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Relying of the "Saucy" Men of the Backcountry: Middlemen and the Fur Trade in Pennsylvania

IN MAY 1768, JOSEPH RIGBY, a backcountry agent of the Philadelphia trading firm of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan, noted in a letter to his employers that he hoped to forward along the lead he was holding in the company's warehouse in Carlisle with the troops who soon would be "going up" to Fort Pitt. At first glance, this seems a routine correspondence; agents like Rigby wrote frequently to their employers to detail the movement of goods and pelts from east to west and back again. Yet as Rigby's note continued, it went on to detail a situation that was anything but ordinary. Although he did not specify it, the lead he intended to send west was destined for the Native Americans of the Ohio Valley whose hunting and trapping supplied the animal pelts that met some of the transatlantic demands for leather. And this trade was mostly clandestine by the late 1760s, for shipments of lead to the Indians, as Rigby made clear, had come to have especially ominous meaning to many of his Carlisle neighbors. "We are," as he lamented to his employers, "Surrounded by Ja-b-t-s [Jacobites?] who are continually prying into every Waggon and package that comes to the Gate to know the Contents, and often ask whether, there is any powder or Lead going back to kill the

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Sc-th Irishmen?"[1]

In the wake of the frontier violence of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's Uprising, Carlisle residents were wary of armed Indians and suspicious of those traders who might be supplying them with arms and ammunition. With tempers running high, some in town began to confront agents like Rigby whom they most suspected of acting counter to what they perceived as their community's best interest. As a result, Rigby and other agents found themselves besieged in Carlisle by what one referred to as "Hidden Villany."[2] Fearing further confrontations and even sabotage by his angry Scots-Irish neighbors, Rigby was desperate to secret this lead out of town as quickly and quietly as possible.[3]

Joseph Rigby's letter to Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan offers us a tantalizing glimpse into the complex and shifting economic milieu of Pennsylvania's fur and skin trade during the 1760s, a time when all players involved in the trade—from eastern merchants like Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan who sponsored it, to agents like Rigby they hired to run it, to the residents of interior towns like Carlisle whose labor and resources sustained it—faced tough choices about the nature and scope of this trade, its risks, and the roles it would—or would not—play in shaping their economic lives and the future of their community.

In this essay, I use this letter, however fragmentary, as a jumping-off point for a close reading of the workings of the fur and skin trade in one backcountry Pennsylvania town of the 1760s. The colony's fur and skin trade, as scholars have told us, was an economically significant, albeit shrinking, piece of a dynamic Anglo-American transatlantic economy. Yet, I argue, it also had a critically important local component to it.

[1] Joseph Rigby to John Baynton, Samuel Wharton, and George Morgan (hereafter cited as BWM), May 28, 1768, reel 5, Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan Papers (BMW Papers), Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, PA (consulted in microfilm at the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, PA).

[2] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Apr. 9, 1768, reel 3, ibid. For a discussion of how Pennsylvania frontierspeople at midcentury assumed that powder and lead traded to the Indians fueled raids on their communities, rather than Indian hunting and survival, see Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 243.

[3] Rigby had reason to be scared. Three years earlier a group of frontiersmen calling themselves the "Black Boys," many of them Scots-Irish residents of Cumberland County, had attacked a wagon train headed to Fort Pitt with arms and liquor destined for trade with the Indians. BWM was the firm sponsoring this shipment of goods. For information about this incident, see Stephen H. Cutcliffe, "Sideling Hill Affair: The Cumberland County Riots of 1765," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 59 (1976): 39–53; Eleanor M. Webster, "Insurrection at Fort Loudon in 1765: Rebellion or Preservation of Peace?" *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 47 (1964): 125–40.

Indeed, because this trade linked European markets and manufactured goods with the small communities—both Native American and Euro-American—of America's interior, it was an enterprise sustained by crucial local, as well as transatlantic, exchanges. By the 1760s, as Joseph Rigby's letter so powerfully attests, the local side of this trade had become especially volatile because it had come to present the people of backcountry towns like Carlisle with increasingly difficult economic and personal choices. They reacted to these challenges in a variety of ways. They could, as hired agents like Rigby chose to do, encourage a trade that promised them money and links to a transatlantic world of goods. Or they could, as the confrontations he and his fellow agents endured suggest, curtail or at least seek to police a trade that promised to strengthen the offensive capabilities of the Ohio Valley Indians living to their west. In either case, however, their choices had consequences for themselves, their community, and the trade itself. To opt for the trade, meant, as Rigby's note implies, aligning with outsiders and thus turning against one's neighbors. Yet to curtail the trade had costs too; doing so meant possibly foregoing the income and goods that Philadelphia merchant firms brought into the interior. Neither choice, as we will see, was simple; each one had its own potential rewards and costs.

To comprehend the context of the choices faced by agents like Rigby and his Carlisle neighbors, one must first understand the nature of the eighteenth-century fur and skin trade, particularly in Pennsylvania, and the forces that were transforming it by the 1760s. Rigby was employed at a tense and pivotal time in the trade. The market demand for furs and skins was mixed at midcentury. While markets for beaver pelts, the long-standing staple of the fur trade, were glutted and prices declining, the increasing popularity in Europe for clothing and other items made of tanned deerskin—coupled with shortages of European hide imports—fueled a growing British demand for American deer hides. The result was a marked shift in the patterns of the trade, from one focused mostly on pelts like beaver to deerskins. Then too, Britain's expanding and diversifying eighteenth-century transatlantic economy was also reshaping the trade in fundamental ways. Rapid commercial expansion had fostered the growth of credit, improved shipping and communications, expanded markets for European imports and American exports, and encouraged

economic diversification. In the middle colonies diversification was marked most clearly by the emergence of grain (and flour) as a major export commodity; grain, not furs and skins, had become the region's major export.[4]

Each colony, however, experienced the impact of these changes differently. While southern traders of the Carolinas and Georgia found themselves almost ideally positioned to profit from the deerskin trade, others, like merchants in New York who had long relied on furs rather than skins as their economic mainstay, found themselves losing out to their Canadian rivals. For many New Yorkers, shifting towards the grain trade was essential to their continued economic well-being. Pennsylvania stood somewhere between these two extremes. Although important, its skin trade was not as central to the economy as it was in the southern colonies. Grain, as in New York, accounted for an increasingly large portion of the colony's exports. Even so, Pennsylvania was not a carbon copy of New York. Because it was a younger colony, it had a more recently developed fur trade, which was geared more towards skins than furs. The colony's traders also had access to lands of the Ohio Valley and beyond, which expanded the colony's economic reach in collecting the commodities of this trade. Indeed, the increased supply of skins and pelts that accompanied the opening of the Ohio country to English traders in the 1740s temporarily staved off the market's gradual decline and countered the colony's surging grain trade for a time by increasing Pennsylvania's fur and skin exports to nearly 50 percent of the colony's total exports to London by the early 1750s. The fur and skin trade remained a key piece of Pennsylvania's transatlantic economy at midcentury.[5]

Compounding these large-scale economic shifts in market demand and supply were more specific changes in imperial and provincial policing of the trade tied to the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's Uprising. War, and the hostilities it fostered with many Ohio Valley tribes, had shut down the trade for a time. The return of peace in the 1760s set the stage for a highly

[4] Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815* (Lincoln, NE, 1993), 42–43; Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore, 1998), 22, chaps. 4 and 7.

[5] Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 50, chap. 5; Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, chaps. 4 and 7; Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673–1800* (Cambridge, 1997), 22–32, see esp. chart on p. 24; Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 77, 241. See also Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 178–79.

competitive trade as many traders scrambled to recoup wartime losses while also pushing the trade in new and hopefully more profitable directions. Yet peace also brought more intensive oversight, especially by British authorities, which curtailed and constricted trading. Once the "long peace" between Indians and white settlers was shattered during the bloody conflicts at midcentury, the British sought to better harness the trade and integrate it into what they hoped would be a more orderly, tightly regulated, and peaceful imperial system. To do so, they divided the trade into two administrative districts, and to better curtail abuses, each trader was licensed, prices fixed, and liquor sales forbidden. They also restricted trade to military garrisons.

Pennsylvania, led by eager proprietary agents and an influential group of their Quaker rivals looking for an outlet for their own ambitions in the aftermath of their wartime withdrawal from the colony's assembly, generally mirrored these policies in its own regulations. The colony named its own set of commissioners to supervise the trade, banned liquor sales, created a monopoly for the province of all trade west of the mountains, and set up official stores at Forts Augusta, Allen, and Pitt. Pennsylvania's trade with the Indians was to be profitable and, when conducted in conjunction with diplomacy, orderly and peaceful as well.

Although many of these regulations ultimately failed, the fur and skin trade changed nonetheless. Regulations that guarded and more closely allied the trade with the British military and its supply contracts cast it as an increasingly imperial enterprise. Other changes, meanwhile, reshaped the trade's scope and reach. Geographically, the trade was moving ever farther west, from the Ohio Valley into the newly acquired Illinois country. At the same time, the transport network of roads needed to move goods between regions had improved. In particular, the wartime construction of the Forbes wagon road between Carlisle and Pittsburgh had reconfigured the colony's commercial landscape, offering more direct and efficient access to and from the interior than ever before. And all of these factors—a changing transatlantic economy, increased regulation, longer distances, and better roads—made the trade competitive in new ways, thereby enlarging its scope, expanding the number of people involved, and magnifying the financial risks. These changes, in turn, ensured that only larger firms, with greater access to capital, credit, and a wide range of imported goods, would control it. By the 1760s, few individuals could afford to act as free agents in the trade. Instead, with large merchant partnerships like

Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan competing, sometimes quite desperately, to control the trade, backcountry men like Joseph Rigby, the Carlisle agent who wrote to his employers in 1768, found themselves employed as agents serving the company's interest. More than ever before, trading had become the entrepreneurial province of companies, not individuals.[6]

In Pennsylvania, where fur and skin trading remained an important piece of the colony's economy, the changing nature of the trade had profound ramifications. Because the economic livelihoods of many provincial officials and the colony's more prominent merchants remained connected to the trade in some way, changes in the trade had the potential to reshape personal fortunes and reorder the distribution of social authority within the colony. For some, these changes brought the benefits of increased wealth and standing. While for others, as John Baynton, Samuel Wharton, and George Morgan discovered quite painfully during the 1760s, the scale, risk, and volatility of the trade could just as easily unmake partnerships, friendships, and reputations.

At the same time, a changed trade also had important diplomatic and political consequences. The exchange of trade goods, furs, and skins continued to shape Indian-white relations in fundamental ways. Yet the enlarged scale and scope of the trade and increased British oversight, coupled with white settlers' lingering fear and resentment of Indians from

[6] For information about the transformation of the fur trade at midcentury, see Stephen Auth, *The Ten Years' War: Indian-White Relations in Pennsylvania, 1755–1765* (New York, 1989); Braun, *Deerskins and Duffels*, chap. 6; William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Panton, Leslie, and Company and John Forbes and Company, 1783–1847* (Pensacola, FL, 1986); Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 147–52, 162–70, 176–82; Thomas Norton, *The Fur Trade in Colonial New York, 1686–1776* (Madison, WI, 1974), 207–15; Stephen H. Cutcliffe, "Indians, Furs, and Empires: The Changing Policies of New York and Pennsylvania, 1674–1768" (PhD diss., Lehigh University, 1976), 249–57; Peter C. Mancall, *Deadly Medicine: Indians and Alcohol in Early America* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), chap. 2; and Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700–1800* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 47–94; James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York, 1999); Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, esp. 60–86, 237–43, 272–85; Larry B. Nelson, *A Man of Distinction among Them: Alexander McKee and British-Indian Affairs along the Ohio Country Frontier, 1754–1799* (Kent, OH, 1999), 30–60; Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy* (Westport, CT, 1961); Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), chap. 8; Albert T. Volwiler, *George Croghan and the Westward Movement, 1741–1782* (Cleveland, OH, 1926); Nicholas Wainwright, *George Croghan: Wilderness Diplomat* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1959), 162–63, 208–9; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991), chap. 7. For Indian responses to this regulation, see Michael McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724–1774* (Lincoln, NE, 1992), 162; Richter, *Facing East*, chap. 5.

the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's Uprising, greatly complicated exchanges and diplomatic relations between Pennsylvania's Indian and white populations; new levels of suspicion and uncertainty plagued both sides. Nonetheless, because the trade remained so closely interwoven with treaty making, even during these times when tensions were running high, trade continued to dramatically impact opportunities for land speculation—and thus politics—in the colony. And together, trade in skins and furs—and the potential tangible and intangible profits to be garnered from it—continued to translate into considerable economic and political clout for some in the colony.[7]

Changes in the trade had other, less obvious impacts too. And these effects rippled through interior communities like Carlisle, the small village of south-central Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley that was situated on the western side of the Susquehanna River, nearly twenty miles southwest of Harris's Ferry (present-day Harrisburg). Although the officials and merchants bankrolling the trade had always depended heavily on the ordinary, but adventurous people from the interior to conduct much of their daily business, this dependence intensified over time as the trade's scope and reach expanded. Companies engaged in trading in the 1760s needed the services of middlemen—paid agents like Rigby—to oversee their interests in the interior. And these new levels of dependence, coupled with the rise of company agents, encouraged the growth of new, more formal relationships between firms and their employees that altered the social and economic dynamics of backcountry communities where these companies established their bases of operation.

These trends were especially evident in Carlisle, a town whose inhabitants were no strangers to the fur trade. The town had been founded in 1751 as one of six "proprietary" towns established across the colony's interior by Thomas Penn, the principal proprietor of the colony in the eighteenth century. For Penn and the colonial officials who helped him plan it, Carlisle was founded not only for the potential profits to be gained from land development and the collection of quitrents in the colony's interior, but was also to serve as a strategic midpoint in a fur and skin trade that was shifting farther westward through time. Penn's surveyors had fixed on the townsite precisely because it was located at or near

[7] For a good discussion of the trade's impact on the postwar economy and politics of the colony, see Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 237–43. See also Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, chap.4; Richter, *Facing East*, 174–88.

the intersection of several of the most heavily trafficked north-south and east-west pathways (all of them former Indian trails) treading through the colony. It was also the former site of the French Huguenot trader James LeTort's trade post to the Shawnee in the 1720s, and thus the location had a proven track record in a trade once overseen largely by James Logan, former provincial secretary of the colony and another Penn family loyalist. Carlisle, Penn's agents believed, had the potential to become an important nexus, or crossroads, in the colony's backcountry. As the colony's then governor summarized the opinions of many, the town "must allways be a great thoroughfare" from Philadelphia to the west, and "the Depositary of the Indian Trade." Carlisle would be one place, they hoped, where the movement of goods and people would converge in ways that were of greatest advantage to the proprietor and themselves.[8]

In the years that followed, evidence, though spotty, suggests that the town's pioneers, a collection of not many more than one hundred mostly Scots-Irish and English settlers, with a scattering of German, French, and Dutch settlers, worked in their own ways to make the fur and skin trade central to the town's identity—and their livelihoods. They, and not Penn and his officials, made Carlisle the town of fur traders, innkeepers, and shopkeepers that it so quickly became in the 1750s.[9] Some of these pioneers, like the well-known Scots-Irish trader Robert Callender, an associate of trader George Croghan and a man closely allied with the proprietary establishment, worked deliberately to ensure that the fur- and skin-trading business came to and through Carlisle (he maintained a house in town and another larger house and mill complex just outside).[10]

[8] For quote, see James Hamilton to Thomas Penn, Apr. 17, 1753, Thomas Penn Papers, 1729–1830, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For information about colonial Carlisle and its founding, see George P. Donehoo, *A History of the Cumberland Valley in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA, 1930), 1:259; Milton E. and Lenore E. Flower, *This is Carlisle: A History of a Pennsylvania Town* (Harrisburg, PA, 1944), 2–30; Frederick A. Godcharles, *Chronicles of Central Pennsylvania* (New York, 1944), 2:94–95; *History of Cumberland and Adams Counties, Pennsylvania* (Chicago, 1886), 4–37, 66–70, 208–62. For discussions of Carlisle's context within Thomas Penn's plans for his colony, see esp. Judith A. Ridner, "'A Handsomely Improved Place': Economic, Social, and Gender-Role Development in a Backcountry Town, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1750–1810" (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1994).

[9] As one traveler observed about Carlisle in 1762, "There are few Tradesmen in Town. It's mostly compos'd of People who keep Shops and Public Houses." See Colonel William Eyre, "Colonel Eyre's Journal of His Trip from New York to Pittsburgh, 1762," ed. Frances R. Reece, *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 27 (1944): 40–41.

[10] Although Robert Callender played a central role in Carlisle's early history, specific information about him is difficult to find because he left behind no comprehensive collection of personal papers. His taxable property is documented on Cumberland County tax lists from 1750 to the 1770s,

They took such personal interest in Carlisle's development because their considerable economic investments in the town and its hinterlands, much like those of Penn, depended heavily on the town's rise as a backcountry commercial entrêpot—especially of commerce linked to fur and skin trading. And such conscious, personal involvement in shaping the trade and linking it to a specific locale was by no means unique to Carlisle's settlers; similar patterns prevailed elsewhere in colonial America. Indeed, as a number of scholars have explained, in frontier exchange economies where agriculture was more subsistence than market oriented, trading in furs and skins offered settlers an economic means through which to offset the cost of imports while also potentially advancing themselves economically.[11]

Even so, Robert Callender's extensive involvement in the trade is not the only story. Although it is difficult to determine exact numbers, fragments of evidence suggest that many other more ordinary townspeople—a substantial minority of the town's 105 taxable heads of household in 1753—also took up the trade in various capacities, but did so in more informal, part-time ways. In the early 1750s, for example, much to the chagrin of colony officials who were trying to control the flow of liquor to the Indians, a number of the town's innkeepers ventured out into Pennsylvania's Indian communities to trade liquor for skins and furs. Although these men were caught and fined for their activities, participating in the fur and skin trade was, presumably, a potentially lucrative way to supplement their income; peddling the liquor they had in plentiful supply to Indians in exchange for pelts that held value in a transatlantic trade offered them a hedge against the uncertainties of the colony's frontier exchange economy. And in the economic context of the early 1750s, before the Seven Years' War and the increased imperial regulation of the fur trade that followed it, there was still room for backcountry men to act as independent entrepreneurs in the trade by brokering their own deals with Indians and merchants.[12]

Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA. Letters and reports written by him or about him are scattered throughout the *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA, 1851–1852). For more information about him, see also Volwiler, *George Croghan*, 261–77; James P. Myers Jr., "Pennsylvania's Awakening: The Kittanning Raid of 1756," *Pennsylvania History* 66 (1999): 399–420.

[11] Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, chap. 4; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, chap. 8.

[12] For a discussion of the pervasiveness of small-scale fur trade among households in the backcountry, see Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 54–70; Matthew C. Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry:*

Aside from traders, other townsmen served as support personnel for the trade by acting as wagon drivers and packhorsemen. For example, the Dutchman Christopher Vanlear, who kept a tavern in Carlisle in the late 1760s and 1770s, was also steadily employed as a wagon hauler for the trade. And for Vanlear, it appears that the combination of retailing and hauling equated to substantial economic success; at the time of his death in 1783, he left behind a tidy estate by backcountry standards. Just as important, Vanlear's involvement in the trade also hints at how trading impacted the activities and responsibilities of Carlisle's women, too. After all, while Vanlear was off on extended trips between east and west, he likely depended on his wife, Elizabeth (who inherited his tavern and maintained it for several decades after his death), to run his tavern business; her competence as a "deputy husband" enabled him to participate in the trade.[13] In so many ways then, the fur and skin trade had both profound and subtle impacts on the town's economy and society.

Of course, in a town where so many people's identities and livelihoods were tied to the trade in some way, the changes that accompanied the trade's restructuring during the 1760s, and the way those changes shaped the relationship between merchant firms and their backcountry agents, had significant ramifications on the local level. As a result, Carlisle residents found themselves facing unanticipated circumstances that generated new and difficult choices about the direction of their lives and community. First, the sudden onset of warfare with the Indians—and French—of the Ohio Valley, which all but halted the trade in the late 1750s and early

The Seven Years' War in Virginia and Pennsylvania, 1754–1765 (Pittsburgh, PA, 2003), 21–24. County court records make clear that in the early 1750s a number of tavern- and storekeepers from Carlisle and the county were engaged in an informal trade with the Indians, trading liquor for skins and furs. In 1751, John McCalister and Samuel Moorehead were charged with carrying "Divers Quantities of Rum" or other "Strong Liquors" in excess of one gallon "amongst the Indians at their Towns Beyond the Christian Inhabitants." John Anderson, James Black, Arthur Donnely, Adam Hoops, William Kelly, Patrick Lafferty, John McCollom, James Moore, James and Samuel Robeson, and Thomas Smith faced similar charges in 1753. See Cumberland County, Clerk of the Court, Loose Papers, box 6, Cumberland County Historical Society.

[13] For information about Vanlear's work as a hauler, see "Invoice of goods received from Christopher Vanlear," June 8, 1763, case 14, box 10, Simon Gratz Collection, Indian Affairs, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; see also William West Wastebook #1, West Family Business Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For more about his status in Carlisle, see Merri Lou S. Schaumann, *A History and Genealogy of Carlisle, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, 1751–1835* (Dover, PA, 1987), 219–20. See also Cumberland County tax rates, 1768, 1779; and Hotel and tavern license applications, Cumberland County Historical Society; Administrative account of Christopher Vanlear's estate, Cumberland County Orphan's Court, docket book #3, 1, 12, Cumberland County Courthouse, Carlisle, PA.

1760s, forced many in Carlisle to look elsewhere for their primary or supplementary sources of income. Some men, like Robert Callender, for example, found that supplying the British army in the region with horses, wagons, forage, provisions, and other supplies could offer lucrative sources of income—at least for a time. Others benefited from the patronage of soldiers in their taverns, and still others did little more than muddle through the war's tough economic times.[14]

Once peace was established and trade gradually resumed, these same men faced another, equally difficult choice about whether they would take up the trade again. Some men likely opted out of it, choosing instead to focus on other forms of retailing or enter the region's expanding grain economy. Many others, evidence suggests, returned to the trade either by choice or necessity, joined in some cases by some of their newer neighbors in town. Yet as these men quickly discovered, the trade they returned to in the 1760s was not the same one they had left. The increasing competitiveness and distance of the trade, coupled with new restrictions and more demands for capital and credit resources and heightened fears of Native Americans, discouraged backcountry men from trading on their own as a hedge against economic adversity; instead, with risks magnified and new regulations in place, trading had become an all-or-nothing enterprise where outsiders like the provincial government or Philadelphia merchant firms—organizations that controlled the capital that kept it running and chose to set up bases of operations in their community—employed local men who oversaw its daily workings as their agents. Carlisle, in short, was no longer a place where an enterprising settler might venture a short distance to an Indian village to barter for furs and skins. As the town was being remade into a new kind of crossroads that served as a way station in a larger scale, more formalized trade, its inhabitants found themselves working for outsiders as paid employees and agents.

In Carlisle, changes in the trade were heralded by the arrival of the Philadelphia merchant firm of John Baynton and Samuel Wharton during the waning years of the Seven Years' War. The Quaker firm had first fixed

[14] For information about the impact of war on Carlisle's community, see *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, ed. S. K. Stevens et al., 6 vols. (Harrisburg, PA, 1951–1972). For a broader discussion of how war created both hardship and opportunity in Pennsylvania's backcountry communities, see Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry*, 70–77.

on Carlisle as a transshipment point when staging trading ventures to Forts Pitt and Detroit in 1760; it came to have far more influence on the community after 1763 when the two men expanded their partnership to include George Morgan (thus becoming Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan) at a time when the return of peace, the breakup of the Friendly Association—a Quaker association of the war years that sought to reestablish peace through diplomatic and trade initiatives aimed at the Native Americans of the Ohio Valley—and the lure of trade in the newly acquired Illinois country were working to encourage more distant and grandiose ventures.

Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan were one merchant partnership that saw economic opportunity in the shifting economy of the fur trade at midcentury. Although they dealt in a wide range of dry goods and agricultural commodities, they, unlike many other Philadelphia firms, became heavily invested in the fur and skin trade too. As peace returned to the west they were mostly undaunted by the large risks posed by increased distances and bureaucracy in the trade, and instead were encouraged by the great profits they might earn from being the first English trading firm to enter into the former French territories of the west. Buoyed by the assurances of Wharton's friend, Indian agent George Croghan, one of colonial Pennsylvania's most notorious go-betweens and William Johnson's deputy superintendent of Indian affairs, the firm plunged forward in its western ventures. They joined Johnson, Croghan, and other leading Pennsylvanians like Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Galloway in the Illinois Company, a land company that sought to get around the Proclamation Line by lobbying for a grant for over a million acres for a new western colony.

They are best known, however, for sponsoring a series of especially ambitious, expensive (pledging more than seventy-five thousand pounds in 1766 alone), and unprofitable trading ventures to the Illinois country beginning in 1765—ventures that resulted in the firm's bankruptcy by the 1770s. Indeed, as Eric Hinderaker has observed: "In an era of ill-advised schemes, this, as it turned out, was one of the worst."[15] Although the fur and skin trade was the primary focus of these ventures (they hoped to corner the trade of this newly opened territory), they, like other entrepreneurs of their time, had many other interconnected interests in the region. They speculated in land, were involved in the meat and tallow trades,

[15] Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 167.

traded with the local French inhabitants, supplied diplomatic presents for the Indians, and tried hard but failed to win a lucrative supply contract from the British army at Fort Chartres. Theirs was a multifaceted and flexible enterprise.[16]

Of course, executing such distant and varied trading ventures required a sizable capital investment to acquire the necessary trade goods from foreign suppliers and pay transport costs. For this piece of the process, obtaining credit was essential and was dependent on perceptions of the firm's soundness and the partners' reputations within the Atlantic commercial community.[17] Conducting the actual trade, however, and particularly moving goods such as metal tools and weapons, woolens, cloth, and liquor overland over such long distances, created other demands that were less explicitly dependent on reputation and more on connections—especially in the backcountry. The firm needed transshipment points across Pennsylvania where horses could be rested and fed and where trustworthy local agents and employees could sort, store, and repack goods and pelts, thereby facilitating the movement of the trade between east and west.

Carlisle, along with Pittsburgh, was one of these points. By the late 1750s, as the eastern terminus of the Forbes Road to Pittsburgh, and situated along the Great Road that led from Philadelphia down the Cumberland Valley into the southern backcountry, Carlisle was a conveniently situated midpoint that offered seemingly ideal road connections between east and west in Pennsylvania—at least by eighteenth-century

[16] For information about Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan and their involvement in western trade and enterprise, see Thomas Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986), chap. 3; Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana, IL, 1998), 236–37, 278–79; Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 141–42, 161–70; Max Savelle, *George Morgan, Colony Builder* (New York, 1932), esp. chaps. 1–2; Volwiler, *George Croghan*, 179, 190–92, 199–201; Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 211–12, 226, 233; Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry*, 191–92; White, *Middle Ground*, chap. 8. For a broader perspective on transatlantic business practices in the eighteenth century, see David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (New York, 1995); Rosiland Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia, 1996), chap. 6. For further discussion of how individuals and small places fit into the Atlantic world market system, see also Bernard Bailyn, "The Idea of Atlantic History," *Itinerario* 20 (1996): 19–44; David Hancock, "The British Atlantic World: Co-ordination, Complexity, and the Emergence of an Atlantic Market Economy, 1651–1815," *Itinerario* 23 (1999): 107–26.

[17] For a discussion of the link among credit, reputation, and manhood in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, see Toby Ditz, "Shipwrecked; or Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 51–80.

standards. As such, it became a key point in what historian Max Savelle has characterized as the "prodigious" transport organization the company assembled for the shipment of its goods.[18] As the company's records reveal, wagon loads of goods purchased in London were hauled first from Philadelphia to Carlisle where they were sorted, repacked, transferred on to either wagons or pack horses, and then sent back out along the road "up" to Fort Pitt. From there, they were reloaded onto river boats heading down the Ohio and up the Mississippi where they were finally off-loaded at a trading area in the Illinois country. The whole process was carried out in reverse—at least until 1770 when they began sending goods downriver to New Orleans—to transport peltry "from over the Hills" and "down" from west to east.[19]

Although way stations like Carlisle were vital to moving goods between regions, it was the people of these places who kept the firm's transport network in motion. The partners could manage only a limited range of their firm's operations; George Morgan went west to manage trading at Kaskaskia, while John Baynton and Samuel Wharton oversaw import and export operations in Philadelphia and England. Even so, this left much of the company's daily business dependent on the work of numerous hired agents who traded with Indians, transported goods and pelts, and staffed transshipment points like the one centered at Carlisle. And this pattern of dependence was not unusual. As several scholars argue, whether operating in the larger Atlantic world or some remote corner of the colonies, every eighteenth-century merchant-entrepreneur knew well that expanding his business into new regions, especially onto the frontiers of colonial America, depended heavily on the work of hired agents who served as deal makers, managers, lobbyists, and de facto community-relations specialists. Staging a successful business venture at this time meant placing one's trust—and thus one's potential profits or losses—in the hands of others.[20] And because agents could have a significant

[18] Savelle, *George Morgan*, 24. For a discussion of Carlisle as a midpoint in Pennsylvania, see Whitfield J. Bell Jr., "Carlisle to Pittsburgh: A Gateway to the West, 1750–1815," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 35 (1952): 157–66.

[19] William Trent to BWM, Sept. 2, 1765, reel 5, and BWM to Thomas McKee, Feb. 16, 1766, reel 1, BWM Papers. For more information about Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan and their economic interests in the American West, see the references in note 16 above.

[20] Hancock, *Citizens of the World*; Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, chap. 6. For a somewhat similar discussion of how trade networks extended from Philadelphia into the interior, see Thomas M. Doerflinger, "Farmers and Dry Goods in the Philadelphia Market Area, 1750–1800," in

impact on a firm's profits and losses, finding reliable employees was one essential component to achieving economic success.

For a Quaker firm seeking to operate out of a predominantly Scots-Irish, Presbyterian town, finding such employees could have been an especially tricky task. As Quakers and Philadelphians, Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan were outsiders in Carlisle. And at a time when tensions among eastern and western, Quaker and non-Quaker, English and non-English, white and Indian peoples were running high in Pennsylvania over such issues as frontier defense, relationships with Indians, political representation, and access to trade, many of Carlisle's Scots-Irish Presbyterians, as well as other non-Quaker peoples in town, were surely suspicious of the firm's sudden presence in their community.

Even so, some circumstances worked in the firm's favor. The firm's partners, although outsiders, had important inside connections to the region and its predominantly Ulster Irish population. Two of the men most involved in plans for the 1764 venture were Irishmen with long-standing connections to the county and its seat. Trader George Croghan, the man most instrumental in fostering the firm's interest in the Illinois country and owner of a one-quarter share in the 1765 venture, had owned a farm just north and east of Carlisle in the early 1750s; he continued to have many connections to people in and around the town in the 1760s. Even more important in shaping the firm's local contacts was the Scots-Irish and Anglican fur trader Robert Callender, the Carlisle pioneer who had been so instrumental in first bringing the trade to the town in the 1750s; his quarter share in Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan's 1765 venture marked his return to the trade and a prominent position in the town and colony. By all indications, he was the person who connected the firm with some of its first Carlisle agents by using his influence with the company's partners to win employment for some of his friends and neighbors. It was "the Recommendation of my Good Friend Mr. Callender" whose house he then dwelt in, for example, that brought John Irwin to the company as one of its first agents at Carlisle and later Fort Pitt. Irwin was not only pleased that the company had "made Choice of me to Transact your Company's Business at Carlisle," he also noted his "great happiness" to continue "under the Inspection & Direction of Mr. Callender" while employed by "a Company of Gentlemen for Whom I have always had the

The Economy of Early America: The Revolutionary Period, 1763–1790, ed. Ronald Hoffman et al. (Charlottesville, VA, 1988), 166–95.

greatest Regard."[21]

Callender's friend John Irwin was typical of both the kind of agents the company employed and the type of local men engaged in the trade by the 1760s. According to the firm's records, five men (Ephraim Blaine, Joseph Dobson, John Irwin, Joseph Rigby, and Joseph Spear) were employed at various times in the 1760s and early 1770s to oversee all or part of the firm's operations at Carlisle. Most, by indication of their surnames, were of Scots or Scots-Irish ancestry, could be identified as either Anglicans or Presbyterians, were of at least middling economic means, had some prior connection to the trade or to fur traders, and were literate. Although the circumstances and setting in which they lived their lives was modest when compared to that of their Philadelphia employers, these men appear mostly to be members of the county's elite, a small group of backcountry gentlemen who wielded influence in the region. They were thoroughly enmeshed in the power and patronage networks of the county, which were controlled locally by men like Croghan and Callender, but which traced their origins to the proprietors and their supporters in the colony. Indeed, Irwin lived with Callender for a time and Blaine eventually managed and then purchased Callender's mill in the 1770s. Dobson was involved with Croghan in a number of land deals in the 1760s; he also became Callender's Carlisle neighbor when he bought a stone house next door to him in 1767.

Although Croghan and Callender were the common denominators that brought these men into the company's service, most of these men, county records suggest, also had long-standing personal ties to the backcountry. Joseph Spear and his brother William lived in the predominantly Scots-Irish township of Donegal in Lancaster County in the early 1750s; by 1756, William had opened a tavern in Carlisle. Ephraim Blaine, too, had roots in Donegal Township. Although born in Ulster, Blaine was raised in Lancaster County and the more northerly reaches of Cumberland County (now Perry County) in the 1740s and 1750s. Joseph Dobson's roots may have reached even deeper into the colony's interior. Although information about his origins is scant, he begins to appear in Cumberland County records by the early 1760s, where he is identified on

[21] John Irwin to BWM, Oct. 21, 1765, reel 4, BWM Papers. For information about Croghan, see Merrell, *Into the American Woods*; Volwiler, *George Croghan*; Wainwright, *George Croghan*. For information about Robert Callender and his connections to other men in the county, see James P. Myers Jr., "Mapping Pennsylvania's Western Frontier in 1756," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123 (1999): 3–30.

several deeds as a "gentleman." Dobson also appears to have had a brother, George, who owned property along the Frankstown Path near Bedford before 1765, suggesting that his ties to western commerce and land speculation may have been longer standing. Aside from the fur trade, these men had other kinds of backcountry commercial experience. Some were retailers. Several had acted as supply agents for John Forbes's army during the Seven Years' War. Ephraim Blaine later parlayed his service to the company and the contacts he made through the trade to win appointment as Commissary General of Purchases during the American Revolution. By all indications, therefore, these agents were a group of economically ambitious men who chose to enlist themselves in the firm's service. And they did so, not only as an opportunity to serve these merchants honorably, but also because they expected to advance their own interests—and fortunes—in the process.[22]

Of course, self-interested agents who were working to advance their own agendas produced divided loyalties, which as Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan quickly discovered, could pose real challenges to the firm's interests. After John Irwin was moved to the company's newly opened store at Fort Pitt in 1766, the partners replaced him after he was accused of sloppy record keeping, living extravagantly, and keeping a woman at company expense. Although Irwin denied most of these charges (and was eventually reinstated into service), he also tried to excuse and explain his behavior; he was "Certain that it [his lifestyle] was not Equal to what people on [of] the Character of your Agents might Expect,—Especially where Several of them [including himself] were Recommended as Gentlemen & to be Treated as Your Friends."[23]

The obvious lesson here, as Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan discovered, was that trustworthy agents were difficult to come by. Yet there was

[22] I draw this composite portrait from a number of local history sources, including Cumberland County tax rates, deed abstracts, wills, and court records, all currently housed at the Cumberland County Historical Society. It should be noted, however, that some of my conclusions about these men remain tentative because county records are especially spotty for the 1750s and 1760s, making it difficult to trace these men in as much detail as I would like. For additional information about these men, see also Schaumann, *History and Genealogy of Carlisle*; Gary T. Hawbaker and Clyde L. Groff, *A New Index: Lancaster County, Pennsylvania before the Federal Census* (Hershey, PA, 1982), 3:98; James B. Whisker, ed., *The Bedford County Archives* (Apollo, PA, 1985), 1:95–109; and the published *Colonial Records of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA, 1838–1853). For specific information about Ephraim Blaine, see Harold Keat, *The Cave Hill Miller* (Carlisle, PA, 1911); and E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984).

[23] John Irwin to BWM, Dec. 31, 1767, reel 4, BWM Papers.

another message here too; namely, those backcountry gentlemen who seemed most able to serve were also the most demanding, for they had high expectations about how they were to be treated while in service. Irwin, for example, made clear that he was accustomed to maintaining a "decent appearance" with "a full Supply of Cloathing" and saw no reason why this should change when working at Fort Pitt, despite coarse conditions that forced him to live "entirely Destitute of every Necessary that people Who have the least regard to Decency wou[l]d require."[24] Other agents expressed similar expectations. Irwin's successor at Carlisle, Joseph Dobson, complained that he also lacked decent clothing. Although he likely exaggerated his appearance to win sympathy from his employers, Dobson noted that he had "hardly a Rag of Cloaths to my back and what I have will be torn to Pieces making up ye Goods." When the company responded by sending cloth for a new suit his way, he was "Abundantly Obliged to you," noting that "my Cloaths was so torn that I Could not appear in the Street."[25] As the remarks of these men make clear, agents expected more than simply wages in return for their service; they also wanted to maintain and perhaps even advance their standard of living. Although employees, they expected that the company would treat them like the gentlemen they believed themselves to be. And as these exchanges suggest, all of these issues and expectations had to be continually and carefully negotiated, lest misunderstandings and accusations of improper conduct arise.

There was more to being an agent, however, than simply negotiating the terms of one's service. Once employed, agents like Irwin and Dobson spent the bulk of their time and energy carrying out myriad duties for the company. Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan maintained at least one warehouse in Carlisle in the 1760s, and an agent's first responsibility was to oversee it and supervise the goods and pelts moving through it over time. In a letter of 1766, another of the firm's agents at Carlisle, Ephraim Blaine, wrote of his work at the warehouse:

> Thomas Day is come Down and has Deliver'd me Twenty one loads of Deer Skins, which came from the Beaver there is one of the Girtys [likely Simon] with five Loads that is not come Yet but I Daily Expect him Day [again referring to Thomas] has been a Good Deal Careless in not

[24] Ibid; John Irwin to BWM, Sept. 2, 1766, ibid.
[25] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Apr. 9, 1768, and May 11, 1768, reel 3, ibid.

> Worming the Skins he brought Down—there is forty Skins which I think Quite Damag'd, & Several Other a little Touch'd with the Worms . . . I have this Day Recd Ten Loads of Dress'd Leather and Parchment, which I have Examin'd and find them all Verry Safe I have about four wagons to load off which I hope will be Done the first of next Week.[26]

Blaine, an experienced fur trader and local retailer, describes his duties rather matter-of-factly; experience had taught him how to deal with traders and assess the quality of the pelts they delivered to him. Even so, overseeing the warehouse was no easy task. As the account books of another Philadelphia merchant, William West, reveal, Carlisle agents oversaw the movement of large quantities of pelts. In July 1769, for example, West noted that he had received "2250 lb. Deer skins from Carlisle" (an estimated 1125 pelts). The next month, West's Carlisle agent reported that he had sent another "2008 lb. Deer skins [some 1004 pelts] . . . from his House to this place [Philadelphia]," while another load was being sent directly "from Fort Pitt." By the end of the month, at the height of the summer, West had received nearly 4000 skins valued at nearly fifteen hundred pounds—the majority of them relayed through Carlisle.[27]

With so much money at stake, the seemingly mundane work of agents like Blaine had broader economic implications. Blaine was doing more than simply packing peltry in wagonloads—and he and his employers were well aware of this fact. As his description makes clear, Blaine stood at the center of an economic world in motion that stretched from the farthest reaches of the American frontier to Europe. Traders and haulers came "down" to Carlisle with a variety of skins and furs. Blaine then sorted through those items, assessed their quality, and loaded the best of them "off" again to Philadelphia. His job, as his own words imply, was to ensure that the company's goods were "Verry Safe" as they moved through this Atlantic world market system; he cast himself as a kind of guard or overseer of the company's economic interests. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to view him solely as a small cog in the economic wheel of the firm's far-flung ventures, for he and the other agents were

[26] Ephraim Blaine to BWM, Aug. 16, 1766, Ephraim Blaine folder, Society Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[27] William West Wastebook #1, July 21, 1769, 75; Aug. 12, 1769, 87; Aug. 4, 1769, 82; Aug. 26, 1769, 97, West Family Business Records. Calculations of the number of pelts per pound are based upon Daniel Usner's finding that deerskins averaged two pounds each, see Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 246.

not passive figures; rather, they acted as important brokers in the trade, for it was their knowledge, experience, personal reputations, and, most important of all, economic choices, on which Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan's ventures depended. Agents decided what goods and pelts would move in or out of the warehouse. They negotiated with traders. As Blaine suggests, he was the one who had to deal with traders Thomas Day and Simon Girty on a face-to-face basis. Agents also traveled west as envoys of the company. "I am going up to Fort Pitt Next Week," Blaine noted in the same letter, and have "left my Brother [Alexander] here who will take care till I Return."[28]

Finally, as a measure of the extent to which land speculation went hand-in-hand with the trade, agents also managed the firm's backcountry landholdings. Sometimes, as John Irwin made clear, this duty entailed surveying new lands; he was "Ready," he noted, "to Attend at the Surveying of Your lands According to your requests."[29] For Carlisle agents, this responsibility more often meant overseeing the two thousand or more acres the firm owned in Cumberland County, including an extensive parcel of pastureland on the town's southern border.[30] Here, agents had to choose carefully how they would seek to police the actions of their neighbors. Typically, they warned off trespassers eager to begin "Culling wood on you Plantation." But acting as policeman was no easy task, for there was no guarantee that locals would obey. As another agent explained, because he had "not a Little Trouble" keeping people away, he was "Obligd to Go once Every Day Round ye Land" to keep things in order. Although many townspeople were initially responsive to his warnings because they were "a Little affraid of me for the Dont Know what to make of me," most paid his warnings less heed over time as the firm started to fail, unpaid taxes on the property mounted, and local commissioners began selling off parcels to collect money owed the county.[31]

Agents faced many constraints in choosing how to best represent the

[28] Ephraim Blaine to BWM, Aug. 16, 1766, Ephraim Blaine folder, Society Collection.

[29] John Irwin to BWM, Oct. 21, 1765, reel 4, BWM Papers.

[30] According to Cumberland County tax rates (which are pretty spotty for the 1760s), BWM owned at least two thousand acres in the county in 1767. See Cumberland County tax rates. For a reference to the firm's pastureland, see Joseph Rigby to BWM, June 11, 1768, reel 5, BWM Papers. An extant map shows this land along Carlisle's southern border. See Map of Carlisle, 1768, RG-17, Land Office Maps, 73/1:10, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, PA.

[31] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Nov. 19, 1768, reel 3, BWM Papers. See also his letters of Nov. 23 and 26, 1768, and Joseph Dobson to John Baynton, Dec. 10, 1769, Joseph Dobson folder, Society Collection.

will and interests of their employers. At each transshipment point the trade generated hefty demands upon the community for horses, wagons, and reliable men to drive them. Agents spent much time and energy focused on the mundane but onerous task of gathering these resources, which were in chronically short supply. Joseph Rigby, who, along with Joseph Dobson, took control of the firm's Carlisle operations by 1768, voiced his frustrations, noting:

> There is at this Time but Twelve Horses to be got in this County, all the rest being on the Road with Your Goods and those of the Contractors—Ralph Nailor [of Carlisle] returned a few days since from Fort Pitt, but his Horses will not be in for some Time, and after they arrived, they must rest 10 or 12 days before they are sufficiently recruited for making another Trip, . . . As pack Horses are so scarce Dobson and I have thought it would be as well to employ two or three Waggons, to Load from this place, with many Bulky articles that are here.[32]

To that end, Rigby traveled eleven miles west to Shippensburg "to enquire of Danl Duncan [a tavernkeeper] whether he knew of any Waggons that would take Loads to Pittsburgh." When Duncan replied that he did not, but "would look out for some," operations temporarily ground to a halt.[33] As Rigby's comments illustrate, transportation issues posed constant challenges for Carlisle agents. And Rigby was not alone in facing them. As early as 1762, Robert Callender had noted he was sending one large shipment of pelts to Philadelphia, but had to wait on an additional "Six or Seven Waggon load more," until "Wagons Can be got to take them."[34] Obtaining transport services also placed agents in a precarious relationship to their neighbors, for their ability to keep the trade moving depended heavily on convincing locals to provide the necessary transport, labor, and/or information about where to obtain these resources. Locals, in turn, had choices to make about whether they would cooperate. And because wagons and horses were valuable forms of property, not all townspeople were predisposed to serve the company—even during the economic hard times of the 1760s.[35]

[32] Joseph Rigby to BWM, May 28, 1768, reel 5, BWM Papers.

[33] Joseph Rigby to BWM, June 4, 1768, ibid.

[34] Robert Callender to BWM, Dec. 1, 1762, reel 2, ibid.

[35] Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry*, 73–87, notes a similar reluctance to provide the British army with needed supplies in the 1750s.

Transportation issues only got thornier with time. Although wagons were the primary form of transport initially, when traversing the mountains between Carlisle and Pittsburgh began to present consistent difficulties by the mid-1760s, operations changed and the use of packhorse trains reemerged on the western leg of the journey. As a result, horses likely came to rival people in Carlisle. At one point in 1766, there were 140 horse-loads worth of goods in Cumberland County. In 1768, one agent noted he had sent out 95 horse-loads of goods "since my arrival here." Three months later another agent reported that he had sent out 445 horse-loads, plus one hundred wagons worth of goods during his one and one-half-year tenure.[36] This change to packhorse transport also made agents' work lives more difficult. Not only did they have to continue to contract for wagons and drivers as they had done in the past, but they also needed to obtain many more horses than before. And packhorsemen were often especially difficult to deal with. Agents found that drivers were very particular about the quantity, size, and weight of goods they chose to transport, for they feared crippling their horses. In one instance, Rigby noted that the large and weighty "Half Barrels" of sugar and coffee the company had sent him were the most difficult to find men to transport. As he explained, it was "vast trouble to engage the Packhorsemen to meddle with them," because most carriers "say they will cut the Horses Hips and through their Sides." This placed Rigby in an awkward position; he wanted to carry out the will of his employers, but his neighbors were reluctant to risk injuring their livestock. His quandary was finally resolved "after one or two had taken them"—whether by persuasion or offers of higher pay we do not know—and "the rest came into it with Less Reluctance, though they complain[ed] of the extraordinary size of the Casks."[37] On this occasion, by coaxing the cooperation of one driver to gain the assistance of others, Rigby won the standoff and the movement of goods resumed. Nonetheless, the packhorsemen had demonstrated their power to alter the ebb and flow of goods between east and west.

Many factors shaped an agent's relationship with his neighbors. But in a region where there was a "Great Scarcity of Money" stemming from the economic downturn of the latter years of the war, among the most impor-

[36] BWM to Joseph Dobson, Feb. 1766, reel 1, Joseph Rigby to BWM, June 11, 1768, reel 5, and Joseph Dobson to BWM, Aug. 5, 1768, reel 3, BWM Papers. See also Savelle, *George Morgan*, 25.

[37] Joseph Rigby to BWM, May 28, 1768, and June 11, 1768, reel 5, BWM Papers.

tant was the company's ability to pay for services rendered.[38] Much as the arrival of the British military had done during the war (Carlisle was the supply and staging ground for the Forbes expedition), Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan's Carlisle operations promised—in theory at least—to infuse cash into the local economy. And cash was a powerful incentive, for it encouraged townspeople (some, not all) to put aside memories of their negative experiences with British supply agents during the Seven Years' War and to work for this firm of outsiders whose trade was directed at Native Americans at a time when anti-Quaker, anti-eastern, and anti-Indian sentiments were running high in the backcountry.[39]

In these circumstances, it was imperative that the company fulfill its promises of payment, a task that became one of the most challenging that agents faced. Indeed, when the company's finances, which had never been especially secure, began to unravel in 1766, agents found themselves facing a difficult predicament; they often did not have the funds to pay for the goods and services they had contracted. John Irwin explained that those men who had wintered horses for the company "is now Demanding pay, and Says they Cannot want it any longer." So, too, were the drivers who had taken goods to the Ohio country some seven months earlier who "have been this long time Warmly applying for their pay." This situation placed him in a quandary. He wanted to serve his employers, but also had to pay his neighbors; he no longer wished to "put them of[f] with Storys."[40] The situation only worsened with time. By 1768, Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan were going broke. With their credit mostly destroyed and little if any cash on hand to pay for goods, the firm's reputation in Carlisle sank to a low. By the summer of that year, as frustrated townspeople began to disassociate themselves from the firm and its trade, Rigby's coagent and successor, Joseph Dobson, anticipated "a Severe Check." When one local businessman refused his bill of credit, saying he "would take no more of ye Company bills" because he already held too many of its unpaid notes, Dobson knew that "if this Should once Gett wind hear we will Gett no more People to Carry for us" and operations would grind to a halt.[41]

[38] John Irwin to BWM, Apr. 4, 1766, reel 4, ibid.

[39] For a discussion of the backcountry's experiences with British supply agents and military officials during the Seven Years' War, see Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry*, chap. 3.

[40] John Irwin to BWM, Apr. 12, 1766, and Apr. 13, 1766, reel 4, BWM Papers. See also Savelle, *George Morgan*, 18–23.

[41] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Aug. 13, 1768, reel 3, BWM Papers.

Agents like Irwin, with strong kin or friendship ties to the community, could finesse such difficult financial situations for a time because they were enmeshed in the highly personalized, face-to-face economy of the backcountry, a region where reputation, connections, and the power to persuade weighed heavily on an agent's ability to get what he wanted out of his neighbors.[42] Others, like Dobson, could not. With no apparent kin connections and few friends in Carlisle, and a volatile temper, haughty attitude, and difficult personality to boot, his powers of persuasion were limited; he was, quite simply, the wrong person for the job, especially during such difficult economic times. As a result, he faced mounting hostility from his neighbors as his ability to fulfill promises of payment waned. In particular, he was embroiled in near constant dispute with several coopers, which hindered his ability to acquire the containers he needed. He claimed the coopers were dishonest; they produced leaky kegs and then demanded high payment. The coopers clearly interpreted the situation differently; they saw the agent of a failing company, and a man who was not their friend, trying to swindle them out of payment owed them for their products. And by all indications, they were correct. From his letters to his employers, it appears that in a rather desperate effort to serve his employers by economizing, Dobson turned to the shady tactic of disputing many craftsmen's charges and then refusing to pay them. For example, after he claimed that one cooper overcharged him by four pounds, Dobson got him to "Get a fresh bill Drawn to my Likeing," and then, when the cooper demanded payment, Dobson stalled, telling him that he had to get the partners' permission before issuing payment. He then chided the cooper that he "was in to Great haste for his mony." The cooper, irate, said "he had nothing to do with you [Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan] Nor Did he Care about you it was me [Dobson] he Lookd to for his mony and he would have it." Dobson, determined to "Keep him out of it," then "bid" the cooper to "Get it in the best manner he was able"—in other words, to take him to court.[43]

This heated exchange illustrates the tenuous nature of the relationship between these agents and their backcountry neighbors and suggests the range of choices available to each side as it engaged the other. Craftsmen like the cooper were willing to work for the firm, but they expected to be

[42] For a discussion of Pennsylvania's backcountry economy in the eighteenth century, see Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, chap. 5.

[43] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Oct. 8, 1768, reel 3, BWM Papers.

compensated for their services. This was a business deal and not a personal favor. Making kegs for Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan was probably little different than doing so for the British army during the war; they did so to earn income during economically tough times—and not out of any sense of loyalty. Even so, there was a highly personal quality to these exchanges. The economic choices these men made, as scholar Naomi Lamoreaux reminds us, were shaped by their perceptions of the situation and the people they were dealing with.[44] And in the face-to-face economy of the backcountry, these perceptions, as the cooper's heated response indicates, were cast in local terms, which were targeted at the agent. Dobson, and not the distantly located company, was responsible for paying him because he had negotiated the deal; this was an agreement between two neighbors in a small frontier town.

In such an economy, where agents were dependent on the services of their neighbors to fulfill their duties to the company, and where the scope and tenor of the deals they negotiated was determined in large measure by their own personalities and local connections, Dobson was at a distinct disadvantage. His prickly personality and hostile perception of his neighbors shaped his interactions with them in a mostly negative fashion. He did not coax locals' cooperation, he bullied them. In fact, he readily admitted that he detested negotiating deals with them because he despised most of them. As he noted about the cooper, for example: "I mortally hate the Rascale," because "he has affronted me Several times" with what Dobson characterized as his "saucy" attitude.[45] By his reckoning of the situation as a backcountry "gentleman" and agent of a Philadelphia merchant firm, townspeople—and especially craftsmen like the cooper—owed him their honesty, cooperation, and deference, not their insolence or presumptuousness.[46] To Dobson, these deals had a class-based dimension. By casting himself as their social superior, he limited his own range of responses and was therefore "affronted" when townspeople like the cooper did not acknowledge his status.

In response, townspeople not only sued him but took their business elsewhere—again demonstrating the power locals held over agents. Indeed, Dobson watched incredulously in 1768 as Robert Callender (who

[44] Naomi R. Lamoreaux, "Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism in the Early American Northeast," *Journal of American History* 90 (2003): 437–61.

[45] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Oct. [n.d.], 1768, reel 3, BWM Papers.

[46] See, for example, Deed 2A193-94, and Deed B130-33 in John C. Fralish, ed., "Cumberland County Archives: Records of the Office of the Recorder of Deeds" (typescript, 1988), 1:38, 74.

after leaving the partnership in 1766 had become one of the firm's rivals for the trade) trumped him by employing Carlisle craftsmen whose services Dobson typically commanded. Although Callender, Dobson reported, "Never Speaks to me Now Nor I to him," he knew he was working, supposedly in "secret," with other former Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan employees to stage their own trading venture to Fort Chartres. In preparation, Callender had engaged the town's coopers to prepare enough kegs to carry fifteen hundred gallons of rum westward.[47] Not long afterwards, Dobson watched to his amazement and chagrin as Callender again employed "a Great many hands" in town—many of them likely local women—in making Indian shirts for this trade.[48] By Dobson's telling, Callender was not only a skilled businessman, but a persuasive personality whose long-standing connections to the community made him especially effective at harnessing the energies of many townspeople—men and women alike—to support his trade enterprises. And this was true even when his ventures seemed to rely most heavily on peddling large quantities of rum to the Indians, an illegal trade that many backcountry residents were opposed to in the wake of the Indian raids of the war years.[49]

Yet townspeople did more than engage in passive resistance by working for others to thwart the firm and its agents, they also acted in more overtly hostile ways towards Dobson and his fellow agent Rigby. By 1768, confrontations between townspeople and the firm's agents were the norm. And these confrontations, which spilled from the confines of shop or courtroom onto the streets of town, grew more intense and threatening through time. Townspeople had turned against the company and its agents, and they were not afraid to express their displeasure in public ways. As Dobson explained, in one instance that spring "Several of the towns people Came about me" while he was loading packhorses bound for Fort Pitt. Confronting him, they asked "whether I had Got Powder and Lead in those Bundles to Kill the Scotch Irish." Dobson, recognizing the disadvantageous and threatening situation in which he found himself, tried to diffuse their anger, explaining that contrary to "my Temper," which could be venomous towards his neighbors, he "answered them Very mildly," and "Smother[ing] my Resentment" towards them, denied their

[47] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Nov. 19, 1768, reel 3, BWM Papers.

[48] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Sept. 24, 1768, and Nov. 12, 1768, ibid.

[49] See, for example, Joseph Dobson to BWM, Nov. 26, 1768, ibid, where he noted that Callender was about to set off for Fort Chartres with two thousand gallons of rum.

charges even though he knew his answer was a lie. Although he had "not Sent any Lead yett," he planned to send four horse-loads worth as part of a larger shipment of rum set to go out soon. His neighbors' suspicions had merit.[50]

By the fall the situation was more tense. Emotions ran high and tempers were especially volatile. More people demanded payment for services rendered for the company, while new rumors of war heightened local fears of Indians and fueled suspicions about firms like Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan that might be supplying them with arms and ammunition. Dobson, growing ever more fearful of his neighbors' wrath and conscious of his status as an unwelcome presence in the town, carried out more of his duties covertly. When six boxes of knives arrived, three of them "wet through," Dobson shut himself in his house, "Lett no body in," and working "all my Self," he unpacked ninety dozen knives, dried them off, and repacked them. He worked clandestinely on purpose, knowing full well if "the[y]," as he termed his Scots-Irish neighbors, "Saw Such a Quantity of Knives the would think the were for Scalping people." And certainly many in town would have been troubled by the sight of these knives, for there was an immense quantity of them—over twenty-three hundred—which were, Dobson judged, "the Handsomest and best made for [the] Indian markett or french men that Ever I Saw." Indeed, as he remarked with a note of nostalgia, these knives were "Just the same make that I used to See with ye french and Indians 20 years a Go all Sloaping and Sharp to the point."[51]

By all indications there was a complex power struggle underway in Carlisle in 1768. While agents like Dobson struggled to preserve their employers' economic position in the town so that they could keep the company's trade ventures moving and retain their positions in the company's service, townspeople were pushing equally hard to assert their authority over the economic direction of their community. For them, the question of whom or what entity would control Carlisle's economic connections to the market systems of the Atlantic world loomed large. Would the town's link to the trade be controlled by local traders like Robert Callender who joined with Philadelphia merchant firms to sponsor trade ventures to the west? Or would outsiders like Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan and their hired agents like Joseph Dobson and Joseph Rigby

[50] Joseph Dobson to BWM, May 11, 1768, ibid.
[51] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Oct. [n.d.], 1768, ibid.

employ the town and its people as economic links serving their interests?

At the same time, townspeople's actions suggest that they were also struggling to define the nature and scope of this trade with Native Americans. As we have seen, despite the lingering fears of Indians following the wars of the 1750s and 1760s, townspeople did not reject all involvement in the fur trade outright; many, for example, were willing to assist their neighbor Callender in his venture to trade large quantities of rum to Indians. Yet townspeople balked when they suspected that Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan's agents, Dobson and Rigby, were sending arms and ammunition west. Providing Indians with arms, townspeople implied through word and deed, was to offer their enemies the tools they needed to wage war against Scots-Irishmen like themselves. Trading arms for furs was unacceptable, and it was the final straw in severing the deteriorating relationship between town residents and the company's agents.

As Dobson explained to his employers, frustration at the company's inability to fulfill its financial obligations, coupled with fear of another Indian war, had created a hostile atmosphere of mutual loathing. Townspeople, Dobson wrote, had come "to hate you and me."[52] Yet he hated his neighbors too, doing everything in his power "Never [to] Speak to any of them, but when I Cant help it or Go into one of their house[s]." Even so, because of his "method of Living alone and Not Asscoating with them the thing me an odd Kind of person." Living this kind of isolated existence on the "wrong" side of the town's social divide was difficult; Dobson was lonely. As he admitted to his employers, "if it was not for the business that you are Pleasd to favour me with . . . I believe I would not Live Long in this County."[53] Carlisle, he noted disdainfully, "is a Dead Place."[54]

Dobson, too, was dead in a metaphorical way. He, like his employers, had gambled and lost. By the time of this letter in 1769, the company he had served so diligently was falling into bankruptcy, its partners beginning to quarrel among themselves. Townspeople had gotten their way. Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan's influence in Carlisle was on the wane, soon to disappear; the company had been brought down not so much by the hostile actions of locals as by the monumental risks of participating in the eighteenth-century Atlantic economy. Dobson's service to the firm as

[52] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Nov. 19 and 26, 1768, ibid.
[53] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Nov. 19, 1768, ibid.
[54] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Dec. 10, 1769, Joseph Dobson folder, Society Collection.

its agent was at its end. But he was trapped; because "my mony is at interest hear," he was "obliged . . . to Reside hear a few years Longer."[55] As time progressed, Dobson sank into obscurity, falling in status from gentleman to yeoman, and finally disappearing from Carlisle's public records entirely by 1779.

In the end, despite Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan's failure, the experiences of this firm and its agents offer us several important lessons about the complex ways that the fur trade shaped Pennsylvania's backcountry economy and society in the 1760s. First, the role that Carlisle agents and townspeople played in Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan's operations makes it clear that the full story of the colonial fur trade has not yet been told. Recent scholarship has taught us much about the trade's impact on Native American communities of the Ohio Valley and elsewhere; it was, as Larry Nelson notes, "the great engine of cultural transformation along the western border."[56] Yet far less is known about the relationship that existed between Euro-American merchants and their backcountry agents, or about the extensive networks of association that linked these agents to the many traders, haulers, packhorsemen, and craftsmen who were employed by them. Even so, as the experiences of this firm and its Carlisle agents make clear, the fur trade needs to be conceived of in broader geographical and cultural terms. It depended upon more than eastern merchants, western traders, and their Indian contacts; it was also aided in critical ways by the middlemen and middleplaces of the North American interior that served as critical links in sustaining these contacts and ensuring the continued movement of goods and pelts. The trade, in short, rested upon a deeply interconnected web of economic and personal relationships that existed between, not only Euro-Americans and Native Americans, but also among various groups of Euro-Americans and the communities and interests of which they were integral parts.

The experience of these agents also demonstrates the extent to which the individuals and towns of the Pennsylvania backcountry were impacted by their contacts with the Philadelphia merchant firms like Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan that were so heavily invested in it. By making Carlisle an important economic pivot point in its operations, Baynton,

[55] Joseph Dobson to BWM, Nov. 19, 1768, reel 3, BWM Papers.
[56] Nelson, *Man of Distinction*, 6.

Wharton, and Morgan helped put Carlisle on the economic map of the colony. In doing so, the firm also drew the town and its inhabitants into the larger workings of the Atlantic world economy. Indeed, by offering townspeople valuable economic opportunities to earn cash—at least in theory—that better enabled them to weather the tough economic times of the 1750s and 1760s, the firm pulled townspeople—albeit in small and sometimes less-than-successful ways—into a larger and more distant market economy. Horses and wagons could be hired out; haulers and packhorsemen found work transporting goods and pelts; and many craftsmen like the town's coopers found work. Even household economies—and the town's women—became enmeshed in the trade when Robert Callender put many to work making Indian shirts. The trade had profound impacts on Carlisle's economy and society.

Yet, as Dobson's tense confrontations with his neighbors remind us, Carlisle residents were neither powerless nor passive players in this trade, or the firm's operations; rather, their actions, though small and local, had significant cumulative consequences in shaping the fortunes of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan and the fate of their Atlantic world enterprises. Indeed, acting in the context of the re-opened and increasingly westward focused trade of the 1760s, Carlisle townspeople had choices to make about the extent of their involvement in it, and about the way it would—or would not—impact their town. As we have seen, they could encourage a trade that benefitted their community and them economically. Or, much to the chagrin of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan and their agents, they could seek to halt—or at least modify or curtail—a trade that supplied their Indian enemies with the tools of war. In either scenario, however, the issue of choice, shaped by perceptions, preferences, and cultural context, remains essential to understanding townspeople's actions and reactions to the fur trade of the 1760s.[57] And in the end, it is the variety of actions that they chose to take in response to the trade—and the presence of these agents in their community—that best demonstrates how one local community of the early American interior impacted the daily workings of one piece of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world economy—in ways both subtle and profound.

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[57] For an interesting discussion of the implications of economic choice, see Lamoureaux, "Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism," 437–61.