

COLO-102
CAB18402084
333/130578

CK to Sec^{MA} of
an BIE

TRADE AND SHIPPING IN YORKTOWN
BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

James O'Mara

Introduction

Urban places in colonial Virginia and the South have been characterized in most studies as being remarkable chiefly for their absence.¹ Until recently, some writers argued that there were no urban places in Virginia or the other southern colonies.² The physical environment, especially, is said to have deflected the impulse to urbanize.³ The chapter that follows challenges that traditional view by considering Yorktown's role as a trading and shipping centre. New light from a hitherto untried perspective will be thrown on the settlement of Virginia in particular, and the South in general.

In 1736, one visitor to Yorktown remarked that the town "though stragglingly built", had "a great Air of Opulence" and made no "inconsiderable Figure...."⁴ Later visitors compared Yorktown favourably to provincial English towns such as Dover. This sort of observation in a colony in which most visitors found few towns of any consequence sets Yorktown apart from other urban settlements. More varied were opinions as to why Yorktown prospered: some commented that it was a slave mart,

and before 1750 the main port of entry for slaves brought into Virginia; others noted its activities as a busy port served by a number of major merchant houses. And one writer reflected that Yorktown was ideally situated as a market for the sweet-scented tobacco region. All of these observations about Yorktown's prominence can be summarized by noting that it performed important urban functions, and it gained its reputation, in part, through the activities of its residents in trade and shipping.

Like many urban places in colonial Virginia, Yorktown began as a "paper town".⁵ But Yorktown's continued existence, and its relative prosperity, in the period 1720 to 1760, is explained by its role as a major port on the Virginia coast and as an important locus for organization of inland trade. The discussion will focus, first, on legislation in the 17th and 18th centuries to encourage trade and shipping in Virginia. This will be followed by an examination of changes in shipping during the 18th century. The final section will examine merchant activities, and delimit Yorktown's sphere of economic influence.

Shipping, Trade Regulation, and
the Early Development of
Yorktown

Town promotion was a constant emphasis of colonial law-making and administration in Virginia --this in spite of continued opposition from the home government, which believed that Great Britain's trade interests were not well served by the growth of towns in the colony. The legislation reflected the self-interest of Virginia planters and merchants and their desire to stimulate and regulate commercial enterprise by fixing the location of markets. Creating urban business monopolies was another aim of the town acts. And controlling the importing of European manufactured goods and the exporting of local products was also a goal of the legislation. The record encompasses acts of the House of Burgesses dating from 1632, first involving attempts to establish towns, then designating places for ports, tobacco warehouses, courts, markets, and fairs, and finally recognizing the legal existence of corporate entities.

The earliest town acts strove mainly to bolster the sagging development of the colony's first capital, Jamestown. In 1680, the Cohabitation Act changed that by attempting to create new urban places province-wide.⁶ Sponsored by the governor, Lord Thomas Culpeper, the intent of the Act was to promote town

development. Culpeper believed that this would encourage a diversification of the colony's economy by creating conditions favourable for the establishment of crafts and manufacturing. Indeed, special provisions were contained in the legislation freeing craftsmen from civil obligations and protecting them from competition.⁷ Merchants who located their homes and stores in towns were extended similar privileges. The intent was that the tobacco trade would benefit from the creation of towns by the centralization of collection facilities, which in turn would raise and stabilize the price of the colony's chief export. The Act met with a mixed response in Virginia and a highly negative reaction in Great Britain, which led eventually to its suspension by the Crown.

The Cohabitation Act of 1680 was followed in 1691 by the Act for Ports. The Act created fifteen ports to encourage urbanization.⁸ All imported goods and exported commodities were to pass through the ports so that the collection of duties would be more methodical and the incidence of customs fraud reduced. The proponents of the legislation believed that this feature of the Act for Ports would make the intended town development contained in it acceptable to the home government. It did not, and the Act was suspended on April 1, 1693. But in the nearly two-year interval between enactment and suspension a number of ports were laid out, including what was to become Yorktown, and some of the sites established a more or less

permanent existence as towns.⁹

Early in the 18th century, one more legislative attempt to bring a network of urban settlement into existence failed, when a 1706 Act proposing towns was suspended by the Crown.¹⁰ This led, after 1711, to the abandonment of legislative programmes to create towns en masse. Town development became an implicit part of other forms of legislation. Colonial legislators recognized that urban places had to perform useful functions in order to thrive and the acts of the House of Burgesses provided a basic core of activities which included, among other things, storage, distribution, and communication. Requiring tobacco inspection in centrally located public warehouses, the establishment of courts in every county, and the granting of exclusive rights to hold fairs and markets were some of the means by which the House of Burgesses continued to promote urbanization, and with it, trading and shipping.

The site of what became Yorktown was one of fifteen designated for development into a town by the Cohabitation Act of 1680. Why the land beside the York River was chosen is unclear, although it seems likely that the owner, Benjamin Reade, was probably anxious to have it developed for such purposes. Near the site, where the York River narrows opposite Tindall's Point (later the site of Gloucester Town), there had been an ordinary, a ferry, and a store for some time.¹¹ But none of these seem to have been a prime consideration for the

location of the town because all were some distance to the northwest of what eventually became Yorktown. Thomas Jefferson later noted that the site had an excellent harbour,¹² but there were many other equally good locations and the area of what became the port was not incorporated into the original town site plan.

The Cohabitation Act of 1680 did not bring about the establishment of a settlement on the York River, and it was not until 1691 when the Act for Ports was declared that any positive steps were taken about the site. As an urban settlement, Yorktown was not an immediate success. The price of town lots was inexpensive, 180 pounds of tobacco each, but uncertainty about how long the provisions for holding land under the Act for Ports would remain in force dampened sales. The Act's suspension in 1693 caused an actual decline in the town's population and ownership of lots.¹³ Five years were to pass before titles were confirmed and more residents came to Yorktown.¹⁴

During those five years the settlement slowly established itself, and when the York County court and an Episcopal church were located on the site during 1697, Yorktown's future began to seem more secure. To be sure, there was still much vacant land in the town and it would be 28 years from the time of founding until all of the town's lots were owned and occupied. But after those first few crucial years Yorktown began to

attract not only officials, part-time planters, and speculators, but also artisans, tradesmen, and merchants. These were the people who would make York a town and an important centre for trade and shipping.

Shipping from Port York and the Import
and Export Trade of Yorktown

The Port of York River was one of six Naval Officer districts in colonial Virginia. The district was the coastline between a point five miles south of Yorktown on York River and the mouth of Piankatank River which empties into the Chesapeake Bay 35 miles northeast of the town.¹⁵ (Map 1 depicts the York River Naval Officer District.) Port York and Yorktown are not synonymous, although Yorktown was the principal port in the district and, from 1721, the location of the Custom House. But because Yorktown was also the chief commercial entrepot for the York River District, and it seems likely that most shipping cleared out of Yorktown, the two will be treated here as one and the same.

The main export passing through Port York during the colonial period was tobacco. In this York did not differ from several of the other colonial ports, including South Potomac, Rappahannock, and Upper James. But what set Port York apart, at least until 1740, was its dominance of tobacco exporting in the colony. For most of the first half of the 18th century more tobacco passed through York annually than the next two ports combined. Some appreciation of the volumes of tobacco exports and the lead York enjoyed can be gained from Table 1.¹⁶ The table shows that the rate of

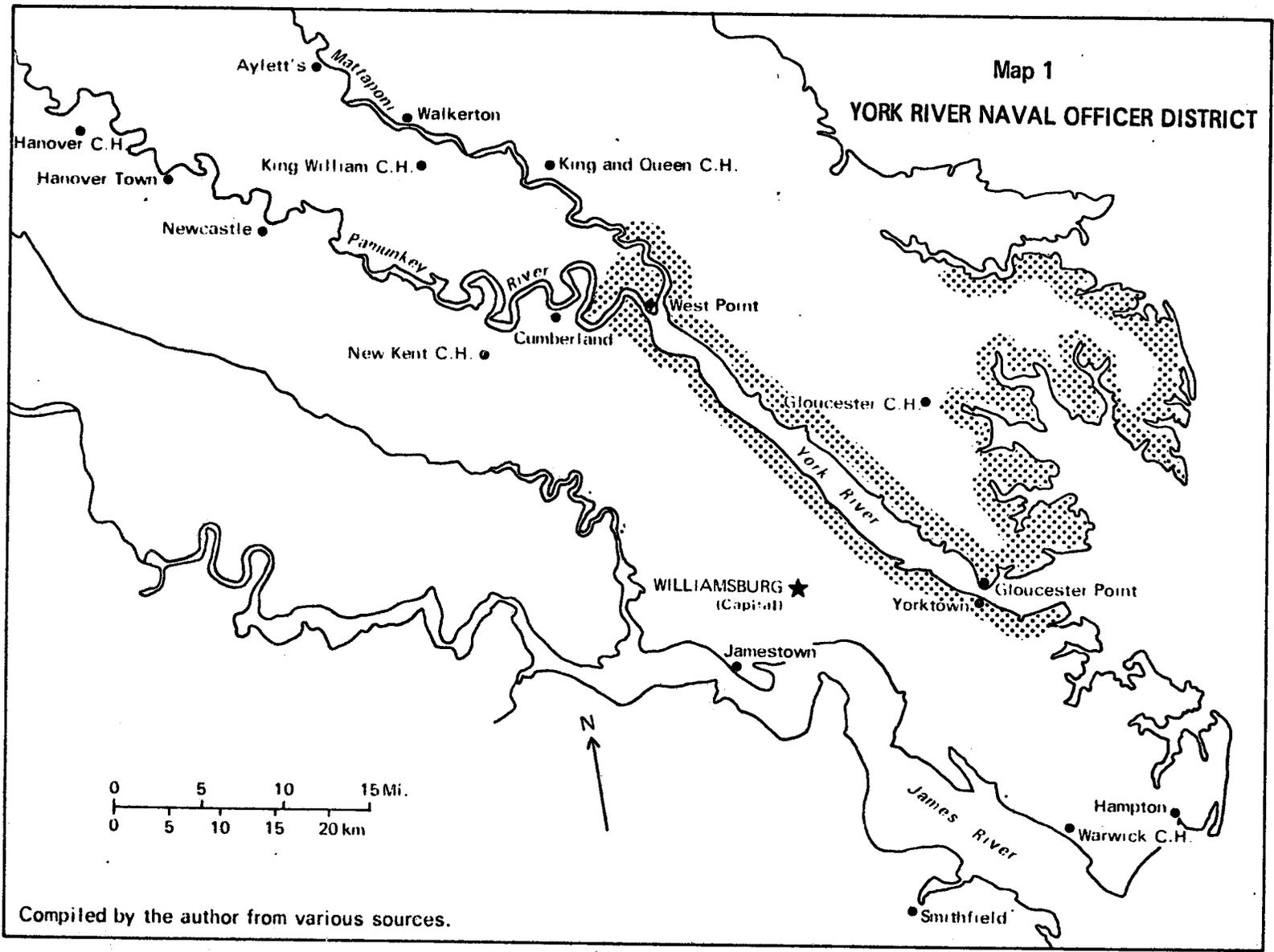


Table 1

GROWTH OF PORT YORK TOBACCO EXPORTS COMPARED WITH
 PORTS SOUTH POTOMAC, RAPPAHANNOCK, HAMPTON, AND
 UPPER JAMES^a

Cumulative Percentage Distribution

Year	Exports of Port York: each 5 year's export as a % of total export to 1774.	Exports of Ports South Potomac, Rappahan- nock, Hampton, and Upper James: each 5 year's export as a % of total export to 1774.
1701-1705	3.3	1.3
1706-1710	11.8	6.7
1711-1715	18.9	10.8
1716-1720	26.6	15.7
1721-1725	33.6	20.3
1726-1730	41.6	25.8
1731-1735	48.5	30.3
1736-1740	55.3	35.6
1741-1745	62.6	45.0
1746-1750	69.2	53.1
1751-1755	78.5	63.3

Table 1--Continued

1756-1760	84.6	72.2
1761-1765	91.0	82.8
1766-1770	95.9	92.9
1771-1774	100.0	100.0

^aCompiled by the author from data that were collected from the 2 Shillings per Hogshead Returns: PRO C05/1316-1353, Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilms; PRO T1/372, Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilm; and Phillipps MSS 11010.

^bAnalysis of exports for the period 1771-1774 indicates Port York fell behind the rate of export of the remaining ports in the colony. Values for Port York are: 1771, 97.1; 1772, 98.1; 1773, 99.2; and for 1774, 100.0. Values for Ports South Potomac, Rappahannock, Hampton, and Upper James are: 1771, 95.5; 1772, 98.4; 1773, 99.5; and for 1774, 100.0.

York's export increase was faster than the rate of increase for the other ports in the colony until 1740. After 1740 the rate slowed and started to fall behind the rate of the other ports. The importance of tobacco to Port York had not declined; the port itself was losing its position in the colony as the leading exporter of all products.

The place of tobacco in Port York's exports cannot be overemphasized. Although many other commodities such as pig iron, staves, shingles, corn, wheat, flour, bread, pork, and beef passed through York, all other exports combined never exceeded more than 20% of the value of tobacco exports between 1730 and 1770.¹⁷ That figure puts the value of York's tobacco exports, as can be seen from the participation ratios in Table 2, slightly ahead of the exports for the colony as a whole. But ratios for Port York are not ahead of those for Ports South Potomac, Rappahannock, and Upper James, which generally show higher degrees of concentration in the production of tobacco for export. Although York's position as a tobacco port declined after 1740, the place of tobacco among its exports did not change substantially.

Other exports in which York showed a degree of specialization include pig iron and staves, and occasionally corn and wheat after 1750. York's pig iron exports exceeded those for each of the other ports until 1760, and between 1725 and 1740 York generally exported half of the colony's supply. Stave exports

Table 2

DISTRIBUTION BY PORT OF VIRGINIA
TOBACCO EXPORTS, 1733 TO 1769^a

Participation Ratios^b

Ports	1733	1742	1750	1755	1764	1769
South Potomac	1.01	1.13	1.17	1.22	1.08	1.15
Rappahannock	1.07	1.13	1.17	1.18	1.10	1.17
York	1.05	1.08	1.06	1.15	1.13	1.15
Hampton (or Lower James)	0.58	0.26	0.31	0.13	0.31	0.40
Upper James	1.09	1.06	1.11	1.15	1.09	1.05

^aDerived by the author from Naval Officer Returns, PRO C05/1349-C05/1450, Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilms, and various county records.

^bThe participation ratio is calculated by dividing the value of tobacco exports for each port by the value of tobacco exports for the colony as a whole.

from the port averaged 220,000 pieces per year, and Port York sent out more than the colony average. But York's absolute share of the colony's stave exports was often less than half of that for Ports Hampton (or Lower James) and Upper James. The value of corn and wheat exports exceeded the colony's average in years when the colony's grain exports as a whole were up, particularly in 1750 and 1769. But again, York's share of corn and wheat exports was usually less than Hampton's and Upper James's, and after 1765 Port South Potomac often exported more grain. During the 18th century, exports of pig iron, staves, corn, and wheat, on average, represented between 10% and 12% of the value of exports passing through Port York.

During the 18th century between 40 and 50 ships cleared Port York annually for all destinations. (See Table 3.) Of that number, tobacco ships usually accounted for half. Ships plying the West Indies and coastal trades made up the remainder of clearances during the first half of the 18th century. During the second half of the century some changes took place. Vessels bound for Lisbon, Madiera, and Ireland rose to account for about 10% of shipping. Coasting, particularly to New England, in the years immediately preceding the Revolution accounted for about one-third of all shipping.¹⁸ Ships destined for the West Indies, other ports on the Atlantic Seaboard, and Southern Europe were carriers in the provisions trade. Corn, wheat, other grains, pork, and beef were the principal com-

Table 3

DESTINATIONS OF SHIPS CLEARING
PORT YORK, 1730 TO 1771^a

Destinations	1730	1740	1750	1761	1771
London	18	10	15	14	15
Bristol	7	14	6	9	6
Liverpool	1	1	3	5	3
Whitehaven	0	0	0	0	0
Glasgow	1	0	2	3	0
Greenock	0	1	0	0	0
Ayr	0	0	0	0	3
Bermuda	4	4	3	2	3
Jamaica	3	0	2	1	1
Barbadoes	3	3	11	4	10
Antigua	0	0	1	2	0
Nevis	0	0	0	0	1
St. Christopher	0	0	1	0	0
St. Kitts	0	0	0	0	1
Surinam	1	0	0	0	0
Lisbon	0	1	2	0	0

Table 3--Continued

Destinations	1730	1740	1750	1761	1771
Madiera	0	2	3	0	2
Cork	0	0	0	2	0
Halifax	0	0	0	1	0
New England	2	2	0	2	0
Boston	0	0	0	0	6
Salem	0	0	0	0	11
Rhode Island	0	1	0	1	1
Piscataway	0	0	0	0	3
Philadelphia	0	0	0	1	0
Maryland	2	1	0	2	0
North Carolina	5	0	0	0	2
Accomac	1	0	0	0	0
Rappahannock	3	2	0	0	0
Lower James	1	0	0	0	0
Upper James	0	0	1	0	0

^aDerived by the author from Naval Officer Returns, PRO C05/1349-C05/1450, Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilms.

modities of the trade. In addition to provisions, ships bound for the West Indies usually also carried staves, shingles, lumber, and naval stores. Although carrying tobacco remained singularly important for Port York's shipping throughout the 18th century, by the time of the Revolution major changes were apparently underway and a reorientation of trade was taking place.

Port York's commercial connections as revealed by ship sailing destinations give further insight into the nature of the changes taking place during the 18th century. (See Table 3.) London was always the single most important destination for ships leaving Port York. London was the centre of the consignment trade, and Port York and its hinterland was the centre of consigning in Virginia. Although London was a major destination for tobacco, other ports in England figured prominently too. Bristol in particular, Liverpool, Whitehaven, and Plymouth received shipments (despite the fact that the last two do not appear to have received any according to data in Table 3). Scottish ports received little tobacco during the first half of the 18th century, but from 1750 onward ships bound for Glasgow, Greenock, and other ports increased in number. But it is worth reiterating that York's position as a tobacco port was declining. In 1725, shipping from York accounted for approximately 45% of all tobacco exports, while in 1771, only 15% of Virginia's tobacco exports originated from Port

York. The strength of the ties between York and Great Britain's ports, it can be assumed, was weakening as the importance of Port York tobacco exports fell.

While the tobacco trade declined in importance provisioning rose. York never equalled the trade of Ports Hampton and Upper James, and its exports were periodically surpassed in volume by Ports South Potomac and Rappahannock. But along with the other Virginia ports, York after 1750 exported increasing amounts of grains and meats, as well as wood products and naval stores. Madiera and Lisbon, and occasionally Oporto, were the prime destinations in Southern Europe for York's corn and wheat exports. Barbadoes, Jamaica, and Bermuda received most of the port's shipments to the West Indies of pork, corn, wheat, tar, pitch, turpentine, staves, and shingles. And in the years immediately before the Revolution, Boston, Salem, and Piscataway destinations accounted for 30% of shipping, receiving from York mostly corn, wheat, and pig iron. The importance of the place of the provisions, wood, and naval stores trades, however, should not be exaggerated. Even at the end of the colonial period these products, along with pig iron, accounted for only about 10% of the value of Port York's exports. This also suggests that while the coasting, West Indies, and Southern European trades were increasingly important to the trade of Port York, their importance was limited.

Import shipping reflected some of the patterns of export

trading. Vessels entering Port York came predominantly from Great Britain, and of the British ports, London and Bristol sent the most amount of shipping.¹⁹ After the middle of the 18th century the numbers of ships arriving from the West Indies, Southern Europe, and the other Atlantic Seaboard colonies increased. But, less can be said about goods entering than products going out.²⁰ In general, British ships carried manufactured goods, wine, and salt. West Indies ships brought in rum and sugar. Coasting vessels carried manufactured goods produced in or transshipped from other colonies and bread stuff. Of the ships entering annually, between 10% and 20% arrived in ballast, seeking cargoes for export to the West Indies or Europe, or goods for transshipment to the other Atlantic Seaboard colonies. Most of the evidence that can be gathered about Port York's import shipping and trading indicates that it was less valuable economically than the export trade. The number of ships arriving in ballast or with light cargoes attests to that conclusion.

A major exception to that statement is provided by the slave trade. Until 1750 York was the principal port of entry for slaves arriving from Africa and the West Indies.²¹ (See Table 4 and Table 5.) Even during 1750, York provided a good enough market for Francis Jerdone, a prominent merchant of Yorktown, to write to his London correspondents asking,

What would you think of an African concern

Table 4

DISTRIBUTION BY PORT OF VIRGINIA
SLAVE IMPORTS, 1719 TO 1762^a

Per Cents of Totals Entering

Ports	1719	1724	1733	1740	1750	1762
South Potomac	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	8.3	0.0
Rappahannock	5.1	0.0	28.2	8.4	0.0	31.6
York	89.8	100	59.7	65.5	0.2	3.3
Hampton (or Lower James)	5.1	0.0	12.1	18.5	12.1	0.0
Upper James	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.4	79.4	65.1
Total Numbers	1842	464	1494	1650	900	1920

^aData are derived from Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America, Vol. 4: The Border Colonies and Southern Colonies (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1935), pp. 173-234.

Table 5

ORIGINS OF PORT YORK SLAVE IMPORTS, 1719 TO 1762^a

Numbers of Ships

Origins	1719	1724	1733	1740	1750	1762
Calabar	6	2	1	1	0	0
Guinea	2	0	0	1	0	0
Madagascar	1	0	0	0	0	0
Gold Coast	1	0	0	0	0	0
Bonny	1	0	0	1	0	0
Angola	1	0	0	0	0	0
Windward Coast	0	1	0	0	0	0
St. Christopher	0	0	1	1	0	0
Barbadoes	0	0	3	1	1	0
Africa	0	0	1	0	0	1

^aData are derived from Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America, Vol. 4: The Border Colonies and Southern Colonies (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1935), pp. 173-234. A recent analysis of similar material is presented by Allan Kulikoff, "The Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, 1700 to 1790," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, 35 (April 1978): 226-259.

of a small vessel yearly to this place[?]
 There is not the least fear of selling here,
 for there is in general as many purchasers
 as there is slaves imported, and the pay is
 always better than for any other commodity....22

But as import duties increased and the colony's pattern of settlement changed, slaving in Port York fell off, so that by 1764 no slaves entered the port, nor did any for the next five years. The slave trade continued in the colony, at levels below those during the first half of the 18th century, and most ships arriving entered through Ports Upper James, Rappahannock, or Hampton.

The decline of the slave trade after 1750 is symptomatic of the decline of Port York in general. The size of cargoes and the actual volume of shipping increased slightly up to the time of the Revolution, but compared with the growth of shipping to and from Ports Upper James, Hampton, Rappahannock, and South Potomac, York's performance was below average. Shifting trade and settlement patterns in the colony account for part of this change. Growth of settlement on the James River in particular contributed to the relative decline of Port York. The port also lacked an extensive back country. And the collapse of the consignment trade during the closing years of the colonial period added a further burden to York's development. Port York had come full circle from being the colony's leading exporter and importer to being one of its lesser ports.

Trade and Merchant Activity in
Yorktown before the Revolution

Cities, towns, and urban growth have been central to many studies of the American past.²³ But historians of the Southern United States and Virginia, and those who study the colonial period especially, have rarely given the subject attention.²⁴ Long-standing notions about the role of the physical environment in determining patterns of life during the colonial period in the South and Virginia appear to be part of the cause for this absence of studies. The abundant rivers of the region are said to have deflected impulses to urbanize by providing a means of direct contact between colonial planters and merchants in Europe. The deficiencies of that approach have been discussed elsewhere.²⁵

Another cause for the absence of urban studies of the South and Virginia appears to lie in the focus of historians and sociologists on the rural-urban dichotomy. Differences between urban folk and rural folk exist, and in colonial Virginia there were undoubtedly some dissimilarities. But one historian, Julius Rubin, has hastened to point out that people living in the United States during the colonial period were "90 per cent agricultural in an occupational sense,... [but] 90 per cent urban in a cultural sense."²⁶ This suggests that studies of the relations between residents of urban places

and the population of surrounding rural areas in Virginia during the colonial period should focus on the cooperation between the two rather than conflict.

Merchants were one group in colonial Virginia who facilitated the integration of town and country. First, they were involved in defining and usually enlarging the functional roles of towns in the colony during the 18th century through international, regional, and local trading. Secondly, they were active in forming the physical settings of towns by financing construction and promoting real estate sales. Other groups, including planters and officials, were as active in establishing towns, and their roles should not be overlooked. But merchants, more so than any other group, were in a position to promote the functional development of urban settlements, and it was this functional development that lay at the core of the relations between towns and country.

Merchant activity predated the founding of Yorktown, although evidence suggests that there were no stores on the actual site until after 1705.²⁷ It was through merchants' efforts that products from the hinterland made their way to the port and out to foreign markets, and imported goods reached planters and other merchants in the surrounding region. Several of their number became leading merchants in the colony and a few in Yorktown were among 18th century Virginia's most influential residents.

The relations between towns and surrounding areas can be examined by studying the organization and shape of hinterlands.²⁸ Data derived from Francis Jerdone's accounts for 1750 and 1751 are suggestive of the area of Yorktown's hinterland. (See Table 6, Table 7, Map 2, and Map 3.) His trade area reaches into the Piedmont, almost to the Northern Neck, and south to the Virginia-North Carolina border country. Jerdone's volume of trade and number of customers is greatest in the counties closest to Yorktown, indicating that the town's sphere of influence is strongest in the York Peninsula. But Jerdone's wholesale and merchant customers are drawn from a wider area, and in fact, the outer limits of Jerdone's mercantile activity are defined by wholesaling activity. This suggests that the town's sphere of influence expands with this kind of trade. Yorktown's sphere of influence, as suggested by evidence from this source, is sizable, covering an area of 20 counties and approximately 2500 square miles.

Jerdone's tobacco purchases, made principally from other merchants, are drawn from an area that is roughly similar to the one in which most of his merchant and wholesale customers were located. (See Table 8 and Map 4.) Because many of those with whom Jerdone had wholesale dealings were also his tobacco suppliers, this is not surprising. But some differences do emerge, and these appear to be the result of single purchases made for cash or for the purpose of clearing a book debt

Table 6

THE CUSTOMERS OF FRANCIS JERDONE, YORKTOWN^a

Residents of	Number of Customers
York County	22
Yorktown	19
Hanover County	13
Williamsburg	9
Gloucester County	9
New Kent County	8
Warwick County	6
King and Queen County	3
Isle of Wight County	2
James City County	2
Accomac County	1
Amelia County	1
Brunswick County	1
Caroline County	1
Charles City County	1
Chesterfield County	1
Elizabeth City County	1 ^b
Hampton	1
Henrico County	1
King William County	1
Louisa County	1
Middlesex County	1
Surry County	1 ^c
West Point	1
	107

^aAccount Book of the Mercantile Business of Francis Jerdone, 1750-1772, Library of the College of William and Mary, Jerdone Papers, Library Lot 1.

^bHampton, although located in Elizabeth City County, is listed separately as it is in the account book.

^cWest Point, although located in King William County, is also given a separate listing for the same reason as above.

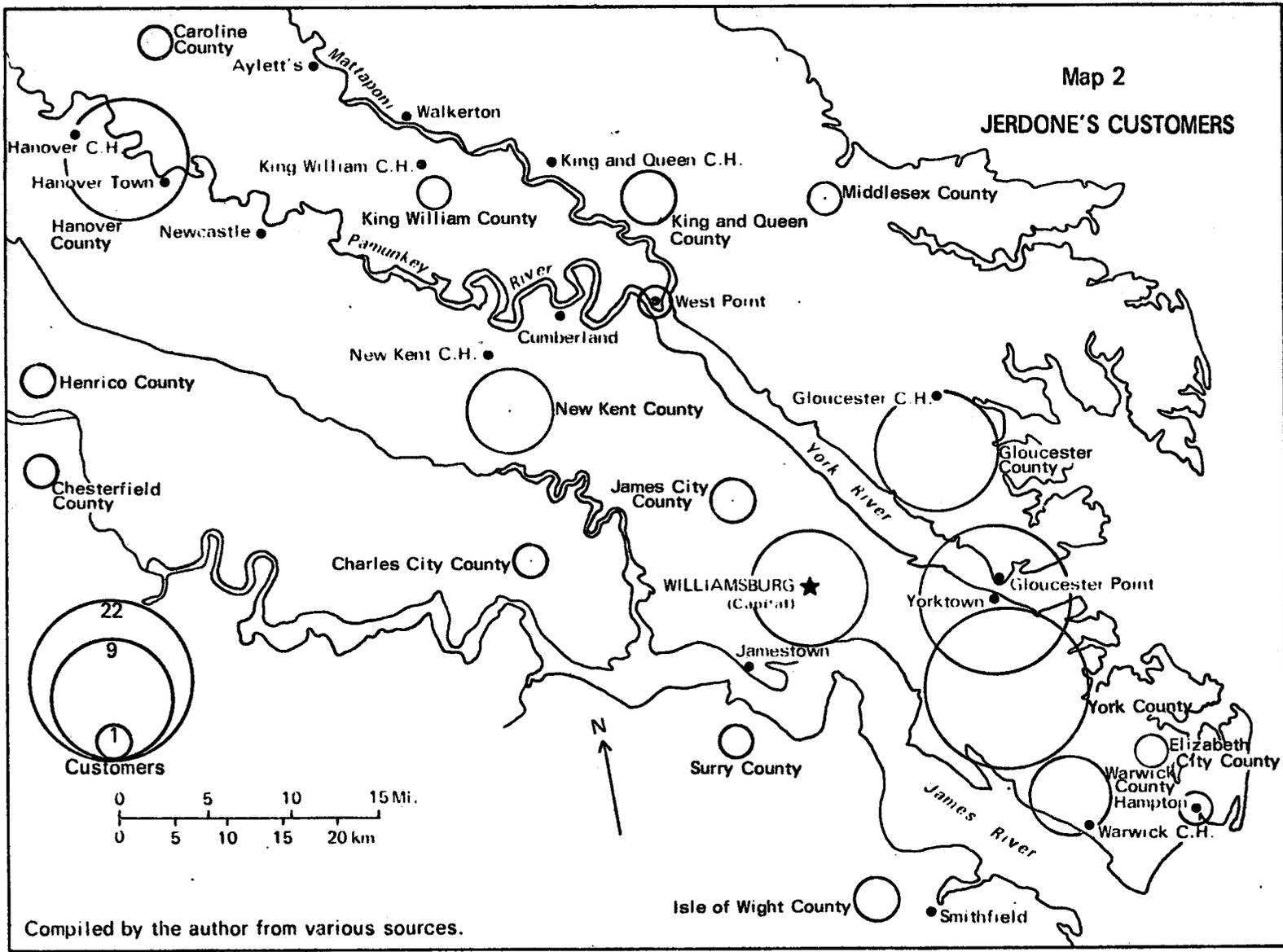


Table 7

THE WHOLESALE CUSTOMERS OF FRANCIS JERDONE, YORKTOWN^a

Residents of	Number of Customers
Hanover County	5
Gloucester County	2
Chesterfield County	1
James City County	1
Louisa County	1
New Kent County	1
Williamsburg	1
Yorktown	1
	<hr/>
	13

^aAccount Book of the Mercantile Business of Francis Jerdone, 1750-1772, Library of the College of William and Mary, Jerdone Papers, Library Lot 1.

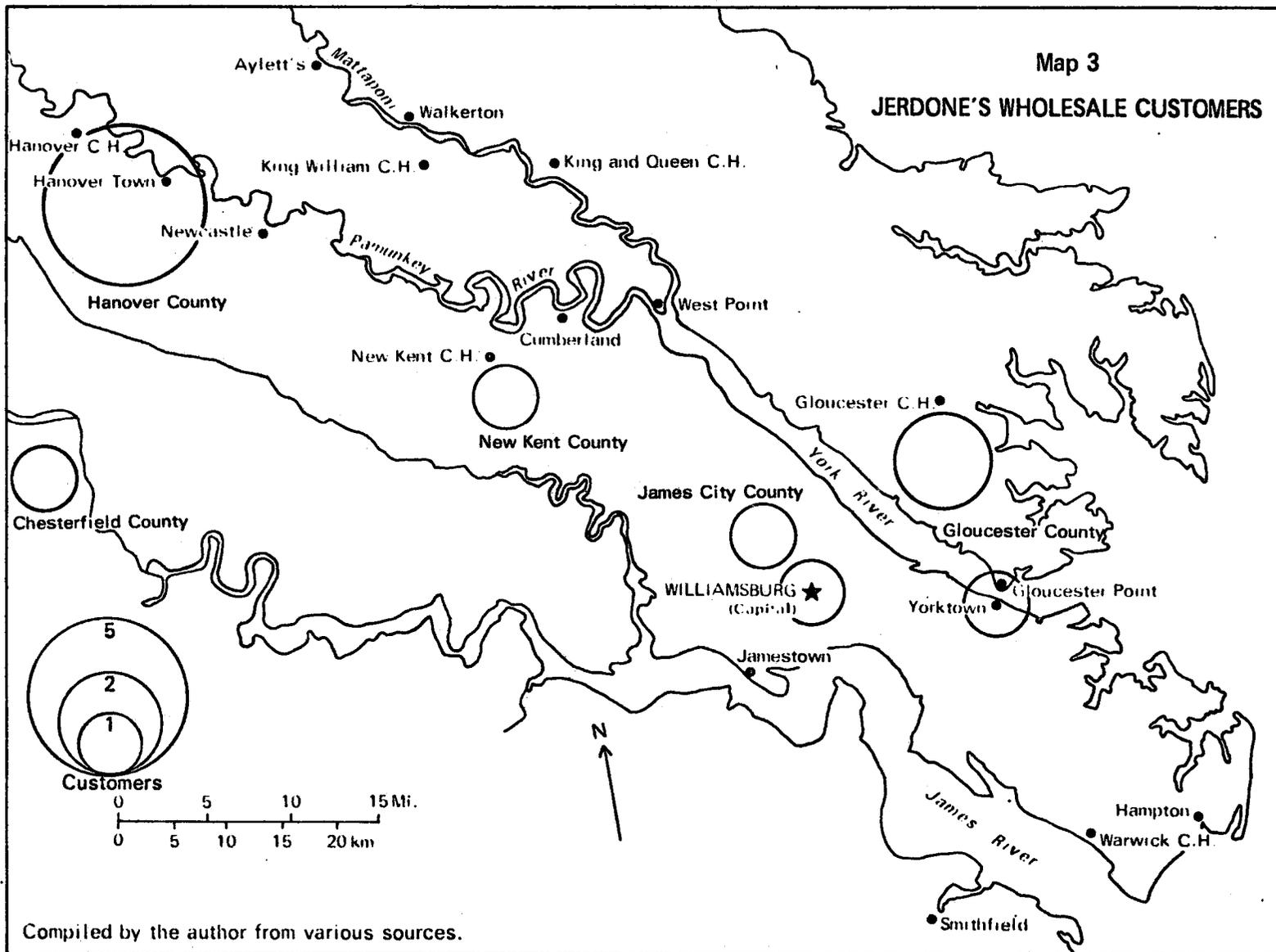


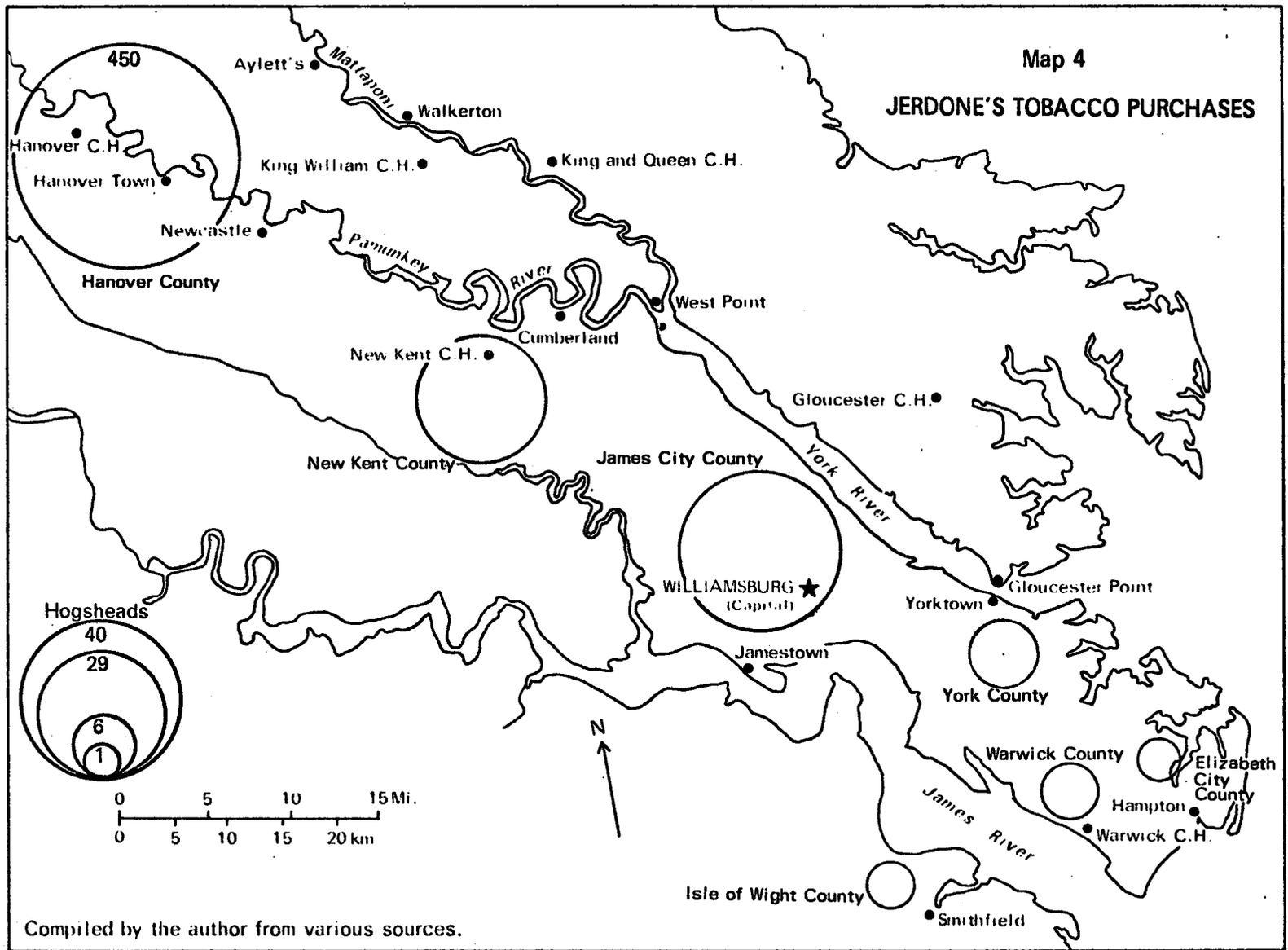
Table 8

FRANCIS JERDONE'S TOBACCO PURCHASES,
APRIL, 1751 TO JULY, 1752^a

County of Purchase	Hogsheads Purchased
Hanover County	450
James City County	40
New Kent County	29
York County	9
Warwick County	6
Isle of Wight County	3
Elizabeth City County	1
Cash Purchases	8
	<u>546^b</u>

^aAccount Book of the Mercantile Business of Francis Jerdone, 1750-1772, Library of the College of William and Mary, Jerdone Papers, Library Lot 1.

^bJerdone lists purchases for the period of 555 hogsheads. A check of his accounts reveals that his adding was faulty.



Jerdone assumed for a third party. A few hogsheads of tobacco that were acquired in distant warehouses, but which were subsequently traded for hogsheads closer at hand, are not included. This practice was common, and although it shows that merchants were willing to take tobacco sight-unseen from warehouses at great distances, the later bartering serves to emphasize that they had areas in which they regularly traded and were unwilling to go beyond them. The practical problems of putting together a cargo for a shipload no doubt also had an important role to play.

Yorktown's merchants sold a large variety of goods, over an extensive area. But the distances over which goods were sold varied with the nature of the item. Yorktown was the chief slave market in the colony during the first half of the 18th century, so the town's market for that good can be considered the entire colony. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that commonly available goods, such as tools, or thread, or rum, would be sold by merchants in the town to customers who lived beyond the immediate neighborhood of Yorktown on a regular basis. The value and the abundance of such products would warrant little travel to obtain them, and for distant customers, would probably be available from merchants in their own neighborhood. Assuming merchants in Yorktown could offer no great price advantages to buyers, one would expect that retail customers living within the neighbor-

hood of Yorktown would buy predominantly inexpensive goods, and those living at a distance would purchase, generally, higher value items.²⁹

Information contained in the account book of Messrs. William Lightfoot and Mordecai Booth, for 1746, tends to support the statement above.³⁰ (See Table 9.) Table 9 takes the form of a contingency table, and it shows the distribution of customers and their purchasing patterns.³¹ As expected, customers near Yorktown outnumber those at a distance by three to one. But of those who lived in the five counties surrounding Yorktown, the vast majority bought less than the average account of sales, and fewer than would have been expected spent more than £20 during the course of the year. Those who lived outside of the neighborhood of Yorktown contracted greater debts individually than the normal expectation, and of those who lived at a distance, fewer than expected spent less than £20 during the year.

Thus two factors emerge as determinants of the size and nature of the trade area of these merchants, Francis Jerdone and Messrs. William Lightfoot and Mordecai Booth, and by inference Yorktown. The kind of selling, whether wholesale or retail, has an effect. Retail customers are generally closer at hand, whereas wholesale customers, who are not bound by the same considerations as retail buyers,³² can be located at a distance from the source of goods. The value,

Table 9

DISTRIBUTION OF LIGHTFOOT AND BOOTH CUSTOMERS^a

Contingency Table

	Customers Spending Less than £20 per Year	Customers Spending More than £20 per Year
Customers Living within Yorktown's Neighborhood ^b	272	40
Customers Living outside Yorktown's Neighborhood ^c	38	52

$\chi^2 = 79.98$ $N = 402$
 Significant at $\chi_{\alpha.001}$ Probability = .000000001
 $\phi = 0.45^d$

^aLightfoot-Booth Account Book, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, microfilm. [Previously misidentified as the Account Book of Augustine Moore.]

^bYorktown's neighborhood is defined as York County and the four counties with which York shares a boundary, James City, Warwick, Elizabeth City, and Gloucester.

^cAll other counties are considered to be outside of the neighborhood of Yorktown.

^dAlthough the chi squared value is significant and the phi value, given the number of cases, indicates a strong association, some variance is left unexplained. This can be attributed to problems in defining the neighborhood and the choice of the critical value of £20.

(i.e., the range of the good),³³ also partially determines the distance between sellers and their location, and consumers and their location.

Merchant involvement in the development of Yorktown was not limited solely to matters of trade. They took an active role in developing the physical setting of the town and promoting real estate sales. Although more is said on the subject in other chapters of this book, merchant activity in this field is noted because it was often closely associated with the expansion of trade and the extension of Yorktown's influence into the surrounding area.

It was noted earlier that the first settlement of Yorktown was not rapid and that the years between the suspension of the 1691 Act for Ports and the confirmation of land titles during 1698 were a time of decline in land ownership and population in the town. There were periods of prosperity mixed with adversity during the first quarter century, but after that the town passed from being "a crude village," and took on an air of wealth and permanence.³⁴ The changing conditions were reflected in construction. A traveller passing through Yorktown during 1736 observed that

You perceive a great Air of Opulence amongst the Inhabitants, who have some of them built themselves Houses, equal in Magnificence to many of our superb ones at St. James's; as those of Mr. Lightfoot, Nelson, &c. Almost every considerable Man keeps an Equipage.... The Taverns are many here, and much frequented,

and an unbounded Licentiousness seems to taint the Morals of the young Gentlemen of this Place. The Court House is the only considerable publick Building, and is no unhandsome Structure. The most considerable Houses are of Brick; some handsome ones of Wood, all built in modern Taste.... There are some very pretty Garden spots in the town; and the avenues leading to Williamsburg, Norfolk &c., are prodigiously agreeable. 35

Such developments lent prestige to Yorktown, and they reflected its growing functional importance. But a contemporaneous event on the edges of town was making an even larger contribution.

The provision of housing for the "lessor Sort" in Yorktown was of major functional importance for the development of the place. The lesser types were generally tradespeople, craftsmen and artisans of many skilled occupations. The class was also made up of clerks, teamsters, and wharfingers, and of those who had no particular trades or skills. These were the people who provided labour for non-slave employment in the community, and it was on their backs, often literally, that the fortunes of merchants and major employers, such as William Rogers the potter, rested. The concerted effort made to promote and develop housing for this group shows that the town's entrepreneurs not only saw a means to turn a profit, but recognized the functional necessity of having such a population.

The suburb was located on land adjoining the southern and western boundaries of the original town site, nestled

between them and the ravine of the Yorktown Creek.³⁶ Lots located in the suburb were half an acre in area like the first town lots, but their number and layout are unknown. Records of the development were destroyed in Richmond during the Civil War. Descriptions tend to agree that much of it was a ramshackle collection of houses made of "Plaister", that it was subject to fires, and that livestock wandered at large in the streets. Nevertheless it afforded a location for lower class housing, and much of the construction that took place was in the form of workingmen's cottages. The suburb was a success, and it became a permanent feature of the town when it was annexed during 1757.³⁷ But the siege of Yorktown proved fatal to it. During September, 1781, British troops invested at Yorktown levelled the suburb to give themselves an unobstructed field of fire. So the development ended, not of its own accord or because of some inexorable process, but because of the necessities of war. But while the suburb existed, it provided an investment opportunity for local entrepreneurs and housing for workers, and through these contributed to Yorktown's functional role in trading and shipping.

Conclusion

Trade and shipping in Yorktown were two important urban functions carried out in the place during the 18th century. In part, this is owing to the initiative of the provincial government. A succession of bills enacted by the House of Burgesses strove to promote precisely what occurred in Yorktown. It became a busy port; as the location of the York River Custom House, Yorktown played a role in the organization and regulation of trade; and the town developed a diversified economy.³⁸ The volume of trade and shipping that came to and went from the port was large, and until mid century, York was Virginia's leading exporter of many commodities. But government initiative alone does not account for Yorktown's rise to prominence. Merchants made Yorktown an important locus for the organization of inland trade, and the town's sphere of economic influence extended deep into the surrounding countryside. Yorktown's decline was due not so much to factors that relate specifically to the place, but to changes that had colony-wide significance. Throughout the 18th century, Yorktown was a functionally important urban place, and part of that importance derived from its role in trade and shipping.

Acknowledgements

A number of people have read and criticised various drafts of this paper, and for that help, I thank them. In particular I wish to thank Roy Merrens, Joe Ernst, and Randy Smith. Part of the research for the paper was supported by a grant-in-aid from Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated. I also wish to thank the staff of the Research Department of Colonial Williamsburg for their many kindnesses to me while researching this chapter.

Footnotes

¹See, for example, John C. Rainbolt, "The Absence of Towns in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," Journal of Southern History 35 (August 1969): 343-60.

²For example, Morris Talpalar, The Sociology of Colonial Virginia (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960), p. 172.

³See, in this connection, Rainbolt, "The Absence of Towns," 343-60; the view has been taken up by television journalism in, Alistair Cooke, America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), esp. pp. 68-72; by an eminent historian, Hugh Jones, The Present State of Virginia, from whence is inferred a short view of Maryland and North Carolina, ed. by Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press for the Virginia Historical Society, 1956), p. 193; and more recently by an historian and a geographer in, Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "The Urban South: The First Two Centuries," in The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South, National University Publication, ed. by Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977), p. 28.

⁴[Edward Kimber], "Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America in the Year 1736," William and Mary Quarterly, 1st Series, 15 (April 1907): 222-3. [Originally published in London Magazine, 1745-46.]

⁵"Paper town" refers here to towns created through legislation by the House of Burgesses. See below for a detailed discussion of town promotion.

⁶William W. Hening, compiler, The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619, Vol. 2 (Richmond, Va.: Franklin Press, 1820), pp. 471-8. Hereafter cited Henings, Volume Number, Page(s) Reference(s). Views on the Virginia experience of town founding are presented in, John W. Reys, Tidewater Towns: City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1972), pp. 65-91; John C. Rainbolt, From Prescription to Persuasion: Manipulation of Seventeenth Century Virginia Economy, National University Publication (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974), pp. 113-7, 132-5, 152-4, and 157-61; Edward M. Riley, "The Town Acts of Colonial Virginia," Journal of Southern History 16 (August 1950): 306-23.

⁷Henings, 2, 471-8. They were not obliged to pay levees for five years after settling in a town and were not required to serve in the militia under certain circumstances. Forestalling was forbidden, and taverns could not be built outside of towns within a radius of five miles.

⁸Henings, 3, 53-69.

⁹Other towns founded at the same time include Tappahannock (or Hobbes Hole), Urbanna, Hampton, Norfolk, Tindall's (or Gloucester) Point, and West Point (or Delaware), and all continue today too.

¹⁰Henings, 3, 404-19.

¹¹Edward M. Riley, "The Founding of Yorktown, Virginia, 1691-1781" (Ph.d. thesis, University of Southern California, 1942), pp. 25-8.

¹²Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, ed. by William Peden, Norton Library (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), pp. 6-7.

¹³Of the 61 lots in the town that were purchased, 37 were abandoned after the suspension of the 1691 Act.

¹⁴Henings, 3, 147.

¹⁵Joseph R. Frese, ed., "The Royal Customs Service in the Chesapeake, 1770: The Reports of John Williams, Inspector General," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 81 (July 1973): 287; Port Districts & Towns of America [1770], British Museum, Additional Manuscripts 15484, Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilm; and for a discussion of the Naval Officer in Virginia during the colonial period, see, Harold B. Gill, jr., "The Naval Office in Virginia, 1692-1700" (M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1959).

¹⁶The 2 Shillings per Hogshead Returns are used as a surrogate measure for the volume of tobacco exports. Governors and colonial administrators often complained of deficiencies in the collection of the tax; be that as it may, the Returns provide a rough measure of the export volumes from each port.

¹⁷Statistic derived by the author from various Naval Officer Returns and price data.

¹⁸For comparative purposes, see, David C. Klingaman, "The

Development of the Coastwise Trade of Virginia in the Late Colonial Period," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 77 (January 1969): 22-45; Arthur P. Middleton, Tobacco Coast: A Maritime History of Chesapeake Bay in the Colonial Era (Newport News, Va.: Mariners' Museum, 1953), pp. 93-212; Malcolm C. Clark, "The Coastwise and Caribbean Trade of the Chesapeake Bay, 1696-1776" (Ph.d. dissertation, Georgetown University, 1970), esp. chps. 2, 3, and 4; Charles W. Sargent, "Virginia and the West Indies Trade, 1740-1765" (Ph.d. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1964), chp. 4; Francis C. Huntley, "The Seaborne Trade of Virginia in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: Port Hampton," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 59 (July 1951): 297-308; Beverly W. Miller, "The Export Trade of Four Colonial Virginia Ports, 1768" (M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1967).

¹⁹Based on Naval Officer Returns for selected years. This finding is similar to that of Sister June Meredith Costin, "Shipping in Yorktown, Virginia, 1740-1744" (M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1973), p. 50.

²⁰Parts of incoming cargoes were often simply listed under general headings such as European goods, manufactured goods, or sundries. Given these gross classifications by Naval Officers, little can be said about the specifics of incoming cargoes during the 18th century.

²¹Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America, Vol. 4: The Border Colonies and the Southern Colonies (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1935), pp. 173-234.

²²"Letter Book of Francis Jerdone," William and Mary Quarterly, 1st Series, 11 (January 1903): 157. [Letter to Messrs. Buchanan and Hamilton, merchants, London, May 26, 1750.]

²³Three recent studies attest to the continuing interest in this subject: Thomas J. Archdeacon, New York City, 1664-1710: Conquest and Change (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976); Stephanie G. Wolf, Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); and Sylvia D. Fries, The Urban Idea in Colonial America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977).

²⁴Two recent studies indicate that this may be changing: Earle and Hoffman, "The Urban South"; _____, "Urban Development in the Eighteenth Century South," Perspectives in American History 10 (1976): 7-80; and a third study indicates a growing interest on the part of geographers, Carville Earle, "The First English Towns of North America," Geographical Review 67 (January 1977): 34-50.

²⁵H. Roy Merrens, "Historical Geography and Early American History," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, 22 (October 1965): 529-48; Joseph A. Ernst and H. Roy Merrens, "Camden's turrets pierce the skies!': The Urban Process in the Southern Colonies during the Eighteenth Century," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, 30 (October 1973): 549-574.

²⁶Julius Rubin, "Urban Growth and Regional Development," in Growth of Seaport Cities, 1790-1825. Proceedings of a Conference Sponsored by the Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation, March 17-19, 1966 (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia for the Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation, 1967), p. 6.

²⁷Thomas Nelson, who was known as "Scotch Tom", may have been the first merchant to settle permanently in Yorktown. He arrived in 1705, reputedly as a supercargo, and founded what became and remained to the end of the colonial period the most influential family in Yorktown.

²⁸This was done using data derived from merchant account books. For comparative purposes, see, Judith J. Schulz, "The Hinterland of Revolutionary Camden, South Carolina," Southeastern Geographer 16 (November 1976): 91-7.

²⁹The theoretical basis for this expectation is provided by central place theory. For a discussion of the general principles of central place theory, see, John U. Marshall, The Location of Service Towns: An Approach to the Analysis of Central Place Systems, Department of Geography Research Publications, No. 3 (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press for the Department of Geography, University of Toronto, 1969), esp. chps. 2 and 3.

³⁰Several assumptions regarding this analysis should be noted. First, the transactions recorded here are retail only; wholesale buying and sales to other merchants were excluded. The immediate neighborhood is defined as York County and those counties which share a boundary with York (James City, Warwick, Elizabeth City, and Gloucester Counties). Because individual sales were often not itemized in detail or were grouped under the general heading of sundries, the customer account volume of sales is substituted. It is assumed that customers living in the vicinity of Yorktown would outnumber those at a distance, but they would spend, individually, less than those who lived outside of Yorktown's neighborhood. The test was made against the average volume of sales, which in 1746 was £20, Virginia currency.

³¹Table 9 is a contingency table. In it, the observed frequencies in each of the four cells is compared with the expected frequencies, and the possibility that the difference between the observed and expected frequencies is attributable to chance is established by using a chi-squared test. For an explanation of the properties of the statistic and its application under this circumstance, see, David M. Smith, Patterns in Human Geography, Geography and Environmental Studies (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books of Canada Ltd., 1977), pp. 238-46; and additional discussion of the technique is provided by G.B. Norcliffe, Inferential Statistics for Geographers: An Introduction (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1977), pp. 111-5.

³²Differences between wholesaling and retailing are discussed by James E. Vance, jr., The Merchant's World: The Geography of Wholesaling, Foundations of Economic Geography Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), esp. chp. 2.

³³The term range is explained by Brian J.L. Berry and William L. Garrison, "A Note on Central Place Theory and the Range of a Good," Economic Geography 34 (October 1958): 304-11.

³⁴A complementary view of Yorktown is supplied in Gregory A. Stiverson and Patrick H. Butler, III, eds., "Virginia in 1732: The Travel Journal of William Hugh Grove," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 85 (January 1977): 18-44.

³⁵[Edward Kimber], "Observations," 222.

³⁶Edward M. Riley, "Suburban Development of Yorktown, Virginia, During the Colonial Period," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 60 (October 1952): 522-36.

³⁷Henings, 7, 139.

³⁸Whether towns in general contributed to the diversification of Virginia's economy is a subject explored in my thesis, "Urbanization in Tidewater Virginia during the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography" (Ph.d. thesis, York University, completing).



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
P.O. BOX 37127
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H26(422)

RECEIVED

DEC 29 1988

CULTURAL RESOURCES
PLANNING DIVISION

Memorandum

To: Regional Historian,
From: Sharman Roberts, Park Historic Architecture Division
Subject: Cultural Resources Reports

Enclosed are duplicate copies of reports sent to the Park Historic Architecture Division for inclusion in the Cultural Resources Repository. A copy of the report is retained in this office and will also be available through NTIS, both in hard copy and on microfiche. We felt these duplicate copies may be of use in your office. Thank you for your attention.

Enclosure