The Rise of the Port of Norfolk and its Decline as a Result of the Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812, 1680-1815

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THE RISE OF THE PORT OF NORFOLK AND ITS DECLINE

AS A RESULT OF THE EMBARGO OF 1807 AND THE

WAR OF 1812. 1680-1815

A Thesis
Submitted to
The Faculty of the College of William and Mary

In Partial Fulfillment
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by
Cecil Llewellyn Blackwell
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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. MAKING OF A PORT, 1680-1775</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. DESTRUCTION, RESTORATION, AND RESURGENCE 1776-1807</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE CHESAPEAKE AFFAIR: THE EMBARGO, NON-INTERCOURSE, AND BLOCKADE. 1807-1815</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES TO CHAPTERS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA SHEET</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of this thesis is to show the impact of the Embargo of 1807, the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809, and the War of 1812 on the seaport town of Norfolk. Norfolk in the first few years of the nineteenth century was a busy port, its commerce thriving, and with its general prosperity depending almost entirely on this seagoing trade. Although the actions of the belligerents in the Napoleonic Wars made neutral trade hazardous these same wars had greatly boosted American trade as there was a plenty of mariners and merchants willing to risk the hazards involved to reap in the lucrative returns from a higher priced market. Norfolk had recovered quickly from its destruction in 1776 to become the entrepôt for the produce of the Tidewater and Chesapeake regions. Her merchants were engaged in business with the countries of Europe, the West Indies and the seaboard States, in spite of the French and British depredations.

In December 1807 President Jefferson decided to put into effect his pet theory of peaceful coercion in retaliation to the disregard of neutral rights by Great Britain and France. He recommended and Congress passed the Embargo Act of December 22, 1807, which prohibited any ship from clearing port for any foreign destination or to leave for another American port except under bond to proceed to a port of the United States. Thus the commerce of Norfolk felt its first great blow from which it was not to recover until many years later. Upon repeal of the Embargo Act in March 1809, the Non-Intercourse Act which replaced it proved almost as restrictive; then came war with Great Britain and the resulting British blockade of the Chesapeake area. When peace came in 1815 Norfolk found
its commerce stagnated, its markets lost, its shipping idle, and its wharves empty, and by now she lacked the resources and the energy to regain her prosperity in face of the British refusal to grant commercial treaties and the competition of the more resourceful and energetic Yankees.

In treating this subject it has seemed appropriate to give briefly the commercial history of Norfolk from its founding in 1680 to the Embargo in 1807. The first chapter, the "Making of a Fort," covers the beginning of Norfolk in 1680 to the eve of the Revolution in 1775. The second chapter covers the burning and total destruction of the town in 1776, and its rebuilding and recapturing of a flourishing commerce in the years from 1783 to 1807. The third and final chapter deal with the events leading up to the Embargo, the effect of that Act and the Non-Intercourse Act which replaced it, and the War of 1812 on the commerce of Norfolk.
CHAPTER I

MAKING OF A FORT, 1680-1775
CHAPTER I

Colonial Virginia was a rural province, with its inhabitants congregated in the Tidewater area on the many rivers and inlets. Ever since John Rolfe introduced a new variety of tobacco and a satisfactory method of curing it that crop became the primary means of livelihood for the settlers. The tobacco was shipped to England where it was sold, the proceeds of which were used to purchase British manufactures. Thus there was established a two-way trade between the planters of Virginia and the merchants of England. The larger planters built their own wharves on the rivers so that this exchange of goods was direct from plantation to the British ports. The smaller planters who did not own a wharf on the river made use of their more affluent neighbor's wharf. "No country is better watered," wrote the Reverend Hugh Jones, in 1722, "for the conveniency of which most houses are built near some landing place; so that anything may be delivered to a gentleman there from London or Bristol, etc., with very little trouble and cost."¹ From the planters' point of view there was no need for ports. "Our country," says Jefferson, "being much intersected with navigable waters, and trade brought generally to our doors, instead of being obliged to go in quest of it, has probably been one of the causes why we have no towns of any consequence."²

The authorities in England had for sometime encouraged the formation of towns to provide a central place for trade in order that it might be better supervised and regulated. Francis Wyatt, one of the early seventeenth century governors, was instructed by the Crown "to draw tradesmen and handicraftmen into towns."³ An act was passed by order of Charles II in 1662 to erect a town at "James City" where the tobacco of the adjacent counties
was to be brought for storage and export." The attempt to build a town where there was no need resulted in failure; "the houses were not made habitable, but fell down before they were finished."

When Culpeper came over in 1680 to assume the governorship of the Colony he brought with him instructions from Charles II to urge the passage of an act to create towns in each county. The King "is resolved as soon as storehouses and conveniences can be provided, to prohibit ships trading here to load or unload but at certain fixed places." An act was accordingly passed instructing feoffees in each county to acquire fifty acres of land for a town. The site selected for lower Norfolk County was "on Nicholas Wise his land on the Eastern Branch on Elizabeth River at the entrance of the Branch." The price fixed by the Assembly was ten thousand pounds of tobacco and cash. The town was to be divided into lots of one-half acre each and to be sold for one hundred pounds of tobacco to those who would build a dwelling or warehouse on it. The actual purchase of this land by the feoffees was made on August 16, 1682, which date may be considered the birthday of the little port of Norfolk, though some local historians prefer to date its birth in 1680 when the enabling act was passed.

The actual laying out of the town and settlement of Norfolk was slow in developing. It was on October 19, 1688, when the Court of Lower Norfolk County ordered 640 pounds paid to Mr. John Ferebee "for surveying the town lands and officiating as Clerk of Militia." Also 400 pounds "to Mr. John Ferebee as Clerk of the Militia and laying out streets in the town." By 1690 there were probably five or six houses. In 1691 Lower Norfolk County was divided into Norfolk and Princess Anne counties,
and in April of that year a visitor wrote that the village "had several dwellings and store houses." Little is known of the town of Norfolk around the turn of the eighteenth century (1700), but there were estimated to be between thirty and fifty homes in the village at that time. In 1705 the Reverend Francis Makemie wrote, "There are beginnings of towns at Williamsburg, Hampton and Norfolk, particularly in Norfolktown, at Elizabeth River, who carry on a small trade with the whole bay." One of the earliest descriptions of Norfolk is given us by William Byrd who visited Norfolk in 1728.

Norfolk has most the air of a town of any in Virginia. There were then twenty brigantines and sloops riding at the wharves, and often times they have more. It has all the advantages of situation requisite for trade and navigation. There is a secure harbor for a good number of ships of any burthen. . . . Their trade is chiefly to the West Indies, whether they export abundance of beef, pork, flour, and lumber. The worst of it is, they contributed much towards debauching the country by importing abundance of rum, which like gin in Great Britain, breaks the constitution, vititates the morals, and ruins the industry of most of the poor people of this country.

This place is the mart for most of the commodities produced in the adjacent parts of North Carolina. . . . It is not a town of ordinaries and public houses, . . . but the inhabitants consist of merchants, ship carpenters, and other useful artisans, with sailors enough to manage their navigation.

By 1736 Norfolk had grown large enough to prompt its citizens to seek incorporation with a government of its own. "The inhabitants of Norfolktown in this Colony," states the Virginia Gazette of November 26, 1736, "having for several years past flourished in trade by their sending vessels to sea, loaded with the commodities of this country, by which several of the merchants are become very considerable and the number of their inhabitants increasing. They lately petitioned the Governor for a charter to incorporate them which was accordingly granted . . . by which they are incorporated by the name of the Borough of Norfolk."
Samuel Boush was appointed the first Mayor and Sir John Randolph the recorder. The inauguration of the new government was an occasion for celebration and when Randolph came to Norfolk to take office in the autumn of 1736, "The gentlemen of the said town and neighborhood showed all imaginable respect by displaying the colors, and firing the guns of the vessels lying there, and entertaining him at their houses in the most elegant manner for several days, amply signalizing their great respect of this joyful occasion." 16

By 1740 Norfolk was a town of perhaps one thousand people. The waterfront was lined with warehouses with peculiarly constructed wharves jutting out from them. 17 "They lay down long pine logs that reach from the shore to the edge of the channel. These are bound fast together by cross-pieces notched into them. . . . A wharf built thus will stand several years in spite of the worm which bites there very much." 18 The chief places of interest were the new market house where the country people came to barter their wares and purchase provisions, the Norfolk County Court House, and St. Paul's Church, just one year old. 19 The war between England and Spain held the attention of the citizens of the Borough at this time. Due to the scare of the Spanish the Council passed a resolution in 1741, "Resolving that in the future the white male inhabitants of this Borough shall be armed at the church upon Sundays, or other days of worship or divine service." 20

The popular customs and amusements, as well as the people of Norfolk before the Revolution, were chiefly English or Scotch. Two fairs, which were huge "markets" were held each year. Those who attended were exempt from arrest, attachment of execution of various processes. The fairs were
the highlights of the year. The merchants displayed their wares; the country people brought in their produce of the farm. They were featured by all kinds of contests. Pole climbing was popular. A well-greased pole with a valuable prize at the top was set up on the middle of the square and the lucky fellow that climbed it got the prize. Next there was a girls' race with a fine Holland Chemise as the prize. Pigs with greased tails were let loose with the announcement that they belonged to anyone who could catch them by the tail and hold on. A kettle of hot mash was sometimes brought out and a prize awarded to any who could gobble it up faster than his competitor.  

Norfolk like the rest of the Colony had its social distinctions, each class going in its own circle. Merchants, clergy, and professional men composed the first class; ship-carpenters and other skilled artisans made up the second class; day laborers and indentured servants, the third class, with free Negroes and slaves constituted the fourth class. Norfolk's society differed from the plantation society in possessing a large independent and prosperous artisan class. Among the house owners of Norfolk in 1776 were seventeen carpenters, six ship carpenters, four bricklayers, four tanners, four blacksmiths, three blockmakers, three bakers, three silversmiths, three joiners, two sailmakers, two shoemakers, a watchmaker, a coppersmith, a cooper, a wheelwright, a tallow-chandler, a saddler, and a hatter. Wages for the skilled artisans were high. The large group of mariners constituted an important and influential class of Norfolk citizens. Some of the best families took to the sea. Among those who received compensation for the destruction of their property in the fires of 1776 were thirty-five persons listed as mariners,
some of them having extensive holdings. In addition to the masters and sea-captains there was a much more numerous group of common sailors.

The presence of so many sailors made Norfolk a favorite port for the famous "press gangs" of the Royal Navy. The Virginia Gazette of October 1, 1767, prints an account of one of these raids committed on September 5, 1767.

This day His Majesty's Sloop-of-War Hornet, commanded by a certain Jeremiah Morgan, dropped down from her moorings opposite the town. The evening of that day a bloody riotous plan was conceived to impress seamen, without consulting the Mayor or any other Magistrate, and preparations were made to carry it into execution. Under cover of night the said Morgan, accompanied by several of his officers and about thirty seamen, came ashore at the public wharf. They walked up to the tavern adjoining the wharf, and after taking a cheerful glass to inspire the Captain with a little Dutch courage, proceeded to that part of town resorted to by seamen.

They went from lodging to lodging arousing the seamen and threatening to break down the doors. Those who resisted were given a rap on the head and dragged out bodily. They were hustled through the street and put aboard the waiting tender. In the meanwhile the alarm had been given and a crowd was soon gathered, some in night attire, headed by Mr. Loyall, a former Mayor of Norfolk. A general melee followed, the result of which Captain Morgan did not get his seamen and some of his own gang were dragged off to jail.

The Lower Norfolk County Antiquary prints an article written by a Norfolk lady which gives us an insight into the social life of Norfolk prior to the Revolution, as enlivened by the presence of many young naval officers who visited Norfolk on war ships and merchantmen.

My father was very hospitable and used to entertain all the strangers of any note that came among us, and especially the Captains and Officers of the British navy. One fifty-gun ship came with thirty-two midshipmen on board, mostly boys and lads of good families and several of them sprigs of nobility. They used to come to my father's house at all hours, and
frequently dined with us. Sometimes, too, they would go into the kitchen
to get a little something to stay their appetites. Of course, I had many
beaux who flattered me and danced with me, and one or two, who loved me
and would have married me if I would have said yes. My father was fond
of good living, and kept a famous cook — poor old Quashbee — who made
the best soups, sauces, and all such things in the world. . . . Father
was particularly fond of arrack punch, and always kept his silver tankard
by him, holding about three pints, which he would empty two or three times
a day till the doctors began to be afraid that he would fall into a lethargy
and limited him to a single one.

The Norfolk of the pre-Revolution era was a busy seaport in an
agricultural colony. Her merchants, mariners, and men of business rivaled
the large planters in wealth, but her way of life set it apart from the
rest of Virginia. Her leading citizens had little in common with the
aristocratic planters. Doctor W. H. T. Squires describes Norfolk at this
period:

The shore line of the borough was lined with warehouses, some brick, but
most of them frame. They were filled to capacity with all kinds and
shapes of barrels, hogsheads, boxes and bales; tobacco, cotton, foodstuffs,
naval stores and products of the farm, awaiting shipment to Europe, New
England or the West Indies. Many packages, too, had arrived and were to
be delivered by boat to the planters up one of the many rivers that emptied
into the bay.

The water side population was rough, though no worse than similar classes
in London or Amsterdam. The farmer, especially if there was silver in
his pocket, had to watch his step. Wild men and desperate women were
alert for human prey. Low dance halls, saloons and taverns were scenes
of endless fights, quarrels, brawls, robberies and even murders.

The market house was alive before five in the morning with men and house-
wives buying and selling. Hucksters from small farms backed up their
wagons on either side of the street and sold to the crowding, jostling
pedestrians. Small merchants were busy in their little shops lined on
each side of the streets adjacent to Market Square. Many of them catered
to the ships and sailors. Many Norfolk fortunes were built upon this
waterside trade.

In the crowds along Market Square were the aristocratic planters, their
families and servants from the plantations; the merchants from the city;
bankers, professional men, artisans, sailors, soldiers; new arrivals
just in from long voyages; visitors, beggars, free negroes; slaves, some
just in from Africa, or more likely just from the West Indies; and no end
of small farmers from the counties around about.
There were many prosperous homes, although not palatial, they were solid and comfortable, and many were elegantly furnished, in mahogany, old silver, rare tapestries and brasses.

Nature gave Norfolk one of the finest harbors in the world. Its ample space of deep water, protected from the sea by a long channel that leads from the Capes and the Chesapeake Bay, afforded a secure anchorage for hundreds of ships. In the calm of the Elizabeth River wharves were easily and cheaply built leading to the warehouses on shore. Chesapeake Bay and the James and York Rivers emptied into Hampton Roads, and the Potomac was only a short distance away. It seemed but natural that the products of the entire region drained by these waterways would land at Norfolk for shipment abroad, and Norfolk would be the entrepot of the entire Tidewater and Chesapeake Bay area. But for the first forty years or so Norfolk had to be content with the local trade of the Elizabeth, being a mart for the adjacent counties only. These were the days when most every plantation had its own wharf and the English merchantmen went up the rivers from plantation to plantation to dispose of their wares and to take on hogsheads of tobacco. It was not until about the third or fourth decade of the eighteenth century, with the settlement of the fall line towns, and the increased size of the ships, that Norfolk became the commercial center of trade for the Chesapeake and Tidewater area.

The soil of the adjacent counties was not suited for the growth of tobacco, and truck farming had not yet been attempted. But the shores around Norfolk were covered with pine forests and these forests provided the chief source of income. Pitch and tar were produced in considerable quantities on the branches of the Elizabeth River. According to Wertenbaker the tar-burner usually established himself upon a navigable stream or inlet, within easy reach of Norfolk. When he had accumulated a fair
supply, he rolled his barrels on board a flat bottomed boat or shallop, hoisted sail, and set off to market. Before sundown his tar, or pitch, or turpentine was resposning on one of the wharves, and he was busily reloading with calico, nails, an axe, a saw, a kettle, stockings, shoes, or other things needed from the merchants store. Perhaps he would return with goods worth twice as much as his little cargo, for the Norfolk merchants were liberal in granting credit. Not infrequently he brought home a goodly sized cask of West Indian rum; in which case the merchant might have to sue for his money, for when the rum flowed freely, the tar-kiln was apt to go out and the turpentine trees go untended.  

The tar-burning industry was carried on by the poor class without help of servants or slaves. A few dozen barrels a year were considered a good output. They built their kilns of clay in a circular floor. Pine logs were laid on and then covered with earth and ignited through a small hole left for the purpose. This was then left to smoulder. The tar trickling down upon the clay floor was drained off into barrels by an inclined pipe. To make pitch the tar was boiled in kettles. To get turpentine a series of gashes were cut in the pine trees and buckets were placed at the bottom to catch the drainings.

Norfolk owed its first real growth to the geography of eastern North Carolina. The settlers on Pamlico and Albemarle sounds found themselves virtually on a landlocked sea. From Cape Henry to Cape Lookout there were only a few inlets and these were too shallow for any but a "very few vessels and of small burden." But as the roads were merely trails and often clogged with mud, the farmers at this time were forced to use the sea route, using shallow draft vessels to bring their produce around by Cape Henry to Norfolk where they unloaded their tobacco and other produce. In addition to tobacco they brought salted pork and beef, Indian corn, tar and pitch, beans, peas, butter, cheese, hides, bees wax and myrtle wax. For the return journey they loaded rum, sugar, molasses, packages of European goods - course linens, woolens, hatchets, nails,
scissors, hoes, axes, files, kettles, skillets; bedding, pewter, hats, shoes, clothing, guns and powder.33

Early in the eighteenth century this trade was rendered precarious by pirates, especially the notorious Captain Teach, better known as Blackbeard. Making their headquarters near Oracoke Inlet, with several armed sloops they preyed upon incoming and outgoing traffic. This was a serious matter for the trade between Norfolk and the Albemarle country, as only the boldest skippers would dare the risk involved. Governor Spotswood of Virginia, upon an appeal from the North Carolina traders, commandeered about fifty-five British sailors from war ships lying in Virginia waters and, placing them on board two armed shallow sloops, sent them off to the Carolina coast. As they approached Oracoke Inlet Blackbeard's flagship was sighted. Blackbeard, realizing his end was at hand, "took up a bowl of liquor, drank damnation to everyone that should give or ask quarter," and fired a broadside. Although twenty Englishmen were killed, the sloops managed to get alongside and hand to hand fight followed in which the pirates were all killed or disabled. Teach with nine of his men were killed, the rest taken prisoners.34 The news of this engagement was received with rejoicing in Norfolk and in the Albemarle and Pamlico regions, and with it the usual trade was resumed.35

By the 1730's with improved roads a large overland trade had sprung up between Norfolk and North Carolina. In 1734 the North Carolina authorities, in a letter to His Majesty's Customs recommending a customs port at Oracoke, bemoaned the loss of trade to Virginia. "Six times more cash is carried out of this country North Carolina into Virginia to purchase Negroes and British commodities than is sufficient to pay the
Kings quit rents." The governor of North Carolina estimated that in 1733 fifty thousand hogs, almost the whole number of fattened oxen in Albemarle County, and many horses, cows, and calves were driven into Virginia annually. He estimated for the same year the Carolina imports into Virginia including hogs, cattle, pork, tar, pitch, tobacco, deer skins, beaver furs, hides, tallow, wax, feathers, beef, butter and cheese to be 50,000 pounds. That most of this trade was with Norfolk is evident as it was the only town in eastern Virginia at that time. This commerce was a boon to Norfolk; it not only supplied the export merchants with goods, but opened the market for imports and provided much local employment.

The Carolinians complained of lowness of prices in Virginia. The butchers paid only for the meat after it was slaughtered. "For the hide, tallow, etc., the butcher pays nothing. The same is the case with hogs. They are taken to Virginia, slaughtered, salted up, and exported and sold as Virginia pork." The tobacco growers also complained. The tobacco is taken to Norfolk where "it is examined by the inspectors . . . all that is merchantable is selected - the remainder is burnt. The Virginia merchants . . . pay the Carolina farmers what they please for their tobacco." Norfolk also developed a prosperous trade with the West Indies during the first half of the eighteenth century. "So early as 1697 Governor Andros reported that the Virginians were exporting to Barbados pork, beef, corn, staves, and a little tobacco." In these early days of her commercial history Norfolk had strong competition with the New Englanders for the carrying trade with the islands. The planters of Virginia, unlike the merchants of New England, were not largely engaged in operating ships. The owners of the large plantations exported their tobacco in their own ships, but the inter-colonial, West Indian, and some of the European
commerce of Virginia was carried on in vessels owned outside the colony, by the shipping of Holland, England, and New England. "The enterprising Yankees swarmed in the Virginia rivers and creeks, bartering off West Indian goods for corn, beans, bacon, and live hogs." But towards the end of the first third of the century, as the Norfolk merchants became more numerous and affluent, Norfolk trade in Virginia built bottoms increased with a corresponding decrease in that of the New Englanders. In 1739 William Byrd warned the Virginia merchants to do nothing to bring the Yankees "again amongst us." "In 1742 Virginia exported to the West Indies beef and pork worth 24,000 pounds and corn worth 5,000 pounds, together with considerable quantities of bread, flour, hogshead and barrel staves, peas, shingles, and candles." They took in return "rum, sugar, molasses, money, some salt, indigo, pimento, ginger, coffee and cocoa." Norfolk merchants had their difficulties with the privateers who were prevalent during the various English wars. Complaints to the Governor in 1739 induced him to announce in the Virginia Gazette his readiness to grant commissions of marque and reprisal against Spain. "Several of our merchants," comments the Gazette, "have been long complaining of the difficulties and dangers they underwent in sending their vessels to sea, lest they should be taken by Spaniards; they have now a fair opportunity of redressing their grievances, by making reprisals on their enemies, and it is not doubted that there are men of spirit as well as ability in this colony, who will fit out vessels for that purpose, to the honor and interest of themselves and their country." Among the vessels captured on their way from Virginia to the West Indies were the Nancy; the Folly; the Jenny; the Two Friends; the Dinwiddie, owned by
Zachariah Hutchings, of Norfolk; the Bacca; the Peggy; the Duchess of Douglas; the Ranger, owned by John Thompson, of Virginia; the Nelly, Sally, Pineapple, Kingbird, Susanna, Betty, Cheap, and Dene. 47

In the early period of Norfolk's existence there were few ocean going vessels owned by Virginians, but after the 1730's shipbuilding took on an added spurt. Shipbuilding materials were plentiful, but skilled labor and seamen were scarce and dear. Of the twenty vessels mentioned by Byrd in 1728 as being in Norfolk it is estimated that only about five were owned or built in Virginia. In 1742 Governor Gooch's report to the Board of Trade indicated about twenty-five vessels as constituting the Virginia merchant fleet. But in the next two decades expansion of trade had so stimulated shipbuilding that in 1764 the Governor was able to report that Virginians owned 102 sea-going vessels, totalling 6,168 tons, and manned by 827 sailors. 48

By the middle of the eighteenth century Norfolk had reached her logical position as the entrepot for the Chesapeake region. The increasing size of the English tobacco ships made it difficult for them to navigate the rivers and do business in piecemeal from plantation to plantation. Also, about this time the Virginia and Maryland farmers had begun a diversification of their crops, raising extensively wheat and corn. The market for these commodities was the West Indies and to find ships bound for the Indies the producers had to send their grain to Norfolk. Thus Norfolk gradually became the center of trade and commerce for North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland which flourished up until the Revolution. There developed a fleet of small shallow-draft vessels plying the rivers and bays to serve as carriers from the plantation to the ships at Norfolk.
and to distribute the wares brought in at Norfolk.

That an increasingly large share of the Virginia trade was shifting to Norfolk is attested by a letter of Governor Fauquier to the Board of Trade in 1764. "The seat of trade is altered," he wrote, "the northern part of the colony employing fewer vessels than heretofore, the southern many more." 43

Some idea of the commerce of Norfolk may be had from the number of vessels in the harbor on December 30, 1775. In addition to Lord Dunmore's fleet there were the following commercial craft: the sloop Christian, of Norfolk, bound for Glasgow with wheat and staves; the sloop Agatha, from Canada to Norfolk with forty-five hogsheads of rum; the brig Cornet, from Glasgow to Norfolk with dry goods; the schooner Peggy, from St. Vincent's to Norfolk with rum and sugar; the sloops Molly and Swallow, from Turks Island for Norfolk with salt. 50

In speaking of Norfolk just prior to the Revolution the Norfolk Herald of January 7, 1835 reminisces:

Norfolk at that time must have been a rare place indeed! Its harbor filled with big ships swallowing up the cargoes of innumerable little schooners and sloops from our rivers, laden with tobacco, wheat, corn, lumber, etc., was a sight worth seeing . . . there was plenty of business . . . The town was thriving, the people were merry as crickets. Every mechanic who plied his trade with the least skill and assiduity was sure to make his fortune; and a broken merchant was rarely heard of. 51

Thus the eve of the Revolution found Norfolk a prosperous town. Its population was estimated to be about six thousand inhabitants. It had risen from a small village of a few hundred inhabitants in 1700 and the port of only southeastern Virginia into the chief port for the entire Tidewater and Chesapeake regions. Its growth was steady and its future seemed bright.
CHAPTER II

DESTRUCTION, RESTORATION, AND RESURGENCE. 1776-1807
CHAPTER XI

The citizens of Norfolk were much perturbed over the acts of parliament (1763 - 1765) putting tighter controls over American commerce. When Edward H. Moseley, surveyor of Elizabeth River, seized several vessels for the breach of the British Navigation Laws, his informer, a Captain William Smith, was treated rather roughly. He was tied to the tail of a cart and paraded about the streets, tarred and feathered, bombarded with rotten eggs and stones and finally thrown into the river, the mayor taking a leading part in these proceedings. Fortunately for him a passing boat picked him out of the water and saved him from drowning. At the passage of the Stamp Act on March 29, 1765, the leading patriot citizens met and decided to call forth the Sons of Liberty, and several days later they drew up resolutions of protest:

We will by all lawful ways . . . defend ourselves in the full enjoyment of, and preserve inviolate to posterity, those inestimable privileges of all free-born British subjects of being taxed only by representatives of their own choosing . . . If we quietly submit to the execution of the said Stamp Act, all our claims to civil liberty will be lost, and we and our posterity, become absolute slaves.

Norfolk reacted with much rejoicing to the news of the repeal of the Stamp Act, but the ardor of the citizens was soon dampened by the succeeding Townshend Acts, and the long series of coercive acts ending with the closing of the port of Boston early in 1774. A Committee of Public Safety was organized in line with the citizens of other communities. To the Boston committee they wrote: "Our bosoms glow with tender regard for you, and we will support you to the limit."

In August, 1774 nine chests of tea, consigned to merchants in Norfolk arrived on the brigantine May and Jane. The committee decided that this tea must not be landed and upon demand upon the merchant owners
to this effect the owners readily complied. For this peaceful
compliance the merchants were given a vote of thanks.56

However, all the merchants were not so patriotic. John Brown, a
Norfolk merchant, was declared an enemy to American liberty by the Committee
in violation of the Continental Association.57 A few weeks later Captain
Sampson of the schoon Elizabeth ran afoul of the Committee. He had been
given permission to store a load of salt brought in against the rules of
the Association while making repairs to his vessel. But when he was ready
to leave he was caught taking on lumber instead of reloading the salt.
The Committee recommended to the merchants, planters, and shippers
to boycott him in the future.58 Walter Chambre was reprimanded for
bringing goods into Norfolk, and the local firm of Silbeck, Rose & Co.
were directed to send their ship back to England without unloading.59

In spite of the patriotism shown by the majority of the citizens,
Norfolk was considered a hotbed of loyalist sentiment in Virginia. The
merchants and shippers comprising the commercial class were largely
Scots, English, and Irish, who in the main were loyal to the British
government,60 and before the final break with England they were quite
influential in the life of Norfolk.

Norfolk was at this time a flourishing town, dependent entirely
on commerce. When the Virginia Convention on July 24, 1775, adopted a
resolution forbidding the exportation of flour, wheat or provisions of
any kind after August 5, 1775, the Norfolk Committee of Safety came to the
aid of the merchants and petitioned the Convention in protest of this
restriction and requested delay in its implementation. The merchants,
declared the committee, "have made large contracts for the articles so
prohibited, and have now on hand considerable quantities of those perishable commodities." They desired delay "to give time for vessels that are now leading to take in their cargoes," and to permit the merchants "to blunt the edge of this sudden calamity." As a result of this petition and the action of Maryland, exportation was left open until September 10.

In 1775 Lord Dunmore fled the Virginia Assembly in Williamsburg and took refuge with the British fleet at Norfolk. It was from here he attempted to force the people back to their allegiance and by so doing caused the patriots of Norfolk and adjacent neighborhoods to organize resistance, ending in open warfare between the governor and the revolutionists. On November 7, 1775, Dunmore issued his proclamation, declaring martial law, and offering freedom to all slaves belonging to the rebels. Thus the first emancipation proclamation preceded Lincoln's by some eighty-seven years. On November 16 Dunmore marched into Norfolk and was joined by the Scottish merchants, their clerks, and many Negroes, and by others who feared the confiscation of their property. He grouped the Scotchmen into a regiment called "the Queen's own Loyal Virginians" and the slaves into the "Scheopean Corps."

Many Tories with their families crowded aboard Dunmore's ships, while there was a general exodus of the loyal Virginians into the adjacent localities; some to Princess Anne and Norfolk counties, some to Suffolk and some to North Carolina. Norfolk became practically a deserted town, except for the militia stationed there and the few inhabitants who had not evacuated.

On the afternoon of January 1, 1776, four British ships moved in close to the town and began a bombardment that ended in the complete
destruction of Norfolk. Several boat-loads of British rowed ashore and set fire to the warehouses and buildings. The Americans seized upon this act as an excuse for finishing the job. American soldiers went from house to house applying the flame until the whole town was burning. By January 3 two-thirds of the town was in ashes, about nine hundred houses destroyed. An extract from the journal of the midshipman on board His Majesty's ship Otter states dramatically:

January 9, 1776 - The detested town of Norfolk is no more! Its destruction happened New Year's Day. About four o'clock in the afternoon the signal was given from the Liverpool, when a dreadful cannonading began from the three ships, which lasted till it was too hot for the rebels to stand on their wharves. Our boats now landed, and set fire to the town in several places. It burned fiercely all night, and the next day; nor are the flames yet extinguished; but no more of Norfolk remains than about twelve houses which have escaped the flames.

The total destruction of Norfolk started a controversy as to who was really responsible for the burning—Dummore or the Revolutionists. The Virginia Assembly appointed a commission in 1777 to investigate and report its findings. They found that 1331 houses had been destroyed by the fires of 1775 and 1776, that a small part had been burned by Dummore on November 30, 1775 and on January 1, 1776, and that the rest were burned by Virginia troops, sometimes by order of the Convention, sometimes without.

Norfolk was finished as a base of operations for the Americans, but the harbor was still very important to defend against the enemy's use of it.

Adam Stephen in his report to Edmund Pendleton on May 25, 1776, upon reconnoitering Norfolk after the fire says:

Norfolk at present is a standing monument of the weakness of our counsels and feeble efforts; before we were roused to a just sense of our danger and interest . . . It is now in our power to secure the Elizabeth River . . . It is the most advantageous post the enemy can possess in Virginia for prosecuting their piratical war . . . The enemy will have no place south of Halifax to clean and repair their ships should we keep them out.
of the Elizabeth River. 71

In May 1776 Dunmore sailed out of Norfolk taking with him a fleet of nearly one hundred vessels, their decks crowded with troops, Negroes, and Tories.72 Among them was Neil Jamieson, the prosperous Norfolk merchant, in his own ship. Other merchants who owned vessels went along with their cargoes. Their warehouses, stores, and houses were destroyed, their building lots confiscated.73 It is estimated that a thousand tory refugees were taken out of Virginia and Maryland in this fleet of Dunmore's.74

"It is significant that of the tory property confiscated by Virginians during the Revolutionary War, one-third belonged to the hated Scottish merchants of Norfolk.75

It is only natural that the scattered residents of Norfolk would take advantage of the first opportunity to come back and rebuild on their property. By the winter of 1778-1779 there were a great many small huts set up.76 Trade was not totally stopped. There were two large french ships in the Elizabeth in May 1779, and scores of vessels were delivering French goods or taking on naval stores, pork, and tobacco.77 Many Virginia vessels left for France loaded with tobacco, which was exchanged for salt, blankets, woollens, medicines, linens, arms, powder, and other articles needed for the war effort in the state.78

But this war-time trade was soon rudely interrupted. In May 1779 Sir George Collier sailed into Hampton Roads with a large British fleet and captured Norfolk and Portsmouth and destroyed many ships in the harbor. Extracts of a letter from Collier to General Sir Henry Clinton, dated off Hampton May 16, 1779, tell the story of this encounter:

After leaving New York the 5th instant with the men-of-war and transports
under my command, ... and on the fourth day (from our sailing) made
the Capes of Virginia, the fleet anchored that night near Willoughby's
Point ... then moved up to Hampton Roads and the Elizabeth River.
Before moving up closer to the fort, the enemy, however saved us the
trouble by quitting it that evening, and we took possession of the fort
and town of Portsmouth, as also Norfolk, ... without resistance. ... 
I am firmly of the opinion that it is a measure most essentially necessary
for His Majesty's service that this post should remain in our hands, since
it appears to be of more real consequence and advantage than any other
the crown now possesses in America, for by securing this the whole trade
of the Chesapeake is at an end, and consequently the sinews of the rebellion
destroyed. The enemy (Americans) previous to their flight set fire to a
fine ship of war of 28 guns belonging to Congress; and also to two large
French merchantmen, one of which was loaded with bale goods, and the other
with a thousand hogsheads of tobacco. The quantity of naval stores of
all kinds found in their arsenals was astonishing. Many vessels for war
were taken on the stocks in different forwardness, one of 36 guns; one of
18; three of 16 guns, and three of 14; besides many merchantmen. The
whole number taken, burnt and destroyed amounted to one hundred and thirty
seven sail of vessels.

A great deal of tobacco, tar and other commodities were found in the
warehouses and some loaded merchantmen were seized in the harbor.79

Norfolk had suffered more than her share during the war. Her
buildings and homes laid in ashes, her population scattered and in most
cases living on the adjacent communities in poverty, her slaves deserted
and carried away, her commerce destroyed, the disaffection of a large part of
her leading merchants and citizens to the tory faction, all pointed to a
dark future, indeed, many wondered if she could ever regain the happiness
and prosperity that the little town had enjoyed in 1775. Many thought that
Portsmouth, across the river, would be the port of the future and that
Norfolk was doomed.

The rebuilding of Norfolk began rather slowly, and apparently, by
the British and some returning tory exiles during the occupation of the
Elizabeth River in 1780 and 1781. In March 1782 the town government met
to plan restoration and at the end of 1783 there were about twelve houses
rebuilt. Immediately after the war a number of English and Scottish merch-
ants migrated to Virginia and planned to set up business in Portsmouth; but the inhabitants of this town, still resentful against the British, would not receive them, so they went to Norfolk. These newcomers played an important role in restoring the town to its former prosperity. Only a few of these had been in Norfolk before the war. There were about thirty or forty Scots of anti-bellum days living in Norfolk in 1785.

Many of the patriot exiles were too poor to rebuild on their lots and refused to sell to those who could. They preferred to rent at high prices. As leases could not be had for more than seven years, the merchants taking these leases hesitated to build permanent buildings on the lots knowing that in a short time the property would revert to the owner. So Norfolk was rebuilt chiefly of small, poorly constructed wooden buildings.

With the signing of the peace treaty with England in 1783, Norfolk rapidly regained her trade. Ships from London, Glasgow, and Liverpool brought in European manufactures and discharged them on the wharves. The town became the entrepot for the produce from Richmond, Petersburg, and other river ports where the larger vessels could not enter. Produce of the back country of Virginia was sent to these places by land and reloaded on barges for transfer to Norfolk for export. Thus Norfolk had become the commercial center of trade between Virginia and North Carolina and Europe.

Prior to the war Norfolk's chief commercial ties had been with the West Indies, but now England's navigation laws restricted this trade to English bottoms and to a limited number of articles. This was a death blow to the shipbuilders and allied trades, causing much unemployment.
among this group. Also the merchants soon found out that the West Indian trade was completely monopolized by British firms. It was useless to appeal to the Congress of the Confederation for relief, so the merchants turned to the state legislature where in 1785 they submitted their complaints. Similar protests were made by other Virginia towns and it was the result of these that Madison suggested an interstate convention on commerce, which brought forth the Annapolis convention, and that in turn the great Constitutional Convention of 1787.34

All the members of the Virginia ratification convention from Norfolk and the surrounding counties voted in the affirmative for the new constitution. When the news reached Norfolk that Virginia had ratified there was much jubilation and celebration. A joint celebration for the fourth of July and the ratification of the Constitution was held. According to Wartenbaker:

A long procession formed at 11 A.M., and marched through the principal streets out to Town Point. In the lead was a band, followed by the various tradesmen of the town and county, holding aloft standards with mottoes emblematic of their crafts—butchers, fishermen, bakers, brewers and distillers, printers, merchants, grocers, pilots, ship carpenters, ropemakers, blacksmiths. Then came the good ship Constitution commanded by Captain Maxwell and drawn by ten horses. Behind marched more tradesmen, seamen, carpenters, bricklayers, glaziers, cabinet makers, coopers, batters, shoemakers, saddlers, peruke makers, goldsmiths, candlemakers, draymen, physicians, lawyers, . . . and last of all the mayor, aldermen and councilmen. . . . Speeches, toasts, and songs followed, after which a bonfire of ten barrels of pitch was set off.35

However, the strengthening of the American government under the new constitution did nothing to induce England to open her colonies to American trade, neither did the controversial Jay Treaty resolve the difficulty. In the meanwhile the tobacco exports decreased from 15,000 hogshead in 1793 to 9,968 in 1795. This was due partially to the European war and partially to the exhaustion of the soil of Virginia.36
About this time the planters of Virginia began increasingly to put their land into wheat and corn and, as the best millers were those of Pennsylvania and New York, a northern trade developed for the merchants of Norfolk, the port being the chief point of transshipment of the grain brought down from the fall-line ports, for shipment to the millers of New York and Pennsylvania. Also the West Indian trade with the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe was booming. The restrictions in the Dutch and Danish islands were generally ignored, and even the trade with the British colonies carried on in British bottoms developed on a large scale. The exports of Norfolk and Portsmouth reached $1,028,789 in 1791, consisting of 37,071 barrels of flour, 341,984 bushels of wheat, 29,376 tons of naval stores, and large quantities of lumber, provisions and tobacco. The duties from imports and tonnage for the same year amounted to $209,519.84. 

The outbreak of the French Revolutionary war in Europe in 1793 greatly boosted the American trade. British shipping was drawn away. Her navigation laws were difficult to enforce in the West Indies. A larger part of the commerce with Europe was thrown into American bottoms. In 1792 the exports from the United States to the British Islands were $2,144,638 whereas in 1801 they had risen to $9,699,722. In 1789 American tonnage employed in foreign trade amounted to 127,000, in 1801 it was 849,000.

Norfolk, naturally, benefitted and received her share of this larger trade. In 1795 the exports from this port consisting chiefly of tobacco, flour, wheat, corn, corn meal, salt beef, fish, tar, turpentine, flaxseed, iron, lead, timber, reached the sum of $1,934,827. In 1804 the exports for the last half of the year reached $2,230,855 and in 1805 the
exports were $4,388,254. The tonnage owned by merchants of the Borough was about 31,292 tons. There were 356 vessels entered at Norfolk from foreign ports in 1800, 369 in 1801, 453 in 1802, 484 in 1804. According to W. S. Forrest:

Norfolk was a busy, bustling place at this period [1800-1806]. The population had nearly reached 8000 including the transient and floating part of the community. There were very many foreigners, principally from England, and Scotland, and quite a few from France, Ireland, etc. Scores of vessels were at the wharves, taking and discharging cargoes, and the streets and lanes, from main street to the river, were thronged with heterogeneous mass of human beings. The houses were principally of wood. There were four shipyards in Norfolk and two in Portsmouth, all of them just as busy as they could be.

The foreign clearances from the port of Norfolk were: for the year 1798, 307; for 1799, 405; for 1800, 422; for 1801, 448. In the years 1804 to 1807, the annual exports varied from five to seven millions of dollars, and the imports for the same period nearly corresponding, were scarcely commensurate to the demand. This trade diffused general prosperity. It bade fair to make Norfolk what it ought to be, the great commercial emporium, not only of the state, but of the whole South. The registered tonnage for the foregoing years amounted on an average to 23,000 owned by Norfolk merchants and employed in foreign trade. The enrolled tonnage in the coasting trade amounted to 7,128 tons, while the whole tonnage of the state employed in foreign trade was 34,015, showing that two-thirds of the foreign trade of Virginia was carried on from this port. The Norfolk Herald of January 13, 1803 lists the vessels in the harbor:

- Ships 42
- Brigs 31
- Snows 2
- Schooners 56
- Sloops 40
It further gives the amount of tonnage paid into the customs house from December 24 to January 12 as 6001 tons. 93

A scanning of the shipping advertisements and the marine memoranda columns in the Norfolk newspapers of the years preceding the embargo gives a good indication of the commerce in and out of Norfolk. The advertisement in the Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger for October 25, 1804, offers the British ship Jeanne for Hull, the well-armed ship Dunrobin Castle for Liverpool, the brig Franklin for Cherbourg, the brig Eliza for freight or charter, the ships Thomas and Sheffield for Bordeaux, the ship Charles Carter for London, the American ship Nancy for freight or charter, the fine ship Sarah for charter, the American ship Peter for charter, the new ship Arcturus for charter, the fast sailing ship Ticorrie for charter, the ship Tammerlane for freight or charter, the ship Brutus for charter, the brig Mary Louisa for freight or charter. 94

The same newspaper of October 30, 1804 in its Marine Memoranda column lists as arrived: the ship Old Tom from Rotterdam, the brig Ann and Francis from Havana, the schooner Eliza from East River, the schooner Mary from St. Martins, the sloop Sally from Charleston, the sloop Zoar from Newport; and as cleared: the brig Conceico for Spain, the brig Father and Sons for Philadelphia, the schooner Lark for Alexandria, the schooner Queen for Bermuda, the schooner Rising States for New York, the schooner Two Brothers for Baltimore, the schooner Ann for Fredericksburg, the sloop Mary Ann Caroline for New York, and the sloop Volunteer for Petersburg. From this paper we also find that the shipyard of Mr. John Foster launched a ship of 380 tons, "allowed by the best judges of naval
architecture to be of superior excellence in mould and construction," to be employed as a constant London trader.95

These were the days said W. S. Forrest. 'when' to use the forcible language of another, 'one might walk from Norfolk to Portsmouth on the decks of the vessels at anchor in the harbor'—when the rich produce of the Indies were piled high on our wharves and stored in our warehouses—when merchants bought cargoes of cotton, corn, and tobacco, and shipped on private account—when Richmond and Petersburg were tributary to Norfolk and their merchants flocked periodically hither to purchase their supplies—when the business of Norfolk was comparatively larger than New York, and really larger than that of Baltimore.96

Norfolk had, indeed, risen rapidly from the ruins of 1783 to a prosperous commercial town in 1807 and the future looked bright for a continuous period of growth and prosperity. Few considered that the current activity might have been due to the wars in Europe and their prosperity was really a false one, and those same wars when the United States became more and more involved would result in commercial restrictions that would spell the ruin and cause the stagnation of Norfolk as a first class commercial port. H. B. Grigsby, speaking in 1860 of the Norfolk of the early 1800's, said:

The trade of our fathers in 1802 was an unnatural trade. It was a fungus that sprung from the diseased condition of foreign powers. It was not the result of developed productive wealth, but the accident of the war between the two greatest commercial nations of the globe, which gave us the carrying trade. It was born of other people's troubles, and destined to die when those troubles were appeased.

Norfolk was soon to experience the vicissitudes of near-war and war, and the measures of peaceful coercion adopted by Jefferson and Madison for our country, all of which combined to sink this port into a state of commercial stagnation for years to come.
CHAPTER III

THE CHESAPEAKE AFFAIR;
THE EMBARGO, NON-INTERCOURSE,
AND BLOCKADE. 1807-1815
CHAPTER III

Norfolk has never known such an era of prosperity as that which began with the last decade of the eighteenth century and continued into the first six or seven years of the nineteenth. "A golden flood poured into the harbor and city from all parts of the world. Every ship that could brave the dangers of the Atlantic became a carrier, and Norfolk was a favorite port, rivalling even Boston and New York."98 There was an immense demand for cotton, tobacco, foodstuffs, and indeed all commodities, as a result of the wars in Europe which began in 1792.

The Napoleonic Wars which brought this prosperity also brought the many harassments and spoliations to American shipping by the beligerents. The most annoying of these was the British practice of impressing our seamen.

In January 1795, a ship belonging to John Calvert of Norfolk was captured by a French schooner and sent into Charleston as a prize.99 By 1798 seizures by the French had become so frequent as to bring ruin to many American shippers. "Our merchants have been plundered of many millions," complained the Norfolk Herald, in January 1801. "In this town claims against the French are . . . in all about $2,000,000."100 In January 1802 the sufferers from French spoliations held a meeting in Norfolk and resolved to petition Congress for relief and to correspond with other communities in the United States for similar action.101

In December 1802 the Norfolk schooner Maria at anchor at Tobago was boarded by French sailors and taken out to sea.102 Another Norfolk schooner, the Sarah, was captured by a French privateer on her passage from St. Domingo to Norfolk in April 1804. She had on board a cargo of
In 1804 the officers of three armed American vessels were taken ashore in Guadeloupe by the French and tried for piracy, in consequence of having fought their vessels. They were sentenced to death, but execution was delayed until advices from France could be had on the subject. In 1805 the schooner Anna-Maria was taken in sight of Cape Henry by a French privateer. "A person who possessed the means," says the Norfolk Gazette in August, 1805, "has made an investigation in the risk from the United States to Jamaica, and from that island to the United States. From examination of an authentic record, it appears that for six months commencing 1 January last, that one vessel out of four, bound to and from Jamaica, has been captured by French and Spanish privateers." The same paper tells of the capture of the sloop George of Norfolk, enroute to Honduras, by a French privateer. "When this will end," further laments the editor of the Gazette, "it is impossible to calculate. Are we to look for a termination of the evil in the annihilation of our commerce, the ruin of our merchants, and the failure of our revenue? Or may we hope that the energy of our government will arrest this infamous system of depredations?"

From 1803 to August 1805 thirteen Norfolk vessels were captured by French and Spanish privateers. By this time our merchants began more and more to arm their vessels and to sail in fleets which gave them a measure of safety. The effect of arming the merchantmen was shown in the case of a small fleet from Port-au-Prince in the fall of 1805. The fleet consisted of two ships of 20 guns and several schooners of from 4 to 8 guns. They were encountered by one of these privateers. "But this marauder soon found that he was not to get his plunder with the same ease as he had
expected to seize upon our defenseless merchantmen." The Mohawk reported falling in with a French privateer mounting fourteen guns, who hove to and "gave us a shot, which being returned by the armed vessels, she hauled her wind and left us."\textsuperscript{107}

While these French spoliations were leading to a cry by the Federalists in America for war with France, the British government's disregard for our neutral rights seemed to overshadow the French. For a long time the British had been plundering our shipping and impressing our seamen with no regard to neutral rights. The English ministry was determined to prevent imports into the French West Indies. After driving most of the French merchantmen from the sea the British set upon keeping American vessels from taking their place. Having put food and provisions on the contraband list in addition to recognized contraband and declared a blockade of the French islands, they sent over their navy to enforce it. The Norfolk merchants were quick to voice complaint of the "arrogance and insolence" of the British captains and courts. In March 1794 the citizens of Norfolk held a meeting which drew up a memorial to Congress. "We in Norfolk and Portsmouth would be exposed to ruin in case of war, but we will support war, if it is necessary to secure our rights."\textsuperscript{108} These seizures continued year after year with accelerated frequency and often with insults and abuse. The Brig \textit{Ann Elizabeth} on her way from Malaga to Norfolk in October 1805 was accosted by a British brig of fourteen or sixteen guns. Armed men were sent aboard carrying cutlasses and pistols. They robbed the Captain and Mate of their possessions and destroyed the ships papers, beating the mate for good measure. The
brig was then allowed to proceed but as a final insult the British fired a broadside which did much damage to the American brig. In February 1806 the citizens of Norfolk and Portsmouth again sent a memorial to Congress complaining of the actions of Great Britain and resolving "that the law of nations founded on the eternal happiness of equal and reciprocal justice and on the consent of nations cannot be abrogated or altered at the mere will and pleasure of any one nation. . . ."110

The encouragement offered to the desertion of British seamen in American ports had been a source of annoyance to the Royal Navy. And in no port was this practice more flagrant than in Norfolk. In 1804 twelve British ships were detained there at one time because of deserters. These British deserters frequently paraded the streets, "cursing their former officers and thumbing their noses at them. It had become a custom for British seamen in American ports to jump overboard and swim ashore, take out naturalization papers under an assumed name and then join some American ship where the wages were higher and life much easier. Of the four thousand seamen required to man the seventy thousand ton of American shipping built each year, half were British, according to a report by Albert Gallatin, the Secretary of the Treasury.112

So the British resorted to indiscriminate search of American vessels on the high seas and even at the entrance to American ports. They would line the crew on deck, take the known British deserters and quite frequently American sailors, with little effort at proof of identification. In April 1795 the American ship Harriet was stopped
at the entrance to Lynnhaven and three men were taken off, two of whom were Americans. In July 1803 the Charles Carter was stopped just out of Norfolk by the British frigate Boston and relieved of four of the crew, all of them Americans.113

The climax of these British insults came on June 22, 1807. While the country was deeply aroused and concerned over the Burr trial in Richmond a tragic event occurred off the Virginia Capes, a few miles outside of the entrance to the harbor of Norfolk, which threw the country at large and especially the citizens of Norfolk in a violent excitement, pushing the Burr trial in the background.

The episode could not have been unexpected, considering the utter disregard of neutral rights exhibited by the British Navy. For many years British seamen had been encouraged to desert in American ports to the great annoyance of the British authorities. Since early in March a British squadron had been lying inside the capes to keep watch on some French frigates which had gone to Annapolis. Occasionally one of these ships would anchor in Hampton Roads or go to the Navy Yard at Gosport for repairs. There were many desertions during these periods. A whole boat's crew of the British sloop Halifax deserted at Norfolk on March 7. The commander of the Halifax learned that these men had enlisted aboard the American frigate Chesapeake. A complaint was duly made to the British consul and to Captain Dacatur without results. The commander of the Halifax met two of these seamen, one of whom was a certain Jenkin Ratford, on the streets of Norfolk and when he inquired of him his intentions, he received a reply in oaths and abuse. There were other complaints of British deserters on board the
Upon investigation by the Secretary of the Navy all of these deserters were proven to be American citizens who had been impressed by the British, except one Jenkin Ratford, an Englishman, on board the **Chesapeake** under the name of Wilson who had apparently been overlooked.

Admiral Berkeley, the British commander of the ships on the North American station, upon receiving these reports at Halifax issued a circular to all of his ships:

Whereas many seamen, subject of His Britannic Majesty, and serving in His ships and vessels, while at anchor in the Chesapeake, deserted and entered on board the United States frigate called the **Chesapeake**, and openly paraded the streets of Norfolk, in sight of their officers, under the American flag, protected by the Magistrates of the town and the recruiting officer belonging to the above mentioned American frigate, which Magistrates and Naval officer refused giving them up, although demanded by his Britannic Majesty's Consul, as well as the Captains of the ships from which the said men had deserted:

The Captains and Commanders of His Majesty's ships and vessels under my command are therefore hereby required and directed, in case of meeting with the American frigate **Chesapeake** at sea, and without the limits of the United States, to show to the Captain of her this order, and to require to search his ship for the deserters ... and proceed and search for the same; and if a similar demand should be made by the American, he is to be permitted to search for any deserters from their service, according to the customs and usage of civilized nations on terms of peace and amity with each other.

On the morning of June 22 the **Chesapeake** with Commodore Barron aboard and Captain Gordon commanding got underway and stood out of the harbor of Hampton Roads bound for the Mediterranean. Her decks were heavily loaded, the gun-deck was encumbered with lumber. At nine o'clock while passing Lynnhaven Bay the officers could see three British warships at anchor in the bay, one of which was the frigate **Leopard**. Soon the **Leopard** got underway and stood out to sea being about a mile distant from the **Chesapeake** as she headed eastward.
about half-past three the two ships were in hailing distance and about
eight or ten miles to sea from Cape Henry light. The Norfolk Gazette
and Public Ledger of June 24 tells in vivid manner what now took place:

We are now to present our readers in details of a most unexampled
outrage in the perpetration of which the blood of our countrymen has
been shed by the hand of violence and the honor and independence of
our nation insulted beyond the possibility of further forbearance.
It was reported that . . . the Chesapeake Frigate, had been attacked
by the British ship Leopard, Captain Humphries, of 50 guns, and that
the Chesapeake had struck her colors. . . . About four o'clock all
doubt was relieved by a spectacle which was calculated and did not fail
to rouse the indignation of every American present, and we trust that
it will never subside until ample satisfaction has been made - eleven
of our wounded fellow citizens arrived in a boat dispatched from the
Chesapeake and now we learned the following particulars, which we
believe are correct.

The Chesapeake Frigate, Captain Gordon, under Commodore Barron, got
underway on Monday morning (June 22) and proceeded to sea, passing
the Capes about 12 o'clock . . . about 3 o'clock the Chesapeake and
Leopard approached, when the customary signal of firing a gun to
leeward, the signal for friends was made from both ships. Being
about three leagues from land the ships came within hail when the
Commander of the Leopard hailed and hoped Commodore Barron was well,
and informed that he had dispatches for the Commodore. The ships hove
to and a boat came on board the Chesapeake with a letter from Captain
Humphries. In this letter was a copy of one from Admiral Berkeley
at Halifax to all British Commanders on this station in which they
were ordered to demand from the Commander of the Chesapeake four
British seamen named in the letter. . . . Commodore Barron returned
an answer to the letter in which he stated that the orders of his
government forbid him to permit his vessel to be searched, or to
deliver a man from her. The boat from the Leopard had no sooner
returned on board than a gun was fired ahead and astern of the
Chesapeake, and instantly followed by a broadside from the Leopard,
accompanied by swivels and small arms. Six other broadsides followed,
the two ships then within pistol shot. On board the Chesapeake all
was astonishment, the ship was unprepared for action, no man at his
quarters; and some of the officers at dinner. In this situation
Commodore Barron hailed the Leopard repeatedly without effect: he
then ordered the colors to be struck; as this was doing a gun from the
Chesapeake was fired, upon which the Leopard fired another broadside.
The colors being now down, an officer was dispatched to the Chesapeake,
who on coming on board expressed some regret . . . He was received
with great indignation by the American officers, who tendered their
swords, which he refused, saying that he wanted the four and nothing
more, and demanded the master role, which was produced by the purser,
and then was exhibited the degrading spectacle of nearly 400 Americans
mustered on deck of an American Man-of-War by order of a British Lieutenant, and four of the crew taken away. . . . We are sorry to add to this account that three of the crew were killed, and sixteen wounded, some of them dangerously.

Feeling in Norfolk over this affair ran to the height of excitement and anger. A town meeting was called which passed resolutions expressing the horror and indignation of the occasion, resolving to support the Government in any manner necessary to obtain satisfaction, and to refuse any intercourse with, or to furnish supplies to any of the British ships of war, or to allow the assistance of pilots. The Militia was called to active service, and troops from Richmond and Petersburg were dispatched to Norfolk, making a total of about 1600 men under the command of Brigadier-General Mathews. Norfolk was preparing for action and for a few days it seemed that war might begin at once. The British ships in the bay were feeling the inconvenience from the want of water and fresh provisions. On July 3 Commodore Douglas, the commander of the British squadron, assuming that an attempt would be made to prevent communication between him and the British Consul at Norfolk sent a threatening letter to Mayor Richard E. Lee. He wrote:

I am determined if this infringement is not immediately annulled, to prohibit every vessel bound either in or out of Norfolk to proceed to their destination, until I know the pleasure of my government. . . . You must be perfectly aware that the British flag never has nor will be insulted with impunity.

Mayor Lee replied on July 4:

The day on which this answer is written, ought of itself to prove to the subjects of your sovereign, that the American people are not to be intimidated by menace. . . . Seduced by the false show of security, that may be sometimes surprised and slaughtered, while unprepared to resist a supposed friend; that delusive security is now, however, passed forever. The late occurrence has taught us to confide our safety no longer to anything but our own force. We do not seek
hostility, nor shall we avoid it. . . . We therefore leave it with you either to engage in war, or to remain on terms of peace.

He added: "Your letters directed to the British Consul at this place have been forwarded to him."

This letter was delivered to Commodore Douglas on July 6 by the Honorable Littleton W. Tazewell and during this interview, with all the British Captains present, Commodore Douglas was courteous and disclaimed any insulting or menacing intentions, stating that his letter had been misconstrued, and that nothing was more remote from his intentions than to start hostilities. Thus the affair was temporarily closed.

In Washington, President Jefferson after consulting with his cabinet issued his proclamation of July 2. The preamble of the proclamation, couched in rather moderate tone, rehearsed the story of American injuries and forbearance, and of British depredations upon neutral rights. The proclamation required all armed vessels of Great Britain to depart from American waters; and in case they failed to do so, it forbade intercourse with them and prohibited supplies from being furnished to them. At the same cabinet meeting other measures were agreed upon. The gunboats were ordered to points where attacks might be expected. The President was to recall all American vessels from the Mediterranean. An express vessel was to be sent to England with dispatches to the American Minister demanding satisfaction for the attack on the Chesapeake. This demand included - (1) a disavowal of the act and of the principle of searching a public armed vessel; (2) the restoration of the men taken from the frigate;
(3) the recall of Admiral Berkeley. It was decided at another cabinet meeting two days later to call Congress to meet on October 26.

After the news of Commodore Douglas's threatening conduct at Norfolk other measures were promulgated. On July 5 it was agreed to call on the governors of all the states to have their quotas of one hundred thousand Militia in readiness. The Governor of Virginia was requested to order such Militia into active service as may be necessary for the defense of Norfolk and vicinity. Little by little, and calmly, Jefferson was drawn into preparations for war.\(^{119}\)

Although Jefferson acquiesced without protest in these war preparations, his inclinations were to avoid hostilities. "Peace was still his passion, and his scheme of peaceful coercion had not yet been tried."\(^{120}\)

"We have acted on these principles," he wrote in regard to England, "(1) to give that Government an opportunity to disavow and make reparation; (2) to give ourselves time to get in the vessels, property, and seamen now spread over the ocean; (3) to do no act which might compromise Congress in their choice between war, non-intercourse, or any other measure."\(^{121}\)

The war fever continued to grow strong, but Jefferson's coolness and his delay in calling Congress served to prevent a committal to the policy of war and he soon was to have the opportunity to try his pet theory of peaceful coercion.

With the settlement of the Chesapeake affair in the hands of the diplomats, seizures and impressments nevertheless continued unabated. Great Britain issued her Orders-in-Council and Napoleon retaliated with his arbitrary decrees. Between these restrictions on neutral
trade Americans found it difficult to engage in any foreign commerce without risk of seizure or confiscation. The British Orders-in-Council and the French decrees were exacting their maximum toll on American shipping when Congress met on October 26, 1807. Jefferson, confident that his policy of peaceful coercion would bring the belligerents to reason, wrote out on a rough piece of paper a draft recommending an embargo on foreign trade, which, being approved by his cabinet, was sent to Congress and rushed through to passage, and on December 22, 1807, he affixed his signature. The embargo forbade the sailing of any ships out of American harbors to foreign ports, while coasting vessels were to give bond restricting them to United States ports.

This all but total stoppage of seagoing trade would naturally fall heavy on the seaport of Norfolk. According to Professor Wert-enbaker:

Her warehouses were locked, her wharves empty, the ships in port moved away to fresh water to avoid worms, property values declined, many merchants faced ruin, her shipyards were idle, her artisans out of work, hundred of sailors walked the streets or packed their bags to leave for foreign countries, the gangs of negro stevedores loafed in the back alleys, the taverns and boarding houses were without guests. 122

The Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger of December 30, 1807, was quick to protest:

It is now no longer a matter of doubt as to the immediate cause of this severe measure, which is to produce universal distress to our country, and to ruin thousands of industrious citizens . . . The article we copy from the National Intelligencer under the title "Embargo," ought to be regarded as more than semi-official. We view it as the government expose, or apology to the people for the distress which they are to experience. The paper then proceeds to speak of this measure, which, in consoling phraseology is termed 'a dignified retirement within ourselves.' To be sure some of our 'hard bargains'
hired at the rate of six dollars a day and gentlemen with comfortable appointments from five to twenty-five thousand dollars per annum may bear this 'dignified retirement' with a great deal of philosophy, and for any length of time; but the planter whose produce is rotting in his barn, the industrious tradesman whose support and that of his family derived from the enterprise of commerce... who will be exposed to want and ruin will not find so much comfort in the 'dignified retirement.'

The same paper in its issue of January 13, 1808, expounded on the pecuniary loss to the mercantile community: "The man of capital finds one half of it suddenly vanished, a merchant who owns three ships worth a few weeks since $40,000 and a real estate consisting of dwelling and warehouse to the same amount - what are they worth today? If valued at what they would bring, they are scarcely worth half the price, perhaps not more than one-third."

The Gazette quotes the following figures from Secretary Gallatin's reports to show the loss of revenue caused by the embargo.

Exports of native produce - 1807 - $48,500,000. Revenue for
1807 - $16,000,000
1806 - $14,000,000
1805 - $12,000,000
1804 - $10,000,000

Revenue for 1808 than in all probability would be $18,000,000.
Estimated five-sixth loss in 1808 to be $14,000,000.
Total loss for 1808 - 48,500,000 in exports and $14,000,000 in revenue amounting to $62,500,000.

The farmers of the adjoining areas were equally aroused. The total destruction of commerce, that source of life and activity of the agriculture of the country, would also cause the ruination of the
agrarian economy, "In vain" said the spokesmen of Stokes County, North Carolina, "does the husbandman sow his grain, plant his cotton or tobacco, or any other article for exportation; in vain raise cattle or support a dairy, if he can find no market . . . these must perish and rot on his hands."126

The press of Norfolk advised its readers to look to the voters for relief. "The spirit of the nation," said the Gazette, "appears to be roused in every part of the country, and men who are known to be friends to commerce and the Constitution are coming forward to save their country from ruin . . . . To the next elections alone can we look for safety. Twelve months continuation of the present men and measures and the area which is covered by the town of Norfolk will be worth more for a field for cultivation than it will be with its numerous and costly buildings. And so will all the seaports and indeed the towns and cities in America,."127 And again on September 19, the Gazette plead to the electorate: "The farmers of this country have but one way left to remove the cumbrous load that sits like an incubus upon them. They must repair to the poles at the approaching elections, with ballots in their hands for men who are known friends of peace and free trade."128 Yet, Mr. Newton, a staunch Jeffersonian, was re-elected to Congress in 1809 from the Norfolk district.

Although the mercantile class of merchants and shippers, and the planters were facing ruin of their former prosperity, it was the seamen who probably fared the worst. They were thrown out of work wholesale, and could not find other employment because unemployment was almost universal. On top of this the Government laid up a number
of gun-boats at Norfolk adding one hundred and seventy more sailors to the unemployed list. The inhabitants of Norfolk were petitioned by these seamen for relief, and in March 1808 the Mayor called a meeting of the citizens of the town to take into consideration measures for relief of the "distressed seamen now in this place."

"It is proposed to raise a fund for their immediate support, to charter a vessel, and having furnished her with provisions, to send all the seamen who are without employment to Washington, where they can apply for support to those who have the means of affording relief or of giving them employment." There were three hundred persons in the town on public support in December 1808, and possibly as many more supported by private charity.

The Norfolk Gazette, keeping up a constant attack on the evils of the embargo, printed a rather pathetic confession of its own inability to keep going.

"The almost annihilation of business of every sort," means the editor on May 18, 1808, "must satisfy anyone who reflects for a moment, that a paper in a commercial town, whose calculations are chiefly on advertising custom cannot exist without punctual payment from subscribers. The increased and increasing difficulties of the present time are severely experienced by the editor of this paper, and he has to reduce publication to twice a week during the present distressing times."

The embargo produced some sarcasm and satire in the press of the day. The term "O grab us" (embargo spelled backwards) was one frequently used. A long poem, a parody on Gray's Elegy, appeared in
the Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger of July 18, 1808 which expresses
in satire the effects of the embargo. Entitled "The Embargo," it
reads in part:

The embargo tolls the knell of parting trade,
The merchant musing paces on the shore,
The last few ships their course have homeward laid,
And left the ocean to return no more!

Now fades the sun of commerce on the sight,
The harbour all a solemn stillness holds,
Save when the smuggler, shrouded by the night
Disturbs the tide-wolves from their distant fold.

Save that from yonder floating castles deck,
With many a curse some sailor may complain,
Of land-man vile, who scanted at 'war a speck',
Debar him from his element the main.

In front of lofty stores, by commerce made,
Where casks and bales once lay in joyful heap,
Each in the narrow dock forever laid,
The mighty riders of the ocean sleep.

To Nova Scotias long neglected strand
Full many a brave and honest heart has hied,
Hands that might be the safe-guard of our land,
Or claim our empire on the ocean wide.

But curs'd embargo stared them in the face,
And lank starvation swiftly on them stole;
Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the general current of the soul.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
And here you see what his reward has been,
He gave to misery all he had - a tear,
He gained 't was all he wished - a pint of gin! 133

The Norfolk merchants remained hopeful that the embargo
would be repealed and normal trade resumed, but towards the end of
1808 these hopes were dampened by the prospects that her former markets
might not be regained even though the embargo be lifted. European
countries were getting their supplies from the East, the West Indies,
and Canada. The West Indies were becoming more and more self-sufficient. A merchant in Jamaica writing to a Norfolk merchant in August 1808 says: "We consider the measure [embargo] one of the best that could possibly happen for the interest of Jamaica. The planters, whose negroes were unprofitably making sugar have now turned part of them to the culture of provisions. . . . When your embargo is off you will find our markets full and your produce selling for little of nothing." Another letter in a similar vein was received by a Norfolk merchant from a gentleman in Antigua. "The embargo has taught our planters not to depend on any other person but themselves. I have suffered greatly in mind and purse from it; but thank God, my troubles on that head are at an end. I shall raise provisions enough to supply my estate for one year from the first of January next; . . . and all my brother planters are as well off,"

With the repeal of the Embargo Act early in March 1809 hope ran high for the resumption of normal trade. "Our marine list," said the Gazette on March 18, 1809, "will show that commerce has again spread her swelling sails to the favoring gales." The Custom House report for this date listed twenty-five ships as cleared. The water front was again alive with sailors, stevedores, clerks, and merchants. The harbor was crowded with sails awaiting to take on their cargo. The joyful news that the Embargo Act had been repealed overshadowed the possible impact of the Non-intercourse Act which was passed to replace it. This act forbade trade with England and France but permitted it with the rest of the continent and elsewhere.
Four days later on March 22 the *Gazette* spoke out in a different tone. "The folly of the Non-Intercourse law is already demonstrated," it said, "as far as exports of this country are concerned. The products of our country will find their way to Great Britain, and are already on their route, using Cadiz, Tangier, St. Bartholomews, St. Jago de Cuba, and Amelia Island as ports of entrepot." Due to a diplomatic blunder on the part of the British Minister in Washington President Madison lifted the restrictions on intercourse with England in April 1809 and for three months the merchants enjoyed virtually unrestricted trade and shipped to England or elsewhere the accumulation of two years produce. In July it was learned that the English Government in London had repudiated her American Minister and non-intercourse was again put into effect against England.\(^{136}\) The ports of St. Jago de Cuba, Amelia Island, Halifax, and Bermuda served as entrepôts for American trade. British and French goods were sold freely in every shop. American ship owners lost this freight and the United States Treasury collected no duties on British goods smuggled from these places. The shores of Amelia Island were strewn with American cotton and other produce awaiting shipment in foreign vessels while British ships were discharging merchandise to be smuggled into the United States or taking on board heavy freights of cotton and naval stores on American account. Custom house officials were easily bought. They did not inquire closely whether cloth was made in England, France, Holland, Germany, or whether rum, sugar, and coffee came from St. Kitts or St. Bartholomews. Cheap English woollens were necessities
and the otherwise good citizens did not hesitate to buy them anyway they could get them. As a result the government lost its revenue the shipping lost much of its freight, the people paid double prices on imports and received half prices for their produce.\textsuperscript{137}

The Norfolk merchants again found their trade lagging, and their ships only partially employed. Before the embargo all the trade to the British colonies and most of it to England had been carried in American bottoms. Now local shipping was used only for the transit to Amelia Island, St. Jago de Cuba, or St. Bartholomew where British vessels took the freight from these points to Great Britain. Non-intercourse was thus working to aid England at the expense of Americans.\textsuperscript{138}

Both England and France continued the seizure of our ships unabated. Reports arrived of the cruel treatment of the crews of American vessels taken in French ports. "We were marched through the town tied together like felons, and for five days fed on bread and water only," wrote one of the men from a Norfolk ship detained in France.\textsuperscript{139} And when the American ship \\textit{Protectress} arrived from Liverpool in February 1811 and was held by local authorities under the Non-Intercourse Act the \textit{Gazette} was quick to complain. "American commerce is in a truly deplorable state. If they go to any place in Europe, except Great Britain, they are seized, sequestered, or confiscated by the orders of our friend the Emperor Napoleon, and so lost to their owners. If they go to Great Britain and return back, they are seized by the laws of our own country, and thus lost to their owners. . . . We think between the Emperor of France and Mr. Madison
our merchants, shipwrights and all those connected with commerce may soon cease their avocations."

Upon declaration of war against England in June 1812, Norfolk from its position was expected to be a prominent point of attack, therefore a large force was concentrated here and preparations were made to resist any British assault upon the town.

On February 5, 1813 a large British fleet anchored in Lynnhaven Roads and Admiral Warren declared a strict and rigorous blockade of all ports and harbors of Chesapeake Bay. Norfolk became the first major victim of this rigorous blockade, for it was not until May 26 that the British Admiral issued his proclamation of a "strict and rigorous blockade of the ports and harbors of New York, Charleston, Port Royal, Savannah, and the river Mississippi," which completed the blockade of the coast, leaving only the ports of New England free.

At first the British seemed content for the most part to close the Bay to commerce. The small craft and privateers were quickly taken or destroyed and a tight blockade was enforced to prevent the egress or ingress of ocean going vessels. But Norfolk seemed too valuable a prize to go unmolested, especially since the American frigate Constellation was anchored there, and nothing the British desired more than the capture or destruction of American frigates. Admiral Warren could earn no greater distinction than the capture of this frigate, which threatened to annoy British commerce should she escape to sea and which neutralized a considerable squadron to watch her to prevent such an escape.

So an attack upon the defenses of Norfolk was planned by Admiral
Warren which resulted in the battle of Craney Island on June 22, 1813, in which the British forces of over twice the number of defenders were repulsed with loss of upwards of two hundred men killed, wounded, or taken prisoners against no loss for the Americans. Norfolk had been saved from capture in this first and only attempt by the enemy to take the port. "Such a band of heroes as lately united their efforts to fortify and defend the town of Norfolk," said the Herald, "deserve the plaudits of their country. . . . Aid was sent from all parts of Virginia. At every alarm the whole people were in arms. . . . The defenders of Craney Island are entitled to the warmest thanks of every true patriot. The invading enemy was astonished when he saw his attempts so ably repulsed, and so soon rendered abortive."  

The British, however, continued the effective blockade of the port and commerce dwindled to virtually nothing. The Chesapeake became a British Naval station for the duration of the war. The domestic exports of Virginia fell from over $3,000,000 for 1812 to $17,581 for the year ending September 30, 1814.  

Practically the only commerce left to the Norfolk merchants was that afforded by the river trade with Richmond and Petersburg, and the smuggling through the shallow waters of Eastern North Carolina. The Embargo Act of December 17, 1813 (the last embargo), put an end to this small trade. The markets of Richmond and Petersburg were closed to Norfolk. "In a few months," wrote the Gazette, "we will feel the effect of this system [embargo], in the articles of
corn, meal, etc. which will be augmented nearly double their present price - all this to be done for fear this produce will fall into the hands of the enemy."

In a letter to the editor of the *Gazette* an anonymous citizen expressed his reactions to the plight of the once prosperous port:

Some few years ago, walking through Wide-Water Street, I was much incommoded by rum puncheons, sugar hogheads, bales of goods, flour, and tobacco hogheads; my ears were grated with the discordant bawling of negroes hoisting these commodities in and out of vessels at the adjoining wharves. . . . On the 20th day of December, 1814, I again took a walk through that street. . . . There were no rum puncheons, bales of goods, sugar and tobacco hogheads in view; no bawling of negroes hoisting these commodities in and out of vessels at the adjoining wharves. . . . Instead of plodding merchants, busy clerks, bales of goods, puncheons, tobacco and sugar hogheads—some Military officers, ten or a dozen idle young men marking time, a few recruits, and fifteen or twenty unemployed negroes in view."

In fact, Norfolk never recovered. For more than half a century the city remained stationary. While the commerce of New England was also ruined, those thrifty people turned to manufacturing. Where once ships were built cotton factories began to hum. Norfolk had the cotton but did not make cloth. She had lumber but did not make furniture. She had tobacco and vegetables and other products of field and farm, but all that were not shipped decayed on the wharves. The 1810 census shows a population of 9,793, the 1830 census shows a population of 9,814.  

In October 1835 the citizens of Norfolk in a long memorial to the State Legislature in regard to increasing bank capital forceably sum up the reasons for Norfolk's stagnation. The *Norfolk Herald* of October 26, 1835 prints this memorial.
Virginia, at one time, was engaged to a considerable extent in direct trade, in which this town very largely participated, it appears from the following extract from public documents the foreign clearances from the port of Norfolk were; for the year 1798 - 307, for the year 1800 - 422, and for the year 1801 - 448. And it is painful for your memorialist to state that down to the present year, 1835, this trade has been reduced to 127 foreign vessels.

The registered tonnage for the years 1804 to 1807 amounted to 23,000 owned by Norfolk merchants, and employed in foreign trade. The coastal tonnage in those years amounted to 7,128. Two-thirds of the foreign trade of the state was carried on from the port of Norfolk. Now in the year 1835 the registered tonnage has dropped to 1694 while the coastal tonnage had increased to 10,669, figures that indicate an almost total decline of the foreign, without a corresponding increase of the coasting trade.

The memorial continues:

How came we to lose this large and profitable trade, and what means should be adopted to regain it? The first branch of the inquiry ... is easily answered. In the years 1807 - 1808 there began a series of commercial restrictions growing out of the wars of Europe, such as our own embargo, non-intercourse, non-importation, the Berlin and Milan decrees, the British Orders-in-Council, and finally the war of 1812, which entirely destroyed our trade and commerce, and visited many of us with irretrievable ruin. From these notorious causes we suffered such immense losses in our navigation and other interests that the means within our reach have never been adequate to repair the disaster. ... We were forced to drop the character of importers and become the mere agents and purchasers, at second hand, of the Northern merchants who provided with abundant capital by the wise policy of their own Legislatures, now began to do for us and all Virginia that business which we had previously done for ourselves.150

By 1815 Norfolk, possessed of one of the best natural harbors of the world, had sunk through the adversity of government trade restrictions and enemy blockade to a very low ebb commerce-wise, and with this loss of commerce went also the general prosperity of the town. She had neither the energy nor resources to compete
with the more energetic and resourceful Northern ports which had by now captured most of the foreign commerce.
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