

VIRGINIA EMBARGOED: THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EFFECTS
OF THE 1807-1809 EMBARGO ON VIRGINIA

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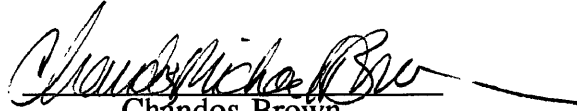
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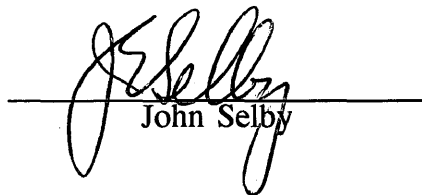
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER I. PRELUDE TO THE EMBARGO	2
CHAPTER II. THE EMBARGO BEGINS	20
CHAPTER III. THE MANUFACTURING SPIRIT	37
CHAPTER IV. POLITICS	59
CHAPTER V. THE FINAL DAYS AND BEYOND	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY	82

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact on the economy and politics of Virginia of the embargo of 1807-1809.

Intended by President Thomas Jefferson to gain concessions from Britain by temporarily halting all United States exports, the embargo caused economic stress within Virginia. It affected not only Virginians directly involved in international trade, but also farmers who depended on grain and tobacco sales to Europe, as well as merchants and lawyers reliant upon farmers as customers. In response, Virginians made once-imported fabrics at home and formed public associations to fund factories to both relieve their income loss and gain economic independence from Britain.

The embargo also caused political tension within the commonwealth. The eastern section of the state, tightly controlled by wealthy families, supported the Republicans who advocated the embargo. In contrast, the more recently settled western section elected several Federalists to Congress.

By the time the embargo ended in 1809, the majority of publicly-funded manufacturing projects had failed, leaving Virginians disillusioned. Politically, experience with the embargo had hardened the Virginians' anti-British resolve and increased the tension between Republican Virginia and the Federalist North.

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CHAPTER I
PRELUDE TO THE EMBARGO

On December 22, 1807, President Thomas Jefferson signed *An Act laying an Embargo on all ships and vessels in the ports and harbors of the United States*. The law prohibited American trade with foreign countries and, combined with the concurrent federal ban on imports, ended all legal American overseas commerce. Jefferson intended the embargo to assist American efforts to gain Great Britain's recognition of American rights on the open seas, but it not only failed to win British concessions, it also deepened animosities within the United States.

This paper examines Virginians' economic and political reactions to the policy, although the Old Dominion's response should by no means be taken as typical of America.¹ New Englanders sometimes used violence to protest the law, but as the home state of Thomas Jefferson, the embargo's author and most ardent advocate, Virginia merits special attention.

Several factors affected Virginians' reactions. Virginians had often used embargoes or threats of embargoes during the colonial period as an assertion of their economic independence from England, and in 1807 they still proudly recalled how a boycott of British goods had served as the prelude to the American Revolution. An expansion of Virginian wealth, especially in the eastern portions of the state, fueled by the exportation of agricultural goods, also affected Virginians.

¹ The use of the word "Virginians" in this paper refers to free men who could vote, not because they were true representatives for the majority of Virginians (they were not), but because, as a group, they had a more direct and powerful influence on the Commonwealth's political and economic course than the balance of Virginia's residents.

The European wars, beginning in 1793, had created an overseas demand for Virginia's wheat, corn, tobacco, and other products. This prosperity led to the development of agricultural support services and commerce dependent upon agricultural exports, but economic diversification toward large-scale manufacturing had not developed within the state. The reliance on agricultural exports made Virginia vulnerable to the embargo's economic effects.

Most Virginians who voted supported Jefferson's Republican party, instead of the Federalists, in both state and national governments. Virginians generally supported the Republicans with their strong states rights stance despite the Federalists' promises to protect American shipping. The Republicans dominated the commonwealth's politics, especially in the east, and for the most part heartily supported the embargo. Despite the appearance of unanimity, however, sectional and economic conflicts did exist within the party.

The early nineteenth-century parties had not yet formed when, during the colonial period, Virginians first threatened, and later carried out, boycotts of English imports and the manufacture of their own goods. When southern colonial planters had trade-related complaints, such as a scarcity of cargo space or shortage of manufactured items, they would often threaten to retaliate against the King by manufacturing their own goods. For instance, early eighteenth-century Virginian arguments in favor of a tobacco inspection act stressed the poverty that would result if Parliament did not approve the act and the necessity for manufacturing clothes and goods. The act passed, although the threat's impact on Parliament is not clear. In 1765, Virginia and other colonies upped the ante when they actually carried out a boycott of British goods. The boycott succeeded in forcing the repeal of the Stamp

Act. The victory convinced Americans that economic coercion could directly change British policies.²

In response to the Boston Tea Party in December 1773, Britain passed what the colonists termed the "Coercive and Intolerable Acts" which virtually blockaded Boston. The Virginia House of Burgesses forcefully denounced Boston's closure, causing Governor Dunmore to dissolve the assembly. Meeting in convention, many former burgesses voted in favor of complete nonimportation of British goods after November 1, 1774, and nonexportation of American goods after August 10, 1775, if the King did not repeal the Coercive Acts. In September 1774, the Continental Congress also adopted these measures as part of the Continental Association, giving power to the local committees throughout the colonies to enforce the measures. Beginning in fall 1774, Virginia's county courts refused to hear debt suits. By doing so, the courts helped to enforce the embargo by making loans insecure, thereby removing the foundation upon which merchants built their trade.³ By refusing to import English products in 1765 and 1774, the colonies asserted their economic independence from Great Britain. The association of embargoes with the American Revolution would again stir Virginians in the early 1800s.

On the eve of the Revolution, Virginians also carried out their earlier threats to manufacture their own goods. Cotton and wool production around Fredericksburg, for instance, increased just prior to the Revolution, and in early 1776 a group of Fredericksburg subscribers attempted to establish a cotton and linen manufactory. The manufactory, like many other industries that were established at

² C. Robert Haywood, "Economic Sanctions: Use of the Threat of Manufacturing by the Southern Colonies," *The Journal of Southern History* 25 (May 1959): 212-213.

³ Warren N. Billings, John E. Selby, Thad W. Tate, *Colonial Virginia: A History* (White Plains, N.Y., 1986), 329-333, 338; Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion* (Garden City, N.Y., 1971), 120-122.

the same time, appears to have failed after the war.⁴ Patriotism alone may not have motivated these early manufacturers, rather the insecurity of credit due to the closed courts may have prompted the turn from trade to production.

In the immediate aftermath of the American Revolution, the duties and prohibitions Great Britain and other European countries placed on America's international traders caused an economic depression in the United States which the lack of a large domestic market and the poor state of overland transportation compounded. In 1793, Great Britain and France began a series of wars that eventually enveloped the European continent, and, except for twenty months from 1801 to 1803, raged until 1815. During the wars, Great Britain was the only belligerent that could effectively protect its merchant vessels and conduct significant trade. Operating as neutrals, American merchants took advantage of the depleted European fleets and seized the opportunity to carry goods that European nations needed but could not supply with their own ships. American farmers, including Virginians, grew the wheat, flour, corn, and other products that European countries needed to feed their armies.⁵

From 1793 until the embargo halted American exports, Virginia experienced great economic expansion due to increased agricultural exports. The average amount of wheat Virginians exported each year from 1802 to 1807 exceeded by nineteen percent the average annual amount exported in 1791 and 1792. Tobacco trade grew thirty-one percent during the same period. These products barely kept pace with the thirty percent rise in Virginia's population between 1790 and 1810, but corn and flour exports increased 145 percent and 960 percent respectively,

⁴ William H. Siener, "Charles Yates, the Grain Trade, and Economic Development in Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1750-1810," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 93 (October 1985): 420-422.

⁵ Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (New York, 1961), 18, 21, 36-37.

reflecting the growth of demand in Europe and the West Indies. Some areas increased their exports at much greater rates. The amount of flour inspected yearly in Fredericksburg between 1801 and 1810 surpassed by thirty to fifty times the quantity annually exported from the Rappahanock region before the American Revolution.⁶

To understand more easily this economic growth and the political differences within Virginia from 1793 to 1807, the commonwealth can be divided into four regions. The relatively flat Tidewater extends from the Atlantic to the fall line, marked by the cities of Fredericksburg, Richmond, and Petersburg. From the fall line to the Blue Mountains stretches the hilly Piedmont. The Valley lies between the Blue Mountains and the Alleghenies, with the rolling Transallegheny Plateau continuing to the western boundary of the Old Dominion on the Mississippi River. As one proceeds westward one reaches areas more recently settled.⁷

During the three decades before the embargo, increasingly infertile land and European war demands caused the people of the Tidewater region to grow less tobacco and more grain than they had under British rule. "The staples of the first [the Tidewater region] are Indian corn principally, small crops of indifferent Tobacco small crops of wheat, & in some parts, lumber," reported Edward Carrington in 1791.⁸ Corn provided the primary agricultural export by the early nineteenth century, but Virginia farmers also shipped wheat and tobacco.

⁶ The calculations of export growth in Virginia are based on Treasury Department data published in Adam Seybert, *Statistical Annals: Embracing the Population, Commerce, Navigation, ... of the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1818), 13, 111; and Arthur G. Peterson, "Commerce of Virginia, 1789-1791," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 2, 10 (1930): 307. Prior to 1802, the Treasury provided this data for 1791 and 1792 only. Siener, "Charles Yates," 422.

⁷ Both contemporaries and modern historians have used these divisions. See, for instance, Edward Carrington to Alexander Hamilton, October 4, 1791, in "Home Manufactures in Virginia in 1791," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 2, 2, (1922): 139; and Charles Henry Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* (Chicago, 1910), 1-3. While Carrington considers all of the area west of the Blue Mountains as the "Upper" region Ambler divides that section into the Valley and the Transallegheny, which proves more useful for this study.

⁸ Carrington to Hamilton, October 4, 1791.

Southeastern counties, such as Sussex and Southampton, produced more than one thousand bales of cotton each year, while the remainder of the state produced smaller amounts. Manufacturing had not taken hold in the region, which lacked the geography for efficient water-powered mills. Traveling through the northern Tidewater in 1796, Isaac Weld noted that slaves, not machines, produced almost every object needed on plantations. In the 1790s, about three-quarters of the population, both free and slave, wore clothes produced in their own homes.⁹

More recently settled than the Tidewater, the Piedmont region produced much of Virginia's tobacco and wheat exports. The northern portion raised primarily wheat, while the southern grew tobacco. Thomas Joynes of Virginia's Eastern Shore, travelling through Louisa county in 1810, found himself in the midst of "the finest tract of wheat land I ever saw. On every side large verdant wheat-fields met and cheered the eye of the traveller."¹⁰ The two crops proved profitable enough that Piedmont farmers limited their cotton growths to "the demand of the private Manufactures of the Country itself." Due to the yearlong demands of tobacco production, the people of Piedmont carried out less household manufacturing than did those of Tidewater, importing many of their goods. It was mostly the poor white women and female slaves who engaged in clothing production.¹¹

Great quantities of wheat grew in the Valley, the principal market crop, along with hemp, flax, and small amounts of tobacco. Along with the Piedmont, this was an important flour-producing area for the European and American market. In the recently settled Transallegheeny area, farmers lived closer to subsistence than did

⁹ Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington, 1933), 816, 684; Rolla Milton Tryon, *Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640-1860* (New York, 1917), 149, 137.

¹⁰ "Memoranda Made by Thomas R. Joynes on a Journey to the States of Ohio and Kentucky, 1810," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 1, 10 (January 1902): 148.

¹¹ Carrington to Hamilton, October 4, 1791; Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 816.

other Virginians. Some did grow wheat or corn as cash crops, but generally tobacco did not survive well. Their relative isolation from foreign goods, and the winter free time that grain cultivation allowed, permitted most western Virginians to utilize home-manufactured linen for their clothing.¹²

Rivers served as the main highways for carrying crops to market. The produce of the Transallegheny traveled down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans. The geography thus limited communication with the more prosperous and politically powerful eastern sections of Virginia. The people of the northern Valley and northern Piedmont shipped their surplus grains and tobacco along the tributaries of the Potomac to Alexandria and Baltimore. Much of the remainder of Virginia's wheat and tobacco travelled down the Piedmont rivers to Fredericksburg, Richmond, or Petersburg.¹³

The Piedmont rivers carried a flourishing grain and produce trade. At least ten flour mills operated near Fredericksburg between 1788 and 1810, providing employment not only for millers, but also for merchants, coopers, and teamsters. In fact, by 1807, millers' needs created a local market for a Fredericksburg factory which specialized in screens and sifters for mills, wheat fans, and wires for patent threshing machines. The profits from exportating and processing grain in Fredericksburg led to the establishment of a cotton gin, manufactories for nails, leather, and shoes, and attempts to improve transportation and banking services. The mills around Richmond also expanded quickly after 1800, allowing millers Thomas Rutherford and Joseph Gallego to become wealthy, leading citizens. Petersburg also participated in the economic prosperity of the period, processing

¹² Carrington to Hamilton, October 4, 1791; Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 816; Otis K. Rice, *The Allegheny Frontier: West Virginia Beginnings, 1730-1830* (Lexington, 1970), 156-157.

¹³ Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 85; Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (Urbana, 1926), 77; Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham, 1931), 91.

both wheat and tobacco. John Melish, traveling through the Old Dominion, described the town in 1806 as "a place of considerable wealth and importance, carrying on a great trade in tobacco and flour.... The market is well supplied with provisions; and there are numerous mills in and about town."¹⁴

Virginia's principal port, Norfolk, also profited from the grain trade. Norfolk merchants purchased the wheat and tobacco milled and cured in Richmond and Petersburg. The Tidewater also contributed to Norfolk's business because plantations sent all of the tobacco grown south of the Rappahanock to the city. Because Virginia millers could not produce flour as fine as northern millers could, many planters sent their wheat to Norfolk for shipment to Pennsylvania and New York mills. Norfolk merchants' trade with the West Indies expanded during the European wars. Virginians sold corn, lumber, and tobacco at lower prices than northern merchants. The number of vessels owned by Norfolk citizens expanded from negligible in 1785 to 120 vessels totalling 23,207 tons in 1806. Shipbuilding in the area increased greatly to supply the demand. Carpenters had to construct ships along the shore and in creeks because they could not find working space along the crowded wharves. International trade made Norfolk a busy, turbulent city. Although not quite the rival of northern ports, her leading merchants still formed the wealthiest and most influential class in the city.¹⁵ The restrictions on international trade during the embargo and nonintercourse temporarily ended this prosperity. It also caused great problems throughout Virginia for farmers, merchants, artisans, and others who depended on profits from the grain and tobacco trade for their livelihood.

¹⁴ Seiner, "Charles Yates," 39-42; Thomas S. Berry "The Rise of Flour Milling in Richmond," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 78 (October 1970): 391, 396-8; James G. Scott and Edward A. Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story: A History* (Petersburg, 1960), 50.

¹⁵ Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 77; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 91, 93, 94, 101-102.

Norfolk may have been a turbulent city at the turn of the century, but Virginia's politics, dominated by the Republican party, were anything but turbulent. Regions with relatively large merchant populations, specifically Norfolk, Richmond, and the vicinity of Alexandria, as well as the Eastern Shore, contained the only significant Federalist strongholds within the predominantly Republican Piedmont and Tidewater. Federalist support of strong currency and a large navy to protect shipping gained the party many merchant followers. Enough Federalists lived in Norfolk and Richmond to support Federalist newspapers. While Republicans controlled the eastern portion of the state, Federalists had relatively more followers in the Valley and Transallegheny. Due to their fears of the Indians and British in the West, the people of the Transallegheny supported the Federalists' promotion of a strong federal government.¹⁶

The issue of states' rights created the main division between the two parties. Republicans believed the structure of the United States government required strong states to check federal power. Federalists supported strong centralized national government which could protect and enrich the whole country. During Jefferson's Republican administration, many Virginians believed that his leadership would ensure the safety of republicanism in the United States, keeping the national government weak in comparison to the state governments. In contrast, the Federalist John Adams's administration had sought to increase the federal government's power and create special privileges for the moneyed class. Adams achieved this end by creating the Bank of United States and by following other policies that many Virginians perceived as favoring the commercialized northern states. In international affairs, Republicans tended to favor France in its struggles

¹⁶James H. Broussard, *The Southern Federalists, 1800-1816* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 200; Rice, *The Allegheny Frontier*, 342-343.

against Great Britain because they sympathized with the French revolutionaries whom Republicans believed fought for freedom as American revolutionaries had. The Federalists generally supported Great Britain because of commercial ties and cultural similarities with the United States.

The election of Jefferson to the presidency in 1800 quieted party strife within the commonwealth. Jefferson swept the Old Dominion, receiving 13,363 of Virginia's 20,797 votes, winning all but Loudon and Augusta counties. The eastern towns and cities, with large Federalist populations, split their votes between the two candidates. Created to oppose Jefferson, the Federalist General Committee disbanded after the election and never revived. Twenty-seven percent of the Virginia General Assembly that was elected in March 1800 and met during the winter of 1800-1801 was Federalist, but from 1801 to 1808 the Federalists controlled only thirteen to eighteen percent of the seats.¹⁷

With their victory in 1800, Virginia Republicans worked to consolidate their power. General Assembly and Congressional elections were conducted by voice vote in public, which kept dissensions to a minimum. The state legislature also gerrymandered the Congressional districts created in 1801 to reduce Federalist influence. The Federalist West received only six districts when the size of its population required eight, and the two strongly Federalist Eastern Shore counties were grouped with several Republican Tidewater counties. Perhaps the strongest disincentive to Federalism came from the political appointment of judges and state militia generals which meant that aspirants to those positions had to support the Republican cause. Furthermore, powerful men controlled Old Dominion politics at all levels. To win an election, candidates had to gain support from leading men in

¹⁷ Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia, S.C., 1980), 214; Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 79; Richard R. Beeman, *The Old Dominion and the New Nation, 1788-1801* (Lexington, 1972), 238; Broussard, *The Southern Federalists*, 294.

the district, a nearly impossible feat for an outsider or someone with unusual political views. After 1800, Virginia Federalists gained election only through personal prestige, or when Republican policy conflicted with their district's needs.¹⁸

The Federalist-Republican party split does not explain all the differences among Virginia politicians. Representatives from east and west of the Blue Mountains sometimes opposed one another. Economic differences between the two regions caused a certain amount of friction. The creation of western counties, each of which brought two representatives to the General Assembly, often caused division along sectional lines as the eastern representatives sought to maintain their control over a commonwealth whose population was moving westward. For instance, the General Assembly had to vote on the division of Harrison county six times before the act passed.¹⁹

Many of Virginia's Republicans proved themselves supporters of agriculturally-based economic development when they backed the establishment of the Bank of Virginia in early 1804. The great expansion of the grain trade during the previous two decades had created a need for a reliable banking institution. However, Virginians believed in the republican principles of balanced government and virtuous citizenry as the basis for republican society. For them, the concentration of economic power in a state bank threatened republican society: corrupt men in control of the state bank could gain undue influence over many people. To allay this fear, Abraham Venable, a respected Republican and former senator, was chosen as the first president, and the simultaneous sale of bank stock in many locations also ensured that no one person or area could gain complete

¹⁸ Broussard, *The Southern Federalists*, 200-207; Anthony F. Upton, "The Road to Power in Virginia in the Early Nineteenth Century," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 62 (July 1954): 263; Beeman, *The Old Dominion*, 238. These restraints on free political expression make it difficult to determine Virginians' true political beliefs.

¹⁹ Broussard, *The Southern Federalists*, 209.

control over the bank. Even though Republican party leadership openly endorsed the project, enough conservative members of the legislature opposed it to keep the bill's outcome in doubt until the final vote.²⁰ The problem of the practical application of republicanism to economic matters arose again during the embargo and nonintercourse when Virginians sought to combine their capital to establish manufactories.

The immediate cause of the embargo came not from Virginia's politics, but from the impressment of American sailors on the high seas by the British Navy. In particular, the impetus came from the incident in June 1807 when the British war ship *Leopard* forcefully removed (from the American perspective, impressed) four seamen from the United States frigate *Chesapeake*.

The issue of impressment arose out of the war Great Britain and France had fought against each other since 1793. America's neutral trade during the war carried great risks as both France and England waged economic warfare on the international commerce of the other country. Throughout the war, England exercised the internationally accepted right of visitation and search of neutral vessels which included stopping and inspecting American ships for enemy goods, contraband, and French military personnel. British officials also searched American ships in British ports for English seamen whom they then impressed into British naval service. The American government believed that Great Britain had a right to conduct these searches in its own ports, but objected when, in 1796, the British began impressing seamen on the high seas.²¹

²⁰ Kathryn R. Malone, "The Fate of Revolutionary Republicanism in Early National Virginia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 7 (Spring 1987): 35-40;

²¹ James Zimmerman, *Impressment of American Seamen* (New York, 1925) 19, 48, 21, 260.

nonbelligerent ships could no longer briefly stay at a neutral port between two French-controlled ports to establish their neutrality. As a result, British commanders seized and condemned about sixty American ships during the next several months. Official protestations against what Americans perceived as an arbitrary act without precedent led nowhere as the British also increased their impressment of American seamen.²²

In response to these perceived attacks on American sovereignty and rights, Congress passed the Nonimportation Act. Signed by Jefferson in early 1806, the act sought to coerce the British into taking a more respectful attitude towards the United States by limiting British imports. Through a combination of hopefulness and indecisiveness, Congress postponed the act several times until it took effect in December 1807.²³ Before that date, however, a British commander's actions would enrage Virginians and cause many to call for war.

During the spring of 1807, numerous English seamen deserted British naval vessels in the Chesapeake Bay in search of better pay and treatment aboard American ships. In March 1807, several sailors left the British ship *Melampus* and the gun sloop *Halifax* in Hampton Roads. When the sailors reached Norfolk, they enlisted on the American frigate *Chesapeake* along with sailors from five other British ships who joined in the months that followed. British officials reported the deserters and their destination to Admiral Berkeley, British Naval Commander at Halifax. On June 7, 1807, without authority from Great Britain, the Admiral issued orders for captains under his command to search the *Chesapeake* if they found her outside of United States boundaries.²⁴

²² Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Los Angeles, 1961) 76-90.

²³ Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 108-112.

²⁴ Zimmerman, *Impressment of American Seamen*, 135-136.

orders for captains under his command to search the *Chesapeake* if they found her outside of United States boundaries.²⁴

With orders in hand, Captain Humphreys of the British frigate *Leopard* encountered Commodore Barron's *Chesapeake* ten miles off the coast of Cape Henry on June 22, 1807. The *Leopard* drew alongside the American ship and Humphreys announced his intention to search her. Commodore Barron attempted to resist, but after a fifteen-minute skirmish, the *Chesapeake* lowered her colors with three men dead and eighteen injured. The British boarded and removed four deserters from the *Melampus* whom they brought to Halifax, imprisoning three who were Americans, and hanging the fourth, an Englishman.²⁵

The *Chesapeake* affair, the only incident during the Early Republican period of a British vessel searching an American warship, immediately ignited passion for war and vocal patriotism in Virginia and throughout the nation. In Norfolk, where citizens knew the *Chesapeake's* sailors, a meeting was called at the town hall, and moved to a church when the crowd overflowed the hall's capacity. The group passed resolutions declaring indignation at the attack, and support for the United States government, and refusing to provide pilots, food, or water for any British ship of war. On June 28, at the funeral for Robert MacDonald, fatally injured aboard the *Chesapeake*, four thousand townspeople processed. Fearing the attack on the *Chesapeake* signalled the beginning of a war, the people of Norfolk worked hard to fortify the city. Young men formed a volunteer militia company, collected powder, and repaired Fort Norfolk and government gunboats as Norfolk prepared to fight.²⁶

²⁴ Zimmerman, *Impressment of American Seamen*, 135-136.

²⁵ Zimmerman, *Impressment of American Seamen*, 136-137; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 109.

²⁶ *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, June 24, 29, July 1, 1807, cited in Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 109-111.

The rest of Virginia supported Norfolk's actions and attitudes. Many counties and cities held town meetings similar to Norfolk's. Williamsburg residents hastily called a meeting on June 25, and two days later "the Citizens of Richmond, Manchester and of their vicinities and many other persons from distant places" met at the capitol in Richmond.²⁷ The members of the committee that wrote resolutions for the Richmond meeting included powerful Virginia politicians, such as Lieutenant Governor Alexander McRae, Chancellor Creed Taylor, and Henrico's Assemblyman William Foushee. In the weeks that followed, the people of Lynchburg, Albemarle County, Bent-Creek, Fredericksburg, Petersburg, and even Wheeling in the Transallegheeny, also held meetings. The resolutions adopted usually expressed support for the people of Norfolk, called for an end to intercourse with British war ships, and declared patriotism and support for the American government. Although these resolutions referred to the attack as an outrage, none called for immediate hostilities. Petersburg's resolutions went further than others, demanding "a suspension of all intercourse with Great-Britain, until such intercourse can be enjoyed on terms of reciprocal respect and independence."²⁸ This statement looked back to the nonimportation of English goods during the American Revolution and also foreshadowed President Jefferson's subsequent response to current conflicts with England.

The Fourth of July celebrations in Richmond demonstrated the heightened sense of patriotism in the wake of the *Chesapeake* affair. The *Richmond Enquirer* reported,

It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm and fervour which animated all our citizens on the celebration of American Independence. .

²⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, July 1, 1807.

²⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, June 27, July 3, 17, 24, 1807; Charles Hammond, et al, *To the Citizens of Ohio County* (Wheeling, 1809), a handbill reprinted in Daniel P. Jordan, "Congressional Electioneering in Early West Virginia: A Mini-War in Broad-sides, 1809," *West Virginia History* 33 (October 1971): 68, mentions the meeting in Wheeling.

. What is it but to say that the spirit of '76 is completely resuscitated? .
 . . Richmond was on that day the miniature of the nation. The eye
 could turn no where without beholding the pomp and preparations of
 war; the ear could scarce catch any sound, but the warm effusions of
 attachment to our independence or of indignations against BRITISH
 OUTRAGE.²⁹

Demonstrations of military expertise by the militia, orations, and toasts marked the
 celebrations which lasted from day break to evening. The same paper captured the
 feelings in Richmond in early July.

Every thing around us breathes the spirit of war. The Volunteer
 Corps are parading in the morning and evening. The young are
 animated by the highest sensations of military ardour, and the old heroes
 of war are seen shedding tears of joy at the revived spirit of the
 American Revolution.³⁰

In fact, the incident drove many Virginians to join the militia. After the departure
 of the Richmond cavalry in early July to defend Norfolk, a group of men, some
 exempt from militia service, organized themselves into another cavalry corps. In
 nearby Hanover county, about two hundred young men volunteered for service
 during July.³¹ The excitement of defending the nation even drove Thomas Ritchie
 to end his honeymoon early to join the militia.³² Some Richmonders, though,
 feared the consequences of war, including merchant James Innes who hoped "that
 people may have time to reflect coolly on the destructive consequences of War."
 But he had to admit that "undoubtedly at present there is a large Spark of war on
 our horizon."³³

²⁹ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 8, 1807. This account may overemphasize the unity of spirit, especially in light
 of editor Thomas Ritchie's enthusiasm, as described below.

³⁰ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 8, 1807.

³¹ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 17, 21, 1807.

³² Charles H. Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie* (Richmond, 1913) 42-43 cited in Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 42-43.

³³ Innes to Francis Jerdone, July 3, 1807, Jerdone Family Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department,
 Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

Virginians' excitement and "military ardour" proved temporary and directed towards the defense of Virginia, not an offensive war against Great Britain. The resolutions of the committees formed in the wake of the *Chesapeake* affair often decried the perils of war, but vowed to uphold American honor by any means necessary. Thomas Jefferson wrote to Governor William Cabell that he had received "a great number" of applications from volunteers to repel an invasion, but not to enlist for a full year. The Mayor of Norfolk, in his letter to the Commodore of the British ship *Bellona*, captured the mood well when he wrote, "We do not seek hostility, nor shall we avoid it."³⁴ England clearly represented a threat to the nation, and Virginians sought to protect themselves and their honor.

Thus excited by the *Chesapeake* affair, the citizens of Virginia had an opportunity to reflect coolly during late summer and fall as they waited for the national government to act. Immediately after the incident, Jefferson had favored war against Great Britain, in the belief that the British actively threatened American commerce and that the United States had its best opportunity for success against Britain while the British fought France. To avoid forewarning England, Jefferson did not call Congress into early session to declare war, expecting that public opinion for war would continue into the fall. Instead, Jefferson prohibited British warships from American waters and issued orders to mobilize gunboats and recall naval vessels from the Mediterranean. During the summer, the administration outlined plans for war and embargo, and dispatched the *Revenge* to England with instructions for Ambassador James Monroe to seek assurances that Britain would not commit further violations of American sovereignty. By the time Congress

³⁴ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 8, 17, 1807; Jefferson to Cabell, August 17, 1807, *The Thomas Jefferson Papers*, Presidential Papers Collection, Reel 39, Library of Congress.

convened on October 26, England had apologized for the Chesapeake incident, but it was clear that the British would continue their policy of impressment.³⁵

By October, Congressmen reflected the public's waning spirit for war. In December 1807, as Congress allowed the Nonimportation Act to go into effect, news from Europe promised worsening trade conditions. The British government had reasserted its right of impressment on October 17, and an order-in-council in November forbade neutrals to trade with French-controlled European ports except under British license. This measure directly threatened America's ability to export native goods to foreign markets. Further news told of Napoleon, in the wake of Continental victories, enforcing the blockade of England for the first time. These provocations prompted Jefferson on December 18 to propose to Congress his only alternative to war or submission, an embargo. Congress quickly approved the measure and Jefferson signed it into law on December 22, 1807.³⁶

In combination with the Nonimportation act, the embargo nearly eliminated the international commerce that had enriched Virginia and the nation. Virginians would have to confront the economic and political consequences of a foreign policy that many in the Old Dominion politically and patriotically favored.

³⁵ Burton Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis: Commerce, Embargo, and the Republican Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979) 74-84; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 143-156.

³⁶ Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (New York, 1962) 103-111; Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980) 216.

CHAPTER II

THE EMBARGO BEGINS

Virginia's Republican newspapers hailed the embargo. "It is our firm belief, too," wrote Ritchie, "that it will contribute to bring the European nations to a sense of justice."³⁷ For Republicans who no longer desired immediate war against Britain, the embargo provided an appealing middle ground between war and submissive peace. But the Federalist papers predicted disaster. The embargo's enforcement of a "dignified retirement within ourselves" will "produce universal distress to our country, and ruin to thousands of industrious citizens," declared the *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*.³⁸ Ritchie also foresaw economic problems, but believed the embargo would bring the European nations "to a sense of justice," if the American people would patriotically uphold the measure and "submit to the inconveniences of the law."³⁹ In late December, however, the newspapers could provide only opinions; the true effects of the embargo were yet to be seen.

The December 1807 "act laying an embargo on all ships and vessels in the ports and harbors of the United States" prohibited any American ship from departing for any foreign port without Presidential authorization (foreign ships in the United States on December 22 could leave with their cargo, but those that arrived thereafter had to depart in ballast only). Before American ships could leave

³⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, December 31, 1807.

³⁸ *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, December 30, 1807.

³⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, December 31, 1807.

for a domestic port, the owner, master, and/or shipper had to post a bond for twice the combined value of their vessel and cargo as insurance that they would reland the ship and its cargo in the United States.⁴⁰

Despite the bonds, the December 22 embargo law proved ineffective at halting trade as some Americans took advantage of the deflated price of goods (especially flour) in the United States and the inflated price in Britain's possessions, to smuggle goods across American borders. In the West Indies, for instance, where the inhabitants did not raise their own grains and relied on American supplies, prices soared. The *Virginia Argus* reported that traders in Havana would pay twenty-four dollars per flour barrel, eighteen dollars at Port Maria, Jamaica, and fourteen dollars at St. Croix. At the same time, merchants could buy flour at four dollars a barrel in Richmond.⁴¹ The temptation proved too great for many Americans. At President Jefferson's suggestion, Congress amended the embargo laws several times to prevent smuggling. On January 9, Congress gave the embargo extra teeth by declaring that embargo violations would result in the forfeiture of both the ship and cargo involved, and that the United States government would no longer accept convicted smugglers' oaths. The law also required owners of vessels which operated only in bays and rivers to post a three hundred dollar bond. This law applied to all vessels, and Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin made sure that the revenue collectors who enforced the law knew that the embargo extended even to "boats under five tons, without deck or masts, batteaux, canoes, and flats."⁴² Sailors of small craft regularly plying the Chesapeake Bay to fish or trade had to

⁴⁰ Circular to Collectors, December 22, 1807, *Papers of Albert Gallatin* (New York: Scholarly Resources, Inc.), Reel 18.

⁴¹ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, April 26, 1808.

⁴² Circulars to Collectors, January 9 and 14, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

pay a fee the equivalent of about sixty barrels (twelve thousand pounds) of flour at pre-embargo prices, about as much as a common laborer earned in a year.⁴³

The most extensive changes in the law came during late April and early May, in reaction to extensive smuggling in the border towns of Eastport, Maine and St. Marys, Georgia. The supplementary law of April 25 not only prohibited the clearance of any vessel for these or any other border town, but also gave the collectors the authority to refuse clearance to any shipper suspected of intending to evade the embargo. That is, shippers could be prevented from sailing merely on the basis of suspicion. The administration construed "intent" so widely that, as Jefferson wrote to several governors, "there being few towns on our sea-coast which cannot be supplied with flour from their interior country, shipments of flour become generally suspicious, and proper subjects of detention." This policy would have severely constricted Virginia's flour trade because most flour went to customers in the United States, but Jefferson allowed several governors to grant permission for shippers to send flour to ports that had not received sufficient supplies from inland.⁴⁴ On May 6, Gallatin further restricted trade by prohibiting all shipping within the Chesapeake Bay because he believed the bay towns did not need to import supplies. On May 18, though, he loosened the restrictions by allowing planters who traditionally sent produce to particular towns to continue to do so. He also exempted trade along a single river and permitted trade to towns that usually received supplies by ship. Collectors were urged to remain vigilant and

⁴³ John Howe, a British spy, had estimated a common American laborer's earnings at one to one and one-half dollars per day. Howe to Sir George Provost, ca. September 1808, in "Secret Reports of John Howe, 1808, II," *American Historical Review* 17 (January 1912): 333.

⁴⁴ Circular to Collectors, April 27, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18; Jefferson to the Governors of Orleans, Georgia, South Carolina, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, May 6, 1808, *Jefferson Papers*, Reel 41.

obtain bonds from all ships travelling within the bay.⁴⁵

As the amendments reveal, the embargo did not halt all Virginia shipping. The Jefferson administration did its best, though, to prevent American products from reaching foreign shores through strict laws enforced by revenue collectors and their quickly growing staffs (Norfolk Collector Larkin Smith reported in November that trade along the coast had increased so much that he needed as many clerks as "when our commerce was in a flourishing state").⁴⁶ The combined effect of law and enforcement greatly reduced trade. The *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, which had contained numerous advertisements for ship and shippers bound for foreign destinations prior to the embargo, had only one or two such ads per issue throughout 1808, and those featured ships bound up the coast to Boston or New York.⁴⁷

The Treasury Department's records support the image of Virginia trade reduced to a trickle. Between October 1802 and September 1807, Virginia exported an average of 986,000 barrels of flour a year to both foreign and domestic ports, but from October 1807 to September 1808 Virginians exported only 263,800 barrels (twenty-seven percent of the previous average). The next year's exports under nonintercourse rebounded to 846,200 barrels, the highest level between the embargo and the War of 1812. Corn exports experienced an even more severe drop during the embargo, falling to 249,500 bushels, nineteen percent of the 1802-1807 average. The nonintercourse act ended in 1810 before corn exports regained their pre-embargo high. From October 1807 to September 1808, tobacco exports declined even more dramatically, to twelve percent of the 1802-1807 average, and did not

⁴⁵ Circulars to Collectors, May 6 and 18, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

⁴⁶ Smith to Albert Gallatin, November 20, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

⁴⁷ See, for example, *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, January 20 and 26, 1808.

the previous five years' average, and from October 1808 to September 1809 amounted to no more than half the average. Foreign shipments likewise declined to a meager five percent of the pre-embargo average (probably all or most occurring from October to December 1807), and during 1808-1809 to twenty-five percent of the five-year average.⁴⁸

The Treasury Department figures reveal a dramatic decline, but they only record shipments that merchants reported to local collectors. They do not include merchandise that shippers smuggled to the West Indies, Britain, or other foreign ports. It is impossible to calculate exactly how much flour and other goods Virginians smuggled during the embargo, because successful smugglers left no records of their activities. However, Virginia collectors reported relatively few known smugglers, hinting that there also were probably few unknown smugglers. Responses from collectors to Gallatin's request to report the number of embargo violations from December 1807 to October 1808, revealed that Richmond Collector John Gibbon's district had nine suspected cases of smuggling, the highest number for any Virginia district.⁴⁹ In Norfolk, Collector Larkin Smith claimed five ships had violated the embargo, and Alexandria Collector Charles Simms reported four evasions, while the Petersburg and Dumfries collectors reported only one infraction in each district.⁵⁰ Possibly the sparcity of reported smugglers resulted from some collectors turning their backs to embargo violations or even collaborating. However, the methods smugglers had to use to export goods indicates that enforcement of the embargo did exist.

⁴⁸ Adam Seybert, *Statistical Annals*, 110-112, 143-144.

⁴⁹ Gibbon to Gallatin, November 21, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

⁵⁰ Smith to Gallatin, November 25, 1808, Simms to Gallatin, November 22, 1808, John Linton to Gallatin, November 24, 1808, and Shore to Gallatin, November 25, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

However, the methods smugglers had to use to export goods indicates that enforcement of the embargo did exist.

According to the collectors, shippers had devised several ways to evade the embargo laws, but Petersburg merchant John Bell's method was the most brazen. In late January, Bell legally cleared the ironically-named schooner *Good Intent* from Petersburg via Norfolk to Boston with one thousand barrels of flour. As the ship left Norfolk, Bell sent out a boat with a replacement captain and crew who forced themselves on board and sent the original sailors back to Norfolk. The new crew then set sail for St. Bartholomew in the West Indies where flour sold at three to four times its United States value.⁵¹ Of course, not every evasion proved as dramatic as Bell's; many simply took advantage of a loophole in the December 22 embargo law which permitted American ships driven by the "dangers of the sea" to land and unload their cargo in foreign ports.⁵² Because no method existed for landlocked American authorities to prove whether a gale had occurred, many captains intentionally set sail for the West Indies and afterwards claimed a storm had driven them there. For instance, a captain in Norfolk described to British spy John Howe how bad weather had "providentially" carried him to Kingston, Jamaica, where he "providentially" sold his flour for about five times what he had purchased it for. If he could successfully reclaim his bonds, the captain planned to return to Jamaica within six weeks.⁵³ Beginning in May 1808, traders in Virginia's port towns took advantage of the Governors' permits to ship goods. The shipper gained clearance for the port specified in his permit, but only partially filled his vessel.

⁵¹ Shore to Gallatin, November 9, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18; *Richmond Virginia Argus*, February 3, 1808.

⁵² Circular to Collectors, December 22, 1807, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

⁵³ John Howe to Sir George Provost, August 5, 1808, in "Secret Reports of John Howe, 1808, I," *American Historical Review* 17 (October 1911), 99.

En route he would secretly take on additional cargo which he would sell in the West Indies, and then sail to the approved American port with the original cargo. Despite the discrepancy in the time it took from one American port to another, the collectors could not charge the shipper with smuggling. The Chesapeake Bay, with many rivers leading into it and the large number of small craft on its waters, provided an ideal place to secretly load the additional cargo.⁵⁴

Between the smugglers collectors reported and those who escaped detection, it seems unlikely that smuggling could have made up the deficit of exports the embargo caused. The Virginia collectors reported a total of twenty suspected smugglers by November 1808. If each smuggler's ship carried an average of one thousand barrels of flour, their twenty thousand barrels would barely make a dent in the seven hundred thousand barrel difference between the official exports during the embargo and the preceding five year average exports. An additional 680 shipments would be needed to cover just the flour deficit, more than two departures a day; a highly improbable amount given the vigilance of the inspectors. A more likely figure would be that as much flour was shipped illegally from Virginia as legally (about 200,000 barrels or two hundred shipments), and even that estimate may be too high. Thus the embargo prevented about 480 shipments of flour alone, and the proportions of halted shipments of other goods must have been even higher.

The decline in shipping, legal and illegal, immediately and directly affected one group of Virginians: sailors. On February 11, 1808, only eight weeks after the passage of the embargo, the seamen in Alexandria petitioned President Jefferson for assistance. "The situation of many of the seamen in this port is truly distressing as they have no means to procure money even to pay their board," declared Henry

⁵⁴ John Shore to Albert Gallatin, November 23, 1808, and Albert Gallatin to Collectors of Alexandria, Tappahanoc, Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk, November 10, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

Moore of Alexandria.⁵⁵ Jefferson helpfully suggested that they could find employment in the Washington Naval Yards. In early May many ships in Alexandria were laden for an immediate departure in hopes that Congress would lift the embargo, but by August "scarcely twenty Seamen" worked on Alexandria's wharves.⁵⁶ In Norfolk, too, because sailors suddenly could not find work, the residents tried to assist the unemployed. In early March a meeting had been called to consider raising money to sent indigent seamen to Washington to find work, but not enough people attended. Despite a petition by "sundry seamen of Norfolk" to Norfolk residents immediately following the failed meeting, a month passed before the Thespian Society established a "Vitualling House" to feed the Norfolk poor. The situation proved so desperate that within a few days the society had spent more than half of its 1200 dollars in contributions on house rents, clothing, provisions, and medicines.⁵⁷ Many Virginia seamen, like their northern comrades, may have eventually made their way up the American coast to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where British captains eagerly employed them.⁵⁸

The embargo also affected merchants, if not so severely as the seamen they employed. In Norfolk, St. George Tucker took the precaution of quarterly collecting rent from his merchant tenants on Campbell's Wharf instead of half-yearly because of "the unfavorable aspect of our public affairs, & the embargoed situation of our commerce."⁵⁹ By early January, Dr. Barraud glumly reported that

⁵⁵ Moore to Jefferson, February 13, 1808, *Jefferson Papers*, Reel 40.

⁵⁶ Jefferson to Henry Moorer, February 18, 1808, *Jefferson Papers*, Reel 40; "Journal of Captain Henry Massie, April-June 1808," *Tyler's Quarterly Magazine* 4 (October 1922): 78; Howe to Sir George Provost, August 5, 1808, "Secret Reports, I," *AHR*, 98.

⁵⁷ *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, March 14, 16, April 18, and 22, 1808.

⁵⁸ "Massie's Journal," *Tyler's*, 84.

⁵⁹ Edward Waddy to St. George Tucker, January 3, 1808, and Notice to the tenants on Campbell's Wharf &c, December 30, 1807, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Microfilm Reel M-24, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

in Norfolk "there was nothing doing in the world of Business but a few attempts to smuggle Cargoes of Flour & Provisions."⁶⁰ Thomas Rutherford, a Richmond merchant and flour miller, later remembered the summer of 1808 as a period "during which I had been much more at leisure than I had been for many years before," and spent the many months with his family visiting friends.⁶¹

Sailors and merchants directly dependent on shipping were relatively small groups in early nineteenth-century Virginia, and were centered in large coastal and fall-line cities. The embargo affected most Virginians by its impact on agricultural prices which fell rapidly in the Piedmont and Tidewater regions. "In twelve hours after the news of the Embargo," complained a Charlottesville resident, "flour fell from 5 1/2\$ to 2 1/2 at this place, and Tobacco from 5/2 to 3\$ and everything [else] in proportion."⁶² A gentleman in Bedford County reported in early January that "The present state of our public affairs is truly gloomy. Tobacco at Lynchburg 15s [fifteen shillings, about two and one half dollars], and dull at that."⁶³ A Richmonder agreed, "The embargo has spoiled our business."⁶⁴

The prices of agricultural products remained low throughout the embargo, although they rebounded slightly from the sudden crash following the law's passage. Wheat sold in Richmond lost one-third of its value, dropping from one dollar per bushel in the Fall of 1807 to sixty-seven cents per bushel from January through June 1808--the lowest price since before 1801. Corn, which had sold for eighty

⁶⁰ Dr. P. Barraud to St. George Tucker, January 10, 1808, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

⁶¹ Thomas Rutherford, "Autobiography 1766-1852," Personal Papers Collection, Virginia State Archives, p. 70.

⁶² John Kelly to William Taylor, January 6, 1808, William Taylor Papers, Library of Congress, cited in Louis Martin Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo* (New York, 1966), 229.

⁶³ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 14, 1808.

⁶⁴ *Martinsburg Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer*, January 29, 1808, the Richmonder's letter was dated January 8.

cents to one dollar per bushel in 1807, lost more than half of its value during the embargo, plummeting to forty cents from January to June. Both grains slowly increased in value beginning in July 1808, with wheat regaining its pre-embargo price by March 1809, and corn doing so in August 1810.⁶⁵ Flour had sold for six to seven and one half dollars per barrel during the winter of 1806 and 1807, and a year later it sold for only four to four and one half dollars per barrel. Flour slowly moved up to five dollars during the summer and fall of 1808. Tobacco, which sold at five and one-half to seven dollars per hundred weight during the previous winter, dropped to four dollars during the embargo winter.⁶⁶

These figures indicate that prices decreased by about one third in Richmond, not an astronomical decline. However, a Republican editor provided the prices and may well have chosen to report the highest in the city.⁶⁷ In contrast, editorialists in other newspapers generally agreed that agricultural goods had lost about half their pre-embargo value.⁶⁸ The amounts Tidewater and Piedmont planters could get for their crops probably ranged between the two figures depending on the circumstances.

Besides the Tidewater and Piedmont regions, the depressed agricultural prices also affected Valley planters and farmers, who generally sold their surplus products to fall-line city merchants, such as those in Richmond and Alexandria. The planters and farmers in the Valley thus received depressed prices for their goods when and

⁶⁵ Arthur G. Peterson, *Historical Study of Prices Received by Producers of Farm Products in Virginia, 1801-1927* (Richmond, 1929), 72, 74.

⁶⁶ Prices based on superfine flour reported in Richmond *Enquirer* December 1806-February 1807, and the Richmond *Virginia Argus* January 1808-February 1808. Thomas Ritchie suspended the *Enquirer's* market price reports from January 5, 1808 to April 18, 1809, perhaps because of political reasons or because of difficulty in finding reliable prices during a period of slowed trade.

⁶⁷ Samuel Pleasants edited the *Virginia Argus*, and had such impressive Republican credentials that the General Assembly had appointed him as the official printer of their laws and proceedings.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Richmond *Virginia Gazette and Public Advertiser* May 20, 1808.

if they tried to sell them. In the Transallegheny region, prices probably did not decline as much as they did in eastern Virginia. In early 1805, Archibald Woods, a miller in Wheeling, received between four and one-half and five and one-half dollars per barrel of flour. By February 1807, prices had declined, and he agreed to sell flour at three dollars and seventy-five cents per barrel. Despite having difficulty finding a buyer, Woods sold flour at four dollars per barrel in April 1808. The relatively competitive price for flour during the embargo shows that the people west of the Allegheny mountains probably felt the embargo's effects much less than those people with easier access to the international market and more surplus goods available for sale.⁶⁹

These depressed prices applied only to those farmers lucky enough to find merchants to whom they could sell; not everyone could find buyers at any price. By late January, the people of Norfolk would only buy small amounts of goods that they could consume at home, instead of large quantities for trading. Planters could not sell one thousand barrels of flour at a time, even for four dollars fifty cents per barrel, and naval and lumber stores would not fetch any price whatsoever because no one needed those items at home.⁷⁰ In Fredericksburg, Robert Patton would not purchase corn from the wealthy Williamsburg judge St. George Tucker in May, despite having bought in years past, because of "the particular situation in which our Country is placed." Specifically, the embargo regulations which restricted the movement of corn up the coast made Patton unwilling to purchase. Tucker did not

⁶⁹ James Baird to Woods, January 14, 1805, Samuel McClure to Woods, May 17, 1805, Richard and Samuel McClure to Woods, February 21, 1807, and Levin Okey to Woods, April 22, 1808, Archibald Woods Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

⁷⁰ *Norfolk Gazette*, January 26, 1808.

try to sell his corn again until early March 1809 when the embargo ended, and then Patton proved at least mildly interested in the crop.⁷¹

Many farmers may have withheld their crops from the market under the commonly held belief that the embargo would last for only a few months. The *Federalist Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger* reported in late January that "of corn and flour there is but little in the market," and advised farmer and millers to keep their grains in warehouses in the expectation of a short embargo.⁷² An Albemarle county planter in February expressed the confusion shared by many others; he would have brought his wheat and tobacco to Richmond early in the winter, but with "the change in our political affairs" he found himself at a loss as to what to do with his goods.⁷³ Once Congress adjourned in April with a tightening, rather than loosening of the embargo, many farmers (and plantation owners) faced the necessity of selling their crops at low prices to pay their debts and taxes. Even so, during the first half of 1808, planters brought only 28,000 barrels of flour into Richmond, half of the usual amount.⁷⁴

The lower prices in eastern Virginia created difficulties for farmers trying to pay taxes and debts. The people of Albemarle County (Thomas Jefferson's home county) had to sell their crops at low prices during the embargo to pay their taxes. By December, many county residents feared that the losses caused by the embargo and poor weather during 1808 had made them "unable...to pay their Just debts without making sacrifices of their property that would ruin them and their families."

⁷¹ Robert Patton to St. George Tucker, May 23, 1808, and March 5, 1809, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

⁷² *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, January 26, 1808.

⁷³ *Virginia Gazette and Public Advertiser*, February 23, 1808.

⁷⁴ *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, June 1, 1808.

A petition to the Virginia legislature requesting assistance met with no support.⁷⁵ About fifty miles to the southeast, Amelia County residents could not even pay their taxes "without a sacrifice of [their] property," according to the deputy sheriff who had tried to collect those taxes. With a kind heart, the deputy advanced money for those he felt could eventually pay him back.⁷⁶

The loss of income from crops meant that not only were taxes difficult to pay, but so were other debts. Debts were usually due around Christmas and paid by selling wheat and tobacco during the winter.⁷⁷ The embargo's timing thus caused additional hardships for farmers because by November or December of each year planters generally had spent their income from the previous year's crop and would not have yet brought their newly harvested produce to market.⁷⁸ Had the embargo passed a month or two later, merchants would have felt its effects more than farmers because farmers would have paid their debts and merchants would be holding the devalued crops. The lack of demand for flour in Alexandria in January 1808 forced Edmund Brooke of Prince William County to request additional time to repay a one thousand dollar debt.⁷⁹ John Bell, the Petersburg merchant who had tried to smuggle goods to the West Indies, also could not meet the terms of a debt. Bell's creditor required payment in cash, probably because grains or tobacco taken in barter would not sell, but Bell could raise sufficient funds. By July, Bell had to rely on the indulgence of his creditor and await the end of the embargo when, as he

⁷⁵ "The petition of Sundry inhabitants of the County of Albemarle," December 1808, Legislative Petitions Collection, Albemarle County, Virginia State Library.

⁷⁶ John T. Leigh to the Virginia Legislature, December 10, 1810, Legislative Petitions, Amelia County.

⁷⁷ Hickory Homespun, "To the Legislature of Virginia," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 28, 1808.

⁷⁸ Richard Beeman, ed., "Trade and Travel in Post-Revolutionary Virginia: A Diary of an Itinerant Peddler, 1807-1808," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 84 (1976), 179.

⁷⁹ Brooke to Tucker, January 12, 1808, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

wrote, "the ability of others, will afford me the means of doing justice to you [the creditor]." ⁸⁰ The inability of debtors to repay their obligations could in turn cause the creditor to default on his own debts. For instance, William Wilson of Alexandria informed St. George Tucker that he could not repay him because a man who had purchased a farm from Tucker "refuses to comply with the contract on Account of the Difficulties he foresees from the present aspect of National affairs." ⁸¹ These were fairly large debts; smaller farmers often owed local merchants for the seeds they had bought in spring and tools they had needed throughout the year.

To address the problems farmers encountered as they tried to pay their debts, on December 30, 1807 a member of Congress suggested to a friend in Richmond that the Virginia legislature pass a law that would prevent the sale of debtors' goods under execution. ⁸² This was the "old Replevin law," revived from the embargoes during the American Revolution that, as one Virginian explained it, "if you press a law process the Debtor can replevy on you for 12 months unless you will take property at three-fourths of its value, which would be a bad Business, when we want money." ⁸³ Although primarily occupied by debates on how to modify Virginia's judicial system, the legislature did pass the replevy bill to relieve debtors. The bill, which passed into law on February 1, 1808, required creditors to accept debtors' goods that had been taken in execution at three-quarters of their value on December 1, 1807, or to accept a bond to pay the full amount of the debt

⁸⁰ John Shore, Collector of Petersburg, to Albert Gallatin, January 11 and 31, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 15; John Bell to Lady Jean Skipwith, April 1 and July 9, 1808, *Skipwith Papers*, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

⁸¹ Wilson to Tucker, December 10, 1808, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

⁸² *Richmond Enquirer*, January 5, 1808.

⁸³ John Kelly to William Taylor, April 15, 1808, cited in Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo*, 230.

after a year, presumably after the debtor had a chance to sell next season's crops. The law easily passed through the General Assembly, went into effect on March 1, 1808, and continued until "the expiration of thirty days after the discontinuance of the embargo."⁸⁴

The replevy law was not universally supported, however. Henry St. George Tucker, a member of the House of Delegates from Winchester, joined the few who voted against the law because he believed the interference with deeds of trust was unconstitutional.⁸⁵ The *Norfolk Gazette's* editor argued that the law's passage would cause the British and French to "smile with contempt" when they realized that the embargo forced Virginians to suspend civil justice.⁸⁶ A letter-writer from Richmond expressed a more practical objection when he complained about his diminished opportunities for collecting debts.⁸⁷

As would be expected from a law that prohibited exportation of American products, the embargo had an immediate impact on the purchasing ability of farmers and merchants, but the embargo's economic effects extended beyond those who relied on foreign markets to those who depended on the purchasing power of farmers and merchants. One group who particularly relied on farmers' disposable income were peddlers. An anonymous Irish-born itinerant peddler recorded his disappointment that on December 31, 1807 at a slave sale in New Market, "There were a Number of People assembled but the a/c [account of] the Embargo having got there, very little of their Cash came into my Hands." The next time the peddler tried to sell his goods, on January 18, 1808, at the nearby Amherst County

⁸⁴ Richmond *Enquirer*, February 4, 1808.

⁸⁵ Tucker to St. George Tucker, February 3, 1808, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

⁸⁶ *Norfolk Gazette*, February 10, 1808.

⁸⁷ Martinsburg *Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer*, January 28, 1808.

courthouse, he again had "very poor Success." He ended his diary a few days later, but probably continued to make very few cash sales throughout the embargo, especially if he continued to peddle in the area near Albemarle County where the farmers would petition for relief later that year.⁸⁸

Many lawyers also relied on those who attended the county court meetings for income. Henry St. George Tucker, the same man who had opposed the Virginia House of Delegates' replevy resolution in January, complained to his father,

At our last August Court [in Frederick County] I began first to meet with anything like profitable practice, but my receipts in actual cash barely repayed my four or five days expenses. The chief of our circulating medium consists of that which every man can coin as fast as he can write--and so it will continue as long as the Embargo lasts.

By December, 1808, Tucker could not afford to send his family to Williamsburg to visit his father as he had done in previous years. "It is not easy to convey to you," he informed his father, "a correct idea of the effect on our practice produced by the difficulties of the Country, and the consequent effect on our purses: so that we think ourselves very well off if we can afford such to stay at home." Tucker even feared that he would have to abandon his practice and take up farming if the courts closed or the embargo continued.⁸⁹ While Henry Tucker had difficulties in the valley region, his brother Nathan estimated that in the Tidewater region near Williamsburg, lawyers had earned only one-quarter as much as usual during the embargo, and that if the courts closed in December 1808, as rumors predicted, the effect would deliver "the coup de grace to some petty beggars who degrade and injure the profession." One hopes he did not consider his brother among the beggars.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Beeman, "Trade and Travel," 187, 188.

⁸⁹ Tucker to St. George Tucker, October 9 and December 2, 1808, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

⁹⁰ Nathan Tucker to John Coalter, December 20, 1808, Swem Rare Books and Manuscripts, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

Dependent on advertising from Norfolk merchants and shippers, the editor of the *Norfolk Gazette* felt a shortage of advertising income by late March. "In this season of general distress and calamity," he wrote to his subscribers, "the editor of this paper neither expects, or claims an exemption."⁹¹ At about the same time, the *Virginia Argus's* editor felt that he had to make payment more convenient for his Richmond subscribers. "The great scarcity of money, and the low price of produce at present, may render it inconvenient to some of our customers to pay cash. For such, the printer will receive (during the continuance of the embargo) corn, flour, corn-meal, or fire wood, at the market prices."⁹²

The effects of the embargo even extended to those families who could afford to send their sons to college. Jane Charlton, who attended the Williamsburg Female Academy, estimated in December, 1808, that seventy young men studied at the College of William and Mary "which is a large Number considering the Embargo." She heard from many students that a continuation of the embargo would prevent them from returning in 1809. While the embargo ruined some planters and merchants, Charlton mainly feared its effects on her social life.⁹³

⁹¹ *Norfolk Gazette*, March 28, 1808.

⁹² Richmond *Virginia Argus*, April 5, 1808.

⁹³ Charlton to Sarah C. Watts, December 4, 1808, Sarah C. Watts Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

CHAPTER III

THE MANUFACTURING SPIRIT

Many Virginians reacted to the decline in their income and also to the perceived threat from Great Britain by supporting household manufactures (the production of clothing at home instead of purchasing it from importers) as both a measure of self-reliance and a patriotic gesture of defiance. Just prior to the embargo, Virginians who made their own fabrics consisted of the poor, the enslaved, and those who lived far away from places where merchants easily imported cloth. A certain number of poor white Virginians wore only what they could produce with their looms.⁹⁴ On large plantations, planters outfitted their slaves with household manufactures produced by female slaves.⁹⁵ In the Richmond area most planters made homespun only for their slaves.⁹⁶ In the Transallegheny region, where the high cost of transportation made imported fabrics expensive, most farming families produced their own clothing. Thus homespun had the reputation in Virginia as material produced and worn by slaves and by poor and rural whites.

Although many Virginians had always produced at least some of their own necessities, the economic conditions imposed by the embargo and nonimportation made household manufactures mandatory for more Virginians. The nonimportation act restricted the supplies of British finished goods, including clothing, on which

⁹⁴ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, June 28, 1808.

⁹⁵ Carol Shammass, "Black Women's Work and the Evolution of Plantation Society in Virginia," *Labor History*, 26 (1985), 24.

⁹⁶ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, May 27, 1808.

many Virginians had relied. If foreign vessels did import items not restricted by the nonimportation act, the embargo act required that any foreign vessel that entered an American port could not depart with items grown or produced in the United States, forcing an unprofitable return voyage with only ballast, and indirectly reducing imports. Thus the prices of imported articles rose in Virginia at the same time that Virginians found their incomes restricted by the embargo. As a result, some Virginians had to produce goods at home that they would have normally purchased from an importer. One Virginian, Judith Randolph of Farmville, Prince Edward County, found that in January 1808, "the Loom & Spining Wheel, or some other means by which we must all learn to live in these hard times" had begun to occupy much of her days.⁹⁷

During the first winter under the embargo, several editorials in Virginia papers advocated household manufactures as a patriotic gesture. The Republican papers primarily supported the patriotic dimension of homespun, but Federalist editors never opposed the issue. On February 11, the Richmond *Enquirer* reprinted an article from the Democratic Press which recommended that the flax seed which Americans usually exported to Ireland should instead be sown on American soil and the linen from the crop used in place of imported linen. A week later, a writer under the pseudonym "Farmer" called for neighborhoods to create associations that would enforce a boycott of British products and encourage American manufactures in their place. "Farmer" believed that virtue and self-denial were necessary for the success of the plan, but pointed out that the glut of buckles that resulted from American fashions changing to shoelaces revealed a British achilles heel. He

⁹⁷ Judith Randolph to John Randolph, January 18, 1808, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

looked forward to the day when "Americans clad in homespun will not be held in such contempt as they are at present."⁹⁸

That day was not long in coming. All across tidewater and piedmont, Virginians resolved to appear in American-made clothing for Independence Day celebrations. These resolutions, like many of Virginians' activities during the embargo, had roots in the years just prior to the Revolutionary War: wealthy merchants and graduating college classes had worn home manufactures to demonstrate their displeasure with British policies.⁹⁹ In Goochland County, the members of the Goochland Literary Institution unanimously agreed on May 7, 1808 to appear in homespun on July 4th. An Institution member summed up the group's feelings: "The Embargo, it is said, is distressing--Agreed--and so is the drawing of a tooth--but we all agree to laugh at a man who shrinks from the extraction of a torturing decayed tooth, because the operation is painful."¹⁰⁰ People of Powhatan County, Port Royal, Richmond, and many other areas followed the Goochland example.¹⁰¹ "One of the most striking spectacles of this day," wrote Thomas Ritchie of Richmond's Independence Day celebration, "was the large number of Virginia Cloth suits which adorned the persons of our city." Witnesses to the Independence Day celebrations must have thought the world had turned upside down. Gentlemen and ladies who just months before had worn expensive imported fabrics now adorned themselves in coarse, hastily-made homespun, and turned their noses up in disdain at those who dared wear beautiful British clothing. American-made clothing had become a symbol of patriotism, a sign of support for the

⁹⁸ Richmond *Enquirer*, February 11 and 19, 1808.

⁹⁹ Victor S. Clarke, *History of the Manufactures in the United States, Volume 1* (1929, reprinted New York, 1949) 216.

¹⁰⁰ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, June 17, 1808.

¹⁰¹ *Petersburg Intelligencer*, June 21, 1808; Richmond *Enquirer*, July 8 and 19, 1808.

Republican president, and "a badge for the consolation and encouragement of the belligerent powers of Europe [to respect American maritime rights]."¹⁰²

The enthusiasm for household manufactures extended beyond the July Fourth celebrations. The Culpeper Society for Promotion of Agricultural and Domestic Manufactures announced on June 4 that they would hold a contest with cash prizes for the Americans who made the best cotton, linen, and woolen clothes with judging in early December. By that time, the members had found that since the society's formation in 1792, they had "become people of some money, debts, books, and other chattels," and requested and received incorporation from the Virginia legislature.¹⁰³ In the Valley region, an association in Winchester also held a similar contest designed to promote household manufacturing.¹⁰⁴

The enthusiasm for homespun prompted one Richmonder to market a twelve-ounce portable spinning machine. According to the inventor, the device would allow a woman to "indulge her disposition for gadding without breaking in upon her more useful employments. She may take her little machine to pieces carry it [with her], and whilst exercising her tongue in the amusements of fashionable conversation, she may be plying her hands with at least equal advantage."¹⁰⁵ The inventor tried to sell the machine not to poor women or slave owners, the traditional producers of household manufactures, but to wealthier women who had time for "fashionable conversation." These women apparently wanted to participate in an activity that had been considered beneath them, but which the embargo and anticipated conflict with Britain had made patriotic.

¹⁰² Richmond *Enquirer*, July 5, 1808.

¹⁰³ *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer*, July 26, 1808; Petition of Culpeper Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Domestic Manufactures, December 1808, Legislative Petitions, Culpeper County.

¹⁰⁴ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, July 22, 1808.

¹⁰⁵ Richmond *Enquirer*, November 18, 1808.

Amidst the patriotic calls for increased household manufactures, contests, and new devices, it is difficult to determine whether Virginians actually increased their production. Prior to 1809, the only reliable reports about the amount of household manufactures in the state comes from reports to Alexander Hamilton in 1791. Absolm Bailey reported that in Surry County in the tidewater residents made about five-sixths of their own cloth, shoes, and stockings. According to Drury Ragsdale's survey of twenty families in King William County, every family ranging from the richest to the poorest, except one, produced at least some fabric for its own use. In Culpeper, Edward Stevens found that the rich people were the primary purchasers of fine stockings and shoes, while the poor made their own, and slaves wore coarse clothing of household manufacture.¹⁰⁶ These reports indicate widespread production in homes and plantations, at least of clothing. During the seventeen years between 1791 and the embargo, incomes rose with the increased trade in flour, tobacco, and other agricultural products with Europe. Most likely, the use of imported fabrics and other goods increased among Virginians along with their incomes as evidenced by "Farmer's" comment about unfashionable homespun clothing. By 1808 generally only the poor and enslaved produced and wore their own homespun.

While homespun may have gained some fashion during the embargo and nonintercourse, some rich Virginians could not or would not abstain from wearing imported clothing (except while celebrating Independence Day). The editor of the *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer* commented in September 1808 that not one out of a hundred Petersburg ladies appeared clad in homespun, despite the women's patriotism.¹⁰⁷ Samuel Mordecai, a young Richmonder, recalled that homespun cost

¹⁰⁶ Absolm Bailey to General Edward Carrington, August 23, 1791, Drury Ragsdale to unknown, September 24, 1791, and Edward Stevens to Alexander Hamilton, October 6, 1791, "Home Manufactures in Virginia in 1791," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 2, 2 (1922), 137-148.

¹⁰⁷ *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer*, September 2, 1808.

"a dollar or more a yard," quite a sum at the time, thus effectively limiting its use to those citizens who could afford it, mostly wealthy Republican politicians.¹⁰⁸ Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin collected more precise information the following year for a report to the House of Representatives. Alexandria Collector Charles Simms wrote to him that household manufacturing around Alexandria produced "the common clothing of three fourths of the people of Virginia."¹⁰⁹ Drawing on Simm's letter and letters from other collectors, Gallatin asserted, rather optimistically, that in 1809 in the "lower counties of Virginia" (the Tidewater and Piedmont regions) "almost the whole of summer clothing, for every description of persons is of household manufacture; and almost all the slaves are entirely clothed in the same manner. The scarcity of wool alone prevents an adequate supply from the same source for winter clothing." He also reported that the number of stores selling imported goods in Mathews County had fallen from fifteen in 1802 to only one in 1809.¹¹⁰ These reports indicate that Virginians produced about as much of their own goods during the embargo and nonintercourse as they had prior to the lucrative trade during the European wars. Patriotism and economic necessity during the embargo had combined to reduce, but not eliminate, Virginians' reliance on imported goods.

A much more ambitious and publicized project that also combined patriotism and personal profit gripped wealthy Virginians' attention during the embargo: manufacturing. Specifically, textile production in relatively large factories. By 1808, Americans had mechanized many, but not all, of the processes involved in

¹⁰⁸ Samuel Mordecai, *Virginia, Especially Richmond, in By-Gone Days; With a Glance at the Present: Being Reminiscences and Last Words of an Old Citizen* (Richmond, 1860), 320.

¹⁰⁹ Charles Simms to Albert Gallatin, November 14, 1809, *The Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 20.

¹¹⁰ Albert Gallatin, "Report on Domestic Manufactures for the House of Representatives," April 19, 1810, *American State Papers, Finance II*, (Washington, 1832), 435.

creating cotton and woolen textiles. The cotton gin which mechanically removed cotton fibers from the seeds was already common. Several factories harnessed water power to spin the fibers into thread, but cloth manufacturers still had to rely on hand looms for weaving the finished cloth. Woolens production likewise had not yet reached the mechanized weaving stage, but the carding, spinning, and fulling steps could be performed utilizing water power. Wool factory owners had to employ skilled operators because the production of wool involved a more complex process than cotton did.¹¹¹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century Virginians made cloth almost entirely by hand, although a few wool carding mills dotted the landscape.¹¹² The mills were usually small establishments that millers built as part of flour mills and which served a local population.¹¹³ Spinning mills, on the other hand, required large investments: one hundred cotton spindles alone cost about two thousand dollars in 1808, not counting the factory building, land, dam for water power, or raw materials. Before 1808 only fifteen such mills existed in the United States, all in New England. In 1808 the leading men from Halifax and Surry Counties, and the cities of Petersburg, and Richmond formed associations with the goal of establishing factories that could spin cotton and wool. With the exception of Surry County, these areas all had the waterfalls necessary for powering textile mills--a factor that limited the areas where manufacturing could spread. These men shared the enthusiasm of many other Americans who would establish eighty-seven new spinning mills across the country by the end of 1809.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Victor S. Clarke, *History of Manufactures in the United States*, Volume 1, 560.

¹¹² Carding aligned the cotton or wool fibers parallel to one another so that the fibers could be easily spun into thread. Fulling finished the completed cloth, making it softer and more supple. Although some Virginians had access to these types of machines, the majority of steps in the production of fabric remained manual.

¹¹³ For an example of this type of carding mill see Siener, "Charles Yates," 424.

¹¹⁴ Gallatin, "Report on Domestic Manufactures," 427.

The manufacturing spirit grew partly out of the same desires that pushed Virginians to support homespun. "To enable people to be *clad in homespun universally...the cloth itself* must be provided by some extraordinary means," declared the *Virginia Argus* editor.¹¹⁵ Ritchie ardently championed textile manufacturing more forcibly than any other Virginian. On February 19, in an editorial that immediately followed "Farmer's," Ritchie claimed that establishing "*manufactures in the bosom of our own country*" would create the same benefits as increasing household manufactures plus have more success because manufactures combined "interests with principle" (or profits with patriotism). The embargo had virtually ended commerce with Europe and thus provided the perfect opportunity for merchants and others to invest in manufacturing. Building on newspaper reports of the recently organized Union Manufacturing Company in Baltimore, Ritchie called on wealthy and influential Virginians to both create and become shareholders in a manufacturing association.¹¹⁶

Despite Ritchie's zeal, Richmonders did not create the first Virginia association; the people of Petersburg did. In 1806 the English traveler John Melish described Petersburg, a small, muddy town by modern standards, as "a place of considerable wealth and importance, carrying a great trade in tobacco and flour, a considerable portion of which is with New York."¹¹⁷ Just the sort of place that the embargo hit especially hard. Nevertheless, Petersburg residents generally supported the embargo, demonstrating great distress at John Bell's attempts to smuggle flour to Liverpool.¹¹⁸ They also supported manufacturing, at least in principle. At a

¹¹⁵ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, May 27, 1808.

¹¹⁶ Richmond *Enquirer*, February 19, 1808.

¹¹⁷ John Melish, *Travels*, cited in James G. Scott and Edward Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story: A History* (Petersburg, 1960), 50.

¹¹⁸ John Shore to Albert Gallatin, January 31, 1808, *The Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 15.

Republican celebration on March 5, marking the seventh anniversary of Jefferson's inauguration, the celebrants, perhaps taking their cue both from articles in the *National Intelligencer* (the Republican party's newspaper) and the lack of business in a city dependent on agricultural trade, drank their thirteenth of seventeen toasts to "Domestic Manufactures--our industry, stimulated by our patriotic Embargo, will prove to our enemies that we will be independent." A speaker rose and eloquently declared that all types of manufacturing "will rise like a phoenix from the ashes of foreign monopolies."¹¹⁹

Not surprisingly, the Saturday, April 16 meeting in Petersburg to organize a manufacturing association drew an "uncommonly numerous" crowd, drawn no doubt by curiosity, but also by a desire to do something constructive with their money and patriotism. At the meeting, participants chose a five-man committee to write a preamble and regulations for the new Petersburg Manufacturing Society.¹²⁰ The committee members were prominent, influential men, including two future mayors of Petersburg: William Bowden (1813-1814), who had led the Petersburg Cavalry to Hampton Roads during the *Chesapeake* incident and Archibald Baugh (1809-1810).¹²¹ Two others had assisted at the March 5 Republican feast: David Walker and a former Petersburg mayor, Robert Birchett.¹²² When the committee reported back the following Saturday, they had drawn up the ambitious goals of the society, including creating a factory that would card, spin, weave, and full cotton and wool as well as manufacture iron tools. The committee also drafted regulations for the new society and called for raising fifty thousand dollars by selling shares at fifty

¹¹⁹ Richmond *Enquirer*, March 11, 1808.

¹²⁰ *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer Extra*, April 26, 1808.

¹²¹ Scott and Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story*, 341; Richard L. Jones, *Dinwiddie County: Carrefour of the Commonwealth* (Richmond, 1976), 125.

¹²² James G. Scott and Edward A. Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story*, 349.

dollars apiece. The committee members acknowledged themselves "to be principally indebted to our northern sister states" for the plan they presented.¹²³ Apparently they had read newspaper articles about Baltimore's Union Manufacturing Society. In response to the plan, the people of Petersburg proved more than merely curious. In one day, they enthusiastically subscribed twenty-five thousand dollars worth of shares.¹²⁴

The events in Petersburg provided an inspiration for three men seventy miles to the southwest in Halifax County. General John B. Scott, Colonel Berryman Green, and General George Carrington distributed notices and raised interest in an early June meeting. These three older men were of considerable influence: all had served in the Revolutionary War and Carrington had served as a member of the Continental Congress in 1785-1786.¹²⁵ About one hundred men attended the meeting, and, according to Carrington, the plan to establish a carding and spinning factory based on the Petersburg example "met as general approbation as any thing I have seen offered to public view." Only two people of the one hundred present raised any objections. At a second meeting on July 8, 1808, the participants subscribed to all but sixty shares which "several patriotic citizens" agreed to purchase if no one else bought them in a reasonable amount of time. The shareholders elected Scott president and Green treasurer.¹²⁶

Richmonders began to organize their own manufacturing association in early June, attracting the influential men of Richmond. By this time the move towards

¹²³ *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer* Extra, April 26, 1808.

¹²⁴ *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), June 27, 1808, cited in Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo*, 234.

¹²⁵ Lyon Gardner Tyler, *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography*, Volume 2 (New York, 1915), 7; Wirt Johnson Carrington, *A History of Halifax County, Virginia* (Richmond, 1924), 184, 224.

¹²⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, July 1, 26, and August 9, 1808.

manufacturing had gained great momentum. The Federalist papers did not criticize the events, remaining content to reprint the Petersburg articles of association without comment, while the Republican press energetically hailed the new organizations. "We cannot but approbate in the highest strains of eulogy, this patriotic manufacturing spirit which so generally pervades our common country," enthused the *Virginia Argus* editor on May 10.¹²⁷ Thomas Ritchie continued his editorials, and both Richmond Republican papers reprinted the 1774 resolutions of Virginians to boycott British goods and encourage American production as an additional argument in favor of manufacturing.¹²⁸

On June 1 "numerous citizens," including a variety of influential and politically powerful men, attended an organizational meeting at the Capitol. Governor William Cabell chaired the meeting and those present appointed Ritchie as secretary. Twenty-one sat on the committee to "digest a plan for the establishment of Manufactures." Committee members included some of the most influential Virginians from both parties. A former governor of Virginia, close friend of the President, and a presidential candidate himself, James Monroe, served on the committee as did his campaign supporters, George Hay (a distinguished lawyer and soon to be Monroe's son-in-law), Jonathan Brockenbrough, and John Clark. Ritchie's father-in-law and former Henrico County delegate, William Foushee, Sr., and Peyton Randolph served on Madison's corresponding committee. Federalists included Edward Carrington (Carrington had lost a bid for the Richmond delegate position a few months earlier to the Republican William Wirt, who also attended the meeting), Richmond merchant and former Revolutionary soldier, Robert Gamble, and the rich flour mill owner, Joseph Gallego. The young Lieutenant Governor

¹²⁷ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, May 10, 1808.

¹²⁸ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, May 10, 1808; Richmond *Enquirer*, May 14, 1808.

Alexander McRae was a committee member as was Abraham Venable, the respected president of the Bank of Virginia.¹²⁹

On June 18, James Monroe presented the committee's report, proposing the formation of the Richmond Manufacturing Company of Virginia for the "establishment and carrying on of manufactures of Cotton, wool, hemp and flax, and the dying and fulling of cloths." Weavers would complete the cloth on looms in their homes. With grander aspirations than Petersburg or Halifax County residents, the Richmonders proposed raising one-half million dollars through the sale of 300,000 dollars worth of shares at thirteen cities across Virginia in August, and 200,000 dollars to the Commonwealth of Virginia.¹³⁰ The sale of shares at cities across the state supposedly ensured that no individual or small group could purchase a controlling percentage and use the society's profits and influence for their own means and was probably a key element in gaining bipartisan support for the society.¹³¹ Those present at the meeting accepted the plan without dissent. "From the spirit now happily prevailing among the people," declared the *Argus*, "we think it is probable that the whole sum of THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS...will almost immediately on opening the books, be subscribed."¹³²

The Independence Day celebrations throughout piedmont and tidewater Virginia reflected the new enthusiasm for manufacturing. As recently as 1806 and 1807 the series of seventeen toasts given at July Fourth dinners did not mention

¹²⁹ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 4, September 13, and October 18, 1808; Cynthia M. Leonard, *The General Assembly of Virginia: A Bicentennial Register of Members* (Richmond, 1978), 247-255; Tyler, *Encyclopedia*, 241..

¹³⁰ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 21, 1808.

¹³¹ Virginians had also used simultaneous share sales, and commonwealth control of a significant percentage of shares as a safeguard against corrupting influences in the 1804 establishment of the Virginia State Bank, which resembles the Richmond Manufacturing Company in many ways. See Kathryn R. Malone, "The Fate of Revolutionary Republicanism in Early National Virginia", 39-40, for a discussion of the Virginia State Bank's establishment.

¹³² Richmond *Virginia Argus*, June 21, 1808.

manufacturing. The Richmond Republicans had toasted only "Agriculture and Commerce" in 1806, and Birchett and Archibald Thewatt, (future Petersburg Manufacturing Society members) who presided over the holiday dinner in Petersburg did not mention manufacturing. In 1808, however, the Richmond celebrants toasted "Domestic Manufactures," and Surry County residents, who had earlier formed an association to promote manufacturing, enthusiastically toasted "American Infant Manufactories" expressing their hopes that such manufactories would soon grow and enable Americans to live without imported goods. People in areas without manufacturing associations also praised manufacturing, including Albemarle County residents who acclaimed the manufacturing spirit, and people from Nottoway County and Portsmouth.¹³³

Virginians had demonstrated their enthusiasm for manufacturing, but despite their ardor, they lacked knowledge about spinning mills. Most of their information initially came from newspaper articles about the organization of associations in the North and the associations' profit estimates. During the summer of 1808, the men involved in the Richmond enterprise found they had to write to Samuel Ogden, a British-born textile specialist in Rhode Island, for answers to such basic questions as the cost and maintenance expenses of spindles, the size of waterwheel and building required for a spinning mill, and the cost of looms and weaving.¹³⁴ John Scott, a Halifax Manufacturing Society founder, showed his ignorance when he admitted at the early June meeting that he did not know the cost of the machinery, nor was he sure whether the machines required skilled or unskilled labor.¹³⁵ This ignorance did not bode well for the Virginia associations: they had created corporations and

¹³³ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 8, 11, 1808; July 5, 12, 19, and 26, 1808; *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer*, June 21, 1808.

¹³⁴ Richmond *Enquirer*, September 6, 1808.

¹³⁵ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 1, 1808.

began to subscribe money without any real knowledge of the process and expenses involved in creating their products.

Not surprisingly, the Richmond and the Halifax associations failed to build their factories. The lack of specialized knowledge may have stopped the Halifax group, although they did manage to get the society incorporated by the Virginia legislature in January 1809, making the Halifax Manufacturing Society the first such society incorporated in Virginia. A lack of capital may also have doomed the society; the incorporation act mentions shares amounting to only five thousand dollars. The society members wanted to increase their capital to as much as twenty thousand dollars, but never had the opportunity.¹³⁶

The Richmond society did not last long enough to request incorporation from the General Assembly that met from December 1808 to February 1809. The society quietly dissolved during autumn, apparently because the members failed to subscribe the seventy-five thousand dollars worth of shares the society's guidelines required before the society could begin operations.¹³⁷ The enthusiasm the *Argus* described had vanished. Politics may have played a central role in dispelling the ardor. The early June committee that drafted the society's articles of association had contained a cross-section of Richmond's leading men, but by mid-June only members of the Richmond Junto, a small, exclusive Republican group, sat on the committee appointed to draft a preamble to the articles.¹³⁸ Apparently, behind-the-scenes maneuvering had reduced those in power to a few Republicans. Disillusion with the society became evident when in late July, less than two weeks before the society planned to start collecting subscriptions, the Republican *Argus* printed two

¹³⁶ Virginia, *Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond, 1809), 46-49.

¹³⁷ Mordecai, *Reminiscences*, 320.

¹³⁸ For an account of the Richmond Junto see Henry Ammon, "The Richmond Junto, 1800-1824," *Virginia Historical Magazine*, 61 (October 1953), 395-418.

letters "from a gentleman to his friend in the country" that directly questioned the soundness of the society. The gentleman described Richmonders as "generally backward in all public spirited measures, and they always endeavor to make up for it, by some extravagant dash, which may figure on paper, but which languishes in reality." He went on to question whether Virginians would ever give up their freedom and work for a large employer, and claimed a successful factory might make so much cloth as to lower prices and put itself out of business.¹³⁹ The editor claimed he still supported manufacturing, but that the letters deserved "the most serious consideration."¹⁴⁰ After a month and a half of consideration, Virginians apparently decided that the control by a few men (which they had tried to avoid by selling shares), the practical problems involved in manufacturing, and perhaps a continued lack of money through the embargo summer, made the Richmond Manufacturing Company of Virginia an undesirable investment. By November, Ritchie would lament, after printing an account of the cornerstone ceremony for the South Carolina Homespun Company, "Why have not the people of Richmond displayed the same honorable perseverance in the establishment of Domestic Manufactures, as the citizens of Charleston?"¹⁴¹

The Petersburg Manufacturing Society, on the other hand, did achieve a measure of success. On January 24, 1809, the General Assembly passed an act incorporating the society with a provision to sell six hundred shares valued in all at thirty-thousand dollars. The seven managers elected by the shareholders had the power to purchase a site, construct a building, and hire a skilled superintendent.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *Richmond Virginia Argus*, July 22, 1808.

¹⁴⁰ *Richmond Virginia Argus*, July 29, 1808.

¹⁴¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, November 8, 1808.

¹⁴² *Acts Passed*, 1809, 68-69.

By November 1809 the society began operating a cotton spinning mill on a site about three miles below Petersburg on a branch of the Appomatox River. According to John Shore, the Petersburg Collector, the factory was "on a small scale and quite in an infant state--but for the ardor, zeal, and patriotism (united with individual interest) of the managers and protectors bids fair to rival older and larger establishments of a similar nature."¹⁴³ The mill had ninety-six spindles in late 1809, not nearly as large as most other mills in the United States with several hundred spindles, but the society had plans to expand to five hundred spindles within a year.¹⁴⁴

Why then did some Virginians support manufacturing efforts in 1808 when Virginia as a whole had shown such little interest in the preceding years? The answer is twofold: both patriotism and the search for profits.

American economic independence was at stake--if Britain continued to seize American ships, the United State would become dependent on British shipping for carrying American produce to market and importing clothing and other manufactured goods. Manufacturing was thus a means of gaining independence. By producing in the United States the goods that Britain usually exported, Americans could conduct their affairs without worrying about whether Britain would halt trade. This idea, of course, went back to the resolutions of 1774, and efforts in the 1780s and 1790s to promote manufacturing both at homes and in workshops. During the first half of the embargo, the *Argus* often repeated its theme that "the establishment of domestic manufactures are necessary to the INDEPENDENCE of the United States." As the editor explained,

The true independence of a nation does not consist merely in having a government of its own, and being free from foreign *rule* or

¹⁴³ John Shore to Albert Gallatin, November 22, 1808, *The Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 20.

¹⁴⁴ Gallatin, "Report on Domestic Manufactures," 432.

dominion...if the majority, or a great part of those, who constitute any particular nation, generally look to foreign merchants to supply them with the *comforts*, and what they call the *necessaries* of life; if, (the balance of trade being against them) many of them are therefore involved in distresses and perplexities, and compelled to rely on the mercy of foreigners...to save them from sinking; if debts unpaid, insolvencies, and law suits are very numerous in that nation; she surely ought not to be considered as genuinely *independent*; however ardent her attachment to the principles of liberty...¹⁴⁵

Thus the establishment of manufacturing instead of importing would make Americans less debt-ridden and thereby truly independent from foreigners. "ARE WE CAPABLE OF BEING *ENTIRELY* INDEPENDENT OR ARE WE NOT?" the Richmond committee challenged Virginians.¹⁴⁶ The March 5, 1808 Republican celebration in Petersburg also reflected this idea. In his speech, John Burke decried the British as practicing "agression and piracy," proclaiming that "during the temporary suspension of commerce, [Americans'] natural industry & genius will be directed to internal improvement." A toast was drunk to "Domestic Manufactures--our industry, stimulated by our patriotic Embargo, will prove to our enemies that we will be independent."¹⁴⁷ The Fourth of July also rang out with toasts to manufacturing. "The Manufacturing spirit now moving over the face of our land--May it grow strong, may it be general and permanent; then shall we be *indeed* an independent nation," the Albemarle County celebrants declared as they hastened towards inebriation.¹⁴⁸

Manufacturing would also provide the patriotic benefit of increasing Americans' virtue. By using the simple, plain goods that American technology could produce, Americans would avoid the luxurious, decadent "gewgaws" that the

¹⁴⁵ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, June 7, 1808.

¹⁴⁶ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 22, 1808.

¹⁴⁷ Richmond *Enquirer*, March 11, 1808.

¹⁴⁸ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 26, 1808.

British exported.¹⁴⁹ Many Virginians in the early nineteenth century, like their Revolutionary forefathers, believed that the economy could influence the virtue of a nation's citizens, and that republican governments, like that of the United States, required virtuous citizens to keep the government healthy.¹⁵⁰ The Petersburg Manufacturing Society's public address on April 23 drew on this belief in its list of manufacturing's advantages, "it will promote the harmony of social life and improve our morals by the exclusion of foreign fashions, vices and luxuries: it will revive our republican manners, simplicity and frugality."¹⁵¹ Richmonders also praised "Domestic Manufactures" because "the injustice of G. Britain made us *politically* independent--the injustice of Britain and France shall make us *morally* so."¹⁵²

Advocates perceived the effort to produce cotton mills as a means to aid the United States in its struggle towards complete independence and virtue, but those who participated could also earn money at a time when earning money by exporting agricultural goods provided great difficulties. The Petersburg committee knew that prospective investors desired not just patriotism, but profits.

Many of our capitalists have expressed a desire for permanent and safe investments, on a reasonable and certain profit; this institution will certainly invite their zealous support. The security of the stock, its transferable and active quality, the certainty and adequateness of profit, are weighty considerations.¹⁵³

The Richmond committee that drafted the preamble also advertised the potential profitability of manufacturing.

¹⁴⁹ The term "gewgaws" comes from "Farmer's" editorial in the *Richmond Enquirer*, February 19, 1808.

¹⁵⁰ McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 7.

¹⁵¹ *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer* Extra, April 26, 1808.

¹⁵² *Richmond Enquirer*, July 5, 1808.

¹⁵³ *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer* Extra, April 26, 1808.

The few experiments in manufactories which have been already made in other states, on a small scale, have demonstrated that there is no legitimate mode of investing money more profitable, perhaps none so much so. We have been informed in such a way, as to rely upon it, that the annual product of money so invested even at a period when our commerce was unmolested, was from ten to fifteen per cent. What accumulation of that profit, [during] the total obstruction of our commerce is likely to produce, will be striking to every mind.¹⁵⁴

George Carrington, involved in the Halifax society, summed up the advantages when he claimed that the Halifax manufacturing plan was both "highly interesting to individual convenience, and national independence at a crisis like this."¹⁵⁵

Many Virginians, though, remained unconvinced by the claims in favor of manufacturing; they believed the plans impractical and fraught with peril for Virginia. An editorial by "Civis" on July 5, the day after the enthusiastic toasts across Virginia, questioned the practicality of manufacturing: "The Virginians, desirous of appearing foremost in the affairs of the union, have entered into associations for promoting manufactures, without perhaps considering their ability to support them." He wondered where farmers could get money to purchase shares when they could not even sell their produce.¹⁵⁶ The question of who would perform the labor also seemed problematical. The *Argus* "gentleman" feared that factories would not succeed unless workers "sacrifice themselves to their employers" resulting in their impoverishment, as had happened in all other countries with manufacturing.¹⁵⁷ "Civis" echoed that concern by claiming that Virginians were "tenacious of their liberty," and thus only slaves would do the labor, and would perform poorly.

¹⁵⁴ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 22, 1808.

¹⁵⁵ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 26, 1808.

¹⁵⁶ *Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer*, July 26, 1808, reprinted from the "*Herald*," probably the Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*.

¹⁵⁷ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, July 22, 1808.

William Banks and William Leigh shared these concerns when they spoke out during the crowded first meeting of the Halifax society. The two men opposed large-scale manufacturing in principle because they believed the United States was "too young to engage in manufactures." In making this argument, Banks and Leigh used the same model of nations progressing through stages of development from simple to complex societies as had both the British economist Adam Smith and many other American thinkers. Societies passed through four stages as they matured: hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce. Most political experts believed the United States to be in the third, while Europe with its "enslaved" factory workers, crowded cities, and overabundant luxuries was in the fourth stage.¹⁵⁸ One of the goals of the Jeffersonian Republicans had been to keep the United States in the agricultural stage where they believed people led more virtuous lives and could thus conduct a republican government most successfully. Thus, the beginning of manufacturing, a symptom of the fourth stage, would make the United States "old" before its time, threatening Americans' virtue and thus the very foundation of the republic. Apparently, such philosophical arguments did not engage the attention of many Halifaxers during the embargo; John Scott, one of the society's organizers, "*very politely* replied that the objection would do very well for the *theorists*, but would have no weight with the planters around him."¹⁵⁹ Gauging by the early enthusiasm for the Halifax society, Scott had appraised his neighbors well.

While Banks, Leigh, and "Civis" did not have objections to manufactures in the North (Banks and Leigh suggested that Virginians trade their agricultural

¹⁵⁸ For a discussion of the eighteenth century concept of states' progression through time see McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, July 1, 1808.

products for the North's finished goods, and "Civis" foresaw the success of manufacturing in the North with its more crowded population and larger private fortunes), John Taylor of Caroline, a former United States senator, objected to the whole idea of manufacturing. In a letter to President Jefferson in December 1808, Taylor claimed that embargoes and manufacturing had failed to help the patriots during the American Revolution and had only caused shortages and hardships. Taylor pointed out that the South was handicapped in manufacturing because its slaves could never rival freemen in quality or quantity of production. Furthermore, providing federal help to manufacturers through protective tariffs or other means, as some had proposed, would unfairly tax the South to the sole benefit of the North. Such protective tariffs, Taylor argued, were unconstitutional because the Constitution had provided for tariffs and other taxes only for raising revenue, not as a means to promote one group of Americans at the expense of others. Besides dividing the country, manufactures would promote large fortunes and thereby threaten the American government because "monarchy generally builds upon a love of property, democracy upon a love of freedom." Taylor feared that the embargo and protecting duties would create another revolution in American government by frustrating legitimate, industrious seekers of property.¹⁶⁰ Though generally thought of as a crankpot during the first decade of the nineteenth century, Taylor had actually voiced the position many Virginians would take towards manufacturing during the antebellum period.

While the publicly financed spinning mills received the majority of press attention during the embargo, other manufacturing efforts also increased. Small carding and fulling mills continued to spread throughout Virginia as household manufacturing increased. Also, the Battersea paper mill in Petersburg began in the

¹⁶⁰ John Taylor to Thomas Jefferson, December 23, 1808, *Jefferson Papers*, Reel 43.

summer of 1808. "Motives of *patriotism* (if no other prevail)," the *Argus* predicted, "should induce all classes of people to preserve their [cotton] rags..." for use in the paper manufacturing process at Battersea.¹⁶¹ In Blandford, near Petersburg, Roderick Haffey started operating a cut nail factory in October in a large house that had formerly served as a tavern.¹⁶² And in Richmond, a private entrepreneur succeeded in establishing what a large committee could not: a spinning mill. B. J. Harris spun cotton for a few years beginning in 1808, but eventually had to convert to grinding wheat.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, August 19, 1808.

¹⁶² *Petersburg Republican*, October 12, 1808.

¹⁶³ Mordecai, *Reminiscences*, 321; "A List of Locations of American Textile Mills, 1808-1818," *The Textile History Review* 4 (January 1963): 48.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICS

Despite the beginnings of manufacturing efforts, the embargo caused economic hardship across Virginia, especially in the Tidewater and Piedmont regions. However, the political reaction of most Virginians to the crisis indicated that they did not exclusively follow their pocketbooks when they voted in the 1808 presidential election. They stood by the Republican party they had supported in 1800 and 1804, and voted for James Madison, Jefferson's designated successor. The presidential election results can be explained by the Virginia voting process that encouraged conservative voting, especially east of the Blue Mountains, and by the desire to maintain Republican strength in the face of increasing challenges from voters in Northern states. In the congressional election in March 1809 and the state elections in April, a break appeared between the western electors who returned more Federalists than two years prior, and the Tidewater and Piedmont citizens who remained staunchly Republican. The results, fueled by the embargo, reversed a decade-long decline in Virginia Federalist power.

Virginians in Tidewater and Piedmont generally accepted the embargo as Jefferson had intended it, a means to preserve American honor while simultaneously trying to get reparations from England for the attack on the *Chesapeake* and a way to prepare for war. In an essay written for his Richmond *Enquirer* on December 31, 1807, Thomas Ritchie praised the measure, declaring that it "emphatically addresses itself to the spirit and patriotism of the people." Because England and

France's decrees menaced American shipping "it would have been madness in our government not to have drawn us into our own shell, and by this precaution to have protected the persons and property of our countrymen." As to his fellow Virginians' reactions, Ritchie downplayed the potential reaction to the embargo's economic impact, appearing certain that Virginians would make the necessary sacrifices for United States honor.¹⁶⁴ In fact, several farmers near Richmond complained to William Pope, a delegate from Powhatan County, about the low flour prices, but after he explained the embargo's goal "they were willing to make any sacrifices for their country; to half starve themselves if they could but starve [the British and the French]."¹⁶⁵

Although the eastern portion of Virginia generally remained loyal to the embargo-supporting Republicans, not all the men in the area supported the act. Early opposition came from Federalists who primarily resided in larger commercial cities like Norfolk, Richmond, and Petersburg. The *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger's* editor was one of these men. He predicted the embargo would "produce universal distress to our country, and ruin to thousands of industrious citizens." As a Federalist, he did not believe the British threatened the United States; instead he thought the French decrees threatened American shipping. Because the French had less of a navy with which to enforce the decrees, no reason existed for the embargo.¹⁶⁶ However, when Lloyd's insurance list reported that from December 15, 1807 to January 5, 1808 foreign nations had detained thirty-six American ships, the editor admitted that his objections to the embargo had diminished.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Ritchie, "The Embargo," *Richmond Enquirer*, December 31, 1807.

¹⁶⁵ William Pope, as reported in "A Sketch. Virginia Legislature House of Delegates, Tuesday, Dec. 5," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 9, 1808.

¹⁶⁶ *Norfolk Gazette*, December 30, 1808.

¹⁶⁷ *Norfolk Gazette*, February 29, 1808.

The Virginia House of Delegates's debate over a resolution in favor of the embargo illustrates Virginians' general support for the embargo, and also illustrates their differing concerns about and goals for the measure. A young, outspoken, and new member of the House of Delegates, William Pope, submitted the resolutions in early January. Pope declared in his resolution that Virginia's General Assembly would be "unpardonably negligent were they to remain silent" about foreign affairs. He expressed a deep regret that events had forced the United States into involvement with the warring European nations, but the "contempt and disdain" shown towards "the cry of 'I AM AN AMERICAN CITIZEN'" demonstrated by the British in impressing American sailors, and in the *Chesapeake* incident, "which will be forever memorable in the annals of America," had forced the United States government to respond. "The honor of a nation, it is believed, on the part of the General Assembly," Pope proclaimed,

is a jewel of inestimable value to be maintained at every hazard... we submit with pleasure to the privations arising from the energetic measures recently adopted by the constituted authorities in the laying an embargo. We feel flattered by the confidence which they reposed in our patriotism and self-denial, and we hereby beg leave to assure the General Government, that this step meets our warm approbation.

Pope ended the resolution with a resolve to commit the energies of Virginia to support any measure that might produce either an honorable peace or a war to avenge America's "injuries."¹⁶⁸

The debate on January 5, 1808, over the adoption of the resolution ostensibly centered around whether House of Delegates members could have a few days to consider the resolution before voting on it. Delegates' arguments reveal a variety of opinions, but also general support of the resolution, the embargo, and possible

¹⁶⁸ "A Sketch. Virginia Legislature. House of Delegates, Tuesday, Dec. 5," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 7, 1808. The following discussion about the debate surrounding Pope's resolution uses this article and the continuation on January 9 as the source.

war against Britain. Not surprisingly, Pope proved the most ardent defender of his resolutions and of government action, "Why do gentlemen waver on these resolutions? There shall be no neutrality in our age....I thought the sentiments in my resolutions...would have been congenial to every American bosom." James Barbour, representing Orange County, envisioned the embargo as a first step towards a war to regain American honor if Great Britain did not provide reparations for the Chesapeake. "Will the price of flour hold us back?" he asked rhetorically. Several others also advocated the embargo as preparation for a war to restore honor. Francis Waller of Mecklenburg County, for instance, believed war would follow the embargo, and added that in June 1807 people did not deliberate on the evils of war, why should they now? Both James Semple of Williamsburg and William Foushee stated that they supported stronger measures than the embargo, but would support the resolutions. Semple and several other members also indicated that they had wanted an embargo in June 1807, and would support one in January 1808. Only James Murdaugh of Norfolk County expressed a horror of impressment and hatred of Europe's disrespect for American maritime rights, in a vivid speech in which he declared that the embargo would force reparations, or else the United States would "wash out its injuries in the blood of the enemy."

A few men who spoke on January 5th voiced doubts about the measure. The debate had not convinced Culpeper County delegate, George Strother, that the embargo was a wise measure. Strother decried the "blind confidence in the wisdom of Congress" voiced by other members. The only delegates from counties outside of the Tidewater and Piedmont regions who spoke during the debates wanted to change the resolution. James Breckenridge, a Federalist from Botetort County in the Valley, decisively lost his bid to alter the resolutions so that they would commit only the members of the General Assembly to support the embargo, rather than "the

whole energies of the commonwealth" as Pope had written. The Republican representative from Frederick County, Henry St. George Tucker, objected to the part of the resolution that affirmed the embargo's appropriateness. Although he thought the United States wronged by the *Chesapeake* incident, Tucker questioned the timing of the embargo when a British envoy would shortly arrive in the United States, and he believed that America needed an outlet for agricultural produce. Tucker alone questioned whether his constituents would willingly undergo the hardships created by the embargo. Other delegates judged from the previous sentiments of their constituents, or from brief conversations, that Virginians would withstand the embargo's hardships for the honor of their country.

The resolutions passed the House of Delegates on January 5 with 153 voting for and thirteen against the measure (twenty-four delegates did not cast a vote). The result demonstrates that initial support for the embargo crossed both party and regional lines, at least within the House of Delegates. Those willing to show their support of Jefferson and give the embargo a try outnumbered those with serious reservations. The presidential election would have similar results.

Electioneering for the presidential race began in late January 1808 when two competing Republican caucuses met in Richmond. The Republican party in Virginia underwent a crisis when friends persuaded the envoy to Britain, James Monroe, to run for president by convincing him that Jefferson and Madison were trying to trivialize his contributions. The warning was confirmed in Monroe's mind when, on his return from British negotiations in December 1807, Jefferson did not consult with him on matters related to Great Britain about which Monroe considered himself a specialist. Monroe never actually believed he could win, but wanted to demonstrate his political power and the personal loyalty surrounding him. On January 21, state delegates and senators held two Republican caucuses in Richmond,

in lieu of the one caucus originally scheduled for January 28. Madison's Richmond supporters heard of plans for a Washington, D.C. caucus for Monroe on January 23, and decided to hold their Richmond caucus even earlier, unanimously selecting Madison with 124 votes. The Monroe faction held their caucus on the same day, choosing Monroe fifty-seven votes to ten. Monroe's support came from three groups: personal friends; the "Old Republicans" who believed that Jefferson, influenced by Madison, had not followed strict Republican policies while president; and Federalists.¹⁶⁹ The Federalists who supported Monroe probably did so as an attempt to split the Republican party. They also did so because the Virginia general election law gave the entire Virginia electoral vote to the candidate that carried a majority of counties. With the small number of Federalists in Virginia, they could not hope to gain any electoral votes for a Federalist candidate, but with Monroe forming a potentially popular alternative to the current administration, the Federalists, at least in Richmond, threw their weight behind Monroe.¹⁷⁰ The presidential caucuses excited much concern around Richmond for at least a month, but despite the split in Richmond, the voters of the Piedmont supported Madison, almost to a man.¹⁷¹ Debates about the presidential election would subside until the fall as the Madison supporters slowly eroded Monroe's strength through editorials that emphasized the need for party unity at a time when the Federalists were gaining support throughout the United States due to the embargo's unpopularity.

In April, county elections were held for the two state delegates to represent each county and one delegate each for Richmond, Williamsburg, and Norfolk.

¹⁶⁹ Harry Ammon, "James Monroe and the Election of 1808 in Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, 20 (January 1963): 33-47; George Tucker to St. George Tucker, January 20, 1808, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Reel M-24.

¹⁷⁰ Richmond *Enquirer*, October 17, 1808.

¹⁷¹ John Preston to Francis Preston, February 15, 1808, Preston Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

State delegate elections, like all elections in Virginia, were controlled by the powerful local families and reflected their views more accurately than the opinions of humbler men. The white male property owners assembled at the county courthouse on the announced election day, and gave individual oral votes in front of the sheriff, the candidates, and the county's leading men. This system insured that the local elite could control the votes of poorer men who depended on the elite's patronage for favors ranging from loans to good treatment in court.¹⁷² The dominance of powerful families was greatest in the Tidewater and Piedmont (which were almost exclusively Republican outside of the larger cities and Eastern Shore), while the more recent settlement and diversified population of the Valley and Transallegany regions (where there were many pockets of Scotch-Irish, and Germans among other ethnic and religious groups) as yet precluded the rise of powerful men and allowed more voter freedom.¹⁷³ Despite the impediments to political change, Virginians in April 1808 elected more minority Federalists to the General Assembly in 1808 than in 1807, reversing a decade-long decline in Federalist power within Virginia.¹⁷⁴ The returns show that at least some of Virginia's elite felt strongly enough about the embargo to throw their support behind the opposition party. In Richmond, for instance, Edward Carrington, described as a "virtuous Federalist" by the Republican Richmond *Enquirer*, received forty percent of the vote for delegate, providing a strong challenge to the Republican candidate William Wirt.¹⁷⁵ Before the end of the summer, Federalists across Virginia would sense their chance of increasing their national and state

¹⁷² Upton, "The Road to Power in Virginia in the Early Nineteenth Century," 259-264.

¹⁷³ Jordan, *Political Leadership in Jefferson's Virginia*, 11-12.

¹⁷⁴ Ambler, *Sectionalism*, 88.

¹⁷⁵ Richmond *Enquirer*, April 8 and 12, 1808.

representation.

Debate over the embargo continued in newspapers throughout the summer, traditionally a slow time in politics when the wealthy would often travel to more comfortable western towns. Republican papers called for Americans to band together and endure the hard times for the country's good. By ending trade with Great Britain, the United States would gain the respect that Americans had fought for during the Revolution. "Let us then make one energetic effort to emancipate ourselves from *commercial* as we have already from *political* bondage," wrote the *Virginia Argus's* editor.¹⁷⁶ Federalists, though, did not believe that Britain was America's true enemy, and thought the Jefferson administration demonstrated an "illegitimate partiality" towards France which also plundered American ships, yet did not suffer as much as Britain did from the embargo.¹⁷⁷ In perhaps their most widely comprehended argument, Federalists also loudly denounced the economic losses caused by the embargo. The *Virginia Gazette's* editor estimated that Albemarle County had lost one hundred thousand dollars "by the planters being compelled to sell their produce at the present pitiful prices, occasioned by the embargo," ten times the amount he calculated that Americans had lost from seizures.¹⁷⁸

As one might expect, a political debate that no one could resolve during Congress's long April to October recess, did not always remain on a high intellectual plane. During the June heat, the *Virginia Gazette's* editor likened the embargo to someone throwing him into a furnace and claiming it was for his own

¹⁷⁶ Richmond *Virginia Argus*, May 31, 1808.

¹⁷⁷ Martinsburg *Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer*, July 29, 1808.

¹⁷⁸ Richmond *Virginia Gazette*, June 17, 1808.

good. He followed the remark with the rather poor but amusing "An Acrostic on the Embargo:"

E ach day I hate thee worse and worse,
 M ost heartily I do thee curse...
 B roughed down by thee to sore distress...
 A nd see no chance to get redress...
 R uin'd...by thee brought into woe...
 G reat loss...and fatal overthrow
 O n the State, by the Embargo.¹⁷⁹

The Republican papers had the disadvantage of not having any Federalist policy to satirize as the Federalists did the embargo, but the *Virginia Argus's* editor did find an opportunity when the *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger* reprinted a diagram from the *Salem Gazette* that spelled out "embargo will ruin us" 270 different ways. He replied to the "attempt at wit," with a nearly identical diagram that read "embargo will save us," claiming it "may be more readily believed."¹⁸⁰

Once summer had ended, the Federalists in Staunton, a relatively large city in the Valley, not only became the most vocal Federalist group in Virginia, but they also defied the example of their fellow party members in Richmond who had decided to quietly express their opinions and support Monroe's presidential efforts. Representing the largest Federalist concentration in Virginia, the Staunton group not only supported the Federalist presidential candidate, Charles Pinkney, instead of Monroe, but also drafted the only Virginian public resolution that denounced the embargo. On September 17, about 130 to 150 Augusta County citizens met at a publicized freeholders meeting "to devise what ought to be done in the present crisis" which the organizers believed threatened their independence and rights.¹⁸¹ By a small majority the assembled freeholders approved the publishing of an

¹⁷⁹ Richmond *Virginia Gazette*, June 17, 1808.

¹⁸⁰ *Norfolk Gazette*, April 14, 1808; Richmond *Virginia Argus*, April 26, 1808.

¹⁸¹ Staunton *Political Censor*, September 7, 1808.

address signed by the Federalist Robert Porterfield, chairman of the meeting. In the address, the Staunton group boldly declared that they not only suspected foreign influence within the Jefferson administration, but that after nine months of embargo,

unless the avenues of commerce are again opened and the commercial people of America suffered to hazard themselves upon the ocean in pursuit of their lawful gain, free and unmolested by any domestic shackles, *we are seriously apprehensive there will soon pervade one general sentiment completely derelictive of longer acquiescence to the will of Congress.*

Moreover, "without an open commerce for the merchants of the U. S. we seriously contemplate the entire downfall of the community, and that bankruptcy and civil war will arise." The group postponed any action on the address until after a second meeting on October 5.¹⁸²

Once published, the address sent waves of outraged protest throughout Republican Virginia. After printing the address in his paper, Ritchie declared, "The consolation is, that *we* [Richmonders] have comparatively so small a number of men, who would adopt such sentiments." On October 3, "a numerous and respectable meeting of Republican Freeholders of Fairfax County" unanimously declared their disgust at the Staunton proceedings and reaffirmed their support of the President's "just, pacific, and strictly neutral conduct" in foreign affairs.¹⁸³ Concern about the address reached the highest level of Virginia's government. Acting Governor Alexander McRae, alarmed by Staunton's actions, requested Judge John Coalter of Staunton to investigate General Porterfield's role in approving the address. Coalter confirmed Porterfield's position as the meeting's chair and the latter's opposition to the embargo, but Coalter stated that despite his own regret at the address, he did not question the patriotism and respectability of those involved

¹⁸² Richmond *Enquirer*, October 4, 1808.

¹⁸³ Richmond *Enquirer*, October 14, 1808.

who he knew personally, and strongly supported their right to express their honest opinions.¹⁸⁴

When the Staunton freeholders reconvened on October 5 to approve their address the Augusta County citizens showed a greater interest in the issue than a month before: four to five hundred men met at the courthouse, three or four times the number who attended the original meeting. This larger group, though, did not support Porterfield's address and voted against adopting it by a slim margin.¹⁸⁵ The vote fairly represented the opinion of enfranchised Augusta County citizens who in November supported Madison by a few votes over his Federalist opponent.

Just as the Virginia Republican party divided its votes between two presidential candidates, the Federalists also demonstrated divisiveness despite their unified opposition to the embargo. Most Federalists would have agreed with "A Citizen of Halifax [County]" who wrote in the *Richmond Virginia Gazette*, "Commercial regulations, Madison's favorite system of coercion, have been fairly tried and have completely failed."¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, during the September meeting, the Staunton group had declared its support of the Federalist candidate Pinkney, while in October, the Richmond Federalists officially announced their support for Monroe. The Richmonders declared they had no choice but to vote for a Republican because of the "violence of the majority" which had created the General Ticket Law and deprived the Federalists of any hope of winning Virginia electors (According to state law, the presidential candidate with the majority of votes would win all of Virginia's electoral votes--minority candidates could not win any Virginia representation in the electoral college.). Instead, Federalists had to choose "one or

¹⁸⁴ Coalter to the Governor, October 27, 1808, in *Calendar of Virginia State Papers* (Richmond, 1892), 24-27.

¹⁸⁵ *Richmond Enquirer*, October 15 and November 18, 1808.

¹⁸⁶ *Richmond Virginia Gazette*, September 27, 1808.

the other of their rival candidates."¹⁸⁷ The choice of Monroe came from the Federalists' desire to widen the split in the Republican party, oppose Jefferson's chosen successor, and support Monroe's implied opposition to the embargo. Other Virginia Federalists had the same idea. "Federal Republicans, on the day of Election *be ready*--have the *Monroe* ticket in writing..." exhorted the Federalist editor of the Martinsburg *Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer*.¹⁸⁸ Despite the Federalist rift, the Staunton group remained true to Pinkney. In a letter distributed just weeks before the election, the Staunton Federalists declared that "the course recommended by the [Federalist] Committee at Richmond, is calculated to insult the feelings of the man they advocate, inasmuch as the avowed object is, not that he should succeed, but that his name should be made use of to defeat the election of his opponent, in this state. We are not disposed to injure the feelings of that Gentleman..."¹⁸⁹ This rift frustrated the hopes of the editor of the Richmond *Virginia Gazette and Public Advertiser* who understood that a united Virginia Federalist party probably could not gain Virginia's electoral votes, but wished that "their vote would be so respectable as to cause the new President...to know...that the principles of Washington are not entirely abandoned in the Ancient Dominion, the declaration of many notwithstanding."¹⁹⁰

Thus in early November enfranchised Virginians met at county courthouses to decide between three presidential candidates, two approved by their parties, and one supported by renegade members of both parties. Despite nearly a year without shipping, of low produce prices, and a cash scarcity, the great majority of

¹⁸⁷ Richmond *Enquirer*, October 18, 1808.

¹⁸⁸ Martinsburg *Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer*, October 28, 1808.

¹⁸⁹ Richmond *Enquirer*, October 29, 1808.

¹⁹⁰ Richmond *Virginia Gazette and Public Advertiser*, October 11, 1808.

Virginians declared through their votes what their actions and editorials had expressed throughout the embargo, strong approval for the Jefferson administration. Madison swept the commonwealth, gaining 14,665 votes to Monroe's 3,408, and Pinkney's mere 760.¹⁹¹

Despite support from such prominent conservative Republicans as Norfolk's Littleton Waller Tazewell and John Taylor of Caroline, Monroe gained most of his support from traditionally Federalist counties.¹⁹² Monroe carried only ten counties and Norfolk Borough. Of those counties, Accomack and Northhampton on the North Shore, Loudon in the Piedmont, Berkeley (where Federalists had been reminded to vote the Monroe ticket) and Hardy in the Valley, and Wood and Harrison in the Transallegheeny had a significant Federalist population, as did Norfolk Borough. The embargo had a similar impact on the three other Monroe counties, all located in Tidewater. Even in Richmond, the 110 votes for Madison and 70 for Monroe reflected almost precisely the April state legislature vote for the Richmond Republican and Federalist candidates. Almost half of Pinkney's support came from Augusta County which gave a bare majority to Madison just as it had barely rejected the Staunton group's resolution a month before.¹⁹³ The Republican rift, apparent during the January caucuses, had healed by election day.

The election was not a referendum on the embargo. While the embargo was an important issue, too many other factors swayed voters, especially in the Tidewater and Piedmont. The gains made by Federalists in the rest of the country demanded Republican unity. Protest votes for Monroe, who had no chance of

¹⁹¹ Ammon, "James Monroe and the Election of 1808 in Virginia," 53.

¹⁹² For evidence of Tazewell and Taylor's support see Tazewell to Monroe, October 8, 1808, James Monroe Papers, Library of Congress, Presidential Papers Microfilm, Series 1, Reel 4; and Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline*, 124.

¹⁹³ Election results from Richmond *Enquirer*, April 12, November 8, 18, 22, and 25, 1808.

winning the national election, would only weaken the Republican party against the nationally strengthened Federalist party, as both Federalist and Republican papers had noted throughout the year. The conservative nature of public voting in Virginia may also have prevented any sudden voting changes away from the ruling Republican administration. For instance, in Dinwiddie, a county as dependent upon agricultural exports as any in the Piedmont, two men made impassioned speeches in favor of Monroe to the freeholders who had gathered at the courthouse to vote. Despite the speeches, the assembled men gave 300 votes to Madison and only five to Monroe.¹⁹⁴ Dedication to preserving American honor probably also disinclined Virginians to supporting presidential candidates who planned to repeal the embargo without declaring war. Despite Madison's victory, Virginia Federalists made political gains during the embargo, but the state would have to wait for the April 1809 elections for Congressional representatives for evidence of this new strength.

¹⁹⁴ *Petersburg Republican*, November 19, 1808.

CHAPTER V

THE FINAL DAYS AND BEYOND

In his address to the General Assembly as that body convened on December 5, 1808, Governor William Cabell reaffirmed the Virginian struggle to support the administration, even as a second harvest went unexported. Virginians, he declared, had borne the "many and great privations and inconveniences" caused by the embargo "with patience as evils necessarily attending the only measure which could have saved us from the greater evils of actual war, or national degradation." He also called for the General Assembly to encourage Virginia's domestic manufactures by any means they found necessary to provide relief from the suspension of foreign commerce.¹⁹⁵ The only measures the General Assembly would adopt to support manufactures, however, were the incorporation of the Petersburg and the Halifax manufacturing companies. The Assembly did not offer bonuses or create committees to encourage manufacturing as other states had done earlier.

Tensions increased within Virginia as the second harvest remained unsold. Residents of the Valley renewed their complaints against the embargo while those to the east tenaciously clung to the policy that increasingly lost favor across the country. On December 23, 1808, Archibald Stuart, writing from Staunton, warned Jefferson that "many of our people are more capable of feeling than reflecting, we are avaricious enterprising, and impatient of restraint, and I fear will compell the

¹⁹⁵ Richmond *Enquirer*, December 8, 1808.

gov't to depart from the prudent measures they are disposed to adopt."¹⁹⁶ While Virginians opposed to the embargo did not send any resolutions to the President as had many New Englanders, the Republicans in several areas felt sufficiently threatened by anti-administration forces that they gathered to declare their support for the beleaguered President. Fear of the "inflammatory proceedings of several towns in the state of Massachusetts" that had denounced the embargo and implied secession compelled Fredericksburg residents to meet on February 10, 1809 to express their own sentiments. In their address, the citizens vowed "to rally around the government of their country...against the aggressions of foreign nations, and the attempts of domestic factions."¹⁹⁷ Prompted perhaps by the Fredericksburg example, or more probably by the tensions within a Federalist-controlled county that had voted 124 to 87 for Monroe over Madison, the Republicans of Leesburg in Loudon County assembled on February 13, 1809, and adopted resolutions in support of the embargo.¹⁹⁸ On February 27, the Leesburg Republican Mechanics likewise expressed their concern and support. "A contrariety of opinion has obtained," they worried, "respecting your Public Agency, & more especially respecting the great measures that have recently suspended our Commerce & exposed us to temporary Privations. On this subject we Unequivocally declare our belief that the course you have resolved was marked out by your Country's interest, and called for by her dearest rights."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Stuart to Jefferson, December 23, 1808, *Jefferson Papers*, Reel 43.

¹⁹⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 17, 1809.

¹⁹⁸ Broussard, *The Southern Federalists*, 373, states that Loudon County, along with the Eastern Shore, were the only eastern Virginia counties that consistently elected Federalists. Jefferson to Armistead Mason, February 24, 1809, *Jefferson Papers*, Reel 43, wherein Jefferson thanked the Leesburg Republicans for their supportive resolutions.

¹⁹⁹ Leesburg Republican Mechanics to Jefferson, February 27, 1809, *Jefferson Papers*, Reel 43.

Of course, not all Piedmont and Tidewater residents shared these sentiments. Many Federalist merchants, like the wealthy Richmond miller and tobacco trader Thomas Rutherford (who since August had two or three ships loaded with tobacco awaiting permission to depart for Ireland), looked forward to the repeal of the embargo. "At the close of the year 1808," Rutherford recalled in his autobiography, "it appeared evident to all thinking men that the measure of the embargo, which had been so long persevered in, was more hurtful to ourselves than it could be to the belligerents on whom it was intended to operate..."²⁰⁰

The general support for the embargo in the Tidewater and Piedmont regions came during a period of continued economic stagnation. The Norfolk Collector Larkin Smith advised Albert Gallatin on November 20, 1808 that despite a recent increase in trade along the coast, Norfolk commerce had not regained its pre-1808 "flourishing state."²⁰¹ The Washington's Birthday celebration in the same port prompted comment from a dejected editor: "the shipping in our harbour, were decorated with splendor, that reminded us of our former prosperity."²⁰² In the inland farming communities, the continued scarcity of cash and low crop prices (the "extremities of the times") made debts difficult to pay, as Alexander Kelly of Fauquier County related to his brother.²⁰³

Despite strong Virginia support for the embargo, pressures from the New England states, including armed opposition to enforcement of the embargo in Bath, Maine, and other ports, prompted Congress in late February to debate a replacement for the embargo (called "nonintercourse") that would permit trade with

²⁰⁰ Rutherford, "Autobiography," 70.

²⁰¹ Smith to Gallatin, November 20, 1808, *Papers of Albert Gallatin*, Reel 18.

²⁰² *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger*, February 23, 1809.

²⁰³ "Letters of Alexander D. Kelly," 30.

neutral countries, but not with Britain or France.²⁰⁴ Rumors concerning the debates caused prices to fluctuate in Richmond. "Produce has declined," wrote the Richmond merchant James Innes on February 28, 1809, "in the course of two days past in consequence of a general opinion that the Embargo would be continued..."²⁰⁵ And yet, in the face of economic disaster from strangled trade, the leading Richmond Republicans gathered that evening to express their political sentiments that the embargo should continue. They believed that Americans should endure economic hardships to resist foreign aggressions and insults. "The picture of foreign aggressions is too deeply stained with violence, rapine, and atrocity for any American to examine it with calmness and composure...When we take a view of what our government has done to preserve our rights, and to preserve us *in peace*, we can but admire the mild, pacific and impartial policy which has been adopted...*Resolved*, that the Embargo ought not to be rescinded until a fair trial of the effect of the laws passed to enforce it shall have been made..." If Congress did repeal the embargo, the Richmond Republicans preferred assertive policies against Britain and France, "even if it is necessary to resort to open and direct war," instead of nonintercourse, a "vain and futile" measure impossible to enforce.²⁰⁶

However, Representatives from New England and the Middle States had united and passed the nonintercourse bill on February 27, 1809, by 81 to 40. The bill, signed by Jefferson, repealed the embargo effective March 4, Jefferson's last day in office.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ For a description of the events in Bath, see "In Defiance of Law," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 19, 1809.

²⁰⁵ Innes to Francis Jerdone, February 28, 1809, Jerdone Family Papers.

²⁰⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 3, 1809.

²⁰⁷ Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo*, 226, 140, 195, 251.

Foreign trade immediately recommenced and grain prices rose as merchants took advantage of a loophole in the new law: American ships could carry produce to Caribbean islands controlled by Spain or Portugal or directly to neutral European countries and there sell their goods to a neutral vendor who would in turn sell to British or French merchants. Beginning with the March 2 edition, ads for ships for charter and ships wanted began reappearing in the *Norfolk Gazette and Public Advertiser*, a sure sign of recovery in that port. Rutherford undoubtedly ordered his ships to set sail while Fredericksburg merchant Robert Patton, who had refused to purchase St. George Tucker's corn in May, wrote to Tucker on March 5, "I am anxious to bargain with you for the Tob. and Corn..."²⁰⁸ From Frederick County in the Valley, Tucker's son wrote on March 18 that because of the embargo's repeal his law practice was "thank heaven, somewhat like old times."²⁰⁹ Throughout March, the average Richmond price for a bushel of wheat jumped from 83 cents in February to 101 cents, an amount that would have been higher if not for the late March disillusionment in nonintercourse.²¹⁰

By late March, merchants found that direct trade with Europe remained as dangerous as before the embargo. James Innes wrote that, "the more we reflect upon the miserable situation of commercial intercourse, the more we are convinced of our danger, and the impossibility of doing anything with any tolerable degree of Safety."²¹¹ Besides danger, renewed trade also brought few profits to American traders. The British, who carried the American goods to their final destination in

²⁰⁸ Patton to Tucker, March 5, 1809, Tucker-Coleman Papers.

²⁰⁹ Henry St. George Tucker to Tucker, March 18, 1809, Tucker-Coleman Papers.

²¹⁰ Peterson, *Prices Received*, 72.

²¹¹ Innes to Francis Jerdone, March 21, 1809, Jerdone Family Papers.

England, deducted their shipping expenses from the purchase price.²¹² The sudden reopening of trade also flooded the market with American grain left from two harvests, causing a decline in prices. The average price for wheat dropped to 78 cents a bushel in Richmond during April, although prices leveled out at a little over one dollar in subsequent months.²¹³

Even with the repeal of the embargo, it became clear during the April Congressional elections that the Valley continued to resent the Republicans who had supported the embargo. Previously, fifteen Republican, one Federalist, and four other congressmen had represented Virginia, but the April 1809 election returned thirteen Republicans, four Federalists, and three others.²¹⁴ While not a Federalist landslide, the outcome left the Valley as strongly Federalist as it had been in 1800 and 1803, erasing a half-decade of Republican gains.²¹⁵ In the northern Valley bordering on Maryland, the incumbent John Morrow lost to James Stephenson, and in the southern Valley counties extending westward through the Transallegheny, James Breckenridge, who a year before as a delegate to the General Assembly had objected to Pope's resolution to commit "the whole energies of the commonwealth" to supporting the embargo, defeated another Republican incumbent, Alexander Wilson. Federalist Jacob Swoope won the Valley counties surrounding Staunton. The Valley supported Federalists over Republicans because powerful local families did not control the region as tightly as eastern sections, and voters could more easily vote their consciences. Also, the Valley had felt the embargo's impact more than the semi-isolated Transallegheny. A correspondent to the Richmond *Virginia*

²¹² *Norfolk Gazette and Public Advertiser*, March 22, 1809.

²¹³ Peterson, *Prices Received*, 72.

²¹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, May 2, 1809.

²¹⁵ Ambler, *Sectionalism*, 90.

Gazette best summarized the mood when he wrote that Valley residents "are beginning to think that between promises of great perfection in government [Jefferson's belief that economic coercion could replace war] and practical oppression there is sometimes little difference. In this section of the country we have not suffered so severely as others have, but we have felt enough to make us *look a head...*"²¹⁶

In the years that followed, Virginia as a whole would not suffer economically as it had during 1808. The Madison administration did continue commercial restrictions after the expiration of nonintercourse, but they proved even milder. Legal flour exports increased from 263,000 barrels during the embargo to approximately 800,000 per year from 1809 to 1810, about the same volume of trade as had been exported each year from 1804 to 1806. In 1811 and 1812 flour exports exceeded one million barrels each year. Tobacco, cotton, and corn likewise reached pre-embargo levels.²¹⁷ Produce prices rebounded. The *Enquirer*, which had suspended its reports on Richmond prices during the embargo, resumed the reports on April 18, 1809, a sure sign of increasing grain values. Beginning in May 1809, the price per bushel of wheat stayed over one dollar (except for a brief dip in September 1809), and even reached one dollar ninety cents just four months before the War of 1812.²¹⁸

As the crisis of the embargo and nonimportation abated, the call for domestically manufactured clothing likewise cooled. For example, during the 1809 Independence Day celebrations, no mention was made of participants appearing in homespun. During the festivities, celebrants did express their support for

²¹⁶ Richmond *Virginia Gazette and Public Advertiser*, April 14, 1809; Kenneth C. Martis, *The Historical Atlas of United States Congressional Districts, 1789-1983* (New York, 1982) 53.

²¹⁷ Seybert, *Statistical Annals*, 111.

²¹⁸ Peterson, *Prices Received*, 70.

manufacturing. "Perseverance and success to our manufactories," toasted the Richmond Artillery and Republican Blues.²¹⁹ Despite the declarations of support, the Petersburg factory was the only publicly-funded textile mill to actually begin production. However, the embargo had sparked several other attempts at creating factories: in 1810 and 1811, the General Assembly passed acts of incorporation for manufacturing societies in Goochland and Prince William Counties respectively.²²⁰ These early attempts at publicly-financed factories seemed to leave a bad taste in Virginians' mouths that eventually led to the antebellum opposition to tariffs. In contrast, New England in 1809 had more than fifty textile mills under construction.²²¹

Politically, Virginia remained staunchly Republican. Although losing the counties surrounding Staunton, Federalists retained their four congressional seats in 1811 by winning the Ohio River district. As a percentage of the total vote, Federalists received only 18 percent in 1811 as compared to 22 percent two years before.²²²

On the whole, Virginians remained staunchly behind the Jefferson administration. They envisioned themselves as preparing for a second American Revolution, this time to gain economic freedom from Great Britain. The wearing of homespun and the attempted creation of relatively large-scale textile manufacturing demonstrated Virginians' resolve to confront what they perceived as a British threat to American sovereignty and honor by using an economic strategy inherited from Revolutionary America. Symbolically, homespun and manufacturing

²¹⁹ Richmond *Enquirer*, July 11, 1809.

²²⁰ *Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond: 1810), 63-65, and the 1811 edition, pp. 66-69.

²²¹ The figure of fifty mills comes from Clarke, *History of Manufactures, Volume 1*, 536.

²²² Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 133.

worked to briefly unite eastern Virginia against Britain, but the manufacturing society founders never realized a profit from their efforts as Virginians missed an opportunity to begin large-scale industries and diversify a Virginian economy that began to stagnate in the following decades from over dependence on agriculture.

The struggle against Britain translated into continued support for the Jefferson administration and Republican candidates who advocated the embargo and possible warfare against Britain. The rebellion in the New England states also helped close Virginian ranks against what they considered the traitorous activities of Northern Federalists. A minority of Virginians, most of whom lived west of the Blue Ridge, believed that Britain posed no immediate threat, and perceived Jefferson and the Republicans as crippling the United States both economically and politically in a vain and ultimately unsuccessful embargo. This minority briefly showed their strength by electing three new Federalist representatives in March 1809, but never reached the power of New England Federalists. The anti-British resolve that pervaded Virginia during the embargo made Virginian support for the War of 1812 virtually inevitable, and the contrast between Virginia's support for the embargo, despite economic hardships, and the Northern armed opposition, fueled the growing political antagonism between the two regions in the nineteenth century.

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