

PHILIP FITHIAN'S PRIVATE JOURNALS AND PERSONAL JOURNIES:

Self-Improvement, Fidelity, and Rebellion, 1766-1776

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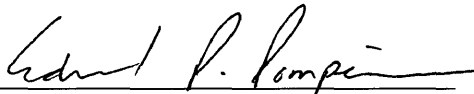
Edward P. Pompeian

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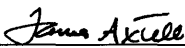
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Edward P. Pompeian


Approved by the Committee, March 2007



Dr. James L. Axtell, Chair



Dr. Christopher D. Grasso, Professor



Dr. Ronald B. Schechter, Professor

Dedicated to my teachers for their guidance and inspiration.
To my closest friends for showing me how to think with novelty
and to live each day in laughter.
To my family for their love, grace, and unceasing support.
Mom, Dad, Aaron, Nick, Adrienne, Helen, Neal, and Eunice,
you inhabit all that I have ever done.
I am blessed to be grateful to so many.

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I have struggled to understand Philip Fithian and his world, and I still have much to learn about them both. As I read and reread Fithian's writings, I realized that I had made the mistakes of misreading his words, of misinterpreting his purposes, and of trying to bind together a series of diaries that possessed continuities but little unity. The erudite suggestions and gentle guidance of important, generous mentors calmed my impatience and directed me toward questions that did not have ready-made or apparent answers. In particular, I would like to thank my advisor, James Axtell, for seeing me through my own journey as a historian and researcher and for challenging me to constantly improve in my practice of the historian's craft. I would also like to thank Chris Grasso and Ron Schechter for all the attention, time, and patience they have given me toward seeing me through this project. I also thank Rhys Isaac and James Allegro for generously reading through some of my early drafts and for offering me their criticisms, suggestions, and encouragement. Finally I would like to thank the members of my MA cohort: Libby, Sharon, Ted, CJ, Sharron, Jess, Nick, and Kelly. You were my scholarly community and I learned as much from you as I did from our professors. My project remains incomplete and far from perfect, but what I have produced would never have been possible without these individuals.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Journals, 1766-76</i>	Palmer, F. Alan ed. <i>The Beloved Cohansie of Philip Vickers Fithian</i> . Bridgeton, New Jersey: Cumberland County Historical Society, 1990.
<i>Journals, 1767-74</i>	Williams, John Rogers ed. <i>Philip Vickers Fithian Journal and Letters 1767-1774....</i> Princeton: Princeton University Library, 1900.
<i>Journal, 1773-74</i>	Farish, Hunter Dickinson ed. <i>Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian...1773-1774</i> . Reprint, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993.
<i>Journal, 1775-76</i>	Albion, Robert Greenhalgh and Leonidas Dodson, eds. <i>Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal, 1775-1776....</i> Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934.
EB	Elizabeth Beatty (Fithian)
PF	Philip Fithian
PUL	Princeton University Library

ABSTRACT

Philip Fithian's diaries have long been an important primary source for historians interested in the history of Colonial America. This study attempts to contextualize his writings and to trace their evolution from 1766 to 1776. In doing so, it elucidates how Fithian's life and diaries were affected by travel outside of his birthplace in New Jersey and by the socio-political and cultural changes that took place in British North America during the late-eighteenth century.

Like his contemporaries, Fithian believed that passion was an impediment to self-improvement and a threat to a well-governed society. Yet he was also influenced by the "sentimental revolution" of the 1760s and 1770s that called upon men to embrace their feelings and emotions. Caught up in the excitements of love and rebellion, Fithian used fidelity to redefine passion from a trait of the enslaved into an attribute of the virtuous. Whether he was in or outside New Jersey, fidelity allowed him to prove his character as a gentleman, Whig, and devoted lover against the criticisms of his community in particular and loyalists in general. His diaries testified to the personal sacrifices he had made to preserve his reputation, love, and freedom during the decade in which the colonies proceeded to revolution. In Fithian's life, love and politics were intimately intertwined by the principles of duty and devotion.

PHILIP FITHIAN'S PRIVATE JOURNALS AND PERSONAL JOURNEYS:

Self-Improvement, Fidelity, and Rebellion, 1766-1776

INTRODUCTION

There was scarcely a day between the autumns of 1773 and 1776 that Philip Vickers Fithian was not traveling abroad. Eight times during those three years, opportunity and circumstance lured the young man away from the familiar marshes, woods, coasts, and villages of his home in southern New Jersey and led him into unfamiliar regions of his province and to the foreign tidewaters, mountains, and cities of neighboring colonies. He had made his first journey in September 1770 at twenty three years of age—ninety-five miles to attend the College of New Jersey at Princeton—and a month before his death in October 1776 he made his last—a ten-mile retreat with the Continental Army from New York City to Harlem.

Not one of Fithian's travels is remarkable by itself. He embarked on many long- and short-distance trips, and the journeys to Princeton and New York were outmatched by two others that had gone further, lasted longer, and proven more difficult for him: in October 1773 he traveled 260 miles to Westmoreland County, Virginia, to work as a tutor, and in the spring of 1776 he trekked approximately 420 miles back to Greenwich from the Appalachian Mountains in southwest Virginia. But as he passed through bustling cities, burgeoning towns, gentry plantations, and frontier backcountries, he jotted down observations on the manners, customs, and follies of the people he met and descriptions of the natural and human environments he encountered. With his pen and paper as his solace during solitary or sedentary moments on the road, he recorded observations and reflections to preserve for his return home.

Travel gave Fithian reason to write but it also changed his life. A succession of journeys forced Fithian to leave Elizabeth Beatty, the woman he loved, behind in New Jersey, and their separation gave him an important reason to keep a diary: writing allowed him to document his experiences outside of New Jersey and to prove that he could maintain his fidelity to her—despite her doubts and the suspicions of acquaintances in Cohansie, who feared he would succumb to vice in Anglican Virginia or the frontier. Fithian believed it was necessary to possess the virtue of fidelity because his private relationship with Elizabeth was rarely free from his community’s scrutiny. Yet, the good reputation and blameless character that were invaluable to a courter were also useful to a partisan of Whig republicanism. As the colonial rebellion progressed, Fithian juxtaposed his devotion to Elizabeth and liberty against the immorality and infidelity of other colonists to absolve himself from the cultural stigma assigned to passion. Like his contemporaries, he believed that passion was an impediment to self-improvement and a threat to a well-governed society.

Yet Fithian was also influenced by the “sentimental revolution” of the 1760s and 1770s that called upon men to embrace their feelings and emotions.¹ Caught up in the excitements of love and rebellion, Fithian used fidelity to redefine passion from a trait of the enslaved into an attribute of the virtuous. Whether he was in or outside New Jersey, fidelity allowed him to prove his character as a gentlemen, Whig, and devoted lover against the criticisms of his community in particular and loyalists in general. His diaries testified to the personal sacrifices he had made to preserve his reputation, love, and freedom during the decade in which the colonies proceeded to revolution. In Fithian’s

¹ For the “sentimental revolution,” see Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), 461-518.

life, love and politics were intimately intertwined by the principles of duty and devotion. Fidelity was of great use to a man who found himself in love during rebellion and revolution.

Fithian documented his fidelity in diaries because he was frequently traveling and unable to demonstrate his sentiments to Elizabeth in person. From 1773 to 1776 his journals record a series of journeys through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and New York. He filled these journal's pages with observations on the manners of the people he met and included descriptions of the towns and landscapes through which he passed. Inspired by literature and popular novels, he also experimented in his "travel diaries" with stylistic embellishments that included asides, allusions, first-person dialogue (sometimes in dialect), and apostrophe.² During those years, Philip maintained five journals that are interrupted by three breaks: the first is a gap from March 15, 1775 to May 9, 1776; the second a gap from September 7, 1776 to November 13, 1776; the last a gap from February to July 1776. Although we cannot know all that occurred in Fithian's life during the time he was not writing, the breaks are significant for what they do tell us. He wrote an average of six to twelve entries per month in his diary while he was at home from 1766 to 1776. On the other hand, he wrote daily when he was traveling. For example, when he was in Virginia from 1773 to 1774, Fithian composed 370 entries during the 371 days he was away from home.³

² Fithian's diaries contain accounts best characterized as a traveler's encounters with unknown people and places. In his exploration of American diary literature, Steven E. Kagle classified Fithian's diaries as travel diaries because Fithian "held the conviction that his stay would be temporary, but also preserved the attitude of an outsider" throughout his travels. See Kagle, *American Diary Literature, 1620-1799* (Boston, 1979), 67-71.

³ The median number of entries Fithian scribbled per month from 1766 to 1767 was seven and the average was twelve. Even more interesting, from July 1773 to September 1776, Fithian only wrote journal entries 141 days out of the 490 he was at home. That is to say, he composed a median of none and an average of six entries per month while he was at home in southern New Jersey. While itinerating along the

Yet, the first diary that Philip Vickers Fithian began in January 1766 was not a travelogue but a spiritual account of his religious faith. In its pages he scribbled mostly bits of hymns, sermons, and biblical quotations for reflection and meditation, and interspersed these with records of the ephemera of daily life. Along with his diary, Fithian also kept a “workbook” from January 1, 1767, until August 15, 1767, in which he recorded his agricultural labors. From the time he began writing until his last entry in October 1767, the young Presbyterian farmer used his juvenile diaries to document the ecology of his tidewater home and to record the human labors, tragedies, and triumphs that nature and nature’s God affected through cold, heat, and storm.

Uniformity and regularity were rarely characteristic of Fithian’s writing, however. Spiritual and agricultural affairs remained the dominant themes of Philip’s life during that first year and a half of writing. By November 1766 academic matters began to creep into the predominantly agricultural and spiritual contents of his writing. Short gaps in the diary highlighted the increasing time and attention Philip paid to the pursuit of learning. As education became more important to him than farming, he recorded his life as a scholar and documented his participation in what John Fea calls a “rural enlightenment.”⁴

Appalachian Mountains he scrawled entries 136 days out of the 220 that he was traveling and preaching. Finally, during his short seventy-two-day service in the Continental Army, there was only one day that Fithian did not compose a record in his diary. For the frequency of Fithian’s diary writing from 1766 to 1776, see Table 1, appendix.

⁴ John Fea argues that Fithian strove to become an enlightened member of the eighteenth century republic of letters, a “citizen of the world” whose primary loyalty was to “an international commonwealth of humankind.” See Fea, “The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian’s Rural Enlightenment,” *Journal of American History* 90 no.2 (September 2003): 464-72. Fea highlights the powerful yearnings young, rural men like Fithian had to achieve the Enlightenment’s ideal of a virtuous, learned, and worldly citizen-gentleman and their struggles against strong attachments to their locales of birth. While I agree that Fithian constantly battled against passion, I perceive two problems with Fea’s analysis of Fithian’s writings. First, Fea overemphasizes the centrality of sociability in the towns of Cohansie to Fithian’s acquiring a sense of himself as an enlightened citizen. Fea’s insistence upon a model of “cosmopolitan rootedness,” or “being cosmopolitan in a given place,” ignores the effect months and years away from home had on Fithian’s personhood. Consequently, his explanation comes at the expense of the real importance inter and intra-colonial travel had in Fithian’s education. Furthermore, I take issue

With his peers, Fithian sought self-improvement through learning, and documented his efforts in his diary, logging letter exchanges, conversations, debates, and attendance at singing schools. Then in the fall of 1767 he suspended his diary writing. For nearly five years while he continued his education at a classical school and at Princeton, Fithian left no record of his life in a journal.

Philip Vickers Fithian was born on December 29, 1747 in Greenwich, New Jersey, a town situated on the banks of the Cohansie River in the tidewater region of the Delaware Bay. He was the first child born to middling Presbyterian farmers, and spent his childhood there, farming on his family's land and receiving an elementary education. In his late teens, Fithian continued his learning under the tutelage of the Rev. Andrew Hunter Sr. and also attended a classical school operated by the Rev. Enoch Green in nearby Deerfield to prepare for a clerical career. His education culminated with his graduation from the College of New Jersey at Princeton in September 1772, where he had enrolled in the fall of 1770. Both his mother and father died in 1772 and left Fithian as their heir to provide for the care of his siblings, with the help of other family members. So at the age of twenty-four Fithian had come to an inopportune and unstable independence by eighteenth-century measures—he was without a salary and without a household of his own.⁵

with Fea's reading of Fithian's journals. In his explanation of Fithian's life in Cohansie, Fea relies on quotations from Fithian's journal which were composed two to six years after Philip had been away from home. Such a disregard for timing and change (the development of Fithian's journals and his maturation) fails to acknowledge the journals as complex texts that evolved over a period of ten years. In this case, context is everything.

⁵ The colonial family and a child's transition into the life stage of adulthood have been investigated by a number of historians. Although the literature is skewed towards New England, generally, in New England, the Middle Colonies, and the South, financial independence seems to have been the one thing that conferred full adult political status on men while marriage seems to have been another important social and cultural marker of adulthood for both men and women. Edmund S. Morgan argues that Puritan parents had not "fulfilled their obligations until they saw 'their Children well dispos'd of, well settled in the world.'"

The last three years of his life were marked by nearly constant movement. At the age of twenty-five, he left Greenwich for a year-long employment as a tutor in the family of Robert Carter at Nomini Hall in Westmoreland County, Virginia, in October 1773. When his employment was fulfilled, he returned to Greenwich on October 25, 1774, and became licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Philadelphia soon afterward. He then spent parts of February and March traveling along the seacoast and interior of eastern New Jersey ministering to congregations with vacant pulpits. He spent half of 1775 and 1776 itinerating in the Appalachian frontiers between southwestern Pennsylvania and southwestern Virginia. In July 1776 he left Greenwich to travel to New York with the Continental Army. It was the last journey he would make, before dysentery took his life on October 8, 1776.

The ten years during which Fithian kept his diaries was a time of remarkable change. It was a period marked by a personal transition into adulthood that also coincided with the rebellion of thirteen colonies against their king in Britain. Accordingly, travel might not have affected Fithian as it did had it not been for the private and public events that influenced his life between 1770 and 1776. On October 25, 1775 he married Elizabeth Beatty, with whom he had been acquainted for about five years. She was the sister-in-law of Fithian's tutor Enoch Green and had come to know

See, Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth Century New England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 79. Robert Gross, believes that a state of semi-independence was "a traditional part of coming of age in New England, a way station in the gradual progress to full adulthood." See, Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 75. Gloria Main also sees marriage and parenthood as fundamental to conferring "full adult status on young people." See, Main, *Peoples of A Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). See also, David Freeman Hawke, *Everyday Life in Early America* (New York: Perennial Library, 1998); David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), 68-75, 274-280, 481-485, 662-668; Daniel Blake Smith, "Autonomy and Affection, Parents and Children in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Families," in Roy N. Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, eds., *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspectives* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985): 46-58; Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

Fithian at Princeton, where she frequented the home of her brother, Dr. John Beatty. Philip and Elizabeth's marriage ended a tumultuous courtship that had been fraught with the emotions of love, suspicion, and anger. Until their marriage, that uneasy relationship had been one of his greatest preoccupations.

The American Revolution also shaped Fithian's life. During the six years he spent in and away from home, he observed the colonies' disaffection with Britain intensify from defiance to rebellion to bloody war. He was a witness to student protests, the radicalization of the Virginia gentry, mobilization on the frontier, and a slow-growing patriotic fervor that moved him to enlist as a chaplain in a battalion of the Continental Army in the summer of 1776. In that service he endured the British siege of New York City in August and September, witnessed the triumph of independence, was evacuated from the city, and survived skirmishes with British troops in one of the Revolutionary War's earliest battles.

Fithian's diaries have survived into the twenty-first century to be mined in bits and pieces by the hands of eager historians, thanks to the diligence of his brother Josiah. The original copies of his diaries were lost sometime after Josiah transcribed Fithian's words from loose pages into a series of eight small, blank books. For over a century these books were privately held by descendants of the Fithian family. In 1900, through the generosity of Mrs. Edward Hitchcock, one of Fithian's descendants, Princeton University was allowed to transcribe and publish a portion of the diaries that covered the period from 1766 to 1767 and from 1773 to 1776. Eight years later, the Hitchcock family

donated Fithian's diaries to his alma mater, where they can still be found in the collections of the Rare Books and Archives Department at the Firestone Library.⁶

However, the conditions under which Fithian's diaries were first published in the twentieth century handicapped scholars who would attempt to learn about their author's life and intentions and the past that he describes. When Princeton University first published some of the diaries in 1900, editor John Rogers Williams omitted Fithian's juvenile writings and much of the journals' content from 1775 and 1776. Subsequent editions have included previously omitted portions of the diaries and letters, but there are still letters and diary entries that have yet to be published. To this day, a complete edition of Fithian's journals has never been published. Moreover, editors have elected to remove choice material from the diaries to create "thematic" versions of Fithian's diaries (student at Princeton, tutor in Virginia, missionary on the frontier) that do not accurately reflect the actual composition of each diary.

Unfortunately, that editorial process unwittingly promoted a piecemeal reading of the texts. Since their publication in 1900, Fithian's diaries have captivated scholars by illuminating "historic places or personages" and by demonstrating Fithian's "own character and circumstances."⁷ Yet the first published editions of the journals had excised portions of his diary *because* editors were most interested in what they said about Princeton or about Virginia's planter elite. Reviewers were quick to esteem the journals for the "vivid description of life" they provide, the "valuable light on Princeton and plantation life in Virginia" that they shed, or for their "invaluable quality as a social and economic source on pre-revolutionary Virginia." But Fithian was neither a historian nor

⁶ John Rogers Williams edited and published the first collection of Fithian's journals and letters for the Princeton Historical Society in 1900.

⁷ "historic places and personages": *Journals, 1767-74*, xiv.

a sociologist, and scholars have erred in characterizing him primarily as a “keen observer” or “journalist.”⁸

Still others have struggled to understand the author of the diaries, finding it difficult to accept the contradictions in a man who some describe as “a gentle young Calvinist from Princeton” in love, or in whom others find a “snob” bent on “protest” and “private moralizing.” It is not the description of churches, spirituality, and Presbyterian practice that makes his journals unique; we would expect these to dominate a Presbyterian clergyman’s diary and if that was all that his diary contained, it *would be* repetitive and protracted. Fithian lived in a time in which our modern dichotomy of secular and religious was not so clear. The eighteenth century was a time in which a Laurence Sterne could be both a man of God and a man of nature, and Fithian was not out of place in that world. Like any of us, Fithian was above all else a “very human individual” who *did* live a life of contradiction. We cannot expect that his own writings would make him seem any less complex. Nor should we try to impose a convenient simplification on his life.⁹

In addition to the blinders of “historic places and personages,” propriety also led scholars to exclude “private” material from the published editions of Fithian’s diaries. In 1900 John Rogers Williams speculated that the journals had not been previously published “owing to the private nature” of the letters to Elizabeth Beatty. Apparently, Williams agreed that these were too private because he also chose to leave out much of

⁸ As one reviewer put it in 1900: “This work is a real valuable contribution to the history of Princeton College, and especially the social life in Virginia.” See: Review of *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal and Letters, 1767-1774...*, ed. by John Rogers Williams, *William and Mary College Historical Quarterly* 10 no. 1 (July, 1901), 71-72. “keen observer”: Louis B. Wright, Review of *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774...*, ed. by Hunter Dickinson Farish, *American Historical Review* 49 no. 2, (Jan. 1944), 297-98.

⁹ “a gentle young Calvinist”: Maude E. Woodfin, Review of *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774...*, ed. by Hunter Dickinson Farish, *Journal of Southern History* 9 no. 4 (Nov. 1943), 561-62. “snob”: Richard H. Shryock, Review of *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal, 1775-1776*, ed. by Robert Greenhalgh Albion and Leonidas Dodson, *American Literature* 9 no. 2 (May, 1937), 270-71.

the material concerning Elizabeth and Philip's relationship from the volume he edited, deeming those portions "too intimate and personal or too trivial a character for publication."¹⁰ However, this proved a great disservice because propriety became an impediment to a clearer historical understanding of the journals. As some scholars had noted, Fithian's romance with Elizabeth was the central conflict of his journals from 1773 to 1776.¹¹ That romance needed to be further investigated.

We may never have known more about Fithian than a series of dates had he not kept journals (and letters) and enriched them with vivid details of the people and world around him. He was not the most prolific eighteenth-century diarist, but his writings contain droll dialogue and biographical sketches, descriptive commentaries on dress, language, leisure, religious customs, and an invaluable record of the political, economic, and social state of the colonies on the eve of the Revolution. Without his rich writing, our knowledge of America's history of slavery, class, religion, the Enlightenment, and the Revolution would greatly suffer. Yet the diaries also tell their own story—a tale of romance and rebellion that drew from popular literature to describe and give meaning to the last five years of his life.

¹⁰ *Journals, 1767-74*, xiii-xiv.

¹¹ I am grateful to James Axtell and Rhys Isaac for suggesting that I not dismiss the centrality of Elizabeth Beatty to the writings of Philip Fithian. Maude H. Woodfin and Ralph B. Flanders took note of the importance of that relationship in their reviews of Robert Greehalgh Albion and Leonidas Dodson's 1934 edition, *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal, 1775-1776*. I am certain that many others have also realized the power Philip's relationship with Elizabeth held over his writing.

CHAPTER I

WRITING TO IMPROVE IN LEARNING: THE STRUGGLE FOR KNOWLEDGE

Wisdom is not the product of some Superficial Thoughts, or much Reading; but the effect of Experience and Observation in a Man, who has lived in the World with his Eyes Open.¹²

A hard rain fell on Greenwich, New Jersey on January 20, 1766, and inspired Fithian to begin writing his first diary. Born from the seas of the Atlantic and pushed inland by a powerful southern wind, the tempest raged through the tidewater lowlands surrounding the Cohansie River, washing out streets and roads and leaving them “so excessively muddy and miry” that it was “almost impossible to travel.”¹³ The storm left eighteen-year-old Fithian trapped indoors, unable to travel, and awed by the power of his god. Amid the “exceeding stormy” weather, he felt a divine call. To him, the fierce storm was the harbinger of his conversion experience and it compelled him to write about it all:

The wind at south east a cloudy heavy morning; in the afternoon the wind freshened being exceeding stormy and rained fast. I being at this time much troubled in my Mind about the state of my soul. My former evidences of Faith and Love to God seem clouded, and I (justly) left in the dark. Sin seems to rage and prevail more furious against Me; but I would hope in the Lord, and endeavor to fix my trust in him as the only object of happiness.¹⁴

With his opening diary entry, he began a narrative of spiritual conversion; a tempest in his spiritual life had accompanied the clouds, thunder, wind, and rain of that January

¹² John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, in James L. Axtell, ed., *The Educational Writings of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1968), 195.

¹³ F. Alan Palmer, ed., *The Beloved Cohansie of Philip Vickers Fithian* (Bridgeton, New Jersey, 1990), “Tuesday, January 21, 1766,” 12. Hereafter, *Journals, 1766-76*.

¹⁴ *Journals, 1766-76*, “Monday, January 20, 1766,” 11.

storm. Adhering to the familiar conventions of the conversion narrative, he imputed his emotional and spiritual turmoil to the worship of his god in the world outside.

Fithian continued to add portions of hymns and sermons and biblical quotations to his diary for reflection and meditation, but his juvenile writings also contain entries that describe the dependence of his rural community on the environment it inhabited.

Greenwich was one of a number of small villages situated in the Cohansie region of Cumberland County, New Jersey. The county contained fewer than three thousand residents in 1747 and a little over 8,000 in 1790; it was a place inhabited by farmers, whose lives and livelihood were dictated by the changing seasons. In daily entries Fithian recorded the human triumphs and tragedies produced by cold, heat, and storm. Winter was a time for cutting wood and threshing rye, when frigid storms forced them to “do nothing but look after creatures.” Croaking frogs and chirping birds announced the advent of spring, and according to Fithian, “their melodious notes keep a continual round of engaging music” proclaiming “an agreeable song to the God of nature.” Spring was a time for digging the ground, for planting parsnips and lettuce in the garden and apples in the nursery, summer was for reaping rye and wheat. Violent summer storms lashed inland from the bay, destroying Cohansie’s fields and impelling its inhabitants to offer “publick petitions...in the congregations...for clear and seasonable weather.” When the wind and rains desisted, the Presbyterians of the Delaware Bay thanked their gracious God, who was “pleased to withhold the Showers,” for sparing them from “entire desolation.” In the autumn, Fithian and his neighbors cut hay, made cider, gathered potatoes, apples, and beans, plowed, sowed, and harrowed rye, and cut their stalks of

corn.¹⁵ With his diary he noted the ecology of the tidewater region in which he lived, describing the rhythms of life deeply affected by nature and his God.

Nature offered pleasure, pain, and wonder to Fithian, but it also taught him important lessons, namely that careful attention to the environment was necessary to successfully live off the land. In July 1766 he noted that late rains and dry weather had “ripened [the] wheat beyond expectation,” and predicted that the “most hurrying and engaging time for harvest Men that perhaps was ever known” was soon to be upon his community. Consequently, his early writings meshed spiritual musings with attentiveness to plants and animals and winds and rains. He scribbled notes on the day’s weather—“Clear this morning, calm and some cooler on account of the great dews; the afternoon is clear and pleasant”—and often ended them with words of spiritual praise—“Then blessed be God, the mighty Lord, The God whom Israel fears; Who only wondrous in his works, beyond compare appears.”¹⁶ When not writing about labor or the weather, Fithian recorded local events and news from the outside world. Finally, from January 1, 1767, until August 15, 1767, he augmented his diary with a workbook in which he logged his agricultural labors. “We have been threshing in the afternoon I went to mill” was typical of his agricultural chores. Consequently, his diary was a repository of the kinds of knowledge that were useful to a farmer, while his workbook was an account of the day’s work.¹⁷

¹⁵Lucius Q.C. Elmer, *History of the Early Settlement and Progress of Cumberland County, New Jersey...* (Bridgeton, NJ: 1869), 36-7, 39; *Journals, 1766-76*, Dec. 2, 1766, Dec. 3, 1766, March 21, 1766, March 16, 1767, July 10, 1766, Sept. 1, 1766 to Nov. 15, 1766, 55, 56, 14, 80, 25, 39-51.

¹⁶ *Journals, 1766-76*, 26, Monday July 14, 1766.

¹⁷ *Journals, 1766-76*, 69, Thursday, January 29, 1767. In no way do I want to suggest that, while a farmer, Fithian was closed off from the outside world, but I do wish to challenge the idea that his experience was a unique product of a “rural enlightenment.” In his study of information diffusion in colonial America, Richard D. Brown argued that eighteenth century New England farmers were not insular peasants. They sought out news and knowledge because they understood their isolation: “farmers were generally sociable,

The contents of Fithian's writing began to slowly change shortly after he began night school in November 1766. Fithian's ambition was to become a minister and he took the education that was required for his vocational choice seriously. As free time to write became scarce, the diary bore the imprint of his newfound identity as a student. "I have for a month past been in night school which has greatly hindered my journal, and entirely broken it off at times, for several days together," he wrote on December 26, 1766. He was "very sorry on the account of stopping the journal," but his attendance at night school prevented him from continuing it. On May 27, 1767 after a months-long struggle to compose daily entries, Philip realized that his studies were more important to him. He was "obliged to break of[f] this journal here, though with reluctance, for several weighty reasons." He did not possess the time "sufficient to continue it" and his other writings.¹⁸

After he thrashed rye, hauled wood, and cleaned and carted flax seeds on his father's and uncle's farms during the day, Philip studied in the evening. In his diary, he related that he was working on the large and small catechisms, the "universal History of the Garden of Eden," the "universal history of the children of Israel," Richard Blackmore's poems, and Homer's *Iliad*. More important, "writing" itself began to appear as a completed task scribbled in the pages of what had previously been a "workbook" reserved for documenting farm labor. On July 21, 1767 Philip recorded in his diary that

literate, and preferred to be informed." The "most critical store of information for farmers was experience." See Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York, 1989), 133, 134.

¹⁸ *Journals, 1766-76*, 55, Thursday, November 27, 1766; 59, Friday, December 26, 1766; 123, Tuesday, July 21, 1767.

he “did a considerable quantity of writing,” and in a parallel entry in his “workbook” he wrote the following: “stormy, I have been writing.”¹⁹

Fithian was a young man driven by a thirst for knowledge and a desire to improve in learning. Busy during the summer of 1767 writing and exchanging letters and short essays with a small group of literary-minded friends, Philip’s diary pages became tinged with desire for self-improvement through further education. In 1767 he explained to his father that “the most happy hours I find in life” are “those when I am quite alone & have free, & undisturbed Liberty to ponder over the Sentiments of some famous Writer.” Philip disapproved of mankind’s natural, “deep drenched” ignorance and praised “a good Education” as “the best fortune a man can possess.”²⁰ So from 1767 to 1769, Fithian continued his education by studying at the Rev. Green’s classical academy in Deerfield. Green prepared Fithian to meet the entrance requirements at Princeton, by teaching him Latin. Within his first month with Green, Fithian had finished his study of grammar in preparation for matriculation.

Fithian’s desire to become learned echoed a Lockean optimism in the ability of education to improve mankind. Education, according to Locke, was meant to achieve four great ends: virtue, wisdom, breeding, and learning. Locke defined virtue as “a true notion of God,” yearning for truth, and the inclination to be “good nature’d”; wisdom as the able management of one’s “Business”; breeding as not thinking “meanly of our selves” or of others. Learning was in general the “possession of an ample stock of useful

¹⁹ *Journals, 1766-76*, Sunday, March 29, 1767, 84; Tuesday, April 7, 1767, 88; Thursday, April 16, 1767, 91; Wednesday, May 13, 1767, 102.

²⁰ Philip Fithian [PF] to Joseph Fithian, August 10, 1767, in *Journal, 1767-74*, 2.

knowledge.”²¹ These life-skills, however, were to be obtained through observation and emulation—“experience reflected upon.”²² Fithian’s understood the connection between seeking models of virtue and self-improvement. For instance, virtuous behavior could be emulated by modeling one’s own behavior on historical exemplars. Fithian described the “true Value” of education as the ability of “Men of Letters...to refine, & often to reform Mankind, to correct their Principles, & check their Vices.” The utility of observation and emulation, according to Fithian, was that “by a general Survey of the Lives & Manners of Men,” educated men “can better form their own Path.”²³ And if he had not yet learned to live a life in pursuit of gentility, virtue, breeding, and spiritual devotion at Deerfield, Fithian surely learned to do so while he was a student at Princeton.

From 1770 to 1772, the College of New Jersey sustained and nurtured Fithian’s intellectual inquisitiveness and academic ambition. The Revolutionary-era colleges were meant to be institutions that removed sons from their families and placed them in an environment in which they were exposed to exemplary models of virtuous living. In this manner, colleges were meant to reform youth, correct familial educational failures, and teach adolescent males how to behave with manly gentility.²⁴ Samuel Finley, president of Princeton from 1761 to 1766, wrote of the value of virtuous examples, asserting that “General precepts form abstract ideas of virtue, but in Examples, Virtues are made visible, in all their Circumstances.” Accordingly, students were taught to live and learn

²¹ Locke, *Some Thoughts*, 122, 240, 241, 244, 245; Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York, 1970), 362.

²² Cremin, 427.

²³ Philip Fithian to Joseph Fithian, September 28, 1769, in Williams, ed., *Journal and Letters*, 5.

²⁴ Phyllis Vine, “The Social Function of Eighteenth-Century Higher Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* 16 no.4 (Winter, 1976), 409. In the eighteenth century, Vine argues, the college rather than the family came to be seen as the social institution most capable of promoting virtue and developing an ethic of social responsibility among the elite. According to Vine, ministers believed that the family could no longer serve as the training ground for youth in light of the moral, religious, and social decline that the clergy believed was taking place at the time.

by observing models drawn from history or contemporary life. Because these exemplars “gave substance to ideas,” tutors at the college stressed emulation, and encouraged their charges to identify with exceptional models of mankind and to strive to live like them.²⁵

Like most colonial colleges at the time, Princeton was created to produce young men who would become public leaders in the church and state; the college was to be a training ground for leaders of both the religious and secular kind. The “New Side” Presbyterian founders built Princeton as “a seminary for educating ministers of the Gospel” and, demonstrating their incorporation of the dominant educational ideals of the time, also hoped “it will be a means of raising up men that will be useful in other learned professions—ornaments of the State as well as the Church.”²⁶ Graduates of the college were meant to become servants of their society; “Live not for your selves, but the Publick,” President Samuel Davies instructed the graduating class of 1760 as he urged them to be virtuous, Christian citizens.²⁷ For Davies, the college’s graduates needed to possess devotion to the gospel as well as intellect and reason. Consequently, the College of New Jersey hoped to make its students the leaders of not just any colonial polity, but a “reformed colonial society.”²⁸

Yet when Fithian arrived at Princeton, he stepped into Dr. John Witherspoon’s college—an American school with a curriculum that had become greatly influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment under its new president. From about 1730 to 1790, Scotland’s universities at Edinburgh and Glasgow became the breeding grounds of the Scottish

²⁵ Howard Miller, *The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education, 1707-1837* (New York, 1976), 91, 90.

²⁶ David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport, Conn., 1985), 12, 14.

²⁷ Miller, 82. Miller skillfully documents and describes the effect of Awakening evangelicalism on the Presbyterian colleges, especially the College of New Jersey: “Colonial Princeton, then, was the institutional expression of ideas and forces that were suddenly released by the Great Awakening,” 102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 83, 87.

Enlightenment. Natural science, empiricism, and experientialism provided the foundation for Scottish intellectuals such as Adam Smith, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, and Hugh Blair, to investigate human nature and society, political economy, rhetoric, and human knowledge and understanding.²⁹ The Scottish universities were educational institutions known for their “utilitarian social service” and commitment to “educational progress and reform,” and they served as the model for Witherspoon’s endeavors at Princeton.³⁰ Witherspoon’s Scottish-influenced curriculum and pedagogy exemplified the college’s newfound commitment to creating enlightened individuals. Oratory was intended to transform students into men who would make a positive impression on others as leaders, while a devotion to free inquiry was meant to instill a spirit of toleration and debate.³¹

Moreover, Witherspoon taught his young scholars a Common Sense moral philosophy that emphasized the importance of seeking models of virtue in “men of learning and worth.”³² Common Sense moral philosophy was in opposition to the enlightened idealism that, prior to his term in office, swept through the British universities and American colleges and threatened to undermine religiosity.³³ In direct contradiction to idealism’s subjectivist assumptions, Witherspoon believed that moral truths could be learned and accurately deduced from observation and so he promoted a

²⁹ Ibid., 86-97.

³⁰ Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York, 1971), 23.

³¹ Princeton’s New Side Presbyterian founders originally chartered the College of New Jersey as a seminary in 1746, but, like most colonial colleges at the time, Princeton trained young men to become public leaders in both the church and state. “Live not for your selves, but the Publick,” President Samuel Davies instructed the graduating class of 1760 as he urged them to be virtuous, Christian citizens (Miller, 82). On the social function of the Revolutionary colleges, see Vine, 409-24. On the founding of Princeton see, Miller, especially 65, 80-87; Robeson, 12-14. Sloan, 131.

³² Sloan, 131.

³³ Idealism was a philosophy that had emerged out of the Enlightenment and stressed that humans could attain only a limited knowledge of reality. See, J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (Lanham, Maryland, 2002), 123-27.

“scientific moral philosophy” that sought to find moral principles through the empirical study of human nature. Witherspoon’s pragmatism emphasized the ability of reason and experience to elucidate real moral truth, but it also had a social function: to give his students “sound judgment” and enable them to share in and identify with the “common experience of all men.”³⁴

Finally, because Witherspoon sought to turn young Princetonians into colonial civil servants, his curriculum touched upon political ideology. Witherspoon’s lectures blended moral philosophy with commentary on government, politics, and law. He emphasized man’s natural rights and the “Protestant-Lockean social compact theory of government, the benefits of mixed government, the necessity for civil liberty, and especially, the right of resistance to tyranny.”³⁵ According to this theory, individuals gave up some of their rights in order to form civil societies and promised their allegiance to some form of government. Individuals consented to that government with their obedience in exchange for its protection of their interests, but if that government appeared to be degenerating into anarchy or tyranny, individuals possessed the right to rebellion.³⁶ Students found historical models of degenerate and tyrannical republics, empires, leaders in readings assigned from classical works by authors like Cicero, Plato, Plutarch, and Tacitus, and discovered more contemporary models of government and society in works by Locke, Montesquieu, and Trenchard and Gordon. As David W. Robson argues, “Princeton and the other Patriot colleges...taught...a value system and a pro-American politics” characterized by the “Commonwealth’ or ‘country Whig’

³⁴ Sloan, 128-29.

³⁵ Sheldon S. Cohen and Larry R. Gerlac, “Princeton in the Coming of the American Revolution,” *New Jersey History* 42 no.2 (Summer 1974), 86.

³⁶ Francis L. Broderick, “Pulpits, Physics, and Politics: The Curriculum of the College of New Jersey, 1746-1794,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser. 6 no. 1 (Jan., 1949), 65-67.

ideology.”³⁷ In Princeton’s Whig and Clio literary and debating societies, students reiterated the lessons they had learned in the classroom and disputed political theories and controversial subjects. Fithian became actively engaged in the Whig Society and shared in debates with like-minded students like James Madison and Philip M. Freneau, who were founding members of the society and devoted patriots of liberty. Consequently, “freedom became the essence of the Princeton system.” Nassau Hall was “a seminary of sedition,” and its classrooms were “nurseries of republicanism.”³⁸

While reminiscing about Princeton on September 19, 1774, Fithian wrote the following entry in his diary: “Every time I reflect on that Place of retirement & Study, where I spent two years which I call the most pleasant as well as the most important Period in my past life—Always when I think upon the *Studies*, the *Discipline*, the *Companions*, the *Neighborhood*, the *exercises*, & *Diversions*, it gives me a secret & real Pleasure.”³⁹ According to Fithian, it was not Cohansie—however rural yet simultaneously cosmopolitan it may have been—but Princeton that was the place that had the greatest affect on his life. Princeton linked Fithian’s life before 1770 to his life afterwards. It was the pinnacle of his educational achievement; his degree confirmed that he possessed a knowledge and status that distinguished him from the majority of colonial society. It admitted him into a professional network of clergymen, who maintained their

³⁷ Robson, 70.

³⁸ Broderick, 50; Louis Leonard Tucker, “Centers of Sedition: Colonial Colleges and the American Revolution,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 41 (Boston, 1980), 30, 18. For a short history of the Whig Society at Princeton see, J. Jefferson Looney, *Nurseries of Letters and Republicanism: A Brief History of the American Whig-Cliosophic Society and its Predecessors, 1765-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1996), 4-8. Bernard Bailyn traced the origins of the Revolutionaries political ideology back to classical philosophy, enlightenment rationalism, English legal history, Protestantism, and especially the radical social and political thought of the English Whig polemicists. Bailyn argued that these ideas created a “contagion of liberty” that surged through colonial American society with great effect. See, Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, 1992), 232.

³⁹ *Journal, 1773-74*, 192, “Monday, September 19, 1774.”

connections through “ministerial associations and networks of college alumni.” The knowledge and status that accompanied a college education gave Fithian some security as a member of the local elite in Cohansie, because he had proven himself to be an intermediary, capable of moving within both the rural and urban communities of colonial America. But his Princeton education also made him an associate of some of British North America’s most wealthy and powerful elite families. Princeton gave Fithian access to social connections that enabled him to “participate in an extensive, cosmopolitan, regional network” and offered him opportunities to continue to improve and secure his status as a man of genteel tastes. It “stamped” him as a “cosmopolitan gentleman, who, whether obscure or prominent, enjoyed access to a network of peers who rose to stations of importance.”⁴⁰

That is not to say that his attachment to home was not important. Fithian would forever be shaped by his childhood and youth in southern New Jersey. He would always be informed by the communities of family, friendship, faith, and learning that the inhabitants of Cohansie created and relied upon to give meaning to their lives. Yet it was at Princeton, and that place alone, where Fithian cultivated what would become two of the most important relationships to occupy him in the last years of his life. One was with a woman. The other was with an idea—liberty—and a fraternity of young men—his “Brother grown-Classmates”—who were devoted to preserving it.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Brown, 70, 91. Brown argues for this type of professional associationalism in the context of New England, but it seems equally appropriate to generalize the same phenomenon to New Jersey and the middle colonies.

⁴¹ “Brother grown...”: *Journal*, 1775-76, 96, “Thursday, August 10, 1775.”

CHAPTER II

WRITING FOR LOVE: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST JEALOUSY

I had sworn to her eternal fidelity;—she had a right to my whole heart:—to divide my affections was to lessen them—to expose them was to risk them: where there is risk there may be loss:—and what wilt thou have, Yorick! to answer to a heart so full of trust and confidence—so good, so gentle, and unreprouching?

—Mr. Yorick⁴²

I began a new journal this morning; you shall see it, for if I live not till your return to England, I will leave it to you as a legacy
—Yorick to Eliza⁴³

As a youth, Fithian was taught to guard himself from being overcome by his emotions. In his juvenile diary he disapproved of peers who had been “conquered by their passions” and whose actions had laid “snares and ruin to entangle the innocent.” And as a student at Princeton, he had come to believe that “several of [the passions], if carried to any considerable length, are generally attended with dangerous consequences.” Educated to control and redirect the passions, Fithian waged a nearly constant ideological battle against the dangers of passion as an adult. Yet, Fithian also believed that the regulation of emotions allowed mankind to engage in “suitable & useful Employments,” for “to be able with Prudence to restrain & with Wisdom to govern our Passions is a laudable, but very difficult Thing.” For instance, ambition was “agreeable and useful” emotion, which “under due regulations” was “very important” in the refinement of human beings, exciting them to “education mightily conducted” and “the study of great

⁴² Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, 2 vols. [Philadelphia], 1770, II, 42.

⁴³ Sterne, *Letters From Yorick to Eliza*, Philadelphia, 1773, 36.

and noble things.” For even though emotion, like jealousy, typically led to destructive human behaviors, it had “various effects when its subjects are different” like any other “strange passion in the human mind.”⁴⁴

Jealousy, anger, and mistrust were emotions that were characteristic of community life in rural Cohansie and of the intimate relationships of the people who inhabited the communities of that region. But no matter how hard Fithian tried to rise above the contentiousness of his daily life, his actions proved that he could not always live up to the principles and values to which he aspired. Despite his rational efforts to control the passions, jealousy consumed him.⁴⁵ Fithian believed that “wherever jealousy between the sexes takes place, it destroys the comfort & happiness of the parties, in proportion to its Strength, & Duration.” In his relationship with Elizabeth Beatty, jealousy proved “mischievous in its nature...& neither desirable, nor laudable.”⁴⁶ When it came to love, his ideals were a weak defense against emotion and the passionate instincts of his heart. Chastised by friends and neighbors for his “rakish” behavior toward young women in the summer of 1773, Fithian repeatedly promised his fidelity to Elizabeth in order to reclaim his good reputation and to secure her love. The principle of fidelity suited Fithian well in his dealings with Elizabeth and other women. Fidelity allowed him to redefine a personal vice into a mantle of gentility and virtue.

Fithian cultivated himself as a genteel man of letters, and he had first found inspiration to uphold his pledge of fidelity to Elizabeth while reading Laurence Sterne’s

⁴⁴ *Journals, 1766-76*, January 24, 1766, 12; *Journals, 1767-74*, September 10, 1772, “An Exercise at the Public Commencement,” 23; PUL, “A Peace on Ambition, composed for an exercise on the respectable Whig Society...written May 20, 1770,” “On Education and Examples their influence on our actions, being an exercise for the Whig Society...performed June 8, 1771,” “On the Passions: An Exercise in the Whig Society Performed Sept. 10, 1771.”

⁴⁵ Fea, 476.

⁴⁶ *Journals, 1767-74*, September 10, 1772, “An Exercise at the Public Commencement,” 23.

Letters from Yorick to Eliza in the summer of 1773. Published posthumously in England and America that year, *Letters to Eliza* was a collection of letters that the English novelist had written to Elizabeth Draper, a married woman he had befriended and fallen in love with in 1766. Sterne and Mrs. Draper's acquaintance was short-lived; it ended when she returned to her husband in India after spending only two months in England.

Fithian identified with Yorick's plight and was moved by the affectionate and sentimental letters that filled Sterne's book. As he pointed out to Elizabeth on August 17, 1773, the poignancy of Sterne's *Letters* had left a strong impression on him:

I have just been reading Yorricks celebrated Letters to Eliza: They are familiar—they are plain—They are beautiful. I love Eliza, from the admirable Description he has given of her: But possibly he has been wholly romantic; & only painted the Woman he could love; or, if has given his own candid Sentiments, & described that Woman in Truth; There is in America an Eliza I would venture, from Yorricks own Picture, to set against it; & let Yorricks himself be Judge should I venture never so largely, I am sure I should succeed.

From that day on Fithian began to use the pseudonym "Eliza" to refer to Elizabeth. Like Yorick, Fithian was separated by many miles from the woman he loved and chose to express the pain of that separation in writing. In September and December 1773 he closed his letters to Elizabeth by saying, "I am, Eliza, yours." Yorick's epistolary professions of love to Eliza and his promises of fidelity moved Philip to overcome his own romantic tragedies.⁴⁷

So it was that, like Yorick, Fithian kept a diary for his Eliza and may even have intended that she read his diaries, either in part or whole, after his return home. Fithian's three "travel journals" are written in an epistolary style as if they were an "open letter" to

⁴⁷ PF to EB, August 31, 1773, September 10, 1773, in *Journal, 1773-74*, 10-11, 12-13.

Elizabeth.⁴⁸ Just two months after returning from a short vacation back home in New Jersey in the spring of 1774, Philip wrote her a promise in his diary: “O my dear Laura, I would not injure your friendly Spirit; So long as I breathe Heavens vital air I am unconditionally & wholly Yours.” Fithian used apostrophe on two subsequent occasions in his 1774 diary. One appears as he described the delight he enjoyed when he toasted her name: “Yesterday evening I scribbled a little for Laura, & to Day I drank her Health from my Heart in generous Medaira—Yes, best of Women, when you are the Toast I drink wine with Pleasure.”⁴⁹ The other appeared following the discovery of a slave insurrection plot on a neighboring plantation, where it was “supposed” that the neighbor’s slaves had appeared in their master’s bedroom “in the middle of the night” to murder him. After learning of what had occurred, Fithian confessed in his diary that, “now, Laura, I sleep in fear too, though my Doors & Windows are all secured!”⁵⁰

The clearest evidence that Fithian wrote his diaries so that he might share them with Elizabeth appears in two letters from November 30 and December 1, 1774, in which he excerpted two complete diary entries. The two letters were written during a tense period in their relationship when he again heard displeasing “Trash” in Cohansie concerning his relationship with Elizabeth. It was rumored that he was “regrettably and impertinently intimate with Miss Beatty,” that she and another woman had “disapproved” of his conduct and had agreed to confront Philip with their “sentiments,” and had advised him to “enter upon a different Behaviour.” To defend himself against any accusation of impropriety, Fithian provided Elizabeth with an “Extract from my Virginia Journal,” that

⁴⁸ See: Rhys Isaac, *Landon Carter’s Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 45.

⁴⁹ *Journal, 1773-74*, 134, July 8, 1774; 120, July 13, 1774.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 187, September 8, 1774.

attested to his devotion to her. As he explained: “pray Madam, did you believe such Trash—?...I was to Day looking over my Papers & saw Something Apropos, if I can turn to it presently you shall have it.”⁵¹ The following day, he sent her a second letter, in which he reminded her of his fidelity again by including another excerpt from his “Virginia Journal.” That excerpt included his resolve to ignore any marriage prospects he might find in Virginia. As he explained to her at the end of the excerpt, “This is not strained Panegyrick; it is still the faintest Image of my Heart.”⁵²

Even though their relationship remained tenuous throughout 1774, Philip continued to address Elizabeth as a reader of his journals following his return to New Jersey that fall. After preaching at Greenwich on November 30, 1774, he explained to his diary how he had nearly bungled his sixth public sermon: “I lost my thoughts I lost my presence of mind, I lost my discourse—And, was within an Inch, my dear Eliza, of losing my Sight.”⁵³ However, his tendency to write directly to Elizabeth as “Eliza” is even more pronounced in the two separate diaries he kept during his missionary journeys in 1775 and 1776. Although he had used apostrophe sparingly in the diary he kept as a tutor, he used it more freely and expressively in his missionary journals. Shortly after he began the narrative of his first missionary expedition to the western Pennsylvania frontier, he related the following anecdote to illustrate the depth of his love for her: “A whipperwill flew down...& began its solitary Song in the same Manner, My dear Eliza, as one did a few Evenings before I left Home, when we were sitting by your Window—Mr Locke’s Doctrine of the Association of Ideas came into my Head at once, & so strong, that the Bird’s Song made me fancy myself in fact, with you—I was for two or three

⁵¹ PF to EB, November 30, 1774, in *Journal, 1773-74*, 211-212.

⁵² PF to EB, December 1, 1774, in *Ibid.*, 212-214.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 249, November 22, 1774.

minutes happy....”⁵⁴ By the time he was writing those two journals, his relationship with Elizabeth was no longer marked by the same tensions the two had experienced before 1775. Free of the jealousy, doubt, and suspicion that had marred their relationship for years, Philip was liberated to write diaries or “volumes” that were decidedly composed for her.

Fithian’s romantic tragedies had begun soon after meeting Elizabeth Beatty in 1770. Beatty was born on March 26, 1752, in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, to Ann Reading and the Rev. Charles Beatty, a prominent New Side Presbyterian minister and a trustee of Princeton. Philip and Elizabeth were first acquainted at Deerfield, New Jersey in June 1770 while Elizabeth was visiting her sister Mary, the wife of the Rev. Enoch Green. From that time forward, Fithian corresponded off and on with Elizabeth (or *Eliza* and *Laura* as he also called her), and stated that he had “an Intimacy” with her since May 1771. Despite their difficult start, the couple had grown closer while Fithian was a student at Princeton; Elizabeth frequently visited her brother, Dr. John Beatty, who lived there, and Fithian had occasionally traveled to “Newington” to “spend an Afternoon with that dear girl Laura” and to escape the confines of Nassau Hall. Their relationship continued after Fithian graduated from Princeton in September 1772, and in October he proposed marriage to her. Elizabeth, however, did not accept his proposal for a “nearer alliance,” and Philip was left to wonder whether she preferred “another’s Love.” On the first of December, Philip began boarding with a family in Deerfield in order to study theology with Enoch Green and to prepare for the examination that would license him as a Presbyterian minister. That winter Philip remained “near the lovely Laura” in Deerfield

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6-7, May 9, 1775.

where he “enjoyed her good society.” He and Elizabeth continued to see each other at her brother-in-law’s home, but their relationship remained undefined.⁵⁵

Then, in August 1773 he traveled to Princeton to inquire about an employment opportunity as a tutor in Virginia and found he was the subject of gossip and ridicule in Cohansie soon after he returned home:

Wednesday, September 1, 1773

Rose by six—Not well this Morning; feel a[n]guish, pained in my bones, & unusually dispirited...My good Landlady, poor old Body, has the Fever and Ague—Dined with her Family—Heard much News of my last Journey to Princeton—That I figured the Beau—Affected the Behaviour of a Rake—Gallanted the Ladies—That I am soon to preach; But will make a damn’d droll appearance in the Pulpit with powdered Hair, a long Cue and deep Ruffles—That Miss Beatty is soon to be married, &c, &c...

Fithian was unimpressed and infuriated. In popular literature, a rake was associated with indiscipline, riot, rebellion, vice, and immorality. The rake was, as G.J. Baker-Benfield relates, “synonymous with extravagance and waste” and the “most flamboyant of a ‘whole movement of fashion’ that fostered ‘infidelity and the pursuit of pleasure.’”⁵⁶

So though he was deeply rooted to his community, Philip found it a source of frustration. He was impatient with the triviality of gossip in his rural community and ashamed that his reputation had become the subject of jest. With sarcasm, his diary entry went on to describe how a cabal of cunning women had spread the malicious and misleading talk:

...Deerfield I vow, is the source of Intelligence! And many of its inhabitants, especially the annuated Females... generally have such extensive knowledge in the Affairs of the Neighbors, being blest with kind Correspondents whom they at first sollicit and afterwards plunder of what is to be wrung from them, either

⁵⁵ *Journal, 1773-74*, 105, May 10, 1774; 127, June 29, 1774; PF to EB, December 15, 1772, in Vincent Stanley McCluskey, “The Life and Times of Philip Vickers Fithian, Revolutionary War Hero,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1991), 99; *Journal, 1773-74*, 32, December 15, 1773.

⁵⁶ Baker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), 45, 38.

by the gentle Influence of Flattery of Persuasion, or by the strong Compulsion of Threatening & Torture!—That kind of Matter, neither mean, foolish, or important can be carrying on within the Sphere of their Connections, which is ten or fifteen Miles in every Way; I say they circumstantially know everything that is done, or actions; & neither the Meanness, the Folly, nor yet the needful Secrecy of a Matter, can avail to hinder its being their vulgar Entertainment...it happens I say, almost always, that some new & false circumstance is added by every Female that relates the Matter, while it is circulating through the clamorous Sisterhood. Men listen to it gladly & feel that they have not wit enough to cough at it themselves.⁵⁷

Philip loved his birthplace, but he also deplored its networks of gossip, which he feared were capable of undermining his character and reputation. Consequently, his home was also “contentious Cohansie.”⁵⁸

The local gossip was particularly irritating to Fithian because it involved his relationship with Elizabeth Beatty. He was courting her and thought that the news of her engagement was false. He related the gossip to Elizabeth in a letter, telling her that “it is something curious, tho’ by no Means troublesome, that every part of my Behaviour, is in whatever Place I go, so circumstantially inspected...But I will turn it off with a Smile.”

He believed the rumor had been spread in Cohansie “in Triumph to dash me!”⁵⁹

Reputation was important to Fithian, and he attempted to assert his honor by restraining his passionate indignation.

However, his romantic relationship with Elizabeth would long remain the conversation of Cohansie’s residents. No matter how hard he tried to keep the intimate details of their relationship private or to ignore his neighbors’ nosiness and judgments, he struggled to safeguard Elizabeth’s affections and maintain his public reputation and character. Fithian presented himself as a man of feeling to Elizabeth to counteract his

⁵⁷ *Journals, 1766-76*, 189-90, September 1, 1773.

⁵⁸ *Journal, 1775-76*, 257, March 15, 1774.

⁵⁹ [PF] to Elizabeth Beatty [EB], August 31, 1773, in *Journal, 1773-74*, 10-11.

reputation for being a “man of the world”; he purposefully highlighted his Christian piety, benevolence, compassion, and especially the “virtuous suffering” he endured while separated from Elizabeth from 1773 to 1776. Until their marriage on October 25, 1775, their romance was rarely without tension or drama.⁶⁰

The tensions between Fithian and Elizabeth resurfaced in the summer of 1773 and continued until May 1775. Elizabeth apparently protested Philip’s decision to leave New Jersey to work as a tutor in the home of Robert Carter in Virginia in August 1773. One year later, he recollected in his diary what had occurred that day: “Last year I had the Pleasure to be present & hear the Examination—I saw Laura too; & the Vixen abused me! She shall repent of that insult; Indeed she must feel, tho’ I wound myself in the experiment, the Consequence of Slighting good-humour & Civility.”⁶¹ Their relationship was not in good standing when Philip left her in that fall, yet when he returned home in 1774 he found that it had still not improved. During that year abroad on the Carter’s plantation, he pined over Elizabeth; she was a frequent subject in his diary and he wrote her a torrent of letters from Virginia, most of which she left unanswered. Moreover, he returned to New Jersey jealous and hurt. In May he had heard a rumor that “two young Gentleman of Fashion & Substance in Town,” were “making their addresses to Laura.”⁶² In October 1774 he heard another rumor that the “turn-Coat Laura...loves & courts one Mr Rodman.” Hearing that news two days before he was depart for home “distressed” him “exceedingly.” He was perplexed by her failure to reply to his letters and utterly devastated by the persistent rumors that another man was courting her. In a frustrated

⁶⁰ Barker-Benfield, 245-248.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 170, August 17, 1774.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 107, May 21, 1774.

fury of jealousy and despair, Philip determined his course of action in the pages of his diary:

Tho I have made a solemn vow which I have no inclination at all to forego, yet if it shall appear that she has listened to another, my dearest vow is not inviolable; I will retreat from every former Promise, I will not hearken to womanish solicitations, but I shall in return for her want of goodness treat her with contempt; & Sincerely pity, instead of resent, her ineffectual Caprice.

Despite the “solemn vow” and all the other promises he had made to her, Fithian believed she had chosen to abandon their courtship. From his perspective, her rejection had fulfilled his expectations of women, as expressed in one of his proverbs: “varium & mutabile semper Feminae.”⁶³ Elizabeth had either betrayed him or he had failed to secure her love. He chose to place the blame on her gender and its duplicitous nature.

Fithian was not the only person who was concerned about the manner in which his courtship with Elizabeth was progressing. In late January 1775, he received three anonymous letters, “written in a disguised hand & sent in a secret Manner to dissuade me from continuing my Intimacy with Laura.” The letters informed him that Elizabeth despised his friendship and had set him “adrift into the wide World.” In addition, Philip wrote in his diary on January 30 that the Rev. Hunter gave him “correction too about my intimacy with Laura, & such as was not so agreeable as I should wish.” According to Fithian, Hunter censured him for his relationship with Beatty and called the gossip a “Stain” on Philip’s “Moral Character.” Philip was shocked to “hear it...from the Lips of Grey-Headed Veneration itself” and wrote a furious letter to Elizabeth in which he called

⁶³ Ibid., 207, October 18, 1774. “Woman is always fickle and changeable.”

her “unstable, treacherous, & every way perfidious” and threatened to end their relationship and leave Cohansie for good.⁶⁴

Throughout their courtship, Fithian struggled to control his passionate desire for Elizabeth and also contain his anger in moments of jealousy and frustration. In Cohansie, he complained of feeling “uneasy and disturbed” when he left her presence. In Virginia, he had nightmares in which “she was treacherous” but, “inspite of all [his] strongest efforts,” he could not stop dwelling on “that Vixen Laura.” In his diary he complained that his attempts to expel her from his thoughts were futile because “like hidden fire they introduce themselves & seize; & overcome me when perhaps I am pursuing some amuseing or useful Study.”⁶⁵ And while he was traveling in the Appalachians, he lamented that “it is hard to be alone in a strange country in Health, much harder to be distrest with Weakness,” and felt “sick—Sick at my Heart” separated from her.⁶⁶ He also lashed out at her in his letters, expressing frustration in her neglect of him.

Fithian’s romance with Elizabeth tested his resolve to uphold his character and to safeguard his “delicate Reputation.” According to Fithian, a good reputation was “like a Virgin’s Character, which, like driven Snow, is easily soiled.”⁶⁷ Other eighteenth-century men also struggled to “cherish the seeds of piety and chastity in a heart which the passions are interested to corrupt.” The effort to love without succumbing to the passions was deemed the “noblest effort of a soul, fraught and fortified with the justest sentiments of Religion and Virtue.”⁶⁸ Realizing that he possessed acquaintances outside New Jersey,

⁶⁴ PF to EB, January 31, 1775, PUL. Note is written on the transcription of the three anonymous letters that Fithian sent to Beatty.

⁶⁵ *Journal*, 1773-74, 82, March 19, 1774; 84, March 22, 1774.

⁶⁶ *Journal*, 1775-76, 97, August 11, 1775.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 98, August 11, 1775.

⁶⁸ Laurence Sterne, “Preface,” to *Letters From Yorick to Eliza*, Philadelphia, 1773, 10.

Fithian cautioned himself against the “impropriety of fixing a Character upon the accidental Behaviour of a few Days,” and affirmed the “Necessity of making *All* our Conduct, in *every* Place, simply, & singly descriptive of our *true* Character.”⁶⁹ He prided himself on his “propriety of conduct with regard to my private character,” and was “exceeding happy” when he “could break away with Reputation” from potentially damaging social environments while in Virginia.⁷⁰ He understood that, no matter what province he found himself in, reputation mattered a great deal in his colonial society.

Fithian’s preoccupation with Elizabeth Beatty and his nearly obsessive concern for his own moral behavior may suggest that he began to keep his diary to document his travels for her during the last three years of his life. When he left Greenwich in 1773 and 1775, Philip was devoted to upholding a promise of fidelity to Elizabeth, and during his journeys he appears to have dedicated his diaries to proving that his vow had been kept. The three diaries Philip wrote during this period center on his travels to northeastern Virginia, western Pennsylvania, and western Virginia. Each journey was recorded in a separate diary “volume,” in which he documented his travels, his experience, and the constancy of his love.

In his diaries he wrote pining accounts of their separation and of his deep yearning to see her again. On December 15, 1773, he was heartsick, dreamed of returning to Elizabeth in New Jersey in order to “enjoy her good society,” and reminisced back to the previous winter when he had lived near her at Deerfield. Three days later he set out a “proposal” to travel back home in May to be examined before the Presbytery of Philadelphia and to “see the good and benevolent Laura.” He wrote her a letter, telling

⁶⁹ *Journal*, 1775-76, 97, August 11, 1775.

⁷⁰ *Journal*, 1773-74, 204, October 12, 1774; 57, January, 18, 1774.

her that he would share “many curious Occurrences of this Winter” when he returned to Cohansie in the spring, “but none with greater Truth than that I have been your constant Admirer.” The young tutor documented his life in his diary to ensure that he *would* be able to tell her about his experiences in the exact terms that he promised.⁷¹

So while his letters testified to his devotion, his diary provided the circumstantial evidence of his fidelity. In letters written from Virginia, he promised Elizabeth that he remained her “constant Admirer;” in his 1773 diary he recorded every precaution he took to excuse himself from large social gatherings and balls where he might be tempted to drink and gamble, or to become too close to the young daughters of the planter elite. Philip was resolved to return to New Jersey untainted by the temptations and vice of Virginia, and so he avoided the gentry’s balls during the first three months of his stay. Fithian knew he would encounter “fine Ladies, Gay Fellows, charming Music” and exquisite and “luxurious Entertainments” on the plantations near the Carter’s home at Nomini Hall; but as he reassured Elizabeth, “I am almost every week invited; Yet I find greater Pleasure at [the Carter’s] Home.” It was not until January 1774 that Philip attended a dance—only after Mrs. Carter had insisted that he go in order to see his Princeton classmate Harry Lee.

As Philip’s diary attests, Virginia was not devoid of temptations or beautiful women, but he was resolved to avoid their snares. Philip flirted and conversed with the ladies of the tidewater, but he maintained his distance, scrutinizing their beauty and manners from afar. He made sure to record invitations he refused and ruminated on the ridicule he faced as a consequence of his rectitude. In July, for example, Mrs. Carter informed him that Betsey Lee, the daughter of “one of the best families in the

⁷¹ *Journal, 1773-74*, 32, December 15, 1773; 34, December 18, 1773; PF to EB, January 9, 1774, 53.

Government” was available for marriage. Philip had the opportunity to “try and make her mine, & settle in this Province” and ally with a family of great wealth and influence. He did not allow himself to be tempted by that possibility, however, but chose politely to avoid public events where he might meet her. “I do not however repent my having staid at Home” he wrote in his diary after he learned he had excused himself from a fish feast that Miss Lee attended at the end of July.⁷²

That Philip refrained from romantic entanglements with Virginia’s wealthy young women shocked Robert Carter’s sons, Bob and Harry. Once Fithian overheard them speculating about his seeming lack of sexual interest:

Says Bob to Harry, behind the Table, I wonder Mr *Fithian* has not fallen in Love yet with some of our Nominy Girls—Here he sits from Month to Month (Not many Months longer said I to myself)...Indeed says *Harry*, drawing his chair clos[e &] lowering his voice, I never in my Life saw a Man who thought so little of these things

Bob and Harry were nearly correct in their appraisal of Philip; he was in love and “vulnerable by Cupids Arrows” but “not by the girls of Westmoreland.” But Philip’s persistent avoidance of social events had earned him a reputation for being “dull, unsociable, & splenetic.” The inclusion of these types of episodes and conversations in the pages of his diary affirmed that had kept his promise to Elizabeth—a promise that attested to great personal sacrifice and self-control.⁷³

In his two missionary diaries from 1775 and 1776, Fithian continued to construct himself as a virtuous and moral man by relating anecdotes of how he had denied temptations. His first missionary diary contains a few moralistic encounters with capricious women, whose behavior contrasts starkly with his discretion. In one

⁷² PF to EB, Dec. 21, 1773, Jan. 9, 1774, in *Journal, 1773-74*, 36, 53.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 134, July 8, 1774; 203, October 12, 1774.

entertaining and well-written entry, he alluded to the romantic flirtations of one young woman by relating their conversation:

No, Sir, I am quite tired of this unneighborhooded Valley—It is remote from all, but transient, accidental Company—It is remote from Navigation which I dearly love—It is out of the Way of News; we have no *Tea*, Sir—nor Tea-Women—You will say then that we have no *Scandal*, nor *Slander*, nor *Calumny*, nor *Match-Making*, nor—No Sir, we are, like native Innocence, yet unsuspecting—But I am a Woman, Sir, I have all their *Weakness*, & giddy *Taste* for perpetual untried Entertainment, & do therefore prefer *much* Company, of *every* Complexion, with *all* their *Sin*, to these Woods, where yet I acknowledge, that Nature revels in daily Luxury—!

He then proceeded to emphasize in an aside that he had withheld divulging the most improper portions of their chat; he swore that she had told him more.⁷⁴

Just as Fithian was intrigued by and feared the luxury of tidewater Virginia, he also enjoyed but feared the ruggedness of the frontier. Even after his marriage in 1775, he found that the rusticity of the Appalachian settlements still posed challenges to his character. One thing Philip disliked about his travels on the frontier was the “Necessity of sleeping in the same Room with all the Family.” He complained of his accommodations, saying that “it seems indelicate...to strip, surrounded by different Ages & Sexes.” Yet he was even more ashamed at having to “rise in the Morning, in the Blaze of Day, with the Eyes of, at least, one blinking Irish Female, searching out Subjects for Remark.”⁷⁵ In his second missionary diary from 1775 and 1776, he wrote that he was “abashed” at having to “sleep in the same Room with a large Family, mostly women,” as if to emphasize his embarrassment and highlight the impropriety of the situation.⁷⁶ Other entries highlighted his devotion by relating stories of the barriers he had maintained to

⁷⁴ *Journal*, 1775-76, 146, Sunday, December 17, 1775.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 67, July 22, 1775.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 146, Sunday, December 17, 1775.

avoid the sexual temptations he encountered while itinerating on the frontier. On February 8, 1776, he scribbled a disjointed conversation in which he was invited to attend a country dance:

Shall we go to the ‘Scotching’ Frolick—O no—There are to be more than ninety Males & Females gathered to dress Flax—Yes, young Women dress flax—Will you go, there is to be a Dance too—? Perhaps you may dance with Miss Gratton—O, no, no, no⁷⁷

Fithian continued to wrestle with temptations while he traveled as a missionary in 1775, and like his diary from 1773, he used these anecdotes to stress his moral competency.

As if these stories were not proof enough, Philip also openly professed his devotion to Elizabeth both in private (in his letters and diary) and public. In his letters, he repeatedly assured her that he continued to love her despite their separation. “You still possess the largest earthly Share of my Regard; &...my Fidelity towards you is unshaken & inviolable,” he wrote. His diary entries not only proved his fidelity to Elizabeth, but also declared his growing love for her. In his diary, he complained of having “left the Girl I love” in New Jersey, described Elizabeth as the “girl who has subdued my heart,” and concluded that it would be “painful” if he “was compell’d by every accident of Fortune” to live in Virginia for the rest of his life. He proudly compared her to the young ladies he met and declared that the most attractive of them all was “yet far below—Laura”: “If they were set together for the choice of an utter stranger, he would not reflect, but in a moment spring to [Elizabeth] the Girl that I mean to regard.”⁷⁸ Yet for nine months he indicated to his hosts why he had no interest in Virginia’s ladies by toasting “with Pleasure Miss Betsy Beatty,” and making his commitment to her public while the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 180, February 5, 1776.

⁷⁸ *Journal, 1773-74*, 108, May 25, 1774; 114, June 5, 1774; 131, July 4, 1774; 156, August 3, 1774; PF to EB, January 9, 1774, 53.

other gentlemen toasted their Virginia wives and lovers. He recorded these toasts in his diary to highlight each opportunity he took to honor Elizabeth, who he deemed “the Rival of them all.” With “great pleasure as truth” he wrote the following vow in his journal: “if a Princess should solicit me to accept, together with Herself, 50,000£...the esteem, & Fidelity which I possess for my dear, dear, Eliza would make me without reflection, evade & refuse the Proposal.”⁷⁹

Private professions of love and devotion were also commonplace in the pages of his missionary diaries. However, the fractiousness that had marked his entries during the fall and winter of 1774 had disappeared with the coming of spring in 1775. The first entry in his missionary diary was an eager farewell to Cohansie and a lover’s lament for the woman he loved:

Farewell, therefore, dear Cohansie; farewell, farewell—Yet know that I do not call you dear of Choice; the Appellation is exhorted from me—It is because many of my near Relations are here; but chiefly, it is because you are to Possess, & guard, by Heaven’s kind Assistance, the dear Person of my much loved Eliza till I shall return—Yesterday I bid her Adieu!—She wep’t & her powerful Tears quite drowned me in melancholy Rapture—! She was silent; I was literally dumb—She held me by the Hand, & I sat reclined, in a mournful Posture, by her Side—But at last I must leave her—We parted in Silence & Tears...⁸⁰

Fithian continued to write professions of love in the diary pages that followed. In June 1775, he wrote in his diary that he carved his name next to that of “my fair *Friend*” on a beech tree, and expressed the hope that “as the beautiful trees grow, let our Love & Friendship also increase in Magnitude & Serenity.”⁸¹ In July he described in tender words the difficulty of their separation:

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 47, January 3, 1774; 157, August 7, 1774; 131, July 4, 1774.

⁸⁰ *Journal*, 1775-76, 7, May 9, 1775.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 40, June 29, 1775.

Often in the warmth of my Heart, my Wishes fly across the Country, & centre in the Peace of my fair Eliza. Your company, my dear Laura, with Health, & Rest, & Plenty, on the Margin of this transparent Water, would rival, to me, the happiest Elysium that was ever exprest by the the Language, or entertainment in the Fancy, of the softest or most inventive Poet⁸²

Consequently, “dull” was how he described himself as he journeyed slowly back to New Jersey at the end of his first missionary tour in the summer of 1775. He was eager to be near Elizabeth again, anxious for their marriage, which was only months away, and anticipated their reunion: “Meet me Eliza, I come, I come, chiefly to thy peaceful Arms I come—Make me a welcome and joyful Meeting.”⁸³ Her residence in Cohansie made it the “great Centre of my softest Earthly Joys.”⁸⁴

Fithian’s marriage to Elizabeth in October 1775 intensified the heart-wrenching separation they were forced to endure when Philip left again for a second missionary tour the following month. “Best of Women to me, my lovely Betsey, from you I am...absent,” he lamented after the first few weeks of his second tour.⁸⁵ Having enjoyed only one month of marital bliss, he scribbled a desperate wish in his diary for the chance to spend “the short space of an Hour” with Elizabeth in the Appalachian Mountains where he imagined they might have “made up; not an Idolatrous Sacrifice, but a most sentimental Repast.”⁸⁶

It has been argued that for “a gentleman pursuing world citizenship,” in the eighteenth century, “homesickness was an especially debilitating passion.” A “love for home” might have been “the greatest moral problem facing the newly educated sons of

⁸² Ibid., 61, July 15, 1775.

⁸³ Ibid., 81 July 31, 1775.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 88, August 5, 1775.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 134, November 20, 1775.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 146, December 17, 1775. Fithian’s marriage announcement appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on November 8, 1775. See, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 8, 1775, (Philadelphia), 3.

British American farmers” during the Enlightenment, but from 1773 to 1776 it was not the cause of Fithian’s emotional distress.⁸⁷ For most of his adult life, Fithian found himself away from home—meaning he was apart from the woman he loved. The passionate love for a woman created Fithian’s greatest moral problems. As he traveled, the growing distances that separated him from her in Cohansie increased his fears that another man would steal her away and heightened his doubt that she would not remain devoted to him. To return home was to be reunited.

The colonies’ preparations for rebellion in 1775 and 1776 ensured that Fithian’s love for freedom and his love for Elizabeth would divide his allegiances. In 1775, he pondered his commitment to patriotism and marriage, concluding that “Surely, I may not enter into any such connexion, however willing—however desirous I am—til’ the Fate of America be known, & settled.” Like a good republican, he resolved to delay marriage for service to the common good. He believed that “in the Conflict I may be called to the Field, & such a Connexion, in its Nature, would make me less capable, & less willing, to answer so reasonable a Call.” As if to reemphasize his patriotic, republican dedication, he continued, “I will not, therefore, marry, till our American Glory be fixed on a permanent Foundation, or taken entirely from us.” However, Fithian did not live up to his pledge. Rebellion and revolution were causes that mattered deeply to him, but he had waited far too long to marry Elizabeth to let politics interfere with his life.⁸⁸

Fithian and Beatty had been married only since October 1775, however, when he chose to sacrifice their marital bliss to revolution in July 1776. He had been temporarily

⁸⁷ Fea, 477, 465. Fea correctly argues that Fithian’s love for Elizabeth was just one among many factors contributing to Fithian’s “homesickness,” but he is wrong to focus on Fithian’s intellectual struggle to control the passions of his local attachment and be cosmopolitan. Fithian clearly identifies that his love for Elizabeth was the primary cause of the emotional turmoil in his life, whether he was or was not at home.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 61, July 17, 1775.

“blest til cruel Britain compelled” him to separate from Elizabeth again that summer and to wage war. That month the colonies declared independence and Britain responded by landing twenty thousand troops at New York City to begin an invasion of North America and to crush the colonial rebellion. After suffering through the bloody and devastating defeat of the Continental Army in the Battle of Long Island, he lamented the sacrifices and losses that his young nation was now enduring. “Cruel George, why without Reason, are so many Mothers robbed of their beloved Children?—So many Lovers forever divided?” he asked in his diary. “Why, since all must lie on thy guilty Head!”⁸⁹ Fithian decried the terrifying destruction and heart-breaking inconveniences of war and blamed them all on his former king. That partisan assessment of his new nation’s plight had evolved from years of increasing radicalization.

⁸⁹ PF to EB, August 26, 1776, in Frank D. Andrews, *Philip Vickers Fithian...Letters to His Wife* (Vineland, N.J.: Smith Printing House, 1932), 38.

CHAPTER III

WRITING FOR LIBERTY: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TYRANNY

The Bladder has been filling with Venom—Now it is distended with
Poison,—full, ready to crack, to split with Rage!⁹⁰

As he spelled out his fidelity to Elizabeth by documenting his everyday life for her in his diary, Fithian also recorded the “politicks” of the colonial confrontations with Britain. In his diary he brandished the standard of fidelity to define and explain his love for Elizabeth and to narrate how he, a British colonist, became a revolutionary against Britain. “I am now called a Rebel against my Sovereign & his Government—This however I deny,” he scribbled indignantly because he believed himself to be an upholder of liberty, not a rebel. Fithian did not consider himself either a rebel or a rake and he did not want to be known as either. Fidelity was a principle that was of romantic and political utility to a man who sought the social benefits of education and character in an enlightened age. But it took time for him to become a revolutionary. His move from moderation to radicalization occurred over a period of six years, which began with his education at Princeton and included his travels in the colonies.

When Fithian arrived at Princeton in the fall of 1770, the college was afire with politics and patriotic fervor. The American defiance of the Stamp Act of 1765 had ignited at the college the first sparks of student protest against imperial measures. Overtly political orations, some addressed directly to the deleterious effects of imported

⁹⁰ *Journal*, 1775-76, 20, June 1, 1775.

British goods on liberty, dominated the commencement ceremony that fall. An “animated” opening exercise with “great propriety and spirit” on “*the evils to which a People is liable when involved in debt*” brought the political crisis to center stage. “Liberty” and “patriotism” dominated the subsequent performances: there was “an elegant Valedictory oration *on Patriotism*,” the audience was “highly entertained” with “an animated and elegant oration *on Frugality*,” and “a polite dialogue *on Liberty*...finished the business of the day.” So that the seriousness of their words would not be lost on their listeners, the students clothed themselves in “American manufactures” to “testify their zeal to promote frugality and industry,” and with “very laudable resolution they all executed [it], excepting four or five.” The editor of the *Boston News-Letter* was enthusiastic:

Upon the whole we cannot but do the young gentlemen justice to observe, that such a spirit of liberty and tender regard for their suffering country breathed in their several performances as gave an inexpressible pleasure to a very crowded assembly...they made a more decent appearance in the eyes of every patriot present, than if the richest production of *Europe* or *Asia* had been employed to adorn them to the best advantage. We can with pleasure taken this opportunity further to inform the public, that the under graduates have agreed to follow their noble example. If young gentlemen of fortune and education, many of whom will probably shine in the various spheres of public life, would thus voluntarily throw aside those articles of superfluity and luxury, which have almost beggared us, and exert themselves for the encouragement of industry, it is not easy to conceive what a wide extended influence their conduct will naturally have on all the lower ranks of mankind.

The graduates of 1765 made their intended impression, and they inspired their successors to replicate their actions.⁹¹

⁹¹ “Princeton, (New-Jersey, September 25, 1765,” *Boston News-Letter* (Boston, Massachusetts), October 17, 1765, 2; “Princeton, (New-Jersey) Sept. 25, 1765,” *New-Hampshire Gazette, and Historical Chronicle* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire), October 25, 1765, 1. At this early stage in the imperial crisis, the non-importation movement did not particularly lead to a unified American public or move the colonists to independence. What did become apparent to them, however, was the importance of their economic role in the British Empire and how “consumer sacrifice would help Americans preserve what they defined as their

The commencement ceremony in 1766 echoed that of 1765. One student defended his thesis on “*Civil Liberty*,” thereby providing “the disputants with an opportunity of displaying the importance of *Liberty* in a new and striking light.” Another ended the bachelor degree recipients’ orations with “a very spirited nervous harangue on *Liberty*.” The occasion ended with “an excellent Oration, on *Patriotism*.”⁹² In a similar fashion, the salutatory oration of the commencement ceremony of 1768 was on “*Civil Liberty*.”⁹³

Then in July 1770, politics at the college reached a new heat and intensity. Only months before Fithian arrived at Princeton, the students marched “in procession to a place fronting the college,” to protest the lifting of the non-importation agreements. Wearing their “black Gowns,” they converged on the college yard while the Nassau Hall bell pealed above them. Frenzied by an intercepted letter indicating that New York merchants had acted against the colony-wide ban on imported British goods, the students burned a copy of it by the hands of a public hangman. The action was interpreted as a statement to “all Promoters of such a daring Breach of Faith” that they might be “blasted in the Eyes of every Lover of Liberty, and their Names handed down to Posterity, as Betrayers of their Country.” And the merchants were. Within days, the news of the students’ “just indignation” made its way from New York to Massachusetts where the account of the protest was reprinted verbatim. Within a week, the incendiary account had arrived in

basic rights and liberties.” See T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 226-27, 234.

⁹² “Princeton, (in New-Jersey) Sept. 24, 1766,” *Boston Evening-Post* (Boston, Massachusetts), October 20, 1766, 2; “Princeton, (in New-Jersey) Sept. 24, 1766,” *New-Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire), October 24, 1766, 2.

⁹³ “Princeton, September 28,” *Boston News-Letter and New-England Chronicle* (Boston, Massachusetts), October 13, 1768, 2; “Princeton, September 28,” *Boston Post-Boy* (Boston, Massachusetts), October 17, 1768, 1.

newspapers in Connecticut and New Hampshire where other patriots sought confirmation that their colonial cause was just.⁹⁴

The ashes of the blazing parchment did not suppress the students' protests, however. At the end of the month, the senior class expressed their determination to receive their honors "dressed in American Manufactures." The young scholars, who were "so early declaring their Love to their Country...at this critical Juncture," became a "laudable Example, in encouraging our own Manufactures." The news of the students' plan inspired the editor of the *New-York Gazette* to honor the "Youths, who will probably fill some of the highest Stations in their Country" and to chastise their fathers who had "fallen asleep." It was an unintended but eerie anticipation of the coming "revolution against patriarchy."⁹⁵

Fithian's class of 1772 also caught the political fever. His closest friend, Andrew Hunter disputed with another student on whether "a mixed Monarchy is the best Form of Government." Other classmates gave speeches on "Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance," "Independence of Spirit," and "the Advantages of political Liberty." The commencement address Fithian composed for his graduation ceremony in the fall of

⁹⁴ "Extract of a Letter from Princeton, July 13," *New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy* (New York, New York) July 16, 1770, 3; "Extract of a Letter from Princeton, July 13," *Essex Gazette* (Salem, Massachusetts), July 24 to July 31, 1770, 2; "Extract of a Letter from Princeton, July 13," *New-York Journal, or the General Advertiser* (New York, New York), July 30, 1770, 93; "Extract of a Letter from Princeton, July 13," *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut), August 2, 1770, 3; "Extract of a Letter from Princeton, July 13," *New-Hampshire Gazette, and Historical Chronicle* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire), August 3, 1770, 2. For an account of the burning of the merchants' letter see also: Letter of James Madison to James Madison Sr., July 23, 1770, in William T. Hutchinson and William M.E. Rachal eds., *Papers of James Madison*, I, (Chicago, 1962), 49-50.

⁹⁵ "Extract from a Letter from New-Brunswick, dated July 24," *New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy* (New York, New York), July 30, 1770, 3; "Extract of a Letter from New-Brunswick, dated July 24," *New-York Journal, or the General Advertiser* (New York, New York), August 2, 1770, 107. On the Revolution's challenge to patriarchy, see Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, 1982), 12-15, 43, 36-87, Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 318-20, and Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1991), esp. 148-149.

1772, entitled “Political Jealousy is a Laudable Passion,” fit the other politically themed orations given by his classmates. Fithian argued that unlike other forms of jealousy, political jealousy was “rational, & uniform, & necessary.” It was a suspicion against the designs of rulers in power and an apprehension that one’s life, liberty, and property might not always be inviolable. This political anxiety effected the preservation of the common good, “the safety of every individual,” the preservation of the state, and the unity of the people. Finally, it was “implanted by the Supreme God in certain Men, which assists them to rule a state in equity, &...to preserve it in safety.”⁹⁶

As he continued his oration, Fithian imagined the possibility of a revolutionary independence. He envisioned a justifiable rebellion at a time when the nation’s rulers had become “inattentive to the national welfare.” In this hypothetical case, “private interest is preferred by Politicians to the National welfare, or...*discord* & mischeivous factions enter among them [showing] that instead of being directed by the genuine gentle temper...they are *possessed* with a spurious, selfish, helborn passion.” Fithian expected that in such a situation the people would become duly “dissatisfied because their own lives and property [had fallen] in danger...&...rebel against the government, & unite among themselves to defend their own lives & secure their property.” And so he concluded:

It therefore remains that I implore the great Genius which presides over our nation, to inspire our *king* & his *council* & all our Rulers with this noble spirit [of political jealousy]...make them always consider that upon their Consultations depends the safety of a vast empire! Let them therefore be all

⁹⁶ “Prince-Town, New-Jersey, October 6,” *New York Gazette, and the Weekly Mercury* (New York, New York), October 12, 1772, 2; “Princeton,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), October 14, 1772, 1; “Princeton,” *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), October 10 to October 17, 1772, 157; “Princeton,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), October 19, 1772, 52; “Prince-Town, New Jersey, October 6,” *New-York Journal, or the General Advertiser* (New York, New York), October 22, 1772, 761. “An Exercise at the public Commencement,” in *Journals, 1767-74*, 23-26.

men of integrity, & unquestionable sincerity...so that our happy government may be established & flourish, so long as the Sun & Moon endure—But, if it is written in the books of Fate that a change in the Government must take place; Oh! transfer it to this *Western World*, set up *here* thy royal standard, where ignorance and barbarity lately reigned...establish a Government, & set over it such men as shall be ever watchful for the common good, that they may ever rule a brave, free, & happy people

Fithian could have uttered this conclusion as a threat or an entreaty, but unwilling to fully picture a complete break from his Britain and his king, he simply laid out the possibility of independence.⁹⁷

In his two years at Princeton, Fithian had become committed to the cause of liberty, educated politically by a curriculum and a culture of peers, tutors, and faculty that was attuned to political tyranny and injustice. Passion for freedom and an obsessive fear of oppression filled the halls of Princeton between 1765 and 1772. The result was that Fithian *could* imagine rebellion as he was leaving Nassau Hall in 1772. And with that imagination he envisioned a “*Western World*”—an America—that promised to be a model government of a free and disinterested society. By the fall of 1772, revolutionary sentiments lay like burning embers.⁹⁸

Yet when Fithian arrived in Virginia’s Northern Neck in October 1773, few embers of discontent were glowing at Robert Carter’s Nomini Hall plantation. Carter had retired in 1772 from public life as a member of House of Burgesses to manage his plantation operations, and he was a gentleman of moderation. Politics remained a topic

⁹⁷ Ibid., 25-26.

⁹⁸ For the politicization of Princeton from the 1760s through the 1770s, see Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Princeton: 1746-1896* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 55-7; Robson, 43-46, 57-74; Hoeveler, 297-302; Cohen and Gerlach, 69-92; Howard H. Peckham, “Collegium Ante Bellum: Attitudes of College Professors and Students Toward the American Revolution,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 95 no. 1, (January, 1971), 50-72. For newspaper accounts of the 1771 commencement ceremony, see “Princeton, Sept. 25,” *New-York Journal, or the General Advertiser* (New York, New York), October 3, 1771, 3; “Princeton, Sept. 25,” *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), September 9 to October 7, 1771, 148; “Princeton, Sept. 25,” *New-York Gazette, and the Weekly Mercury* (New York, New York), October 7, 1771, 2.

of discussion in the great house at Nomini Hall throughout 1774, but Robert Carter did not immediately share the enthusiasm that was building in some colonial circles, especially the unease among the “lower class of People” that May. Fithian wrote in his diary that “it is hard to know [Carter’s] opinion from any thing he declares.”⁹⁹ Fithian continued to probe Carter about his political views. When Lord Dunmore, governor of Virginia, abolished the Virginia assembly on May 26, 1774, Carter commanded that no one in his household would take part in the colony-wide fast to protest the closure of Boston’s port. Carter’s resolution led Fithian to conclude that his employer did not sympathize with the colonial cause and was a “courtier.” It was not until late in September 1774 that Carter finally broke his conservative and guarded stance on the state of colonial affairs by expressing his support for boycotting the consumption of British tea.

However, Fithian observed that not all of the Virginian planter-elite were as moderate as his employer. While in Virginia Fithian spent time with Henry Lee Jr, a classmate from Princeton, who graduated in the class of 1773 and who certainly did not share Robert Carter’s conservatism.¹⁰⁰ In January 1774, Fithian socialized with “Harrey” or “Squire” Lee, as Fithian called him, at a ball held at the Lee’s home. It was a raucous occasion where Fithian witnessed “some toasting the Sons of America” and others “singing ‘Liberty Songs’ as they call’d them, in which six, eight, ten or more would put their Heads near together and roar.” Over time, Lee became a frequent visitor at the Carter’s plantation, and his arrival at Nomini Hall was accompanied by the sharing of the

⁹⁹ *Journal, 1773-74*, 111, May 31, 1774.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Lee Jr., would go on to serve as a cavalryman in the Continental Dragoons during the Revolutionary War and earn the nickname of “Light-Horse Harry” Lee. For a biography of Henry Lee Jr., see Harrison, “Henry Lee, Jr.,” in *Princetonians: 1769-1775*, 301-308.

most recent news concerning the political developments in imperial policy. “Squire” Lee notified Fithian of the passage of the Administration of Justice Act—“another Act of Parliament” that was part of the Coercive Acts—by delivering a “late London Newspaper” to the Carter’s home. It was neither Lee’s nor any other’s fault that the Carter household heard about the passage of the act twenty-nine days after it had been enacted. The news from England sailed across the Atlantic slowly. Lee also carried local news of public protests in Richmond, at which “the people drest & burnt with great marks of Detestation the infamous Lord *North*.” Fithian imagined that these actions were only the beginning of greater conflict. “Heaven knows where the tumults will End!” he exclaimed.¹⁰¹ Throughout the summer of 1774, Fithian’s diary entries show that Lee acted as the emissary of the outside world to the Carter’s household. On June 21 “the ‘Squire’ brought the Carters a copy of the *Pennsylvania Packet* that provided “accounts that the Northern Colonies are zealous & stedfast in resolutions to maintain their Liberties.” Over a cup of coffee on July 2 he gave the Carters a “Newspaper containing the debate, of the House of Commons concerning the Repeal of the Tea-duty.” At dinner on August 15, Lee notified the Carters that an East India Company tea-ship had arrived in Maryland.

Friends and neighbors like “Harrey” Lee could connect Philip to worlds outside the plantation with the printed word of newspapers. At other times, however, colonists linked themselves to each other across the continent and to Europeans across the sea through simple conversation. The news, after all, was also spread by word of mouth, and in everyday conversations people talked about the news. At dinner on May 29, 1774, “Politicks were the topic” and the three gentlemen dining with the Carters that night

¹⁰¹ *Journal, 1773-74*, 57, Tuesday, January 18, 1774; 121-122, June 18, 1774.

“indeed...seemed warm.” Fithian noticed their tempers, because the men discussed the “melancholy aspect of American affairs at present.”¹⁰² Likewise, at breakfast on the morning of June 7, 1774, he wrote that “all the conversation is Politicks; but People seem moderate & yet unsettled in their determinations to stand out.”¹⁰³ On yet another occasion in the fall of 1774, Fithian dined at a neighbor’s home with two gentleman who gave “Reports concerning political affairs,” but could not satiate his desire for news of the proceedings of the Continental Congress. Consequently, ordinary conversation—centered around politics, news, rumors, and gossip about others—was another conveyor of political education and molder of political identity.

But sometimes when people talked about the news they simply got it wrong. Networks of misinformation were often just as effective as networks of information at agitating the discontented. Because rumor of events in faraway colonies moved ahead of the printed news, fear, hysteria, passion, and excitement often settled onto the population in Virginia during the time that elapsed before confirmation or dismissal of the rumors from the north. For example, Fithian learned on January 23, 1774, that ships laden with tea had arrived in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and that “the New-Yorkers” had burned the home of “his Excellency Governor Tryon for having said that, if orders concerning the Tea had been transmitted to him he would have landed it tho’ under the mouths of the Cannon!” But it wasn’t until two weeks later that the *Virginia Gazette* verified the “accounts concerning the Tea at Boston” and the “account of the Burning of the House of Governor Tryon.” By that time, the gentlemen in Virginia had already “applaud[ed] and honour[ed] our Northern Colonies for so manly, & patriotic

¹⁰² Ibid., 110, Sunday, May 29, 1774.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 116, June 7, 1774.

Resistance!”¹⁰⁴ On another occasion, Mrs. Carter returned to Nomini Hall after a short trip carrying “word...arrived from Boston that Governor Gage has fired on the Town.” Rumor magnified the gravity of the situation and fed the Virginians’ worst fears. “It is expected his orders are to burn & beat it to Destruction!” wrote Fithian, as he related the dire news in his journal. The expected destruction of Boston remained “much talked off & still confirmed!” until one of the Carter’s neighbors informed Philip that the account of Boston’s plight was false. Fithian did not learn this news from a newspaper; he learned it from a neighbor; who learned it from a letter sent by Colonel Lee; who learned it while attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁵ The disheartening rumors illustrated the mood and mindset of the gentlemen patriots in Virginia. Fear was both an emotion and a state of mind for Americans riveted by the deteriorating colonial situation. In such a state, they did not expect British warships and soldiers to keep their cannon and guns silent when they were sent by the crown to pacify an increasingly rebellious colonial community. Rumors accentuated their fears.

The sharing and reading of news heightened Fithian’s sense of growing political turmoil, but it also reinforced his inclination to identify with the colonial cause. At dinners, sermons, feasts, balls, and coffees, British men and women began choosing for themselves, or were forced by their peers to choose, whether they were “patriots” or “courtiers.”¹⁰⁶ In social gatherings, Virginians made public their private political beliefs and in the process attempted to create a political consensus. Public avowals of allegiance forced others to choose whether or not to conform in their own political identity.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal, 1773-74*, 59, Monday, January 24, 1774; 63, Monday, February 7, 1774.

¹⁰⁵ *Journal, 1773-74*, 191, Saturday, September 17, 1774; 192, Sunday, September 18, 1774; 194, Thursday, September 22, 1774.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 111, Tuesday, May 31, 1774.

As the colonists began to divide into factions, Fithian probed into others' beliefs and opinions to determine who was a partisan of the colonial cause, and who was against it. Radicalized by his relationships with Virginians, he scrutinized his acquaintances and the strangers he came into contact with to determine their political leanings. An encounter with a like-minded patriot could encourage and impassion commitments to the American cause. The relationship between Harry Lee and Fithian illustrates how colonists created a shared sensibility or fellow feeling through politics. Lee had talked with Fithian "of going to Philadelphia to the Congress" that would be meeting the coming September. Inspired by Lee's eagerness, Fithian wanted to go too. A day after the conversation, Fithian wrote a letter to a friend back in New Jersey, expressing regret that it was not "convenient for me to be in town when the gentlemen from the respective Colonies shall meet." He could not attend the congress, but he could "wish for their union and usefulness." The letter itself, however, was meant to radicalize its recipient or shame him into becoming more politically active on the side of liberty: "I suppose you join in the general language, and assert your liberties and oppose oppression. I hope at least you are on the right side of the question."¹⁰⁷ To patriots like Fithian and Lee, there was only one "*right side*" and that side demanded increasing commitments from its supporters in late August 1774.

Those who were suspected of being moderates needed to be gently pushed out of their neutrality. Those who expressed opinions contrary to the supporters of colonial protests needed to be regarded as potential enemies. After one gentleman named Captain Walker made "several exceeding unpopular Sentiments with regard to the present

¹⁰⁷ *Journal, 1773-74*, 169, Monday, August 15, 1774; PF to Nathaniel Donald Jr., August 21, 1774, in *Ibid.*, 173.

amazing Disturbances through the Colonies” during dinner in the Carter’s home, Fithian became infuriated. Afterwards, in his diary he left an angry account of the situation and a nasty impression of the man:

One in special I think proper to record because it fixes his Character, & declares him, in Spite of all pretence, an enemy of America—He asserted that no Officers (at Boston or elsewhere) are obliged, either by law, or Right, to question or refuse any kind of orders which they receive from the Sovereign, or commanding Officer—But I account every man, who possess, & publishes such sentiments in the Crisis of Fate of a vast Empire, as great as an enemy to America at least, as Milton’s *Arch Devil* was to Mankind!¹⁰⁸

The irritating comment had likely arisen out of a discussion of ethical questions relating to the use of force against citizens. It was a timely conversation considering the violence that had occurred between British soldiers and British American subjects in New York and Boston only a few years before. But at this time, with the Continental Congress in assembly, a controversial point of view provoked a radical response. Radicalization turned some British colonials like Philip Fithian into *enemies of oppression* while it transformed other British subjects like Captain Walker into *enemies of America*.

In this environment, daily, repeated, and ritualized actions took on new political meanings and became important to the intercolonial network of colonial supporters. One ritualized action that took on new political meanings was toasting. Before they could enjoy their food and drink, elite Virginians offered toasts. By tradition the first toast was offered to the king and queen, the second to the governor of Virginia, the next to friends and prosperity, and the last to ladies. As the colonial crisis grew, other toasts became common. Fithian first began to notice the shift in January 1774. On January 24, 1774, he recorded the dinnertime visit of two gentlemen, Colonel Frank Lee from Richmond County and a Colonel Harrison of Maryland. He wrote that there were “professions of

¹⁰⁸ *Journal, 1773-74*, 191, Thursday, September 16, 1774.

Liberty here expressed in Songs Toasts, &c.” The following day, he made note of the sequence of the evening’s toasts: “Toasts the *King, Queen, Governor & Colonel*, of Virginia. Northern Sons of Liberty. & a good price for our commodities.”¹⁰⁹ Although they increasingly hoped for “Agreement & Firmness through the American Colonies,” the Virginians continued to offer “loyal toasts” to their king and queen into the fall of 1774.¹¹⁰

Another action that took on political significance was the consumption of coffee. On May 29, 1774, Fithian recorded that the Carter household drank coffee rather than tea that afternoon because “they are now too patriotic to use tea.”¹¹¹ Coffee consumption centered on socialization, and so whenever they drank their new patriotic beverage the Virginian elite also shared news, rumor, and debate. Fithian recorded that “at Coffee” on July 21, 1774, he, “Squire” Lee, and the Carters conversed on “American affairs” and shared a Williamsburg newspaper “in which are accounts that the Northern Colonies are zealous & stedfast in resolutions to maintain their Liberties.”¹¹² In late September, Fithian recorded one “merry” event that demonstrated the seriousness with which Virginians boycotted British tea:

Mrs Carter made a dish of Tea. At Coffee, she sent me a dish—& the Colonel both ignorant—He smelt, sipt—look’d—At last with great gravity he asks what’s this?—Do you ask Sir—Poh!—And out he throws it splash a sacrifice to Vulcan¹¹³

The same conveyors of politicization—newspapers, rumor, conversation, and coffee—continued to affect Fithian during his travels through the rugged environments of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 59, Monday, January 24, 1774; 59, Tuesday, January 25, 1774.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 196, September 27, 1774; 198, September 29, 1774.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 110, May 29, 1774.

¹¹² Ibid., 123, July 21, 1774.

¹¹³ Ibid., 195-196, September 26, 1774.

western Pennsylvania and Virginia in 1775 and 1776. In the rustic settlements of the West, conversations revolved around “politicks,” rumor spread fear and misinformation, and newspapers were an important and crucial medium of communication. But Fithian’s missionary journals show that the political climate of the colonies had greatly changed between October 1774 and May 1775.¹¹⁴ The mood among Whigs in Virginia was growing increasingly militant. In March 1775, the Second Virginia Convention passed a resolution to raise militias in every county for the “purpose of our defence,” and in April, Governor Dunmore confiscated the colony’s gunpowder from its stores in Williamsburg. Finally, the outbreak of armed conflict between British troops and Massachusetts militiamen at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 reshaped the political atmosphere in the colonies and ensured that Fithian’s radicalization would be made complete.

As he traveled through the frontier during the summer of 1775 he calculated the frontiersmen’s enthusiasm for “the American Cause,” by talking politics and observing the military preparations of the people who lived there. The inhabitants of Virginia’s western settlements were “in arms,” busy organizing themselves into volunteer militia regiments when Fithian arrived in June. The militia musters were public rituals laden with political meaning. Besides opportunities to drill and practice military maneuvers, the musters were public spectacles in which men, through their voluntary participation, openly displayed their political views to their frontier communities. Fithian was continuously impressed by the festive atmosphere and “grand Figure” of the military

¹¹⁴ Woody Holton argues the colonists in Virginia were not all ready for rebellion until 1776. Elite Virginians in particular were reluctantly pushed into rebellion to protect their economic interests and real estate on the frontier and to maintain their control of their colonial society. Indebtedness to British merchants, discontented smallholders, fear of Indians, and the threat of slave revolt were the precipitating factors that led to independence. See, Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, & the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

musters.¹¹⁵ Women were in the street and “at doors” to marvel at the sounds of “drums beating, Fifes & Bag-Pipes playing, &...sonorous & heroic Tunes.” He was also caught up in the excitement and spectacle and participated in the muster of one independent company. The site of these military preparations lead him to proclaim with approval that “Mars the great God of Battle, is now honoured in every Part of this spacious Colony, but here every Presence is warlike, every Sound is martial!”¹¹⁶ At Stephensburg and Winchester, he made note of the “fiery tempor” and patriotic demeanor of the men of stature who led the militia exercises. Overwhelmingly, it was “men of note,” “influence,” and “property” who were “warm in the Cause” and set a powerful example for the rest of their community.¹¹⁷ Under these circumstances, Fithian was left to pronounce that “The Bladder has been filling with Venom—Now it is distended with Poison,—full, ready to crack, to split with Rage!”¹¹⁸

There was very little toleration for the conservatism and moderation that had prevailed among the colonists only a few years earlier in this war-crazed atmosphere. Unlike the professional military of the despotic British, a republican military was ideally an army of free American men.¹¹⁹ Although militiamen voluntary served, the colonels of the militia resorted to force and shame on one occasion to isolate a man, who was “backward in...Attendance with the Company of Independents.” A militia “file” was sent to intimidate the man into participation, and after some “Resistance” he “was compelled.” However, the man’s defiance and the militia’s terrorism quickly became

¹¹⁵ *Journal, 1775-76*, 31, June 17, 1775.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24, June 6, 1775.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31, June 14, 1775.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20, June 1, 1775.

¹¹⁹ Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783*, (Chapel Hill, 1979), 50.

public knowledge, and he was in a state of “great Fear” and humility after townspeople began “talking of Tar & Feathers.” Awed by what was transpiring, Fithian declared that these “mortifying Weapons, with their necessary Appendages, *Scoff & Shame*, are popular Terrors, & of great Influence.”¹²⁰

Throughout the summer of 1775 and into the winter of 1776, newspapers and conversations carried ominous “intelligence” from the east. Over coffee on July 2, 1775, Fithian learned from the newspapers that the “Provincials were worsted” at the Battle of Bunker Hill. In August, he heard news of the siege of Boston and a rumor that a ship loaded with “Powder & Arms destined to the Southward, for the Negroes” arrived in Philadelphia.¹²¹ Already by July 1, 1775, Philip was prepared to “hazard *Life & Credit*, & Property, in the general, and needful Contest for what is our *All*.” Yet following the news of the Battle of Bunker Hill in July, Dunmore’s proclamation in November, and the siege of Quebec in December, Fithian and inhabitants of the frontier communities became even more radicalized. Dunmore’s proclamation was greatly responsible for intensifying the Virginians’ resolve and moving them toward revolution. With the proclamation, the governor declared martial law in Virginia, commanded “all his Majesty’s subjects to repair to the Royal standard,” and freed all servants and slaves who were “able to bear Arms” against the rebellious colonists. Fithian observed that the Virginians were “much distressed with Dunmore’s proceedings” and “deeply alarmed at [the] infernal Scheme;” he believed that the governor’s act seemed “to quicken all in Revolution to overpower him however at every Risk.”¹²² The consumption of tea, once frowned upon, was now totally “out of the Question” and it was almost “Treason against

¹²⁰ *Journal*, 1775-76, 25, June 8, 1775.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 46, July 2, 1775; 94, August 9, 1775.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 135, November 28, 1775.

the Country to mention it, much more to drink it.”¹²³ “No Tories are permitted to vent their Sentiments,” he observed, while “the Name of Whig has the Port of Majesty.”¹²⁴

In this state of heightened tension, persistent divisions suddenly emerged among the colonial populace, even though, as Fithian observed, “resistance by Arms to ministerial Oppression seems to be the purpose of all.”¹²⁵ The restructuring of the independent militia companies into minuteman battalions of “embodied Regulars” led to conflicts between the gentleman-planters, who commanded the battalions through their social position and distinction, and the egalitarian-minded smallholders, who filled the ranks. Fithian felt that the “Continental Spirit” persevered, but it was “retarded by internal Divisions concerning the Mode of appointing Officers”—the smallholders favoring democratic election, whereas the gentry had decided to appoint all officers.¹²⁶

In January 1776, Fithian himself became indignant with the gentry’s leadership style. While preaching in the Lower Cow Pasture Valley, Philip attended a muster at which he observed the militiamen “drinking, and Horse-Racing—Hollowing, [and] carousing,” instead of practicing their military exercises. He was shocked by the “fantastic” scene:

False, or at best visionary, are such Pretensions with so base a Conduct—talk of supporting Freedom by meeting & practicing Bacchanalian Revels.—preposterous & vain are all such Pretensions.

¹²³ Ibid., 151, December 25, 1775.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 134, November, 1775.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 134, November 20, 1775.

¹²⁶ Michael A. McDonnell details how the division over the volunteer militia devolved into a class struggle, a “more enduring conflict than the one against Britain...between the gentry and the ‘lower’ and ‘middling sorts.’” See, McDonnell, “Popular Mobilization and Political Culture in Revolutionary Virginia: The Failure of the Minutemen and the Revolution From Below,” *Journal of American History* 85 no. 3 (Dec., 1998), 947.

It is serving the Father of Deception under the Colour of Patriotism.
 Forbid it Decency & Valour that sacred Patriotism should be so cursedly
 prostituted, to subserve such Diabolical Purposes!¹²⁷

The event left him greatly upset. Among the officers of the militia in the Appalachian valley he encountered vice where benevolence, disinterestedness, and virtue should have been found, for these were the “strengths that gave the revolutionaries the promise of defeating British conspiracy.”¹²⁸ Astonished by the elite leadership’s unpatriotic infidelities, Fithian pronounced condemnation on them for adulterating the virtuous cause to which he remained devoted.

Upon the completion of his second missionary tour and his return to Cohansie in February 1776, Philip discontinued his diary. When he resumed it again on July 12, 1776, he and his new country were in a state of war. Fithian had left home again to reinforce New York City, to uphold his commitment to earthly freedom, and to honor his heavenly lord as a chaplain in the Continental Army. Within days, the last vestiges of the colonial past were being forever erased by revolutionaries in ritualistic violence against the symbols of their former king. Fithian witnessed the “orgy of iconoclastic violence in the streets” that erupted in the summer of 1776.¹²⁹ In New York City on July 13, 1776, he wrote in his diary: “I went this Day to view the Pedastal & other Ruins of the Place Where the King of Great Britain lately stood [at the Bowling Green]. His Head was first

¹²⁷ *Journal, 1775-76*, 158, January 1, 1776.

¹²⁸ Royster, 22-3, Isaac, *Transformation*, 256. Another way of looking at Fithian’s disgust for the proceedings of the militia commanders is to see the Revolution as having different meanings for different participants. Thus unlike the nominally-Anglican elite Virginians, Fithian and his fellow Presbyterian-Cohansians experienced the Revolution as a “moral revolution” that linked spiritual and temporal salvation together as Fea argues. See Fea, “Rural Religion: Protestant Community and the Moral Improvement of the South Jersey Countryside, 1676-1800,” (PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1999), 288-92.

¹²⁹ McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 306. McConville argues that this iconoclasm against the monarchy was the result of a “collapse of royal institutional legitimacy in 1773 and 1774” when the colonists unsuccessfully demanded that the “imperial father of their imagination restrain a tyrannical Parliament.” See McConville, 248.

strook off, and afterwards the Trunk was carried through the principal Parts of the City, among many Spectators, Fifes & Drums all the Way, beating the “Rogues March.”¹³⁰ Finally, on July 18, 1776, independence was “formally proclaimed” at New York’s City Hall. The royal coat of arms “in Canvass” was thrown down to the street from a “Window of the Hall among the People & was seized, & torn, & stamped, & at last burned, with unparalell’d Rage.” Afterwards, the crowd gouged the sculpted royal symbol from its relief on the edifice and threw the bits of stone into the fire “amidst repeated Acclamations of the throng.”¹³¹

By the time he was offering his spiritual services to American soldiers under siege in New York City, Fithian had reconciled his life and his faith to the colonial rebellion.¹³² He believed that if only “Christ was honoured more...we might expect a more effectual Blessing of our Arms.”¹³³ He was resolved to find honor in the sacrifice of life for the colonies’ “peace and freedom,” because “if then we are in the Path which leads to [death], an English bullet lodged in our Heart will fortunately shorten our Journey to Felicity.”¹³⁴ American independence was the will of God and “Heaven is the Prize for which we contend.”¹³⁵ The fear of death, the care and succor of the sick and dying, and the fury of battle were horrific and tragic distractions, but Fithian was able to cope with them by relying on hope of salvation in either this life or the next.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 188, July 13, 1776.

¹³¹ Ibid., 190, July 18, 1776.

¹³² On the unification of Christianity and politics in the Revolution see, Royster, esp. 18-9, and how political thought mixed with religious thought so that the “cause of liberty became the cause of God” in the civil millennialism of Revolutionary ministers in New England see, Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, 1977), 64.

¹³³ Ibid., 194, July 24, 1776.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 210, August 15, 1776; 130-131, November 14, 1775.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 130-131, November 13, 1775.

Although his separation from Elizabeth never ceased to plague him, he found calm, peace, and promise in their love. Whether he was destined to be reunited with her on earth or in heaven, he looked longingly forward to a pleasurable future with Elizabeth when the death and destruction of war were over. Despite all the suffering, Fithian's "ever-dear Betsey" and "faithful Wife" remained a purpose in life. In his diary, he never stopped thinking of her: "Not a Word of being amiss do I say to my dear *Laura*; it would give her unnecessary Pain...I only say that we are in high Spirits."¹³⁶ And he never stopped writing it for her: "We sleep on the Floor in a Blanket; Lodging you will say hard enough. I think so too."¹³⁷ She was always in his thoughts and prayers:

Oh preserve us both, Good Providence, to possess the Wish of both our Souls, the Comfort of enjoying each other's Society, after these stormy Days are blown quite over—O grant it; Amen¹³⁸

Fithian's dream of an earthly reunification with Elizabeth was never realized. On September 23, 1776, he was struck "dangerously ill" by dysentery, and within a couple of weeks was "reduced to the lowest state of life." At his request, Andrew Hunter Jr. wrote to Elizabeth to apprise her of her husband's dire situation. Contrary to Fithian's instructions, Hunter urged her to come immediately to New York:

He has given me no orders to request any of his Friends to come to see him, but were I in his situation I should wish to see so near a Friend as a wife—If any of his Relations should choose to come there will not be the least Danger of the Enemy in the Journey—Pray make yourself as easy as possible—He is not past Recovery tho' very sick.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Ibid., 205, August 6, 1776.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 187, July 13, 1776.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 211, August 18, 1776.

¹³⁹ Andrew Hunter to EBF, Sept. 28, 1776, in Andrews, ed., *Letters*, 47.

Despite the urgent entreaties of Hunter, Elizabeth did not come to care for her husband. Hunter tended to Fithian for seventeen days until October 8, 1776, when Fithian took his last breath; his childhood friend from Cohansie and classmate at Princeton had remained faithful to him until the very end. Two days later, Hunter and members of Fithian's regiment buried him "with as much decency as the nature of the case would allow."¹⁴⁰

The last words he entered into his diary before his death related a collective longing to return home: "Our Lads grow tired, & begin to count the Days of their Service which yet remain."¹⁴¹ It was a fitting conclusion from a man who had spent over half of the last two years of his life miles away from the woman he loved.

¹⁴⁰ *Journal, 1775-76*, 242-3, Sept. 28, Oct. 4, Oct. 8, Oct. 10, 1776.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 241, Sept. 23, 1776.

CONCLUSION

My advice to all who, in future, pass over these Hills, & I do it as a Friend to their Soul & Body, is, to enter on the Journey armed with an uncommon Share of Patience & Perseverance.¹⁴²

When Fithian left Greenwich, New Jersey, on the morning of Wednesday, October 20, 1773, his departure was of little significance outside the corn and rye fields, apple orchards, and pastures of the Cohansie region and went unnoticed by the colonial papers, whose slow-growing tendrils were spreading news of tea, taxes, and “unconstitutional imposition” from colony to colony.¹⁴³ Today, he and his journeys are well-known by historians of colonial America. Few would dispute that he brought “the perspective of an outsider to the Anglican South,” made “astute observations about late colonial society,” or left a “graphic and intimate portrait of Virginia plantation life, culture, and education.”¹⁴⁴ But to focus our attentions on the man’s observations or to zero in on his depictions of the Virginia gentry is to ignore the breadth and depth of his work—Fithian had his own purposes in mind as he wrote his diaries from 1766 to 1776. Some of the reasons he wrote were to become educated, to cultivate himself as a gentlemen, to protect a courtship and to secure love, to establish his reputation, and to assert an identity as a partisan of the American cause.

¹⁴² *Journal, 1775-76*, 92, August 8, 1775.

¹⁴³ “Philadelphia, Oct. 18,” *The Pennsylvania Chronicle* (October 11-18, 1773), 154. In an entry in his work book dated Friday, February 5, 1767, Fithian writes: “To day we received the first newspaper from Mr. Goddards new printing office.” This entry provides an indication that his father held a subscription to the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, which was published by William Goddard in Philadelphia. For Fithian’s entry see *Journals, 1766-76*, 70.

¹⁴⁴ McCluskey, “The Life and Times,” 1-2. Franklin Parker, “Philip Vickers Fithian: Northern Tutor on a Southern Plantation,” *Journal of the West* 4 (1965): 62.

Much had changed in Fithian's life from 1766 to 1776, and those changes had a profound affect on his writing—who he was writing for, what subjects he wrote about, and the style with which he chose to write. If Fithian's writings are to be understood at all, they must be read in their entirety. After all, Fithian wrote more than just a record of daily life in rural southwest New Jersey or observations on the manners and customs of the Virginia gentry. To record and observe were not his goals; they were a means to practice being a gentlemen of taste and letters. To write his journals Fithian drew from his education at Princeton and from the popular literature he read as leisure. In order to describe Fithian's work accurately, to reconstruct his intellectual and social world, and to analyze the impact these worlds had on his private chronicles, we must investigate the contexts in which he wrote and pay attention to what he said about his own writing.

Fithian had ambitions to become a published author in the last years of his life. In his own words, his purpose was to write on "Subjects for Contemplation, which were plain in themselves, & pleasant, and had always been, to me, agreeably amusing."¹⁴⁵ Already in 1774 he labeled his writings "volumes" and in 1775 he had chosen to discontinue the composition of daily entries in favor of organizing his second itinerant's journal of 1775 and 1776 into eight "chapters." This organization allowed Fithian to frame his narrative spatially on travel and thematically on love by focusing on his departure from and return to Elizabeth in Cohansie, "the Place of beginning." Appropriately enough, his first chapter described the "dear Hour of my Parting with a lovely Woman." Reflecting on his literary progress, he concluded that the chapters of his present volume were still increasing like "the distinct Periods of my Time."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ *Journal, 1775-76*, 75, Friday, July 28, 1775.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 163, January 3, 1776.

At the very least, he imagined himself as developing into a “peripatetick philosopher,” apt to “ramble and stare about on the Wilds, and Luxuries of Nature’s Bosom.”¹⁴⁷ Yet he felt his talents were handicapped by his weak and frail body:

I am a good Deal inclined to think, my skinny Ghostly Body,—& floating, volatile Mind... would be able to collect together, & give the World some *curious, & accurate, & useful* Volume! Perhaps my Mind, contracted & fluttering, as it appears to be, when it shall be freed from its present Embarrassment, will expand & show out a Capacity ample, & important, as Locke’s, or Newton’s or Witherspoon’s.¹⁴⁸

Fithian read from Mandeville, Pope, Milton, Swift, and Sterne, and these writers provided him with models of literary genius from which he could model his own writing.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, by 1774 he was already experimenting with literary conventions drawn from his readings. For example, two days after he began reading the first volume of *Tristram Shandy*, he started emulating Sterne’s use of dialogue to narrate his diary. Like Sterne, Fithian sought to capture the banality of everyday speech and to use it as a vehicle of humor. In that context, sustained agonizing over trivial mishaps and the dire consequences of human life provided both moral commentary and also comedic relief in his travel diaries.

Eventually, narrative organization and style became so important to Fithian that he chose to edit his journal entries. On August 24, 1775, he wrote that he spent the day “writing out, altering, & abridging, some of my Manuscripts.”¹⁵⁰ And as he matured as a writer, he became increasingly careful “to oblige my Readers” by promising to have composed candid depictions of true events while also alluding to

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 90, August 7, 1775; 72, July 26, 1775.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 75-6, Friday, July 28, 1775.

¹⁴⁹ *Journals, 1766-76*, 162, July 21, 1773; *Journal, 1773-74*, 39, 129, Dec. 24, 1773, July 3, 1774; *Journal, 1775-76*, 99, Aug. 12, 1777.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 117, August 24, 1775.

having censored lurid dialogue and behaviors from his writing. From 1773 to 1774, the reader had been Elizabeth Beatty, but after 1775, Fithian was addressing other potential readers. Shortly before his death, Fithian wrote Elizabeth a letter that attested to the import he assigned to his writings. After professing his love to her, describing the military situation in New York, and directing her in the management of some household business, Fithian wrote that, “Most of all take care of my Books and Papers, keep them, I intreat you secure; some of them to me are of very great Moment; keep them, then secure.”¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, Fithian did not explain why his writings were so important and we will never conclusively know what he intended for them because he died before he had a chance to finish them, to further edit them, or to see them published.

Like any piece of scholarship, this exploration of Fithian’s writing is intended to create more questions than it answers. I will offer a few that I believe Fithian’s diary challenges historians to more carefully attempt to answer.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the expansion and improvement of colonial roads, bridges, and ferries, rapid population growth, and the establishment of new towns nurtured a nascent inland trade that connected town to village and colony to colony in British North America. Yet the very same forces that created an “interregional commercial exchange” ensured that more than horses, carts, and goods moved across town lines, county boundaries, and colonial borders.¹⁵² Eighteenth-century colonists—*people*—traveled outside the familiar locales of their homes and birthplaces. They drove

¹⁵¹ PF to EB, August 26, 1776, in Andrews, *Letters*, 36.

¹⁵² Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 89. See also Wood, 137.

the horses and oxen that carried colonial goods. They visited friends and family members in neighboring villages and counties. And while they did not all have the opportunity to travel outside their colony, some like Fithian found new opportunities to work, study, and seek pleasure in unfamiliar places. What were the political and cultural effects of improvements in infrastructure and the growth of land-based, intercolonial travel and commerce in the second half of the eighteenth century?

Travel clearly defined Fithian's writings. Through both local and intercolonial travel, he acquired and created knowledge through careful observation and reflection. Even more important, he also began to redefine his identity as a colonist. As he traveled, Greenwich, Princeton, Westmoreland County, Philadelphia, New Castle, and Annapolis became familiar hubs connecting Fithian to a network of social relations, professional associates, and political partisans that spanned four colonies and three geographical regions. In his study of information diffusion in colonial America, Richard D. Brown discovered that the exchange of letters and personal travel "played a significant role in enriching local information networks" and that these "word-of-mouth" networks were more provincial and imperial than colonial newspapers, which maintained a European focus.¹⁵³ Consequently, if Fithian had not traveled first from his birthplace in Cohansie to study as a student at Princeton, to work for a year in the home of a Virginia planter elite, and finally to itinerate on the rustic frontiers of western America, it is possible that he may not have developed the same revolutionary sentiments that he did. Travel introduced Fithian to men and women from distant American colonies, exposed him to

¹⁵³ Brown, 137. Brown goes even further, arguing that "however diverse colonial America had been overall, within rural communities scarcity had all but required conformity of perceptions since nearly everyone shared access to the same information and the same interpretative commentaries on it." See Brown, 294.

the environments, economies, and landscapes that made one colony simultaneously distinct yet also familiar, stimulated his politicization into the Whig culture of republicanism, and transformed him as a Greenwicher, a British subject, and an “American.” How representative was Fithian’s experience of a colonial traveler on the eve of the Revolution?

It is often said that the most difficult challenge in examining a diary and relating one’s findings is to represent the diary accurately as its author intended it and to depict the author as he or she truly was in the past. Some might argue that because diaries may contain dissimulations they are a type of historical evidence that is unlike newspapers or pottery shards and that requires extra attention and criticism. Diaries, however, are like any other historical artifact. They have a creator; they have purposes; and they have audiences. It is the historian’s task to relate who the author was, as he or she described him- or herself. It is the historian’s responsibility to recount the diary’s purpose as its author stated it. Finally, it is the historian’s duty to draw attention to the person or persons by whom the diary was meant to be read.

Fithian believed he had something to say as a writer and was convinced that his words would be preserved for future generations, who he predicted presciently, “shall read these Papers a couple of hundred Years hence.” Although he was writing about the Appalachians when he recommended that future travelers “enter on the Journey armed with an uncommon Share of Patience & Perseverance,” his words are fitting advice for the historian seeking to understand him and his eighteenth-century world.

Everyday, the historian's craft entails the difficult obligation to strive to reconstruct the past accurately—to avoid errors when we describe people and places gone by. Fithian's diary is a worthy artifact with which to practice that craft. It deserves our careful attention for a multitude of reasons: it provides unique insights into people who no longer live and local cultures that have been unalterably changed by the passage of years; and it is an artifact that held great meaning to its author. Most important, it gives us a rich look at one person's experience of education, romance, and rebellion from 1766 to 1776. Relating Fithian's story provides a bold and sharp account of an America long past—recovering a history that is both “local and personal” but also, in a broader sense, colonial. For as Richard Brown has said, retelling the story of an individual's life makes the past “actual and comprehensible in a way that is different from the general and abstract.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ The essayist Paul Gruchow writes that, “all history is both local and personal. To tell what we remember and to keep on telling it is to keep the past alive in the present.” See Gruchow, *Grassroots: The Universe of Home*, (Minneapolis, 1995), 6; Brown, 5.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

FITHIAN'S WRITING: JAN. 20, 1766 TO SEPT. 22, 1776

Year	Month/Day	No. of entries	Days without entries
1766	January 20, 1766	2	29
	February	2	26
	March	4	27
	April	7	23
	May	8	23
	June	6	24
	July	26	5
	August	5	26
	September	4	26
	October	7	24
	November	5	25
	December	7	24
1767	January	5	26
	February	11	18
	March	28	3
	April	28	3
	May	29	2
	June	28	2
	July	29	2
	August	10	21
	September	4	26
	October	4	27
<i>BREAK 1 NO ENTRIES FROM Nov. 1767 to June 1773</i>			
1773	June 30, 1773	1	29
	July	31	0
	August	16	15
	September	29	1
	October	31	0 *left home 10/20
	November	30	0
	December	31	0
1774	January	31	0
	February	28	1
	March	31	0
	April	30	0 *home, 4/16 to 5/16
	May	31	0 *home, 4/16 to 5/16
	June	30	0
	July	31	0
	August	31	0
	September	30	0
	October	27	4 *Back home 10/25
	November	4	26

	December	5	26
1775	January	6	25
	February	12	15
	March	7	24
BREAK 2	NO ENTRIES	Mar. 19, 1775 to May 9, 1775	
	May 9, 1775	23	8
	June	30	0
	July	31	0
	August	29	2
	September	7	23
BREAK 3	NO ENTRIES	Sept. 6, 1775 to Nov. 13, 1775	
	November 13, 1775	7	23
	December	22	9
1776	January	23	8
	February	14	15
BREAK 4	NO ENTRIES	Feb. 19, 1776 to July 12, 1776	
	July 12, 1776	20	11
	August	30	1
	September	22	*8

TABLE 2

THE FREQUENCY OF FITHIAN'S WRITING

Year	Days Writing
1766	83 23%
1767	176 48%
1768	0
1769	0
1770	0
1771	0
1772	0
1773	169 46% *
1774	309 84% *
1775	174 48% †
1776	109 ‡

*Tutor in Virginia, Oct. 20, 1773 to Oct. 25, 1774 (wrote 370 out of the 371 days)

†First Missionary Tour, March 5, 1775 to Sept. 7, 1775 (wrote 120 out of the 122 days)

Second Missionary Tour, Nov. 13, 1775 to Feb. 19, 1776 (wrote 66 out of the 98 days)

‡Chaplain, July 12, 1776 to Sept. 22, 1776, (wrote 72 out of the 73 days)

TABLE 3

TRAVEL AND WRITING: JUNE 1773 THROUGH SEPT. 1776

Month/Year	Days Spent at Home	Number of Entries
July 1773	31	31
August 1773	10	16—ten composed at home*
September 1773	30	29
October 1773	19	31
November 1773	0	30
December 1773	0	31
January 1774	0	31
February 1774	0	28
March 1774	0	31
April 1774	14	30
May 1774	15	31
June 1774	0	30
July 1774	0	31
August 1774	0	31
September 1774	0	30
October 1774	5	29—two written at home
November 1774	26	4
December 1774	31	5
January 1775	31	6
February 1775	11	12—three written at home**
March 1775	26	7—three written at home**
April 1775	30	0
May 1775	8	23—none written at home
June 1775	0	30
July 1775	0	31
August 1775	2	29—none written at home
September 1775	23	7—none written at home
October 1775	31	0
November 1775	12	7—none written at home
December 1775	0	22
January 1776	0	23
February 1776	5	14—none written at home
March 1776	31	0
April 1776	30	0
May 1776	31	0
June 1776	30	0
July 1776	8	20—none written at home
August 1776	0	30
September 1776	0	22†

*Fithian traveled to Princeton and spent most of the month there and in Philadelphia

**itinerating in eastern New Jersey around Egg Harbor during this period

† Fithian's last entry was on September 22, 1776, before his death on October 8

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VITA

Edward P. Pompeian

Edward P. Pompeian was born in Rochester, Minnesota on April 13, 1983. He graduated from Rochester Mayo High School in June 2001. Edward received his B.A. from Saint Olaf College in 2005 with a degree in History and American Studies.

In August 2005, he entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate student in the Department of History. Edward defended his master's thesis in the spring of 2006. He is currently a first year doctoral student in history at William and Mary.