

PRIVATE LIBRARIES IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY VIRGINIA

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Books have long represented an important topic of study by historians, for intellectual history embraces not only the history of ideas but also the resources which sustain intellectual life. In the mid-nineteenth century the increased mechanization of binding techniques, as well as the invention of cheap paper from wood pulp, dramatically lowered the cost of books and thus allowed for an increase in their production, distribution, and influence, making them a very common intellectual resource.¹ A question which remains to be answered is the extent to which people relied on books for information and entertainment before the age of cheap printed material.

Various historians have addressed the issue of the influence of print culture in pre-Revolutionary America, among them Samuel Eliot Morison, T. G. Wright, Louis Wright and Richard Beale Davis. The question has most frequently been approached from a regional perspective-- T. G. Wright and Morison writing on seventeenth and eighteenth century New England, Richard Beale Davis on the South, Joseph Wheeler on Maryland, and Louis Wright, Philip Alexander Bruce and George Smart on Virginia.²

In their studies of New England, Wright and Morison argued convincingly against a previously held notion

that seventeenth century New England was an intellectually barren place suffering under a repressive Puritanism. They documented a lively interest in literature, history, and education in general and Morison showed that the Puritan clergy contributed in many ways to a stimulating intellectual atmosphere. Both historians were sensitive to the apparent influences of English culture, as well as to the distinctly American developments, citing information about the book trade, public and college libraries, as well as court records containing wills and estate inventories which frequently included itemized lists of personal libraries.

In a number of works on intellectual life in the South, Davis used similar types of evidence to support his claim that the South in the eighteenth century had a high rate of literacy and surprisingly varied personal libraries among its citizens. The theme in his studies, as well as in those by Bruce, Louis Wright, Smart and others was that professional men in colonial America, and especially wealthy professional men, read widely in many subject areas--ranging from religious treatises to English novels, with a large number of practical and reference books thrown in. Louis Wright concentrated his research on wealthy families like the Fitzhughs, the Lees, the Carters, and the Byrds, all of Virginia, because of the tremendous influence which these families had on colonial America. He said, "And to their reading we owe

in part the kind of world they left to their descendants."³

Many of the publications on reading tastes and individual libraries relied heavily for source material on published inventories of books taken from county and city court records. Virginia has particularly rich archives of such estate inventories. The William and Mary Quarterly and The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography have published hundreds of lists of books found in Virginia probate records, which detail the collections of some of the most interesting and varied libraries. George Smart's article, "Private Libraries in Colonial Virginia," was based on one hundred of these inventories. His approach was to separate all of the book titles into subject categories in order to get a clearer idea of what types of books people owned.⁴ A similar methodology was used in a frequently cited University of Virginia M. A. thesis entitled "Private Libraries in Virginia in the Eighteenth Century."⁵

The temptation in these studies has been to generalize about the book collections of the population in general based on the published inventories, which usually belonged to wealthy planters or distinguished professionals. And because there are occasional instances in the published records of ordinary artisans or laborers who owned large and varied collections, there is some evidence to support the argument that

books were widely disseminated across class lines. In fact, when all of the probate records in a given location are closely examined, rather than just the published ones, these conclusions cannot be substantiated.

Few systematic studies of entire communities and the personal libraries, or lack of them, at all income levels have been published. Among the best to date are those studies included in Morison's Intellectual Life of Colonial New England, Jackson Turner Main's Social Structure of Revolutionary America, and Joseph T. Wheeler's series of articles on colonial Maryland in the Maryland Historical Magazine, all of which examined the nature and extent of private libraries in several locations using data from probate records--Morison for Essex and Middlesex Counties in Massachusetts, Main for Massachusetts, Virginia and South Carolina, and Wheeler for eighteenth century Maryland.⁶ Morison and Main both used this data to make brief points about literacy and reading habits, but the focus of their work was on broader intellectual and social history questions. Wheeler's Ph.D. dissertation, as well as the series of articles which grew out of it, were specifically concerned with book ownership and personal libraries and their influence on intellectual life in Maryland. In his summary article he discussed the lack of comparable information for other locations in early America and his subsequent inability to draw broader conclusions

based on his Maryland findings. He did note that his results seemed to contradict the commonly held notion that books played an important part in the lives of almost all Americans regardless of occupation and income level, and he speculated that further study of other early records might also challenge the conclusions of L. Wright, Davis, and Smart.⁷

This paper reports on the results of a study of two Virginia counties, Lunenburg and Fairfax, and the city of Fredericksburg during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Every estate inventory in these locations, a total of 908, was examined during a thirty-six year period for the counties (1780-1816) and a fifty-eight year period for Fredericksburg (1782-1840), in order to gain insight into book owners, non-owners and the types of libraries which people had. This analysis poses a number of important questions, such as who owned books, what professions did they have, and how much of a factor was wealth for book ownership. It also indicates the kinds of books people owned, the size of private libraries, and the characteristics of individual libraries in a city as compared to two rural areas.

This type of research is not without its drawbacks, and one must be conscious of the limitations. For instance, the inventories cannot give a completely accurate picture of an entire community, because they describe possessions of the dead, not the living,

underrepresent women, and ignore slaves.⁸ Despite these omissions, personal property inventories do exist for a sizeable cross section of the population including individuals from a wide variety of income levels and occupational groups. (See Appendix I for a more complete explanation of the research problems posed by the inventories).

Although there are innumerable studies of printing and publishing--as well as of importing, exporting and distributing printed materials--which contain valuable information about books in America, using such an approach in order to discover the interests of the average reader is like "trying to infer the distribution of wealth from the gross national product."⁹ Suffice it to say here that, although a perfect account of what books people owned and read will never be possible and that a study such as this one is limited by the idiosyncracies of old probate records, the inventories nevertheless represent the best available source of information on what people actually read.

The three Virginia locations, two counties and a city, studied for this paper were chosen for several reasons. Of primary concern was the availability of legible probate records in areas with relatively stable geographical borders during this time period. Many counties had to be eliminated from consideration because they had major changes in their size and configuration

during this time. A representative geographical sampling was also a consideration, Fairfax being on the Northern Neck and Lunenburg on the Southside. There were very few cities which kept their records separate from the counties in which they were located, making the data for urban areas difficult to isolate. However, the city of Fredericksburg, a thriving commercial port, kept its records distinct from those of Spotsylvania County from its incorporation in 1782, making it a good choice.¹⁰ In addition, these locations complement those chosen for a comparable book ownership study, by Joseph F. Kett, to be discussed later in this paper (Botetourt and Allegheny counties from the Valley and the trans-Valley, Charles City from Tidewater, and the city of Petersburg).¹¹ Of the 908 inventories included in this study, 400 were from Fairfax County, 1780-1816; 375 were from Lunenburg County, 1780-1816; and 133 were from Fredericksburg, 1782-1840 (the time period was lengthened in order to increase the sample size for this small city).

Fredericksburg, referred to as the "Athens of America" by Francis T. Brooke, claimed William Hening, John Mercer, and Matthew Fontaine Maury, among its most famous sons. Geographically well situated, Baron de Montlezum describes it (about 1790):

The city communicates to the north with Washington with a road. . . To the south a stage road leads to Richmond. . . Two roads lead to the west, one terminating in

Orange County where is the residence of the President of the United States.¹²

Fredericksburg's accessibility was enhanced by its location on the Rappahannock River, where it represented the last navigable port before the Falls, and gave its residents access to goods from all over the world. According to the reconstructed census of 1790 its population was 1485, including 567 slaves.¹³ The free white population came primarily from England, but also from Germany, France, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and several other European countries, creating a diversity of customs, manners, traditions and educational backgrounds. Many of its citizens traveled widely, and the town itself attracted a variety of famous travelers.¹⁴ All of these factors contributed to an intellectually stimulating environment.

The book trade in Fredericksburg appears to have been a relatively sophisticated one in which local merchants ordered a large number of scholarly books from England on a wide range of subjects. In fact, merchants in Fredericksburg and Falmouth supplied half of the eastern section of Virginia with books, as well as part of the frontier to the West.¹⁵

The first book store in Fredericksburg was established in 1796 by Launcelot Mullen who wrote to his distributor Mathew Carey in Philadelphia, when planning the store,

This place is extremely well adapted for a

Book-Store--nothing of the kind having before been established here--the people Generally Rich, Well educated, & fond of the study of literature. . .¹⁶

Of this venture Parson Weems, the itinerate traveling book salesman who worked for Carey, said "I have good hopes of Mullen at Fredericksburg." He urged Carey to send larger quantities to him in future shipments,

You must increase the number variety etc. etc. of your Novels, Romances Entertaining histories & blank books, stationary, spelling books and all school books by wholesale wd suit that place well.¹⁷

Weems referred to Fredericksburg often in his voluminous correspondence with Carey and consistently gave the impression of a thriving book trade--the central problem always being to supply the merchants with sufficient quantity and variety of books.

Life in Lunenburg County was very different than in Fredericksburg. Formed out of Brunswick County in 1746, its 1790 population is recorded as 8959, about half of which were slaves.¹⁸ Over fifty percent of the white men in that county owned land and three quarters of those owned small farms of between 100 and 500 acres. Of those who did not own land, half belonged to landowning families.¹⁹ Parson Weems included Lunenburg on his book selling journeys, and the estate inventory belonging to Philip Jackson, who died in Lunenburg in 1797, provides additional evidence that a wide assortment of books were sold in the town. His dry goods store offered at least sixty different titles, many in

multiple copies, ranging from history, to literature and classics, to reference books. In spite of Mr. Jackson's store, the community, which was relatively isolated from any urban areas and was considered a frontier settlement until the middle of the eighteenth century, lacked what would be considered a lively book trade.

The third location studied, Fairfax County, was subdivided from Prince William County in 1742 and by 1790 had 12,310 residents, including 4574 slaves.²⁰ It was for the most part a plantation society, heavily dependent on slave labor. Tobacco was the major crop in the eighteenth century, although it eventually exhausted the soil, causing the population to decline slightly after 1800, as people moved west to escape the less profitable farms which had been divided and redivided among families.²¹

Fairfax enjoyed close proximity to urban influences, being adjacent to the city of Alexandria as well as the District of Columbia. The fact that it had been well-populated since colonial times and was home to such influential citizens as George Washington and George Mason, meant that Fairfax fell somewhere in between Fredericksburg and Lunenburg in terms of the population's access to and interest in books.

The proportion of free blacks in each of these communities during the period studied has important

implications for the comparative results. The fact that they were free meant that they were likely to be inventoried, while the fact that they were black increased the odds that they would be illiterate non-book owners. The 1810 census indicates that in Fairfax and Lunenburg counties their proportions in the free population were not that significant (7.6% and 3.5%), however they comprised 27.7% of the free population in Fredericksburg.²²

Because the inventories from all of these locations were often detailed and included information on estate values, clues to a person's occupation, and even book titles and/or authors, it was possible to approach the topic of book ownership from a number of angles. In addition to figuring the percentages of book owners versus non-owners in each of the locations, it was possible to compare the relative wealth of these groups, to calculate the average size of the libraries in relation to the estate size, and to study many of the inventories in terms of occupational categories. Finally, the itemized lists of books allowed for subject analysis of a significant proportion of the libraries. The results illuminate the extent and character of book ownership in eighteenth century Virginia and some interesting contrasts between the rural and urban areas.

When all of the 908 inventories in the study were considered, more than half of the inventories included

at least one book.(chart 1.0) Although Lunenburg had the highest percentage of book owners per se, the average size of the book collections in that rural community was much smaller than in the other two places. Less than one quarter of the Lunenburg libraries included as many as ten books. The Fairfax collections, slightly larger on the average than those in Lunenburg, reflect the fact that it was an older and more diverse community, yet not nearly as sophisticated as Fredericksburg where the collections were by far the largest(see charts 3.3 and 3.4).

The data in charts 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrates that the size of an individual's library was closely related, as one might expect, to the appraised amount of his personal property estate inventory, and this was particularly true of the rural areas. Very few of the inventories appraised at under \$1000 in Lunenburg and Fairfax Counties included as many as twenty books, but people in Fredericksburg with small personal estates were much more likely to have sizeable book collections.

The contrast between the rural communities and Fredericksburg is even more striking when the average number of volumes in the libraries is examined in relation to the appraised value of the estates.(chart 4.0) In Fredericksburg the average library size in those estates worth less than \$500 was thirteen volumes, while the figure for Lunenburg was approximately four volumes.

The margin widens as the estate size increases, and in the very wealthy estates there is a dramatic difference. The average volume count in estates valued at over \$5000 in Fredericksburg was 229 volumes, while the comparable figure for Lunenburg was approximately sixteen volumes. (chart 4.0)

In the counties the mere fact of ownership of any books at all was also related to estate size, however, that was not the case in Fredericksburg. In Lunenburg none of the decedants with estates valued at under \$100 owned even one book, although the rate of ownership rose sharply as the estate values increased. In Fredericksburg, not only did a poor person have the same chance of owning a book as a rich one, he sometimes possessed an interesting collection of secular books.

Occupation is another factor which correlates directly with the fact of ownership as well as with the size and content of the libraries. Occupations are rarely listed as such in the probate records, but there are clues in the lists of personal property and sometimes in the wills. Occasionally, titles such as Dr., Rev., or Atty., make the profession obvious. Equally helpful are the store inventories listed as part of the personal property belonging to merchants. People owning ten slaves or more as well as farm machinery, livestock or the like, could safely be counted as farmers, and those with fewer than ten slaves were also counted as

farmers if there was sufficient evidence in the inventories. The chart on occupations and book ownership (5.0) also includes a category for laborers. For the purpose of this study, that category consists of those persons for whom no other occupational clues exist, whose estates were valued at less than \$500, and who owned no slaves or land(as far as that was possible to discern). Women who fell into this category were not counted as such since it was unlikely that they had been laborers. However, women who owned large plantations and ten slaves or more were counted with the farmers. The category for merchants and proprietors includes ship owners, ferryboat operators, and innkeepers, in addition to shopkeepers of all kinds.

As one might expect, the laborers were the least likely group to own books. In Lunenburg County none of the men in this category owned as many as ten books, and very few owned that many in either of the other places. Laborers from Fairfax owned slightly more books on the average than those those from Fredericksburg, no doubt because of the high proportion of free blacks living in Fredericksburg, most of whom would have been laborers. Artisans were much more likely to own books than laborers, although it was not unusual to find a merchant with no books even in Fredericksburg. Farmers with large personal estates in both Fairfax and Lunenburg owned books most of the time, and occasionally

had substantial collections.(chart 5.0) The farmers with fewer slaves owned fewer books, and in Lunenburg small farmers did not own books at all.

The figures in chart 5.0 tend to support the theory advanced by David Cressy in Literacy and the Social Order that people read books necessary to their livelihood.²³ Ship owners had books on sailing and merchants owned accounting books. Similarly, doctors, lawyers and clergymen owned professional books. What distinguishes the professional group was the likelihood of large collections which included books other than those related to their profession. This phenomenon can also be noted in the lists of books included in Joseph Wheeler's studies of professionals in Maryland, as well as Joseph Kett's Virginia book study.²⁴ It is very likely that because their professions required a high level of literacy that a taste for reading in general followed.²⁵

Significant wealth was not always an indication of book ownership. In Fredericksburg approximately half of the very wealthy farmers(those people with personal property estates valued at over \$2000 who also owned at least ten slaves) did not own a single book. In both Fairfax and Fredericksburg a substantial number of the merchants did not own books. Other factors such as educational opportunities, family attitudes, urbanization, and other circumstances appear to have been more

important than wealth in fostering an interest in books.

Because a significant proportion of the estate inventories included specific information as to the authors and/or titles of the books, it was possible to study those collections in greater detail. This study uses twelve subject groupings: 1) religious books, 2) essays and literature, 3) travel and geography, 4) history, biography, and memoirs, 5) politics and political economy, 6) classical Greek and Roman literature, 7) language and textbooks, 8) reference and practical books, 9) science, 10) music, art, and architecture, 11) philosophy, and 12) law. A complete discussion of the criteria used for assigning books to the categories is contained in Appendix II.

Two methods for analyzing the subject categories were employed. In chart 7.0 the total number of itemized titles in the Fredericksburg inventories, as well as in the Lunenburg inventories, have been arranged to show the percentage of titles in each of the subject categories. Since the large individual collections tended to inflate the percentages for several of the categories, chart 8.0 measures the frequency with which each of the subject categories is represented among the book owning population, as opposed to the numbers of books owned.

The Fredericksburg collections were by far the most diverse. More than a quarter of the itemized titles

were in the literature category, almost as many were religious books, and there were significant percentages of history, biography, law, reference and practical books. The proportions for Lunenburg were quite different. By far the highest percentage(41%) of the books in those itemized inventories were religious in nature. The remaining books consisted of reference and practical books, histories and biographies, textbooks, and literature books, all in similar proportions. Households owning even one book on subjects pertaining to science, politics, law, philosophy, travel, music, the fine arts, or classical literature were quite rare.

Chart 8.0 demonstrates that in both the rural and urban communities, virtually all of the the households owned at least one religious book. Reference and practical books were commonplace in Fredericksburg, while only a quarter of the Lunenburg book owning households included them. In fact, except for the religious and textbook categories, Fredericksburg households had significantly higher representation in every subject area. Even so, high percentages of history and literature did not occur except in the larger libraries with more than twenty volumes, where the diversity of the collections increased in proportion to the size in most cases.

The availability of books was not a major cause of the difference in the size and scope of the Fredericksburg collections, compared to those in Lunenburg; for,

as the huge inventory in Philip Jackson's store suggests, books were available in rural as well as urban areas. The most important reason for the difference appears to have been related to occupation and need. Virtually everyone in Lunenburg was a farmer of one type or another, while Fredericksburg was a city of merchants, artisans, ship owners and other professionals, who depended on books for assistance in earning their livelihood. Farmers were less inclined to turn to books for instruction about their daily work. Instead, if they owned any books at all, they owned Bibles, prayerbooks, and hymnals.

Joseph Kett's comparisons of city and rural book owners bear a striking resemblance to this study's. In his study of 1400 inventories from Allegheny County, Charles City County, Botetourt County and the city of Petersburg from as early as 1784 in some cases to as late as 1874 in others (all years were not covered for all places), he found similar proportions of book ownership in rural areas as compared to the city. In addition, he found virtually the same proportion as did this study of religious books and secular books in these locations. His Petersburg citizen appears to have been the exact counterpart of the typical man from Fredericksburg,

Compared to contemporary rural Virginians, he was no more likely to be literate or to own books. But if he owned books at all, he was nearly three times as likely as rural Virginians to own large

numbers of books, much more likely to own books of poetry, fiction, history, biography, and philosophy, less likely to own a preponderance of religious works. If he owned a large number of books, he was less likely to be wealthy. Whether he owned few books or many, he was more likely to own useful or practical books.²⁶

The number of households in this study which contained only a Bible, or else a Bible and a prayerbook, is striking. In Fredericksburg, even with its cosmopolitan influences, nearly half of the small libraries--those with ten or less books--contained only religious works. In both Lunenburg and Fairfax the comparable percentages were even higher. Not surprising, the Bible was by far the most common book in this study, and undoubtedly in America. It was listed in more than half of the itemized inventories in Fredericksburg and in almost three quarters of those in Lunenburg County. In fact, the Bible accounted for 25% of the entire list of itemized books in Lunenburg.²⁷ Parson Weems often wrote Mathew Carey in Philadelphia asking for more Bibles to sell, as well as advising what types of Bibles to publish. In one letter he said,

My subscribers for the Bible are Numerous & Clamorous. I should be happy to have nothing to do for you but in the subscriptioning way for Large Books.²⁸

And in another report,
Thank God, the Bible still goes well, . . .
I am agreeably surprised to find among the multitude such a spirit of veneration for the Bible. Good old Book. I hope we shall live by you in this world and in the world to come.²⁹

There is evidence in several of the wills recorded

at this time to support Weems' claims about the prevalent attitude regarding the Bible. Ann Stevenson of Fredericksburg, who died in 1830, willed to each of her relatives only a Bible saying, "This Bible I consider the best and richest donation I could possible leave them."³⁰ In 1800 James Blair's will declared that all of his estate be divided among his family except,

Hume's History of England my mason's medal and a Bible (I brought to this country with me) these articles I will and desire to my son Andrew William Blair. . . they are but trifling but I place a great value on them.³¹

Weems made frequent references in his correspondence to the types of Bibles which sold well. It was clear that there was some competition in that market and that he thought fancy Bibles would sell well:

As to the costly Bible you speak of, there can exist no doubt of the importance of such a bible. The Wealthy, who, thank God, are pretty numerous in our land will never put up with a 5 or 6 dollar bible, and counting to get but one Bible, as one Wife, in their life time, they wish, as they say, to have that one of the best sort. . . The Rich man's Bible therefore is to be undertaken.³²

Apparently the Bible was the only religious book which Weems encouraged Carey to print in an expensive edition, because in one letter he says, "I can sell you a great many Prayer Books But for God's sake sell Divinity cheap."³³ Thus, the high proportion of book ownership in rural areas is due to the widespread distribution of the Bible, rather than to a high level of intellectual sophistication or familiarity with an assortment of

printed materials among the general population. Similar trends are apparent in both the Kett and the Wheeler studies which show that if those households with just Bibles and/or prayerbooks were eliminated, the numbers of book owners would decrease dramatically.³⁴

For the most part British and European books predominated in American private libraries. It has been estimated that in 1784 three quarters of the books in Virginia had been published abroad, American publishing being far less advanced than European publishing during this period.³⁵ By the mid-eighteenth century there were about twenty four printing presses spread among ten of the colonies. Between 1743 and 1760 approximately 3600 titles were published by these presses--most of them in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. These publications consisted primarily of sermons, pamphlets, almanacs and reprints of popular English works, all of which were relatively inexpensive to produce and easy to sell.³⁶

Very few American publications were listed in the inventories. Undoubtedly, a high proportion of the cheaply produced sermons and pamphlets, which comprised a major part of the American output, did not survive a person's lifetime, or else were sufficiently shabby to be listed in the inventories only as "parcels of old books." When American books were cited, more often than not they were political documents such as state or

federal acts and laws, or other government publications, for printers depended heavily on government patronage to provide a large percentage of their income.³⁷

Parson Weems' lively correspondence with Mathew Carey gives a good indication of what other types of books people read or were anxious to purchase. After a trip to Fredericksburg he wrote Carey in order to recommend books for which he thought there was a ready market in that town. This list included several reference books like Entick's Dictionary, Gibson's Surveying, Moore's Navigation "and a few school Bibles--some dream books, dreaming dictionaries, and above all some Pilg. Progress."³⁸ On another occasion, before a southern sales trip, Weems requested from Carey a number of books which are typical of those found in the inventories--not at all surprising since Mathew Carey's publishing business and his book distribution efforts were virtually unrivaled in the South.³⁹ The list includes a sampling of reference books, religious books, practical books, classical works, history books, several novels, and textbooks.⁴⁰

The physical appearance of the books was evidently as important to many of Weems' customers as the contents. He received complaints if the color of the binding changed in the middle of a multi-volume work, and at one point he entreated Carey to "keep with Green."⁴¹ He advised his boss several years later,

Too much attention can't be paid to the Binding.
The Eye is everything--charm that and you are
safe. They won't look at boards--I tell you
again the eye is all, all, all.⁴²

Since the inventories rarely contain physical descriptions of the books, we will have to take Weems' word for this criterion for book acquisition.

The evidence regarding publishing and the book trade in America, like that found in Parson Weems' correspondence, indicates that books were widely distributed and often discussed--giving the appearance of being a very important part of eighteenth and early nineteenth century American life. In fact, in the geographical areas studied for this paper the ownership of books was not at all commonplace, nor were the typical libraries which did exist particularly distinguished. The ownership rate, as has been demonstrated, was close to 50% in Fairfax and Fredericksburg and 61% in Lunenburg. The percentage of people who owned books other than religious books was significantly lower than that, and most of the personal libraries which did exist were quite small. Only 17% of the inventories included as many as ten volumes. Practical books and reference books enjoyed some popularity, history and literature books appeared in the larger collections, while books on science, philosophy, the fine arts, or the classics were extremely rare.

If we return now to the central issue of this paper --the question of the extent to which people in

the general population relied on books for information and entertainment before the age of cheap print--we would have to conclude that, at least in these areas of Virginia, the societies were not print oriented. If one adjusts for the high percentage of free blacks living in Fredericksburg, one might argue that at least in the urban centers, society was becoming more dependent on and interested in printed information. But it is clear from the results of this inquiry, as well as from the studies by Kett and Wheeler(see charts 10.0-10.2), that books did not play a critical role in the average household in eighteenth century Virginia or Maryland. Unquestionably, for some intellectuals and professionals, who for the most part were concentrated in urban areas, books were extremely important; and Bibles, too, were clearly treasured by a number of people. However, the evidence assembled here cannot support extension of this claim to the population at large. Instead, it underscores the significance of factors such as wealth, occupation, and especially a commercial economy, in determining whether or not individuals developed an interest in reading or collecting books before the mid-nineteenth century.

APPENDIX I

Notes on the Use of Probate Records for
Book Ownership Research

The probate records do not include everyone who died. According to the Virginia law every decedent with or without a will, was entitled to probate by the general court or county where they had a house. If they did not have a house, the appraisal took place under the jurisdiction of the court where the person died.⁴³ The law implies then that every person's estate would be inventoried upon their demise. In a study by Gloria Main in which she compared death record numbers with numbers of inventories in two Massachusetts counties 1650-1720, the inventory coverage ranged from 25% to 90% with the percentages tending towards the lower side during the Revolution and in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, death records were not kept in Virginia until 1853, so it is impossible to be sure of the percentages covered by the inventories used for this study. It appears that the law may have been applied more rigorously in some communities than in others according to the discretion or efficiency of local officials.⁴⁵

The number of women included in the records is

very small because of the laws restricting their property rights. Since the belongings of married women were considered to be the property of their husbands, it was rare to find an inventory of any married woman whose death predated that of her husband. Those women who were included in the inventories were presumably single, divorced or widowed. And, of course, slaves were never inventoried since they lacked any legal status, and were themselves considered to be personal property.

The accuracy of the appraisal figures varied depending upon the person appointed by the court to inventory the estate, particularly since this person was usually a neighbor or a friend.⁴⁶ In general, the appraised value of the estate was fairly close to the actual estate sale prices paid.

The inventories only record personal property and not real property so that the appraisals do not always accurately reflect a person's total wealth.⁴⁷ For the purpose of comparison, however, the figures used are adequate because all of the inventories have the same restrictions. In those few cases in which land value was included in the estate appraisal, I have deducted it from the total appraised value.

The exact value of the currency is difficult to calculate during this period, especially since the early inventories were in pounds sterling and the

later ones were in dollars. For this paper pounds sterling were converted at the rate of \$4.45 to one pound based on John McCusker's figures in his Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook.⁴⁸ In fact, this rate probably varied somewhat during the time periods involved and among the various locations.

It is possible that some books may have been missed by the appraisers or that for any number of reasons books did not survive a person's lifetime. Another question which is frequently raised about this type of research is whether or not ownership constitutes readership. Books were expensive, however, until after the 1820's when reprinting became popular and resulted in cheaper, more plentiful books.⁴⁹ In addition, books were not easy to obtain since most were still published in England. It seems safe to assume that most books were read and in fact, were quite prized by their owners.⁵⁰ In support of this assumption is the high proportion of practical or how-to type books found in many private libraries.

APPENDIX II

Subject Categories Used in Analyzing Contents
of Individual Libraries

The following guidelines were followed in assigning books to the twelve subject categories:

1. Religious books included Bibles, hymnals, prayer-books, devotional works and sermons. Religious literature(e. g. Thomson's Seasons, Pilgrim's Progress) was included in the literature category.
2. Essays and literature included poetry, novels, general literature, including foreign language works and translations. Classical Greek and Roman literature and translations were not included, but are in the classics category.
3. Travel and geography books included personal travel accounts and miscellaneous geography books. Gazetteers were included under reference books.
4. History, biography, and memoirs included autobiographies and classical history as well.
5. Politics and political economy included works on government also.
6. Classical Greek and Roman literature counted works in the original language or in translation.
7. Language and textbooks included preceptors, spellers, grammars(including foreign language grammars), mathematics books, etc. Dictionaries were counted under

reference books.

8. Reference and practical books included dictionaries, home medical guides like Buchan's Encyclopedia, how-to books (books on surveying, navigation, gardening, etc.)
9. Science did not include home medical guides.
10. Music, art, and architecture did not include hymnals.
11. Philosophy did not include Greek and Roman philosophers.
12. Law included interpretive legal works like Blackstone's Commentaries, as well as public documents, such as the Laws of Virginia, etc.

The results of the subject analysis are summarized in charts 7.0 and 8.0. Titles were counted rather than volumes in these calculations even though a number of the titles were multi-volume works. Magazines and pamphlets were usually cited as such in the inventories so they were not placed in subject classifications. Chart 8.0 includes a note on the frequency with which these categories were in the inventories. In addition to the magazines and pamphlets, approximately 2% of the titles could not be classified either due to insufficient information or cryptic abbreviations.

APPENDIX III

Statistical Charts

1.0 Total Number of Book Owners and Non-Book Owners
in this Study

	<u>Owners</u>	<u>Non-owners</u>	<u>Total #</u>
Fairfax Co. (1780-1816)	214(53.5%)	186(46.5%)	400
Lunenburg Co. (1780-1816)	230(61%)	145(39%)	375
Fredericksburg (1782-1840)	<u>66(50%)</u>	<u>67(50%)</u>	<u>133</u>
	510(56%)	398(44%)	908
[Fredericksburg (1782-1816	22(50%)	22(50%)	44]

Wealth Studies

2.0 Wealth and Ownership: Percentage of book owners
by assessed value of estate 1780-1816

Value(\$)	of estate*	<u>F'burg</u>	#	<u>L'burg</u>	#	<u>F'fax</u>	#
0-100	4.5%	1		0%	0	6.5%	14
100-500	9	2		13.5	29	20	43
501-2000	36	8		29.5	63	33.5	72
2001-5000	32	7		35	75	21	46
5001-10,000				14.5	31	9.8	21
over 10,000	18	4		7	15	7	15

2.1 Wealth and Non-ownership: Percentage of people with
no books by assessed value of estate

0-100	4.5%	1		15%	21	15.5%	29
101-500	27	6		29	40	27	50
501-2000	27	6		31.5	43	29.5	55
2001-5000	27	6		15.5	21	16	30
5001-10,000				4	6	3	6
over 10,000	14	3		4	5	4	8

2.2 Distribution of Inventories by Value and Area

(1780-1816): Book owners and non-owners combined

0-100	4%	2		6%	21	11%	43
101-500	18	8		20	69	23	93
501-2000	32	14		30	106	32	127
2001-5000	30	13		27.5	96	19	76
5001-10,000				10.5	37	7	27
over 10,000	16	7		6	20	6	23

*L=\$4.45

2.3 Wealth and Ownership: Percentage of People at
Each Income Level Who Owned Books(1780-1816)

Estate Value	F'burg	L'burg	F'fax
\$0-100	50%	0%	32.5%
101-500	25	42	46.2
501-2000	57	59.4	56.7
2001-5000	53.8	78	60.5
5001-10,000	57	83.8	77.7
over 10,000		75	65.2

N.B. Some inventories in all of the wealth chart have not been included in the figures, either because they were not appraised or they were far too inflated(1780-1781).

3.0 Percentage of All Owners Owning Fewer Than 10 Books*

F'burg	L'burg	F'fax
38%	76.5%	71%

3.1 Percentage of All Owners Owning 10 Books or More

62	23.5	29
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3.2 Percentage of All Owners Owning 20 Books or More (or \$20 or More Worth of Books)

42	7.5	17
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3.3 Percentage of All Owners Owning 20 or More Books Whose Estates were Assessed at Less Than \$500

6	0	3
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3.4 Percentage of All Owners Owning 20 or More Books Whose Estates were Assessed at Less than \$1000

11	4	5
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N. B. Total number of bookowners for each of these locations used in these calculations: F'burg-66, L'burg-225, F'fax-214

*Whenever it was impossible to arrive at exact volumes or title counts, the following formula was used to calculate library size: \$10 worth of books=10 volumes, \$20 worth=20 volumes.

4.0 Average Size of Library Relative to Size of Estate
 (Counted in Volumes): Lunenburg and Fredericks-
 burg(1780-1816)

Estate Size	<u>Number of Volumes</u>		
	F'burg	L'burg	[F'burg(1782- 1840)
under \$500	13 v.	3.8 v.	11.1 v.
501-2000	10.8	4.3	25
2001-5000	37.7	6.2	98.4
over 5000	229	15.9	171.5]

N. B. This chart counts volumes instead of titles,
 counting 5 volumes to each unspecified "parcel
 of books."

5.0 Occupation and Bookownership

OCCUPATION	% with books	% with 10 or more
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Fredericksburg:

laborer	31%	3%
artisan	66.6	0
doctor	100	100
lawyer	100	100
merchant or proprietor	56	37.5
clergyman	100	100
farmer-10+ slaves	41.7	33.3

Lunenburg:

laborer	36.9	0
artisan	100	0
doctor	100	100
lawyer		
clergyman	100	100
merchant or prop.	100	66.6
farmer-10+ slaves	78	19

Fairfax:

laborer	43	5.4
artisan	71.4	28.6
doctor	100	100
lawyer	100	100
clergyman	100	100
merchant or prop.	55.5	44.4
farmer-10+ slaves	69.8	31.4

6.0 Women and Bookownership

Location	% with books	% with 10 or more
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Fredericksburg(16)*	37.5%	18.8%
Lunenburg(26)	38.5	3.8
Fairfax(36)	50	5.5

*Refers to number of women in the records.

7.0 Percentage of Titles in the Itemized Libraries
in Each Subject Classification: Fredericksburg
and Lunenburg Co.

Category	F'burg	L'burg
Essays and literature	26.9%	10.4
Religious books	21.6	41.4
History, biography, memoirs	11.3	12.5
Law	11	1.3
Reference and practical	8.5	14
Science	4.3	4.3
Travel and geography	3.5	2
Language and textbooks	3	10
Philosophy	3	1
Politics	2.8	1
Classical Greek and Roman lit.	2.5	1
Music, art, architecture	.3	1

N. B. Approximately 2% of the titles could not be identified due to illegible records or insufficient information. In addition, the magazines and pamphlets were not classified:

Total # of Magazines	57	6
Total # of Pamphlets	100	3

8.0 Subject Categories of Books Represented in the Inventories: Percentage of book owners (itemized) in Fredericksburg and Lunenburg Co. who owned at least one book in the specified category.

<u>Category</u>	<u>F'burg</u>	<u>L'burg</u>
Religious books	80.5%	83%
Reference and practical	64	25
History, biography, memoirs	50	10.5
Essays and literature	47	9
Travel and geography	36	5
Classical Greek and Roman lit.	25	2
Science	17	3
Language and textbooks	17	17
Music, art and architecture	5.5	1
Politics	30.5	4
Law	28	2
Philosophy	22	1

N. B.: In addition, 30.5% of the itemized households in the Fredericksburg sample included at least one magazine as did 4% of those in Lunenburg. 28% of the households in the Fredericksburg sample owned at least one pamphlet and the comparable figure for Lunenburg was 3%.

9.0 Small Book Owners(10 Books or less): Distribution
of titles in small libraries(which are at least
partially classified)

Scheme:51

- I. Only itemized title was the Bible(includes
libraries with more than 1 Bible)
- II. Only itemized titles were religious works(in-
cluding Bibles)
- III. Number of secular titles was less than 21%
of religious titles
- IV. Number of secular titles was 21% to 50% of
number of religious titles
- V. Number of secular titles was 51% or more of
religious titles

	<u>F'burg(11)*</u>		<u>L'burg(78)</u>		<u>F'fax(49)</u>	
	# libs.	%	# libs.	%	# libs.	%
I.	3	27	29	37	22	45
II.	5	45	53	68	30	61
III.	0	0	1	1	4	8
IV.	1	9	7	9	3	6
V.	5	45	17	22	12	24

*Refers to # of libraries in this sample.

10.0 Percentage of Inventories Including at Least

One Book in Studies by Wheeler, Kett, and McClung:

Md.(1700-1776) ⁵²	Va.(1784-1874) ⁵³	Va.(1780-1816)
60%	approx. 47%	56%

10.1 Percentage of Book owners having 10 v. or more:

25%	10-40% incl.Peters- burg	31% incl.F'burg
	10-20% excl.P'burg	26% excl.F'burg

10.2 Percentage with 20 v. or more:

3%	7-30% incl. P'burg	16% incl.F'burg
	7-15% excl. P'burg	10% excl.F'burg

NOTES

¹Frank L. Schick, The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Background (New York, 1958), p. 10.

²Samuel Eliot Morison, The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England (New York, 1956[1936]); Thomas Goddard Wright, Literary Culture in Early New England, 1620-1730 (New York, 1966[1920]); Louis B. Wright, First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class (San Marino, 1940); Richard Beale Davis, A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century (Athens, 1979); Davis, Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 1790-1830 (Chapel Hill, 1966); Davis Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763 (3 vols., Knoxville, 1978); Joseph T. Wheeler, "Books Owned by Marylanders, 1700-1776," Maryland Historical Magazine, 35(1940), 337-353; Wheeler, "Literary Culture in Eighteenth Century Maryland, 1700-1776: Summary of Findings," Maryland Historical Magazine, 38(1943), 273-76; Philip Alexander Bruce, Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century (New York, 1910); George Smart, "Private Libraries in Colonial Virginia," American Literature, 10(1938), 24-52.

³L. Wright, First Gentlemen, p. 154.

⁴Smart, "Private Libraries," p. 33.

⁵John M. Patterson, "Private Libraries in Virginia in the Eighteenth Century," Thesis. University of Virginia, 1936.

⁶Main (Princeton, 1965). Main uses statistics from other studies including those by Wheeler and Smart, and combines them with his own.

⁷Wheeler, Maryland Historical Magazine, 38(1943), 276.

⁸Women comprised only 8.6% of the individuals in the inventories, presumably because married women did not have property rights and seem not to have had their possessions inventoried if they died before their husbands.

⁹Joseph F. Kett, "The American Family as an Intellectual Institution, 1780-1880," an unpublished paper delivered at the History of Education Workshop, University of Chicago, March 3, 1978, p. 36.

- ¹⁰Hornbook of Virginia History(Richmond, 1965), p. 33.
- ¹¹Kett, p. 36.
- ¹²Oscar Darter, Colonial Fredericksburg and Neighborhood in Perspective(New York, 1957), p. 64.
- ¹³U. S. Bureau of Census. Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790-Records of the State Enumerations: 1782-1785, Virginia(Washington, 1908), p. 10.
- ¹⁴Darter, pp. 218-220.
- ¹⁵Ibid, p. 142.
- ¹⁶Mason Locke Weems, Mason Locke Weems, his Works and Ways, ed. Emily Skeel(3 vols., New York, 1929), II, p. 37.
- ¹⁷Ibid., II, p. 44.
- ¹⁸Hornbook of Virginia History, p. 23; U. S. Bureau of Census. Heads of Families, 1790, p. 9.
- ¹⁹Main, p. 169.
- ²⁰Hornbook, p. 19; U. S. Bureau of Census, p. 9.
- ²¹Nan Netherington, et. al. Fairfax County, Virginia: A History(Fairfax, 1978), p. 156.
- ²²U. S. Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules of the Third Census of the U. S.: 1810, Virginia(Washington, 1958), microfilm ed.
- ²³David Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order; Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England(Cambridge, England, 1980), p. 177.
- ²⁴Wheeler, "Reading Interests of the Professional Classes in Colonial Maryland, 1700-1776," Maryland Historical Magazine, 36 (1941), 281-301; Kett, pp. 43-45.
- ²⁵Kett, p. 45.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 46.
- ²⁷In Fredericksburg 8.3% of the bookowners had no books other than a Bible, while the comparable figure for Lunenburg was 30%.
- ²⁸Weems, II, p. 194.

²⁹Weems, II, p. 136.

³⁰Fredericksburg Will Book, vol. C, microfilm copy from Virginia State Library, p. 127.

³¹Ibid., vol. A, p. 319.

³²Weems, III, p. 75.

³³Ibid., II, p. 171.

³⁴Kett, p. 55; Wheeler, "Literary Culture," p. 274.

³⁵Howard Mumford Jones, American and French Culture, 1750-1848 (Chapel Hill, 1927), p. 28.

³⁶H. Trevor Colbourn, The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution (New York, 1974), pp. 18-19.

³⁷Schick, p. 35.

³⁸Weems, II, p. 271.

³⁹Earl L. Bradsher, Mathew Carey, Editor, Author and Publisher: A Study in American Literary Development (New York, 1912), p. 9.

⁴⁰Weems, II, pp. 279-280. The list is as follows: "Johnson's Dictionary, Baileys Dictionary, Enticks Dictionary, Gibson surveying, Moors Navigation, Euclid's Elements, Scotts lessons, Columb. Orator, Children of the Abbey, Charlotte Temple, Sundry best novels, Milton's Paradise Lost, Young's Night Thoughts, Thomsons Seasons, Pilgrim's progress, Bunyans Holy War, Jefferson's Notes, Rippons Hymns, New Methodist Hymns, Newton Hymns, Watts Psalms and Hymns, Russels 7 Sermons, Whitfields Sermons, Morse Geog. abridgd, Morse Am. Gazetteer, Art of Speaking, Pleasing Instructor, Broad Grin's Jersters, Song Books. Plutarch, Josephus Anacharsis, Buchans Domestic Medicine, Zoonomia, Wilson's history of the Egyptian Expedition, Vicar of Wakefield, 2 doz. spelling books, 2 doz. Columbian primers."

⁴¹Ibid., p. 197.

⁴²Ibid., p. 303.

⁴³Virøinia. Laws, Statutes at Large, ed. by William Waller Henings (Richmond, 1819), vol. 4, p. 21; vol.5, pp. 454-456.

⁴⁴Main, "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, 32(1975), 98.

⁴⁵Ibid., 97-99.

⁴⁶Ibid., 91.

⁴⁷Harold B. Gill, Jr. and George M. Curtis, III, "Virginia's Colonial Probate Policies and the Preconditions for Economic History," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 87(1979), 71.

⁴⁸McCusker(Chapel Hill, 1978), p. 10.

⁴⁹Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader; A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900 (Chicago, 1957), p. 267.

⁵⁰Davis, A Colonial Southern Bookshelf, p. 8.

⁵¹Kett, p. 55.

⁵²Wheeler, "Literary Culture in Eighteenth Century Maryland," p. 274.

⁵³Kett, p. 47.