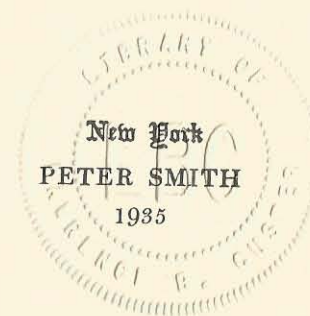


ECONOMIC HISTORY
OF
VIRGINIA IN THE SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY

AN INQUIRY INTO THE MATERIAL CONDITION OF
THE PEOPLE, BASED UPON ORIGINAL AND
CONTEMPORANEOUS RECORDS

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which is identified in an illustrious degree with the subsequent history of England either in a social or political way.¹

¹ The following is the list: Micajah Perry, Thomas Lane, James Dryden, Jonathan Mathews, Richard Cox, Samuel Groom, Anthony Stratton, John Cary, Josiah Bacon, John Blackall, John Browne, Edward Littlepage, Robert Bristow, James Wagstaffe, John Taillor, Robert Ruddell, Arthur Bayley, Robert Bristow, Jr., Timothy Keyser, John Cooper, George Richards, Daniel Parker, Christopher Morgan, Sr., Peter Paggin. See *British State Papers, America and West Indies*, No. 512; *McDonald Papers*, vol. VII, pp. 251, 252, Va. State Library. Among the other English merchants who were engaged in the trade with Virginia were the following: York County—Stephen Duport, Peregrine Browne, John Lee, Joseph Hunter, Joseph Francis, Daniel Jenkins, Samuel Dean, Richard Starkey, Thomas Walsh; Lower Norfolk—William Bird of Bristol, Nathan Stainesmore, William Atterbury of London, Francis Wells, Thomas Meriwether, Joseph Knott, John Munyon, John Kick, Isaac Merritt, James Harris (some of these merchants refer to themselves now as of England, and now as of Lower Norfolk); Accomac—Thomas Willbourne of York, Francis Lee of London; Rappahannock—David Griffin of London, George Daly of Plymouth, John Nuttall, Thomas Griffith, Francis Benton, William Jenkins, Richard Gower; Middlesex—William Twigg of Dublin, Daniel Stoodley of London, Francis Moore of Dublin, George Lee, Roger Burrough, Gawin Corbin, Edward Hill, John Bowles, Perient Trott, Richard Wilson, John Jeffreys, James Cary, William Crisp, all of London; Richard Lonnon of Dublin, Henry Ashton of Liverpool, John Goodwin, Jonathan Mathews, John Taylor; Lancaster—Thomas Ellis, Edward Harper, both of London; William Jennings, Anthony Cock of Bristol, John Hinde, Philip Taylor, Mathew Pitt, Philip Whistler of London, Thomas City, Francis Febran, Thomas Chitwood, Robert Hooper, John Fish, Thomas Booth, John Drake, all of London; Thomas Cooper, Joseph Hunt, and John Jayne of Bristol; Northampton—Nicholas Jackson, Thomas Heeman, Isaac Foxcroft, Ralph Allen, Thomas Buckner, Richard Corkhill of Biddeford, Henry Scarborough, John Martyn, John Bryce, Edward Prescott of London, Joseph Hunt of Bristol. The estates of many of these merchants at their deaths were inventoried in Virginia, showing that they were property holders if not residents at one time of the Colony. Thomas Chitwood is referred to sometimes as of Lancaster, and sometimes as of England. "Some from being wool shoppers and of meaner employment in England," remarks the author of *Leah and Rachel*, "have in Virginia become great merchants and attained to the most eminent advancement the Country afforded." p. 20, Force's *Historical Tracts*, vol. III.

There is reason to think that the trade with Virginia was not steadily lucrative to an uncommon degree after all the necessary charges had been met, although the nominal margin of gain appeared to be very large. This margin is easily discovered through the whole extent of the century. In the winter of 1623, which, as has been seen, was one of such extraordinary want as to raise the prices of all articles of food to a point hitherto unknown, George Harrison wrote to his brother in England that if he would secure a vessel and send her to Virginia with a cargo of wine, butter, cheese, sugar, and other provisions, he could easily obtain a profit of two hundred pounds sterling at the least, about five thousand dollars in our modern currency. The amount required for the purchase of such a cargo in England rendered this sum equivalent to a gain of not less than fifty per cent, perhaps even to a gain of a hundred.¹ In 1626, the margin, after paying three shillings a pound for tobacco, was so small, that the English merchants declared that there was no inducement to exchange their goods for that commodity. The regulation fixing this as the price was revoked, and the English traders permitted to obtain, for their goods, tobacco at the lowest rates at which they could purchase it, in order to ensure some profit after the payment of all expenses.² This profit is stated to have ranged in 1638 from six to ten pence on each pound of that product disposed of at wholesale.³ About

¹ George Harrison to his Brother, *British State Papers, Colonial*, No. 17, vol. II; *Sainsbury Abstracts for 1623*, p. 78, Va. State Library.

² Instructions to Governor Yearley, 1626, *British State Papers, Colonial; Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. II, p. 394. In the Instructions to Berkeley, 1641, there was the following clause: "that the merchant be not constrained to take tobacco at any price in exchange for his wares, but that it be lawful for him to make his own bargain for his goods." *British State Papers, Colonial; McDonald Papers*, vol. I, p. 358, Va. State Library.

³ Remonstrance of Planters, *British State Papers, Colonial*, vol. IX, No. 100; *Winder Papers*, vol. I, p. 124, Va. State Library.

the crops of the planters to whom goods had been sold on credit, not improbably twelve months beforehand.¹ The English merchants were in the habit of doing this, and in consequence enjoyed a notable advantage over their Dutch rivals. The opinion of Captain Devries was just as correct in its relation to the condition of trade fifty years later as it was at the particular period in which he wrote. In 1683, Colonel William Fitzhugh, who had a thorough knowledge of the course of business in Virginia, corresponding with certain shipowners in New England who had recently for the first time sent to the Colony a vessel loaded with merchandise, but with no one to dispose of it but the captain, who was ignorant of the country, stated that casual trading was destructive of all profit, because the owner of the goods, being in Virginia only for a short time, had to hasten his departure to reduce the cost attendant upon the navigation of his ship, and was, therefore, compelled to sell in order to secure a cargo of tobacco, whether its price was high or low. If, on the other hand, the merchandise, as soon as it was brought to the Colony, was placed in the hands of a factor, the latter could as occasion arose gradually dispose of it to advantage, being in a position to wait for an advance in rates if those prevailing were not satisfactory. When the vessel belonging to the owner of the commodities arrived, the products for which these commodities had previously from time to time been exchanged would be ready for delivery at certain places, and the expense of a long stay would be avoided. These facts were well known to the English traders and governed their action.²

The English merchants who supplied the planters with manufactured articles may be roughly divided into two

¹ Devries' *Voyages from Holland to America*, p. 112.

² *Letters of William Fitzhugh*, Feb. 5, 1682-83.

classes: first, those who resided in the mother country and disposed of goods to the colonists either directly upon the receipt of the tobacco in England, or who shipped goods to Virginia to be sold there by factors; secondly, those who lived either permanently or temporarily in the Colony and exchanged the commodities which they had ordered, for the products of the country, acting either in their own persons or through local representatives in their different mercantile transactions. To the first class belonged men of such standing as Micajah Perry, Thomas Lane, John Cary, John Cooper, George Richards, Peter Paggin, and John Bland. These English merchants in many instances had brothers or near relatives in Virginia who served as their agents. This was the case with Micajah Perry. It was also the case with John Bland. The English traders who resided in the Colony were men like Francis Lee, John Chew, Thomas Burbage, Robert Vaulx, and John Greene. In some instances they returned to England. This was the case with Robert Vaulx,¹ John Greene,² and Francis Lee.³ Participation in commercial exchange with the Virginians does not appear to have been the direct means of acquiring vast fortunes on the part of the merchants who resided in the mother country, although it is known that many persons engaged in this trade were men in affluent circumstances. Of the twenty-four who, towards the close of the seventeenth century, furnished the greater portion of the supplies of various kinds imported into the Colonies of Maryland and Virginia, not one bore a name

¹ *Records of York County*, vol. 1684-1687, p. 163, Va. State Library.

² References to Greene will be found in vol. 1663-1668 of *Rappahannock Records*, Va. State Library.

³ In *Records of Middlesex County* (original vol. 1673-1685, p. 103), Lee speaks of himself as "of London, formerly of Virginia." See also *Records of York*, 1694-1702, p. 35, Va. State Library.