on the lower James River in the early 1750s, bringing in tar, pitch, and turpentine from North Carolina. Paul married Frances Newton, daughter of founding alderman George Newton, and like his brother-in-law, Thomas Newton I, with whom he was associated in business, Paul Loyall carried on an extensive trade with Maryland. Elected councilman in 1757, Loyall reached the rank of alderman in 1761. He continued to captain his own vessels, however, sailing up the Chesapeake Bay to purchase wheat as late as 1765.⁶⁸

The changes in the Virginia economy after 1750 increased Norfolk's importance as a commercial center in Virginia. Local population increased, with the borough gaining most. The borough also grew in area, and the expanded concerns of its leaders brought increased authority to borough magistrates. The close, family-connected nature of the borough hierarchy continued, but an influx of new, younger and more aggressive merchants, many of them from Scotland, subjected the established leadership to stresses which manifested themselves in conflict during the 1760s when ethnic and economic tensions flared into open violence.

⁶⁸Naval Office Lists, P.R.O., C.O. 5/1446, Entries and Clearances, Lower James River Customs District, 1751-1752. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 108, 122.

Chapter IV
Crisis in Confidence: Magistrates and
Violence in Norfolk, 1762-1769

The economic changes after mid-century, while greatly enhancing Norfolk's commercial status, subjected the borough oligarchy to strains as numbers of new arrivals competed with the established group for economic and political place. Never the most stable of locales, the waterfronts of Norfolk and Portsmouth saw repeated violence as these tensions erupted sporadically in the years during and after the Seven Years' War. By 1769 seven years of turmoil had created a bitter factional split within the ranks of the borough elite. Dissatisfaction with imperial measures was only a contributing factor in Norfolk's troubles during the 1760s, and in the summer of 1775, when Virginia's last royal governor, Lord Dunmore, sought the safety of the Elizabeth River after his flight from Williamsburg, he arrived in an area already divided. The choices which the struggle with Britain imposed upon Norfolk's inhabitants merely formalized rifts which had begun some years earlier.

The rancorous division among Norfolk's leaders was presaged in 1755, when several local merchants and others held the mock mayoral election at the home of tavern-keeper and eventual vendue master Richard Scott. The group, which included Lewis Hansford, Archibald and James Campbell, John

Ellegood, and William Aitchison, elected as mayor one of Scott's slaves. For this obvious affront to the borough's real mayor, Richard Kelsick, the Common Hall made the perpetrators publicly apologize. Resentment of Kelsick's quick rise to prominence undoubtedly spurred the mockery, and the action marks the beginning--symbolic perhaps--of dissatisfaction with the borough magistrates. There was ethnic jealousy involved as well, for the Campbells and Aitchison were Scots, and Ellegood was allied by marriage with Aitchison.¹

This fissure in Norfolk's ruling group widened in a series of violent disturbances in the next decade. Before the close of the Seven Years' War, the area shook with a riot directed against foreign seamen, tumult over changes in British policy after the war, opposition to an attempt of the British Navy to impress local citizens, a domestic conflict which had political ramifications, and a bitter factional feud over medical policy. On the surface these disturbances possessed few common origins. But taken together, the incidents of violence in Norfolk in the 1760s worked to divide borough and county leadership and eroded confidence in the ability of local magistrates to enforce the order in the community. Economic competition among established and rising commercial interests also exacerbated the tensions. The resulting conflict extended even beyond

¹Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 101.

the Revolution.²

The Seven Years' War brought the first of these episodes to Norfolk's wharves. In October 1762, a British transport, *Amity's Addition*, arrived in the Elizabeth River with 120 Spaniards of Havana's garrison whom the British had captured earlier that summer. Under the terms of their capitulation, the captives were being returned to Spain, but when the vessel sprung a leak and put into Norfolk for repairs, it became necessary to house and feed them ashore.

The Spaniards were lodged in several houses in Portsmouth owned by local merchant Francis Miller. The major concern of their commander, Don Pedro de Bermudez, was the poor quality and quantity of foodstuffs on board the transport. The Spanish officer experienced difficulties in getting provisions for his men from Norfolk's mayor Paul Loyall and Colonel John Hunter, who was the local "agent victualler" for the British government. According to Portsmouth merchant Charles Steuart, the Scot who had arrived in 1750, Bermudez "had been very importunate with Mr. Loyall for fresh provisions for his men, but their victualing ashore began only last Thursday," already mid-November. Bermudez eventually asked Steuart to procure a supply sufficient for a seventy-day passage to Cadiz.³

²For an episodic account of the pre-Revolutionary violence in Norfolk which makes an attempt at an ethnic-economic analysis, see Edward A. Smyth, "Mob Violence in Pre-Revolutionary Norfolk, Virginia," (M.A. thesis, Old Dominion University, 1975).

³Steuart to Fauquier, 9 November, 23 November 1762, in George Reese, ed., *Official Papers of Francis Fauquier*, 3 vols., (Charlottesville, Va., 1980), II, 821, 832; Benjamin J. Hillman, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of*

The then royal governor, Francis Fauquier, granted Steuart permission to purchase the requisite victuals and requested that the enterprising merchant choose two local men to join Captain Mainwaring of the local guardship H.M.S. *Arundel* in inspecting the provisions aboard the transport. But before Steuart could comply with the governor's wishes, some British crewmen of the *Arundel* took matters in their own hands.⁴

On the evening of November 21, 1762, two British sailors got into an argument with two Spaniards. The British seamen called for the assistance of their mates, forming a mob which drove the Spaniards to their lodgings, killing two and wounding several others in the process. Bent on robbery, the British tars attacked Don Pedro Bermudez himself, wounding him in the head, and injuring one of his subordinates and several servants. Not satisfied with the plunder they had taken and the injuries inflicted, the tars then set the Spanish quarters on fire, while several of the unruly sailors went for gunpowder to blow the place up. Fortunately for the Spanish, Captain Mainwaring arrived with others of his crew and, with the help of some local inhabitants, dispersed the mob.⁵

As a result of the attack, Bermudez had his men transported across the river to Norfolk where the borough magistrates assured him there would be no repetition of

Colonial Virginia, 6 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1966), VI, 235-36.

⁴Fauquier to Steuart, 23 November 1762, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, II, 828.

⁵Steuart to Fauquier, 23 November 1762, *ibid.*, II, 831.

violence. The Spanish commander remained fearful, as there were no troops within the borough, but he praised several of the locals who had rendered assistance during the attack. Among those singled out was Portsmouth merchant James Rae, who, at considerable risk, carried Don Pedro's wife and two officers to safety. Along with Rae, Charles Steuart, Thomas Veale, Colonel Robert Tucker, William Aitchison, and James Parker received special mention from Don Pedro. He also praised the Norfolk militia, which had "discovered the greatest Alacrity" to assist the battered Spanish prisoners.⁶

Attributing the attack to the actions of a few drunken sailors, Lieutenant Governor Fauquier communicated to Bermudez his regret at the incident, and promised the Spaniard "all the satisfaction that the laws will allow." The governor wrote in turn to Borough Mayor Paul Loyall urging quick proceedings against those involved in the riot. Although there is no mention of legal proceedings in either the borough or county court records, some action did occur, for the governor's correspondence indicates that Bermudez himself refused to attend and allowed only his inferior officers to testify.⁷

For his part, Steuart labored mightily to procure some special delicacies befitting a man of the proud Spanish commander's rank. He sent Don Pedro furniture to replace

⁶*Ibid.*; Bermudez to Fauquier, 24 November, 1762, *ibid.*, II, 832.

⁷Fauquier to Bermudez, 26 November 1762, Fauquier to Loyall, 26 November, 1762, Steuart to Fauquier, 2 December 1762, *ibid.*, II, 836, 844.

some damaged in the attack; he found a quantity of Norfolk's best butter for his table, and he attempted to get some Bristol water for Bermudez as Norfolk's water was so bad. Because of these efforts and his conduct during the attack, the Spanish considered Steuart their special friend and comforter.⁸

Only four of the rioters were sent on to Williamsburg for trial. One group of Norfolk magistrates wished to remand the entire group which appeared before them, but on the second day of the inquiry, according to Steuart, "some other Justices being on the Bench, all that were brought before them were cleared; though in my opinion & that of many others, some of them were more guilty than some of those who were to go up." For example, Portsmouth merchant Francis Miller swore positively that one Thomas Boon and several others went to find dynamite to blow up the Spaniards. The justices, however, cleared Boon because the intent was never carried into execution. There thus arose, especially among Steuart and the others who had aided the Spaniards, a belief that the local court, either borough or county, failed to do its duty by the Spaniards.⁹

At least one borough magistrate proved diligent. Two of the rioters discharged were Italians, and as Bermudez feared they would cause further disturbances, he prevailed upon Steuart to have them recommitted to jail until the Spanish sailed. Steuart applied to Maximilian Calvert, "a

⁸Steuart to Fauquier, 2 December 1762, Fauquier to Steuart, 9 December 1762, *ibid.*, II, 844, 849.

⁹Steuart to Fauquier, 2 December 1762, *ibid.*, II, 844.

Magistrate who has been very active & diligent in this matter," and who, as an alderman of Norfolk Borough, exercised the same authority as a county justice. Calvert had the two Italians immediately placed in the borough jail.¹⁰

None of the four men who were sent on to Williamsburg was convicted because no one testified against them. Fauquier regretted that no witnesses came forward, but hastened to assure Bermudez that everything had been conducted according to the highest principles of British justice:

It is possible, Sir, that you will find this rather strange, but you must understand that under the British Constitution the freedom of the subject is so well defended and indeed strengthened that the greatest wretch cannot be punished without positive proof. If we had caught the man who fired through the window into the room where your people had gone, so that some were killed by the shots, and if that had been proved by witnesses who had seen it, he would be condemned to death.¹¹

Charles Steuart himself, in his vigorous attempts to prosecute the rioters, declared that he acted not at the instigation of the Spanish, whose leaders he considered "sensible men, . . . polite well-bred Strangers," but "as a friend to Justice." Like Fauquier, both Steuart and Bermudez were of the opinion that the riot was owing "entirely to the rage & fury of our drunken Seamen (the most licentious of all human Beings)."¹²

The reluctance of several of the local justices to

¹⁰*Ibid.*, II, 845.

¹¹Fauquier to Bermudez, 20 Dec., 1762, *ibid.*, II, 865.

¹²*Ibid.*

prosecute many of the perpetrators, and the refusal of the high-born Spanish commander to testify, meant that the British seamen who attacked the prisoners, killed two men and robbed and beat their commander, escaped the noose. Steuart and Fauquier, however, seemed more disturbed at the affront to a man of such aristocratic mien as Bermudez than at any harm done to the rank and file Spanish soldier or servant by the failure to convict. Bermudez wrote to Fauquier that he understood the workings of the British legal system, "Sir, the laws are everywhere alike, and I am altogether convinced that your Council acts with complete propriety."

The Spanish commander reserved his highest accolades for Steuart,

a gentleman to who [sic] we are indebted for every sort of courtesy, he is our protector, our consolation, in a word the man to whom, after yourself, we are obligated for everything. I beg you Sir, to thank him for this, until I am in a position to show my gratitude.

Steuart capitalized on Spanish goodwill some years later when he received an appointment to a British customs post after securing a recommendation from the Spanish ambassador in London.¹³

But the reputations of some of the other Norfolk leaders did not match that of the energetic Scottish merchant. Not every local inhabitant had wholeheartedly aided the Spaniards. Apart from the reluctant Norfolk justices, many of the local sailors and laborers had sided

¹³Bermudez to Fauquier, 27 Dec., 1762, *ibid.*, II, 867; Charles Steuart to Aitchison and Parker, 29 January 1764, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

with the British seamen. Some may have participated in the attack themselves. Colonel Hunter, the local agent, had been slow in complying with Fauquier's order to provision the *Amity's Assistance*, replying that he needed time to examine his contract. Eventually the agent agreed to supply the transport, but refused to include the provisions Steuart had provided in his account to the government.¹⁴

Merchant magnate Andrew Sprowle, at whose shipyard the transport was repaired, refused to accept as payment the bills of Captain Longbottom, the transport's commander, insisting instead on a bottomry bond, essentially a mortgage, on the vessel. Longbottom wrote to Mr. White, agent victualler in New York, but White was absent on a trip to Albany. No other Norfolk merchant had either the standing or inclination to countersign Captain Longbottom's bills, and eventually Fauquier himself had to endorse the bills so that the long delayed transport could proceed to Spain. With the exception of Charles Steuart and several other local merchants, most of them newer arrivals to the area, local leaders did not acquit themselves well after the attack on the Spanish prisoners. Whatever the motivation behind the riot, and hatred of Spaniards seems to have been the main cause, the behavior of Norfolk area magistrates after the affair casts doubt upon their ability to preserve the peace of the town and punish wrongdoers. Newer arrivals to the Elizabeth River such as Charles Steuart, who performed so assiduously in his efforts to satisfy the

¹⁴Hillman, ed., *Executive Journals*, VI, 246-7.

aristocratic Spanish commander, may have possessed a more heightened awareness of what was proper conduct for a magistrate. In Steuart's opinion, by their failure to prevent the riot or prosecute the wrongdoers the established leaders of borough and county did not measure up.¹⁵

The end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 did not bring peace to Norfolk's wharves, and violence erupted again soon after. The problems engendered in the peace settlement, and the British government's attempts to deal with those problems, triggered a decade of tension and struggle throughout the British American colonies which culminated in revolution. Norfolk did not escape a share of the violence.

Financially exhausted from the struggle with France, and facing the necessity of administering vast new territories won in the Seven Years' War, the British government cast about for some means of increasing revenues. Convinced that the colonies should share the burden of empire, Parliament enacted a series of statutes to make the American colonies furnish some of the necessary funds. In the words of one observer to his Norfolk correspondents, the mother country had presented "her infant colonies. . . with a list of favors," which they would no doubt receive "with proper acknowledgements of filial duty and respect." The writer proved somewhat less than prescient.¹⁶

¹⁵*Ibid.*, VI, 248; Fauquier to Charles Steuart, 9 February 1763, Steuart to Fauquier, 15 February 1763, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, II, 914-16.

¹⁶Charles Steuart to Aitchison and Parker, 18 March 1764, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

It was the Stamp Act, a tax on official documents and other printed paper, which generated the first great outbreak of colonial opposition to the new measures. Resentment of the statute in the summer of 1765 culminated in the Virginia burgesses issuing a set of resolutions against the act. In October, George Mercer, who had been named stamp distributor for Virginia, narrowly escaped violence in Williamsburg.¹⁷

The unfortunate stamp distributor arrived in the provincial capital on October 30, during the "public times," when the town was full of merchants and officials from all over the colony. The reaction to his appearance indicates a considerable consensus among the merchants and planters who had gathered to do business at the capital. According to Fauquier,

The mercantile people were all assembled as usual. the first word I heard was "One and All." Upon which as at a word agreed upon before between themselves, they all quitted the place to find Colonel Mercer at his Fathers Lodgings where it was known he was. This Concourse of people I should call a Mob, did I not know that it was chiefly if not altogether composed of Gentlemen of property in the Colony[,] some of them at the Head of their Respective Counties, and the Merchants of the Country, whether English Scotch, or Virginians.¹⁸

The angry crowd confronted Mercer, and when the frightened official appealed to Fauquier and some of his followers at a nearby coffee house, they followed him and

¹⁷The standard account of the Stamp Act and its reception in America remains Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*, 2nd ed., (New York, 1962). For events in Virginia, see especially 120-132.

¹⁸Fauquier to the Board of Trade, 3 November 1765, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, III, 1292; Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 200-201.

forced the issue. It was Fauquier's opinion that only respect for the governor kept Mercer from bodily harm. On the following evening the harried stamp official announced from the steps of the Capitol his intention not to issue the stamps.¹⁹

In Norfolk, the established leadership conformed to the cessation of official business entailed by Mercer's agreeing to issue no stamps. Clerk of the hustings court, Samuel Boush III, whose commercial interests, property, and public office in the borough made him one of Norfolk's most affluent inhabitants, probably expressed the majority view of borough leaders with his inscription at the bottom of the minutes of court for October 22, 1765: "Liberty, Liberty, sweet Liberty. Remember the first of November 1765." The court did not sit again until May 1766, after the Stamp Act was repealed.²⁰

Violence over the hated measure broke out in Norfolk early in 1766. Led by several of the borough leaders, a group of Norfolk inhabitants formed a local chapter of the Sons of Liberty to protest the Stamp Act. They attacked a ship captain suspected of informing customs officials of smuggling. Leader of the Sons was ship captain, merchant, and borough magistrate Paul Loyall.

Loyall had been prominent in borough affairs for a number of years since his arrival in the area in the early

¹⁹Fauquier to the Board of Trade, 3 November, 1765, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, III, 1293.

²⁰Norfolk Hustings Court Order Book 1. [microfilm, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.].

1750s. First chosen to the common council in June 1757, he became alderman in January 1761 and served as mayor during the attack on the Spanish prisoners the following year. An active merchant, Loyall employed his brother John as ship captain. But by 1764 John Loyall was dead, and Paul returned to the quarterdeck late in 1765, sailing to Maryland to purchase flour.²¹

In Baltimore Loyall met with William Lux, who had corresponded regularly with Loyall and Norfolk magnate Robert Tucker since 1763. Lux was conspicuous among the grain merchants of the burgeoning Maryland metropolis, and on this occasion Loyall attempted "to engage all the flour he could possibly do here."²² But the Norfolk merchant ultimately returned to Norfolk with a more important cargo than flour, for William Lux was the principal force behind the organization of Baltimore's Sons of Liberty. The pinch of an economic recession in the Atlantic trading network had put Maryland merchants in a foul mood, and the Stamp Act exacerbated these sentiments.²³

Loyall arrived in Baltimore during the height of discontent, during which Lux was chief among several local merchants and artisans who expressed their resentment of British mercantile restrictions. After the announcement of

²¹Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 108, 122, 132.

²²John Taylor, Jr. to Neil Jamieson, 1 December 1765, Neil Jamieson Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²³Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland*, (Baltimore, Md., 1973), 36.

the Stamp Act, Lux wrote to a correspondent,

The Stamp Act is likely to oppress us so much, that it behooves us to think in time of getting a warm coat for winter, manufactured here, as I am sure we shall not be able to purchase one from our mother country, where all the produce of our labor has centered from our first settlement here.

By October Lux was writing that, if the stamp measure went into operation, "it must inevitably ruin us."²⁴

Following the model of meetings of merchants in New York and Philadelphia in early November, and similar gatherings in Massachusetts port towns, all of which enacted boycotts of British goods until the hated act was repealed, Maryland's mercantile community met to discuss similar resolves. On November 11 Lux wrote that Maryland merchants "are on the eve of doing it here," but since the Maryland nonimportation agreement was only informal and unwritten, the extent of acceptance among the mercantile community cannot be measured.²⁵

Lux, however, went farther in his opposition to the measure. On the suggestion of several New York merchants, who wrote to Lux that they were forming an organization called the Sons of Liberty to push for repeal of the Stamp Act, Lux transformed the Baltimore Mechanics Society, founded in 1763, into a Baltimore chapter of the Sons. On

²⁴William Lux to Samuel Browne, 29 July 1765; William Lux to James Russell, 14 October 1765, William Lux Letterbook. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.], quoted in Hoffman, *Spirit of Dissension*, 36.

²⁵Hoffman, *Spirit of Dissension*, 37-38; William Lux to Joseph Watkins, 11 November 1765, William Lux Letterbook. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

February 24, 1766, along with another leading Baltimore merchant, Robert Adair, Lux presided at a meeting with the mechanics to organize the Sons of Liberty.²⁶

Loyall made several voyages to Baltimore from November 1765 to March of the following year and met with Lux a number of times during the latter's pre-occupation with the Baltimore Sons of Liberty. Undoubtedly influenced by the happenings in Baltimore, by March 1766, soon after returning from the Maryland city, Loyall persuaded local leaders to form a Norfolk chapter of the Sons. On March 31, two days after an all-night session at a local tavern, the local group convened. Inspired, as they stated, by the example of other towns in the colonies, the Norfolk Sons of Liberty published a set of resolutions in defense of the privileges of freeborn Englishmen which threatened as an enemy to the country anyone who attempted to employ the stamps.²⁷

Like the Baltimore group, Norfolk's Sons contained a number of artisans, but as there was no artisans' society corresponding to the Baltimore mechanics association in the borough, merchants made up the largest single group among Norfolk Sons of Liberty. The Baltimore Sons numbered thirty-three members, including nineteen merchants (58%), five storekeepers (15%), six artisans (18%), two innkeepers (6%), and one unidentified person. Of the fifty-seven men who signed Norfolk's Sons of Liberty resolves, thirty can be

²⁶Hoffman, *Spirit of Dissension*, 38-39.

²⁷William Lux to Paul Loyall, 25 March, 15 April 1766, William Lux Letterbook. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

identified as merchants or sons of merchants (52%), twelve artisans (21%), five ship captains (8%), five professional men (two doctors, two lawyers, and one clergyman) and three planters, one of whom, Edward Hack Moseley, can be considered a merchant-planter. The Norfolk Sons therefore contained a higher proportion of community leadership than the Baltimore organization. Norfolk Sons of Liberty included both established leaders and newer arrivals to the community, but notable absences were Neil Jamieson, Andrew Sprowle, and a number of merchants from the Portsmouth side of the Elizabeth River.²⁸

Paul Loyall's role in the formation of the Norfolk Sons of Liberty did not escape the notice of His Majesty's representative on the scene, Captain Jeremiah Morgan of the British sloop *Hornet*. It was Loyall, Morgan wrote to Lieutenant Governor Fauquier, who,

coming from the Northward [and] having declared, that notwithstanding the Virginians were the first who attempted to oppose the Stamp Act were now become mute and pusilanimous [sic] while the people of the other Colonies asserted their rights like sons of Liberty which had likewise behove them to do.²⁹

Soon after their meeting, several of Norfolk's Sons translated their opposition into actual violence. Interestingly, their activity was not directed against the Stamp Act itself; instead they moved against a ship captain suspected of informing British officials of custom

²⁸Hoffmann, *Spirit of Dissension*, 40; William J. Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*, 7 vols., (Charlottesville, Va., 1973-83), I, 45-48.

²⁹Captain Jeremiah Morgan to Francis Fauquier, 5 April 1766, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, III, 1349.

violations. Merchants John Gilchrist, Matthew and John Phripp, James Campbell, all Sons of Liberty, along with a Captain Fleming, seized Captain William Smith, master of a schooner owned by Gilchrist, carried him to the market house, and accused him of informing the governor that the snow *Vigilant*, owner unknown, had smuggled certain goods.

Despite Smith's protests of innocence, the Sons, with the active encouragement of mayor Maximilian Calvert, who was also a Son of Liberty, tied Smith behind a cart and marched him down to the County Wharf amidst a hail of stones from the crowd which had gathered. There he was tarred and feathered and pelted with more stones and rotten eggs. The crowd then marched Smith back to the market house, where merchant-storekeeper John Lawrence, another Son of Liberty, suggested he be thrown into the Elizabeth River. George Veale, Norfolk County magistrate, vestryman and town leader from Portsmouth, who was not a member of the Sons of Liberty, managed to dissuade them. Smith was finally untied, only to be thrown into the river anyway, where he would have drowned had not a boat fished him out.³⁰

The bedraggled sea captain found refuge with Captain Morgan aboard the *Hornet*, and the British officer related the incident to Lieutenant Governor Fauquier: "when you hear the treatment they gave him it will shock you as it did me; the Man don't tell half the Story in his Letter that I have heard from others." Morgan went on to attribute the trouble to the borough leaders rather than those across the river:

³⁰Enclosure: William Smith to Jeremiah Morgan, 3 April 1766, *ibid.*, III, 1351-2.

"There is not a man of Portsmouth side [of] the Water I believe that will sign their paper, except it be Mr. John Goodrich a Merchant in Portsmouth who seems to me to be troublesome." Morgan signaled out for special approbation George Veale, who had saved Smith from certain drowning, and who, as "a Worthy Magistrate for this County," was "worthy your Honors notice."³¹

Morgan's missives to Fauquier indicate a divergence between Norfolk and Portsmouth merchants. Perhaps because Portsmouth contained a higher percentage of newer arrivals, inhabitants of the south side of the Elizabeth River, including several justices of Norfolk County, seemed less inclined than borough merchants and magistrates to countenance such demonstrations as the riot against the Spanish and the tarring of Captain Smith. Across in Norfolk Borough, magistrates Paul Loyall and Maximilian Calvert, both members of the founding group, were emerging as leaders of a more spirited collection of leaders, willing to sanction and at times even encourage mob action. Loyall, his business partner Matthew Phripp and brother-in-law Thomas Newton joined Samuel Boush and Maximilian Calvert as the core of patriot leadership in the conflict with the British. Calvert's younger brother Joseph, later named sergeant of the borough, also played a key role in subsequent mob violence. With such aldermen as Loyall, Newton, and Calvert, charged with keeping the peace but at times appearing in the forefront of mob activity, it is not

³¹Jeremiah Morgan to Francis Fauquier, 5 April 1766, *ibid.*, III, 1349-50.

surprising that other men of note began to question their authority.³²

On the heels of the attack on Captain Smith, Lieutenant Governor Fauquier received an application for the post of vendue master, or public auctioneer, from Joseph Calvert, Maximilian's younger brother. Despite, or perhaps because of, the accompanying signatures of thirty of Norfolk's first citizens, Fauquier, incensed at the behavior of Norfolk's leaders to Captain Smith, refused to sanction Calvert's appointment. The Lieutenant Governor wrote instead to merchant William Orange, the former member of the Royal Navy who had settled in Norfolk in the 1740s, sanctioning Orange's candidate for the post of vendue master:

as long as I have the honor to be his Majesty's representative in this Colony, I shall always think it my duty to support and recompence in what manner I am able All gentlemen who have suffered any injury in support of this Government, And on all occasions discountenance those who fly in the face of it. This is always my duty but more particularly so, at this time when it seems to be a fashion to throw off all respect to Laws and every thing that is decent.³³

Both Joseph and his older brother Maximilian Calvert were incensed at the governor's rejection of Joseph. The younger man had a history of turbulent behavior. In 1756 the county court ordered him to give a £20 bond for three months good behavior for publicly insulting Josiah Smith, one of the aging county magistrates. Five years later Calvert was the defendant in a suit before the borough court

³²For an advertisement of the partnership of Loyall and Phripp, see *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 21 July 1768.

³³Gentlemen of Norfolk to Francis Fauquier, 28 April 1766, Francis Fauquier to William Orange, 2 May 1766, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, III, 1357-8.

for which his brother Maximilian entered himself special bail. Maximilian again came to his brother's rescue after Joseph's failure to win approval as vendue master, posting a £5,000 bond so that Joseph could establish his vendue business without official affirmation. Asserting that "malice and revenge will ever be attended with impotence and disappointment when opposed to liberty and public spirit," Joseph Calvert publicly announced that "as a Son of Liberty," he had taken the oath required of vendue master and opened a warehouse. His entry into the vendue business and his irascible temperament provided much fuel for future violence in Norfolk.³⁴

For his own part, British Captain Morgan remained convinced that Paul Loyall had fomented the disturbances at Norfolk in the spring of 1766, and the following year the British commander had a personal encounter with Loyall. With his own vessel undermanned, Morgan believed that Norfolk contained large numbers of runaway seamen. Because the presence of the *Hornet* had halted the illicit trade by which Morgan thought most Norfolk merchants made their livings, the deserters, in his view, had become an important market for Norfolk's tradesmen:

The Seamen that come in ships from Great Britain seldom or ever have above a Months pay due to them at their Arrival here as they commonly receive two months pay advance at home, the moment they come here they run away from their Ships, fly to Norfolk, there apply to a set of People they call Crimps, who Supplys them with

³⁴Norfolk County Order Book 1. [microfilm, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.]; Norfolk Borough Hustings and Corporation Court Order Book 7. [microfilm, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.]; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 2 May 1766.

every thing they want, all this Answers the Interest of the Town of Norfolk, Ships from all parts of Virginia & Chisapeak bay when they want Men are obliged to get how they can into Hampton Road & go to Norfolk for Men.³⁵

Determined to re-crew his vessel by sweeping the tenements and taverns along Norfolk's waterfront, Morgan and thirty of his men landed at the public wharf on the night of September 5, 1767. With the *Hornet's* tender's swivel guns covering the pier, Morgan and several officers and seamen proceeded to a nearby tavern where, according to an account published by Norfolk Mayor George Abyvon, the captain took a glass to fortify himself with some "Dutch courage." At eleven o'clock that night, announcing that he had the mayor's warrant, Morgan demanded "with oaths and threats" that the houses in the part of town "resorted to by seamen," be opened and searched. In his own recounting of the incident which followed, Morgan insisted that he had entered only inns and whorehouses.

The British captain and his men seized several unfortunate seamen, knocking down any who resisted. The noise of these struggles soon reached the ears of Norfolk's magistrates, including Paul Loyall, who rushed to the scene along with several other inhabitants. Soon the muster for the borough militia began to sound, and more residents issued from their homes: in Morgan's words, "the Town [was] coming down[,] Whites & Blacks all arm'd." The British captain and his men retreated to the river, but Morgan was cornered under a tree at the head of the wharf. Loyall

³⁵Jeremiah Morgan to Francis Fauquier, 11 September 1767, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers III*, 1500-1.

approached and demanded why Morgan was disturbing the peace. The angry British captain replied with threats, unsheathing his sword and calling upon his crew, who escorted him down to the tender. On reaching the comparative safety of his vessel Morgan turned again to Loyall, challenging him with threats and cursing all the local magistrates.

Captain Morgan was next surprised to see Loyall and Maximilian Calvert, "two noted rioters," who called on the angry townsmen to board the tender. Morgan and several of his men made it back to the *Hornet* in the tender, but Norfolk magistrates imprisoned the British seamen who remained on shore.³⁶

Borough mayor George Abyvon witnessed the incident and later published an account in the *Virginia Gazette* portraying Captain Morgan as the villain. The borough magistrates went so far as to issue a bench warrant for Morgan's arrest, and a committee, including Paul Loyall, Archibald Campbell, William Aitchison, William Bradley, and James Parker, drew up an address to the British Admiralty commissioners seeking action "relative to the riotous Behavior of Jeremiah Morgan."³⁷

Captain Morgan, believing that his only fault lay in not applying to a constable for proper authority to make a search, contended that he was willing to stand trial at Williamsburg. He had neglected to secure the warrants

³⁶The account of Morgan's press raid is found in the *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 1 October 1767; Jeremiah Morgan to Francis Fauquier, 11 September 1767, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, III, 1500-1.

³⁷Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 152.

because on all previous occasions, by the time he went through proper channels, Norfolk's inhabitants had raised the alarm and any deserters escaped out of town. The British captain returned to England soon after the incident, maintaining his low opinion of the merchants and magistrates of the borough. According to Morgan, borough leaders claimed special privileges--privileges Morgan believed they did not merit--because of their charter. He wrote to the corporation chastising them for their conduct and sent Lieutenant Governor Fauquier a final diatribe against borough leaders:

Good God was your Honour and I to prosecute all the Rioters that attacked us belonging to Norfolk there would not be twenty left unhang'd belonging to the Town.

I am credibly informed that there has not been a Mayor nor Alderman in Norfolk that ever took the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy upon their being appointed into Office. . . as your Honour will certainly find it so, I refer to your better Judgement whither they have a right to send a man to Goall or claim any privelege from their Charter if they have a Charter.³⁸

Norfolk's impressment affair was one of a number of such outbreaks which occurred throughout colonial seaports following the Seven Years' War. In 1764 a New York mob protesting British seizures destroyed a navy tender. Four years later, a similar riot took place in Boston, where an angry group of inhabitants burned a boat belonging to the customs collector. In Norfolk, however, it was the magistrates themselves who took the lead in opposition to

³⁸Jeremiah Morgan to Francis Fauquier, 11 September 1767, with enclosure, Morgan to the Mayor and Corporation of Norfolk, 7 September 1767, in Reese, ed., *Official Papers*, III, 1501-1503.

British impressment.³⁹

Captain Morgan's departure did not end Norfolk's troubles. The British officer had singled out Paul Loyall and Maximilian Calvert as the two magistrates who had caused the most trouble in the incidents of 1766 and 1767. And while there may have been a consensus among borough leaders condemning the British captain in attempting to press Norfolk seamen, Calvert's performance as alderman came under increasing scrutiny from several borough inhabitants angered over his handling of local disputes. Most of those criticizing Calvert were Scots.

Early in 1767, Scottish doctor Alexander Gordon, for example, chided several borough magistrates, including Calvert, for failing to do their duty. Gordon had arrived in Norfolk in 1761, establishing a practice as surgeon and operating an apothecary shop, where he sold drugs imported from London. Late in 1766, the doctor swore out a complaint to borough magistrate John Hutchings against one Ralph Inman, whom he labelled "a man of bad character," for stealing a heifer valued at £3. Hutchings had Inman committed to the borough jail, but released him on bail three days later. Frightened for the safety of his family, the doctor addressed a letter to the *Gazette*, in which he asked a more than rhetorical question: after a person is committed to jail for a felony, can he be granted bail prior to being brought before an examining court?⁴⁰

³⁹Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America*, (New York, 1946), 276-77.

⁴⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 8 January, 12

Gordon next got a peace warrant from Colonel Robert Tucker, who sat on the benches of both borough and county, and Inman found himself back in jail. But the alleged cow thief had friends in high places among the borough leaders, for he was again allowed bail by magistrate Maximilian Calvert, whom Gordon described as Inman's "friend, with whom he has connections." Gordon also contended that Inman and several of his friends, before and after his incarcerations, went about "insulting and intimidating Crown's evidence." Inman was eventually sent to Williamsburg for trial where, in April 1767, he was acquitted of all charges.⁴¹

By 1768 both Hutchings and Tucker were dead. Early in September 1766 lightning struck and burnt to the ground Tucker's warehouses on the Elizabeth. The notable merchant lost almost 100 hogsheads of rum, in addition to a large quantity of sugar and molasses. The disaster permanently crippled Tucker's mercantile operations. Within a week the once affluent merchant published an appeal to his debtors, especially those "who have disappointed me for many courts past." He gamely asserted that he still had some West India goods on hand and intended to purchase wheat as usual to provide bread and flour for Norfolk's maritime industry. But the damage caused by the fire proved catastrophic. Hard upon the loss of his warehouses, an English firm, Criss and Warren, with which Tucker had associated in shipping cargoes, went bankrupt. The tragedy on Norfolk's waterfront and the bankruptcy of Criss and Warren sent the once able

February 1767.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 8 January, 12 February, 23 April 1767.

merchant, his affairs in chaos, into a fatal decline. He died on July 1, 1767.⁴²

The *Virginia Gazette* offered the following description of Tucker's career at Norfolk: "[He] has carried on a very extensive trade in the place, with the greatest credit and honor. He was a gentleman eminently distinguished for the Christian and social virtues which makes his death universally regretted." Among those who regretted Tucker's demise was William Nelson, merchant-planter from Yorktown, who perhaps provided a more suitable epitaph: "a Life of so much honest Industry was hardly ever spent to so little good purpose."⁴³

Despite his considerable business over a career which spanned almost five decades, Tucker died in debt. By October 1767, his estate was sold at public vendue to satisfy his creditors. The goods which had survived the fire included 120 hogsheads of Antigua rum, five of Jamaican, six hogsheads of molasses, and 100 barrels of muscovado sugar. There were four ocean-going vessels and three flats. Several cattle and other articles were also sold. There were upwards of fifty slaves, many of whom were skilled bakers, millers, coopers, sawyers and watermen, an indication of the range of Tucker's business activities.⁴⁴

⁴²*Ibid.*, 5, 12 September 1766.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 9 July 1767; William Nelson to John Norton, 25 November 1767, in Frances Norton Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia*, 2nd ed., (Newton Abbot, Devon, 1968), 34.

⁴⁴*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 8 October 1767, 1 September 1768.

Tucker also owned extensive real estate in and around Norfolk. There were two unimproved lots in the east end of the borough, and a lot in Portsmouth at the intersection of Crawford and Glasgow Streets. Outside of the two towns was a tract near Great Bridge, on the southern branch of the Elizabeth River, a lot at Northwest Landing in the southern reaches of Norfolk County where goods arrived from North Carolina, a lot at New Town in Princess Anne County, seventy-five acres up the southern branch of the Elizabeth River, a one-twelfth share in a venture to improve the Dismal Swamp land, and 253 acres of timber at the head of the western branch of the Nansemond River. All was sold at public vendue. Tucker, who more than any other local inhabitant approached the status of Virginia planter, apparently had developed the planters' habits of living beyond their means, and the litigation stemming from his tangled affairs lasted until well after the Revolution.⁴⁵

Early in 1768, Norfolk's other long-time leader, seventy-seven-year-old John Hutchings, followed Tucker to the grave. Eulogies lamented Hutchings as "a gentleman of most amiable character," and a "worthy member of society." The town turned out for his funeral, one of the last expressions of consensus in the Norfolk community. Preceded by the borough militia, who paraded with clubbed muskets, muffled drums, and mourning banners, Hutchings' casket was carried by six of the borough's aldermen. Six "reputable tradesmen" also appeared in the procession, and Hutchings'

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 13 October 1768.

relations and "a great concourse of people of all ranks and degrees" brought up the rear.⁴⁶

The last of the original borough founders, Tucker and Hutchings had engrossed a large share of local commerce since the 1740s, and both served long terms in the House of Burgesses. As venerable elder statesmen, the two represented pre-1750 Norfolk and served as impressive forces for moderation within the community. Their deaths eliminated any hope of amelioration of the violence that had plagued the area since the Seven Years War.

The deaths of the two elderly merchants hastened the breakdown of even a semblance of unity among the ranks of the borough elite. In 1768 and 1769 Joseph and Maximilian Calvert again came under fire during the public airing of a domestic dispute between Margaret Bannerman and her husband Benjamin. In June 1768, Margaret appeared before county magistrate George Veale to swear that her estranged husband, Benjamin, who appears to have been a fortune-hunter from Scotland via the West Indies, had defrauded her of substantial sums of money. Benjamin Bannerman, according to Margaret, was an unscrupulous merchant-adventurer who had arrived in Virginia some years earlier and wooed Margaret, a fairly well-to-do ship captain's widow, telling her that he was heir to his brother's fortune in Scotland. She married him and paid his debts in Antigua after he showed her letters stating that his brother had died. Later she found out that the letters were forgeries, but by then Benjamin

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 7 April 1768.

had taken her money and announced that he intended to leave the country.⁴⁷

Margaret sued in the hustings court, although why the borough magistrates held jurisdiction is not obvious, and the town justices granted her a separate maintenance. Benjamin appealed the ruling, but the General Court upheld the decision, fixing the sum at £65 Virginia currency per year in addition to payments for Margaret's rent and cost of living since the separation.

Early in 1769, Benjamin went public with his account of the dispute, focusing most of his ire interestingly enough not on his estranged wife, but on the borough magistrates. He recounted the experience of another borough gentleman, "known to be a ringleader of mobs, and a disturber of the peace in that community," who had refused to appear before a magistrate on a peace warrant. This reluctant transgressor had a brother on the hustings court, who defended his sibling and "threatened to kick the magistrate's backside off the bench who had granted the warrant." Bannerman asked if justice were possible in such a court. As for Margaret, she was cruel and a drunkard, had buried two husbands already, and had tried to poison him.⁴⁸

The "ringleader of mobs" to whom Bannerman referred was none other than Joseph Calvert, and it was his brother Maximilian who had threatened one of his fellow magistrates (presumably William Aitchison) with bodily harm. During the

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 18 June 1767, 7 July 1768.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 20 April 1769 (supplement).

course of the Bannerman dispute, Joseph and Maximilian had become embroiled in a far more serious conflict which for a time tore the community apart. In the summer of 1768, the hotheaded vendue master Joseph, acting in his capacity as borough sergeant, forcibly quarantined several patients who had been inoculated for smallpox at Norfolk. The resulting violence, which carried over into the following year, brought to a flashpoint the ethnic and economic conflicts which had smoldered for several years.

Every hot, humid summer brought to Norfolk the danger of an outbreak of any number of tropical diseases with the daily arrival of West Indian vessels. From the time of the borough's founding its officials had maintained constant vigilance against outbreaks of yellow fever or the more dreaded smallpox. In June 1737, when the town of Hampton was visited by a severe epidemic of smallpox, Norfolk's Common Hall forbade borough inhabitants from receiving any person or goods from across Hampton Roads. Despite the precautions of the local leaders, however, there were serious outbreaks of the disease in the borough in 1744 and 1746, and a particularly severe epidemic in 1752.⁴⁹

By the late 1760s, there had not been a serious incidence of smallpox in Norfolk for several years, but the fear remained, many deeming the disease "an inseparable companion" of Norfolk's greatly enlarged commerce. Some of the community were thus outraged when Scottish merchant Dr. Archibald Campbell and a small group of Norfolk's leading

⁴⁹Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 49, 60; Smyth, "Mob Violence," 22.

men asked Dr. John Dalgleish, another Scottish doctor, to inoculate their families for smallpox.

Newly arrived in the colony, Dalgleish had advertised his services in the *Virginia Gazette*. Inoculation, which involved infecting the patient with the disease, was still new enough to encounter widespread opposition in the colonies. There had been an outbreak of violence in York County over the technique just prior to Dalgleish's arrival at Norfolk. In addition to the fear of the disease, there was a good deal of suspicion of the motives of both Dalgleish and Campbell. Some of Norfolk's citizens perceived them as unscrupulous and venal and attributed their intention to inoculate primarily to a desire for profit.⁵⁰

After an initial plan fell through to perform the inoculations at a house that Dalgleish had procured, Campbell chose to have the immunization done at his home, which lay on Tanner's Creek, about three miles outside of the borough. Among the important townsmen who asked Campbell to allow members of their families to be inoculated were Scottish merchants James Parker, his partner William Aitchison, Neil Jamieson, and James Archdeacon. Non-Scots who favored inoculation of their families included Lewis Hansford and Cornelius Calvert, older brother of Joseph and

⁵⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 25 August 1768 (supplement); Patrick Henderson, "Smallpox and Patriotism, The Norfolk Riots, 1768-1769," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXIII (1965), 413-4; Frank L. Dewey, "Thomas Jefferson's Law Practice: The Norfolk Anti-Inoculation Riots," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XCI (1983), 40.

Maximilian. Cornelius Calvert was mayor of Norfolk Borough, and Campbell, Hansford, and Aitchison were aldermen. James Parker was a member of the common council.⁵¹

Some of the local citizens, fearing an outbreak of the disease if Campbell went through with his intentions, applied to two of the county magistrates to halt the proceedings. The county justices, however, considered the affair a borough matter and announced that they had no jurisdiction in the matter. The following day Paul Loyall and Maximilian Calvert, the two borough magistrates who had led the Stamp Act protest in 1766 and the opposition to Captain Morgan in 1767, met with Campbell in an effort to work out a compromise. They arranged another meeting at a tavern where the Campbell group, except for Aitchison, faced Loyall, Maximilian Calvert, Samuel Boush, town clerk and one of the borough's wealthiest men, former mayor George Abyvon, and the physician partners James Taylor and James Ramsay, both members of the established leadership who feared the competition which Dalgleish represented.⁵²

At this juncture all agreed that inoculation was necessary, but Loyall's group objected to having it done at Campbell's plantation. They therefore worked out a compromise: another location would be found for the inoculations, and Doctors Ramsay and Taylor would assist Dalgleish. Having pledged to use their influence to defuse any attempts to halt the proceedings, the group adjourned

⁵¹*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 25 August 1768 (supplement).

⁵²*Ibid.*

their meeting with an apparent consensus.⁵³

The agreement soon dissolved, however. The following day Ramsay and Taylor refused to take part in the inoculations, and although several other locations for the immunization were examined, none was found suitable. On June 25, while there was still a good deal of opposition to inoculation, Dalgleish performed several inoculations at Campbell's. Mayor Cornelius Calvert, one of the pro-inoculationists, had announcements posted on the road to the Campbell estate, warning people to stay away and promising every effort to prevent the spread of the disease.⁵⁴

Once the inoculations had actually been performed, Norfolk's leaders again tried to work out a compromise by which the patients would remain at Dr. Campbell's until they were well enough to move to the pesthouse. But the anti-inoculationists took matters into their own hands. On the night of June 27, Borough Sergeant Joseph Calvert led a group of men, which he had recruited "with a drum and flag," to Campbell's home, rounded up the sick patients, and marched them several miles in a driving thunderstorm to the pest house. It was a harrowing experience for those involved. Sick and feverish, they "were drove about from place to place and so ill used that we had scarcely a chance of recovering."⁵⁵

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*; Margaret Parker to Charles Steuart, 21 August 1768, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]

The incident shocked the inoculationists because the mob's victims were women and children, and, moreover, Archibald Campbell and Cornelius Calvert had already agreed to move them to the pesthouse as soon as it could be made ready for their reception. The inoculationists seemed to have anticipated the attack, for earlier that day, they had applied to several borough magistrates to forestall the threat of mob action, but no help was forthcoming. Magistrate Paul Loyall, the veteran of several demonstrations of previous years, had accompanied the mob ostensibly to preserve order, but when asked why he had not halted the proceedings, he replied, clearly siding with ringleader Joseph Calvert, that "in other countries mobs were common, and if people could not carry their point in one way they would in another."⁵⁶

Joseph's brother Maximilian Calvert and Thomas Newton, both borough magistrates who were present at the incident, offered a similar view of the proceedings. When Lewis Hansford told Maximilian Calvert that it was his duty as an alderman to protect Hansford's wife and children, Calvert reportedly addressed the mob, "Well then, Gentlemen, you know what you have to do." For his part, Thomas Newton stated that the inoculationists should have foreseen the results of their actions.⁵⁷

Paul Loyall later publicly denied that he had made any

⁵⁶*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 25 August 1768 (supplement). The term, "moral economy," is from E. P. Thompson's seminal article, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, L (1971), 76-136.

⁵⁷*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 25 August 1768 (supplement).

statement concerning mobs and announced that he was "averse to inflammatory measures." He made pains to point out his status in the community. If the inoculationists persisted in blaming him for the attack, Loyall insisted, he was prepared to satisfy them in a gentlemanly way, "as my station, and I believe my behaviour through life, puts me on a footing with the first of them."⁵⁸

Joseph Calvert, the leader of the mob, remained uncontrite and soon published his own brief account of the incident. Calvert maintained that he had "made it my business to be acquainted with the whole affair" regarding the proposed inoculation and referred to the inoculationists as "a set of *****", who would not stick out to do anything to carry their infernal plots into execution." He reserved his special ire for Campbell, the leader of the inoculation party, whom Calvert characterized as

a V***** [villain], who has for some years past been endeavouring to introduce that disorder [smallpox] among us, with no other than his avaricious views. I will leave the poor tradesmen to say how he paid them their bills off, when they built his row of houses in the town of Norfolk; also the poor inhabitants of this county[,] how they were distressed to pay off his bills in the year 1752, for his attendance on them in the smallpox.⁵⁹

The violence did not end with the march to the pesthouse. Two days after the attack, Archibald Campbell's house was burned to the ground. Following "a representation by many of the principal inhabitants of Norfolk," the governor and council offered a £40 reward for the capture of

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 29 August 1768.

⁵⁹*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 6 September 1768.

the perpetrator or perpetrators, to which Campbell added a further £100, but the arsonists were never discovered.⁶⁰

Campbell and his allies blamed Samuel Boush for the destruction of Campbell's house. On the day of the riot, Boush had announced that he was willing to pay complete damages if the mob succeeded in tearing Campbell's house down. Boush later admitted he had made the statement, but denied that it could be considered incendiary (its literal effect, as it turned out). Campbell was not mollified, applying to Boush the old adage, "*Qui capit ille fecit*, or whom the cap fits let him wear it." For a time Campbell considered suing Boush for the damages, and at least one of his associates believed that he had an excellent case.⁶¹

Cornelius Calvert and several of the other inoculationists brought criminal proceedings against the mob, and the anti-inoculationists sued Dalgleish and the others for performing illegal inoculations. There also followed a spate of civil suits, in connection with which Thomas Jefferson later appeared for some of the mob's victims before the General Court. The legal actions dragged on for several years, keeping tensions high in Norfolk and sparking a recurrence of violence in 1769. Although resentment of the clannish Scots on the part of Paul Loyall, Maximilian and Joseph Calvert, Thomas Newton and Samuel

⁶⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 22 September 1768; Hillman, ed., *Executive Journals*, VI, 299.

⁶¹*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 1 September 1768; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 8 September 1768; James Parker to Charles Steuart, 20 October 1769, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Boush, who were all members of Norfolk's original ruling families, was a key factor in sparking the original riot, the dispute went beyond ethnic jealousy. There were several other reasons for the belligerence of Joseph Calvert and the other magistrates toward the inoculationists.⁶²

Among the inoculationists terrorized by the mob was William Orange. Orange, a native of England and veteran of the Royal Navy, had emigrated to Virginia in the 1740s. Active in trade, by 1750 Orange was a member of the common council. In 1766, however, Orange appeared on the side of order after the Sons of Liberty had tarred and stoned Captain Smith, and it was his candidate for vendue master, Stephen Tankard, that Lieutenant Governor Fauquier appointed, to the ire of Joseph and Maximilian Calvert. The following year Orange resigned his council seat, and in 1768 Orange appeared among the inoculationists. His involvement in the dispute eventually led him to leave the colony and return to England.⁶³

Other victims of the anti-inoculationist mob were members of the family of Lewis Hansford. Hansford, who was not a Scot, was one of the new arrivals in Norfolk's merchant community in the 1750s. He had joined Aitchison and the others in the insult to Mayor Kelsick in 1755. Two years later Hansford was elevated to the common council,

⁶²Dewey, "Jefferson's Law Practice," 42.

⁶³Smyth, "Pre-Revolutionary Mob Violence," 63; "Transcript of the MS Books and Papers of the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses. . . ." P.R.O., T.O. 1/549. [Loyalist Transcripts, New York Public Library]. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

taking his seat at the same time as Paul Loyall, and in 1762 Hansford became an alderman. But Hansford was not a success as a merchant. By the mid-1760s he owed a mortgage of £500 to the estate of the deceased Robert Tucker, and Thomas Newton and John Wilson, executors of the Tucker estate, obtained a ruling from the borough court to have some of Hansford's property sold to satisfy the debt.⁶⁴

Hansford also owed money to Christopher Calvert, another member of that seemingly innumerable family. In March 1769 Joseph Calvert, as borough sergeant, attempted to serve a writ on Hansford for recovery of the debt owed to Calvert's brother. Hansford locked himself in his room and refused to accept the writ. Joseph then applied to his brother, Mayor Cornelius Calvert, for the latter's signature on an escape warrant for Hansford's arrest and returned to apprehend Hansford on the following day.

As Joseph proceeded to the borough jail with Hansford in tow, Cornelius Calvert, alleging that his signature on the warrant had been obtained illegally because Hansford had not really fled, attempted to halt the arrest. There are conflicting accounts of what happened next. According to Joseph, Cornelius threatened to pull a pistol from his pocket, and when prevented, tried to seize Joseph's stick, but fell and injured himself. Cornelius maintained that he had no pistol, but was intervening at the request of Hansford's son. He seized Joseph's stick because the

⁶⁴*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 21 September 1769.

sergeant had raised it against Hansford and himself.⁶⁵

The bad blood between brothers Joseph and Maximilian Calvert on the one hand and Cornelius Calvert on the other may perhaps be explained by the fact that the elder Cornelius Calvert, father of Cornelius, Maximilian, Joseph, as well as several other sons and daughters, had entailed a portion of his estate to a younger son. The entail was broken, however, and the land went to the eldest son, Cornelius, who in turn leased the property to another brother, ship captain Saunders. Whether Maximilian and Joseph resented Cornelius' action is unknown, but at any rate, there were twelve children who had to share in the estate of the middling merchant, and it is evident that a good deal of enmity developed among the brothers.

More important than exacerbating a rift within the Calvert family, the smallpox affair left behind a lasting legacy of bitterness on the part of inoculationists toward the anti-inoculationists and their mob tactics. The inoculationists, many of them Scots and all newer arrivals who had risen to prominence in the 1760s, remained incensed at the behavior of the magistrates--Maximilian Calvert, Paul Loyall, Thomas Newton, and George Abyvon--who had condoned the action of Joseph Calvert's mob.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, Cornelius Calvert's suit against the rioters

⁶⁵Lewis Hansford, Joseph Calvert, and Cornelius Calvert all published accounts of the incident. See *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 20 April 1769; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 20 April 1769 (supplement).

⁶⁶Norfolk County Deed Book 18. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

commenced before the General Court in Williamsburg in April 1769. There was further trouble in Norfolk in the following month when Cornelius Calvert had Dalgleish inoculate three slaves who worked on a vessel which had arrived from Montserrat with smallpox on board. When word of this action spread, the doctor was imprisoned and an alderman (presumably a pro-inoculationist) was knocked down in the street. In the evening Cornelius Calvert's home was attacked and its windows broken by a mob who demanded that he drop his lawsuit against the rioters of the previous year. Calvert offered his general acquiescence in order to halt the vandalism.⁶⁷

The mob next moved on to Campbell's house, where, joined by Joseph Calvert, they broke his windows and drank his liquor until he gave a promise similar to Cornelius Calvert's. Present at Campbell's during the attack was Campbell's daughter, wife of James Gilchrist, one of Joseph Calvert's rivals as vendue master. She was in labor at the time, and the house was filled with ladies attending her. According to one of the inoculationists, her lying in was the main reason the mob attacked Campbell.⁶⁸

At the home of James Parker, their next target, however, the mob ran into stiffer resistance. Parker had driven out to Campbell's with the wife of his business partner, William Aitchison, and he quickly made his way home

⁶⁷*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 9 January 1772.

⁶⁸James Parker to Charles Steuart, [28 May 1769], Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

when the mob appeared. There, with the help of armed servants and others, Parker confronted the mob, refusing to accede to their demands and eventually driving them off.⁶⁹

The mob's activity on this occasion was aimed at stopping the suit in Williamsburg. The leaders of the previous year's riots wished to coerce their victims into dropping the charges, and their attack on Campbell's home during his daughter's labor seemed to have accomplished its purpose, for the Scottish doctor kept his promise and later withdrew from the suit.

Norfolk's smallpox affair of 1768 and 1769 also exacerbated the split between county and borough leaders. In 1768, as Dalgleish and Campbell planned their strategy, the county justices refused to make any ruling on the legality of inoculation even though the place where the operation was to be carried out had been moved outside the borough into the county. It was left for the borough magistrates, led by Maximilian Calvert, Paul Loyall, and Thomas Newton, to supervise the mob's action in forcing the patients to move to the pesthouse. The following year, when Dalgleish was arrested, the warrant for his apprehension was issued by county magistrate John Taylor, brother of Dalgleish's rival and anti-inoculationist Doctor James Taylor. The county's deputy sheriff, Samuel Portlock, however, refused to act and returned the warrant with a note that Dalgleish was located within borough limits. Thus it was left to the borough sergeant, the irascible Joseph

⁶⁹Henderson, "Smallpox and Patriotism," 419-20.

Calvert, to arrest Dalglish with a warrant from the borough bench issued by his brother, borough magistrate Maximilian Calvert. The county justices, however, then stepped in and issued a writ to have Dalglish tried before the General Court in Williamsburg. The county justices seemed to have favored the inoculationists in the dispute.⁷⁰

Norfolk County was the scene of a heated election for burgesses in the midst of the smallpox affair. A number of candidates entered the field, and the importance of the election is attested by the fact that the poll was recorded in the county deed book. A total of eight candidates received votes for the two seats, but three of the candidates, including Joseph Calvert, received two or fewer votes, and another, artisan Joseph Lockhart, received only twelve votes.⁷¹

John Wilson, member of a prominent county family, received the most votes (330) of any candidate, while the other seat went to Thomas Newton, who polled 303 votes. Another candidate was John Brickell, a lawyer who had only recently arrived in Norfolk from North Carolina. Most of the inoculationists, including Campbell, Parker, Aitchison, Hansford, Neil Jamieson, and Cornelius Calvert, along with Scots Alexander Gordon, and Andrew Sprowle, voted for Wilson and Brickell. Most of the anti-inoculationists and establishment leaders, including Paul Loyall, James Taylor,

⁷⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 9 January 1772.

⁷¹Norfolk County Deed Book 23. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Joseph Hutchings, and Samuel Boush, made Wilson, who seems to have been a consensus candidate, and Newton their choices. Joseph Calvert voted solely for Wilson, and his brother Maximilian voted for Wilson and Veale. Relatively newer merchants of an English background, including inoculationist William Orange and his son-in-law Matthew Rothery, and Thomas Thompson and Samuel Farmer, made Brickell and Veale their choices.⁷²

Brickell, who received a disappointing eighty-three votes, challenged the result. The unsuccessful attorney charged Newton with fraud, alleging that the establishment candidate had offered bribes to voters, and that several of his friends, "in a tumultuous and riotous manner," had prevented Brickell's supporters from voting. Brickell was successful in his demand for a new election, and the scenario was repeated the following year with the same result.⁷³

The election of 1769, with Veale dropping out of the race, also shows a parallel between a voter's stand in the smallpox affair and his candidate. The inoculationists again translated their hatred of Thomas Newton into votes for his opponent. They again failed to muster enough votes, and Newton won.⁷⁴

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³Robert E. and B. Katherine Brown, *Virginia, 1705-1786: Democracy or Aristocracy?*, (East Lansing, Mich., 1964), 155; J. P. Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Colonial Virginia, 1766-1769*, (Richmond, Va., 1906), 197.

⁷⁴Norfolk County Deed Book 24. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Within the borough, the campaign for burgess did not reach the same level of intensity. Borough burgess Joseph Hutchings, son of long-time burgess John Hutchings who had himself been a burgess since 1761, commanded the overwhelming support of the town's principal inhabitants. In May 1769, on Joseph Hutchings' return from Williamsburg, a delegation of the borough's principal inhabitants met him, expressed their approbation of his conduct in the assembly, and "genteely and elegantly entertained" him at a lavish fete. They assured Hutchings that if he desired to continue as their representative, they would elect him without the necessity of his campaigning. Apparently, even in the midst of the turbulence, the borough oligarchy maintained its control over the choosing of a burgess.⁷⁵

The smallpox riots at Norfolk in 1768 and 1769 left a bitter legacy. To Campbell and the other inoculationists, the attack on the sick patients clearly showed that borough sergeant Joseph Calvert and his allies, magistrates Paul Loyall, Maximilian Calvert, and Thomas Newton, and clerk Samuel Boush, could not be relied upon to preserve order and actually incited mob activity. The smallpox riot of 1768 forms part of a pattern of violence in Norfolk during the decade. While each outbreak of violence in Norfolk seemed an isolated incident, taken together, the riots and turmoil revealed a magistracy at times powerless to prevent disturbances in the community. The riot against the Spanish in 1762, the attack on Captain Smith in 1766, the resistance

⁷⁵*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 1 June 1769.

to British impressment the following year, the release of troublemaker Ralph Inman, the public airing of the Bannerman's domestic dispute, and the smallpox violence of 1768-9 offered telling evidence that several borough aldermen could not keep public order.

The half-decade of violence eroded confidence in the ability or even desire of the established magistrates to maintain order. It also fostered a split within the borough ruling group. On one side of the schism stood the older, established borough families and their allies--the Newton, Boush, Calvert, and Loyall faction--who possessed a strong hold on the borough bench dating from 1736. On the other side arose a group of various dissidents. Many of them were Scots such as James Parker, William Aitchison, and Archibald Campbell. Others were native Englishmen such as William Orange and Lewis Hansford who had arrived in the 1740s or later and found it more difficult to gain access into the established circle. Cornelius Calvert was an aberration: his brothers Joseph and Maximilian numbered among the leading anti-inoculationists, but Cornelius was one of the most fierce inoculationists.

This local dispute took place during a period of heightened political and commercial activity. As opposition to British policies mounted, and the schism in the Norfolk merchant community grew deeper, area merchants were also developing more specialized commercial functions as the area's trade grew. During the 1770s, for a time it seemed that Norfolk area merchants would lead the rest of Virginia's commercial community in forming a province-wide

merchants' association. But the attempt failed. The split among Norfolk's commercial leaders and the growing imperial crisis ultimately destroyed the efforts of Norfolk's merchants effectively to combine their interests with those of other Virginia merchants. The Revolution and the choices it imposed further hardened divisions already present in Norfolk's leadership.

Chapter V
Norfolk Merchants and the Imperial Crisis:
Commercial Development and the Virginia Merchants'
Association

The violence plaguing Norfolk during the 1760s was played out against a background of continued economic development. The expansion of Norfolk's economy in the years after 1750 formed part of wider alterations in Virginia's economy and the Atlantic trading world. Although tobacco remained Virginia's most important crop, the growing importance of wheat and corn as cash crops and the resulting diversification represented a significant development in Norfolk's economic life.

Norfolk's economic growth had several important consequences for Norfolk's merchants. With increased capital at their command, Norfolk traders, especially the newer arrivals after mid-century, began increasingly to invest in domestic manufacturing schemes to augment their business. But mercantilist restrictions on manufacturing in the colonies made such ventures limited, and imports of British manufactured items remained a high priority and a significant sign of economic vitality. The end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 saw a significant rise in the volume of British imports to the Chesapeake, most of which entered the lower James River. The increase of imports from the mother

country to Norfolk's wharves sparked the development of more specialized business functions among Norfolk merchants. In addition to specialization, the years after 1750 saw a growing sense of class consciousness among all of Virginia's merchants and led to a move toward increased cooperation among the colony's merchants. This trend culminated in an unsuccessful attempt to establish a provincial merchants' association.

Although British capital and credit remained important in Norfolk's commercial growth, especially for the newer arrivals, Norfolk's established merchants themselves served as sources of credit to the area's less affluent inhabitants. At the apex of a chain of local economic relationships, the merchant-magistrates not only owned much of the choice waterfront property which they leased to other merchants, but they also lent money and advanced credit to the area's planters, merchants, and artisans.

The established merchants gained much of their local financial standing by virtue of their ownership of land within the borough. With the commercial expansion and population growth in the years after 1750 such property became more expensive. Many of the new merchants who became successful after mid-century, such as William Aitchison, Andrew Sprowle, and Daniel Rothery, began their careers renting property from either Samuel Boush or George Newton, the borough's two major property holders. Increase in rents in the borough was undoubtedly a major reason for the success of the town of Portsmouth after its founding in

1752.¹

As sources of credit Norfolk's major merchants became involved in a number of financial dealings with lesser local inhabitants. John Hutchings, for example, the borough's foremost merchant, advanced a sum to ship carpenter Francis Dyson in 1742 for a mortgage on a lot on the west side of the road leading north out of the borough. Five years later Owen Lloyd and his wife Christian mortgaged their furniture to Hutchings for £99. In 1743 Samuel Boush II executed a bond for £200 Virginia currency as security for eighty acres of land ship captain Henry Miller sold to Boush.²

There is evidence that this financial activity increased after 1750 as the area underwent commercial expansion. In 1754 Norfolk County planter Samuel Butt pledged three slaves, only one of whom was an adult male, to Thomas Newton for £37/4/1. Merchant John Phripp, a member of the borough founding group, held a mortgage on property of Josiah Russell which he conveyed to master carpenter Robert Waller when Russell died intestate in 1755.³

The leading merchants' control of local credit can also be seen in their involvement in domestic manufacturing. Even before the town became a borough, Norfolk's major

¹"Transcript of the MS Books and Papers of the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses. . . " P.R.O., T.O. 1/549. [Loyalist Transcripts, New York Public Library]. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²Norfolk County Deed Book 13. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

³Norfolk County Deed Book 17. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

merchants had processed local products for export. Borough founder Samuel Boush, for example, possessed among his effects in 1736 a large pitch kettle, used in extracting the product of the local pine forests. Robert Tucker II, another local magnate from the early period, was proprietor of a large bakery in the 1740s, which supplied many of the provisions for local vessels. Of course the most significant local industry from the earliest years of the county was shipbuilding and repair, and Andrew Sprowle's facility at Gosport, in full operation by 1760, represented the most extensive industrial enterprise of any local merchant.

After mid-century, many of the new arrivals to the Elizabeth River, staked by a cargo of British goods or ties to British firms, invested in manufacturing through association with local artisans. These enterprises blossomed especially in the late 1760s and early 1770s, when the policy of non-importation provided an incentive for their formation.

Matthew Rothery and his brother, Daniel, both of whom came from England in the late 1740s, purchased property within the borough and rented a portion to master blacksmith Joel Mohun. The agreement went beyond the landlord-tenant relationship, for the slaves who worked in Mohun's shop belonged to Matthew Rothery, and in 1755 Daniel Rothery had an apprentice bound to him in the trade of smithing.⁴

⁴*Virginia Gazette*, (Purdie and Dixon), 17 October 1771; Loyalist Transcripts. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Apprentice Bond: Robert Stewart to Daniel Rothery, 17 January 1755, in Norfolk

Whitehaven merchant Henry Fleming, who arrived in Norfolk in 1770, combined an import-export business with a saddle manufactory in the borough. Announcing that he intended to sell men's and women's saddles of every kind wholesale or retail, Fleming asserted that the imported leather he used was "neater and more durable" than local leather. The Whitehaven native had some initial problems with his concern; his saddles made of imported leather were more expensive, and in 1772 his master saddle-maker died. But he persisted, hiring more workmen and lowering prices. He also moved his shop and store to a better location, leasing a house formerly occupied by Maximilian Calvert.⁵

The 1770s also saw James Ingram, the Scottish emigrant who imported European goods, establish a shoe factory, directed by Ingram's partner, shoemaker William Forsyth. Using imported leather, the concern made boots as well as men's, women's and children's shoes.⁶

Those wishing to avoid the higher cost of imported leather could obtain locally produced leather from merchant Thomas Thompson, a lesser importer in the wine trade who owned a tanyard at a fork in the road from Norfolk Borough to Tanner's Creek and Princess Anne County. Thompson employed three black slaves at the tannery, one of whom was

County Deed Book 17. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 22 November 1770, 8 August 1771, 10 December 1772.

⁶*Ibid.*, 2 April, 1772; *Loyalist Transcripts*. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

"a tolerable good currier."⁷

A more extensive leather processing plant was the firm of Donald Campbell and Company. Established in the 1760s by a group of Scottish merchants which included John Hunter and James Parker, the tanyard was part of a larger complex which included a ropeworks and shoe factory. The concern occupied four and a half acres and employed fifty skilled slaves. Testifying after the Revolution, Parker called it the "largest rope and tan work in America."⁸

The division between inoculationists and anti-inoculationists manifested itself in several of these business ventures. Not to be outdone by the Scots, native Norfolkian Thomas Newton, an anti-inoculationist, established a ropeworks in Norfolk in 1770 to compete with the Scottish concern. The new ropeworks employed workmen "from some of the best rope walks in England," and Newton promised that their product was "not inferior to any imported." Newton hired William Plume, an Irish immigrant and one-time employee at the Scottish ropeworks, as manager of the ropery and associated ship store. Plume's pre-Revolutionary career was not without controversy. He appeared before the hustings court on several occasions, charged with "being a person of lewd life and conversation and a common disturber of the peace." But apparently Plume possessed standing with established leader Thomas Newton and

⁷*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 26 September, 1771, 17 September, 1772.

⁸Loyalist Transcripts. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

prospered at the new ropery, eventually rising to a prominent position in Norfolk after the Revolution.⁹

With the presence of two rival ropeworks in Norfolk, it became increasingly difficult to market imported cordage. Henry Fleming, who in addition to his saddlery, carried on a trade in imported manufactures through his Whitehaven partners Fisher and Bragg, frequently complained of slow sales of imported rope because of the existence of two local ropeworks.

Scarce a vessel arrives here but one party or the other are acquainted with the Capt. his owners or connexions which make it exceeding difficult to do anything considerable in the sale of that commodity.¹⁰

One of the most ambitious undertakings in Norfolk before the Revolution was a rum distillery established in 1769 by a group of Scottish merchants and other newer arrivals. Norfolk already featured one distillery: a small operation which Thomas Newton and Paul Loyall had founded some years earlier. Seeking to compete with Newton and take advantage of rising demand upriver for rum, the new firm's local shareholders included Neil Jamieson, William Orange, partners George Logan and Robert Gilmour, and Dr. Archibald Campbell. The directors hired Scotsman William Calderhead, who was also a shareholder, to manage the operation.

⁹*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 31 May 1770; Elizabeth Wingo and W. Bruce Wingo, comps., *Norfolk County, Virginia Tithables, 1766-1780*, (Chesapeake, Va., 1985), 84, 113, 146, 204-5; Norfolk Borough Hustings Court Order Book 1. [microfilm, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.].

¹⁰Henry Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 13 April 1773, Henry Fleming to Lidderdale and Co., 7 June 1773, Papers of Henry Fleming. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Notable by the absence of their names from the list of initial subscribers were Scots William Aitchison and James Parker. Jamieson had proposed their participation in combination with their old friend Charles Steuart, then a Royal Customs official in Boston. Current agitation in Boston over British customs regulation may have made Jamieson wary of including Steuart except as a silent partner. Parker also resented Jamieson's dictatorial control over the operation, and he and Aitchison declined the offer of shares.¹¹

Capitalized with an initial £6,000 in Virginia currency, the operation was underway by 1771, but the business proved more costly than originally estimated, and the following year the original capital was raised to £6,000 sterling. The directors, who included several Scottish factors on other Virginia rivers such as Thomas Montgomerie of Dumfries, Alexander Donald and James Lyle of Rocky Ridge, Archibald McCall of Hobb's Hole, Buchanan and Duncan of Petersburg, Edward Brisbane of Petersburg, and Daniel McCallum of Osborne's, agreed to delay dividends for seven years in order to plow profits back into the business. With that leeway, the business prospered. By the time the Revolution intervened to make any returns impossible, the manager of the Scottish concern estimated that the original shares had nearly doubled in value. The success of the

¹¹James Parker to Charles Steuart, 5 July 1769, December 1769, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Charles Steuart to James Parker, 29 July 1769, 12 February 1771, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

distillery came at the expense of the older firm. By early 1771, with still another distillery being built in Portsmouth, Newton and Loyall had been obliged to lease their operation to John Gilchrist, John Goodrich, and Thomas Archdeacon.¹²

A further indication of the area's commercial vitality in this period was another attempt to have the customs house at Hampton moved to Norfolk. Buoyed by an inspection visit of John Williams, the British Inspector General of Customs, Norfolk's leading merchants petitioned for the relocation. In addition to the advantages such a move would provide to Norfolk's commerce, there was also the prospect of additional official positions in the British colonial bureaucracy. Leading local traders fell over themselves in their efforts to impress Williams. Princess Anne County merchant-planter Edward Hack Moseley, who already held the post of surveyor for the Elizabeth River, held a grand ball for Williams at his estate, and borough alderman Maximilian Calvert importuned the Inspector General to consider his brother Joseph for a post.¹³

Williams favored the relocation. Nineteen-twentieths

¹²Loyalist Transcripts. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; James Parker to Charles Steuart, 19 April 1771, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

¹³William Aitchison to Charles Steuart, 2 January 1770, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; See also Joseph R. Frese, ed., "The Royal Customs Service in the Chesapeake, 1770: The Reports of John Williams, Inspector General," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXI (1973), 280-318.

of all the dutiable goods entered in the lower James River landed at Norfolk's wharves, and of the average of 233 vessels clearing annually, only twelve were not owned by Norfolk merchants. His superiors in London failed to accede to his recommendation, however, and the customs house remained at Hampton.¹⁴

Not all local merchants favored locating the customs house in Norfolk. Portsmouth merchants, most of whom were members of the Scottish faction, submitted a petition to have the customs house moved to their town, asserting that Portsmouth was more convenient to Suffolk, Smithfield, and North Carolina. Although sympathizing more with the Portsmouth than the Norfolk traders, partners William Aitchison and James Parker signed neither petition. They preferred that the customs house remain where it was rather than relocate to Norfolk, "where the magistrates may at any time raise a mob and pull down the house."¹⁵

The increased involvement of Norfolk's leading merchants in domestic manufacturing provides only one indication of the area's commercial growth after mid-century. Another important development was the growth of specialized business functions, similar to those available in the large seaports in the North. One measure of this is the increase in the number and importance of storekeepers. Several of the older Norfolk merchants had operated stores

¹⁴Frese, ed., "Royal Customs Service," 314.

¹⁵James Parker to Charles Steuart, 2 January 1770, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

in conjunction with their import business, usually employing clerks as storekeepers. After the 1750s, there was a growing number of independent merchants who described themselves as storekeepers, or grocers. One step below the importers, yet of higher standing than clerks, Norfolk's storekeepers sold products from the West Indies and the Wine Islands and usually featured European manufactured goods.

Shopkeeper Alexander Bruce apprenticed Scarborough Tankard to the business in 1755. Bruce was successful enough to subscribe £50 to the building of a new public wharf in 1761, and in the same year his erstwhile apprentice received a license to operate a borough tavern.¹⁶

John Lawrence operated a store in which he sold goods imported in the name of his Liverpool partners, John Sparling and William Bolden. The firm imported a wide variety of goods to Norfolk's wharves, including on one occasion 1,500 bushels of coal from Newcastle. In addition to a range of English manufactured items, Lawrence also sold salt, beer, cheese, and potatoes. In 1766 the firm also imported cargoes of slaves direct from Africa, landing them at Bermuda Hundred on the upper James River where they were auctioned to Virginia planters. Associated with them in

¹⁶Norfolk County Deed Book 17. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; "Schedule [of subscribers to the public wharf]," in W. W. Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the laws of Virginia . . .*, 13 vols., (Richmond, 1819-1823), VII, 437, reprinted in Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 126; Norfolk Borough Hustings and Corporation Court Order Book 7. [microfilm, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.].

this venture was York County planter Thomas Tabb.¹⁷

Balfour and Barraud was another firm which operated a store in Norfolk in the 1760s. James Balfour hailed from Hampton, where he resided in a comfortable home, across Hampton Roads from Norfolk. His partner, Daniel Barraud, who may have had a connection in Williamsburg, operated the store in Norfolk Borough in which various European and East Indian goods were offered for sale. Similar to John Lawrence's association with planter-merchant Thomas Tabb, Balfour and Barraud dealt with Rappahannock River planter Mann Page, although the relationship was probably that of debtor-creditor. Page sold a group of slaves at Hanover and assigned the notes for their purchase to Balfour and Barraud. The latter announced that they would be in attendance at the General Court at Williamsburg to collect the sums due.¹⁸

There is other evidence that as Norfolk's commercial development proceeded, local merchants and mercantile firms extended their economic tendrils up Virginia's rivers to the planters who depended so heavily on credit to maintain their roles and status in Virginia society. The Scottish distillery, for example, included among its shareholders Scottish merchants in upriver towns. The establishment of this network of Scottish factors throughout the province

¹⁷*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 11 April, 13 June 1766; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 4 July, 1 August, 27 November 1766.

¹⁸*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 13 June 1766; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 10 October 1766, 29 January, 12 March 1767.

proved an impetus for the formation of a regular association of merchants in 1769.

Norfolk's Scots, in particular, with their access to credit from the great Scottish tobacco houses, and their factors upriver, were able to offer financial services to Virginia planters. In 1765 prominent King and Queen County planter Carter Braxton employed Norfolk merchant Neil Jamieson to purchase insurance, and asked Jamieson to bring together a group of local merchants to purchase a £1000 bond Braxton had received from a Mr. Brown. That Norfolk merchants could provide such specialized services, is another indication of the port's economic maturation.¹⁹

An additional measure of Norfolk's commercial development after 1750 was the increase in the number of vendue masters. The vanguard of commercial specialization, the vendue master, or public auctioneer, was a quasi-official functionary who presided over sales of debt-encumbered estates and sold goods damaged by storm or shipwreck. Merchants also resorted to vendue for quick sales of imported goods if local markets were glutted. Vendue masters generally required cash or short credit for their sales, and they usually exacted up to a five per cent commission. Although they sold at lower prices than regular sales, the volume of their business usually meant considerable profits.²⁰

¹⁹Carter Braxton to Neil Jamieson, 2 September 1765, Neil Jamieson Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²⁰Virginia Harrington, *The New York Merchant On the Eve of the Revolution*, reprint ed., (Gloucester, Mass., 1964),

Such specialized merchants were numerous in the busiest seaports where higher volume of trade in British manufactured goods, a major staple of vendue sales, made the post profitable. In the southern colonies the position required official approval, and vendue masters were sometimes chosen from among persons with official connections. In Charleston, for example, Robert Wells, publisher of the *South Carolina Weekly Gazette*, served as public auctioneer as well as marshal of the local vice-admiralty court.²¹

As a sort of public official, vendue masters were sometimes subject to criticism, particularly regarding their management of sheriff's sales of debt-encumbered estates. In 1768 a resident of Nansemond County wrote to the *Virginia Gazette* to complain of "the fraud, injustice, and perjury" at an estate sale in a neighboring county. The writer contended that plate worth £200 was sold for £50; slaves worth £80 sold for £20, and a new, fashionable coach worth at least £120 went for £10. In sum, the writer asserted, items that commanded a mere £300 might have sold for £1,000 if fairly exposed to the public. The post of vendue master, an important position, attracted a good deal of controversy.²²

Because auctions usually meant sales at lower prices,

92-3.

²¹Robert M. Weir, "The Role of the Newspaper Press in the Southern Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution: An Interpretation," in Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution*, (Worcester, Mass., 1980), 104.

²²*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 6 October 1768.

established commission merchants and importers also regularly bemoaned vendue sales. In 1747 Charleston merchant Henry Laurens, unable to sell some fabric from Hamburg, complained that

the town is so glutted with all kinds of goods that we have Vendues every day in the week where shopkeepers, etc. supply themselves, so that the stores have little chance of selling any goods except to set customers in the country at 12 months credit, which method I don't choose just now.²³

The developments in the Atlantic economy which were so significant in Norfolk's commercial development after 1750, also made the vendue master more significant. During the 1760s especially, when increased imports of British manufactured goods created a occasional gluts in the markets in the northern seaports, British merchants began to export goods directly to vendue merchants. The greater number of such auction sales caused more resentment among established merchants in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.²⁴

Because of the legacy of the violence of the 1760s, the controversy surrounding Norfolk's auctioneers stemmed from more personal circumstances. In Norfolk in the 1760s, although most vendue masters specialized in public sales, many of the auctioneers continued to engage in private

²³Henry Laurens to James Crokatt, 18 January 1747, in Philip Hamer, et al., eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, 12 vols. to date, (Columbia, S.C., 1968-), I, 101.

²⁴Marc Egnal, *A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 138. Thomas Doerflinger, however, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 170-171, asserts that the increase in vendue sales in Philadelphia in the late 1760s was not as significant as Egnal believes. In Norfolk there is little evidence of animosity toward auctioneers because English firms exported to them directly; rather, the controversies centered on personal and ethnic differences.

business. Because the position required significant commercial standing within the community, Norfolk's vendue criers were sponsored by groups of merchants who stood for the large bond necessary. As the number and importance of the area's vendue masters increased, there emerged bitter rivalries among these syndicates for the business. In addition, vendue masters often served in other official capacities, and criticism directed at their handling of public sales sometimes spilled over into their exercise of other functions.

Norfolk merchant Alexander Ross, who eventually served as both councilman and alderman, appears to have been the borough's first vendue master. Borough founder Alexander Mackenzie employed Ross as auctioneer as early as 1749. The following year the Common Council ordered Ross to pay charges arising from his sale of the cargo and fixtures of the ship *Nostra Senioria De los Godos*. Sums were due to James Anthony Ullrichus, James van Wardts and his wife Adriana, and Jean Brisanneau, including charges for travel to Williamsburg, presumably to attend Virginia's Vice-Admiralty Court.²⁵

A second early Norfolk vendue master was tavern keeper Richard Scott. In 1754 Scott purchased a storehouse on Main Street from Norfolk merchant Hugh Blackburn for £1,185 Virginia currency. A group of the area's most prominent men, including John Taylor, Robert Tucker, Reverend Charles

²⁵Alexander Mackenzie Account Book, 1748-50. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 79-80.

Smith, and attorney James Holt, advanced Scott the money to buy the warehouse for his vendue business.²⁶

Vendue masters needed the backing of such influential persons to inspire public confidence, and vendue masters were obliged to post a substantial bond (£5,000 Virginia currency by mid-1760s). Although regulation of public auctioneers was left to the locality, it was common to secure the assent of governor and council. The rewards of the post could be great. Vendue sales were made for cash or short term credit, and commission generally amounted to five percent on the first £100, and two and a half percent thereafter. Scott, however, apparently had trouble making ends meet; he re-negotiated his loan on at least one occasion, and died in debt in 1766.²⁷

Like Ross, Scott too held local office, attaining a seat on the council in 1751, becoming deputy clerk of the borough in the following year, and eventually being named borough sergeant with the responsibility for collecting the tax. But the one-time innkeeper remained controversial. His tavern was the scene of the mock election in 1755, and at his death eleven years later, there was a deficiency in his sergeant's accounts. The shortage caused difficulty for former Mayor Maximilian Calvert. A resolution of the Common

²⁶Indenture of 13 March, 1754, in Norfolk County Deed Book 17. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²⁷Virginia did not pass a law regulating auctions until after the Revolution. See Samuel Shepherd, ed., *The Statutes at Large*. . . , reprint ed., 3 vols., (New York, 1970), II, 22; Indenture of 24 January 1757, in Norfolk County Deed Book 18. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Hall asked whether Calvert

by not taking Bond of Richard Scott collector of the Two and a half per cent Tax pursuant to Bye Law, is not liable for the deficiency of the said Tax, and whether he, by such neglect did not make himself security for the said Scotts faithful discharge of his collectorship, and the Question being put it passed in the Affirmative.²⁸

Following Scott's death, his house and lot were advertised for sale in order to satisfy his creditors. Managers of the sale included some of Norfolk's first citizens and undoubtedly represented the chief creditors to the estate--Thomas Newton, Cornelius Calvert, Samuel Boush, George Abyvon, Paul Loyall, John Willoughby, and James Taylor, who acted for Lemuel Willoughby. Despite the implication of debt, however, the late vendue master's holdings were "so well known they need no description."²⁹

After Scott's demise, Maximilian Calvert put up the £5,000 bond for the former mayor's younger brother Joseph to succeed the late vendue master. Calvert's application to the governor, however, came just after the Sons of Liberty attacked the suspected informer Captain William Smith. Another group of Norfolk merchants advanced their candidate, tavern-keeper Stephen Tankard, and although Tankard's inn also served as a local house of prostitution, Lieutenant Governor Fauquier favored Tankard over Calvert because of Calvert's connection with the Sons of Liberty. Securing a security from his brother, magistrate Maximilian, the irate Joseph Calvert rented a warehouse and advertised his vendue

²⁸Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 80, 88, 148-9.

²⁹*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 12 March 1767.

business without the governor's approval. The controversy over Calvert and the ensuing rivalry between vendue masters exacerbated tensions in Norfolk before the Revolution, for it was Joseph Calvert who led the anti-inoculationist mob two years later.³⁰

Like his predecessor Richard Scott, eventually Joseph Calvert also simultaneously held the post of borough sergeant. Because of the public trust vested in vendue masters they were suitable candidates for offices such as borough sergeant which required handling public money.

Norfolk's earliest auctioneers attempted to maintain their private business in addition to their public functions. But as the volume of Norfolk's trade increased, some found it difficult to play both roles. In 1766 vendue master Thomas Hepburn, for example, advertised his "commission business," offering to sell "any goods sent to him either by private or public sale." As a private merchant, Hepburn joined Robert Hart of Page's Warehouse and Captain William Fox of the *Matty*, in exporting tobacco or furs from the James, York, or Rappahannock Rivers to London. His public business included the vendue sale of the brigantine *Little Patrick*, "new sheathed and a very fast sailer," along with the vessel's inventory. But in November

³⁰For Tankard's reputation, see Robert Colville to Neil Jamieson, 4 March 1765, Neil Jamieson Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. Colville wrote an abject apology to Jamieson for his addiction to prostitutes, pleading that his future conduct would comply with "your good wishes. You was pleased to tell me that I might take a whore on board but Bad as I am my inclination does not lead that way. You was pleased to ask the second mate what house I used--I never did use any but Mr. Tankard's or Mr. Dun's."

Hepburn announced that he was quitting the vendue business, as it interfered too much with his private concerns.

Henceforth, he would sell only local produce or other goods sent to him in private transactions. James Gilchrist, "a young gentleman of known honor, experience, and diligence," took over Hepburn's auction business.³¹

Gilchrist, a Scot, soon emerged as one of Joseph Calvert's chief rivals as vendue merchant. Gilchrist became auctioneer of choice for a group of merchants who had opposed Joseph Calvert's entering the vendue business. The group who employed Gilchrist included some of the borough's leading Scottish merchants, such as James and Archibald Campbell, William Aitchison, James Parker, and John Hunter, who, along with Robert Tucker, were also the principal partners in the Scottish ropeworks. When Hunter fell ill and left Norfolk in 1766, the General Court ordered his share in the ropeworks sold at public vendue. His partners made sure that Gilchrist, who was Archibald Campbell's son-in-law, conducted the sale. Gilchrist also served as auctioneer for other Scots such as Neil Jamieson. By late 1767, his vendue business had grown to such an extent that Gilchrist took on as partner a descendant of borough founder John Taylor, and the firm advertised as Gilchrist and Taylor.³²

Norfolk's growth and economic development in the 1750s

³¹*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 9 May, 16 May, 1766; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 13 November, 26 November, 1766.

³²*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 7 May 1767, 14 May 1767, 10 December 1767.

and 1760s saw the number of public auctioneers increase to three or four. This figure compares favorably to the six auctioneers who regularly advertised in New York in 1770, and the seven vendue merchants listed for Philadelphia in 1774. Indeed, by the mid-1760s, the auction business had grown to the extent that the Common Hall considered taxing the proceeds of vendue sales. The vendue criers' din was so great by 1767 that borough leaders ordered that "for the Future" vendue masters should not "beat the drum for their sale of goods, within the Limits of the said Borough."³³

Because of their involvement in a variety of interests, Norfolk's vendue merchants were in the forefront of further commercial specialization in the 1760s and 1770s. In addition to his vendue business, Joseph Calvert acted as broker for Virginia merchants who desired to trans-ship goods via Norfolk. Brokers were agents who stored, shipped, or sold goods consigned to their care. By April 1768, Calvert could announce that he continued "the business of disposing of any kind of goods, etc., for cash or credit on commission at the usual per cent." Because a syndicate backed Calvert, his access to their credit and storage facilities enabled him to deal in all sorts of goods--English manufactures, West Indian produce, locally produced foodstuffs, or even tobacco--and because Calvert possessed the public status of vendue master, the personal knowledge which was usually the rule in traditional commercial

³³Harrington, *New York Merchant*, 93; Jacob Price, "Economic Function and Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," *Perspectives in American History*, VIII (1974), 178; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 148, 149.

transactions was not necessary.³⁴

Calvert also offered to secure insurance. Virginia and Norfolk merchants were accustomed to purchasing insurance for their ventures from Philadelphia or Britain, or relying upon the great Scottish tobacco houses which furnished insurance through their American factors such as Neil Jamieson. Calvert's offer to provide insurance perhaps represents an attempt to compete with the Scots, but at any rate, it serves as a mark of Norfolk's economic development.³⁵

Another of Calvert's rivals as vendue master and broker was William McCaa. Constantly hounded by creditors, McCaa was a shadowy figure who operated on the fringes of the established mercantile community and lacked the backing which Calvert commanded. Nevertheless McCaa did a considerable business. In 1768 he advertised his services as broker and auctioneer, offering to sell a range of goods and emphasizing several features in an attempt to garner Calvert's trade. McCaa asserted that he possessed greater storage and loading facilities than Calvert. In addition he offered consigners the use of a chest, in which textiles could be stored without the danger of fading. McCaa hoped that this storage facility would not offend purchasers who presumably would be obliged to buy such goods sight unseen.³⁶

³⁴*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 14 April 1768 (supplement).

³⁵*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 23 May 1766.

³⁶*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 14 April 1768.

Of course Calvert was highly offended by McCaa's advertisement, and publicly fired back that he, too, would sell goods from a chest, if those consigning goods to him would provide the chest. But Calvert recommended doing without a chest, "well knowing the goods will not sell for so much by one-third" if stored away. Calvert implied that the purpose of using such a device was not to prevent cloth goods from fading, but to give the broker an opportunity to purchase the best goods at a lower price before the public was able to buy. As for the use of additional cranes and warehouses for storing goods, Calvert contended that his expense in purchasing such facilities would not justify the return. But because of his commercial contacts at Norfolk Calvert could arrange extra storage and was always willing to oversee others who had cranes and warehouses.³⁷

McCaa never did escape debt despite his efforts. By early 1770, pressed from all sides, he advertised for payment from his debtors and offered some of his property for sale, including his gardener, a pair of globes, a telescope, thermometer, tankard, and other personal items to satisfy his own creditors. In April, McCaa announced his resignation from business. A former associate, George Kelly, took over the vendue and brokerage concerns. Kelly continued in that capacity until after the Revolution and eventually become alderman and mayor of the borough in the 1780s. McCaa, however, did not escape indebtedness. By 1771 it was the general opinion among Norfolk's mercantile

³⁷*Ibid.* For the use of a chest to store fabrics, see Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, 94.

men that he "was not worth a shilling."³⁸

Norfolk commission merchant James Archdeacon was another vendue master who also opened an "ensurance office" at Norfolk. In 1771 Archdeacon, who had "provided convenient warehouses for the reception of goods," announced that he intended to sell on commission goods at either private sale or public vendue. As an insurer, Archdeacon in particular desired "orders from the country," and directed traders who attended the General Court at Williamsburg to pay the premiums there; others had to include the premiums with their orders. Greatest care would be taken, he asserted, "to have good people to the parties."³⁹

Vendue master George Kelly, McCaa's successor, as if in answer to Archdeacon, announced soon after that he continued his vendue and brokerage business, which constituted "his whole employment." Kelly's advertisement is the first sign of a Norfolk merchant specializing entirely in brokerage and vendue.⁴⁰

There are other signs of Norfolk's growing commercial sophistication. In the early 1770s, as a response to the shortage of currency, a chronic problem in Virginia's economy, exacerbated on this occasion by a contraction of

³⁸*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 6 January, 10 April 1770; William Cunninghame to James Wilson and Company, 16 February 1771, William Cunninghame and Company Letterbook. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

³⁹James H. Soltow, *The Economic Role of Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, Va., 1965), 16-17; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 31 October 1771.

⁴⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 5 November 1771, 10 December 1772.

British credit, several James River merchants attempted to establish a private bank. Organized by prominent merchant-planter Thomas Tabb of the Lower Peninsula and dubbed the James River Bank, the plan called for the issuing of twelve-month notes, presumably on mercantile credit. The proposal never reached fruition, but in his initial efforts, Tabb ordered Norfolk merchant James Ingram, whose brother in London furnished paper for several Scottish banks, to procure the bank's paper. In the currency crisis of 1773, the Virginia legislature issued the stillborn bank's notes as Virginia paper, and at least one local merchant, Portsmouth storekeeper William Donaldson, a Scot who had emigrated to Virginia in 1763, accepted the notes as payment for goods. His claims after the Revolution included £150 in "James River bank bills."⁴¹

Increasing specialization was only one sign of Norfolk's commercial development after the mid-eighteenth century. With the changes in Virginia's economy after 1750, there is evidence that the province's merchants as a group began to develop a separate class consciousness in many ways opposed to that of the province's traditional planter elite. The chartering of Norfolk Borough in 1736 represents the first concrete sign of an organized commercial interest in Virginia, but founding magistrates such as long-time burgesses John Hutchings and Robert Tucker, as well as

⁴¹Loyalist Transcripts. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. See also Robert Carter Nicholas to John Norton and Sons, 17 March 1773, 30 July 1773, in Frances Norton Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons: Merchants of London and Virginia*, 2nd ed., (Newton Abbott, Devon, 1968), 305-308, 340-342.

members of the Boush and Newton families, all of whom owed much of their affluence to investments in land, can be considered as the local equivalents of Virginia's tobacco planters.

After 1750, however, the changes in Virginia's economy brought a new set of merchants into Norfolk, who, just as they challenged the established group for positions of authority, also began to express a distinctive consciousness separate from and in many ways opposed to the planter ethos. Norfolk merchant Charles Steuart provided an early indication of this development in a 1751 letter to a West Indian correspondent. "Unfortunately our legislature," he wrote, "[is] made chiefly of county gentlemen who in their great wisdom think fit to lay the burden for the support of government on trade."⁴²

Despite this growing sense of separate interest from the planters, Norfolk's mercantile community remained fragmented. Partly because of the schism which developed as a result of the smallpox riots, colonial Norfolk traders did not form a chamber of commerce or similar organization to protect their interests. Other colonial seaports featured a similar lack of cohesion among its merchants. In Philadelphia, for example, an attempt to organize a chamber of commerce before the Revolution "produced meager results." Only New York City saw the establishment of such an organization. In 1764 city merchants first met informally

⁴²Charles Steuart to Walter Tullideph, 23 September 1751, Charles Steuart Letterbooks. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

to address the Board of Trade on "the declining state of trade," but their memorial failed to prevent the passage of the Sugar Act. In 1768 New York City formally organized a chamber of commerce, the first of its kind in the colonies, and its founding "marks New York as a progressive business community."⁴³

The purpose of the New York organization was to encourage commerce, support industry, arbitrate disputes and foster legislation favorable to trade. Most of the leading merchants of the community were members, and they immediately tackled what they perceived as their greatest problems: lack of currency, regulation of manufactures, and amelioration of commercial disputes. The New York chamber was not political. Although founded in the midst of growing opposition to the Townshend duties, the organization never passed resolutions either favoring or opposing non-importation. The chamber's mixed membership probably worked against any discussion of political issues. The New York merchants were primarily interested in internal regulation of their own business practices. For example, members of the New York chamber were required to attend monthly meetings on penalty of a fine.⁴⁴

When Virginia merchants attempted to form a mercantile organization, it was to Williamsburg rather than Norfolk that they looked. The provincial capital was an important focus for Virginia's economic life. Four times a year, at

⁴³Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, 19; Harrington, *New York Merchant*, 74-75, 320.

⁴⁴Harrington, *New York Merchant*, 74-75.

the sessions of the General Court in April and October, and those of the Court of Oyer and Terminer in June and December, the colony's men of note gathered to transact business. In addition, the economic significance of Williamsburg had increased in 1733, when the local Hustings Court had been granted jurisdiction over all debt cases in Virginia.⁴⁵

Virginia merchants had long employed both the meetings of the county courts and the General Court at the capital to transact business and exchange information, especially with regard to the tobacco trade. In 1751, for example, an advertisement in the *Gazette* stated that the ship *Allerton*, belonging to John Hardman of Liverpool, would take on tobacco at £7 per ton with liberty of consignment. Those interested were asked to contact any of a number of Virginia merchants who served as agents for the Liverpool merchant. These included David Jameson of Yorktown, John Hyndman in Williamsburg, Benjamin Hubbard and Captain Thomas Danzie of King William County, Thomas Aitchison of Richmond, David Bell of Warwick, Charles Turnbull of Petersburg, or the ship's captain, James Wallace, "who will attend the courts." The Cape Company, which formed the same year to bring whaling to Virginia and which included several Norfolk merchants among its members, also held meetings at the provincial capital. There were thus powerful reasons for

⁴⁵Soltow, *Economic Role of Williamsburg*, 6; Calvin B. Coulter, "The Virginia Merchant," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1944), 237-38; Robert P. Thomson, "The Merchant in Virginia, 1700-1775," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1955), 279-80.

holding merchants meetings at the colonial capital instead of Norfolk, which had become the colony's foremost commercial center.⁴⁶

During the 1760s Norfolk merchants, many of them newly arrived emigrants from Scotland, increased their participation in province-wide activity, and their involvement in the tobacco trade grew as well. In 1766, for example, Lewis Hansford of Norfolk Borough advertised the ship *Union*, burden 360 hogsheads, to load tobacco at a charge of £7 per ton, or £6 if delivered to the side of the vessel at Norfolk. Interested shippers were requested to contact Hansford, William Holt of Williamsburg, or John Hylton of Bermuda Hundred. Norfolk merchant Neil Jamieson, Scottish partner of the Glasgow firm of Glassford and Company, also made extensive tobacco purchases throughout the 1760s. The new distillery established in Norfolk in 1769, of which Jamieson was a principal, included among its shareholders merchants based along Virginia's rivers.⁴⁷

With the expansion and diversification of Virginia's economy and the increase in the number of merchants in the 1760s, the court sessions in Williamsburg grew more important as informal forums for the exchange of commercial information. By the late 1760s a movement arose to institutionalize these meetings. In 1769 a group of merchants met at the Raleigh Tavern to give the "public times," as meetings of the General and Oyer and Terminer

⁴⁶*Virginia Gazette* (Hunter) 20 June 1751.

⁴⁷Soltow, *Economic Role*, 183-84; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 4 April 1766.

Courts at Williamsburg were known, a more regular status. This gathering, which chose Gosport magnate Andrew Sprowle as its chairman and included a number of other local merchants, announced its intention "to expedite the mode and shorten the expense of doing business." They adopted several rules, and fixed specific days during the Court's meetings in April, July, October, and November to engage in business. The rules limited the period for setting the rate of exchange and for payment of all money contracts to the three days after the meetings commenced. In order to impose regularity in business dealings, persons contracting business during the public times were to be considered violators if they were not present on the first day.⁴⁸

Sprowle was an appropriate choice to head the committee, for he had served as spokesman for Virginia's merchants in addressing Governor Botetourt on the latter's arrival in Virginia the previous October. Prominent planter-merchant William Nelson of Yorktown left an astute portrait of Virginia's foremost merchant on the occasion:

The old Fellow wears his own Hair, as white as old Charles Hansford's was, with a Pig tail to it, but bald as the brave Lord Granby; and cuts as droll a Figure as you ever saw Him in a Silk coat & two or three holes in his stocking at the same Time he is a respectable Appearance, the oldest among the Trade, & acquitted himself well.

Sprowle's address to the governor showed "plainness [sic] Elegance & Simplicity, and far out does the studied Performance of the P[ro]fessors] & Masters of the College." When informed of this favorable comparison, Sprowle replied,

⁴⁸*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 29 June 1769.

"Aye, Sir, the Parsons do nothing well, unless they are paid for it."⁴⁹

The formation of the Virginia merchants' association was in part a response to the enactment of the Townshend Acts, and Virginia's merchant community, including Norfolk's traders, were drawn into the imperial crisis during the 1770s. Concurrent with the merchants' meeting in the spring of 1769, the Raleigh Tavern also hosted an extralegal assembly of burgesses after Governor Botetourt dismissed them for protesting the British measures. The angry burgesses, calling themselves an "association," included in their number a group representing "the Body of Merchants," a clear reference to the mercantile organization meeting at the same time. The purpose of the combined group was to cooperate with the other colonies in a non-importation agreement. They published a list of banned products of the mother country and appointed overseers in each county to enforce the agreement by "moral suasion." Transgressors' names were to be published in the *Virginia Gazette*. Participation of the merchants was clearly necessary to the success of non-importation, and inclusion of the merchants' group in the Association also indicates the desire for unanimity in the Virginia leaders' opposition to Britain.⁵⁰

But the Virginia merchant organization never represented the interests of all of the merchants of the

⁴⁹William Nelson to John Norton, 14 November, 1768, in Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons*, 76.

⁵⁰Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776*, (New York, 1939), 136-38, 198.

colony. Most Virginia merchants, including those from the Norfolk area, did not support non-importation. Virginia's Treasurer, Robert Carter Nicholas, confessed himself to be "astonished" that the merchants failed to support the Association's resolves wholeheartedly.⁵¹ The reason was obvious to commercial men: non-importation would help Virginia's artisans, but would only hurt merchants who depended upon commerce for a living. As Norfolk merchant James Parker wrote:

The Association is sent to every county in Virginia. There is hardly a tailor or cobbler in town but what has signed it. Jo[seph] Calvert carried it about in name of Colo. Hutchings; I do not hear that any merchants here have signed it except B & Ballard & B[asset] & Alex. Moseley and very few in the colony. The people in N[orth] Hampton decline it alleging if they do the merchants in Norfolk will not buy their corn & c.⁵²

Although the majority of the colony's traders opposed the Association in 1769, the following year the merchants' committee again expressed its support for non-importation, even when news arrived of Parliament's repeal of all the Townshend duties except the tax on tea. In June, the merchants met in Williamsburg to "take under their consideration the general state of the trade of this colony." A committee of 125 was chosen, with Sprowle continuing as president. The group comprised merchants from all of Virginia's rivers, but Norfolk merchants were prominent and included William Aitchison, Archibald

⁵¹Robert C. Nicholas to John Norton, 31 May 1769, in Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons*, 96.

⁵²James Parker to Charles Steuart, 22 June 1769, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Campbell, John Greenwood, John Hutchings, Neil Jamieson, John Lawrence, George Logan, Paul Loyall, Matthew Phripp, and John Taylor. Portsmouth merchants on the committee included Jerman Baker, Thomas Hepburn, James Marsden, Humphrey Roberts, and Robert Shedden.⁵³

The committee published a summary of its position in the *Gazette* which optimistically indicated near unanimous mercantile support for the colonial Association:

The invitation from the first Associators to the commercial part of the country has been accepted, with a cheerfulness equal to the judgment and politeness with which it was offered; and the merchants have, on this occasion, shewn an attachment to the true interest of this colony equal to that of any set of men, and exceeded by none.

The author went on to decry the partial repeal of the Townshend duties as "a measure calculated only to deceive those whom they had before abused" and stressed the importance of the merchants' committee as a conduit for the sentiments of the colony's widely scattered traders. The manifesto concluded that there existed a real conjunction of interests between merchant and planter.⁵⁴

It appeared so, for just as in the previous year, when Virginia's burgesses met to amend the non-importation agreement, they invited the merchants to join them. The name of Andrew Sprowle, "Chairman of the Trade," appeared second on the list of Associators, following that of Speaker of the House Peyton Randolph, the moderator of the

⁵³*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 28 June 1770, repr. in William Maxwell, ed., *Virginia Historical Register*, 6 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1848-1853), III, 79-81.

⁵⁴Maxwell, ed., *Virginia Historical Register*, III, 79-80.

Association. Other burgesses signed, including Princess Anne and Norfolk representatives Edward Hack Moseley and John Hutchings. Local merchants who signed the Association of 1770 included Archibald Campbell, James Balfour, Daniel Barraud, George Logan, Humphrey Roberts, Thomas Newton, Jr., Neil Jamieson, and James Archdeacon. Even the irascible James Parker signed.⁵⁵

In Norfolk, a longer list of local associators appeared in the *Gazette* of 26 July. Norfolk's associators included a cross section of the town's economic sector. Merchant-magistrates such as Charles Thomas, Matthew Phripp, Paul Loyall, Samuel Boush, Lewis Hansford, William Aitchison, Maximilian Calvert, and George Abyvon affixed their names. Other merchants such as Francis Miller, John Greenwood, vendue master Joseph Calvert, merchant-tanner Thomas Thompson, storekeeper John Lawrence, tavern-keeper Stephen Tankard, and ship captains Mason Miller and William Chisholm also signed. Norfolk's associators of 1770 also included a large number of artisans.⁵⁶

But the apparent consensus masked a real difference of opinion among the local merchants. Parker, apologizing for his adherence to the Association, wrote to Charles Steuart in London that local merchants were coerced:

Colonel Archibald Cary had waited on most of the principal merchants about the head of the James River [and] told them that there would be a general message sent them by the gentlemen of the Assembly when the

⁵⁵William J. Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*, 7 vols., (Charlottesville, Va., 1973-1983), I, 79-80.

⁵⁶*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 26 July 1770.

Trade were collected at Williamsburg requesting them to join in an association. Cary hoped they would consent--if not . . . the militia would be round to shoot up their stores.

Once the upper James River merchants agreed, those below, including the reluctant Parker, "contrary to our inclination," found themselves obliged to comply with the Association.⁵⁷

With such lukewarm adherents, it is not surprising that Virginia's Associators eventually disbanded. In July 1771, after merchants of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston abandoned non-importation, the Virginia Association ended.

Throughout the 1770s, however, the Virginia merchants' committee continued to hold regular meetings at Williamsburg. In 1772 they published proceedings of their meeting in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in order to provide Philadelphia's merchants with information regarding the Virginia group. The price of wheat was particularly high in Philadelphia that year, and many Virginians were shipping to that port.⁵⁸

To facilitate correspondence with Britain, ship captain Robert Necks, who made frequent voyages to the mother country, placed a box at Raleigh Tavern in which merchants could place their letters to their British contacts. During the November 1772 meeting, however, someone stole the box, a minor irritant but symbolic of the difficulties the

⁵⁷James Parker to Charles Steuart, 2 August 1770, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵⁸Soltow, *Economic Role*, 87-88.

merchants faced in organizing themselves.⁵⁹

Non-attendance remained the major problem for the Virginia merchant organization. Lack of a sufficient quorum of merchants caused delays, as in May 1772, when the committee announced a postponement of the July meeting because they were so late accomplishing their business at the April gathering. By November the problem had become acute, and the committee met "to take under their consideration the late irregular and uncertain times of coming here to transact business, by which the Trade has been much disconcerted." They unanimously agreed to continue meeting at four specific dates each year, with Sprowle continuing as chairman. Notices of their proceedings were to be placed in the newspapers of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. The committee also announced its intention to discipline merchants who did not attend the meetings. Members of the larger body who failed to appear during the regular meeting times would be fined £5; if they refused to pay, their names would be published "as persons who do not pay a proper regard to their solemn promises and agreements."⁶⁰

Non-attendance remained the bane of the organization, and eventually the province's traders began to fragment into regional groups. In June 1774 a group of seventy-two merchants, including local traders Neil Jamieson, Matthew

⁵⁹*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 26 November 1772.

⁶⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 21 May 1772, 26 November 1772; Soltow, *Economic Role*, 12-13.

Phripp, James Ingram, Cornelius Calvert, and Eilbeck, Ross, and Company, joined in a final attempt to regularize the meetings. "Having for some time past experienced very great inconvenience arising from the Time of our Meeting in Williamsburg," they resolved for the future to meet there every 25th of April and October. But the dispersed Virginia merchants had begun to move toward smaller, more localized groups. Earlier, merchants on the lower James River had announced their intention to hold regular attendance in Williamsburg during the first three or four days of every February. The last recorded meeting of the merchants was announced for May 1775. By that time Dunmore had fled the capital, and the Revolution burst upon Virginia, wreaking particular havoc on Norfolk and its merchants.⁶¹

Although a significant indication of the growing importance of the colony's merchants, the Virginia merchants' association ultimately failed to regularize the province's business practices. The pressure wrought by the crisis with Britain undoubtedly played a major role in the demise of the organization, but there were other factors involved. While the Norfolk-Portsmouth area had emerged as Virginia's most advanced commercial locale, the merchants continued to call their meetings in the capital at Williamsburg because of that town's political significance. As Norfolk's economic significance increased, that of Williamsburg declined, and this rivalry between two centers of economic activity probably worked against the merchants'

⁶¹*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 13 January 1774, 30 June 1774; *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 20 January 1774.

organization.⁶² James Parker had revealed another division between merchants of the upper James River and those of the Norfolk area in the 1770 non-importation agreement. The split within the ranks of Norfolk merchants engendered in the smallpox affair may also have worked against cohesion. Finally, there were several shocks to the Virginia economy during the 1770s, which, when examined in light of the imperial conflict, also help to explain the fragmentation of Virginia's merchant community.

⁶²Soltow, *Economic Role*, 183.

Chapter VI
Norfolk Merchants and the Imperial Crisis II:
Indebtedness and Loyalties, 1770-1775

The unrest which plagued Norfolk during the 1760s died down after 1770, but the inoculation affair left a legacy of bitterness. Many inhabitants no doubt agreed with Charles Steuart who wrote to his friend James Parker that he never expected to hear again that friendship and harmony reigned in Norfolk. Parker, one of the most bitter of the inoculationists who actively pursued the rioters and their upper-class allies in the courts, encountered hostility as late as July 1771. He had written to Reverend Charles Smith, asking him to baptise his infant son, Charles Steuart Parker, but Smith, pleading parish duties and a case of vertigo, did not come. Parker later noted that the Reverend was "a worthy good man, but such were the vulgar prejudices against me for having inoculated my family for the smallpox, [that] fearing insult he would not come."¹

Early the following year, Cornelius Calvert, another fervent inoculationist, felt compelled to publish his view of the anti-inoculationist magistrates in the *Gazette*:

¹Charles Steuart to James Parker, 6 February 1770, notation on Charles Smith to James Parker, 27 July 1771, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

When villains can mob their first magistrate, abuse his wife and children, and get rioters, doctors, magistrates, and a clerk whose children have received the benefit of inoculation, as securities. . . it behooves every well meaning good subject to make it public. Some may tamely sit down under it. I never shall.²

The division resulting from the inoculation affair continued to poison the borough corporation. In August 1773 the Common Hall ordered borough sergeant Joseph Calvert, who had led the anti-inoculationist mob five years earlier, to wait on alderman William Aitchison, James Parker's business partner and another of the principal inoculationists, to determine Aitchison's reasons for non-attendance at the borough court. Calvert duly queried the aging Scottish merchant, who replied, according to Calvert,

that he did not know any person had any such authority as to desire his reasons for not giving his attendance at the Hall and Hustings court and that he thought it very impertinent in those who took the Liberty of doing it.³

Aitchison's attitude was a further indication of the division among Norfolk's leaders. At a subsequent meeting of the Common Hall, Mayor Charles Thomas himself questioned Aitchison, and the crusty merchant repeated his assertion that neither the mayor nor any other person had any right to ask him his reasons for not sitting. The mayor also asked Lewis Hansford, another prominent inoculationist who had run afoul of Joseph Calvert, why he did not attend meetings of the Common Hall, and Hansford answered that he did not

²*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 9 January 1772.

³Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 176.

choose to sit. When Aitchison and Hansford did appear before the borough bench to offer their statements, it was the turn of their arch foe Maximilian Calvert to absent himself. When questioned Calvert stated that he "was always ready and willing to sit."⁴

In addition to the schism among Norfolk Borough leaders, there is evidence of a widening split during the 1760s between the inhabitants of the borough and the more recently created commercial town of Portsmouth across the river. As an unincorporated town, Portsmouth, which by the 1760s contained a thriving mercantile community, remained under the jurisdiction of the magistrates of Norfolk County. By the early 1770s, merchants operating in Portsmouth had begun to assert their significance in Virginia's economy, tinged perhaps with jealousy of the merchants across the river. Early in 1772, the Portsmouth traders addressed Virginia's new executive, John Murray, Earl of Dunmore: "As the encouragement and promotion of trade must necessarily become a capital object of your attention . . . we recommend this town yet in its infancy to your Excellency's notice and patronage. . . from our importance to the community." Dunmore answered that he would strive to fulfill their hopes and would be happy to find opportunities to assist in increasing Portsmouth's trade.⁵

Some of the borough inhabitants, on the other hand, saw their neighbors across the river as a collection of greedy

⁴*Ibid.*, 177.

⁵*Virginia Gazette*, (Purdie and Dixon) 2 January, 1772.

parvenus. In 1767, an anonymous pundit, calling himself "Timothy Trimsharp," published an alleged dialogue between a Norfolkian and a newly arrived Englishman. Espying "a full boat from Portsmouth," the Englishman asked his companion the names of its occupants. There was county justice and vestryman George Veale, "a man void of shame, honour, and honesty," John Goodrich, another prominent Portsmouth trader, whom the Norfolkian admitted was "a very honest man, with good looking after," and a third man, "the present Lord Mayor of Portsmouth. I will lay you a half crown bowl, if you speak to him, he will want you to settle in Portsmouth."⁶

At the same time, a series of public attacks on county magistrate George Veale illustrates the condescending attitude towards the the town of Portsmouth and the county justices who resided there. Veale and his brother, sons of Mary Veale, the housekeeper of Portsmouth founder William Crawford, had inherited the bulk of Crawford's estate at the latter's death in 1762. Crawford had taken young George under his wing some years earlier, and with the elder man's patronage, George Veale had been elevated to the county bench in 1749. It was in his capacity as vestryman for Portsmouth parish, however, that Veale found himself subjected to public criticism in 1767.⁷

The 1761 Act of Assembly which divided the original

⁶*Virginia Gazette*, (Purdie and Dixon) 19 February 1767.

⁷Norfolk County Will Book 1. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Charles B. Cross, Jr., *The County Court, 1637-1904: Norfolk County, Virginia*, (Portsmouth, Va., 1964), 145.

parish of Norfolk caused friction between borough and county leaders. Rival vestries debated how to divide the funds allocated for poor relief, and a bequest of Matthew Godfrey, who left 100 acres and several slaves for the use of the parish, only complicated matters. Norfolk County magistrates were given charge of the Godfrey bequest, the profits of which were to be divided between the three new parishes according to tithables. In addition, the assembly ordered the vestry of the now smaller Elizabeth River parish to divide money originally set aside for building walls around the original church between the new parishes of St. Bride's and Portsmouth.⁸

The division of Elizabeth River parish meant that two new churches had to be built. Early in 1767 a visitor from Nansemond County had an opportunity to examine the new church in Portsmouth and found several major construction flaws. In a letter to the *Gazette*, the visitor aired his complaints. No collection of vestrymen, he asserted, except those "void of shame, honor, and honesty," could have allowed the erection of such a shoddy structure. The observer hinted that certain of the vestry must have been connected with the builder and by implication pocketed a large kickback for letting the contract. Such men, he concluded, who so betrayed parish business, were "unworthy of society. . . or of bearing any public office."⁹

⁸W. W. Hening, *The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia . . .*, 13 vols., (Richmond, 1819-1823), VII, 416, 419.

⁹Letter signed, "Viator," *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 8 January 1767.

Fingers pointed to vestryman George Veale, who had been chiefly responsible for hiring the architect and builder. Local wit "Timothy Trimsharp" clearly indicted Veale, contending that he was the man the previous letter writer had referred to as "void of shame, honor, and honesty." Veale was responsible for the miserable Portsmouth church, only three years old but already falling apart. "Some of the poor were obliged to sell their beds to pay the tax" to build the church, Trimsharp asserted. The commentator also attacked the sexton, whom he described as "a tool of V____l, and a rake hell for a shilling," willing to "send soul and body to the Devil for money!"¹⁰

Next the church builder himself, a butcher by trade, joined the public indictment of Veale. In a letter signed "A Honest Man [*sic*]," the butcher *cum* builder claimed that he had never built such an edifice before, and blamed still another--his partner, "an ignorant man who said he knew what he was doing"--who had signed the contract with Veale. The erstwhile builder went on to assert his political orthodoxy, maintaining that he "always railed against the cursed Stamp Act."¹¹

Such expressions of political sentiment had become common in the late 1760s as indications of one's honesty and honor. The local squabbles within the borough and between Norfolk and Portsmouth took place in an atmosphere of mounting anxiety as relations between colonies and Britain

¹⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 19 February 1767.

¹¹*Ibid.*

grew increasingly strained in the 1760s and 1770s. Norfolk's established merchants generally hastened to assert their opposition to the British. Paul Loyall, allied with Thomas Newton in business and marriage, was the borough's most fervid patriot. Samuel Boush, borough clerk and one of Norfolk's richest inhabitants, endorsed the cessation of official business in 1765 and 1776. And Joseph Calvert, backed by his brother Maximilian, had advertised his vendue business as a Son of Liberty.

But other local merchants, of whom James Parker provides the foremost example, resented the established group, and did not support the Association. In June 1770, when the Virginia Association published a list of banned English products, they appointed overseers in each county to enforce the agreement by "moral suasion." "Moral suasion" turned out to be the publication of transgressors' names in the *Gazette*. The following month Portsmouth importers John and William Brown ran afoul of the local committee in the only recorded instance of a violation of non-importation.¹²

The Browns were consignees for a quantity of English goods unloaded from the *Sharp*, Captain Speirs. The Norfolk committee promptly had the goods reloaded, and allowed the vessel to proceed up the Chesapeake to the Potomac to take on tobacco. Speirs later apologized for landing the goods, and agreed that he had acted "very imprudently," but the Brown brothers were not so deferential; they had attempted

¹²William J. Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*, 7 vols., (Charlottesville, Va., 1973-1983), I, 79-80.

to block efforts of the local committee to inspect the goods.¹³

The persistence of the division within the borough elite, the rivalry between borough and county, and agitation over imperial policy all played themselves out against a background of economic shocks. During the 1770s a series of tremors shook the colony's economy and exacerbated the divisions within the Norfolk mercantile community. The chronic shortage of currency and a banking crisis in the mother country combined to focus attention on the problem of indebtedness, a major feature of Virginia's economy.

Opposition to the Townshend Acts, never strong among merchants to begin with, eventually ceased after repeal of all the duties except that on tea. Non-importation was not successful: Virginia merchants actually *increased* the volume of their imports during the period. Repeal of the acts saw imports of British goods increase even more rapidly.¹⁴

The great increase in British imports after 1770, which in Norfolk had brought increased mercantile specialization, exacerbated a chronic problem faced by Virginia merchants--the lack of an adequate circulating medium. British mercantilist restrictions on the colonials coining of

¹³Virginia Gazette (Rind), 19 July, 2 August, 23 August, 6 September, 1770.

¹⁴Joseph Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973), 237; Richard B. Sheridan, "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and the American Colonies," *The Journal of Economic History*, XX (1960), 170; Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776*, (New York, 1939), 198; Jacob Price, *Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 130.

currency or even importing it, meant that gold and silver coin flowed out of the colonies to the mother country. Funds for emergencies such as wars or disasters were usually raised by printing paper money, to be retired in the form of taxes after circulating a limited number of years. Such expedients were temporary at best, except in Massachusetts, which had issued paper money since 1696. Of course if not retired properly, such emissions tended to depreciate rapidly. In Virginia following the Seven Years' War, several factors combined to make the currency problem even more acute.

Revelations of financial irregularities after the death of Speaker of the House and Treasurer John Robinson in 1766 caused consternation among Virginia's leading men. Robinson had failed to retire as required by law some £100,000 in Virginia paper money, instead re-issuing the notes to hard-pressed planters. The audit after Robinson's death revealed that the debtors to the estate (and thus to the Virginia Treasury) included many of the most prominent Virginia names.¹⁵

Virginia's House of Burgesses debated several measures to increase the money supply in Virginia and alleviate the chaos caused by Robinson's activities. In the spring of 1767 they fixed upon the creation of a loan office. The Treasury would lend £200,000 at five percent interest, borrowing £100,000 sterling from British merchants to secure

¹⁵Ernst, *Money and Politics*, 174-196; David Mays, *Edmund Pendleton, 1721-1803: A Biography*, 2 vols., (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), I, 174-208.

the loan. The security would be repaid by an additional duty on exported tobacco. While the scheme might have indirectly alleviated the currency shortage, it was mainly designed to relieve the high-placed debtors embarrassed by the Robinson scandal. As such it never really stood a chance of being enacted. Under the provisions of the Currency Act of 1764, the colony was forbidden to make such paper emissions legal tender. Virginia merchants generally distrusted paper money schemes, and they, as well as the Virginia Council, opposed the plan. British merchants were reluctant to advance the security, and the Board of Trade ultimately rejected the plan.¹⁶

The acute shortage of currency thus did not disappear, and the opposition of Virginia merchants toward paper money began to erode in the late 1760s. Falmouth merchant William Allason aptly summed up this change in attitude in a letter to his brother in 1767:

Money becomes exceeding scarce among us, I suspect we shall in some time be as fond of having our Assembly authorized by Parliament to Emit more paper currency, as we was some time ago of preventing it."¹⁷

Allason's prediction came true two years later when Virginia merchants joined the Burgesses in pressing for a small issue of treasury paper. Governor Botetourt authorized the printing of some £10,000 in notes redeemable in two years, but the small size of the emission did little

¹⁶Ernst, *Money and Politics*, 235-236.

¹⁷William Allason to his brother, 29 October 1767, "The Letters of William Allason, Merchant, of Falmouth, Virginia," *Richmond College Historical Papers*, II (1917), 143.

to ease the shortage of currency.¹⁸

Renewed calls for paper money came in 1771, after spring floods in the James, York and Rappahannock Rivers drowned fields and washed away warehouses, destroying much of the previous year's tobacco crop. It was the merchants on this occasion who led the push for paper, petitioning the assembly for relief, and the burgesses voted to issue £30,000, but not as legal tender, to cover the cost of the reimbursements. It was also during this period that peninsula merchant-planter Thomas Tabb attempted unsuccessfully to form a private bank.¹⁹

In the midst of this latest currency crisis came news of a serious setback in banking circles in the mother country. In 1772 the failure of the Ayr Bank of Scotland triggered a series of similar stoppages which had repercussions in the colonies. The firm's London correspondents, the banking firm of Neal, James, Fordyce, and Down, closed first, and this failure caused a general panic among other banking firms of England and Scotland, many of which were large houses trading to Virginia. British merchants trading with the colonies, while avoiding a general panic, responded to the crisis by becoming more cautious in extending credit. This curtailment hit particularly hard in Virginia, where many planters, accustomed to allow their debts to accumulate over a number

¹⁸Ernst, *Money and Politics*, 240-1.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 302. Two tantalizing allusions to this private banking scheme can be found in Frances Norton Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons: Merchants of London and Virginia*, 2nd ed., (Newton Abbot, Devon, 1968), 306, 342.

of years, had no means to satisfy demands for repayment.²⁰

The credit restriction of 1772 accelerated the relative decline of the consignment system of marketing tobacco. Cultivation of the staple had been moving westward, and while many tidewater planters were making the transition to new agricultural products or manufacturing, the shift was not accomplished without stress. The crisis of 1772 exacerbated this stress because most planters were unprepared to liquidate their debts. Some adopted policies of retrenchment, postponing purchases of land and slaves. Other planters reacted by shifting their demands for credit from merchant to merchant, a temporary expedient at best. Planters could also use their political influence to delay or avoid repayment.²¹

Norfolk merchants involved in the grain trade to the West Indies or southern Europe were cushioned from the worst effects of the crisis of 1772. But those tied closely to British firms and heavily involved with backcountry storekeepers became frustrated as their British principals and creditors increased their demands for remittances. Merchants involved in the cargo trade, importations direct from British firms on twelve months credit, also suffered, but there is little evidence in Norfolk of any significant increase in this type of commerce.²²

²⁰Ernst, *Money and Politics*, 329; Sheridan, "British Credit Crisis," 169, 171-2; Price, *Capital and Credit*, 131.

²¹Sheridan, "British Credit Crisis," 184-5; Price, *Capital and Credit*, 127, 136.

²²Price, *Capital and Credit*, 136. Price may over-emphasize the growth of the cargo trade in the 1760s and

The shortage of currency, which had become acute by 1772, and the credit crisis of that year, threw Virginia's economy into a recession. Exacerbating conditions was the discovery in January 1773 that a group of forgers operating out of Pittsylvania County had cleverly counterfeited a large amount of the 1771 issue of paper money. This revelation greatly reduced confidence in the nearly £100,000 in valid notes still in circulation. Treasurer Robert Carter Nicholas proposed borrowing specie in order to redeem the good notes. The burgesses trimmed Nicholas' proposal back, allowing only £37,000 to be raised, and when only some £4,000 in specie actually came in, the Treasurer ended up approving an issue of £29,000 in new paper. The treasury notes were printed on paper imported from London "some Years ago by one of our Considerable Merchants, who, with several others, had a Design of establishing a private Bank." The James River Bank, the stillborn attempt of merchant Thomas Tabb and others to establish a private bank, thus made it possible for a supposedly forgery-proof emission. The fact that the treasury notes still bore the James River Bank imprint explains the existence of "James River Bank Notes" in post-revolutionary inventories.²³

1770s. The most prominent Norfolk merchants, such as John Hutchings, Thomas Newton, and Robert Tucker, imported goods direct from England since the 1740s.

²³Ernst, *Money and Politics*, 333-4; cf. "Paper Money in Colonial Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., XX (1911-1912), 227-262, a reprint of letters of Robert Carter Nicholas to the *Gazette* in defense of the paper scheme; *Statutes*, VIII, 647-651; For the existence of James River Bank notes, see the inventory of Portsmouth storekeeper William Donaldson, "Transcript of the MS Books and Papers of the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses. . . ." P.R.O., T.O. 1/549. [Loyalist Transcripts, New York Public Library].

The straitened economic circumstances of Virginia in the 1770s--the glut of British imports, the dearth of currency, the credit crisis of 1772, and the discovery of the counterfeiters--created a growing feeling of economic malaise in the province. Contributing to the notion that something was wrong at the heart of Virginia's economy was another chronic condition of the colony's commerce: the problem of indebtedness, which the economic fluctuations of the early 1770s heightened.²⁴

Indebtedness was a part of Virginia's tobacco economy. British merchants saw the extension of credit to Virginia planters who purchased more land and slaves as an investment guaranteeing their future supply of tobacco. But because planters who marketed their crop on consignment often bought more British goods than their subsequent crops could pay for, they went into debt to the British suppliers. In addition, planters who suffered through seasons of low tobacco prices often had trouble making payments to British merchants. In the 1750s, Norfolk merchant Charles Steuart recognized the importance of tobacco in determining the terms and length of time of repayment of debts.

Trade of our staple which always furnishes us the greatest number of Bills [of exchange] that can be depended on, has lately been on so precarious a footing, that the orders for purchasing have been later this year than usual. We have had money for some time

[microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²⁴Marc Egnal and Joseph Ernst, "An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXII (1972), 3-32, sets forth the effects of the broad economic changes of the pre-Revolutionary period, but underestimates the growing commercial group in Virginia.

in the hands of some gentlemen in the country payable in bills of exchange the 10th next month, and we have now such orders as will enable us to draw largely.²⁵

Steuart himself had trouble collecting debts, and often resorted to court action after the failure of persuasion. Late in 1752 Steuart noted that Colonel John Henry, justice of Hanover County and father of the illustrious orator Patrick Henry, had written him "another evasive letter." Steuart had planned to travel to Hanover County himself to confront the Colonel, but was unable to, so he wrote him insisting that Henry pay the interest due on his bond to a British merchant. Colonel Henry, to his credit, paid the interest, as well as that on a joint bond with his brother Reverend Patrick Henry.²⁶

The increase in Virginia grain shipments after mid-century helped some planters redress their deficits, but the great advance in British imports after 1770 fostered continued indebtedness. The credit crisis of 1772 redoubled efforts of British merchants and their American factors to collect, but these attempts proved generally unsuccessful in substantially reducing debt. By the time of the Revolution Virginians' debts to British merchants had reached such proportions that contemporaries attributed a large degree of the province's support for independence to a desire to escape an oppressive burden of debt. Thomas Jefferson himself, in an oft-quoted statement, ascribed Virginia's

²⁵Steuart to Stephen Adye, 30 May, 1752, Steuart Letterbooks. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

²⁶Steuart to William Bowden, 20 November, 1752, *Ibid.*

support for the Revolution to the more than £2,000,000 sterling that he estimated that Virginians owed British merchants, and his own estate was encumbered all his life and beyond with a large debt bequeathed him by his father-in-law. To James Parker, the Scottish merchant at Norfolk who became a fervent loyalist, the connection between indebtedness and opposition to Britain was clear. In a list of Virginians who endorsed the Association of 1774, Parker noted that only three out of the twelve men listed could have commanded any credit at all.²⁷

Yet indebtedness in Virginia before the Revolution proved a more complex issue than suggested in Jefferson's and Parker's model of Chesapeake tobacco planters in hock up to their eyes to British consignment houses. The growth of the direct marketing system for tobacco after mid-century, far from alleviating the problem, actually spread the tentacles of debt as Scottish factors and storekeepers began to extend credit to Virginia's middling farmers. Much of Virginia's pre-Revolutionary debt was owed to Virginia rather than British merchants.²⁸

²⁷For a telling discussion of Virginia's debt structure during the Revolutionary era and its impact on revolutionary sentiment see Emory G. Evans, "Planter Indebtedness and the Coming of the Revolution in Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XIX (1962), 511-533, and "Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXVIII (1971), 349-374; Aubrey C. Land, "Economic Behavior in a Planting Society: The Eighteenth Century Chesapeake," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXIII (1967), 469-485; Price, *Capital and Credit*, esp., 124-139; Myra L. Rich, "Speculations on the Significance of Debt: Virginia, 1781-1789," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXVI (1968), 301-317.

²⁸Price, *Capital and Credit*, 137, citing the work of Evans and Land.

The economic shocks of the 1760s and 1770s therefore underscored the problem of indebtedness among Virginians of all classes. In Norfolk there was a large number of merchants who acted as agents or factors for creditor firms in Britain. Neil Jamieson, for example, whose commercial activities extended throughout Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, encountered repeated problems in collecting sums. Late in 1769, for example, George Muter, Jamieson's agent in Halifax, North Carolina, wrote to his employer that it was "almost impossible to collect any money lately." Throughout early 1771 Jamieson made extensive and largely unsuccessful debt-collecting trips through Virginia's piedmont. Compounding Jamieson's problems was the fact that he was one of the executors of the estate of Norfolk magnate Robert Tucker, who had died in debt in 1767 but who was also owed considerable sums. Indeed, the winding up of Tucker's considerable affairs took many years.²⁹

No merchant at Norfolk suffered more from the economic troubles of the 1770s than Henry Fleming, factor and partner for the Whitehaven exporting firm Fisher and Bragg. The glut of British imports had by 1773 made it difficult to sell such goods except on longer than normal credit. Felt hats, for example, previously in great demand at Norfolk, had become a drug on the market. Indeed, hats of all kinds, except for fashionable women's silk and satin bonnets, sold very slowly. Inexpensive manufactured goods imported in

²⁹George Muter to Neil Jamieson, 20 October 1769, Neil Jamieson to James Glassford, 26 April, 2 May 1771, Neil Jamieson Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

bulk, such as oznaburgs (cheap fabric used to clothe slaves), often sold at vendue for less than the first cost, or invoice price. Compounding the depressed situation was the fact that Fleming's shipments of tar from North Carolina to Whitehaven, admittedly a small part of the exchange, had met a satiated market in England.³⁰

Further exacerbating Fleming's problems was the small margin on which he operated. Early in 1773, for example, he wrote to his Whitehaven partners that he expected two shipments of North Carolina tar, together with sums he expected to collect at the next April Court, would provide enough to pay for the goods that the firm would ship in the spring.³¹

Fleming could not promise his English correspondents more because of his lack of success in collecting debts, and such difficulties in obtaining money due the firm was his major problem. Beginning in early 1773, Fleming's letters to his Whitehaven correspondents continually sound laments regarding sluggish collections. Part of the problem, according to Fleming, was the attitude displayed by the debtor planters. He related the example of one "RA," to whom Fleming had written that it meant nothing to his English correspondents if RA "supposed himself worth millions," if he was not punctual in payment. The only effective way for RA to convince Fisher and Bragg of his

³⁰Henry Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 17 January 1773, Papers of Henry Fleming. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

³¹Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 16 July 1773, Fleming to Joseph Watson, 25 April 1773, *ibid.*

worth would be to come to Williamsburg during public times prepared to pay Fleming the entire balance of the debt. If he did not pay, Fleming "would surely have the honor of arresting a great man." The Virginia planter, highly offended at Fleming's missive, responded that he had never received such a letter in his life.³²

Fleming adopted such a hardened attitude toward debtors who put him off with innumerable excuses as he stayed busy (and disappointed) trying to collect debts at court meetings. The Norfolk importer refused Joseph Jones and Company who begged him to dismiss a suit, promising to pay as soon as they were able. Fleming noted, "I've had [such] promises before."³³

Often those who did pay their debts did so with bills of exchange which were refused by their British correspondents. Protesting bills was a way of delaying payment, as legal action could be undertaken only after they were returned to the colony. Fleming, like many Virginians, believed that the fault lay with the British merchants who refused such bills in their attempts to curtail credit during the crisis of 1772 and 1773. Fleming himself repeatedly apologized to his British correspondents for remitting protested bills or even bills that he anticipated would be protested. Money was so scarce in Virginia, that such bills, despite their instability, had to be accepted. By fall of 1773 Fleming estimated that he had remitted a

³²Fleming to Joseph Watson, 25 April 1773, *ibid.*

³³Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 28 June 1773, *ibid.*

total of £365/6/10 in bills of exchange from the previous court that he expected to be refused.³⁴

The discovery of the counterfeit paper in early 1773 further hampered debt collection. "The late ingenious counterfeit in our paper currency has been a great loss to many and furnished others with a plausible excuse for evading a debt payment." According to Fleming, many creditors were not receiving 10 percent of the debts due them.

Fleming also decried the commercial rivalries between the Scots and native merchants in Norfolk and criticized the Scots for their clannishness. According to the Whitehaven native, Scottish merchants pleaded lack of money to pay their Virginia debts while reserving funds to purchase bills of exchange to relieve their distressed countrymen at home. Fleming believed that when a Scotsman made a punctual payment it was usually to other Scots. "For seldom their haughty spirits will condescend to treat either Buckskin [native] or Englishmen with any tolerable decency--They surely think themselves Lords of this lower world."³⁵

Once a creditor did manage to haul a recalcitrant debtor to court, there were usually further delays. Merchants found Virginia courts to be notoriously slow even in the best of times, and the economic troubles of the 1770s made the justices, many of whom owed substantial sums, even more reluctant to sit. According to Fleming, the Virginia

³⁴Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 25 May, 13 October 1773, *ibid.*

³⁵Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 25 May 1773, *ibid.*

county courts all behaved "shamefully tedious[ly]," except that of York County. York County was the seat of merchant-planter William Nelson, who, although a debtor himself, was a merchant with strong connections in Britain and generally sympathized with creditors.

The example of York County aside, Fleming castigated the Virginia legal system for its protection of debtors. Having such cheap law (lawyers generally charged no more than £2 or £3), it was common for persons to put off execution by appearing before the justices with promises to pay, concealing their hypocritical intentions. Fleming believed that when sued the Virginia debtor comforted himself that that he would not be forced to pay for at least three years.

The root of the entire problem, according to Fleming, echoing the earlier criticism of Norfolk's magistrates, lay in the character of native-born justices:

A B____sk_n [Buckskin] with a proper share of impudence will raise himself the shadow of a large estate in plantations and negroes (perhaps not paid for), and gets himself recommended by such like as a fit person for a commission of the peace, which is generally granted. He therefore takes his seat upon the bench just as often as his indolence will permit. A cold day, or a hot one, or any such frivolous pretence seems to form reason enough for being absent.

Norfolk County proved no exception to Fleming's sour view of the courts, but he judged the borough magistrates, who of course were themselves merchants, to be somewhat more responsible:

In this county which is of a very small extent we count near twenty justices and frequently not four of that gang can be got to make a court. In the Borough indeed we have rather better under the business of its court

being up to nine months.³⁶

Even when a creditor did get his day in court before a quorum of justices, and received a favorable ruling, there could be a delay in execution of the judgment. Local sheriffs, responsible for carrying out the courts' decrees, often sympathized with the defendants and helped them evade judgment. In May 1773, Fleming got a favorable ruling on a debt due from Josiah Wright, but the sheriff kept the property, and at the next court Fleming had to get an execution against the sheriff. He promised payment but did not deliver, so Fleming had to sue again for recovery.

Fleming's contentions regarding the character of Virginia's justices and those of Norfolk Borough and County in particular served only to reinforce criticisms of the Norfolk magistrates which stemmed from the violence of the 1760s. Merchants who, like Fleming, acted as agents for British firms such as Neil Jamieson, James Parker, William Aitchison, formed what can be termed a creditor group among Norfolk mercantile men. They had a record of criticizing several of the borough magistrates because of the latter's inability to prevent or complicity in the violence of the 1760s. Underlying the situation was the growing divergence between borough and county leadership and signs of a rivalry between Norfolk and Portsmouth. Confusion over jurisdiction between borough and county combined with fears that local magistrates, especially county justices, conspired to interrupt the normal machinery of debt collection in the

³⁶Fleming to Fisher and Bragg, 31 July 1773, *ibid.*

1770s by refusing to sit.

Thus the real significance of the issue of pre-revolutionary indebtedness in Virginia lay not in debtors becoming patriots to avoid payment, as Thomas Jefferson and James Parker suggested, but in creditors like Parker and Henry Fleming remaining loyal because the patriots who formed *ad hoc* governments threatened to upset the normal operation of debt-collection. This concern only heightened their distrust of local patriots who in their view had abrogated any claim to leadership after the smallpox riots. The anti-inoculationist leaders Paul Loyall, Maximilian Calvert, and Thomas Newton, who also represented the established, pre-1750 leadership of the borough, appeared foremost in the ranks of local patriots, and it was toward them that loyalists such as Parker directed their ire.

It was in this economically strained and faction-ridden atmosphere that news of the British Coercive Acts arrived in Norfolk in the spring of 1774. Parliament's response to the Boston Tea Party of December 1773, the Intolerable Acts met widespread opposition throughout the colonies. The Virginia House of Burgesses promptly set June 1 as a day of prayer and fasting in support of Boston, and Governor Dunmore just as promptly dismissed the Assembly. As they had done in 1769, the burgesses immediately convened at the Raleigh Tavern to call for a special convention to meet in August and a general continental congress to discuss the American response to British officials.³⁷

³⁷John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783*, (Williamsburg, Va., 1988), 8.

In conjunction with the action of Virginia's burgesses, concerned citizens throughout the colony held protest meetings in support of Boston. In Norfolk the first meeting took place on May 30. Choosing as chairman county burgess Thomas Newton II, Norfolk's townspeople read letters and newspapers from Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The meeting took note of the Assembly's extralegal resolution declaring June 1 a day of fast and prayer and, joining with Portsmouth citizens, chose a committee of correspondence. These local leaders of opposition sentiment included Newton, Joseph Hutchings, John Goodrich, Paul Loyall, James Taylor, Matthew Phripp, Alexander Love, Robert Shedden, Robert Taylor, Samuel Inglis, Samuel Kerr, Henry Brown, John Greenwood, Neil Jamieson, John Mitchel, Alexander Skinner, William Harvey, Thomas Brown, and Robert Gilmour.³⁸

The choosing of a joint Norfolk-Portsmouth committee of correspondence seemingly underscored the unity of borough and town in their reaction to the measures against Boston. The joint committee wrote to Charleston, South Carolina, on the following day that Parliament's attack on Boston was an attack on all the colonies and asserted that the men of such mercantile centers as Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Charleston should take the lead in efforts to relieve the suffering of the Bostonians. The local committee agreed that a continental congress should be called and asserted that the trading part of the community "ought particularly to interfere." Only speedy measures could help unhappy Boston.

³⁸Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 87-89.

They concluded their missive to South Carolina with an assurance that they would be better able to communicate the sense of Virginia's men of trade when the general merchants' meeting took place at Williamsburg the following week. The local merchants may have seen this collective action in support of Boston as a way of getting the moribund merchants' association back on its feet.³⁹

But the June meeting of merchants never took place. Instead a smaller group of Virginia traders announced their desire for regular meetings of merchants. Comprising merchants from all of Virginia's rivers, but including a preponderance of commercial men active on the James River, the group included local traders Neil Jamieson and his partner James Glassford, Matthew Phripp, Cornelius Calvert, James Ingram, the firm of Inglis and Long, and Eilbeck, Ross, and Company. The name of Edmund Pendleton, the executor of the estate of former Speaker-Treasurer John Robinson on the list, indicates that the group probably represented a body of merchants concerned about the collapse of normal business operations in this period of economic and imperial crisis.⁴⁰

As spring turned to summer, opposition meetings and correspondence continued. In June the Norfolk committee wrote to Baltimore that the Coercive Acts were a "fatal stroke to the liberties of these colonies--a public robbery of our rights." The following day a similar letter went to

³⁹*Ibid.*, II, 94.

⁴⁰*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 30 June 1774.

Boston, relating that Virginians had chosen June 1 as a day of fasting and prayer and expressing the hope that God would end Boston's afflictions and remove the "pernicious counsellors" from King George III. On June 27 the Norfolk committee called for a public meeting in order that the local burgesses may ascertain their sentiments prior to the provincial convention at Williamsburg scheduled for August. Burgesses Thomas Newton II, James Holt, and Joseph Hutchings all concurred in the call for a public meeting.⁴¹

Newton and Hutchings were descendants of two of the borough's original aldermen. James Holt, the other burgess from Norfolk County, was a lawyer from Surry County. Born around 1710 on Hog Island, Holt had come to Norfolk in 1752 and married Anne Osheal, widow of town recorder David Osheal and daughter of town clerk Samuel Boush. Holt was a virulent anti-Scot. His will, drawn up in 1779 and proved in 1801, left his law books to the borough corporation, to hold in trust for the county court. Additional bequests were made to his wife Anne and his niece Clairmond, "provided she did not marry a Scotchman."⁴²

The local meeting to instruct the burgesses was duly convened on July 6 1774, with Thomas Newton II as moderator. The Intolerable Acts were again condemned as the "most violent and dangerous infraction of the solemn chartered rights of these colonies." The meeting instructed Newton,

⁴¹van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 111-12, 134.

⁴²"The Holt Family," *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, VII (1925), 282.

Holt and Hutchings to join in a provincial association against all imports and exports (except medicines) from and to Great Britain.⁴³

Anti-Scottish sentiment also emerged at this time as a prominent theme in opposition to Britain. This attitude was attested by a letter to the *Gazette* of July 21 titled "Alarming Soliloquy." Its author accused Scots of twice joining the French in plans for abolishing Protestantism in Britain by supporting pretenders in 1715 and 1745. The diatribe further attributed the hated Stamp Act and the annulment of the election of John Wilkes to Scottish influence on king and a corrupt Parliament. The author went on to assert that Scots aimed at the extension of arbitrary and tyrannic power in almost every part of the English dominion, and concluded that every American who joined them ought to be declared an enemy to liberty and his country.⁴⁴

As the summer wore on, local opposition to Britain began to erode. The non-importation resolves of the Virginia convention and the Continental Congress, enforced locally by committee, were not uniformly popular. Norfolk's committee of enforcement--George Abyvon, Samuel Boush, Paul Loyall, Richard Taylor, and William Selden--for the most part were descendants of the pre-1750 borough elite or their kin by marriage. In August they ordered a cargo of tea aboard the *Mary and Jane* returned to England. The merchants to whom the tea was consigned--Neil Jamieson, George and

⁴³*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 14 July 1774.

⁴⁴*Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 21 July 1774.

John Bowness, and John Lawrence and Company--agreed to return the cargo, but may have complied solely because the proceedings appeared publicly in the pages of the *Gazette*.⁴⁵

The imperial crisis monopolized provincial affairs during the fall of 1774. Just as in 1770, at the October 1774 meeting of the General Court in Williamsburg, Virginia's associators attempted to enforce unanimity. Norfolk merchant Samuel Inglis reported on the proceedings to his father-in-law William Aitchison. Aitchison and his partner James Parker had been coerced into signing the Association in 1770, and Aitchison wrote of what might have been in store for those who did not comply on this occasion:

every method has been used to get everyone [to] sign the association. A large tar mop was erected near the capitol with a bag of feathers to it and a barrel of tar underneath--several people were called before the committee and obliged to scotch any unguarded expressions they had used. Amongst the rest was Warwick and Wallace [two Suffolk merchants] for taking away their teas from the ship that lay here[.] [T]heir lives were threatened but tar and feathers was thought to be the slightest punishment they could get off with. However by the intercession of the Speaker[,] Treasurer[,] Pendleton[,] Bland and others who employed all their native powers in their favor they got clear by promising to deliver the tea (altho' now in Carolina) either to the Nansemond or the Norfolk Committee to be burned.⁴⁶

Aitchison continued that it was fortunate that Parker, who hated both the local and provincial patriots, had not been present at Williamsburg. A complaint had been directed against him for some intemperate words, and had Parker attended, he would have been as roughly treated as any of

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 22 August 1774.

⁴⁶William Aitchison to James Parker, 14 November 1774, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

the others. Aitchison concluded by begging Parker to guard his tongue in the future: "There is no contending against such numbers."⁴⁷

By the end of 1774, other proto-loyalists began to question the activities of Norfolk's enforcement committee. In December, "A Real Associator" charged that he had been informed by a reputable mercantile house of Norfolk that "sack salt is now at the rate of 4s. per bushel." The writer wished to know how that price could be reconciled with the ninth article of the Association which stated that sellers should not take advantage of scarcities to overcharge customers.⁴⁸

William Davies, son of dissenting minister Samuel Davies and clerk of the Borough committee, took it upon himself to respond to the critic. He contended that "a sack, containing *four bushels of the best salt* sells currently at 9 shillings including 2 shillings for the sack." Davies asked "Real Associator" to reveal his source, then informed the public of the pending sale of an assortment of goods imported (presumably before the non-importation went into effect) in the brig *Alexander* for several gentlemen of the borough.⁴⁹

Such criticism of their conduct did not prevent the Norfolk enforcement committee from overseeing compliance to

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 211-12; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 29 December 1774.

⁴⁹Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 227-8; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 12 January 1775.

the nonimportation agreement, and they remained busy throughout 1775. By January Portsmouth inhabitants had seceded to form their own committee, and Matthew Phripp became Norfolk committee chairman. That month he and fellow members Dr. James Taylor, Joseph Hutchings, Thomas Newton II, Richard Taylor, and Samuel Inglis met to debate a request of Captain Howard Esten, who had earlier run afoul of the Tappahannock (Hobb's Hole) patriots when he attempted to land some tea consigned to John Norton and Sons of Yorktown. Esten, a veteran of the trade between Virginia and Britain, applied to the Norfolk committee for a certificate that he had taken on board his vessel only enough lumber to serve as ballast. The Norfolk patriots granted his request.⁵⁰

Scottish Dr. Alexander Gordon was not so fortunate in his dealings with Norfolk's committee. Gordon had recently imported more than £200 sterling worth of medicine. According to the Virginia articles of association medicine was exempt from non-importation, but the Continental Association, approved in Philadelphia, had not exempted medical items, and the local committee told Gordon that the continental resolutions superseded the Virginia agreement. Dr. Taylor of the borough committee informed Gordon that Taylor himself had been placed at disadvantage by the Continental agreement, for he had fully expected them to allow importation of medicines. Taylor, who had neglected

⁵⁰van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 214, 217; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Hunter), 14 January 1775.

to place any orders until October, had no doubt that he would send back his cargo of medical supplies, expected in February.

Unmollified, Gordon determined to store his goods instead of selling them at auction as was the practice for goods ordered before, but arriving after, the Continental Association. The committee protested this conduct. Never, they asserted, had any borough inhabitant bid against the importer in auctions of such items, and Gordon could therefore expect to purchase his cargo back for little more than the vendue master's charges. The Scottish doctor, however, persisted in his course, insisting "with some warmth" that several persons be appointed to receive the medicines and see that they were stored properly. The committee acceded, but published a record of the proceedings.⁵¹

Angry over his treatment at the hands of Norfolk's committee, Gordon, who had had problems with borough aldermen in 1767 over a man he attempted to have prosecuted, took charge of the medicines himself, had them unloaded and stored at a warehouse he procured for the purpose. Claiming that some of the goods were damaged, he then prevailed on Mayor George Abyvon to issue an order for a survey of the goods. Gordon broke open several of the packages to inspect the shipment and announced that he would keep the goods in his storehouse until he received a ruling on the matter from

⁵¹Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 258-60.

Peyton Randolph.⁵²

Called before the committee to explain his conduct, Gordon produced a written justification, and the committee agreed to await Randolph's answer to Gordon's missive. On February 6, 1775, Randolph's answer arrived: he had ruled against Gordon, and the irate physician was ordered to sell the medicines at public vendue in order to claim the insurance. Gordon rejected the "mild proposals of this committee," refusing to deliver up the goods or even to show the invoice. The committee therefore unanimously published their opinion that he had violated the Association.⁵³

Not all Scots reacted so vehemently against committee strictures. On January 23 there was a public sale of part of a cargo imported from Glasgow in the *Richmond* for Thomas McCullough, who had delivered up the goods agreeable to the tenth article of the Continental Association. Many non-Scots were also detected in violations of non-importation. In February Captain John Sampson, master of the snow *Elizabeth* from Bristol, ran afoul of the committee. Sampson had entered the Elizabeth River with a load of salt which the committee allowed him to store while his vessel was overhauled. When the repairs were done, Sampson attempted to take on a cargo of lumber instead of reloading the salt. After "repeated prevarications" to the committee, Sampson sought the protection of a British warship in the Elizabeth

⁵²*Ibid.*, II, 270; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 16 Februray 1775.

⁵³van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 272, 278; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 16 February 1775.

River, and it was reported that he intended to load grain. The committee therefore published his name as a violator of the association, and subsequently Sampson reloaded the salt and sailed for Bristol.⁵⁴

Of the total of thirty-seven individuals brought before the Norfolk committee, nine were Scots or associated with Scottish firms. In March 1775, John Brown, the Scot who, with his brother William, had fallen afoul of the non-importation committee in 1770, was again subject to scrutiny by the local overseers. On March 2 the brig *Fanny* arrived from Jamaica carrying a number of slaves shipped on Brown's account. Brown, his Jamaican correspondent, and the captain of the vessel all knew of the continental association forbidding the importation of slaves, but Brown insisted that he had not given the orders for the shipment. The secretary of the committee examined Brown's books which contained some letters to various Jamaican merchants written in mid-December and early January. In them, Brown had given "positive and particular orders for remittances to be made him in slaves," hinting at the necessity for secrecy. The committee concluded that Brown had violated the Association and urged no further dealings with him.⁵⁵

Anti-Scottish sentiment grew as opposition to Britain

⁵⁴Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 260, 288, 318, 354; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 14 January 1775, (Pinkney), 6 April 1775.

⁵⁵Adele Hast, *Loyalism in Revolutionary Virginia: The Norfolk Area and the Eastern Shore*, (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1982), 19; Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 307-8; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 25 March 1775.

increased immediately preceding the Revolution. Scots formed a large proportion of the Norfolk merchants who remained loyal to Britain.⁵⁶ But ethnicity was only one factor in determining allegiances in 1775. The seeds of Norfolk's patriot-loyalist split were sown in the 1750s, when newcomers challenged an established borough elite, which included other new arrivals who, through marriage and/or commercial partnership managed to penetrate the charmed circle. The most prominent leaders of the opposition to Britain in the 1760s and 1770s were members of this older borough elite or their allies by marriage. Local burgesses Thomas Newton II, Joseph Hutchings, and James Holt fell into this category. Chairman of the oversight committee, Matthew Phripp, along with his sometime business partner Paul Loyall, active opponents of Britain, were both connected to borough founders by marriage or birth. Borough clerk Samuel Boush, member of the 1774-75 oversight committee, was scion of perhaps the most important borough founder and, with Newton, was the major borough property owner. Professional men such as Holt and Dr. James Taylor, who was a son of founding alderman John Taylor, also appeared in the forefront of opposition. Newer arrivals who attained rank within the borough hierarchy during the 1750s, such as George Abyvon and Charles Thomas, also opposed the British.

Many of these Norfolk patriots, such as Loyall, Newton,

⁵⁶See Hast, *Loyalism in Revolutionary Virginia*, 13-15. Hast over-emphasizes both the ethnic dimension to loyalism in Norfolk and consensus among merchants in opposition to Britain during the 1760s and 1770s.

Boush, and Taylor, had also been members of the anti-inoculationist group in 1768 and 1769. Their opponents in that affair, the inoculationists James Parker, William Aitchison, Neil Jamieson, and William Orange, had lost all faith in the ability of the patriot leaders to maintain order. Orange left the borough and returned to England before the troubles of the mid-1770s. Parker and Aitchison never supported non-importation, and Jamieson's support was lukewarm at best. Among the inoculationists only Cornelius Calvert and Lewis Hansford, both of whom possessed the important family ties to the established group, can be numbered among the patriots.

The economic problems of the 1770s played a major role in the formation of allegiances in 1775. The shortage of currency and the credit crisis of 1772 and 1773 focused attention on debtor-creditor relationships. With the failure of the Virginia merchants' association, creditors such as Neil Jamieson and Henry Fleming feared for continued difficulty collecting debts should the imperial crisis not be resolved. James Parker had no doubt about the motivation of the patriots; he attributed opposition to Britain to a desire to escape debt. Fleming, who hated the Scots, but who experienced firsthand the difficulties in collecting debts from Virginia planters and merchants in 1772 and 1773, also became a prominent loyalist.

Norfolk's patriot leaders were members of established families--Newton, Boush, Loyall, Taylor, Hutchings and Calvert--who possessed a tradition of local leadership going back to the borough's founding. Anxiety concerning debt

collection, fear of mob rule, and distrust of local leadership combined to lead another group of Norfolk merchants, such as Fleming, Jamieson, Aitchison, and Parker actively to support Britain. These loyalists had all arrived in the 1740s or later and had grown to resent the established leaders.

Other Norfolk merchants straddled the fence for as long as they could. Scottish inoculationist Archibald Campbell, for example, sailed to Bermuda in 1775 in an attempt to escape the coming conflict. Fellow Scot Andrew Sprowle, the magnate of Gosport and president of the Virginia merchants' committee, had more to lose by leaving. He equivocated for as long as he could, then eventually became a loyalist and died aboard a British vessel in 1776. For both men it was the arrival of Governor Dunmore on the Elizabeth River in the summer of 1775 that decided their course of action. Along with Norfolk's more confirmed loyalists, Campbell and Sprowle balked at defying Dunmore, the personification of British authority.

Chapter VII
Norfolk Merchants in the Revolution, 1775-1783

Early on the morning of June 8, 1775, Virginia's last royal governor, Lord Dunmore, abandoned all attempts to deal with the increasingly recalcitrant provincial leaders and left his palace in Williamsburg, taking refuge aboard H.M.S. *Magdalen*, anchored in nearby Queen's Creek. Transferring to the *Fowey*, another British warship off Yorktown, Dunmore debated his options while Virginia's burgesses continued their session in Williamsburg. For the next three weeks Dunmore refused to leave the safety of the British vessel, despite attempts of the burgesses to persuade him to return to Williamsburg.¹

In June, Dunmore put his wife and children on board the *Magdalen*, and ordered the vessel to England, diverting it from its original destination, Delaware Bay. The removal of the governor's family, along with the earlier appearance of additional British vessels in the York River, seemed an indication of Dunmore's intention to fight, and these developments impelled some of the governor's supporters to leave the colony.²

¹John Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783*, (Williamsburg, Va., 1988), 43-45.

²*Ibid.*, 46.

Such choices were forced on Norfolk's inhabitants when Dunmore and the British warships arrived in the Elizabeth River in July. Conscripting two local merchant vessels to augment his force, the governor arranged his small but dangerous flotilla along the eastern branch of the Elizabeth River, urging locals to join him. Dunmore had chosen Norfolk because it offered a potential base of support, and the possibility of Norfolk's loyal citizens swelling Dunmore's force was sufficiently evident to leaders of the Williamsburg Volunteers that they wrote to Norfolk's Committee of Safety soon after the governor's arrival. The Williamsburg patriots were "truly alarmed at a report that some of you are deserting the Glorious Cause, being informed that there are volunteers recruiting in opposition to the Continental plan."³

Secretary of the Borough Committee of Safety William Davies attempted to allay the Williamsburg patriots' fears. There were no grounds, he asserted, for the belief that "any among us are deserting the cause of their country and enlisting against it." But Davies went on, unwittingly perhaps, to reveal that Norfolk did in fact contain large numbers of potential British supporters. The time may come, he wrote, when the Norfolk patriots would call on Williamsburg for help, "surrounded as we are by armed vessels and *some suspected inhabitants*."⁴

³William J. Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*, 7 vols., (Charlottesville, Va., 1973-1983), III, 322.

⁴*Ibid.*, 331, my italics.

Because Norfolk was an area of divided loyalties, it was important for borough and county patriots to present a united front, and the day following Davies' letter to Williamsburg, Norfolk County chose a new committee of safety. Comprising members of the county elite such as John Wilson, George Veale, Matthew Godfrey, and Bassett Moseley, the county committee included as one of its supervisors arch patriot borough merchant Paul Loyall. The county committee's other supervisor was none other than William Davies, secretary of the borough committee. The presence of Davies and Loyall on the committee, as well as the fact that county meetings were held in the borough because the county courthouse was still located there, signified that it was the borough patriots rather than county leaders who called the shots at this juncture.⁵

As merchants though, the borough's patriots did not yet stand fully behind the opposition policy. They opposed, for example, advancing the date of non-exportation to August 5 in compliance with the decision of the General Congress in Philadelphia. The borough committee urged the Virginia Convention to rescind the order, asserting that moving the date up would cause "exceeding great hardships" to local merchants. Many Norfolk traders had purchased large quantities of grain and other commodities believing they would be allowed to export them through September 10. Now they had large stocks on hand and too little time to dispose

⁵*Ibid.*, 327.

of them.⁶

Independent of the borough committee, another group of merchants petitioned for repeal of the order. They reiterated the damage such a stoppage of trade would inflict, stressing that their large stocks of grain, a perishable commodity, would spoil if not exported. Their foresight in making large purchases, which in normal times promised profits, would be the cause of heavy losses if the date were changed. In addition, Virginia's earlier imposition of non-exportation would give unfair advantage to merchants in other colonies who conformed to the original date. The Norfolk traders cited the precedent of 1770 when New York and Philadelphia merchants effectively opposed non-exportation in response to the Townshend Acts. Finally, if the Virginia Convention did not retract the order, it would destroy the merchants' confidence in their representatives.⁷

Signers of this petition included many of the area's more prominent merchants, but only Matthew Phripp, chairman of the borough committee, his partner Preeson Bowdoin, and Thomas Newton II can be considered among the borough's active patriots. Most of the other subscribers were grain merchants and Scottish factors who had the most to lose should non-exportation be implemented early. Cornelius

⁶"Norfolk Borough Committee of Safety, to the Convention, 28 July, 1775," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XIV (1906), 51-2; Van Schreeven, et al., eds. *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 365; cf. John Schaw to Robert Carter, 28 July 1775, Carter Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va.

⁷Van Schreeven, et al., eds. *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 365-6.

Calvert also affixed his name to this petition, an indication that many of those who signed were inoculationists who mistrusted the local magistrates and provincial leaders. Scottish merchants who signed included Archibald Campbell, James Gilchrist, partners George Logan and Robert Gilmour, and Neil Jamieson. They were joined by Norfolk merchants of English origin who had become successful after 1750, including John Greenwood, Henry Fleming, John Lawrence, Charles Thomas, and Lewis Hansford.⁸

The Virginia Convention eventually rescinded the order to stop exports in August because of the failure of the Maryland leaders to conform. The repeal gave Norfolk merchants a little more time, but as the original date for non-exportation approached, local merchants with close ties to Britain began to chafe at the prospect of an embargo. Even before Dunmore's arrival, the possibility of economic strictures broke up established family businesses. Norfolk trader James Ingram, for example, who served as American agent for the family firm which included his three brothers in Britain, had seen the business dissolved in early 1775 and its holdings placed in trust. In August Ingram discovered that his brother John claimed half of a £1,600 bill to satisfy various debts assigned to the trustees of the Company. Another brother, Archibald, one of the trustees, delayed arbitrating the claim until he heard from James, an action which greatly angered John. Archibald wrote that he foresaw a British victory in the coming

⁸*Ibid.*

conflict and he expected widespread confiscations of rebel property. In that event, Archibald intended "to become a purchaser and retire, if possible near you."⁹

Such letters, confiscated by the patriots and later published in the *Gazette*, did much to inflame patriot opinion against local merchants, especially the Scots. The committees of public safety confiscated letters from local merchants throughout the fall and winter of 1775 which revealed that many Norfolk traders were actively seeking ways to avoid the commercial regulations. These nascent loyalists represented later arrivals to the Elizabeth River. With the important exception of Andrew Sprowle, who had immigrated earlier, those detected corresponding with British merchants in violation of the Continental Association were merchants who arrived in Norfolk after mid-century. The older established group, descendants of the borough founders and their kin, numbered among Norfolk's foremost patriots and conformed to the commercial regulations of the Continental Congress. Other local traders, however, mainly those of Scottish background and others who had arrived after mid-century, attempted to continue dealing with their British contacts.

Ironically, while many of the British firms proceeded with caution during the crisis of 1775, their Norfolk correspondents were less discreet. Early in August, for example, Whitehaven exporter Walter Chambre informed Norfolk

⁹intercepted letter, Archibald Ingram to James Ingram, 30 August 1775, in Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 58-60.

merchant John Eilbeck, a post-1750 arrival from Whitehaven, that he intended to make no further shipments to Eilbeck. The Norfolk merchant then applied to London factor Christopher Henderson who wrote him that he could procure the goods Eilbeck desired, but that to ship them in the normal fashion would be dangerous. Henderson did not doubt Eilbeck's sincerity, but should the goods be confiscated leaving Eilbeck unable to remit, Henderson might suffer "distress in point of punctuality in fulfilling my engagement. . . [that] would give me more uneasiness than any advantage or gain."¹⁰

Another local merchant who attempted to continue his commercial activities was the venerable Andrew Sprowle. In August Sprowle ordered some stockings and Irish linens from Glasgow merchant George Brown. Brown shipped the goods but doubted that Sprowle would receive them.¹¹

Meanwhile, as Norfolk's anxious merchants pondered their options during the summer of 1775, Lord Dunmore in the Elizabeth River prepared for war. At the end of July his forces had been augmented by the arrival of sixty men from the British garrison at St. Augustine, Florida, carried into the Norfolk harbor aboard Preeson Bowdoin's confiscated vessel. The governor ordered the troops landed at Sprowle's Gosport shipyard and warehouse complex.¹²

¹⁰intercepted letter, Christopher Henderson to Messers Eilbeck, Ross, and Co., 8 August 1775, *ibid.*, IV, 38-40.

¹¹intercepted letters, George Brown to Andrew Sprowle, 1 September 1775, n.d., *ibid.*, IV, 66, 79.

¹²Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 55.

In addition to their commercial concerns, Norfolk's leaders now faced a British military build-up. Their major concern was not the troops themselves but the "exceeding bad effects [which] have arisen among the blacks from the neighborhood of the men of war, [and] which we have reason to believe will be very much increased by the arrival of these troops."¹³

Norfolk slaveowners had been concerned about the possibility of large numbers of slaves flocking to Dunmore's colors since the governor's arrival. Up to this point, however, Dunmore and his officers had been scrupulous to discourage the enrollment of slaves, and they had actually turned away many blacks from their ships. Such restraint even earned the approbation of the borough's Common Hall which on 28 July appointed Archibald Campbell and James Taylor to thank the British commanders for returning runaways.¹⁴

But the precarious peace between patriot leaders and Dunmore and his adherents in Norfolk was soon shattered. It was the governor's housing of the troops at Sprowle's buildings at Gosport which provided the initial spark which eventually literally burst into flames. The governor had appointed merchant John Schaw as commissary for the British troops, charging him with procuring victuals and other supplies. Early in August, Schaw pointed out to Dunmore's

¹³Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 378.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 381, n. 13; Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 186.

troops one of the patriot volunteers, a company fifer named Alexander Main. Main, conspicuous by his fringed hunting shirt, the standard patriot dress, was hauled before Dunmore who questioned the shirtman and held him prisoner for several days.¹⁵

Schaw was a Scottish merchant formerly associated with Andrew Sprowle. When Sprowle's son and the latter's young partner both died in 1771, the older merchant appointed Schaw to collect the debts owed to the firm. Schaw had also maintained connections with the Brown brothers, the Portsmouth merchants who had earned opprobrium for violations of the non-importation agreements in 1770 and 1774. Schaw was thus not a popular figure among Norfolk's patriots.¹⁶

The borough Committee of Public Safety labelled Schaw a tool of the British and an enemy to American liberty. Soon after, Schaw was seized by a group of borough inhabitants, who marched him about town to the tune of Yankee Doodle, "as played by the Fifer he had caused to be apprehended." He narrowly escaped being tarred and feathered and managed to gain the safety of the home of one of the borough aldermen, most likely William Aitchison. Delivered to the committee the following morning, Schaw was made publicly to apologize. He admitted that he had pointed Main out to the British "in open disrespect to the good people of this country," and

¹⁵Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 406.

¹⁶*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 31 October 1771; Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 417, n. 16.

announced that henceforth he intended conducting himself "as a zealous advocate for the rights and liberties of America."¹⁷

Following Schaw's penance, local patriots turned their attention to Andrew Sprowle. Since Gosport was outside borough limits, it fell to the county committee to summon Sprowle to answer questions concerning his housing of the British troops in his warehouses. Captain John MacCartney, of the British ship *Mercury*, immediately fired off an angry letter of protest to Norfolk Borough Mayor Paul Loyall. To protect the lives and property of loyal citizens, MacCartney asserted that he stood ready to bombard the borough.¹⁸

Loyall's response was a masterpiece of obfuscation. In the past local officials had used confusion over jurisdiction between borough and county to avoid responsibility, and on this occasion Loyall argued that since the summons to Sprowle had been issued by the county committee, the borough magistrates had no authority. But as the meeting was to be held within the borough limits, the mayor was willing to guarantee that Sprowle would suffer no harm. Loyall, Norfolk's most active patriot since the time of the Stamp Act, continued sarcastically, and his response deserves to be quoted at length:

I have always found the authority of the magistracy sufficiently complete for the maintenance of good government and good order; and while I thank you for

¹⁷Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 408, n. 10, 415-5, 420, 426, n. 2; *Virginia Gazette, or Norfolk Intelligencer*, 16 August 1775.

¹⁸Captain John MacCartney to Paul Loyall, 12 August 1775, repr. in Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 186-7.

your chearful [sic] offers of assistance for that laudable purpose, yet I presume your intention is only to act within the line of your department. I confess I feel myself somewhat astonished at the last paragraph of your letter, which seems to imply a threatening, that would eventually prove destructive to the persons and properties of his Majesty's subjects. A personal insult offered to an individual, by the ill guided zeal of a number of thoughtless youth, can never justify a hint of that nature. At any rate it is to be presumed, that gentlemen in military departments, will not intermeddle in that capacity, unless particularly required by the civil authority; as I am determined, whenever I find any unlawful combinations or persecutions to prevail within the sphere of my jurisdiction, to take every legal method to supress them.¹⁹

Loayll's answer encapsulated the crucial difference between Norfolk's patriots and loyalists in their attitudes toward civil authority. As a part of the established, legally constituted magistracy of the borough, Loyall was one of those responsible for public order. He justified his opposition to the Stamp Act in 1766, his fracas with British Captain Morgan the following year, and his efforts to prevent the smallpox inoculations of 1768 and 1769 as efforts to preserve the community peace. Local merchants who opposed Loyall, such as James Parker, William Aitchison, Archibald Campbell and the other inoculationists, were themselves prominent men in the borough. They saw Loyall as a one of the chief mob ringleaders and rabble rousers who was himself the chief danger to the order he was pledged to protect. British authorities such as Captain Morgan in the mid-1760s and in 1775 Dunmore's captains on the Elizabeth River viewed Loyall with similar mistrust.

As for the object of this exchange, Sprowle replied to

¹⁹Paul Loyall to Captain John MacCartney, 14 August 1775, reprinted in Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 188.

the summons of the Norfolk County committee in a tone of wounded innocence. He had not been informed of Dunmore's intentions until the British had landed and taken possession of his sail loft; he therefore decided that moderation was the best policy. The old merchant was indignant at the treatment meted out to Schaw and insisted that a British escort accompany him to the borough. Sprowle awkwardly underlined the fear felt by all who did not wholeheartedly support Norfolk's patriots.

I insist on it that I shall not appear before you without [the Army and Navy] escorting me and protecting me from the mob, from their behavior to John Schaw as they say it w[oul]d appear the committee have no government [but] of the mob.²⁰

Sprowle was willing to compromise. He indicated that he would meet the committee aboard a vessel in the Elizabeth River or they could convene at his home at Gosport. The aging merchant, who had arrived in Norfolk in the 1730s, refused to cross over to Norfolk Borough without protection.

Self preservation is the first law of nature. I am old and am an older American than any of ye to be used as Schaw was at my time of day what no man durst in my younger days.²¹

After the British captain announced that he would accompany Sprowle to Norfolk, the merchant duly appeared before the county committee. He testified that he had protested Dunmore's occupation of his warehouse, but the royal executive, busy with the refitting of his flagship,

²⁰Sprowle to Norfolk County Committee, 16 August 1775, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

²¹*Ibid.*

had paid no attention.²²

Sprowle's testimony apparently satisfied the county committee. Although chiding the merchant for not having informed them sooner that his property had been appropriated, they recognized "the fatal necessity of your submitting to their [the British] arbitrary and unprecedented acts of Tyranny." In a flourish of revolutionary rhetoric praising liberty and property, the county committee informed Sprowle that it was "a cruel situation indeed when every petty officer in his majesty's service assumes the authority of an absolute monarch and the private property of a peaceable citizen is seized upon as lawful prey."²³

Despite his assertion to the contrary, by this time Sprowle had probably decided that his sympathies lay with the British. As a merchant, one of his main considerations was with the stoppage of commerce. He, too, saw the coming conflict as a threat to property, but viewed the patriots as the chief enemies to property. Indeed, amid the growing tension between Dunmore and Norfolk's patriots, property became the major concern of many of the local traders. Merchant Archibald Campbell, undecided himself, expressed a common view:

I am afraid we shall have a disagreeable time of it here, we expect that the town will soon be garrisoned either with Regulars or Provincials, should it become

²²Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 452.

²³Norfolk County Committee to Andrew Sprowle, 21 August 1775, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

the seat of either it will be equally disagreeable to the inhabitants and make property very precarious.²⁴

By September such fears approached realization as the tense situation in the Elizabeth River moved towards violence. The opening salvo, however, came not in the borough itself, but across the harbor in Hampton. During a storm on the evening of September 2 a tender belonging to the British vessel *Otter* was driven ashore. The local inhabitants seized a quantity of stores, including some muskets and cutlasses, belonging to the boat.

Captain Squire of the *Otter* wrote to the committee of Elizabeth City County for the return of the goods and began seizing vessels belonging to Hampton residents when the committee returned only a portion. In Norfolk, an exodus of inhabitants with their household goods commenced in anticipation of the trouble which was to follow.

"Everything is in great confusion and a much heavier cloud seems to hang over us," wrote one observer who remained.

"Almost everybody is moved their things out of town." The town's inhabitants were thrown into a "state of uncertainty and anxiety. . . a region of political darkness, not knowing well what to fear or what to hope for--but in continual dread of some evil."²⁵

To the editor of the local newspaper, committed patriot John Hunter Holt, there was little doubt about what had

²⁴Archibald Campbell to St. George Tucker, 11 August 1775, *ibid.*

²⁵Thomas Roberts to St. George Tucker, 10 September 1775, William McAlester to St. George Tucker, 15 September 1775, *ibid.*

transpired. In the pages of the *Virginia Gazette*, or *Norfolk Intelligencer*, which he had been publishing in Norfolk since spring, Holt, repeating familiar arguments concerning private property, castigated the British commander:

We hope that those who have lived under and enjoyed the blessings of the British Constitution, will not continue tame spectators of such flagrant violations of its most salutary laws in defence of private property.²⁶

Captain Squire soon responded to Holt's repeated goadings. He warned the intemperate editor that he would confiscate the press if the attacks continued. On September 30 did just that, landing a party of men who seized the press and two of Holt's employees, whom the official remonstrance later characterized as members of Holt's family. Dunmore, who had urged the seizure to obtain a means of keeping the area's loyal inhabitants informed, soon had set up the press on his command vessel and began printing his own journal.²⁷

The Borough Common Hall reacted to the seizure with a predictable remonstrance. Mayor Loyall, aldermen Archibald Campbell and Charles Thomas, and councilmen Robert Taylor and Thomas Claiborne were appointed to draw up the protest

²⁶*Virginia Gazette, or Norfolk Intelligencer*, 20 September 1775, quoted in Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 134.

²⁷Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 153; cf. Brent Tarter, "'The Very Standard of Liberty': Lord Dunmore's Seizure of the *Virginia Gazette, or Norfolk Intelligencer*," *Virginia Cavalcade*, XXV (1975), 58-71; James Parker to Charles Steuart, 19 July 1775, Charles Steuart Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

which Campbell and fellow aldermen Cornelius Calvert and William Aitchison, the most moderate members of the corporation, delivered to the governor on the following day. They contended that Squire had seized of the press "in open violation of the peace and good order." The borough magistrates argued, somewhat disingenuously, that they had always preserved the peace of Norfolk and had not prevented British vessels from being supplied. They concluded that they could have opposed Squire with force had they been so inclined.²⁸

They were mistaken in the latter assumption. The local militia had not obeyed the orders of Colonel Matthew Phripp to attack the British, and Phripp resigned in disgust. The failure of Norfolk's leaders effectively to oppose Squire's seizure of the printing press damaged the standing of Norfolk's patriots with other Virginia opposition leaders and underscored the Convention's concern over the loyalties of Norfolk's inhabitants.²⁹

Dunmore answered the borough remonstrance by praising Captain Squire for performing a great service for Norfolk's inhabitants. The British had removed from the borough a "means of poisoning the minds of the people, and exciting in them a Spirit of Rebellion and Sedition." Dunmore denied that the borough magistrates always endeavored to maintain the peace and had not hampered the victualling of His

²⁸Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 192-3.

²⁹Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 59; intercepted letter, George Rae to John Rae, 7 November 1775, in Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 337.

Majesty's forces at Norfolk.³⁰

In October, as provincial troops gathered in Williamsburg, Dunmore made another move. In an attempt to cripple local opposition, he ordered his troops to confiscate and destroy armaments secreted around Norfolk. The redcoats' first target was a cache of weapons belonging to patriot burgess Joseph Hutchings, son of borough founder and longtime burgess John Hutchings, who had been active in privateering during the Seven Years' War. Dunmore's troops found and destroyed nineteen cannon left over from the previous conflict belonging to the younger Hutchings. Within several days, by means of similar sallies, Dunmore had managed to capture or destroy a total of seventy-two cannon and a large quantity of smaller weapons and supplies. Dunmore was less successful in his attack on Hampton, where a line of sunken vessels obstructed the entrance to the harbor, and a troop from Williamsburg drove off the British landing party.³¹

By this time, Andrew Sprowle, who really had no other choice with the British troops remaining at Gosport, had abandoned any pretence of sympathy with the patriots. One loyalist described Gosport as "the only place in Virginia that can be called happy and peaceful." Sprowle was "the father of all and no one does anything without his advice and direction[,] even the Governor himself who styles himself Liuetenant Governor of Gosport." The aged merchant,

³⁰Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 193-4.

³¹Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 62-3.

who expected the British to destroy all of the "disaffected towns in Virginia" except Norfolk and Portsmouth, continued to import goods under the protection of the British army and navy.³²

Other Norfolk area merchants who continued their commercial activities to supply Dunmore's forces included William Aitchison and his partner James Parker, and John Lawrence. The Virginia patriot leaders stigmatized these and others as "enemies to American liberty" and readied troops to march on Norfolk via the south side of the James River.³³

While shortages of supplies delayed the Virginia troops, Dunmore routed local patriots at a battle at Kemp's Landing in Princess Anne County, capturing Joseph Hutchings in the affray. The governor then raised the king's standard and issued a proclamation he had prepared some weeks earlier which declared the colony in revolt and freed all slaves and servants of the rebels. On November 23 Dunmore took formal occupation of the borough and began to erect a line of perimeter defenses.³⁴

Local merchants and leaders who had chafed under the

³²intercepted letters, Katharine Hunter to Miss Katharine Hunter, 29 October 1775, Andrew Sprowle to George Brown, 1 November, 5 November 1775, in Van Schreeven, et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 304, 313, 325.

³³intercepted letters, George Rae to John Rae, 7 November 1775, Robert Shedden to John Shedden, 9 November 1775, Anthony Warwick to Cuming, McKenzie, and Co., 10 November 1775, Aitchison and Parker to William Bolden, 11 November 1775, John Lawrence to Sparling and Bolden, 12 November 1775, *ibid.*, IV, 337, 353, 369, 382.

³⁴Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 65-6, 68.

authority of the patriot committees saw Dunmore's victory as an opportunity to restore legal government to the area. The British victory at Kemp's Landing brought to a culmination the divisions which had arisen in Norfolk in the previous decade. Among those who joined Dunmore's forces and took up positions of authority were Jacob Ellegood, son of borough founder John Ellegood, and brother-in-law of Scottish merchant and inoculationist William Aitchison. Ellegood, second in command of the Norfolk County militia, added his troops to those of the governor and accepted a commission as colonel of the Queen's Own Loyal Regiment. Henry Fleming, the Whitehaven factor, became a major in Dunmore's militia. James Parker, William Aitchison's business partner and another Ellegood brother-in-law, became Dunmore's chief of engineers. The governor also employed Neil Jamieson, who commanded considerable credit, as his head of supply. James Ingram became chief justice, and John Brown served as vendue master.³⁵

On the other hand, Dunmore's victory and subsequent proclamation presented Norfolk's patriots with an unsavory prospect, as they were now compelled to aver their loyalty to the king. They obliged. Matthew Phripp had actually sworn allegiance some time earlier, having been captured while visiting his aged father. After the battle at Kemp's Landing, as the victorious governor marched back to Norfolk

³⁵*Ibid.*, 69; "Transcript of the MS Books and Papers of the Commission of Enquiry into the Losses. . . ." P.R.O., T.O. 1/549. [Loyalist Transcripts, New York Public Library]. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Borough in triumph, more than two hundred locals took the oath of allegiance, including Mayor Loyall and the borough aldermen.³⁶

Dunmore's ascension in Norfolk proved short-lived. Having fortified the causeway at Great Bridge, which stood astride the only major land route across the Elizabeth River to the southward, the British finally confronted the Virginia troops there in early December. On December 9, after a series of desultory skirmishes, the British attacked. Abandoning the safety of their stronger position, the redcoats marched along the causeway in an attempt to dislodge the Virginians. The provincial troops guarding the causeway, under the command of former Norfolk inhabitant Edward Champion Travis of Jamestown, held their fire until the British troops came within several yards, then unleashed a devastating volley. Decimated and demoralized, Dunmore's force struggled back to Norfolk the following day.³⁷

Because the loss of Great Bridge made the governor's position at Norfolk untenable, he abandoned the town for the safety of the ships in the Elizabeth River. Many of those who had so recently pledged their loyalty to the king accompanied the British. The Virginia forces, augmented by the arrival of troops from North Carolina under Robert Howe, who took command by virtue of his continental commission, marched into Norfolk on December 14.³⁸

³⁶Charles B. Cross, Jr., ed., *Memoirs of Helen Calvert Maxwell Read*, (Chesapeake, Va., 1970), 54.

³⁷Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 71-3.

³⁸Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 195-6.

The victorious shirtmen proved no saviors to the borough's harassed populace. To Howe and his superiors in Williamsburg, Norfolk's entire population had fallen under suspicion because of their loyalty to Dunmore. Even patriot leaders such as Loyall and Phripp were not wholly trusted because they had sworn allegiance to the king. Only their active support for the provincial revolutionaries could redeem Norfolk's patriots.

In the meantime, intercepted letters which local merchants had written to their British correspondents began to surface which further inflamed opinion against Norfolk. The experience of Archibald Campbell, a moderate member of the borough government who applied for a permit to land some household items from a vessel to which they had been consigned for safety, was probably typical. Howe ordered Campbell to deliver himself to the Convention in Williamsburg and abide by their determination; in the meantime his goods would be protected. "I mean you no compliment," the North Carolina patriot continued sternly, "when I add that I shall feel real pleasure should you be able to justify your conduct, and return to your home as happy as I wish you."³⁹

The Committee acquitted Campbell of any charges of enmity to America, allowing him to return to Norfolk. In the meantime, however, events had intervened to make his trip to Williamsburg meaningless.

³⁹Robert Howe to Archibald Campbell, 27 December 1775, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

On the afternoon of January 1, 1776, Dunmore's vessels commenced a bombardment of the borough in an effort to halt the public parades of the shirtmen. Several parties of redcoats landed and set fire to the warehouses along the river's edge. Virginia troops beat off the British but did little to halt the fires; indeed, the Virginians had received orders from the Convention to burn the Scottish distillery, Gosport, and the mill on the south side of the Elizabeth which had formerly belonged to Robert Tucker. For three days the fires continued, consuming a good portion of the borough's waterfront. Skirmishing between patriot troops and Dunmore's forces continued until early February when, with the Convention's consent, Howe ordered the borough's remaining structures destroyed and withdrew, leaving garrisons at Great Bridge and Kemp's Landing.⁴⁰

The destruction of the borough was nearly total. Few buildings survived the fires of January and February 1776. The total value of real and personal property lost in the conflagrations amounted to more than £176,000. Among individuals who suffered most was merchant Thomas Newton, whose combined losses surpassed £10,000. Samuel Boush, with his extensive property holdings, lost fifty-seven buildings and personal goods amounting to £7,405. William Orange, who had returned to England several years earlier after the smallpox riots, lost forty buildings and property amounting to £4,792 in value. Archibald Campbell, in Williamsburg at the time the first fires were set, did not lose much

⁴⁰Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 82-4.

personal property because his quick-thinking clerk loaded the household furniture on board one of his vessels. But a vessel in the continental service later captured Campbell's brigantine, and the furniture was destroyed because Dunmore had given Campbell's captain a safe conduct.⁴¹

The destruction of Norfolk Borough scattered its inhabitants. Those who had remained loyal to the governor, including Andrew Sprowle, James Parker, Neil Jamieson, John and Jonathan Eilbeck, Henry Fleming, John Brown, James Gilchrist, and James Ingram joined Dunmore's fleet in the Elizabeth River. William Aitchison, who remained, was later sent a prisoner to Williamsburg where he died soon after. Sprowle died too, falling victim to the smallpox which swept through the loyalist refugees aboard Dunmore's ships. The venerable Gosport merchant's widow Catharine survived but underwent further indignity at the hands of Dunmore. She had received a safe passage from the Virginia Committee of Safety to visit her son, a prisoner at Halifax, North Carolina. When she returned to Virginia, the patriots ordered her to rejoin Dunmore's fleet, but the former governor refused to permit her to do so. British Captain Andrew Hammond therefore put her on a vessel bound for Glasgow, where she complained that she was "now barbarously condemned to leave this fleet by a Governor that was himself but a little while ago protected and supported by my ever

⁴¹"Schedule of Claims Entered for Losses Sustained by the Late Inhabitants of the Borough of Norfolk," *Journal of the House of Delegates . . . 1835*, (Richmond, Va., 1835), Doc. No. 43; St. George Tucker to Thomas Nelson, 1 September 1776, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

dear deceased husband."⁴²

Norfolk's loyalists accompanied Dunmore late in May when he moved his force north to Gwynn's Island at the mouth of the Piankitank River in Matthews County. In July patriots drove the loyalists from this refuge, and the following month Virginia's last royal governor sailed through the Capes, leaving the state forever and taking many former Norfolk area residents with him.

Meanwhile, those who remained at Norfolk dazedly attempted to put their lives back together. Many fled to the surrounding countryside, where they awaited developments in that terrible winter and spring of 1776. By April the ruins of the borough began to turn green as spring rains and mild weather induced growth of vegetation. The state had attempted to relieve the victims as early as February, granting Edward Stables and Robert Pleasant permission to load a vessel in the James River with provisions to be carried to Kemps Landing for the refugees.⁴³

Such forays were hazardous as long as Dunmore remained in the area, and Virginia officials remained concerned that local traders continued to supply his forces. In April, therefore, the Virginia Convention appointed several county and borough patriots, including James Holt, Arthur Boush,

⁴²Petition of Catharine Sprowle, 27 June 1776, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

⁴³H.R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the Council of State of Virginia*, 7 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1932), II, 420; James Gilchrist to St. George Tucker, 21 April 1776, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

and Cornelius Calvert, to investigate the behavior of the county's inhabitants and ordered the entire population removed to the interior of the state. Virginia Committee of Safety member Archibald Cary purchased provisions and hired wagons to carry the inhabitants as far as Suffolk, but the order was rescinded after the flight of Dunmore from the area in May.⁴⁴

In June, on the traditional day for choosing Norfolk's mayor, six of the borough officials--all who remained--gathered within the walls of the burned courthouse to elect a mayor. Aldermen Paul Loyall, George Abyvon, and Cornelius Calvert met with councilmen John Ramsay, Bassett Moseley, and Robert Taylor. They selected Abyvon as their executive for the coming year, "notwithstanding the destruction of the said borough, by the cruel hand of tyranny." A motion was passed thanking Loyall "for his patriotick and spirited behaviour during his mayoralty," and the group retired to a nearby farm where among their toasts they expressed the hope that the borough would "phoenix-like, rise out of its own ashes." Commerce, so essential to Norfolk's colonial development, proved the key to its survival and reconstruction after the war.⁴⁵

Dunmore's departure from Virginia marked the official capitulation of royal government in the colony. But the hostile line between British and Virginians had actually been drawn during the previous year when the governor had

⁴⁴McIlwaine, ed., *Council Journals*, II, 497, 507.

⁴⁵Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 196-7.

abandoned the royal palace and refused to deal with the patriots. The royal governor's behavior had created an irrevocable split and made the Convention the *de facto* government of Virginia. In its struggle with the British, this new state government found itself faced with several concerns, the most important of which was the problem of supply. Despite strenuous attempts to encourage domestic production of essential items such as iron, lead, and salt, Virginia officials soon found it necessary to procure most of their supplies outside the state. Local merchants who remained in Virginia possessed the commercial experience to aid in supplying the Virginia troops.⁴⁶

Early in February 1776, for example, before the complete destruction of the borough, the Norfolk firm of John Greenwood, Thomas Ritson and Samuel Marsh received a warrant for £10 for stores they provided the Virginia troops who occupied Norfolk. Merchant-magistrate Paul Loyall, Norfolk's leading patriot, also furnished the Virginia troops with lead and canvas.⁴⁷

Throughout the Revolution Virginia forces remained short of vital necessities, from armaments and ammunition to hemp and foodstuffs. Salt, necessary for preserving meat, proved especially scarce. Iron, too, was precious. In June 1776, some months after the destruction of Norfolk Borough, Virginia's Committee of Safety received a report that local inhabitants had returned to the scene of destruction,

⁴⁶Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 169-70.

⁴⁷McIlwaine, *Council Journals*, I, 127, II, 405.

collecting nails and large pieces of iron. The committee immediately ordered Christopher Calvert to confiscate the iron and nails, have them appraised and report the names of the scavengers, "that justice may hereafter be done to the respective proprietors."⁴⁸

But gunpowder initially was the most crucial need for Virginia's war effort. It was Dunmore's removal of powder from the magazine at Williamsburg in April 1775 which had triggered the conflict between governor and burgesses, and as early as May, while governor and burgesses dickered, the Convention cast about for someone to supply that vital necessity. They soon fixed on John Goodrich "in Norfolk, a famous contraband man."⁴⁹

Goodrich was actually a Portsmouth-based merchant from Nansemond County, where he owned a large plantation. He possessed property in Isle of Wight County, and with his partner and son-in-law, Portsmouth merchant Robert Shedden, who was also associated with Andrew Sprowle, Goodrich had built up an extensive pre-Revolutionary trade with the West Indies. He and his sons, "legends in their own day," captained vessels carrying the usual cargoes from Portsmouth to the Caribbean. The enterprising and experienced merchant also operated a James River passenger and freight service conveying people and goods between the Elizabeth River and

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, I, 17.

⁴⁹Robert W. Coakley, "Virginia Commerce during the American Revolution," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1949), 129-30; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 44; George M. Curtis III, "The Goodrich Family and the Revolution in Virginia, 1774-1776," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXIV (1976), 49.

Williamsburg. He seemed the perfect go-between for the gunpowder venture.⁵⁰

Virginia Treasurer Robert Carter Nicholas therefore asked Norfolk County burgess Thomas Newton to present a scheme to Goodrich, and Newton gave Goodrich's son William £5000 in bills of exchange drawn on English tobacco merchants John Norton and Sons. William Goodrich was also to carry letters to St. Eustatius from Norfolk merchant Matthew Phripp, chairman of the borough Committee of Safety.⁵¹

William sailed to the Caribbean where after considerable effort he was able to procure about £950 worth of powder. He also purchased a quantity of English manufactured goods which he disguised as Dutch. Returning to Virginia via Ocracoke Inlet, he delivered the gunpowder in Williamsburg in October. In the meantime, Dunmore had captured his brother and brother-in-law, and the combination of the governor's persuasion and the fact that the patriots condemned the importation of dry goods as a violation of the Association, pushed the Goodriches over to the British side. Their knowledge of the creeks and inlets along the James River and Chesapeake Bay made the family valuable allies of the British. In April 1776, John Goodrich, Sr., who had recently brought Dunmore a prize cargo of flour, bread, and wheat, was himself captured by patriots in North Carolina. He later escaped and was recaptured on a number of

⁵⁰Curtis, "Goodrich Family," 51.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 54-5.

occasions. Goodrich and his sons eventually joined loyalists in New York and at least one member of the family participated in every British raid into Virginia until Cornwallis' campaign.⁵²

As the career of Goodrich shows, the conflict with Britain made commerce extremely hazardous. Dunmore's activity in the Elizabeth River area through the summer of 1776 and the subsequent British naval operations in the Chesapeake Bay throughout 1777 and 1778 constricted normal avenues of trade. North Carolina and the Eastern Shore grew in importance as entrepots for goods entering the lower James River. South Quay, a small village in Nansemond County on the Blackwater River southwest of Norfolk, became transformed into a bustling commercial center as the terminus for goods brought from North Carolina. Norfolk area merchants soon found themselves in those locations.⁵³

State officials actively promoted mercantile schemes to alleviate shortages of essential items. Late in 1775, the Convention established a public store under William Aylett to be responsible for supply. In December 1776 a separate Department of Trade for Virginia was established. Aylett remained as its agent until December 1777, when Thomas Smith succeeded him. Benjamin Day took over from Smith in May 1779; then in January 1781 Portsmouth trader David Ross became agent, serving until May 1782.⁵⁴

⁵²*Ibid.*, 71, 74.

⁵³Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 157-9.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 230-234.

From the beginning of the conflict, the West Indies figured prominently in Virginia's plans to supply its troops. In September 1776 the Virginia government ordered seven vessels to proceed to the West Indies carrying cargoes of flour and tobacco in exchange for gunpowder, salt, blankets, sail canvas, medicines, woollens, and other necessities. The ships weighed anchor in November and December, except the *Liberty*, which was delayed until March of the following year. Typical of the fate of the plan was the loss of one of the vessels, the *Defiance*, which, as Paul Loyall informed Aylett, ran aground and was lost in Hampton Roads in October 1777.⁵⁵

Such incidents exacerbated the problem of supplying the war effort. Salt remained scarce. In September 1776 the inhabitants of Nansemond County rioted, demanding that merchant Richard Savage hold a public sale of his cargo of precious salt. But they had no funds, and Savage petitioned the state to purchase the salt and dole it out to the people. The Committee of Safety refused, however, contending that "it would be very impolitic thus to gratify and reward the riotous disposition of those people so disgraceful to government." They also advised the Nansemond County Lieutenant to raise a force to suppress "so lawless a spirit."⁵⁶

By 1777 the dearth of essential supplies had reached

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 235-237; McIlwaine, ed., *Council Journals*, I, 158; Paul Loyall to William Aylett, 4 October 1777, Aylett Papers, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

⁵⁶McIlwaine, ed., *Council Journals*, I, 180.

crisis stage. The state government blamed shortages on speculators and enacted measures prohibiting "forestalling, regrating, engrossing, or sales at public vendue." Shortages did not guarantee high profits for merchants. In May 1777, Matthew Phripp and Cornelius Calvert were appointed commissioners to inquire into the petition of two merchants who had contracted to supply the troops on the southside of the James River. Because provisions in that district were scarce, the suppliers had purchased additional flour, but the removal of some of the troops to South Carolina left them with 550 barrels of useless flour on their hands. They petitioned the House of Delegates for relief.⁵⁷

The following year Virginia's new commercial agent, Thomas Smith, formulated a bolder scheme to alleviate shortages in which Virginia vessels loaded with tobacco would sail to France where both ship and cargo would be sold. The proceeds would be used to purchase supplies for shipment on French ships to the West Indies. From there swift pilot boats would smuggle the cargoes into Virginia through North Carolina. Four vessels, the *Greyhound*, *Jane*, *Congress*, and *Liberty*, were duly loaded. Christopher Calvert, state agent at South Quay until relieved by Smith in August 1778, supervised the fitting out of the *Greyhound*, then reported that it was chased aground by a British man-

⁵⁷Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 176; cf. W. W. Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia . . .*, 13 vols., (Richmond, 1819-1823), IX, 382-4, X, 157-8, 425; *Journal of the House of Delegates . . .*, 1777, (Richmond, Va., 1828), 12-13.

of-war and its cargo of precious tobacco confiscated.⁵⁸

Importing goods from North Carolina through South Quay or via the Eastern Shore also remained hazardous. State agents such as Thomas Smith instructed captains of most of the state vessels to risk the route through the Capes. During Smith's tenure as state purchasing agent, there were probably no more than twelve such voyages to the West Indies.⁵⁹

The state-sponsored attempts to supply the Virginia war effort fell far short of the hopes of Virginia's patriot government. Through mid-1779, public ventures provided a small flow of supplies, but the British invasion of that year and subsequent incursions, along with Virginia's runaway inflation, made the state commercial endeavors "but a feeble flicker." Private trade, which operated principally to supply the civilian population, far overshadowed public commerce.⁶⁰

Of course private commercial ventures during the war were subject to strict regulation. Importers of essential items were often forced to sell them to the state. In September 1776, Captain Richard Fowle, of the sloop *Good Intent* of Bermuda, for example, brought in 800 bushels of salt and some rum and coffee. The state offered him twenty shillings per bushel for the salt, but Fowle wished to sell

⁵⁸Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 247-50, 270-72; cf. Christopher Calvert to Major William Cooper, Smith Papers, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

⁵⁹Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 273-5.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 295-7.

to the public at a higher price. The State board of trade ordered him instead to deliver the salt to Jamestown and there take a load of grain "pursuant to a resolution of Congress."⁶¹

Merchants or ship captains wishing to engage in trade had to secure a permit from the Virginia Committee of Safety. Much of this commerce duplicated the pre-war West Indian trade, except that trading with British islands was prohibited. Instead foreign islands such as St. Eustatius and Hispaniola became significant ports of call for Virginia ship captains. In September 1776 Captain John Middleton of the schooner *Polly* was accused of carrying his cargo to Bermuda instead of his avowed destination of Hispaniola. An inquiry eventually blamed Middleton but exonerated his employer, Matthew Phripp.⁶²

In their West Indies trade, Norfolk's dispersed merchants were joined by merchants from other locations in Virginia. Suffolk merchant John Granberry, for example, carried grain to Hispaniola. Merchant-planter Josiah Parker of Isle of Wight County shipped tobacco and corn to Curacao. The Richmond firm Storrs and Walker ventured cargoes to the West Indies. Norfolk ship captain John Marnex carried tobacco, bread, and flour to Curacao for the Petersburg firm Robertson and Oldham.⁶³

Scattered as Norfolk merchants were, some were able to

⁶¹McIlwaine, ed., *Council Journals*, I, 145.

⁶²*Ibid.*, I, 151, 165.

⁶³*Ibid.*, I, 86, 94, 134, 138.

continue in private ventures. Matthew Phripp, Paul Loyall, Thomas Newton, and Preeson Bowdoin, longtime participants in the West Indies trade, were the most active who ventured private schemes to supply Virginia troops via St. Eustatius. They joined with other Virginia merchants in a series of firms trading with the West Indies.⁶⁴

These Norfolk merchants generally preferred private ventures even when officially employed to purchase supplies for the state. As state agent on the southside of the James River in late 1780, Thomas Newton urged the commissary department not to depend wholly on state commissioners. While protesting that he had "no views of making a fortune out of my country," Newton believed that issuing certificates for actual purchases was a better system than using vouchers for quantities confiscated because purchases could be made on equal or better terms than seizures.⁶⁵

Matthew Phripp remained at Norfolk, where he participated in ventures with Bermuda native St. George Tucker, Archibald Campbell's nephew who had studied law at the College of William and Mary but during the Revolution found commerce more lucrative. Tucker, who recognized the potential for profit in supplying Virginia shortages, purchased a sloop, *Enterprise*, and conveyed rum and salt

⁶⁴Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 241, cites letters from Bowdoin to Aylett, Newton and Norton, 4 Dec. 1776; cf. Aylett Papers, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

⁶⁵Thomas Newton to Thomas Jefferson, 21 November 1780, Julian P. Boyd, et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 24 vols. to date, (Princeton, N.J., 1950-), IV, 136.

from the West Indies to Phripp at Norfolk and to other Virginia merchants.⁶⁶

The Eastern Shore, where some of the Norfolk merchants relocated after the destruction of the borough, became a prime location for mercantile ventures, at least through 1779 when the British presence in the Chesapeake Bay made crossing the bay too dangerous. Norfolk grain merchant Samuel Inglis, for example, went to the Eastern Shore after the destruction of the borough. He eventually traveled to Philadelphia, where he became associated with merchant financier Robert Morris, with whom he had dealt before the war.⁶⁷

Eastern Shore merchant Nathaniel Lyttleton Savage, one of the investors in the Scottish distillery at Norfolk, joined fellow Eastern Shore natives Isaac and Thoroughgood Smith and Norfolk traders Preeson Bowdoin and Thomas Newton in a firm named Smith, Savage, and Company. State purchasing agent William Aylett was also a member, as was Williamsburg trader John Hatley Norton and West Indies agent John Ball. Each possessed an eighth share in the enterprise, formed to engage in the West Indies trade, but the company was dissolved in April 1777. Bowdoin resumed his association with Matthew Phripp, and the two maintained a connection with Thoroughgood Smith and James Hunter at

⁶⁶St. George Tucker to Matthew Phripp, 20 September 1776, John Page to St. George Tucker, 28 September 1776, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

⁶⁷Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 303.

Fredericksburg.⁶⁸

In 1778 Phripp and Bowdoin joined a diverse group of Virginia merchants in the firm Fielding Lewis and Company. Lewis, a Rappahannock River merchant, headed the group which also included Joshua Storrs, a Quaker merchant in Richmond, ironmonger James Hunter and ship captain Eliezar Callender of Fredericksburg, and John Holloway of Petersburg, as well as Isaac and Thoroughgood Smith on the Eastern Shore. The firm was broken up in the summer of 1779. Bowdoin and Phripp, however, continued a loose association with Hunter and the Smiths which profited in 1779 from the return of the sloop *Hannah* from Amsterdam with a cargo worth £5500. The two Norfolk merchants also purchased a share in a Richmond ropery.⁶⁹

The mixture of private and public business so characteristic of commerce during the Revolution possessed dangers independent of the actual fighting. In 1780, John Banks, a partner in Smith, Bowdoin and Hunter, was detected trading with the enemy. Banks had used bills on Robert Morris to purchase Virginia tobacco which he then sold to British merchants for clothing and other supplies for General Greene's troops in South Carolina. When the plan was revealed, the Virginia firm headed by John Hunter, with which Banks was associated, faced ruin. When Morris' notes were protested and the overseas price of tobacco fell, the firm became liable for the debt to the British merchants.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 315-17.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 317, 342; *Virginia Gazette, or, the American Advertiser*, 19 January 1782.

Bowdoin and Smith eventually settled with Banks, but Hunter attempted to escape the debt through litigation, finally dying in 1788, "a virtual bankrupt."⁷⁰

On the southside of the James River, through which much of Virginia's Revolutionary commerce flowed, the mixture of public and private commerce was most evident. In addition to the activities of Thomas Newton, who became a public purchasing agent there in 1780, Cornelius Calvert in Suffolk and his cousin or brother Christopher, agent for a time at South Quay, imported and exported goods via North Carolina on public and private accounts. Christopher Calvert, a notorious complainer, was eventually dismissed from his post amid allegations of incompetence.⁷¹

In early 1778 Suffolk merchants and shipbuilders John and Wills Cowper joined Thomas Newton in advertising the schooner *Betsey* to sail for France, the patriots' most important trading partner through mid-1779. The Cowpers also associated with St. George Tucker in ventures to the West Indies. In 1780, however, they were forced to scuttle their vessel, the privateer *Marquis de Lafayette*, with the approach of the British. The ship was refloated, carried to Portsmouth by the invaders, sunk again, raised and later sailed to sea.⁷²

Despite the problems associated with Virginia's

⁷⁰Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 362-5.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 303, 327, 344-5.

⁷²"The Ship *Marquis Lafayette*," in William Maxwell, ed., *Virginia Historical Register*, 6 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1848-1853), II, 146-55.

commerce during the war, opportunities for Norfolk merchants and others remained viable. The variegated activities in which Norfolk merchants such as Newton, Phripp and Bowdoin participated illustrates the flexibility necessary in the face of war and state regulation. Partnerships were formed and dissolved, then re-established. Profits under the stressful circumstances of conflict came to depend less on established status and more on ability and inclination to take risks. Many of those who succeeded were speculators who took chances. Providing goods for the state in an official capacity also had its rewards, as the wartime careers of Newton and Loyall show. There was an influx of new merchants, some from Virginia, others from the North, who entered Virginia commerce in a "grand scramble for the purchase of exportable commodities, and even for the control of the new channel of the tobacco trade."⁷³

For private traders, the French contract to supply the Farmers General with tobacco offered the most potential for profit. But this was one channel of trade in which Virginia merchants fell far short of pre-war activity. Formerly controlled by the great Glasgow houses, the tobacco commerce was completely disrupted by the war. Virginia merchants signally failed to gain an inroad in this valuable trade, acting instead as factors for merchants from the North. The Philadelphia firm Willing and Morris, which had dealt in grain locally with Inglis and Long, employed Benjamin Harrison and Carter Braxton in Virginia and Silas Deane in

⁷³Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 181-2.

Paris in an effort to win the rich tobacco contract. Williamsburg merchant Samuel Beall was also in France, as partner with John Hatley Norton and C.M. Thruston to supply Virginia with gunpowder in return for tobacco.

Philadelphia merchant John Wilcocks, who possessed strong West Indian connections, and his partner the New York trader Nicholas Low, were two other northern merchants who attempted to capture a share of the tobacco trade. Their junior partners were Alexander Nelson and John Heron, who operated stores at Richmond and Norfolk respectively. Nelson, Heron and Company imported salt, rum, bar iron, sugar, coffee, and manufactured goods from Europe to sell to local planters for tobacco which they shipped to their principals in Philadelphia and New York. They accepted bank notes, Morris bills, or specie if tobacco proved unavailable. By 1786 the firm's initial investment of £8,000 had more than quadrupled, and the company had eight different vessels involved in the trade as well as a store, warehouses and a granary in Norfolk and a store in Petersburg. After that year, however, the firm foundered, awash in long-term contracts to Virginia planters, poor cash flow, and internal dissension.⁷⁴

Thus the Virginia tobacco trade during the Revolution proved a chimera. Northern merchants who attempted to garner a share of this formerly lucrative commerce during

⁷⁴See the firm's advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette, or, the American Advertiser*, 7 December 1783, 12 April, 10 May, 5 July 1783; Thomas Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise, Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 289-290.

the war did not fare well. Following the Revolution, while tobacco shipments resumed to nearly pre-war levels, the failure of native Virginia merchants to assume control of the trade did much to hamper the state's post-war economy.⁷⁵

In addition to commerce, the needs of the nascent Virginia navy made shipbuilding an important part of Virginia's wartime economy. The Virginia troops had burned Andrew Sprowle's Gosport shipyard adjacent to Portsmouth with its complex of wharves, warehouses and sail lofts. Repairs were effected quickly, however, and soon the facility was busy with construction of ships for the newly created Virginia navy. The shipyard was so successful that it became a target of a British invasion in 1779. Led by Commodore Sir George Collier and Major General Edward Matthew, the redcoats landed at Portsmouth in the spring of 1779, and marched to Gosport where the shipyard was fired. Several half-completed vessels, including a twenty-eight-gun frigate on the stocks, were destroyed. Barely lingering, the British departed in less than a month.⁷⁶

The British withdrawal no doubt disappointed Norfolk loyalists such as James Parker, who accompanied the invaders. Reunited with his wife, who had remained at

⁷⁵Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 195, 199; Doerflinger, *Vigorous Spirit*, 360-1; Jacob Price, *France and the Chesapeake: A History of the French Tobacco Monopoly, 1674-1791, and of its Relationship to the British and American Tobacco Trades*, 2 vols., (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1973), II, 715-7, 728-9.

⁷⁶Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 204-208; "Collier and Matthew's Invasion of Virginia, in 1779," Maxwell, ed., *Virginia Historical Register*, IV (1851), 181-195. In his report Admiral Collier indicated that the Virginians had set fire to the shipyard and burned their own vessels.

Eastwood, her father's home in Princess Anne County, Parker, die-hard Tory that he was, expressed concern for the treatment of Matthew Phripp's wife and family. The British had discovered arms and ammunition concealed at Phripp's home, which also flew an American flag. The redcoats would have instantly destroyed the house had not Margaret Parker interceded. With the British army's protection extended to Mrs. Phripp, the chief danger became the sailors from the warships and privateers which had accompanied the British.⁷⁷

The following year, the British reappeared on the Elizabeth River on two separate occasions. On October 20 British Major General Alexander Leslie, commanding a force of more than 2200 men, entered the Chesapeake Bay. Half of the force, including Norfolk Tories Hector MacAlestor and James Parker, landed at Portsmouth. Parker, Leslie's "Commissioner of Captures," relished the prospect of doing battle with the Virginia militia commanding by Thomas Nelson, whom Parker termed "puff-paste Tommy."⁷⁸

But the anticipated battle did not materialize. Within a week, the British had spread to the south and west, taking Suffolk and upsetting the main trade route from North Carolina. By mid November, however, British plans had changed, and General Leslie received orders to abandon Portsmouth. Parker again expressed his disappointment at the lack of British staying power. He would not have

⁷⁷James Parker to Margaret Parker, 15 May 1779, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁷⁸James Parker to Alexander Elmsly, 11 October 1780, *ibid.*

accompanied the expedition, he wrote, had he not received assurances that the British intended to stay at Norfolk. The area's inhabitants seemed entirely to favor the British.⁷⁹

The Virginians at first appeared chary of the unpredictable Leslie's intentions. Thomas Newton, purchasing agent for the southside, returned to Suffolk after the British withdrawal but before they had quitted the Chesapeake Bay. Newton believed that the redcoats would re-land the troops, as they had delayed sailing for several days.⁸⁰

But Newton was mistaken. Leslie's forces did indeed depart, but late in December the British returned, taking the Virginians completely by surprise. A force commanded by Benedict Arnold, who had recently changed sides, bypassed Portsmouth and sailed right up the James River. Arnold got as far as Richmond where Virginia's government had relocated, throwing state officials into a panic as they fled westward. Then the British withdrew down the James River, and Arnold dug in at Portsmouth.⁸¹

But Arnold's successes were part of the final act of the war. When Lord Cornwallis, commander of the British southern forces, moved into Virginia in June 1781,

⁷⁹Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 216, 221; James Parker to Charles Steuart, November 1780, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁸⁰Thomas Newton to Thomas Jefferson, 21 November 1780, Boyd, et al., eds., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, IV, 136.

⁸¹Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 222-5.

Washington saw an opportunity to trap the British if mastery of the sea off the Virginia Capes could be gained. The French fleet effectively blocked the British relief expedition in September, and Cornwallis, by now dug in at Yorktown, surrendered in October. The defeat of his troops initiated a change of government in Britain and the new ministry sued for peace.

Following the disruption of the British invasions of 1779 and 1780-1 and the surrender of Cornwallis, there was a revival of trade in Virginia beginning in 1782, but the commerce offered smaller profits. The devaluation of the continental and Virginia paper money and return to specie transactions resulted in a severe deflation which hampered mercantile expansion. Suffolk merchant Wills Cowper, whose brother John eventually relocated in Norfolk, summed up the situation in an echo of pre-war mercantile concern; "Our trade here is in a very declining state, there appears to be a total inability in both the merchant and the planter to discharge their contracts which renders business very disagreeable."⁸²

John Cowper was only one of a number of merchants who relocated in Norfolk after the war, joining Norfolk traders who had served the state during the conflict. Established Norfolkkians who had engaged in commerce during the war, such as Thomas Newton, Paul Loyall, and Preeson Bowdoin, returned to the borough where they found themselves in company with

⁸²Wills Cowper & Co. to Christopher Champlin, 2 August 1782, in "Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800," Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 7th ser., X, 166, quoted in Coakley, "Virginia Commerce," 352-3.

merchants from other parts of Virginia. Norfolk's post-war mercantile leaders worked to rebuild the town and re-establish its commercial vitality.

Chapter VIII
Norfolk in the Confederation Period:
Rebuilding the Borough, 1781-1787

The defeat of the British provided the Norfolk area with a measure of stability. Those who had remained through the destruction of the borough in 1776 and the British invasions of 1779, 1780, and 1781, could begin to look to the future. Norfolk's inhabitants faced many problems after the Revolution, chief among which were the rebuilding of the borough and the revitalization of its commerce. It is a measure of the enterprise of Norfolk's merchant community that they succeeded so quickly in advancing the area's commerce to pre-war levels.

Following Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, there remained several immediate concerns troubling to local merchants. New York traders who had accompanied the British army were allowed three months to sell their stocks for tobacco. Most sold to the Continental Commissary, and British vessels under flags of truce were allowed to load tobacco in return. Norfolk's merchants who had seen state service during the war grew particularly irate over abuses of this policy.

The captain of the British brigantine *Alexander*, for example, received permission to load tobacco at Burwell's Ferry for goods which "capitulants" had sold to the army.

Refitting at Portsmouth, the vessel underwent an overhaul extensive enough for a voyage to Europe instead of New York, and the captain had even purchased staves for export in other vessels. Local inhabitants were "so enraged at this procedure, they could scarcely be restrained from open violence." William Mitchell, Virginia's "Superintendent of Flaggs," charged with oversight of such activities, apologized for the incident, pleading ignorance of the commercial regulations governing loyalist traffic. But the apology did little to mollify local merchants, who were themselves prohibited from exporting staves under wartime constraints.¹

The status of returning loyalists and British merchants seeking entry into the state was another major concern of local merchants. State policy toward the return of exiled Tory merchants was influenced by fears of competition as well as the fact that an influx of British merchant-factors seeking repayment of prewar debts had the potential to embarrass the planter elite. Norfolk merchants, in particular, apprehensive "lest the trade of our country must be ruined," inveighed against "the abuse of allowing some mercenary men among us." Such sentiments prompted the state legislature to forbid the entry of British subjects except under flag of truce or by shipwreck.²

¹Colonel Matthew Godfrey to Governor Harrison, 16 July 1782, in William P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond*, 11 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1875), III, 219.

²Thomas Newton to Colonel Davies, 1 August 1782, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, III, 244; Robert W. Coakley, "Virginia Commerce During the American Revolution,"

Norfolk leaders protested the granting of such flags to loyalists whom they deemed enemies. Norfolk mayor George Kelly and local burgess and militia commander Thomas Newton, for example, urged the arrest of John Mclean, who had been granted permission to land in July 1782. Mclean, a pre-war inhabitant of the borough, who had departed for England in 1774 to seek treatment for a "disorder which baffled the skill and efforts" of Norfolk's doctors, turned himself in to authorities. He later successfully petitioned the state legislature to be allowed to remain at Norfolk, and while a number of other prominent citizens endorsed his good character, the names of Kelly and Newton did not appear on the petition.³

Violence between local loyalists and patriots continued in the immediate aftermath of Cornwallis's surrender. Early in 1782, a loyalist mob brandishing clubs attacked the Princess Anne County court, and were driven off only after "spirited exertions." Local militia commander Thomas Newton fulminated against the "atrocious villains," complaining that the distance to Richmond made it too expensive to transport the large number of "traitors, [who] are all taken up here and sufficient proof to hang many of them if the court was to sit here."⁴

(unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1949), 356-7, 374-5.

³George Kelly to Governor Harrison, 30 July 1782, Colonel Newton to Colonel Davies, 30 July 1782, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, III, 238; Legislative Petitions (Norfolk Borough), 11 November 1782, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

⁴Thomas Newton, Jr., to Colonel William Davies, 17 March 1782, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, III, 101.

Such incidents hardly improved relations between pro- and anti-British. Margaret Parker, arch-loyalist James Parker's wife who had remained in Princess Anne County for the duration of the war, wrote in the summer of 1783 that while violence against the British and their supporters seemed to be on the wane, "I would not have had any friend of mine to have ventured here when the news of peace first reached us, and for sometime after." Another observer sympathetic to the British judged late in that year that it would be a long time before locals treated British subjects warmly. Patrick Parker, James Parker's son who returned to the area after the war, wrote that the locals remained

very much heated against their enemies. . . a refugee coming here just now would stand in some danger of being very badly used. Colonel Jack Thoroughgood refused to sit at a dinner at Dr. Kemp's at Kemps Landing to which a gentleman from Britain had been invited and another of the guests would have abused the Briton had not Dr. Kemp intervened.⁵

Hostility toward returning loyalists continued through 1784, occasionally erupting into violence. In January Portsmouth patriots gave returning Jonathan Eilbeck "a most confounded beating." Eilbeck, the Whitehaven native who with his brother had traded at Norfolk before the war, hurriedly left town. In July the Portsmouth inhabitants turned on one John Kerr, demanding that he leave town. Contending that "it is morally impossible for Whiggs and Tories ever to live or coincide together," they threatened

⁵Margaret Parker to James Parker, 9 July 1783, Alexander Diack to James Parker, 24 November 1783, Patrick Parker to James Parker, November 1783, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

"disagreeable measures," should Kerr fail to take heed.⁶

In Norfolk Borough, anti-British sentiment proved weaker. In the state legislature, Patrick Henry led an effort to repeal the laws against returning loyalists. His initial bill, introduced in May 1783, was postponed, but the loyalists who began dribbling in anyway generally arrived without incident. In the Norfolk area, where loyalists did encounter difficulties, most opposition came from the county denizens, including residents of Portsmouth. When the Assembly eventually enacted compromise bills allowing the return of loyalists, the most consistent proponents of these bills hailed from urban areas, including Norfolk Borough.⁷

Norfolk area loyalists had been important members of Norfolk's pre-war society, and, despite the parent's disaffection, their offspring were generally welcomed back. Of course rabid Tories like James Parker and Jacob Ellegood, who had actually borne arms against America, remained unwelcome. Ellegood, former Colonel of the Queen's Loyal Regiment, was a particular target of abuse when he returned in 1787 to check the disposition of his property. But even the hatred of Ellegood was not unanimous. A local cleric

⁶Letter of Portsmouth Inhabitants to John Kerr, 7 July 1784, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, III, 596-7; Patrick Parker to James Parker, 10 January 1784, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁷Norman K. Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics, 1781-1800*, (New York, 1978), 202-203; cf. Isaac Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia: Chapters in the Economic History of the Revolution*, (Philadelphia, 1926), 138; Edmund Randolph to James Madison, 13 September, 1783, William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, eds., *The Papers of James Madison*, 16 vols., (Chicago, 1962-1989), VII, 314-315.

went so far as to fight a duel with Thomas Wishart, an avid patriot who insulted Ellegood. Wishart's shot wounded the parson above the knee, but the uncompromising minister, with the ball still lodged in his leg, preached a sermon that Sunday. He dined that evening with Ellegood, vowing to "have another go at Wishart."⁸

Children of loyalists, on the other hand, were generally welcomed back without incident. James Parker's eldest son Patrick, for example, returned to Norfolk after the war, even remaining against his father's wishes. Margaret Parker, the young man's mother, optimistically wrote to her husband that "all our neighbors have received Pate very kindly," a judgment with which Patrick himself concurred.⁹

The younger Parker became clerk in the commercial firm of local merchant magistrate Robert Taylor and wrote to his father that he hunted with "even the most violent people in the county." On one occasion he had dinner with his father's old enemy, the arch-patriot Paul Loyall. Patrick informed his father of these friendships in order "to show you that the people here carry no great resentment to the second generation as you used to say sometimes you were afraid of." Parker later journeyed to England, and on his return to Norfolk in 1785 again received a warm welcome. This time Loyall greeted him warmly, shaking his hand and

⁸Molly Aitchison to Patrick Parker, 13 April 1787, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁹Margaret Parker to James Parker, 29 July 1783, Patrick Parker to James Parker, 10 January 1784, *ibid.*

saluting. He even inquired after the health of his old enemy, Parker's father. "Who would have imagined it!" Patrick wrote.¹⁰

In far-off Britain James Parker did not forget or forgive his enemies so easily. The former Norfolk merchant remained convinced that Virginia debtors had initiated the revolt. "They [the Virginians] owe their enemies more than they are worth: sufficient cause never to be reconciled," he noted, and before he received word of his son's reception at Norfolk, Parker wrote to his wife that he feared trouble, "from the fiery proceedings we have heard of. At worst they will permit him to stay a few months to see his relations and give me some account of the wreck of my fortune." In London, he wrote, Virginians went "unmolested about their affairs as if no such thing had happened."¹¹

The elder Parker must have suffered further to hear that his niece Rebecca Aitchison, the daughter of his deceased partner William Aitchison, had married Richmond merchant George Nicholson. Nicholson was partner of David Ross, who operated a business in Portsmouth and on the James River fall line and became one of the richest men in post-Revolutionary Virginia. Patrick Parker considered Ross "one of our first men in Virginia." But his father disagreed. "A proper first rate man for Virginia," he marginalized on Patrick's letter, "never pays a debt and defrauds all who are so unfortunate to have business with him." James Parker

¹⁰Patrick Parker to James Parker, 9 May 1785, *ibid.*

¹¹James Parker to Margaret Parker, 23 August 1783, *ibid.*

eventually became reconciled to his nephew-in-law Nicholson after the latter ended his association with Ross.¹²

The crusty loyalist never returned to Norfolk and remained adamant that his son should quit the area. The young man was equally stubborn, however, for he believed that the town would soon attain its former commercial vitality. "When men of property and worth take the lead in Publick affairs, (a period that I flatter myself is fast approaching)," Patrick wrote optimistically, "I make no doubt but this country will again resume its ancient good character to which it had so just a title."¹³

Thus while initially hostile, the attitude of local inhabitants proved less inimical toward second-generation Tories. Eventually British subjects found few obstacles to establishing businesses in Norfolk. Although returning Scots and other non-Virginia merchants were at first resented and accused of helping to re-establish old trading patterns, their entry into Virginia's commerce also brought much needed money and credit. By 1787 most Virginians, including a sizable proportion of Norfolk area inhabitants, were no longer concerned over the issue of returning loyalists.¹⁴

Indeed, enmity toward the British in general seems to have lessened by the end of the Confederation period. Local merchants, concerned above all with commerce and commercial

¹²Patrick Parker to James Parker, November 1783, George Nicholson to James Parker, 10 May 1785, *ibid.*

¹³Patrick Parker to James Parker, 15 May 1786, *ibid.*

¹⁴Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 201-3.

policy, betrayed a respectful admiration for their former enemies. In their assessment of Virginia's 1786 statutes governing trade, local merchants recommended a number of changes, asserting that "Great Britain acts in these instances more liberally than any other power, and we believe in all matters relative to trade is the best guide."¹⁵

If Norfolk tolerated or even welcomed second-generation merchants such as Patrick Parker and Donald Campbell, whose father Archibald was cleared of being pro-British and spent the war in Bermuda, it was perhaps because local leaders had other pressing matters, chief among which was the revitalization of the borough government. The Common Hall had met periodically during the war, but the pre-war aldermen who remained, James Taylor, George Abyvon, Paul Loyall, Cornelius Calvert, Thomas Newton, and Charles Thomas, sometimes had problems getting qualified men to attend meetings. During the war, it became difficult at times to fill seats on the common council, the first step in attaining the rank of alderman. In 1780, for example, merchants Thomas Price and Thomas Ritson both refused to sit on the council.¹⁶

Despite the British incursions from 1779 on, however, new men, most of whom possessed ties to the pre-war elite, did join the council and were subsequently elevated to the

¹⁵Thomas Brown to Governor Edmund Randolph, 14 February 1787, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 241.

¹⁶Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 203.

borough magistracy. Bassett Moseley, son of Norfolk County merchant-planter and customs surveyor Edward Hack Moseley, joined the inner circle in 1780. His brother Alexander served as borough clerk. Robert Taylor, who may have been related to borough founders John and Archibald Taylor, also became an alderman in 1780. Two years later George Kelly, the pre-war vendue master who had resumed his business in the borough, was made an alderman, replacing the deceased George Abyvon. Cary Hansford, son of Lewis Hansford, took the seat of Bassett Moseley the same year. The following year, Thomas Matthews, who had emigrated to Norfolk from the West Indies in 1767, studied law at the college of William and Mary, and commanded Virginia troops at Norfolk during the war, was chosen alderman in place of the deceased Charles Thomas. Matthews was soon elected burgess for the borough.¹⁷

The end of the Revolution also saw the continued augmentation of the borough government's authority, a process which dated back to the 1750s. In part, this may have been a response to complaints regarding the conduct of county magistrates. In 1782 a doctor had inoculated Virginia troops stationed at Portsmouth for smallpox which raged locally. Frustrated by local leaders, the physician asked the state for compensation of £100 and official recognition, contending that "men of discernment, steadiness and integrity" were lacking "in the management of our unweildy political machine. . . it's impossible to do

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 205, 207, 216; *Virginia Gazette, or, the American Advertiser*, 10 August 1782.

justice to the ignorance of our lawyers or magistrates."¹⁸

Borough magistrates such as Thomas Newton and Thomas Matthews had proved their patriotism by active service during the war and possessed the trust of state officials. In 1784 the legislature granted borough aldermen the authority to register wills and deeds, formerly the prerogative of the county court. The same year Norfolk's Common Hall also passed an ordinance governing the appointment of vendue masters. Before the war, the borough had taxed the public auctioneers, but there had been no provisions for their appointment apart from the traditional sanction of the governor and council. With the end of royal government, however, sales of confiscated property and the glut of imports made the conduct of public auctions a pressing issue, and the Common Hall passed the vendue ordinance as part of the regulation of town markets. Surprisingly, it was not until 1796 that the state government passed a law allowing such regulation.¹⁹

Once Norfolk's Common Hall had re-established itself, the most important task it faced was rebuilding the town. Construction proceeded slowly. As early as June 1777, the state legislature had appointed a commission to survey the town in order to lay out the borough's streets. The British invasions in the latter part of the war, however, delayed

¹⁸Dr. N. Slaughter to Colonel William Davies, 18 January 1782, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, III, 35.

¹⁹W. W. Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia*. . . , 13 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1818-1823), XI, 386-387; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 222, 224; Samuel Shepherd, ed., *Statutes at Large* . . . , reprint ed., 3 vols., (New York, 1970), II, 22.

the work of the commission, and its report was not confirmed until December 1782, following a petition from Norfolk's mayor and aldermen.²⁰

Because the plan called for Norfolk's streets to be widened, some of the local merchants, who would lose valuable property in the alteration, opposed it. In March 1783 the Common Hall, concerned "that Various Opinions prevailed with respect to the future Regulating the Streets within this Borough," sanctioned the commissioners' proposal, but only after a tumultuous meeting. They found it necessary to approve ordinances prohibiting members from addressing the mayor while sitting, and they also passed a law forbidding members from speaking more than twice on the same question without permission.²¹

Several merchants remained unhappy. Although the plan was later revised to narrow the new streets, Water Street, which ran parallel to the Elizabeth River, was straightened so that it cut obliquely across the waterfront lots of some of the borough merchants. In 1786 they petitioned the state legislature for the street to be moved twenty-eight feet to the north. A larger group of merchants, however, who favored the change, submitted a successful counter-petition, arguing that the proposed Water Street had undergone "a mature consideration in the Hall of the Borough," and that

²⁰Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 199-201; Legislative Petitions (Norfolk Borough), 16 November 1776, 14 November, 1782, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

²¹Hening, *Statutes*, XI, 156-158; Tarter, *Order Book*, 213-13.

to change the plan would not be advantageous to the public good. But the rival petitions only hampered the town's rebuilding further.²²

Lack of money also delayed the construction of public buildings. In 1784 the Common Hall appointed a committee to estimate the costs of constructing a new town hall. Because of the burden of taxes on Norfolk's inhabitants, bids were taken only for the building's exterior, windows, doors, and staircase. Borough leaders would "in future day provide means for Elegantly compleating the inside Work."²³

In the face of such problems, Norfolk's revitalization proceeded. As early as August 1783, one returning merchant observed that Norfolk seemed bustling with activity.

You cannot imagine what a change there is in this place since I left it last--there are 30 or 40 topsail vessels here--a great stir of business and a great number of houses building[.] [I]f it increases in the same proportion that it has done for these three months past [Norfolk] will be a place of very great consequence in a very few years.²⁴

Borough property owners provided an incentive for construction by offering favorable terms to those who promised to build. Princess Anne County merchant-planter Anthony Walke, who owned considerable property on the borough's east side, offered long term leases on lots with the stipulation that renters construct buildings on the

²²Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 222; Legislative Petitions (Norfolk Borough), November 1786, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

²³Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 222.

²⁴Donald Campbell to St. George Tucker, 8 August 1783, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

property. Terms of these agreements varied from the eleven-year leases offered to Patrick McCauley and Goldsberry Hackett to the ninety-nine-year lease Walke gave to William and Ezekiel Drummond. Jonathan Calvert gave Whitehaven merchant John Foster a six-and-a-half-year lease on a lot for one shilling per year, provided that Foster construct a storehouse on the property and relinquish his claim within the stipulated time.

Women were often the grantors in these agreements. Some of them were widows such as Rebecca Moseley who rented a lot on Main Street to master carpenter William Goodchild for three years at £16 per year with the stipulation that Goodchild improve the property. At the end of the lease Goodchild could move or sell the improvements to his profit. A similar arrangement, but for a longer period, was the eight-year lease Mary Marsden, widow of merchant James Marsden, offered James Anderson on condition that Anderson build and improve "to his own advantage."²⁵

Such agreements occasionally went into great detail regarding the responsibility of the renter. Rebecca Moseley leased a lot to Henrico County merchants Benjamin Jordan and John Bell for six years provided that Jordan and Bell undertook to build a thirty-foot square two story house "with garret and cellar" which could be used as a store. The rent was to be decided by a committee of three arbitrators, and the deed even stipulated the size of the

²⁵Norfolk Borough Deed Book 1, Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.

posts to be used in the construction.²⁶

The prospect of purchasing forfeited estates at low prices also provided an incentive to settlement at Norfolk. The state had confiscated property belonging to loyalists who had departed with Dunmore in 1776 or been declared enemies of America. Sales of confiscated estates were scheduled for as early as 1780, and Revolutionary Norfolk merchant Preeson Bowdoin traveled to the borough only to find the sales delayed. The postponement put Bowdoin "in a very disagreeable situation. . . from all that I can gather the lands will not go high," but he did not wish to remain in Norfolk until the planned auctions.²⁷

Bowdoin's ultimate disappointment stemmed from another source. The British invasion in the fall of 1780 postponed sales again. By 1782, however, some of the property had been sold, and patriots and loyalists alike knew further sales were pending. Thomas Newton, commander of militia at Norfolk Borough at the close of the war, thought that the sales should proceed over the objections of the loyalists, and despite the fact that privateering activity continued around Norfolk. "The caveats entered against the sales are frivolous and ought to be set aside," Newton wrote, and while "we hear fighting every day and night here, . . . there is considerable property to be sold yet, much of which

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Preeson Bowdoin to James Hunter, Jr., 13 July 1780, Hunter Papers, Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

is very valuable."²⁸

It was not until the following year that most of the escheated property was actually sold. A large portion of the confiscated property belonged to Neil Jamieson. Jamieson, Dunmore's chief of supply who had sailed away with the departing governor in 1776, had made his way to New York where he continued in commerce, supplying the British army. But the crafty Scot apparently played both sides of the street during the war. In 1779 he received permission to ship manufactured goods to the West Indies and freighted £16,000 sterling worth of dry goods to St. Eustatius where there were reports that he had sold the goods to the Americans.²⁹

Jamieson's alleged aid to the American cause did not prevent Norfolk County escheator Matthew Godfrey from selling his property. The auctioneer's cry signaled sales of property of other local loyalists, such as Scottish doctor Alexander Gordon, John and Jonathan Eilbeck, John Greenwood and Henry Fleming, all Whitehaven natives who had remained loyal to the king. Merchants George and John Bowness and their partner ship captain William Chisholm, and partners George Logan and Robert Gilmour, also forfeited their borough property. These sales undoubtedly drew men with capital to the town after the Revolution. Martin

²⁸Thomas Newton to Colonel William Davies, 4 March 1782, Newton to _____, 14 March, 1782, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, III, 83.

²⁹James Parker to Charles Steuart, 9 January 1779, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

Murphy, for example, whose origin and status remain unknown but who may have been related to pre-war Norfolk silversmith James Murphy, purchased property which had belonged to Greenwood, pledging £50,000 to the state to have the deed signed and sealed by Governor Patrick Henry. Murphy then sold the lots to local merchant James Heron. Indeed, most of the forfeited property ended up in the hands of local merchants and their associates who had prospered during the war from official contracts, or long-time county inhabitants such as Solomon Talbot, who purchased a portion of Eilbeck's lots and buildings.³⁰

Captain James Maxwell, Maximilian Calvert's son-in-law who had supervised ship construction for the Virginia Navy during the war, purchased another portion of Eilbeck's land. The Bowness property, comprising 8,400 square feet of prime river frontage, went to the Suffolk mercantile and shipbuilding firm of brothers William, Wills and John Cowper, who also purchased several lots in Portsmouth, one of which featured a bakery. After the death of William, the surviving brothers relocated to the borough, selling a portion of their newly acquired lands for £1,000 to Baltimore merchant Robert Ballard.³¹

James Marsden, a former Norfolk area merchant who had located in Richmond during the Revolution, bought property

³⁰Norfolk Borough Deed Book 1, Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.; *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, 9 October 1784.

³¹Norfolk Borough Deed Book 1, Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.; *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, 23 October 1784.

formerly belonging to Tory George Logan, which his widow leased after his death. Jonathan Calvert purchased the confiscated lots of Whitehaven factor and loyalist Henry Fleming. Calvert in turn rented the property to another Whitehaven merchant, John Foster, who had only recently arrived in the borough.³²

The Cowpers, Maxwell, and Calvert had all been active in procuring supplies for the state during the war, and other Virginians who had seen state service acquired much of the escheated property. Bolling Starke, for example, appointed state auditor in 1781, acquired property formerly belonging to Norfolk loyalist James Dawson which the escheator had sold to John Ross. Starke, a Richmond resident, sold the lot in turn to Patrick McCauley.³³

Norfolk resident William Plume, a pre-war immigrant from Ireland, purchased the Scottish ropework. Plume, a former apprentice of James Parker who had lived on the property for a time, purchased the facility "for a sum of paper money not equal to £150 cash." Parker's agent in Norfolk, Alexander Diack, was out of town at the time, and the sale proved a disagreeable surprise when he returned. Plume also purchased a lot on Main Street valued at £1,500 which had formerly belonged to Tory Robert Gilmour, George

³²Norfolk Borough Register (1783-1790), Bound MS in Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.; Norfolk Borough Deed Book 1, Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.

³³Norfolk Borough Deed Book 1, Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.

Logan's business partner.³⁴

Among the confiscated land sold in Portsmouth, was the quarter-acre lot of James Miller, purchased by Aaron Milhado for £1,750. Andrew Sprowle's extensive holdings at Gosport and Portsmouth, part of Norfolk County, were not sold until mid-1785. According to one local inhabitant, the county expected to receive £80,000 for the more than 300 lots, one of which sold for £950. William Ronald, pre-war partner of the firm of Aitchison and Parker, served as one of the commissioners for the sales.³⁵

Not all the property belonging to local loyalists was sequestered and sold at auction. Through his agent in Norfolk, Alexander Diack, and his son Patrick, James Parker advertised the sale of his townhouse. Described as "the well-known seat in the borough . . . laid out in the most elegant taste," the two-story brick dwelling was sold after some delay.³⁶

There were other sales at Norfolk after the war which provided opportunities to those with cash or credit. At the

³⁴Alexander Diack to James Parker, 11 December 1784, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Norfolk Borough Register (1783-1790) Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.

³⁵Norfolk County Deed Book 29. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Patrick Parker to James Parker 14 June 1785, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; William Ronald to Governor Patrick Henry, 10 June 1785, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 33.

³⁶*Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, 25 June 1775; Patrick Parker to James Parker, 14 June 1785, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

same time as the sales of confiscated property were proceeding, Preeson Bowdoin and Thomas Newton, executors of the estate of Robert Tucker, sold off some of the considerable lands belonging to Tucker's estate. Norfolk's foremost merchant-magistrate had died in 1767 deep in debt, and his estate went through considerable litigation interrupted by the war. The property included the valuable site on the south bank of the Elizabeth where Tucker had operated a large mill and bakery and which had been Dunmore's last bastion before his departure from the Elizabeth. In July 1783 the state also sold off several of the vessels which had been employed in public service during the war. Included in the group was a fifty-six-foot schooner, "well-suited for the West Indies trade," a thirty-foot boat, frames and planks of two galleys, and some spare rigging and ironwork.³⁷

Such sales undoubtedly sparked increased commercial activity in Norfolk, and returning merchants lauded Norfolk's commercial virtues. One of the most prominent advantage was the Elizabeth River anchorage which remained unfrozen in all but the very coldest weather. Donald Campbell, son of Archibald Campbell, who returned to the borough in the cold winter of 1783, aptly described the area:

the cattle in this part of the country have suffered very much by the severe weather [and] they are usually turned into reed marshes in the winter where vast numbers have perished, [yet] the harbour is crowded with vessels from all parts. . . many bound for other

³⁷*Virginia Gazette, or, the American Advertiser*, 12 April 1783; 5 July 1783.

parts of America but unable to get there. . . my partiality for this unfortunate place makes me in some measure pleased with the circumstances--as it shews the singular and capital advantage the port has over every other to the northward of it, that of being open in the severest weather almost ever known.³⁸

Campbell, a native of Norfolk who had traded in the West Indies during the war, was one of a number of merchants who resumed commerce in Norfolk after the Revolution. Despite the departure of the loyalists and the scattering of other local merchants following the destruction of their homes, Norfolk soon took on the bustling appearance of its former status. As early as 1783, Margaret Parker described the "great many merchants come from all quarters to settle in poor Norfolk." They were all strangers to her, but she asserted that the continued peace would soon find the borough in its former flourishing state.³⁹

By early 1784 her son Patrick was able to write that "this town is building pretty fast again." While rents were very high--from £100 to £120 in Virginia currency per year--food was plentiful and cheap. Parker's sole complaint was the cold. He was sleeping in a loft over his employer's store, and had been obliged to melt the ink in his inkstand before he could write.⁴⁰

Other observers commented on Norfolk's post-war commercial vitality. Martin Oster, French consul at

³⁸Donald Campbell to St. George Tucker, 1 March 1783, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

³⁹Margaret Parker to James Parker, 29 July 1783, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁴⁰Patrick Parker to James Parker 10 January 1784, *ibid.*

Norfolk, reported in 1784 that while Richmond and Petersburg were rapidly expanding, Norfolk, "with a host of ships of every nation in the harbor," outstripped both fall line towns. The following year Oster requested a list of the vessels which had entered and cleared in the previous year. Norfolk's Collector of Customs, Josiah Parker, refused, thinking the information important enough that the governor's approval was necessary. "Although I consider the French nation as our protectors from Tyranny," Parker wrote, "I know they are politick and perhaps may make use of these means to counteract our commercial plans at some future day, when we may not be on as happy terms, as we are at present."⁴¹

Josiah Parker, originally from Isle of Wight County, had been one of the strongest advocates for moving the customs house from its pre-war location at Hampton to Norfolk. Appointed collector during the debate over Virginia commercial policy, Parker frequently pointed out the difficulties that he experienced in carrying out his responsibilities. Scarcity of cash meant collections were slow, but more troubling was the "dispersed situation of merchants" with no fixed place for official entries. State legislators complied with Parker's wishes and located the customs house at Norfolk officially in 1786.⁴²

Discussion of state commercial policy, including the

⁴¹*Ibid.*; J. Rives Childs, "French Consul Martin Oster Reports on Virginia, 1784-1796," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXVI (1968), 30.

⁴²Josiah Parker to the Executive, 7 July 1785, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 41.

naming of official ports of entry, occupied Virginia's legislators for much of the Confederation period. At the center of the debate was James Madison's Port Bill, his solution to the problem of maintaining Virginia's economic independence. By specifying only two ports of entry-- Norfolk and Alexandria--in an attempt to centralize the state's commerce, Madison undoubtedly hoped that Virginia merchants would capture the mercantile activity which the English and Scottish had monopolized for so long.⁴³

Madison's bill, however, did not pass in its original form. Local interests in the assembly proved too strong, and the legislators amended the measure by adding the ports of York, Tappahannock, and Bermuda Hundred. Thus, just as before the war, all of Virginia's major rivers came to contain official ports of entry. With the relocation of the lower James River port from Hampton to Norfolk, borough merchants had finally gained proper recognition of the commercial importance of Norfolk.⁴⁴

Moving the customs house to Norfolk did not eliminate Collector Parker's major problem. Smuggling, always a concern owing to the area's numerous creeks and inlets, may have increased during the Confederation period, if the chronic complaints of the officials are to be believed. The increasing volume of trade in Norfolk, confusion over state

⁴³Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 136; cf. Robert Bittner, "Economic Independence and the Port Bill of 1784," in Richard Rutyna and Peter Stewart, eds., *Virginia in the American Revolution, A Collection of Essays*, I, (Norfolk, Va., 1977), 73-92.

⁴⁴Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 136.

commercial regulations, and shortages of manpower and equipment combined to harass state officials. Naval Officer James Barron, charged with enforcing the state's commercial regulations on the lower James River, repeatedly complained of his problems in discovering violations. Possessing only two vessels to patrol the local creeks and inlets, Barron was hard pressed to detect smugglers, especially when one of his boats was grounded for repairs in mid-1785. While his men did manage several captures in Hampton Roads and the Nansemond River, confiscating illegal cargoes of rum, sugar, molasses, salt, and dry goods, Barron wrote that it was "impossible for one boat to attend the trade in James and Norfolk Rivers, when so many daily arrivals happen."⁴⁵

Norfolk's merchants also held a general suspicion and misapprehension of the state regulations which hampered efforts at enforcement. Searcher William Graves, for example, informed Barron in 1786 of his doubts about the captain of the *George*, a vessel from Jamaica. Collector Parker authorized Graves to search the vessel, as the borough mayor and aldermen refused to offer their assistance. Sure enough, Graves found a number of items in the ship's cargo which had not appeared on the manifest, and he begged Barron to come to his aid:

Should you not come in time I shall be disgraced, the Merchants are all collected, making remarks and condemning me for my good wishes for my country.

Barron with five crewmen sailed quickly across Hampton Roads

⁴⁵James Barron to Governor Henry, 14 May, 26 July, 12 December, 21 December 1785, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 30, 43, 72, 74.

and had the vessel's hatches sealed while Graves proceeded to the court in Williamsburg to initiate suit.⁴⁶

Willis Wilson, a prominent Norfolk County planter and commander of militia, also recognized widespread local dissatisfaction with state commercial regulations. In July 1786 Wilson became "a spectator of a most daring insult to the laws of this commonwealth." Searcher Graves boarded a vessel which he suspected of bringing in illegal goods. The captain threatened Graves and ordered him off the ship, then sailed away as the crew "bid defiance to both towns [Norfolk and Portsmouth] with repeated huzzahs." Wilson, recounting the incident to Governor Patrick Henry, connected such violations with a general spirit of lawlessness, "I fear this may be a great encouragement to the rabble and those disaffected by our laws."⁴⁷

In 1787 Portsmouth merchants counteracted such repeated official complaints with a list of grievances of their own. While the conduct of the state customs officials gave "very general satisfaction," local merchants opposed several of the state's new commercial laws. A tonnage of six pence per entering vessel to be applied toward building a lighthouse at Cape Henry was unfair because vessels bound for Maryland which entered the Chesapeake Bay would benefit from the lighthouse without paying. The law requiring ship masters to make their reports within twenty-four hours did not give

⁴⁶William Graves to Commodore Barron, 3 April 1786, Barron to Governor Henry, 10 April, 1786, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 112, 116.

⁴⁷Willis Wilson to Governor Henry, 7 July 1786, *ibid.*, IV, 153-4.

them enough time, and a shilling charge per seaman toward the building of a Marine Hospital was being applied to other purposes. In a complaint directed at William Graves, the Portsmouth merchants grumbled that searchers should not have the power to appoint as many assistants as they wished, as "persons of no responsibility should not control property of merchants." Finally, the merchants contended that most violations were simple mistakes resulting from misunderstanding of the regulations, or, more significantly, the fact that shippers in Britain or the West Indies no longer possessed personal knowledge of the local merchants. Commerce was entering a new, more impersonal era.⁴⁸

Local merchants also fretted over competition both from Maryland traders and merchants in Richmond and Petersburg on the upper James River. Throughout 1785 and 1786 vessels from Baltimore loaded with West Indian and other foreign goods bypassed Norfolk and proceeded up the James River to Petersburg and Richmond. They received drawbacks on Maryland duties by re-exporting to Virginia, but paid no corresponding duties in the Commonwealth. A group of "respectable merchants" of the borough informed Collector Josiah Parker that such practices damaged Norfolk's trade.⁴⁹

The commercial regulations enacted by the General Assembly in 1786 did little to allay such complaints. The result of compromises by which local representatives had

⁴⁸Thomas Brown to Governor Edmund Randolph, 14 February 1787, *ibid.*, IV, 238-240.

⁴⁹Josiah Parker to Governor Patrick Henry, 12 March 1786, *ibid.*, IV, 102.

watered down Madison's original bill, the new commercial statute was confusing at best. Merchants as well as the customs officials charged with enforcing the rules agreed that the regulations would only increase Maryland's trade at the expense of that of Virginia.⁵⁰

The advantages Maryland merchants received under Virginia's new commercial policy with its complicated tonnage charges also troubled local traders, who by early 1787 saw Norfolk as "already a formidable rival to Baltimore." Indeed, during the Confederation period Baltimore became one of Norfolk's major trading partners. Merchants of the growing Maryland metropolis shipped iron to Norfolk and re-exported armaments and dry goods to the lower Chesapeake Bay. Local merchants in turn sent cargoes of local products, including tobacco, hemp, pork, lumber, and tar to Baltimore.⁵¹ After passage of the Virginia commercial bill in 1786, several local merchants reportedly expressed intentions of relocating to Baltimore because of Virginia's sliding scale of additional duties on American and foreign vessels.⁵²

⁵⁰See, for example, Charles Lee to Governor Randolph, 19 February 1787, and William Graves to Governor Randolph, 2 December 1787, *ibid.*, IV, 245.

⁵¹Norfolk Naval Office Returns, 1781-1786. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵²Thomas Brown to Governor Edmund Randolph, 14 February 1787, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 241; Hening, *Statutes*, XII, 289-90. The Virginia regulations called for a two shilling per ton duty on American vessels, three shillings for vessels of countries having a commercial treaty with the United States, and six shillings on vessels owned outright or in part by citizens of other nations. In addition, goods imported in ships from nations without a commercial treaty with the United States were subject to an additional two

Frustration with state commercial policy during the Confederation period undoubtedly helped determine the attitudes of Norfolk merchants toward the debates over a stronger national government. Norfolk's traders became for the most part federalists, and saw the prospect of a central government with the ability to regulate commerce as beneficial.

There were other reasons for optimism among Norfolk merchants during the Confederation period. North Carolina remained an important source of products shipped from Elizabeth River wharves, and local merchants favored the increase of such contacts. In 1785 the governor appointed a commission to assess the cost of constructing a canal joining the southern branch of the Elizabeth River to North Carolina waters. Such a conduit, formed, in the words of commissioner William Ronald, "a scheme which will be extremely beneficial both to the trading and landed interest of this country." Before the Revolution, George Washington had joined with several others in a land company interested in draining the Dismal Swamp on Norfolk's southern reaches, and the company had dug several small ditches. But Washington believed that a canal transversing the swamp would be too expensive, and in the 1790s he disassociated himself from the land company. By that time, however, the state had approved the digging of a canal

percent *ad valorem* duty above the regular duty. Maryland aimed its regulations more directly at the British, charging five shillings per ton on British vessels with a two percent *ad valorem* duty on British goods imported in British ships. See Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States during the Confederation, 1781-1789*, (New York, 1950), 298-300.

through the swamp, and from its inception in 1787, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company slowly proceeded with its construction. The canal was completed in 1805, and locks and a feeder ditch from Lake Drummond were added in subsequent years.⁵³

Other post-war developments broadened Norfolk's commerce. The elimination of British mercantile restrictions on foreign commerce allowed merchants to trade legally with non-British Caribbean islands, and Norfolkkians traded regularly with St. Thomas and less often with St. Eustatius, which had been an important entrepot during the Revolution. There was also contact with European ports, such as the French towns of Brest, Nantes, and L'Orient, and Ostend and Amsterdam in the Low Countries. During the 1780s, only a few local merchants possessed the capital to engage in this trade with the Continent, and they usually acted in concert with northern merchants. In 1784, for example, Nelson, Heron, and Company, Norfolk agents for Philadelphia and New York tobacco merchants Wilcocks and Low, imported manufactured goods into Norfolk and Richmond in four vessels, one of which came from Amsterdam.⁵⁴

Despite these changes, the basic pattern of Norfolk's trade after the war remained along pre-war lines. Even the British restrictions on American trade only slightly

⁵³William Ronald to Governor Patrick Henry, 21 February 1785, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 12; Alexander Cosby Brown, *The Dismal Swamp Canal*, (Chesapeake, Va., 1970), 27-8, 45; Hening, *Statutes*, VIII, 18-19.

⁵⁴Norfolk Naval Office Returns, 1781-1786. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; *Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle* 27 November 1784.

affected Norfolk's commerce. Although British commercial regulations reduced the volume of Norfolk's trade with British possessions from pre-war levels, Britain and the British Caribbean remained important trading partners after the treaty was signed in 1783. Entries and clearances at Norfolk for the 1780s indicate that the colonial pattern of trade persisted to a large degree. Imports of manufactured goods from London and the outports formed the most dynamic sector of the Norfolk's immediate post-war commerce. Pre-war merchants with close ties to British firms, such as storekeeper John Lawrence, who maintained connections in Liverpool, returned to Norfolk to continue the pre-war pattern. By 1789 Lawrence was importing textiles and clothing from Britain as well as participating in the West Indies trade. Because of his pre-war experience and success after the Revolution, Norfolk's storekeepers came to view Lawrence as a mentor.⁵⁵

Indeed, aside from the confusion and dissatisfaction with state commercial policy, the major problem local merchants faced during the Confederation period was the glut of British imported goods. British shippers, many of whom did not know the new local merchants, flooded Virginia's shores with manufactures in the wake of the wartime constriction of trade. By late 1784, one Norfolk clerk

⁵⁵*Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle*, 22 May 1784; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette*, 23 September, 21 October 1789; *Norfolk Naval Office Returns, 1781-1787*. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]; Patrick Parker to James Parker, 8 January 1787, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

wrote:

We are so overwhelmed with vendues that the shopkeepers supply themselves there with everything greatly under prime cost and undersell all the stores considerably.⁵⁶

French Consul Martin Oster also commented on the prevalence of vendues. Virginia was saturated with English, Scottish and Irish goods, most of which were "sold at public auction. This method is generally adopted and particularly at Norfolk where everything is in abundance." Goods sold at vendue were generally not consigned to individual merchants, and local vendue masters such as George Kelly, who was also mayor of the borough in 1784, advertised regular Wednesday sales of such items. Regular importers, however, suffered increasing frustration.⁵⁷

The situation grew worse through 1785 as imports continued to pile high on Norfolk's wharves. "Never in my life have I seen such an alteration in anything as our Norfolk merchants," wrote one Norfolk storekeeper,

Every house is a store full of goods (upon credit I suppose), and no sale at all for them. The merchants who have got goods by the [recently arrived] *Virginia Hero* wish to God they were safe in London again--The ruin of hundreds in my opinion is approaching fast.⁵⁸

Merchants gained some relief by both traditional and new avenues of the West Indian trade. But British tonnage restrictions on foreign vessels trading to British islands

⁵⁶Alexander Diack to James Parker 11 December 1784, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁵⁷Childs, "French Consul Martin Oster," 35; *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, 21 May 1785.

⁵⁸Patrick Parker to James Parker, 12 May 1785, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

meant that Norfolk merchants had to limit cargoes or employ British bottoms in that commerce. In all, Norfolk's trade with the Caribbean, so important to the area before the Revolution, fell to about seventy-five percent of its pre-war volume during the Confederation period.⁵⁹

Norfolk's inhabitants indicated their discontent with British commercial restrictions in a 1786 petition to the state legislature in which they urged reciprocal sanctions. Their protest stated that trade labored "under the many evils and disadvantages in consequence of its being monopolized by Foreigners, particularly British merchants and Factors." British regulations on commerce with their West Indian possessions had damaged Norfolk's trade and all but halted local shipbuilding. Norfolk merchants pleaded for Virginia to deny entries from the British West Indies until the general Congress enacted a treaty with Great Britain.⁶⁰

The glut of imports, along with the decline of the Caribbean commerce, made it difficult for marginal operators or men just starting out such as Patrick Parker, who had left Robert Taylor's employ by 1785 and opened his own store. In June 1786, a local importer furnished the ever optimistic Parker with £350 worth of dry goods. "I have at last begun to try to do something for myself," Patrick wrote his father,

⁵⁹Peter C. Stewart, "Elizabeth River Commerce During the Revolutionary Era," in Rutyna and Stewart, eds., *Virginia in the American Revolution*, I, 64-5.

⁶⁰Legislative Petitions (Norfolk Borough), Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

This I know is going into business at great disadvantage--but as I have many friends who wish me well I am in hopes I shall be able to gain some sort of livelihood. . . I wrote you once to buy me Hume's history but as every penny is now an object to me instead of the books you will please purchase me any little article that can be turned to my account here--woolens, negro cottons, or anything of that kind.

Parker's business remained strictly local and small-scale. He sold mainly to Princess Anne County farmers who bought from him out of respect for his mother. Many of his customers were family members. With a good day's business amounting to about \$11 cash, he evidently struggled.⁶¹

Because Parker's store did not provide the income that the young man had anticipated, by early 1787 he had determined finally to accept his father's advice and remove to Charleston. He disagreed with his father, however, that Charleston offered him a better opportunity and railed in particular against South Carolina's passion for paper money. It was a "great risque," he wrote,

to buy goods with hard cash, and when exposed to sale to be obliged to take so much paper trash that is in fact every minute while in your possession depreciating in value.

Furthermore, South Carolina offered only two products of any value--rice and indigo--whereas Norfolk traders could avail themselves of a number of local products, such as tobacco, lumber, corn, wheat, skins, and so forth. In addition, Patrick also objected to a South Carolina law which, in his view, overvalued land as security for cash debts and worked to the advantage of the land owner:

⁶¹Patrick Parker to James Parker 29 June, 10 July 1786, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

I owe you £200, [and] it is out of my power to pay you in cash or the staple--but I have an Indigo swamp which I value at £400--I now offer you this swamp and you will pay me the balance.⁶²

Proceeding overland, Patrick reluctantly started for Charleston at the end of February 1787. An observant traveler, Parker described the state of commerce to the south of Norfolk, and what he found was not encouraging. Passing through Suffolk, the young storekeeper lamented to his father the decline of that town's trade:

But alas it is not the Suffolk [as] you knew it. Its staple now instead of receiving a bounty[,] from an account of sales John Granberry shewed me from Liverpool, will bear scarce the freight. So much for independence.

The situation in North Carolina was scarcely better. Parker found Edenton "a dull place," and New Bern worse. In a sorrowful mood Parker reported that the former governor's palace at the North Carolina capital had been converted to a school: "God help me how it hurts me to see these ancient regal buildings converted to such purposes." One of the problems, Patrick Parker believed, was the influx of Irish immigrants into both Virginia and Maryland since the peace. "They lack the industrious disposition of the Scots and most fail after two years."⁶³

By June 1787, Patrick was back in Norfolk, returning to pursue an affair of the heart. His cousin Molly Aitchison had recently broken off her engagement to another, and Patrick rushed back to press his suit successfully.

⁶²Patrick Parker to James Parker, 1 January, 8 January 1787, *ibid.*

⁶³Patrick Parker to James Parker, 2 March 1787, *ibid.*

Immensely proud of his bride, Patrick described her as "one of the best of her sex." She "had refused attentions of some of the most eligible men of the state," including "a rich older gentleman in Richmond, Mr. Cary, one of the delegates, and young John Phripp."⁶⁴

Yet if his personal life gave satisfaction, business continued less than agreeable to Patrick. The commercial climate had not improved, as dry goods continued to saturate local markets. Patrick blamed British exporters:

There are in the town of Norfolk five mercantile houses which have imported goods regularly since the peace, and several at Petersburg and Richmond[.] If your merchants keep complaining of the want of payment from this country what in the name of God is the reason they will keep sending such cargoes in.

Such laments, when taken at face value, support the traditional view of the Confederation period as a time of economic dislocation. But there was another side to the economic problems of the 1780s. Despite the slowed economy of the mid-1780s, there remained opportunity available to those with capital or credit, as Patrick Parker himself recognized. Low prices offered advantages to those possessing patience and capital. "In a very few years," the young merchant wrote,

a man in the country with a few hundreds might make a very good fortune solely on account of the distressed situation of it. Rum, sugar, and coffee, not to speak of dry goods, have often been sold at Norfolk cheaper than they were put on board from where they were exported.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Patrick Parker to James Parker, 26 August, 17 December 1787, *ibid.*

⁶⁵Patrick Parker to James Parker, 2 March 1787, *ibid.*; The best argument against the view of the Confederation period as one of unmixed gloom can be found in Jensen, *The*

With a new wife, Patrick remained as determined as ever to stay at Norfolk and again defied his father's wishes to leave. To James Parker's offer of a further £1,500 advance to move back to Charleston, Patrick replied that South Carolina, "where there are no courts of justice and not even a shadow of the law," was a far greater risk than Virginia.

I do not see that great confusion in this state which you mention--those of the merchants who were prudent enough not to give too much credit import regularly spring and fall. True it is that times are remarkably dull but I believe this port has a greater share of business than any at present on the continent.

Eventually James Parker relented and advanced his son £2,000 with which the young man established a West Indies trading concern. By 1790, Patrick Parker's business had improved and he was elected to the borough common council. The young merchant's attitude during the Confederation period, which may have been typical of Norfolk area merchants, comprised a mixture of gloom and optimism: anxiety over present conditions combined with a persistent belief that the future held better.⁶⁶

Such optimism increased among Norfolk's merchants when the delegates in Philadelphia proposed a new national constitution, giving a stronger central government the power to regulate commerce. The plan would eliminate confusion and rivalries over separate state regulations. Many local

New Nation, esp. pp. 179-193.

⁶⁶Patrick Parker to James Parker, 20 August 1787, Bond, 9 June 1788, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.]. Edward C. Papenfuse, *In Pursuit of Profit: The Annapolis Merchants in the Era of the American Revolution, 1763-1805*, (Baltimore, Md., 1975), 153, detects a similar optimism among Annapolis merchants, only slightly eroded by the depression of 1785 and 1786.

merchants agreed with Edward Carrington, a Virginia delegate to the Constitutional Convention, who wrote of "the impossibility of managing the Trade of America by State Arrangement." Carrington knew first-hand of Norfolk's commercial vitality, having visited the borough in 1786 where he

was struck at seeing ships not only crowded three or four deep at the wharves, but moored so thickly in the stream that a ferry boat passing from Norfolk to Portsmouth could advance only by cautiously working her zigzag course among them.⁶⁷

The debates over ratification of the Constitution in Virginia commenced in June 1788. Representative of Norfolk Borough was Thomas Matthews, Speaker of the House of Delegates, in whom Norfolk's federalist merchants had entrusted their sentiments favoring the new plan of government. As speaker, Matthews played a pivotal role in Virginia's ratification of the Constitution. In a parliamentary maneuver by the pro-Constitution forces, Matthews was elevated to the chair of the Committee of the Whole and guided the debates of the meeting's final days, including the vote on ratification.⁶⁸

As the new central government got underway, Norfolk had regained a measure of its pre-war commercial vitality. Commerce remained at the heart of local concerns, and Norfolk merchants had expressed their federalist sentiments

⁶⁷Edward Carrington to Governor Randolph, 2 April 1787, in Palmer, ed., *Calendar*, IV, 264; Hugh Blair Grigsby, *The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788*, 2 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1890), I, 12.

⁶⁸David John Mays, *Edmund Pendleton, 1721-1803, A Biography*, 2 vols., (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), II, 263-69.

by electing Matthews to the Virginia Ratification Convention. To underscore their continuing interest in trade, as their representative to the United States Congress, Norfolkins elected Collector Josiah Parker, who had experienced first hand problems of commercial regulation under the Confederation, although the election was close.

Thomas Jefferson himself, returning to Virginia from France in November of that year, recognized the borough's progress since the conflagration of 1776. Disembarking at Norfolk, Jefferson read in the local newspaper that he had been named Secretary of State in the new government, and he received his first official recognition from the Borough Common Hall. In answer to their welcoming address, Jefferson praised Norfolk's renewal. He was happy to arrive at a place

which I had seen before indeed in greater splendor, but which I now see rising like a Phoenix out of its ashes to that importance to which the laws of nature destine it. . . we have every ground to hope [for] the future welfare of your city.⁶⁹

⁶⁹Thomas Jefferson to William Short, 14 December 1789, in Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12 vols., (New York, 1904), VI, 26; Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 24 vols. to date, (Princeton, N.J., 1950-), XV, 556.

Chapter IX
Commercial Norfolk, 1790-1800:
Bank and Chamber

The rebuilding of the Norfolk Borough and the re-
invigoration of its commerce after the Revolution placed the
town's merchant-magistrates at the pinnacle of local
affairs. But the political authority exercised by the local
economic elite, a key characteristic of colonial Norfolk,
did not long outlast the Confederation period. As Norfolk's
inhabitants entrusted their pro-Constitution sentiments to
sometime alderman Thomas Matthews, their representative to
the Virginia Convention in 1788, at home the local elite
faced a successful challenge to the borough's corporate form
of government. By 1786, Norfolk's Common Hall, the self-
perpetuating oligarchy which had run borough affairs since
1736 had become the target of group of artisans who urged
that the charter be amended to permit popular election of
the common council.

Norfolk's post-war aldermen maintained the web of
family and commercial ties by which a small group of
commercial leaders had monopolized power in the borough
before the Revolution. Most new aldermen appointed during
and after the Revolution possessed ties to the pre-war
elite. These included Cary Hansford, son of alderman Lewis
Hansford and his wife Ann Taylor, and Bassett Moseley, scion

of a prominent county family who married Rebecca Newton, descendant of a borough founding family. George Kelly, the pre-war vendue master, while not connected by marriage with a prominent borough family, had formed a business partnership with Thomas Newton and consolidated his position in the borough hierarchy by his 1783 marriage to Catharine Godfrey, daughter of an important county family and relation of Matthew Godfrey, the escheator of confiscated property.¹

The career of another post-war alderman, Paul Proby, illustrates the traditional importance of family connections among borough leaders. Proby's father, Peter, originally from Hampton, had been a ship captain for Norfolk merchant Paul Loyall before the war and married Loyall's sister. His son, Paul, named perhaps for Loyall, settled in Princess Anne County, where, following the death of his first wife, he married Mary Ramsay, daughter of Dr. John Ramsay of Norfolk Borough and granddaughter of the venerable alderman and burgess John Hutchings. With such connections, Paul Proby rose rapidly to a position in the borough hierarchy after the Revolution, being named councilman in 1780 and alderman in 1785.²

In addition to family connections, service to the state during the Revolution became an important factor in the

¹"Marriage Bonds of Norfolk County," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd ser., VIII (1928), 100, 106, 168.

²Charles McIntosh, "The Proby Family of England and of Hampton and Norfolk, Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXII (1914), 325-6; Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736-1798*, (Richmond, Va., 1979), 203, 231.

borough's post-war leadership. Thomas Mathews, a pre-war immigrant from Barbados, served as militia commander at Norfolk during the war, became a borough alderman and was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates after the Revolution. Another post-war alderman, Benjamin Pollard, possessed both the family connection and a record of service to the state. Pollard, who may have been related to a prominent Philadelphia mercantile family, had been a merchant in Richmond before the Revolution and served as lieutenant of marines in the Virginia Navy during the war. By 1784 he had become active in commerce in Norfolk Borough where he purchased a lot and married Abigail Taylor, daughter of alderman Dr. James Taylor. Named to the common council that year, Pollard became an alderman in 1787 and attained the post of mayor, serving the usual one-year term.³

But this closed nature of the borough magistracy which emphasized such family ties as the path to power did not persist. By the late 1780s, sparked both by pre-war animosities and the fact that the Virginia Assembly had granted new charters allowing for popular participation in local politics to fall-line towns such as Petersburg and Richmond, a movement arose in Norfolk to amend the borough charter to permit the popular election of common councilmen. Throughout the United States after the Revolution, especially in the North, conservatives pressed for

³Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 221, 246; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Legislative Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 3 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1918-19), I, 145.

incorporation of towns as cities in order to reduce the role of the town meeting. By contrast, in Norfolk, one of the few towns possessing a pre-war charter of incorporation as a city, the movement to amend the borough government ended the power of the oligarchic magistracy and pushed the town in a more democratic direction by extending authority to a popularly elected council.⁴

The impulse to change the borough government had its roots as far back as 1755 when several young men of the borough, frustrated perhaps because of the rapid rise of outsiders who married into the hierarchy, elevated a slave to the mayor's chair in a mock election. Lewis Hansford, one of the ringleaders of this insult to the mayor, did eventually attain the rank of alderman. Hansford, however, was an inoculationist in 1768 and as such grew to distrust the anti-inoculationist magistrates such as Maximilian Calvert and Paul Loyall. In 1774 Hansford advocated popular election for the borough council, the body from which aldermen were traditionally chosen. Unsuccessful in this attempt to increase popular participation in the borough government, the financially troubled Hansford left the area after the war, resigning his seat on the borough bench by letter in 1785.⁵

The movement for popular election of common council reappeared after the war. This time it was another

⁴Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States During the Confederation, 1781-1789*, (New York, 1950), 118-19.

⁵Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 231.

inoculationist alderman, Cornelius Calvert, who led the attack on the magistrates' corporate privilege. In 1786 Calvert, who remained an alderman through the Revolution and had never forgiven high-placed leaders of the anti-inoculationist mob which had threatened his family in 1768 and 1769, placed himself at the head of a self-styled faction of "plebeyans."⁶

In November Calvert's group submitted a petition to the state legislature to amend the borough charter. They charged that under the present government, the mayor, recorder, and aldermen held office for life and filled their ranks "without voice of the free holders, citizens and free men. They impose taxes on your petitioners without their consent--contrary to the rights of free citizens and opposite to the genius of a Republican government." The signers desired that the charter be amended to allow popular election of the common council, the body from which aldermen were traditionally chosen.⁷

The "plebeyan" petition contained few signatures from Norfolk's ruling group of merchants and professional men. Joining Cornelius Calvert in signing were 111 of Norfolk's citizens, including a large number of master artisans such as blacksmith Samuel Blews, tailor Joshua Peede, shoemaker James Leitch, and joiner William Bevan. Other artisans such as William Goodchild, Philip Ritter, Oneysephus Dameron,

⁶Patrick Parker to James Parker, May 1787, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

⁷Legislative Petitions (Norfolk Borough), Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

along with ship captains Henry Cornick and John Calvert also signed the petition. Only Cornelius and John Calvert, Princess Anne County merchant-planter Anthony Walke, who owned a great deal of property in the borough but held no office, his brother Thomas, and Charles and Nathaniel Boush can be numbered among the established, family-connected ruling group from which borough magistrates such as Cornelius Calvert were ordinarily chosen.⁸

The Common Hall, with the exception of Cornelius Calvert of course, acted quickly to protect the original charter. In anticipation of Calvert's petition, the borough leaders deputed aldermen Thomas Mathews, George Kelly, Cary Hansford, and councilmen George Loyall and Richard Evers Lee, an attorney, to draw up a counter petition. Their protest, signed by seventy-three of Norfolk's most prominent citizens, was presented to the Assembly at the same time as the "plebeyan" petition. The counter memorial asserted that the borough charter, originally granted by George II, had been

confirmed by repeated Acts of the Legislature previous to the glorious revollution [sic]; and further confirmed by the bill of rights, and Constitution by a Convention of the People, held in Wmsburg in the Year 1776.

The movement to amend the charter, the borough leaders charged, stemmed from the desire of its proponents to operate "Tippling houses," contrary to borough ordinance. Furthermore, the established magistrates and councilmen, "from their situation for business in the commercial line,"

⁸*Ibid.*

maintained contacts with "the People of all Nations," and unless the magistrates retained the authority to pass laws for their own government, they would face threats to order and good government from "disorderly and evil-disposed persons." This was a clear statement of the traditional ruling ethos and the feature of the borough oligarchy since 1736. The Common Hall maintained that prominent mercantile men, by virtue of their international outlook, were best suited to exercise local authority.⁹

Faced with opposing petitions, the Assembly took no action, thereby favoring the established rulers. By the following year, however, the pressure to bring Norfolk's charter into conformity with the new charters which the Assembly was granting to towns such as Alexandria, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, and Richmond proved too strong. In December 1787, the legislature amended the borough charter to provide for popular election of the council. In addition, the common councilmen were given the power to elect one of their number president, and they received the sole right to tax Norfolk's inhabitants and appropriate public money. The aldermen retained their judicial function as borough Court of Hustings. Vacancies among the Court would be filled by the governor from recommendations of the common council. The new charter was to take effect in June 1788.¹⁰

⁹*Ibid.*, The counter petition with signatures is reprinted in Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 241-243.

¹⁰W. W. Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia. . .*, 13 vols., (Richmond, 1819-23), XII, 609-610, reprinted in Tarter, ed.,

Norfolk's new charter represented a real change in the operation of the borough government. Henceforth it would be the common council which initiated all ordinances and controlled the public purse in the tradition of the lower houses of state legislatures. The aldermen, who retained their roles as justices of the Hustings Court and continued as registrars of wills and deeds, would henceforth be chosen from a group of qualified men recommended by the council, but not necessarily from council members, as had formerly been the practice.

For his part, Cornelius Calvert, not fully satisfied with the change, remained determined to expose the fiscal mismanagement among the aldermen. Target of his ire was merchant-magistrate Paul Loyall, "the Tyrant," who had served as mayor during the tense year of 1775 when Governor Dunmore faced Norfolk from his warships in the Elizabeth. Loyall at the time had received about £45 from the previous mayor to be applied to the borough account. The account to June 1775 indicated that Loyall had disbursed £15 of the money, but subsequent accounts had been destroyed in the conflagration of 1776. Prior to the charter change, the Common Hall had allowed Loyall's claim of another £30 worth of disbursements for which the vouchers had been lost in the 1779 British invasion, and the borough government subsequently relieved the former mayor of any further responsibility for the remainder of the funds.

Calvert was incensed. In February 1788 he met Paul's son, borough sergeant George Loyall, in a street encounter

Order Book, 256-257; Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 20-1.

which very nearly led to blows. The crusty Calvert warned Loyall that he faced a beating, unless he returned with "a mob at his a__e." Calvert later had a writ served attaching Paul Loyall's personal property, but the outcome of the suit remains unknown.¹¹

Calvert took on another part of the borough establishment in the following decade, when he charged that the former church wardens of Elizabeth River parish owed the parish some £1400 from money received from the state as compensation for the destruction of the church. Calvert's allegations formed part of his defense of the parish's minister, the Reverend William Bland, whom state Episcopal leaders in 1793 had adjudged guilty of "obstinate disregard and contempt of the rules and regulations of the Protestant Episcopal Church." Calvert and a group of fellow vestrymen, all of whom had joined him in the "plebeyans" in 1786, sought to combat the attempt of rival vestrymen, many of whom had held the office before the Revolution, to unseat the Reverend Bland.¹²

Meanwhile, in June 1788, the first election for the borough common council under the new charter took place. If Calvert and his group hoped for a radical change in the membership of the council, they were disappointed. Only three of the sixteen men elected in 1788 were new--John Ingram, William Armistead Bayley, and Doctor Frederick

¹¹Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 25, 253-4; *Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal*, 12 March 1788.

¹²*Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser*, 23 February, 9, 23 March 1793.

Williams--and they had all signed the petition arguing against the change.¹³

It was not until 1791 that the first advocates of the charter amendment won seats. Three of Calvert's "plebeyans," artisans Philip Ritter, Robert Keel, and George Wilson, were voted in. The majority of the council remained Old Guard, however, as voters also elected merchants John Lawrence and George Kelly, the latter who had resigned his seat on the alderman's bench to run for the council.¹⁴

With their authority augmented by the charter change and despite being a minority, Norfolk's new artisan-councilmen slowly began to assert themselves, although this process was not without conflict. In 1791, despite the presence on the council of former aldermen such as George Kelly and Thomas Mathews, the council enacted ordinances which can be interpreted as attacks on Norfolk's elite. They placed a new tax on billiard tables, and amended their own rules to allow any bill to be considered before a committee of the whole, thus subjecting it to review by the entire body, rather than a small committee.¹⁵

The common council also moved to take a more active role in Norfolk's commercial development. In 1792 they determined to acquire the rights to the Town Point land, the peninsula at the borough's westernmost point, and appointed a group to meet with the principals of the Town Point

¹³Tarter, ed., *Order Book*, 264.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 300-1.

Company, the pre-war trustees who had supervised the point's development. Since the war, the company had done little to improve the land, and the wharf and other facilities which had been constructed before the Revolution had not been rebuilt. The council committee duly met with the trustees and reported that

it would be of Considerable advantage to the Corporation if the Town Point Land was properly improved, that in its present State it is injurious to the Harbour, and must without Attention lessen the draught of Water in the Channel, that a thorough repair of that property would be a means of inviting an Additional number of Merchants to reside among us, and must eventually facilitate the Commerce of the Town.¹⁶

In a fairly straightforward transaction, the council agreed to pay the trustees of the Town Point Company the sum of £2,000 in three installments beginning in 1795. Five percent interest on the principal was to be paid annually, and the council would fulfill these terms with the £400 annual income which they anticipated from the land. Accordingly, they surveyed and subdivided Town Point, offering ninety-nine year leases on the property with stipulations that the lots be improved within three years. The leases were sold to the highest bidders in a lottery. In what was perhaps a final defense of their traditional prerogative, the mayor and aldermen protested what they considered the council's high-handed action in acting without their consent. Since the council had already purchased the land and leased the lots, there remained little that the aldermen could do but acquiesce in the deal. In a face-saving measure, the council apologized and allowed

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 312.

the mayor to examine the disposition of the property.¹⁷

By 1794, artisans increasingly filled the ranks of Norfolk's common council. Yet there remained a sprinkling of successful commercial or professional men, who usually occupied the position of president. The aldermen's bench continued to attract Norfolk's most prominent merchants, but the charter change greatly reduced their role in the day-to-day running of the borough.

Among the new members of the Court of Hustings in the years from 1787 through the 1790s was William Pennock, who had been an active merchant in Richmond during the Revolution. Associated with southside planter Peyton Skipwith who raised wheat and tobacco, Pennock imported European goods from London and sold them at his store in Richmond after the Revolution.¹⁸

Another Richmond merchant who moved to Norfolk in the late 1780s was Wright Southgate. Like Pennock, Southgate imported manufactured goods in Richmond immediately after the Revolution, then moved to Norfolk in the early 1790s. Thomas Blanchard, a broker and vendue master, Daniel Bedinger, who had served as Deputy Customs Collector under Josiah Parker, Philemon Gatewood, another customs official, Baylor Hill, and attorney Richard E. Lee were also new arrivals to the borough in the 1780s who attained prominent positions. Hill, Bedinger, Gatewood and Southgate all

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 312-15, 318-21.

¹⁸*Virginia Gazette, or, the American Advertiser*, 12 January 1782, 5 July 1783; *Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle*, 21 May 1785, 4 December 1785.

became aldermen, while Blanchard was elected to the council in 1796. Lee, initially councilman, was appointed alderman, then resigned from the bench to run for council after the charter change.¹⁹

Moses Myers was another newcomer to Norfolk Borough in the 1780s, arriving in 1787. Prior to the Revolution, Myers had been a partner in a commercial firm in Philadelphia. During the conflict he had traded in St. Eustatius where he was captured when the British took the island in 1780. Myers returned to America after the war, and while collecting debts due his firm from Virginia merchants and farmers, he determined to settle at Norfolk, where, staked with a parcel of imported goods from Amsterdam and his new wife's \$2,000 dowry, Myers judged that he could attain a "snug business and sure income." Myers prospered, building up a substantial business, winning election to the council in 1794, and serving as its president in the following year.²⁰

Merchants such as Myers had recognized the potential Norfolk offered, and by the 1790s the area of the Elizabeth River had regained its status as a thriving commercial community. One indication of Norfolk's growth can be seen in the increase in the area's population. Norfolk County

¹⁹*Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle*, 21 May 1785.

²⁰Moses Myers to Marcus Elcan, 19 June, 1787, Myers Papers, Archives, University Library, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Va.; cf. Moses M. Burak, "Moses Myers of Norfolk," (M.A. thesis, University of Richmond, 1952); Thomas M. Costa and Peter C. Stewart, "Moses Myers, Merchant of Norfolk, 1752-1835: His Life and Legacy," MS, Chrysler Museum at Norfolk, Norfolk, Va., 1982.

tithables for 1784 numbered 4,620, of which 1,697 were slaves under the age of sixteen. A 1785 enumeration, excluding the borough, listed 5,171 white inhabitants of Norfolk County. The census of 1790 which probably includes both county and borough, shows a total population of 14,524, including 5,345 slaves. Local census data for 1800 is missing, but in 1810, by which time Norfolk's economic decline had begun, the borough's population numbered 9,193, including 3,825 slaves, and the county contained 13,417 inhabitants, of whom 5,611 were slaves.²¹

The decade and a half following the ratification of the Constitution marked a golden period in the commercial development of the Elizabeth River area. One characteristic of local economic growth was the continued development of specialized commercial functions in the borough, a trend which had been so conspicuous in the years prior to the Revolution.

Vendues, or sales of goods at auction, which had increased significantly before the Revolution, remained an important part of the area's commercial activity after the war. With the glut of imports during the mid-1780s vendues became especially important, and the 1790s saw little diminution of regular auctions in the borough. George Kelly, a pre-war vendue master, continued his business, on one occasion while serving as mayor certifying his own

²¹Evarts B. Greene and Virginia Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790*, (New York, 1932), 155; Edward W. James, ed., *The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, 6 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1897), II, 74; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1810.

status as official auctioneer. Among other vendue masters active in the borough in the last decade of the eighteenth century were Thomas Blanchard, a post-war arrival who gained a seat on the council in 1796, the firm of Samuel Burke and Peter Brunet, and John H. Hall.²²

Another Norfolk commercial specialist was Edward Owens, who opened a broker's office in the borough, "opposite Mr. Kelly's auction." An indication of Norfolk's commercial vitality by the 1790s, Owens' advertisement announced that he sold "public securities, vessels, lands, houses, lots, negroes, stock, carriages, furniture, lumber, produce, and merchandise of all sorts."²³

Entries and clearances for the 1790s indicate that Norfolk merchants continued their heavy involvement with the Caribbean trade. Barbados, Bermuda, Antigua, and Jamaica were important destinations for vessels loading at Norfolk's wharves. British strictures on American trade to the West Indies remained in force, and because British regulations permitted trade with the islands in British bottoms, Norfolk merchants such as Benjamin Pollard occasionally chartered British vessels to ship local produce to the West Indies. Some Norfolk traders undoubtedly evaded the restrictions by employing complaisant British subjects of the islands to certify ownership of vessels bringing in cargoes from Norfolk. Moses Myers, for example, president of Norfolk's

²²Norfolk Borough Register (1783-1790), Bound MS in Clerk's Office, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Va.; *Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser*, 11 August 1792.

²³*Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette*, 23 September 1789.

common council in the 1790s, concocted a scheme with Jamaica traders Joseph and Donato Nathan in which the brothers served as fronts for goods Myers exported to Jamaica. Norfolk merchants also continued to trade with the non-British islands such as Guadeloupe, Hispaniola, and St. Eustatius.²⁴

The Anglo-French War which broke out in 1792 spelled a temporary end to British strictures and provided Norfolk merchants with further opportunities for profit. Because neutral shipping was subject to seizure by both belligerents at various times, a number of Norfolk vessels were captured. But profits from successful ventures tended to offset losses from captures. The value of exports from Norfolk and Portsmouth rose from a little over \$1,000,000 in 1791 to more than \$4,000,000 by 1804.²⁵

Despite such economic growth during the 1790s, local merchants still lacked one important commercial institution--there was no bank in the borough. The absence of such a depository became evident as early as the mid-1780s. One local inhabitant who was a child at the time later recalled seeing Norfolk's merchants, their specie stored on the upper floors of their warehouses, tossing piles of coin about with shovels. To provide a much needed source of capital and

²⁴*Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser*, 11, 18 August, 22, 29 September 1792; Moses Myers to James Swan, 8 September, 1795, Myers Papers, Archives, University Library, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Va.

²⁵Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*, 2nd ed., ed. Marvin W. Schlegel, (Durham, N.C., 1962), 85, 94. Wertenbaker goes on, however, to over-emphasize Norfolk merchants' losses in the wartime commerce.

credit for the area's expanding trade, local merchants in the 1790s sought the establishment of a branch of the new Bank of the United States. The parent Bank of the United States was part of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton's financial program and had been established in 1791 soon after the commencement of the new national government.²⁶

Despite the evident appeal of the new bank to Virginia's merchants, the effort to establish a branch of the Bank of the United States in Virginia proved difficult. The attitude of the state's leaders toward the Bank, which was closely allied to the central government, remained one of suspicion. The eventual success of the Bank's Norfolk promoters in opening a branch by 1800, and the establishment of Norfolk's Chamber of Commerce the same year, illustrate the continued influence of the town's merchant community and provide another indication of Norfolk's commercial growth since the borough's destruction in 1776. Norfolk merchants who were instrumental in the establishment of the Bank branch and the Chamber of Commerce were also in a sense recapturing a share of the domination which they had lost when the borough charter was amended in 1787. Furthermore, the founding of a chamber of commerce may have sprung from the desire of Norfolk's commercial men to close ranks

²⁶"The Bank of the United States," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, VIII (1901), 289-91; "Memorial of the Merchants and Traders of Norfolk and Portsmouth . . . to the President and Directors of the Bank of the United States," [1794], Etting Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.; Hugh Blair Grigsby, *The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788*, 2 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1890), I, 12.

against competition from the expanding fall line towns.

The debate over the establishment of a centralized financial institution involved the related problem of securing an adequate supply of currency which had so plagued Virginia merchants in the colonial period. State forays into paper issues alleviated short-term currency shortages, but as the paper tended to depreciate if not properly secured, Treasury issuances tended to promote inflation with resulting economic stagnation.

During the Revolution Virginia as well as the Continental Congress had printed paper money to finance the war. As early as 1775 the Virginia legislature authorized an issue of £350,000, and within two years, the volume of state paper had risen to more than £900,000. Because as the war dragged on the legislature authorized new issues and postponed retiring previous paper, the notes greatly depreciated. By 1781 Virginia paper was officially declared worthless.²⁷

Continental finance was scarcely better. In an effort to alleviate the financial woes of the central government during the war, in 1780 the Continental Congress appointed Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris director of finances. The foundation of Morris' plan for the revitalization of the country's finances was the enactment of a five percent duty on imports. In addition to the impost, Morris, in an attempt to stabilize the government's finances and establish a regular supply of currency, also founded the Bank of North

²⁷John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783*, (Williamsburg, Va., 1988), 52, 152, 285.

America, a semi-public institution typical of the complexities of Morris's machinations during the war. Virginia's merchants, long familiar with the problems associated with the lack of currency, favored the establishment of a Virginia branch "to create a financial center for their activities," but the state legislature, while agreeing to the impost, proved hostile to the bank and blocked efforts to establish a branch in the state. Morris' bank survived the Revolution, but by the time of the ratification of the Constitution, its power had been greatly curtailed under its new charter of 1787, and it never exerted influence outside its home state of Pennsylvania.²⁸

Mistrust of Morris coupled with a general animus toward paper money promoted opposition to Morris's bank. State officials during the war were particularly frustrated by the depreciation of the state and Continental currency. Typical perhaps was the attitude of Josiah Parker, militia colonel of Isle of Wight County who after the war served as Collector of Customs at Norfolk and was subsequently elected the area's first congressman. In a long missive to Governor Benjamin Harrison in March 1782, Parker defended his troops and asked that they be excused from filling the state's quota to the Continental Army. "They are now good

²⁸John Hunter, Jr. to Theodorick Bland, Jr., 5 May 1782, Bland Papers, II, 80-81, quoted in Robert W. Coakley, "Virginia Commerce during the American Revolution," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1949), 352; E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), 123-4; James O. Wettereau, "The Branches of the Bank of the United States," *Journal of Economic History*, II (1942) Supplement, 67-8.

soldiers," he wrote,

severely disciplined and used to hard duty. . . . Some months [ago] we had the whole army of Virginia to feed, even without money or the idea of it, as not even the paper bubble was introduced to the people from the public treasury.²⁹

Those involved in the state's war effort were not the only ones who distrusted paper money. After the war, another Parker, Norfolk clerk Patrick Parker, criticized the monetary policies of North Carolina, where a colleague, Alexander Diack, had gone to collect debts:

they have again got paper money amongst them. [Diack] could not get a farthing of rent when he was there except paper dollars. We have not as yet got them amongst us but I fear it will soon be the case. Afraid this country will never be completely happy again.³⁰

Significantly, Parker enjoined his correspondent to keep secret the "political part" of his letter, for his dislike of paper emissions was not shared by all at Norfolk. A number of Norfolk merchants manifested less distaste for paper money. Agreeing with Robert Morris, these businessmen believed that if properly controlled and backed by a strong government or financial institution, paper money could provide the economy with a much needed injection of capital.

Closely allied to the question of paper money was the role of the government in the economy. The example of the stillborn James River Bank, a pre-war attempt to form a private bank, shows the difficulties private merchants faced

²⁹Colonel Josiah Parker to Governor Harrison, 10 March 1782, in William P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts Preserved at the State Capitol at Richmond*, 11 vols., (Richmond, Va., 1875), III, 92.

³⁰Patrick Parker to James Parker, [November] 1783, Parker Family Papers. [microfilm, Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.].

in an attempt to establish a commercial financial institution. In the colonial period, only the legislature possessed the authority to enlarge currency by paper emissions, and such issues often brought the colony into conflict with Parliament. The currency crisis during the Revolution underscored the connection between state financial policy, the development of banking, and capital formation. Those who had served the state in some capacity during the Revolution, whether they favored or suspected paper money, were best placed to understand the connection between government and currency.

St. George Tucker, for example, Archibald Campbell's nephew who had come to Virginia from Bermuda in 1771 to study law at the College of William and Mary, engaged in a number of public and private commercial ventures during the war. Following the Revolution, Tucker offered a keen analysis of Virginia loan office certificates, one expedient by which the state had attempted to finance the war effort. The notes had not been funded by July 1783, but Tucker thought it probable that at least the interest on the certificates would eventually be paid, and perhaps the principal as well. Even paying the interest would cause a rise in value of the notes, Tucker astutely commented, "for a moneyed man will prefer receiving six percent on them to letting his money to private persons at five."³¹

A group of Norfolk merchants agreed with Tucker's

³¹St. George Tucker to Capt. Willis Morgan, 14 July 1783, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

analysis. Allowing state certificates to remain in the Treasury promised their holders a steady income provided the state could pay the interest. Several of Norfolk's most important merchants understood this connection between public debt and private investment. In 1777 state loan office certificates had been issued to Norfolk patriots as compensation for the destruction of their property by state troops. A small group of Norfolk's most prosperous traders, including Cornelius Calvert and his son, Thomas Newton and his son, James Maxwell, Maximilian Calvert, Samuel Boush, and Richard Taylor, a recent immigrant from the West Indies, allowed the funds to remain in the Treasury. In 1784 they asked the state for new certificates bearing specie valuations with interest from the date of the original issue. The state could then furnish them with annual warrants for five percent interest on the certificates which they could use to pay state taxes. The principal could be discharged at a later date.³²

Of course not every Norfolk merchant was in a position to allow his certificates to remain in the Treasury. Another group including George Loyall, son of Paul Loyall, Cary Hansford, son of Lewis Hansford, Paul Proby, Wilson Boush, and Cornelius and Christopher Calvert, nephews of the elder Cornelius Calvert, petitioned the legislature for relief because they had been obliged to take payment from the Treasury in depreciated paper. Their plea was

³²Legislative Petitions (Norfolk Borough), Archives Division, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

refused.³³

There was little ideological difference between the two groups, but there is no doubt that merchants of the first group, such as the Newtons, had acted in various official capacities during the war and understood the connection between public debt and private profit. Hamilton's program possessed such a connection, and the intrusion of commercial banking into Virginia after the war was freighted with political repercussions. Three major banking institutions established offices in the Commonwealth in the years between the ratification of the Constitution and the War of 1812. The first was the Bank of the United States--Hamilton's bank--which represented an elitist, corporate group. The state also established two banks--the Bank of Virginia and the Farmers' Bank of Virginia--which in part served as a response to the larger national institution. All three opened branch offices in Norfolk.

Because the Bank of the United States was so closely allied to the central government, its extension to Virginia met with strong opposition. But Norfolk's leading merchants were basically pragmatists who favored the opening of a local branch as beneficial to their commerce. Their eventual success illustrates the commercial importance of the port on the Elizabeth River by 1800 and the efforts of its leading merchants to continue dominance in the area's

³³*Ibid.* The Calverts, Newtons, Maxwell, and Boush all served Virginia in an official capacity during the war. Among the second group, who were younger, less established merchants, only Christopher Calvert definitely held a state post during the Revolution, and he was dismissed under a charge of incompetence. See above, p. 272.

economic life.

Like Robert Morris and the Norfolk investors, Alexander Hamilton understood the complexities of banking and finance and the connection between public debt and private profit. As early as 1781, after hearing that Morris had been placed in charge of finance, Hamilton wrote the Philadelphia merchant presenting a scheme for a quasi-public bank which would act as the financial agent for the government and regularize the country's currency. After being named Secretary of the Treasury after ratification of the Constitution, Hamilton reasserted the desirability of such a bank and recommended its establishment, contending that "currency and credit were the lifeblood of an economy" and could be "supplied only by a national banking system."³⁴

In his complete program Hamilton advocated full funding of the national debt, assumption of state debts, a system of tariffs and excise taxes, and a national bank. As a money bank, differing from the land banks established by colonial governments before the Revolution, Hamilton's institution would based its lending and discount policies on specific mercantile transactions. Because its notes would provide a much desired medium of exchange, it had many proponents among the commercial classes, but as part of Hamilton's financial program, the bank's political significance outweighed its economic function, especially in planter-

³⁴John C. Miller, *Alexander Hamilton and the Growth of the New Nation*, (New York, 1959), 60; Robert C. Alberts, *The Golden Voyage: The Life and Times of William Bingham, 1752-1804*, (Boston, 1969), 201.

dominated Virginia.

The new bank seemed too cozy with the federal government for many Virginians. According to Hamilton's plan, the United States government was to own one-fifth of the Bank's stock, and the money to purchase its shares was to come from the Bank itself in the form of a two million dollar loan! The institution's appeal to the commercial men and speculators, and its close alliance with the federal government would prove to be major factors governing its reception in Virginia.³⁵

Hamilton's funding and assumption program passed the United States Senate relatively easily and squeaked through the House after a compromise in which Virginia's representatives agreed to assumption if the nation's capital were moved to the Potomac within ten years. Among the Virginia delegation, only Senator Richard Henry Lee voted for the bill incorporating the Bank. President Washington deliberated for some time before signing the bill, but made the Bank's charter law in February 1791.³⁶

By early 1792, the Bank of the United States had established its home office in Philadelphia with branches in Boston, New York, Baltimore and Charleston. Hamilton had at first opposed setting up branches, fearing that local mismanagement would weaken the Bank, but by 1792 he had

³⁵For the distinction between "money banks" and "land banks" see Fritz Redlich, *The Molding of American Banking*, 2 vols., (New York, 1968), I, 6-11; Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War*, (Princeton, N.J., 1957), 118-119; Norman K. Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics, 1781-1800*, (New York, 1978), 404.

³⁶Alberts, *The Golden Voyage*, 201-6. Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 405.

become reconciled to the idea of satellite offices. In June he wrote to William Heth, a prominent Petersburg area planter and collector for the upper James River District, asking for Heth's confidential opinion regarding the best location for a Virginia branch. Asserting that "deposits by individuals are of very great importance to a Bank," Hamilton thought that the best location should contain "a considerable mercantile circulating capital," and assumed that a branch would be established at either Richmond, Petersburg, or Norfolk. The Secretary believed that Norfolk certainly met the requirements and desired Heth's assessment of the other two Virginia cities.³⁷

Heth responded that Richmond, as state capital, was the best location for a branch of the Bank. Although its trade was less than that of Petersburg, Richmond was increasing in wealth and population every day. On the other hand, according to Heth, Norfolk was not suitable at all. Commerce at both Richmond and Petersburg was "infinitely greater" than at Norfolk, where trade went chiefly to the West Indies. The town's voluminous customs returns were deceiving, as the borough served mainly as an entrepot for merchandise imported by inland merchants. Heth summed up his attitude toward Norfolk in a fit of pique, writing, "certain vessels are entered there because I am collector here."³⁸

³⁷Alexander Hamilton to William Heth, 7 June, 1792, in Jacob Cooke, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 27 vols., (New York, 1972-1987), XI, 493-4.

³⁸William Heth to Alexander Hamilton, 28 June, 1792, *ibid.*, XI, 584-7.

Heth also commented on Virginia's commerce in general. The state's merchants were hardly deserving of the name, being mostly factors, agents or shopkeepers for British merchants and manufacturers. The commercial towns competed with each other for shares of the trade, thus if one place were chosen for a branch of the Bank, the other locations would be so disappointed and angry that they would not cooperate. Heth doubted that a branch would succeed in Virginia because of the lack of specie; he advocated that the Bank be empowered to receive deposits in tobacco! Finally, the pessimistic and somewhat embittered collector advised Hamilton that the popularity of the Washington administration was decreasing in Republican Virginia.³⁹

Heth proved initially correct in his analysis of the most likely place to establish a branch of the Bank. Most of the Virginia stockholders of the institution lived in or near the state capital. In July 1792, the Bank's president and directors in Philadelphia decided to establish the Virginia office in Richmond, announcing that an election for a local board of directors would take place in September. Hamilton was surprised that the directors had decided on Richmond so quickly, for, despite Heth's evaluation, the Secretary preferred Norfolk to Richmond. In this determination he relied on his own initial impression and that of another Virginia correspondent, Edward Carrington. Carrington, struck by Norfolk's crowded harbor on a visit in 1786, wrote to Hamilton in early 1792, favoring Norfolk as

³⁹*Ibid.*

an alternative to Richmond for the branch.⁴⁰

Despite Heth's evaluation, formed no doubt from an animus toward the borough's commercial men, Norfolk in the 1790s was the scene of a thriving international trade, and foremost among those who favored Norfolk as the location for a branch of the Bank were the town's merchants. In petitions addressed to the president and directors in Philadelphia in 1792 and again two years later, Norfolk's commercial men presented their case. They offered as evidence the more than \$200,000 worth of duties on imports and tonnage taken at the port during 1791. Furthermore, the projected canal through the Dismal Swamp, an effort to tap the produce of northeastern North Carolina, would greatly increase trade at Norfolk. Even William Heth believed that opening this canal would greatly diminish or even destroy Petersburg's trade.⁴¹

But Hamilton's bank had powerful enemies in the state, chief among whom was Thomas Jefferson, Washington's Secretary of State. When the president requested Jefferson's views on the bank, the secretary responded that it was unconstitutional--an evaluation which had almost convinced the President not to sign the bill. Throughout 1792 Jefferson corresponded with James Madison, another

⁴⁰Grigsby, *History of the Virginia Federal Convention*, I, 12; Alexander Hamilton to Edward Carrington, 25 July 1792, in Cooke, ed., *Hamilton Papers*, XII, 83-4. Unfortunately Carrington's letter to Hamilton has not survived.

⁴¹"Bank of the United States," 289-91; "Memorial of Merchants and Traders"; William Heth to Alexander Hamilton, 28 June, 1792, in Cooke, ed., *Hamilton Papers*, XI, 586.

opponent of the Bank. With the prospect of a branch opening in their home state, Jefferson proposed an alternate scheme:

It seems nearly settled with the Treasuro-bankites that a branch shall be established at Richmond; could not a country bank be set up to befriend the agricultural man by letting him have money on a deposit of tobacco notes, or even wheat, for a short time, and would not such a bank enlist the legislature in its favor, and against the Treasury bank?⁴²

Virginians, especially those opposed to the nationalist traits of the new government, tended to view Hamilton's plan as the culmination of an alliance between the federal government and northern merchants. Even such staunch Virginia Federalists as Richard B. Lee and Alexander White had voted against the bank in 1791.⁴³

James Monroe, also anti-Bank, received the task of organizing opposition to the institution among Virginia's former anti-federalists--Patrick Henry, Henry Tazewell, and John Breckinridge. Other potential opponents of the Virginia branch were less dogmatic. Richard Henry Lee as United States Senator had voted for the Bank, and St. George Tucker, who understood as well as Hamilton the complexities of banking and finance, favored a state commercial bank. As such ambiguities attest, the agitation over the bank in Virginia was less significant as a strict party struggle than other concerns. The nascent Virginia Republican Party's three-year campaign against the Hamiltonian financial system was largely futile--the French Revolution

⁴²Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 3 July, 1792, Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12 vols., (New York, 1904-5), VII, 132.

⁴³Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 404.

was a better issue.⁴⁴

Furthermore, local interests rather than party affiliation, influenced the initial reaction to the federal bank. Although Republican leaders may have objected to Hamilton's bank, the rank and file did not seem particularly interested. As Jefferson's letter to Madison shows, the Republican leaders did not necessarily object to banks per se, only the structure of the Bank of the United States and its close alliance with the federal government.

In the commercial centers of the Commonwealth support for the Bank was almost undivided. In addition to Norfolk, both Richmond and Alexandria petitioned for a branch of the Bank of the United States. Richmond, strategically located at the fall line of the James River, was quickly becoming an emporium for the burgeoning agricultural production of western Virginia and had a strong coterie of Federalist commercial men. But its petition also included the signatures of Republicans Wilson Cary Nicholas, James Innis, and Robert Gamble, the latter a merchant who subsequently became a strong Federalist and William Wirt's father-in-law. However, in Alexandria, a Federalist town, Stevens Thomson Mason was the only known Republican to sign the petition.⁴⁵

The merchants of the Virginia towns acted no differently than commercial men in other cities who, whatever their views before the Bank was chartered, scrambled to attain a branch in their locales after the

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 407, 420.

⁴⁵"Bank of the United States," 291-5. Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 473.

fact. Alexandria's businessmen, frustrated in their effort to win a branch of the national bank, chartered their own bank. On December 7, 1792, subscriptions for the Bank of Alexandria, capitalized at \$150,000, were taken in less than two hours. The Alexandria bank, however, never attained either the capital or political significance of the major banks.⁴⁶

On a local level, a more serious problem than state opposition to opening a Virginia branch was securing a sufficient number of men with the necessary funds to form a board of directors. By 1794, the Norfolk merchants, with a petition before the Virginia Assembly, had submitted another application to the directors in Philadelphia. Norfolk merchant William Pennock remained optimistic as he indicated that men of sufficient capital would be found:

there is little doubt of it [the legislative petition] being granted. As to a branch here not paying its own expenses is entirely out of the question. I think in a little time it would yield considerable profit as the trade of this place under all disadvantages increases everyday and a Bank properly conducted would assist us much. There is not a sufficient number of stockholders of the description for the Directors but they will purchase when required.

Pennock's solution reversed the problem: if the Philadelphia directors approved Norfolk as a site for a branch, those who were appointed directors would buy the requisite shares.⁴⁷

The Philadelphia directors apparently agreed. A committee to which the Norfolk memorial of 1794 was referred

⁴⁶Wettereau, "Branches," 71-72. *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser*, 13 December 1792.

⁴⁷William Pennock to Plumstead and McCall, 20 November 1794, Etting Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.

reported favorably, and the board resolved to establish an office of discount and deposit at Norfolk "whenever the legislature of the said state shall pass a law authorizing them to discount notes of hand or bills of exchange at a rate of interest not exceeding six percent per annum."⁴⁸

In 1795 the Virginia Assembly finally passed an act allowing the Bank to establish a branch in Virginia. The act permitted the president and directors of the mother office in Philadelphia to establish a branch or branches in Virginia and allowed such offices to charge six percent interest. Thus the final stumbling block was removed, and the Philadelphia directors voted sometime in 1797 to establish the Virginia branch at Norfolk. It took two more years for local merchants to purchase enough shares to allow the election of a local board and cashier, but in May 1800, the Norfolk office of discount and deposit of the Bank of the United States opened its doors.⁴⁹

Robert Taylor, a member of the common council whose father Richard had emigrated to Norfolk from the West Indies just before the Revolution, became president of the new bank, and other borough officials among the bank's directors included alderman John Cowper and common councilman Luke Wheeler. But although several of the bank's thirteen directors had held borough posts in the past, in 1800 the majority were not serving in the borough government.

⁴⁸Minutes of the meeting of the President and Directors of the Bank of the United States, n.d. [December, 1794?], Etting Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.

⁴⁹Samuel Shepherd, *The Statutes at Large . . .*, reprint ed., 3 vols., (New York, 1970), I, 357.

Closely related to the bank as an example of Norfolk's leading merchants' economic ascendancy after 1800 was the borough chamber of commerce, established in the same year the new bank opened its doors. As an indication of the connection between the bank and the new chamber, only two of the bank's thirteen directors were not among the chamber's forty-seven charter members, and president of the bank Robert Taylor's name appears at the head of the list of chamber members.⁵⁰

The opening of the bank and formation of the chamber represented attempts of Norfolk's leading merchants to sustain their economic domination over the area. As the only major banking institution in Virginia until 1804, the Norfolk branch of the Bank of the United States enjoyed a great deal of power over the banking and credit practices within the state. Republicans and disgruntled merchants from other commercial towns charged the board of the branch with monopolistic practices. Indeed, the few surviving records of the Norfolk branch reveal that at one point more than half of the discounts issued were notes of directors or ex-directors and their business associates.⁵¹

With such opposition, Norfolk's banking monopoly did not last. Opponents of the bank charged that its directors composed "a combination to divide the greatest share of the capital among themselves and adherents." In 1804, in part as a response to criticism of the Norfolk branch of the Bank

⁵⁰William Simmons, pub., *The Norfolk Directory for the Year 1801*, (Norfolk, Va., 1801).

⁵¹Wettereau, "Branches," 89-91.

of the United States, a group of state leaders decided to establish a Virginia bank, to compete for a share of the Commonwealth's financial business.⁵²

The establishment of the Bank of Virginia with its home office in Richmond and branches in Norfolk, Fredericksburg, and Petersburg, broke the banking monopoly held by the Bank of the United States and sparked a party-inspired war of words over the two institutions. Federalists bitterly attacked the state bank which the Republican legislature chartered. To Federalists the state bank's charter, which stipulated that the Commonwealth's Treasurer had a vote in choosing local directors, was overtly political. In Norfolk, the *Gazette and Public Ledger*, a Federalist newspaper whose publisher, John Cowper, sat on the board of the Bank of the United States, charged that Bank of Virginia stock was selling under par because of fears of state control.⁵³

Although established to combat the monopoly of banking exercised by the Bank of the United States, the Bank of Virginia proved to be just as monopolistic. From the time of its founding the state bank engrossed the banking functions of the Commonwealth except at Norfolk where the office of the Bank of the United States remained a thorn in its side until 1811. Because of the superior assets of its parent Philadelphia bank, the Norfolk directors of the Bank of the United States were able to control the issues and

⁵²*Richmond Enquirer*, 12 November 1804.

⁵³*Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, 12 May 1805.

discounts of both banks in town. With greater resources, the Norfolk branch of the Bank of the United States could maintain a greater balance between liabilities and funds on hand. This competition forced the state bank to pursue more conservative policies than it might have otherwise, differing little in this regard from the national bank. In Norfolk the rival bank offices represented commercial rivalries rather than ideological differences. Their founding marks another stage in the transition from the oligarchical domination of the local economy in the colonial period to the more individualistic competitive atmosphere of the early national period.⁵⁴

The opening of the Bank of the United States at Norfolk and the formation of the local chamber of commerce in 1800, as well as the establishment of a branch of the state bank in 1804, capped a decade-and-a-half of economic development locally. Norfolk's trade, nearly snuffed out by the Revolution, had grown since the war to surpass pre-war levels. The war between the French and British during the 1790s played a major role in this growth. By interrupting regular channels of the Caribbean trade, the war forced West Indian officials into increased reliance upon Americans for vital foodstuffs and other supplies. Norfolk merchants, always prominent in this commerce, reaped its profits.⁵⁵

⁵⁴George T. Starnes, *Sixty Years of Branch Banking in Virginia*, (New York, 1931), 37-38.

⁵⁵Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860*, (New York, 1966), 53; Harold U. Faulkner, *American Economic History*, 8th ed., (New York, 1960), 219-220; Wertebaker, *Norfolk*, 84-5. It is difficult directly to compare Norfolk's pre-war and post-war commerce, but most

But this wartime economy also held its dangers. French and British attacks on American vessels increased as the war continued. Norfolk merchants suffered their share of these seizures, but local leaders, most of whom were firm Federalists, were slow to criticize the administration's policy of neutrality. While Virginia Republicans condemned Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality of April 1793, Norfolk's inhabitants, led by Federalist Mayor Robert Taylor, publicly supported Washington, desiring above all "a continuance . . . of the blessings which peace and tranquility have afforded the United States."⁵⁶

A local group of nascent Republicans opposed the administration's policy. In June 1794, borough Francophiles formed the Norfolk-Portsmouth Democratic Society. In a public attack on the national government, the society charged that "British influence" on legislators and members of Washington's administration had given rise to "tameness and dilatoriness" in dealing with British spoliations of American vessels on the high seas. The democratic society consisted primarily of artisans and lesser tradesmen, but president of the body was Thomas Newton III, who had succeeded Taylor as borough mayor.⁵⁷

contemporary accounts note the remarkable vitality of Norfolk's trade by the 1790s. See, for example, the Jarvis MS, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and Adam Lindsay to Thomas Jefferson, 12 April 1792, in Julian Boyd, et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 24 vols. to date, (Princeton, N.J., 1950-), XXIII, 409-10.

⁵⁶Richard R. Beeman, *The Old Dominion and the New Nation, 1788-1801*, (Lexington, Ky., 1972), 121; *Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser*, 21 September 1793.

⁵⁷Beeman, *The Old Dominion*, 125-26; *Virginia Chronicle*

That same year saw the founding of Norfolk's first overtly political newspaper, the *Herald*. Its editor, James O'Connor, a virulently anti-British Irish immigrant, was a fervent democrat who distrusted Norfolk's merchant elite. For the next several years his paper consistently attacked the Federalist administration and its pro-British policies.⁵⁸

Norfolk merchants, while primarily Federalists, did not welcome attacks on their shipping, and their economic concerns usually outweighed strict political allegiances. Throughout the 1790s, they generally denounced both British and French depredations. Early in 1794, local inhabitants convened a meeting of "Merchants, Mariners, and other Citizens of the Towns of Norfolk and Portsmouth, and of the County of Norfolk" to protest British high seas conduct. Chaired by Thomas Mathews, local representative to the Virginia House of Delegates, the assemblage issued a memorial to Congress expressing their "highest indignation" at British attacks on neutral commerce.⁵⁹

When French attacks increased after 1797, sparking a quasi war between France and the United States, borough aldermen supported the anti-French policy of the Federalist administration of President John Adams. The merchant-magistrates went so far as to refuse to post the Virginia

and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser, 3 June 1794; William Carson, "Norfolk and Anglo-American Relations," (M.A. thesis, Old Dominion University, 1976), 5.

⁵⁸Carson, "Anglo-American Relations," 8.

⁵⁹*Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser*, 5 April 1794.

Resolves against the Federalist Alien and Sedition Acts. Wishing to avoid "disseminating opinions and principles tending to undermine the federal authority," the aldermen announced that the resolutions of the Virginia legislature would be kept in the borough clerk's office, "for inspection of any who cared to look."⁶⁰

Norfolk merchant Moses Myers best illustrates the flexibility of the local traders regarding the political allegiances forming in the 1790s. Myers, a native of New York who had arrived in Norfolk in 1787, prospered and in 1792 built a fine brick dwelling in the borough. During the 1790s and 1800s he served at various times as president of the common council and militia colonel. Myers was one of the founding directors of the Norfolk branch of the Bank of the United States and a charter member of the chamber of commerce. A Federalist who maintained cordial relations with local British consul Colonel John Hamilton, Myers on one occasion in the 1790s successfully interceded to prevent a riot of British seamen on Norfolk's wharves. Yet the Norfolk merchant was not above occasional circumventions of British strictures on American trade to the West Indies, and apparently belying his friendliness with the British, Myers also served as French agent in the borough. He was one of a number of local merchants who welcomed French refugees from the Haitian rebellion in 1794.⁶¹

⁶⁰Beeman, *The Old Dominion*, 174-75; James, *Lower Norfolk County Antiquary*, I, 16-17.

⁶¹Costa and Stewart, "Moses Myers, Merchant of Norfolk."

John Cowper was another local trader whose political sympathies shifted with the changing direction of commercial winds. Cowper, a native of Suffolk who had carried on an extensive wartime trade with his brothers, moved to Norfolk after the Revolution where he purchased confiscated property and had established a prosperous trading firm by the 1790s. A fervent Republican during the middle years of the decade, Cowper began to lean toward the Federalists as French depredations increased in 1798. Yet at the same time he attempted to establish a commercial connection with Philadelphia trader Tench Coxe, who had recently resigned from a position in the Adams government. In his application to Coxe, Cowper criticized the Federalist administration's anti-French policy. "It surely was not desirable," Cowper wrote to Coxe, "to belong to an administration whose measures are likely to produce the sad calamity of war." By 1804, however, Cowper had become a confirmed Federalist and founded the *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, a Federalist organ opposed to O'Connor's Republican *Herald*.⁶²

Both Cowper and Myers were founding directors of the United States Bank at Norfolk and charter members of the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce. Their political pragmatism during the 1790s explains why the bank, which Norfolk merchants supported nearly unanimously, was less a political than an economic issue. The formation of the local chamber of commerce the same year underscored both Norfolk's

⁶²John Cowper to Tench Coxe, 28 January 1798, Coxe Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.; Carson, "Anglo-American Relations," 11.

prosperity and the commercial consensus within the community.

This consensus was underscored by the founding in 1802 of the *Commercial Register*. Wishing to avoid, according to its prospectus, the renewal of "those factions which the Editor has been informed did once prevail with much bitterness," the paper lauded the spirit of harmony which seemed to characterize Norfolk during the opening years of the nineteenth century. Especially pleasing to the editor was the borough's recent July 4 celebration, in which "Aristocrat and Democrat, Republican and Federalist forgot party distinction."⁶³

Unfortunately, the harmony and prosperity which the *Register's* optimistic editor found so abundant in 1802 did not last. The new journal itself stopped printing shortly, after one of its publishers, Meriwether Jones, became public printer to the Commonwealth in December. Jones's partner, William Worsley, bitterly announced the folding of the paper the following January. It would be the "height of folly," Worsley maintained, "to remain longer in an ungrateful employment, by which I become deeper and deeper immersed in the vortex of ruin."⁶⁴

Worsley's complaint perhaps over-dramatically forecast the end of Norfolk's prosperity. While John Cowper's founding of the *Federalist Gazette and Public Ledger* in 1804 set him against the *Republican Herald* and spelled a

⁶³*Commercial Register*, 16, 18 August 1802.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 11 January 1803.

resurgence of factionalism in the Borough, it was the Embargo Act of 1807 which provided the initial setback to Norfolk's economic prosperity. As the war between British and French resumed following a brief interruption in 1802-03, Republican President Thomas Jefferson grew increasingly concerned with violations of American neutrality. With the British victory at Trafalgar in 1805, the Royal Navy maintained virtually unchecked control of the seas, and their attacks on American shipping mounted. The British practice of impressing American seamen greatly heightened anti-British sentiment.

In June 1807, anti-British feeling reached a peak following an attack by the British frigate *Leopard* on the United States vessel *Chesapeake* in the Chesapeake Bay just off Lynnhaven Inlet. Four American seamen died in the incident, and while many Americans demanded war with Britain, Jefferson's response was to ask Congress for an embargo on American foreign trade. The Embargo Act, passed in December, did not have the desired effect on the British, but it did severely damage American commerce. Norfolk's economy, so dependent on commerce, was particularly hard-hit.⁶⁵

Norfolk merchants never really recovered from Jefferson's Embargo, even after its repeal in March, 1809. Non-intercourse with Britain and France continued, and as the Embargo had thrown the West Indies trade into the hands of British shippers, Caribbean markets remained saturated.

⁶⁵Faulkner, *American Economic History*, 222; Wertebaker, *Norfolk*, 105-108.

There was a partial upswing in 1809 and 1810, but the dissolution of the Bank of the United States in 1811 and economic vicissitudes after the War of 1812 culminating in the Panic of 1819, took a further toll on local commerce.

As damaging as the Embargo and subsequent developments were, the ultimate stagnation of Norfolk's economy came with the decline of the West Indies trade after 1825. From its beginnings the success of Norfolk's commerce had depended heavily on the Caribbean trade. The rapid recovery of that commerce after the Revolution played the major role in Norfolk's post-war prosperity. By 1800, with the establishment of the Bank of the United States and chamber of commerce at Norfolk, the area had reached an economic high-water mark. But the Embargo of 1807 provided an initial shock to local commerce, and with the subsequent decline of the West Indies trade, Norfolk's merchants never again attained positions of prominence which they had enjoyed in the colonial and post-war periods.⁶⁶

⁶⁶North, *Economic Growth*, 77.

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