Frustation is a common feature of history and a frequent theme of literature. As found in historical records and writing, frustrations are of many kinds and on many different scales, global, international, national, regional, local and individual. Literature presents many illustrations of the kinds and scales of frustration, but the novelist and the playwright give particular attention to individual or personal frustration.

The historical biographer cannot, in the study of the lives of great men, ignore frustrations of one or more kinds and in different degrees. In some cases the frustrations are small and the great man surmounts them. But the lives of some men, not triumphantly great, reveal frustration (frequently a series or body of frustrations) as relatively complete. In the case of many such individuals the frustrations are the result of divided and often conflicting ideals, an outgrowth of variations about concepts involved in general and highly familiar terms such as men, people, country, nation, community, re-

This somewhat extensive article by Dr. Alfred P. James, a veteran contributor to our magazine, is a product of earlier research on the Ohio Company of Virginia. A special biographical study, it supplements The George Mercer Papers Relating to the Ohio Company of Virginia, compiled and edited by Lois Mulkern (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1954), and The Ohio Company, Its Inner History, by Alfred P. James (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1959). It furnishes a valuable thread running through the earlier publications. Its relevancy to the history of Western Pennsylvania is clearly apparent.—Ed.
ligion, loyalty, freedom, society, individuality and other such generalizations.

Historical biography, if sound, cannot ignore the matter of frustration. Only the fictionist, whether or not prejudiced or propagandistic, can depict a life without frustrations.

In an historical biography one must for the most part find and rely upon documents or other surviving evidence of some kind. While it is amazing how much documentation has survived and can be found and utilized, there has usually been in an individual life much which did not get recorded. This is well known to be true of the great men. Of lesser men it is even more the case. Of the so-called common men it is sometimes difficult to establish even the matter of definitive identity.

The correlation of the role of a man in his own times and of his deserved place in history is a matter of much speculative interest. Here most certainly adequate documentation plays a big role. Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson and Franklin, great in their times, left behind voluminous documentation. Their well preserved papers are invaluable not only about their own lives, but for information about many of their contemporaries.

Were it not for the extant papers of two men, George Washington and Henry Bouquet, the biography of George Mercer, a frustrated young Virginia aristocrat, could not, with any fulness, be written. It is notable that the able editor of the recently published *George Mercer Papers* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1954), an archival work, did not include a sketch of the life of George Mercer, but in commentary and annotations provided excellent sketches of the lives of some of his associates and contemporaries.

George Mercer, oldest son of John Mercer and of Catherine Mason Mercer, his first wife, was born June 23, 1733, probably at Marlborough, the family home on the Potomac River in Stafford County, Virginia. His father, John Mercer, an able, learned lawyer, who had become a planter, was born in Dublin, Ireland, though possibly of English antecedents, and with the exception of his brother, James, was without American colonial relatives, but his mother was connected with a family best featured by having in colonial Virginia no less than six successive gentlemen by the name George Mason, of whom far the most significant was George Mason of Gunston Hall, a nephew of Catherine Mason Mercer.

The relative validity, in this case, of the old axiom, "Like father,
like son," requires attention to John Mercer and his home, "Marlborough." Born in 1706 he left Europe at the age of seventeen and settled in Virginia. According to his letter of January 28, 1768, to his son George, then in London, "Except my education I never got a shilling of my father's or any other relations estate; every penny I ever got has been by my own industry and with as much fatigue as most people have undergone and out of that I contributed very considerably towards the recovery of my father's estate and the settlement of my bro. James." ¹ The revealing items in the statement are about education and work, both featured in surviving documentary evidence. His education in Dublin provided a remarkable and unmistakable penmanship, characterized by minute lettering and regularity of spacing of both pages and lines. It also provided interest in many aspects of culture. Not less significant was John Mercer's incessant labor, interrupted mainly, if not only, by periods of bad health so common in colonial Virginia. As his letter of January 28, 1768, clearly reveals, he established a home library of considerable size and comprehensive scope, kept up to date by new acquisitions. He consciously secured materials suitable for children of different ages. It is well known that George Mason of Gunston Hall owed much of his scholarly and cultured accomplishment to the fact that as a boy and young man he lived at periods with his aunt Catherine at Marlborough. Available lists of materials on the library of John Mercer throw light not only on himself and his children, but also upon George Mason.

Before he was twenty-three years old, John Mercer had established himself in Virginia. He studied law and government, got married, acquired lands and took up the combined role of lawyer and planter.

In 1957, extensive archaeological work under the Smithsonian Institute was being carried out at Marlborough. In the process, primarily of establishing the location, foundations and size of the buildings, many hundreds of artifacts and other items have been unearthed, recorded, studied and preserved. One interesting archaeological conjecture is that the residential mansion had halls running through the structure both from front to rear and from side to side, thus dividing the main floor into four somewhat separate divisions.

¹ George Mercer Papers, Relating to the Ohio Company of Virginia. Compiled and Edited by Lois Mulkearn, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1954 (hereinafter cited as G. M. P.), 204.
It is a regional tradition and belief that life at Marlborough was on the grand scale or in high style, and at an expense beyond the income and means of its owner. Work on the plantation was done, as then usual, by slaves, under overseers and foremen. The researcher instinctively recalls other Virginia plantations, such as Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall, Stratford, Mt. Airy, and Sabine Hall.

In the case of John Mercer, to the emphasis on scholarship and culture, on the practice of law, and on the responsibilities of a planter must be added the equally typical colonial Virginia interest of building up extensive and sometimes widely scattered holdings of land, often on the wilderness frontier of that day.

Life at Marlborough was at least for John Mercer, and probably for Catherine Mercer, active and strenuous. Facilities must have been commodious, for room was required not only for a large and ever increasing family but for many and frequent guests. It is said that by his first wife, Catherine, John Mercer had ten children of whom only six survived childhood.

It was in such a home and amid such surroundings that George Mercer grew up as a boy and a young man. He had many relatives, and more friends, on similar estates in the immediate region. He belonged to the society of the Fairfaxes, the Washingtons, the Lees, the Carters, the Taylors, the Thorntons, the Corwins and others described in many regional treatises, but adequately depicted in Douglas Southall Freeman's *George Washington*. Probably as the oldest boy in the family, he accompanied his father on legal, business or social trips to Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Williamsburg and elsewhere and thereby early became familiar with the legal, governmental, business, political and social life of colonial Virginia in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Though his father, John Mercer, made jottings in large ledgers, several of which have survived, no mention was found there of George Mercer, 1733-1749. The birth, boyhood, schooling, habits, character, and other matters relating to his oldest son, found no mention in the ledgers.

Growing up on a slavery plantation, George Mercer unavoidably became familiar with the "peculiar institution" of slavery. Apart from the possibility of violent fits of temper on the part of John Mercer, slavery at Marlborough seems to have been benevolent and paternalistic. But however benevolent, the social and psychological results of such acquaintance with slavery are easily conjectured, well
understood and, in the case of George Mercer, easily observed. By birth and rearing he was a member of the prevailing aristocracy in his region, the so-called barons of the Potomac and Rappahannock. That he should have acquired and maintained the ideals of his class was perfectly natural, and this seems to have been the case. Throughout his life, under circumstances whether favorable or unfavorable, he remained aristocratic in spirit and, as far as possible, in his manner of living.

As to the early education of George Mercer, there is little doubt that it was given much personal consideration and attention by his father. But, as his neatly kept note books indicate, John Mercer was often away from home for short and sometimes for relatively long periods of time. He was therefore naturally greatly interested in tutors for his children. He probably, like Robert Carter, of Nomini Hall, had tutors for his early children by his first wife Catherine though documentary evidence of this in print or elsewhere is not easily found. Anyhow, George Mercer came to young manhood with good penmanship and with much capacity for logical organization and lucid presentation of factual matters.

On the appearance and the physique of George Mercer, information is not abundant. A small portrait of him has survived. It reveals dark, well-groomed hair, deep-set eyes, regular features, and some indication of enduring immaturity. From documentary records it is evident that while on one hand his physique was capable of considerable endurance, facing as he did the heat of summers, the bitterness of cold winters, the fatigue of extended travel and the hardships of military campaigning, on the other hand he was sometimes sick not only for a few days, but for several weeks. In this respect he was like his father, like his brother James and not unlike his cousin George Mason and his sometime friend George Washington.

The tradition has survived, that life at Marlborough was socially gay and sportive, that much attention was given to pure bred horses and regional horse racing, that Marlborough had its own race track often frequented by other gentlemen of the region. Probably there was much feasting and drinking. Beer, ale, imported wines and probably imported rum, cognac and whisky were freely consumed. And according to custom, there were dancing and games at the races and the house parties. It was a sporting world in which young George Mercer

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2 Found in the W. Garnett Chisolm Collection, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.
grew into adolescence and early manhood. He was a young sport and not at all ashamed of it. Manual occupation or labor was no part of his education nor of his culture. Men of his class or status did not expect to depend upon brawn.

It is stated by several writers that George Mercer attended William and Mary College. But destruction by fire of the early college records has rendered the institutional documentation both inadequate and questionable. One printed list of students, admittedly based on the recollections of professors, contains the names of George, James, and John Francis Mercer, all three under the date 1767. Actually, George Mercer was in the Ohio Valley in 1753, in military service, mainly, for the next ten years; and in Europe almost continuously after July 1763. Even James Mercer was thirty-two years old in 1767 and only the half-brother John Francis could have been enrolled in 1767 at the early age of nine. Since at that time colleges had academies, many sons of the aristocracy registered at an early age. It is not improbable that George Mercer entered William and Mary in 1748, at fifteen, and graduated in 1752. Extensive and intensive research would be necessary to establish the facts.

In the lack of adequate institutional data at William and Mary College, random notations in John Mercer's famous ledgers give indefinite but valuable information about George Mercer and his brothers as students in Williamsburg. The first possibly pertinent item is payment by John Mercer of a Williamsburg mercantile account of £ 2..7..8, November 14, 1748. The next item, found in Ledger C, is more specific, as follows: "To College of Wm and Mary, By Subscription to Schools, £12..3..0." This may have been a donation to the college, October 1749, but it happens to correspond to entrance fees paid April 5, 1750. Not only George Mercer at age sixteen seems to have been in college session 1749-1750, but also his brothers John Fenton Mercer and James Mercer, the last then only fourteen years old. Itemized, also in Ledger C, is settlement in October 1749 of a small mercantile account with William Prentis of Williamsburg.

On folio 131 of John Mercer's Ledger C is a comprehensive financial statement entitled "Son's Maintenance at Williamsburg Dr." The punctuation of the first word is incorrect. It should be "Sons," for there were three of them involved in the account. Itemized under

3 The fact of his attendance was attested by authorities at William and Mary College in 1958, but on the basis of very inadequate institutional information.
the date, April 5, 1750, are eight transactions. The list involves "To Cash £ 1.7.6," seemingly an item from folio 119, from which also probably came seven items marked "To Do. pd" meaning "To Cash paid" as follows:

Mr. Robinson for Entrance £ 4.12.
Mr. Grame Do 4.12.
Mr. Davenport Do 4.6.8
1.12.6
Housekeeper 3.10.
For Candles .15..10
For Pocket Money 3.6.4

[£ 22.15.4]

Another item of April 1750, found in the ledger, folio 100, as "To William Dering by Lodging By my Sons Do £ 5," is restated on folio 131 as "To Mr. Dering for Board £ 5. . . . ." Another item of April 1750, found on folio 110, "To Peter Scott, Joyner at Williamsburg By mending a table for my sons, £ .2..6" is restated, folio 131, as "To Peter Scott for mending a Table £ .2..6."

Put under the caption, April 5, 1750, "Sons Maintenance at Williamsburg" are several highly descriptive and revealing items, such as "To Cash pd. for Lottery Tickets" 7..10.6; "To Do. pd. for washing" 1..1..0; and four items under the general heading "To Housekeeping at Williamsburg for sundrys vizt. A featherbed and furniture £ 8. . . . . ; A Desk £ 1..1..6; An oval table £ 1..1..," and "3 chairs 7/ £ 1..1.." a total of £ 11.3..6. Evidently the Mercer boys, George, John and James rented unfurnished rooms in Williamsburg and equipped them with the minimum essentials, but secured board elsewhere in town.

According to John Mercer's Ledger B, George Mercer lost his mother, Catherine Mason Mercer, June 14, 1750. It is reasonable to suppose that whether the boys were or were not then in Williamsburg, they were at Marlborough for the funeral.

It would seem from items in the ledgers of John Mercer, that George Mercer and his two brothers were in Williamsburg during July and August 1750, and that instruction at William and Mary College must have been continuous, possibly on a tutorial basis.

On folio 131, recapitulated from other entries, not found, are such items as "To general charges for sundrys vizt. To Cash pd. Mr. Preston as advanced to George £ 2..3..," "to George £ 2..3..," "to the Usher, £ 1..11..3," a total of £ 5..17..3 as of July 1750 and drawn from
Under August 1750 are three items, (1) "To Cash paid the Nurse attending Jno. and Jas. £ 2..3..," (2) "To John and James £ 1..1..6," and (3) "To Wm. Thomson for Taylors work £ 3..10..6." Since from earliest settlement at Jamestown malaria was prevalent in the area and in fact was not suppressed for three centuries, it is conjectured that the Mercer boys were afflicted by it.

From the ledgers of John Mercer it appears that not only George Mercer but also his younger brothers, John Fenton and James, were at school (presumably William and Mary) in Williamsburg at what might be called the session of 1750-1751, certainly for what could be styled the first term or semester. On September 14 is jotted down the item, "To Mr. John Holt, merchant at Williamsburg, By sons maintenance to this day [£] 4..5..7½," an item recapitulated in October 1750. In September 1750 is also mentioned an item, "To Cash to George [£] 1..1..6."

While it is not certain that the items in John Mercer's ledgers were not payments of earlier debts, it seems probable that nine items of October 1750 referring to recent or current matters, show that George and his brothers were in Williamsburg at the time. One item mentions "To Do. to Do. John James and nurse, £ 6..9..," meaning "To Cash to George, John, James and nurse." Another item says "To James Cocke, Williamsburg By sons maintenance for sundrys to this day £ 1..15..9." Another item recorded "To Richardus Covington, Williamsburg [Tavern keeper] By Georges and Jemmys Entrance to barn dance £ 2..3... . . ."

Recapitulated in Ledger C, folio 131, as from folio 42, is the item "To James Power for cash to George [£] 2..3.." Similarly recapitulated is an item from folio 82, "By Sons maintenance for sundries To William Prentis, merchant in Williamsburg [£] 18..1..3½" and also another item "To Richard Gamble, Williamsburg By 2 wigs my sons [£] 4..6..0, By shaving them both the 1st of this mo. £ 1..1..3." A somewhat indefinite item, seemingly from folio 141, is "To Books for sundrys . . . £ 22..4..7½." The last item in this account is for £ 126..13..1½. But since there were three boys involved, it may be assumed that the educational bills of George Mercer for 1750 amounted to at least £ 40 per annum, or possibly per semester.

On the probable attendance of George Mercer at William and Mary during the winter of 1751-1752, no data have been found. The ledgers of John Mercer are often strangely blank on important matters. The testy old gentleman seems to have been greatly self
centered though his love for members of his family is very certain.

The usual expenses of education are here happily documented. Included are tuition, pocket money, janitor service, lighting, room rent, board, repairs, washing, furniture, medical expenses, clothing, merchandise, dancing lessons, wigs, barber shop payments, books and lottery tickets. But items such as transportation, sports, entertainment and beverages are not found in the ledgers. Nor is there any mention of valets. The later somewhat luxurious habits of George Mercer were obviously not acquired at William and Mary.

What the aristocratic young collegian was doing in the summer and autumn of 1752 and in the winter months of 1752-1753 has not been determined. Joseph M. Toner, a great antiquarian authority, thinks he was studying law under his father. But John Mercer in 1766 implied that George was, at the time, more interested in the plumb line and the square, that is to say in architecture and surveying, than in following the practice of law. And seemingly George Mercer soon became interested in the Ohio Company and in all matters relating to the Virginia frontier. Probably both John Mercer and his oldest son hoped to find there some use of his collegiate education, particularly of mathematics and his resulting ability as a prospective surveyor and cartographer. So George Mercer turned to the west in early 1753. According to his own statement on his map, he was in the Monongahela Valley in early 1753.

At a meeting of the Committee of the Ohio Company at Marlborough, February 6, 1753, an Instruction was drawn up saying, "If Colo. Cresap has not agreed with any person to clear a Road for the Company, You are with the advice and assistance of the said Colo. Cresap to agree with the proper Indians who are best acquainted with the ways Immediately to cut a Road, from Wills Creek to the Fork of Mohangaly at the cheapest Rate you can for Goods and this you may mention publickly to the Indians at the Loggs Town or not as you can see Occasion." Although this item, of February 6, 1753, is annotated by John Mercer himself as "One of the Instructions given by the Comp to Mr. Gist April 28, 1752," it is not found in the three extant copies of the instructions to Gist. And the annotation itself was written at least six years after February 6, 1753. It is true also that Gist was paid for the work of getting the road cut, but it is a reasonable

5 G. M. P., 52-54; 176; and 269-71.
conjecture, since Gist and Cresap in early 1753 were already along the Monongahela, that the instruction has application to George Mercer as, at the least, a messenger. Certainly George Mercer in April 1753, when winter was over and wilderness travel more pleasant, was on a mission of some kind to the Indian town, presumably Logstown, and probably to Chartiers Creek to survey and make a plot of the location of the proposed Ohio Company post, or fort, and settlement.

It may well be that the proposals of the Committee of the Ohio Company, July 25, 1753, signed by Philip Ludwell Lee, James Scott, George Mason and John Mercer, were founded upon reports of his trip by young George Mercer. The ideas of the division of lands on Chartiers Creek and of the structure of the fort and the town probably came from the trained mind of the young scion of a leading member of the company. The map and its notations, of great historical importance, may be a component part of the report made by George Mercer after his return to Marlborough in the early summer of 1753. It may therefore be conjecturally dated as drawn at Marlborough in June or early July 1753, though from its provenance as a royal map in the Crown Collection, it may have been drawn up as late as 1762, for presentation to the British Government in connection with some memorial, or state of the case, of the Ohio Company. John Mercer had a copy of this map in his possession in January 1767 and claimed that George Mercer also had a copy in London.7

That George Mercer was along the lower Potomac on July 25, 1753, the date of a meeting of the Committee of the Ohio Company, is evidenced by his witness to the signature of Thomas Ludwell Lee to the Articles of Agreement.

George Mercer, in this his first recorded trip to the trans-Allegheny west, thus began his great acquaintance with the region. Like Washington, six months later, he probably stopped at Winchester, Wills Creek, at Gist's Place with Christopher Gist, at Turtle Creek with John Fraser and at Pine Creek with George Croghan. For a whole decade his life was to be dominated by the frontier and its problems.

What the young Virginia colonial aristocrat did in the latter part

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6 Ibid., 147-150; 178-79.
7 Ibid., 227. The surviving copy, in the Crown Collection, is obviously not that once in the possession of John Mercer, but probably yet a third copy submitted to what George Mercer was accustomed to call “The Government.” It was in the Public Record office in 1882, very likely in the Treasury papers, for in 1769 copies of some of the Ohio Company papers were deposited with the Treasury.
of 1753 is not indicated by surviving documentation. He may have reconsidered law or surrendered himself to the mastery of surveying and cartography. But, as his father in 1768 indicated, he had become familiar with the upper Ohio Valley and doubtless remained alert to developments there.

On the return of George Washington, in January 1754, from his famous trip of mid-winter, the situation changed with dramatic rapidity. On the basis of Washington's widely publicized report, Governor Robert Dinwiddie took steps to raise troops. George Mercer and his brother, John Fenton Mercer, entered military service. According to John Mercer, writing in the Virginia Gazette, September 26, 1766, George Mercer enrolled under Colonel Fry with the rank of lieutenant, and the pay of four shillings per day, February 25, 1754, at the age of twenty, and, having recruited a few men, became a part of the First Virginia Regiment, soon, on the accidental death of its first commander, to come under the command of Colonel George Washington.

Probably George Mercer was in or near Alexandria in February and March, 1754. And unless perchance he and his recruits were despatched earlier, he left Alexandria, April 2, 1754, arrived at Winchester, April 10, spent a week there and, on march again, arrived, April 20, 1754, at Job Pearsall's, near Romney, West Virginia, of today. A few days later at Wills Creek he was to hear of the disaster which had overtaken the Virginians at the Forks of the Ohio, April 17, 1754, the very day of his departure from Winchester.

At Wills Creek, in late April, George Mercer must have observed or at least sensed the prevailing uncertainty, when his almost equally young commander, George Washington, was deciding what to do, a matter treated gingerly by Freeman in his biography of Washington.

Having made his decision to advance rather than stand or retreat, Washington, after a few days work on the old Ohio Company road, moved west from Wills Creek, April 29, 1754. In very bad weather and by slow stages of advance, he reached the Great Meadows May 24, 1754. Lieutenant George Mercer may well have supervised work on the road in May 1754 just as he was to do in June 1754, June 1755, and July and August 1758. This may account in part for the fact that the three companies of George Mercer, Robert Stobo and Andrew Lewis reached the Great Meadows as late as June 9, 1754.

The available records seem to indicate that George Mercer was promoted, at least to the responsibilities of a captaincy, in early June
1754. Colonel George Washington appears to have been pleased with him, for in a letter to Dinwiddie, June 12, 1754, he stated tersely, "Lieutenant George Mercer will worthily succeed to a company." Possibly he was named captain, June 4, 1754, after having served as acting-captain on the march from Wills Creek. As captain, his pay per day would have been eight shillings Virginia currency, double his pay as lieutenant.

When Washington advanced from Fort Necessity on June 16, 1754, George Mercer's company marched down the mountain to Gist's plantation and he may therefore have been present at the Indian Conference, June 19, 1754. But the mouth of Redstone Creek was the primary immediate objective of Washington and marking out and clearing a road to it was a logical early step. Such work was begun June 27, 1754. According to early data, Captain Andrew Lewis with a few officers and sixty men began to clear the road, but according to a later statement of George Mercer, he himself was in command of a "Working Party" that opened up the road to within three or four miles of Redstone Creek. The men must have worked well, for on the next day the force was recalled and reached Gist's Place on June 29, 1754. In keeping with news of a strong French and Indian advance, it was time to retreat and after a frightful uphill march, in which officers' horses were used for other army purposes, the exhausted Virginians reached Fort Necessity. In the siege and battle there July 4, 1754, George Mercer conducted himself well and was wounded though not seriously. Washington after his arrival at Wills Creek entitled him "George Mercer, Cap't." On August 30, 1754, along with others, George Mercer was voted the "Thanks of this House" by the House of Burgesses. He seems to have remained in the First Regiment, now reorganized under George Washington. Doubtless he found time for visits to Williamsburg, Fredericksburg, Marlborough and Alexandria. During the summer he bought at a sale in Alexandria a forfeited lot.

Whatever may have been the raiment of Lieutenant (later

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10 Kate Mason Rowland. Life of George Mason, I, 77-78 (hereinafter cited as Rowland, Mason). See the deed, from the Alexandria Trustees to George Mercer, September 9, 1754, Deed Book C 1, folio 794, Fairfax County, Virginia. He probably sold it to John Askon, November 20, 1754, ibid., folio 842.
Captain) George Mercer in early 1754, and probably it was composed of a good supply of laced shirts, braided coats, etc., after October 5, 1754, he was under the orders of Washington that “Every officer of the Virginia Regiment is, as soon as possible, to provide himself with an uniform Dress, which is to be of fine Broad Cloath: The Coat Blue, faced and cuffed with scarlet, and trimmed with Silver. The Waistcoat Scarlet, with a plain Silver Lace (if to be had) the Breeches to be blue; and every one to provide himself with a Silver-laced Hat of a Fashionable size.” 11 This noteworthy change from the buckskin and coonskin of the frontier civilian and soldier, probably met with the complete approval of the young Virginia aristocrat, Captain George Mercer. It would be easy for an artist to depict any likeness of George Mercer in this prescribed garb. As stated above, only a small portrait has survived.

Captain Mercer may have been in late 1754 at frontier posts from time to time, but in January 1755, he was at Fredericksburg with a small force of recruits for his independent company. Disciplinary trouble arose and Governor Dinwiddie suggested that they be marched to Winchester. To a complaint of Captain Mercer that his commission was unduly late, Dinwiddie cited his rapid rise in the service and advocated patience as a virtue. Mercer’s recruits seem to have been carpenters, fifty of them, called at the time “Hatchet Men,” or what might today be called axemen. As such the company served in the famous campaign of 1755.

With George Washington retired to private life in the winter of 1754-1755 and therefore leaving little contemporary reference, in his papers, to military matters, the account of George Mercer in early 1755 is not easily established. On May 12, 1755, at Fort Cumberland, he was attached to the Second Brigade commanded by Colonel Dunbar. His “Company of Carpenters” was an independent Virginia body and not regulars in the regular regiments. He may have been attached to Dunbar’s Brigade only after the arrival of the latter at Winchester. The extant orderly books do not show that he marched from Alexandria to Winchester with Braddock’s troops, but it is likely that he did march from Winchester to Fort Cumberland with Braddock’s forces.

On June 4, 1755 Braddock’s orders of the day required “Cap’t. Mercer’s Company of Carpenters to hold themselves in readiness to

march at an hour's warning." 12 Probably Captain George Mercer's axe-men cut down trees and hacked out shrubs on the long painful route of Braddock to Fort Necessity. On the division of the forces in early July, Captain Mercer's company seems to have been left behind at Dunbar's Camp on the mountain. 13 If, as is claimed by some, he was present on the battlefield of July 9, 1755, and was wounded there, he must have accompanied Washington who, on the very eve of the famous clash, went from this Camp to the front.

Whether wounded or not, Captain George Mercer, like the more famous Colonel George Washington, soon found himself back in Fort Cumberland, and on the departure east of Dunbar's regulars, probably back in Winchester or again at Williamsburg, Fredericksburg, Marlborough and Alexandria. Both in 1754 and in 1755 his efforts, like those of Washington, ended in frustration, though not in disgrace nor in discredit.

The defeat and death of Braddock, followed by the removal of Dunbar's Brigade to the Atlantic Coast, alarmed the governments of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, especially the last, for its frontier settlements extended hundreds of miles along the Alleghenies from the mouth of Wills Creek to the eastern branches of the Great Kanawha and of the Tennessee. Courageous though they were, and skilful in defense and Indian fighting, the isolated pioneers were no match for marauding bands of French and Indians who made sporadic but deadly warfare upon them. In the confusion and disaster, Governor Dinwiddie drew upon all available talent and resources. The First Virginia Regiment was reorganized with George Washington as Colonel in command. A string of small forts or posts of garrisons was stretched along the Virginia frontier. Companies of the Virginia militia under the best available officers, were stationed at these forts or posts. Washington was in general military control of such defense and travelled extensively from place to place. Among his attendants was Captain George Mercer, already acting aide-de-camp, and in September 1754 officially appointed as such. On a trip from Alexandria to Winchester, Washington, Mercer and John Kirkpatrick, a clerk, stopped at Rock Creek and surveyed a considerable stock of Ohio Company goods in storage there. These goods, probably from the fourth cargo, possibly shipped from London in 1753, were in 1756

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12 Disney, Orderly Book, Library of Congress MS.; Lowdermilk, History of Cumberland, 278.
13 Pennsylvania Historical Society, Memoirs, V, 363-64.
inventoried by Christopher Gist and the inventory turned in to Washington at Winchester, and thus preserved among the Washington papers.

In late October 1755, Washington sent out a body of troops under Major Andrew Lewis, and with Captain Mercer, followed Lewis on a march toward Fort Cumberland. Three days later, they overtook Lewis encamped on the Little Cacapon. It took four days in 1755 to march in the mountains a distance easily covered in one hour today by automobile. The weather was bad in late October, but Washington was again in Winchester in early January. His return trip in deep winter may have been equally or more disagreeable. During this time "Cap’t. George Mercer worked diligently as his aide and John Kirkpatrick of Alexandria as his clerk." 14

George Mercer seems to have done double duty in the winter of 1755-1756 as aide-de-camp and messenger of George Washington and as Captain in command of the Second Company of the Virginia Regiment. When Washington in early January 1756 received orders from Major General William Shirley, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty’s Forces in North America, to march from Winchester to Fort Cumberland on March 10th, Captain Mercer and his command were not only left at Winchester but Mercer himself was sent down to Williamsburg "for more money and to satisfie how the 10,000 £ has been applied." 15 On his return he may have visited Fredericksburg, Marlborough and Alexandria. And he may not have returned to Winchester, or if he did he soon met Washington there for both of them were at Mount Vernon in early February. Washington, as is well known, was dissatisfied with the inferiority of colonial military rank when in conjunction with officers of rank in the regular forces of the Crown. Mercer had much the same feeling and a kindred point of view. This frustration of inferior rank, met in the field, Washington decided to protest in person at Headquarters in Boston.

On this first of his many long recorded trips, George Mercer rode horseback from Mount Vernon to Annapolis, thence to Philadelphia where he remained February 8-13, 1756, thence to New York where again several days were spent and then to Boston which was reached February 27th. The mission accomplished he was back in New York, March 10th for another stay of four days, and again in

15 Dinwiddie Papers, II, 315-17; G. W., I, 288.
Philadelphia on March 17th and back again at Annapolis, March 23rd. This two month trip in the northern colonies probably influenced the later career of the young aristocrat. It may have given him a continental and possibly an imperial British point of view. And on the trip he played the role of treasurer and paymaster of expenses, keeping accounts later found in Washington's papers, accounts which indicate that the aide-de-camp himself spent money rather freely on the trip.

Again at home in Virginia in the summer of 1756, George Mercer and his commander seem to have settled in Winchester as headquarters for military matters. In September, Washington received the Inventory of Ohio Company goods in storage at Rock Creek, a holograph of Christopher Gist who at this time was employed in Virginia in military and diplomatic roles. On September 7, George Mercer signed a writ of attachment against Richard Pearis.

The maintenance of discipline at Fort Loudoun (Winchester) was no small problem. Eighteen deserters were out at one time in early December. Captain Mercer was sent out in search of them. As Washington reported to Dinwiddie, December 10, 1756, "Capt. Mercer returned the 7th with sixteen of the Deserters; the other two escaped his diligence." 16 He must have had great efficiency as well as mere diligence. He probably visited many parts of the Virginia frontier of that day.

George Mercer was put, and left, in command at Fort Loudoun, Winchester, in December 1756. As Freeman puts it, he "was directed to remain at Fort Loudoun, and to exercise particular diligence and care in the continued discipline of the men and in the further construction of the fort." 17 This was heavy responsibility and Captain Mercer was getting education in military administration and management. His instructions from Washington were elaborate and lengthy. 18 Analysed briefly, they were instructions to observe rules and orders, issue all orders for stores to be used, send to Alexandria for clothing and superintend its distribution, provide the rations of rum, expedite all expresses, watch all desertion, procure tools from below, grant no discharges, pay all the servants and pay all small bills.

On these responsibilities a new troublesome one was superim-

16 G. W., I, 518.
17 Ibid., 530-531; Freeman, Washington, II, 231.
18 Ibid., I, 530.
posed with the appearance in Winchester of southern Indian allies of Virginia. On April 5, 1757, Washington wrote Dinwiddie, "A letter which I received from Capt. Mercer upon my return to Alexandria informs me that 95 Catawbas . . . are now in Winchester, waiting orders how to conduct themselves," and stating that the Indians "wanted matchcoats, shirts, leggings, and all other necessaries." 19

According to letters of George Mercer to George Washington, April 24 and April 26, 1757,20 the Indians soon began to "conduct themselves" very badly. The details are not recorded but the distress usual in such situations may be easily imagined. It was probably the main worry of the young commandant. The old dilemma of neglect and resulting Indian displeasure versus foolish waste, seems to have been met on this occasion by the device of reasonable generosity based upon seeming necessity.

Governor Dinwiddie in early 1757 likewise found himself in a dilemma. Lord Loudoun, the new Commander-in-Chief, wanted colonial reinforcements and the use of Virginia companies in the campaign of that year in South Carolina and Georgia, but the Virginia legislators and taxpayers wanted a reduction in military expenses. In connection with the latter, Dinwiddie attempted the reorganization of the First Virginia Regiment by the reduction of the rank of some officers. On this process he wrote to Washington, May 16, 1757, "Those I have thought proper to continue are Captains Mercer . . ." etc. This, so far as Captain Mercer was concerned, was very timely, for he was almost immediately sent with his company to South Carolina. George Washington, May 24, 1757, writing from Fort Loudoun to Dinwiddie, mentions "Mr. Mercer's going off." 21 And Mercer evidently left behind at Winchester some troublesome Indian expense accounts, but Washington, after investigation of these, reported to Dinwiddie, June 12, 1757, that there was no blame to be attached, that the Indian gifts had been approved by Mercer's fellow officers. Earlier, June 10, 1757, Washington, in a letter to John Robinson, had questioned Mercer's accounts and taken measures to stop payments thereon, but he evidently quickly learned better, and on July 10, 1757 sent to Dinwiddie two receipts "for money which

19 Ibid., II, 20.
Capt. Mercer laid out for necessaries for the Indians,” receipts which Washington earlier had shown, in Williamsburg, to Dinwiddie. This information was also, July 10, 1757, sent to John Robinson.22

The march of Captain Mercer’s company from Winchester to Hampton and the sea voyage from Hampton to Charleston, South Carolina, are not described in the accessible printed materials.

It is known that the expedition sailed from Hampton, Virginia, May 31, 1757, and “After a long passage . . . arrived safe” at Charleston, June 15, 1757.23 It is also known from the voluminous correspondence of Colonel Henry Bouquet, in command of the expedition, that there was smallpox among the Virginians and that many were infected by the disease. According to Bouquet the climate was not salubrious and the heat was almost unbearable. He also was caustic about the billets and quarters available for his troops.

In a letter of August 17, 1757, from Charleston, to George Washington, Captain Mercer stated, “I wrote you via Philadelphia, a few days after my Arrival,” 24 but this first letter probably of late June, has not been found. In this second letter, he praises Colonel Henry Bouquet, his new commander, and writes much about Charleston, which he found a small place, its inhabitants overrated, its young ladies not beautiful, the local gossip often scandalous and the “Shape of the Ladies” not good. But he praised highly the reception and treatment given him and the Virginia troops, probably, however, having in mind the officers rather than the privates.

Possibly the climate of South Carolina in August was too much for Captain Mercer, for, on August 26, 1757, writing to Governor Henry Ellis of Georgia, Bouquet said, “I send you one Company of the Provincial Troops of Virginia, as you have desired,” “Capt. Mercer being sick, Lieut. Stuart hath the Command of the Same.” 25

Evidently the sickness of Captain Mercer was long drawn out. He probably had malaria which was almost chronic along the southern seaboard. But he was able to write, November 2, 1757, to George Washington, stating, “We have still hoped to see Virginia this Fall, till the Arrival of a Man of War, from Lord Loudoun,” adding such remarks as “I find my long stay in this place has only increased the

22 G. W., II, 86.
24 Letters to G. W., II, 173-180.
25 B. P., 21,631, folio 63.
very bad opinion I at first conceived of it” and “were I safe at Home So. Carolina would be the Last Place I ever would come to.” Ten days later, November 12, 1757, Colonel Bouquet wrote Governor Henry Ellis, “I have orders from Ld. Loudoun to send back to Virginia the Troops of that Province . . . Capt. Mercer who will have the honour to deliver this Letter, has been detained here by sickness. I take the Liberty to recommend him to you.” Nearly a month later, Colonel Bouquet in another letter to Governor Ellis, December 10, 1757, wrote, “Captain Mercer arrived here yesterday with his Company, he expresses the utmost Satisfaction of your Goodness to them and in general of the kind usage they have met with in your province.” Evidently George Mercer returned to Virginia in mid-winter. Bouquet himself was soon ordered to join the proposed campaign of General John Forbes directed against Fort Duquesne. One of the important results of this Carolina episode was that in addition to more extended travel and despite unfortunate illness, George Mercer had won an acquaintance and an enduring friendship with Colonel Henry Bouquet, a significant figure in the history of the colonial frontier from 1758 to 1764. The loss of this friendship, by the untimely death of Bouquet in 1765, may be considered one of many frustrations in the life and career of George Mercer.

The British imperial officials, political and military, called for the greatest possible colonial assistance for the projected campaigns of 1758 against Louisbourg, Ticonderoga and Fort Duquesne. Virginia responded to the call by the establishment of the Second Virginia Regiment, whose command was assigned to Colonel William Byrd III, of Westover. The new commander probably knew Captain George Mercer and his influential relatives and he needed an officer with the experience of George Mercer. Colonel Byrd, therefore, offered Captain Mercer the position of Lieutenant Colonel of the Second Virginia Regiment. Since like another Virginian, a more famous George, Captain Mercer was ambitious, he quickly accepted the position which incidentally carried payment of half a guinea per day. And evidently he threw himself and his influence into the scales in promoting the interests as well as the organization of the new regiment. And since Colonel Byrd was absent bringing up southern Indians to the support of General Forbes and did not reach Winchester.

27 B. P., 21, 632, folio 20 A.
28 Ibid., folio 21 B.
until the last of May, the organization and establishment of the Second Regiment must have fallen mainly upon Lieutenant Colonel George Mercer.

Obviously, and not unnaturally, Colonel Washington, his earlier patron, was none too well pleased. On April 24, 1758 he wrote to John Blair, the influential Virginia politician, “That was a most extraordinary request of Colonel Mercer’s concerning the exchange of officers, and calculated it would seem rather to breed confusion and to gratify his own vanity than to benefit the other regiment.” 29 Washington, fully aware of his own ambition, but never seeing it as vanity, was possibly entirely correct about Lieutenant Colonel Mercer. And this action of George Mercer may have, for a time, cost him the favor, support and patronage of the man destined to dominate the American scene in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. That Mercer did not lose entirely the friendship of Washington, was highly creditable to both.

Lieutenant Colonel Mercer seems to have proposed to gather a “Troop of Light Horse” in the Second Regiment. This is mentioned without comment, favorable or unfavorable, by Washington in an order to a friend, May 24, 1758.10 He may have been displeased or amused, but he may have been merely indifferent or possibly have welcomed this innovation, later made famous by Henry Lee (Light Horse Harry) and imitated by John Francis Mercer in 1781 at a critical stage in the Revolutionary War in Virginia.

Colonel George Mercer was at Winchester in early June 1758. There he was chief officer under Colonel William Byrd III, who as the junior of Colonel Washington was in turn under Washington, while both regimental commanders were subject to orders from Colonel John St. Clair, Deputy Quartermaster-General. On June 9, 1758, St. Clair wrote Colonel Bouquet, “. . . Lieut. Col. Mercer shall join you after the Ten Companies wt. ye Indians are set off for Fort Cumberland.” 31 Four days later St. Clair issued orders that “Col. Byrd with as many Companies as are ready of his Regiment to march the 26th” and “the Rest of that Regiment to follow with Lieut. Col. Mercer as soon as they can be got ready.” 32 Getting ready evidently took little time for at the beginning of the second week of July 1758,

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29 G. W., II, 183-85.  
30 Ibid., 203-204. This troop was put under Captain Robert Stewart. Pennsylvania had, earlier, a similar light horse troop.  
31 B. P., 21,639, folio 17 A, A.L.S.  
32 Letters to G. W., II, 231.
Colonel Byrd had his regiment in rendezvous at Fort Cumberland, from which, July 9, 1758, he wrote Colonel Bouquet, "Col. Mercer marches tomorrow with two other Companys of mine and one of Col. Washington's Regiment," adding, "I take the Liberty to intreat you Sir to send him back to me as soon as he has open'd the Communication, for he is of great Service here." 33 Obviously George Mercer had won another advocate and friend, though the later collapse of the military and political status of Byrd was to be yet another frustration of his fellow officer and fellow aristocrat. On the same day Colonel Washington notified Bouquet, "Three Companies under Colo. Mercer proceed on the Raystown Road, which we began to open yesterday." 34 Unlike Byrd, Washington does not plead the need of the service, at Fort Cumberland, of his onetime aide-de-camp. The reaction and reply of Bouquet was immediate. He wrote Washington, July 11, 1758, from "Reas Town," "We begin tomorrow to cut the road on this side to meet Col. Mercer and save him the trouble of going so far." 35

On this road building assignment of mid-July 1758, Lieutenant Colonel Mercer was not blessed with good fortune. His supplies from Fort Cumberland began quickly to run short. He wrote Washington, July 12, 1758, "I had a most violent fit of the ague and fever Tuesday, which confined me all day, from 8 in the morning to a waggon and did not leave me till the same hour next morning." 36 To those familiar with malaria it is obvious that this was probably a recurrence of his sickness at Charleston just one year earlier. But the conscientious and determined young officer also wrote, "If I have my health dont doubt but I will be very diligent in completing the road, but I assure you 2 or 3 more fits will make me incapable of anything." 37 Washington informed Bouquet the following day, July 13, 1758, "By a party from Colo Mercer, to this place for Provisions, I find they have open'd the Road 6 miles only." 38 A part of the blame Washington thought was due to the unnecessary 30 foot width of the road then being constructed. Sickness, shortage of supplies and hostile Indian attack, actual or threatened, may have slowed down road construction; but within two weeks with forces working both from Fort Cumberland

33 B. P., 21,643, folio 143, A.L.S. Bouquet in writing about Colonel Byrd, June 3, 1758, said "Lt. Col. Mercer is a Man that he can depend upon for the Command of his Regiment." Ibid., 21,639, f. 9.
34 G. W., II, 232-33; B. P., 21,641, folio 8, A.L.S.
35 MSS Papers of Washington, VIII, folio 130, A.L.S.
36 Letters to G. W., II, 355-56.
37 Ibid.
38 G. W., II, 235; B. P., 21,641, folio 11, A.L.S.
and Raystown the communication between the two posts was opened up, before anything more than explorations and surveys had been made of the road from Raystown to Loyal Hannon. It was on July 27, 1758, that Bouquet wrote Washington, "Lt. Col. Mercer tells me that the Second Regt. will want about 12 Tents in all." 39 The Second Regiment, of 859 men, was at Fort Cumberland in early August. Presumably Lieutenant Colonel Mercer was there with them. A month later he was at Raystown for Washington addressed him there, September 9, 1758, saying only three days' flour remained at Fort Cumberland, and requesting Mercer to facilitate and expedite the transmission of supplies from Bedford to Wills Creek, 40 an interesting matter in the light of Washington's famous effort to have General Forbes follow the older road used earlier by Braddock.

By the end of July 1758, the Indians brought up with so much trouble from the South, had sneaked away and gone home. The Virginia forces were drawn out from Fort Cumberland and engaged in defending communications against hostile Indians and in working upon Forbes Road. Early in September some of the British forces marched across two ridges of mountains and descended upon Loyal Hannon, an old Indian town along the upper Loyalhanna. Work on a fort there was immediately begun. Gradually assembled in or around this fort were companies of British regulars as well as of Pennsylvania and Virginia colonial troops. The episode of Grant's expedition and defeat in late September was an important interlude. And equally important was a French and Indian counterattack upon the post of Colonel James Burd at Loyal Hannon. Meanwhile the Second Virginia Regiment was along the lines of communication. Lieutenant Colonel Mercer was Field Officer of the Day, September 22, 28, and October 2, 6, 8, 22 and 24. The regiment reached Loyal Hannon in the last week of October and Lieutenant Colonel Mercer was Field Officer for the Grass Guard, November 9, 1758. 41

At Loyal Hannon the weather was bad, winter had set in, the pay and enlistment of several thousand colonial troops were due to cease at the end of November and General Forbes was gravely ill. The situation seemed desperate in the second week of the month. Then it changed suddenly, with dramatic results.

Rumors of an impending enemy attack, probably aimed at the

39 Letters to G. W., II, 395; MSS Papers of Washington, VIII, folio 180, A.L.S.
40 G. W., II, 286.
destruction of the horses and cattle of the encampment, led to a British-American attempt to surround and capture the supposedly approaching enemy. About half a regiment of Virginia colonial troops (presumably from the First Virginia Regiment) were sent forward under Colonel George Washington in one surrounding movement and a similar body (presumably from the Second Virginia Regiment) under Lieutenant Colonel George Mercer was ordered to complete the surrounding movement. It happened that these two forces on approaching each other mistook allies for enemies and opened fire, with loss of 14 killed and 25 wounded before the firing could be halted. Thomas Branon, a sergeant in the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mercer, later petitioned the House of Burgesses for recompense for being wounded "in the Neck," on the 14th of November.42

A fortunate circumstance of this warfare in the woods was that a few of the enemy were captured and, under pressure, revealed that the French, because of inadequate provisions, were withdrawing from Fort Duquesne.

On a slight improvement in the now wintry weather and with the necessary courage for at least one last attempt to reach his first goal, General Forbes ordered a general advance of his army. In this advance Lieutenant Colonel George Mercer, with the Second Virginia Regiment, was in the division under Colonel Montgomery. He was Field Officer at Turtle Creek, November 21, was in command of some forces November 22 and 23, 1758, and doubtless marched with them into the smoking ruins of Fort Duquesne.43

In about ten days General Forbes had marched from Loyal Hannon to Fort Duquesne, but he himself was desperately ill. Indian affairs were critical, shelter was lacking, supplies were dangerously low and only a small fraction of his troops could be kept for any length of time at Pittsburgh. He quickly decided to march his British regulars east to winter quarters. And, as Forbes wrote General Abercromby, November 26, 1758, "The Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina troops may all disband tomorrow, as their provinces pay them no longer."44

It seems that the bulk of the Virginia troops left the Forks of the Ohio immediately after its capture. Presumably they went back along

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42 Journal of the House of Burgesses, 1751-1758, 179.
43 Forbes Orderly Book, Washington Papers, L.C.
44 General John Forbes. Writings Related to his Services in North America. Compiled and edited by Alfred P. James, Pittsburgh, 1938 (hereinafter cited as Forbes Writings), 263.
Forbes Road to Loyal Hannon (first re-named Pittsburgh and, later, Ligonier) and on to Raystown (re-named Bedford), and there, parting with the British regulars, turned south to Fort Cumberland, with many going on to Winchester and eventually to their homes and families.

Colonel William Byrd’s Second Virginia Regiment lost its field organization and probably, temporarily, its establishment. Colonel George Mercer returned home and was in Williamsburg late in January. Governor Francis Fauquier wrote Colonel Byrd, January 23, 1759, about rebuilding the regiment, saying about proposed new officers, “Lieutenant Colo Mercer who will deliver this to you, can give you a better Acct as they are mostly his Friends, so he may know their Dispositions,” and adding, “I am not without hopes of reinstating him, but this Affair in Embryo.”

But Lieutenant Colonel Mercer had the good will of Colonel Henry Bouquet and the latter probably recommended him to General John Stanwix who had succeeded General Forbes as commander in the southern department. Evidence seems to indicate that General Stanwix summoned Lieutenant Colonel Mercer to meet him on the coast, possibly at Philadelphia. Probably as a result of this George Mercer was in Philadelphia in late March and early April 1759. He may have received promises of appointment and promotion from Stanwix, which in turn may have needed confirmation from General Amherst. As yet the status of Mercer appeared indeterminate. But he, on his way back to Virginia, stopped at Annapolis, where on April 17, 1759, Governor Sharpe in a letter to the proprietor, mentions “Lieut Colo Mercer of the Virginia Forces who is just come from Philadelphia.”

Very probably Mercer spent the summer of 1759 in military service. In early August he was ordered to push the clearing of Braddock’s Road, a matter demanded both by the interests of Virginia, and by the necessity of forwarding supplies from Maryland and Virginia to the military forces and laborers then being assembled at Pittsburgh. About his somewhat indefinite and also anomalous situation George Mercer wrote General Stanwix, August 12, 1759, saying he was serving as a Volunteer “being even out of Commission from the Colony.”

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46 Archives of Maryland, IX, Correspondence of . . . Sharpe, Vol. II, 1757-1761, 331.
47 B. P., 21,644, folio 302, A.L.S.
One week later, August 19, 1759, he was granted a warrant appointing him Assistant Deputy Quartermaster-General for the provinces of Maryland and Virginia, a position corresponding to that of his intimate Friend, Captain Lewis Ourry, in Pennsylvania. While the warrant was sent to Mercer by Colonel Bouquet, the appointment was made by General Stanwix then at Bedford en route to Pittsburgh to superintend the construction of a powerful new fort. In his letter of notification, Colonel Bouquet, on the authority of Stanwix, outlined the nature of Mercer's work and the pay received in such a position. The compensation of "Seven Shillings and Six Pence St. per day during the time employed" was insufficient for the living expenses of one with the habits and outlook of Lieutenant Colonel George Mercer, a situation not helped by the fact that in connection with his functions he was assigned a "Credit for Eight hundred Pounds Sterl. upon Col. Hunter," the Virginia Paymaster.

Thus began what was possibly the most important service and successful effort in the half century life of the young colonial aristocrat. His rank and authority may not have been high and his pay was small, but his duties were manifold and his responsibilities heavy. Roads, wagons, horses, boats, barrels, convoys, as well as tents and clothing, were involved. But contracts for provisions, prices, accounts, payments and settlements of accounts were also a part of his obligation. In many ways he was a combination of quartermaster, commissary and paymaster. His correspondence with Bouquet at this period is burdened with problems and detail. His major responsibility was that of opening and keeping cleared Braddock's road from Winchester to the Monongahela Valley. A feature of this was providing supplies for Colonel James Burd in his construction of the road to the mouth of Redstone Creek in 1759, work which Washington, Lewis and Mercer had first started in June 1754. Colonel Bouquet mentions "Col. Mercer having agreed with Col. Burd in August last to supply him upon the Monongahela with Provisions from Virginia." Fort Cumberland seems to have been the geographical key, but Winchester was hardly less important. Mercer found Fort Cumberland in great need of repairs in August 1759. He found himself with no carpenters and no tools. He proposed to go at once to Winchester to secure them. He travelled widely over Frederick County, Virginia.

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48 Ibid., 21,652, folio 148.
49 Ibid., folio 149.
50 Bouquet to Thomas Walker, October 25, 1759, B. P., 21,652, folio 192, A.L.S.
51 Ibid., 21,644, folio 330, A.L.S.
tions since 1753 had improved but as yet very little. His letters claim that the settlers were unreliable and sharp in business matters. Vexation on his part may account for some of his unfavorable comment. “The old misers,” he wrote, “take more delight in telling over the Pieces of Gold or Silver than twice the Quantity of Paper.” “Pray Sir,” he wrote, “be pleased if possible to send me down some Gold or Dollars,” for, he added, “it will have a strange Effect upon the Eyes, and Minds, indeed, of the Farmers.” It is not impossible that he himself realized fully the difference between British pounds sterling and colonial paper money. The lack of cash and the extent of the use of credit and of resulting indebtedness were familiar to Colonel Mercer and most of his contemporaries. Financial frustration and unfortunate decisions, based upon or caused by such frustration, increasingly dominated his later years.

At Fort Cumberland, Colonel George Mercer, A.D.Q.M.G., saw quickly the advisability of promoting water transportation along the upper Potomac. He knew about or had heard of old scows formerly in use but later stranded and lost sight of. Probably these old scows had been used by the Ohio Company, 1750-1755, and possibly by Braddock. Mercer proposed to find them along the river and restore them to use or, as an alternative, build new ones. Mercer wrote Bouquet that artificers, especially those capable of building a scow, were very scarce and very expensive at Wills Creek. In a letter to Colonel James Burd, September 1, Colonel Bouquet explained transportation and supply difficulties, saying, “Mercer writes me that he wants a Ship Carpenter to Cork [sic] the Scows upon Potowmack.” Colonel Mercer, as was well known by Colonel Bouquet, showed great interest in promoting trade of Virginians with the Ohio Valley. He tried to incite individuals to enter upon the trade, and probably after two full years of association with George Mercer the alert Bouquet knew much about the Ohio Company and George Mercer’s relation thereto.

Bouquet preserved, for himself and posterity, six letters from Mercer in the month between August 28 and September 28, 1759. The matter of the old scows got repeated mention. That after much search they could not be found is little surprising. In his long letter of September 28, 1759, Mercer discussed a crooked deal he suffered in saddles for pack-horses. He reported a bad drouth which dried up

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 21,652, folio 162 A.
most of the mill streams and shut off much of the production of flour, and he portrayed the incessant problem of prices and payments. He strongly stated his desire to be in Williamsburg in November, on private business "of the greatest importance."  

The letter, September 16, 1759, of Lieutenant Colonel Mercer to his old companion-at-arms, George Washington, was newsy and has been much used by later historians. Mercer said he had not been east of the Blue Ridge since June. He informed Washington about his plan to be in Williamsburg in November, though he, in propriety, omitted the Mercer family financial crisis revealed in the now accessible George Mercer papers, and used his military land claims as the object of his trip, stating that he had intended to go to England itself in 1759. He naturally reported his new commission from Stanwix and informed Washington, "We are going to build a very respectable Fort at Pittsburg, of Bricks," leaving to posterity the uncertainty of the word "We," as used.

The situation and particularly the perplexities of George Mercer during the month of October 1759, are clearly revealed in surviving correspondence. In a letter, mainly about supplies, Bouquet, October 1, 1759, promised Mercer, "I shall mention to the General that your private affairs call you to Williamsburg the beginning of Novemr. and there will be no difficulty to obtain his leave persuaded that you will come up again as soon as you can." Mercer at this time was accused by Thomas Barrow, at Pittsburgh, of having "been a little perplexed with notions of exchange." The Assistant Deputy Quartermaster-General was reprimanded by Bouquet for having bought beeves (on "my Orders") probably in excess number and of inferior weight and quality, a matter which Mercer admitted in his letter to Bouquet, October 9, 1759, a letter in which Mercer again stated, "I must again, as my Business is very urgent, repeat my Request for leave to go to Wmburg."  

George Mercer's letter of October 4, 1759, to James Burd, on Redstone Creek, is of much personal biographical significance. It says at the end, "I have a dull Time of it — No Amusement, but much business and in case of an idle Hour which very seldom happens, I am

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54 Ibid., 21,644, folio 417.
55 Letters to G. W., III, 158-63.
56 B. P., 21,652, folio 185 C.
57 Ibid., 21,644, folio 432, A.L.S.
58 Ibid., 21,652, folio 189 C.
59 Ibid., 21,653, folio 195.
obliged to betake myself to a Book for Conversation as this Town does not abound with good Company, indeed it has none and I am the only creature here that struts militantly or appears with Scarlet or a Sword Knot so that I really appear by myself.”  

The correspondence of the middle of the month is largely about supplies, particularly for Colonel Burd's construction forces, a matter in which Bouquet continued to manifest great interest. And when Mercer, from Winchester, blamed Joseph Galbraith at Fort Cumberland for lengthy inspections of goods in transit to the Monongahela, he got in answer a sharp rebuttal of the allegation.

Probably the most important and certainly the most self-revealing biographical information on George Mercer is that found in his long letter of October 27, 1759, to his trusted commander and friend, Colonel Bouquet.

Several matters are dealt with, each of importance then and later. He repeated the more than a month old request for temporary leave from his post and duties that he might go to Williamsburg about a private matter that probably meant £500 consideration to him. Probably in relation to the necessity of this, he detailed his situation in his assignment. His hours were long, his duties heavy and the result was excessive fatigue. In addition his expenses were high and his pay inadequate. He claimed his bare living expenses amounted to seven shillings sixpence per day. High rent for his room was an item and he mentioned the “two Servts and the Horses I am obliged to keep.” Since he was no longer on the Virginia payroll, he wondered, so he said, if better pay in a better position in the British army could not be secured for him. Much of this has the appearance of emotional frustration. Attempted self-analysis and revelation appear in his statement “I thank God, I am blessed with a Sufficiency to live well and genteely on, never more than since you have known me. As I despise Money farther than to answer the common uses of well living, I never coveted more.” The matter of living less well is expressed, but blandly rejected. It may well be that this was a critical moment in his life. More than one Virginian of the planter aristocracy had the same outlook and took a gambler's chance on the future.

60 Shippen Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, IV, 175, A.L.S.
61 Bouquet to Mercer, October 25, 1759, B. P., 21,652, folio 192, A. Df. S.
62 Mercer to Galbraith, October 22, 1759, B. P., 21,644, folio 455 and Galbraith to Mercer, October 22, 1759. B. P., 21,644, folio 468.
63 B. P., 21,644, folio 460, A.L.S.
64 Ibid.
On the same day, October 27, 1759, Colonel Mercer wrote to General John Stanwix at Pittsburgh. He discussed supplies, recommended Mr. Graham as contractor for such supplies, assumed himself the responsibility for sending up large amounts of "Cheese Butter," and, asserting his wish to go to Williamsburg about "a Law Affair," announced that in order to take care of it he must set out the following day, which he was certain would cause no trouble for he had affairs well in hand and he would return quickly.65

The trip of Colonel Mercer from Winchester to the Virginia seaboard probably took place in late October and early November. On his return to Winchester he wrote Colonel Bouquet November 28, 1759, "I received yours of the 9th Instant on my Return from Williamsburg, where not only my Business, but a most violent Cold I had taken detained Me many Days longer than I expected." 66

The exact "Business" or "Law Affair" of George Mercer in Williamsburg in November 1759 is not definitively certain. It may have been in connection with land claims under the Dinwiddie Proclamation of February 19, 1754. But it seems also to have included or been in connection with a land release, involving a deed of large tracts of land from John Mercer to George Mercer and James Mercer, a penal bond to John Mercer for the sum of £ 6000 from George Mercer, James Mercer, John Tayloe and Presley Thornton, and a release of the tracts of land mentioned in the deed, by George Mercer and James Mercer to John Tayloe and Presley Thornton.67

Since the release, in the handwriting of John Mercer, was found in the George Mercer papers, and not found recorded anywhere, it has the appearance of a complicated system of mortgage by which John Mercer secured money for his heavy debts and his sons received claims to vast tracts of mortgaged land. From the document itself certain data about George Mercer can be gleaned. He was in Virginia, possibly at Williamsburg, with John Tayloe, Presley Thornton and James Mercer on November 5, 1759. He was still in Virginia on November 25, 1759, the date of the signatures upon the land release. And, as noted earlier, he was back at Winchester upon his duties, November 28, 1759. Where the signing was done is uncertain though it was probably done at Williamsburg. If so, George Mercer made high speed, for that day, in getting to Winchester within three days.

65 Ibid., 21,644, folio 464, A.L.S.
66 Ibid., folio 494.
67 G. M. P., 40-45.
In the meantime, he continued his interest in "our Scow." 68

While in Williamsburg promoting legislation to secure promised military bounty lands, George Mercer may have submitted himself to the authorities as a surveyor of such lands. On December 10, 1759, he was duly appointed as an authorized surveyor. 69 His limited correspondence of December 1759 was in relation to supplies of salt and other necessities of military provisions. Seemingly he had a visit from Colonel Bouquet during the month. Since Bouquet possessed lands in nearby Maryland, the visit may have been social as well as official.

The life of George Mercer in January 1760 is dramatically stated in his letter of January 25, 1760, to Colonel Bouquet. Neither abstract nor paraphrase would do it justice. The biographical part of it is:

"Since you left me I believe no man ever felt more cruel Fortune than myself. A Gentleman of the physical Tribe prescribing drawing of a Tooth, as the surest Cure for the Pain, broke the Tooth, and at the same Stroke was so extreamly lucky as to fracture my Jaw Bone which for twenty odd Days made me delerious, frantic, raving mad, nay if I coud say any Thing worse of myself, I am convinced I have a very just right to do it, but thank God, I have at last got the better of it." 70

In midwinter, in that day, military matters were usually quiet. The roads were bad and ordinary transportation difficult if not impossible. In this relative inactivity, George Mercer, in addition to care for his healing jawbone, seems to have worked upon his financial military accounts and reflected upon his military land claims. In connection with the latter, he expected trouble with a rival faction and its surveyor, Thomas Bullit, and wrote a letter to George Washington, the dominant figure and worker in the matter of bounty lands. This letter of February 17, 1760, frequently cited in footnotes, definitely represented reestablished relationship of Mercer with Washington. In the letter George Mercer announced, "My Business call Me to Phila.," 71 meaning thereby his military accounts.

At Winchester in February 1760, Colonel Mercer found "... the Town and Country around Us being much infested with the Small Pox, which has now become fatal," as he wrote Colonel Bouquet, March 1, 1760, saying also, "I have waited your Orders to repair

68 Mercer to Bouquet, November 28, 1759, B. P., 21,644, folio 494.
69 Minutes of William and Mary College, William and Mary College Quarterly, first series, III, 129.
70 B. P., 21,645, folio 26, A.L.S.
71 Letters to G. W., III, 172-75.
to Philadelphia with great Impatience with some weeks past . . .” 72

On the life of Colonel Mercer in March and April 1760 information is slight. Presumably he stayed on at Winchester in the routine of his position. And in May he put in a claim of £ 266.0.6. for a share in the sale of land bought by George Washington, a claim recognized and paid by Washington. 73 In May he was in Philadelphia settling accounts with Bouquet and eventually with General Amherst. On May 24 he signed a document saying, “Received from Colo. Henry Bouquet the Accounts of Ballances due the People of Virginia which together with Mr. Walker's own General Account I am to deliver to said Mr. Walker, at Winchester, he being appointed to pay the same.” 74 But seemingly George Mercer took much time in reaching Winchester. He saw Governor Sharpe of Maryland on the trip and carried letters from him to Governor Fauquier at Williamsburg in mid-June. 75 He presumably was at Winchester in late June and he may have been in Frederick County during the mid-summer months, for he now had a plantation on the Shenandoah River. But in October 1760 he was again in Williamsburg from which he went to Fredericksburg. 76 Late in December he was again in Philadelphia for he wrote Bouquet, December 27, 1760, a letter of importance for his biography. He featured the long letter with the statement “I have only been in Town two nights, and as you know I am no Swainer, have not made a single Tea Visit yet, nor am I certain I shall.” 77

Thomas Cresap had earlier asked Colonel Bouquet to become a member of the Ohio Company, 78 and now in this letter George Mercer enlarged upon the idea. He hoped to see Bouquet and said, “I shall let you see all the Papers etc. relative to the Company Business,” an exaggeration or at least a careless use of the word “all,” for by this time the papers of the Ohio Company were voluminous and it is doubtful that its books were sent to Philadelphia. He may have had copies of the more significant documents, some of which copies may have remained in his possession and thereby became a part of the now well-known George Mercer papers.

72 B. P., 21,645, folio 65, A.L.S.
74 B. P., 21,634, folio 183, A.L.S.
75 Md. Arch., IX, 422-23.
76 Mercer to Trent, November 8, 1760, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Etting Collection, Ohio Company Papers, A.L.S.
77 B. P., 21,645, folios 340-51, A.L.S.
78 Ibid., folio 163.
In this letter Colonel Mercer stated, "I shall be here and at New York till the middle of February."

From this somewhat scanty record it is apparent that George Mercer in 1760 had declined the "Honor" of continuing as Assistant Deputy Quartermaster-General in Maryland and Virginia, possibly in June 1760, but almost certainly before October and had turned to such activities as: settling old military accounts, such as those of the expenses of Virginia in connection with recruiting southern Indians under William Byrd III, Richard Pearis and others; establishing his own plantation in Frederick County, Virginia, acting as scout and agent of the Ohio Company in which, by the unrecorded deed of his father, he had a half claim to a one-fortieth share; and finally in entering politics as a candidate with George Washington for the two seats, from Frederick County, in the House of Burgesses.

Mercer was well and widely known in Frederick County. On his military service and his duties as Assistant Deputy Quartermaster-General he had ridden into probably every section of the county. He now probably retraced his earlier trips. Possibly March and April were spent in such action. According to Freeman's Washington (III, 62), "George Mercer canvassing actively, had spent [before the election of May 18, 1760] approximately £ 50 on account of his fellow candidate." He adds, "Washington repaid him in cash on the day after the election" (Washington's Ledger A, folio 40). Here, George Mercer met with success rather than frustration. His father, John Mercer, evidently was in Winchester on election day for he mentions the outcome in his ledger. For the time Washington, Mercer and James Wood, founder of Winchester and clerk of the court of the county, were the three powerful political figures in Frederick County.

It is claimed that Lieutenant Colonel George Mercer was given a colonelcy in July 176179 but where and why is not apparent. George Mercer himself stated his situation in a letter to Bouquet July 25, 1761, as follows: "Since I left Phila. I have been up and down so often in the World, frequently sick, indeed seldom well, out of Spirits, fretting and Confused, that I never had an Opportunity of writing you and I really am now so much indisposed, that had I not some Business of Consequence I should not have troubled you." At the end, he wrote, "do Me your Friend the Favor to Write Me as soon as possible to Philadelphia for which place I set off next week." 80

79 Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LX, 411.
80 B. P., 21,647, folio 72, A.L.S.
About two weeks later, in his letter of August 9, 1761 to Bouquet he said, "My Ill state of Health, has kept Me here longer than I intended, but tomorrow I certainly set off for Phila. where I shall be glad to receive your Commands." 81 Without giving the reasons, Mercer reported that he expected to continue the trip from Philadelphia to New York, Halifax and Louisburg. No mention by him of such a trip to Louisburg appears in any of his correspondence. It is faintly possible that like others, he thought a sea voyage would be beneficial to his health. But probably the projected trip was in connection with a claim of £ 1,100 by John Mercer against one Samuel Wroughton, who had lived at Marlborough as a guest for three years, and finally made arrangements to pay £ 300 on account, but had kept possession of it, and departed clandestinely for Louisburg, leaving behind £ 800 of debt which had to be paid by his host, a claim presented to General Amherst by John Mercer, August 1, 1769, in a letter carried to New York by George Mercer. 82

Colonel George Mercer, as he was thereafter called, does not re-appear in public notice, nor in private correspondence, until January 1762, when he was again in Virginia at Williamsburg in the session of the Assembly as a burgess from Frederick County. 83 On the adjournment of the Assembly, he departed, carrying a letter of Governor Fauquier, of March 12, 1762, to Colonel Bouquet then in Pittsburgh. 84 On May 17, 1762, from Winchester, Colonel Mercer wrote Bouquet, "The Governor delivered me the Letter for you some Time-since, and I should have dispatched it immediately, but I believe it is now almost a month since I left Williamsburg." 85 His excuse was that he had been ill with ague and fever (malaria). He also said he was again just setting off for Philadelphia and expected to be there six weeks. And that is what he did. Writing to Colonel Bouquet, May 28, 1762, James Livingston said, "Colo Mercer is gone to Philada for Cloathing for the Regiment, with Orders for 6 s / Sterlg pr. yard for the private men." 86 He seems to have been back in military life. And Colonel Mercer himself says he was not present at the meeting of the Potomac Company in Frederick, Maryland, in May 1762 though he was "one of the two treasurers appointed, the other one

81 Ibid., folio 73, A.L.S.
82 P.R.O. W.O. 34: 44.
83 Journal of the House of Burgesses, 1762, 41-42.
84 B. P., 21,648, folio 160, A.L.S.
85 Ibid., folio 181, A.L.S.
86 Ibid., folio 181.
being a Marylander,” and was greatly interested in the navigation of the Potomac.

Bachelorhood as against matrimony was a matter of discussion in three or more letters of George Mercer to Henry Bouquet. Mercer did not praise the role of a bachelor except in relation to marriage as the alternative, one which he considered a gamble, particularly in the matter of congeniality. In two letters he uses the ambiguous word “Rambling” as descriptive of his bachelorhood. The first letter was written May 17, 1762, where he speaks of “roving and rambling through the world for these eight Months past.”

On June 12, 1762, from Philadelphia, he wrote a long letter to Bouquet, then at Pittsburgh. Apology was made for neglect in not writing for some time and he acknowledged the justification of a scolding which Bouquet had indulged in. Matrimony is discussed at length and with a frankness which, as Mercer said, could be exercised only between confident friends. One sentence says, “I am greatly pleased to find my Resolution of quitting the military life approved of by so good a Judge, and more especially as I think it the first necessary step towards what you so strongly recommend on another occasion leaving off rambling and becoming a Man of serious Character, if any thing could effect such a change.” No comment on this is called for, but it can be seen that Bouquet was a wise man as well as a good friend and that George Mercer had self-acknowledged shortcomings and weaknesses, which in turn may have been responsible for some of the frustrations of his life.

From Philadelphia in late June, Colonel Mercer went to New York to settle more Virginia accounts with General Amherst. On his return to Philadelphia he wrote Bouquet, August 12, 1762. “I went to New York,” he said. “I made a five weeks Trip of it and am now just returned.” For the third time he launched into a discussion of women and of married life. He must have seen many unhappy marriages and families. Like George Bernard Shaw two centuries later, he looked upon matrimony as an “irrational knot.” “I have,” he wrote, “seen so many Devils after the Ceremony.” But he thought also of other matters such as his “Plantation in Virginia on Shenandoah River” where grass was abundant and where, after the manner of his

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87 Rowland, Mason, I, 189.
88 See Mercer to Bouquet, August 12, 1762, B. P., 21,648, folio 307, A.L.S.
89 Ibid., folio 168, A.L.S.
90 Ibid., folio 213, A.L.S.
91 Ibid., folio 307, A.L.S.
father, he was engaged in the breeding of pure blood horses. An invitation was extended to Bouquet who had a large estate in nearby Maryland, to send his mares to Mercer's plantation for breeding with his blooded stallions.

In regard to Philadelphia, Bouquet said "The News of the Place" was "so trifling" as to be unworthy of mention. "One half of it," he wrote, "is scandal and the rest Family Affairs." He announced, "I set out this very day for Virginia." 92

Information about Colonel Mercer in late August and throughout September 1762 has not been found. In early October he was at "Ourry Park," probably a place in the Allegheny Mountains, near Fort Bedford. A surviving fragment of his letter of October 6, 1762, from "Ourry Park" mentions the King's horses, lost, strayed or stolen but recoverable. Many of them, he thought, were in Frederick County, Virginia, and, in his opinion, could be recovered by offering rewards for their recovery. 93

A deed to Benjamin Hart for 973 acres at the price of £ 200, made in Loudoun County, November 7, 1762, by John Hough as attorney-in-fact for John Mercer . . . George Mercer . . . and James Mercer concerns George Mercer, in that he probably got £ 50 as his half of a moiety of "All that Tract" on Limestone Run.

In November 1762 George Mercer was at the Assembly in Williamsburg as a burgess from Frederick County. His brother James Mercer who owned two properties at Bath (later Berkeley Springs) was present as a burgess from recently established Hampshire County. 94

While in Williamsburg, George Mercer presented a personal petition (not found) "praying that he may be allowed some satisfaction for the Trouble he was at, and the Expenses he incurred, in attending the Commissioners appointed by his Excellency Sir Jeffry Amherst at New York for settling the Accounts of the Expenses of this Colony for the Campaign of the year 1760." 95 It was "Resolved, That the Petition . . . is reasonable and that he ought to be allowed the Sum of £ 500 for his Services." The Council agreed 96 and the Governor

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., folio 391, A.L.S. Ourry Park may have been a fanciful name for the General's House (or Commandant's House) above the fort. This house was occupied by Ourry for about five years. Ourry had a land warrant for 200 acres on Clarks Run but it was never surveyed nor patented.
94 Journal of the House of Burgesses, 63; 148; 152; 154; 160; 162.
95 Ibid., 139.
96 Ibid., 146.
signed the act December 23, 1762.\(^\text{97}\) This was highly generous treatment. Here again Mercer was successful and not frustrated. He now had a nice sum of available money. There were many possible uses for it.

What followed is best stated by Mercer in a letter of January 9, 1763, to his friend, Colonel Bouquet. “Your Favour of 26th October was near two months Travelling to me at Williamsburg and our Session of Assembly was as tedium; at last We go a Holy Day on the 24th Decr. just time enough for me to ride to Westover to take my Christmas Dinner. Here I have remained ever since.”\(^\text{98}\) He was now a guest of his old Second Virginia Regiment Colonel, William Byrd III. It was a lively social experience. Among the other guests at Westover was the sister of Mrs. William Byrd, Anne Willing of Philadelphia, the object of devotion of Colonel Bouquet. This item alone indicates that Colonel Mercer when in Philadelphia enjoyed association with the cream of its social circles. In this letter, Mercer said, “I expect to be home in a Fortnight” and that he would be in Fredericksburg in Virginia, which he claimed as the place of his “abode.”\(^\text{99}\)

But on January 30, 1763, he was still a guest at Westover as is seen in his letter of that date to Colonel Bouquet, a letter in which he comments upon the Westover Christmas party and makes a notable statement about Virginia friendliness and hospitality, really about life in planter circles with which he was highly familiar. But “In Virginia Sir,” he added, “We have Christmas always, at least there is generally good Cheer a hearty Welcome and indifferent Company to be met with.”\(^\text{100}\)

Presumably George Mercer in early February 1763 was in Fredericksburg and probably at times at Marlborough and at Gunston Hall in conferences with James Mercer, John Mercer, George Mason and other regional members of the Ohio Company. He was not yet clear of contracts connected with past military campaigns,\(^\text{101}\) but he was most concerned with the possibility of promoting the welfare of the Ohio Company around Wills Creek, Maryland, and across the Potomac in Virginia. The leaders of the Ohio Company, probably

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 160.  
\(^{98}\) B. P., 21,649, f. 13, A.L.S.  
\(^{99}\) Ibid., f. 38, A.L.S.  
\(^{100}\) Ibid.  
\(^{101}\) Bouquet to General Robert Monckton, February 12, 1763, B. P., 21,634, f. 206 df.
after a discussion with George Mercer about the situation on the Monongahela and on the Upper Potomac, decided to realize something from their property near Wills Creek. By the Articles of Agreement of May 23, 1751, the Committee of the Ohio Company had executive power to act. A notice, unusually elaborate, of a meeting of the Ohio Company was drawn up and submitted to the newspapers for publication. It appeared in the *Maryland Gazette*, Annapolis, Maryland, February 17, 1763, and in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 24, 1763, exactly one week later, all “By Order of the Committee of the Ohio Company.” The meeting was called for “Tuesday the First of March . . .”

Not so clearly explicable, there appeared in the newspapers, with the above notice a lengthy advertisement of the Sale of Ohio Company “Lots for a Town at Fort Cumberland” and for the sale of the New Store land and buildings just across the Potomac from the mouth of Wills Creek. The sale was advertised to take place on Friday, April 15, 1763. And this advertisement is signed by George Mercer, not by the Committee of the Ohio Company. The details in the advertisement belong in the history of the Ohio Company rather than in the biography of George Mercer.

What was proposed in early February was approved in an official “Meeting of a Committee of the Ohio Company at Stafford Court house on Wednesday the 2d day of March 1763.” George Mercer was probably present on this occasion. The end of the resolution to sell the Lots states, “. . . George Mason is hereby impowered and required to execute Deeds and Leases as above mentioned to the persons purchasing and taking up the said Lotts or that he make a power of Attorney into Colo. George Mercer to execute and acknowledge the said Deeds and Leases in his name and that John Mercer Esq. be requested to draw up a Form for the said Deeds and Leases and power of Attorney according to the above mentioned Terms.”

It is probable that George Mercer hurried to Wills Creek to survey or lay out the lots as mentioned in the advertisement of February 17, 1763, and now enjoined in the resolution of March 2, 1763. It is virtually certain that he did not remain near Marlborough and Gunston Hall until John Mercer had drawn up the Form for the said Deeds and Leases and Power of Attorney and George Mason had signed the Power of Attorney, which was signed and recorded in the

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102 *The Ohio Company, Its Inner History*, by Alfred P. James, 205-219.
103 G. M. P., 181-82.
last week of March. It is reasonable to suppose that he left for Wills Creek, or Fort Cumberland about March 5, 1763, and reached his destination early in the second week of the month; that he made shortly his rough survey notes known as the Field Notes for the Charlottesburg Survey and made preparations for the sale announced for April 15, 1763. He bade fair to become the founder of Cumberland, Maryland, a quarter of a century before this role fell to Thomas Beall, son of Samuel. But another frustration of his career arose. Though largely in ruins and almost abandoned, Fort Cumberland was of military importance in case of a violent Indian uprising, of which vague rumors were circulating among Indian traders and at distant military posts. Rumors that the military authorities would probably re-occupy the area and seize any houses found there stopped the prospects of any sale on April 15, 1763. As George Mercer expressed it in the printed Case, p. 29, "the company . . . sent one of their members from Virginia, to the commander in chief of the kings forces at New York, on purpose to obtain his leave to build a town on their own lands." 104 There is little, if any, doubt that the emissary was George Mercer. The fact that he did not name himself as such can be attributed to the modesty required in such a document. The fact that he underlined the statement may well indicate that it was a personal revelation which greatly affected him. It is worth notice, that if this be correct, George Mercer claims to have been, in 1763, a member of the Ohio Company, possibly as a result of his father's deed of November 1759.

From Fort Cumberland to Philadelphia was more than two hundred miles. If George Mercer returned to the lower Potomac for discussion and instructions, the distance was more nearly two hundred and fifty miles. It was a week's trip by horseback. On or before March 28, 1763, he was in Philadelphia, for a letter of Bouquet to Amherst March 28, 1763 is endorsed "To Sir Jeffery Amherst, 27th March 1763 by Coll. Geo. Mercer." 105 Probably a conference with Bouquet in Philadelphia was a matter of a day or two. Mercer, therefore, must have left Fort Cumberland not later than March 18, 1763, after a stay there of about two weeks. From Philadelphia, Mercer went on to New York which he reached on or before March 31, 1763. On March 31, 1763, Captain Gavin Cochrane, writing from New York, to Colonel Bouquet, remarked, "I happened to be with Coll. Robertson when I had the pleasure of yours by Colonel Mercer, and showed it to

104 The Case, in reduced facsimile, in G. M. P. as Part II.
105 B. P., 21,634, f. 220 Df.
him," 106 and General Amherst, writing to Colonel Bouquet April 3, 1763, from New York, said, "Colonel Mercer Arrived here a few days ago, and Delivered me Your Letter of the 27th March." 107 In the printed Case of 1770, George Mercer described the interview with Amherst, who refused his assent to the subdivision of the lands. This refusal of Amherst was an injury to the interests of the Ohio Company and another frustration of the career of George Mercer who, if not so unfortunately rebuffed in this project, might have spent many profitable years, financial and otherwise, in real estate operations along Wills Creek and the upper Potomac.

According to his own account,108 George Mercer returned to Fort Cumberland and on April 15, 1763, met the would-be purchasers of lots, reported the decision of General Amherst and its acceptance, for the time being, by the Ohio Company and called off the sale while forbidding any occupation or settlement of the Company’s land.

In the meantime, while Colonel Mercer was in Philadelphia, George Mason signed the Power of Attorney to George Mercer, and had it recorded at Frederick County Courthouse, Frederick, Maryland, March 29, 1763.109 Probably written by John Mercer, though the original in his inimitable handwriting has not been found, the document on record reiterates ideas and plans already advertised February 17, 1763, and outlined in the Ohio Company resolution of March 2, 1763. Since the power of attorney assigned to George Mercer was abortive, it has the historical value only of a factuality and of a testimony to confidence at the time in the ability and integrity of Mercer. It may therefore be merely mentioned.

Colonel Mercer evidently left Fort Cumberland in April. He probably stopped for a few days at Winchester and at his plantation on the Shenandoah in the morning shadow of the Blue Ridge. In May he was in Williamsburg as one of the Burgesses from Frederick County.110 While he was in Williamsburg, Abraham Traxell, a Pennsylvania German and probably a tenant on Bouquet’s Maryland lands, wrote Bouquet, June 13, 1763, from “Long Meadow” that he had sent the best mares to Colonel Mercer’s place where they would be permitted to remain until ready and fit for work.111

106 Ibid., 21,649, f. 101, A.L.S.
107 Ibid., 21,634, f. 244 L.S.
108 Case, loc. cit., 29.
111 B. P., 21,649, f. 163, A.L.S.
On June 16, 1763, there was published in the *Maryland Gazette* another notice of a Meeting of the Ohio Company, this one to be held at Stafford Courthouse on Monday, July 4, 1763. Somewhat remarkably, under the circumstances, this newspaper issue of June 16, 1763, contains another long, somewhat revised, advertisement of the sale of the Ohio Company property on Wills Creek and at the New Store settlement, a matter so abortive as to receive little or no attention in the records of the time. In fact, as eventualities were to reveal, the Ohio Company had decided upon a different policy. It would appeal again as of old to the authorities in London, to the King in Council.

As early as 1759, George Mercer had considered a trip to Europe, though his motivation is nowhere revealed. He may have been thinking of military bounties promised by Governor Dinwiddie. He may have hoped to secure confirmation to the Ohio Company of the old lands of the Company along the lower Monongahela, now cleared of the enemy in late 1759. He may have hoped for preferment as an imperial colonial official and he may have wished to travel abroad and see the old world as so many of his fellow colonial aristocrats were in the habit of doing. After his rebuff by Amherst in April 1763 and the frustration of his real estate plans along the upper Potomac, he determined, it seems, to go to Europe. His plans antedate the meeting of the Ohio Company at Stafford Courthouse July 4, 1763. He evidently submitted a memorial to the Governor and Council of Virginia, for in Document B, Rockingham Papers is found much biographical data best revealed in its original format of June 16, 1763:

Upon Consideration of a Memorial of George Mercer Esqr. produced and read this day in Council, setting forth that he has been long engaged in the Service and Defense of this Colony and is now determined upon going to Europe to sollicit his Majesty for some Employment, and requesting such Recommendation from this Board as they shall think him deserving of.

We the Lieutenant-Governor, and Council do, with the highest satisfaction and the most religious regard to Truth, hereby testify that the said George Mercer has for many years served in the Troops of this Colony, was Lieutenant Colonel of a Regiment, and always beloved as a brave active and Gallant Officer — That he has often been employed by the Government in many important Services, and has ever discharged the Trusts reposed in him with the greatest Expedition, Exactness and Fidelity: That his Conduct in every Station and upon all occasions as well in a private as public capacity has been such we have observed with Pleasure and can commend with Justice.

112 *Letters to G. W.*, III, 158-63.
113 Printed in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LX, 410.
A letter of the Committee of Correspondence of Virginia to Edward Montague, June 17, 1763, is of similar character and purport. It said, "Colo Mercer who will deliver you this, was one of those Officers, being at first appointed a Captain. But as he distinguished himself by his Gallant Behaviour, was promoted to the Rank of a Lieutenant Colonel, in which office he gained universal Applause. This Gent. goes home to endeav. to be in some manner rewarded for his faithful services and you are desired to introduce him properly and influence in his Fav. Besides, this our Recommendation, we doubt not but his Conduct and Behavior will be such as to entitle him to your Fav. and Protection." 114

However skeptical one may be about the validity and value, in general, of testimonials, it is, in the light of the independent origins of these statements, impossible to conceive of more favorable statements about anyone. Colonel George Mercer was, at the age of thirty, in good military, social and political standing in Virginia in the middle of June 1763. His several frustrations of the previous decade had not yet produced anything resembling total or complete external frustration.

With such public approval and with such preliminary activity on his own part, it was natural that George Mercer was selected and appointed as the member to represent the Ohio Company at London in the near future. At the meeting of July 4, 1763, there was introduced a petition to be presented to the King. Probably prepared earlier by John Mercer and approved by Philip Ludwell Lee and Thomas Ludwell Lee, members of the Committee, it was signed by them and four additional members of the Company. 115

An interesting and somewhat personal document of the meeting was the holograph George Mercer item, saying, "The members present approve of the Terms recommended by their Committee at their last Meeting proposed by Colo. George Mercer to sollicit their Grant in England; and agree that their Treasurer do give Credit to Messrs. Hanbury's Account with the Company, for the Amount of Mr. Samuel Smith's Share of the Company's Lands and Stock and close Mr. Smith's Account in the Company's Books by Credit for the same." 116 The nine members present signed this document. But in addition to this item, it was "Resolved that the Company will upon

114 Ibid., 350.
116 N.Y.P.L. Emmet MS, 13417.
the very first Notice from Colo Mercer reimburse and repay him any Sums of money which he shall judge necessary to expend in order to obtain a Grant for the Ohio Company on the terms they have now Petitioned for provided the Sum does not exceed two thousand pounds sterling in the whole, including any money that may be advanced or raised by Charlton Palmer Esqr. on this Accot.” Certainly an indication of confidence in his procedure, this resolution was, nevertheless, only a limited carte blanche in finances. Anything different financially would have been poor business. The confidence is well expressed in the text of the Ohio Company’s Appointment and Instructions to George Mercer, the first paragraph of which is: “Sir From our Knowledge of you, We trusting in your Skill, abilities and Address, do as members of the Ohio Company, impower you to sollicit for that Company according to the following Instructions.”

The instructions were “to proceed as soon as convenient to London,” to consult Dinwiddie and the Hanburys, to act jointly with Charlton Palmer in the presentation of the petition, to wait upon Lord Halifax asking his patronage, to write the Company frequently and to settle “the Company’s Account with Messrs. Hanbury, and use few Words but say them often.”

Several items in the Instructions require specific attention. One mentions the Petition “which you now have with you.” Another mentions “our state Case which Mr. Palmer has.” Yet another speaks of “the Papers you have with you” (possibly copies of official records).

The last paragraph sagely remarked, “We doubt not of your Oconomy in the Expences, and of your Dispatch in returning to Us . . .” On these points there may have been no doubt in the minds of fellow members and friends in 1763, but on the basis of eventualities these ideas were later to be far short of realization.

Evidently Colonel Mercer did not sail immediately for England, though he left Marlborough July 6, 1763. Governor Fauquier wrote to the Board of Trade, July 8, 1763, in the letter referred to Mercer as an authority on Indian matters, and sent the letter to England by Mercer. The new London agent of the Ohio Company remarks in the Case, of 1770 (p. 31), “Their agent arrived in London in September 1763.”

Thus came about a profound and critical change in the career of

117 G. M. P., 182 and also 296.
118 Ibid., 182-83.
119 John Mercer’s Ledger, Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pennsylvania.
George Mercer. What he might have accomplished if he had remained in Virginia is a matter of interesting speculation. He might have later received military promotion such as came to Washington, Hugh Mercer, William Weedon, William W. Woodward, Henry Lee, Daniel Morgan and other friends and neighbors of Colonel George Mercer. He might have gone far in politics and become a governor as did his younger half-brother, John Francis Mercer. He might have grown in wealth and power with the expanding western frontier of Virginia and Kentucky. But he turned away from these possibilities and with exception of about three months in the autumn of 1765, spent the rest of his life in Europe.

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