In the years between 1750 and 1783 the old conflict of interests and ideologies within the so-called British Empire became in one generation so acute as to produce fission and warfare. There were naturally serious emotional conflicts in the case of individuals. The issue was imperialism versus regionalism or what soon became nationalism. Tradition, legalism, constitutionalism, interests, rights and other things became a matter of emotional conflict. There is, from somewhat scanty data, evidence of such conflict or conflicts in the case of George Mercer.

In remarkably concise yet highly comprehensive statement, George Mercer said he, on his arrival in London, "immediately waited on the secretary of state with this memorial, which he told him he would inform his majesty of, and that he should be commanded to attend with it, whenever his majesty would be pleased to receive it; but no orders were ever sent him on the subject: and on the 7th of October following his majesty was pleased to issue his royal proclamation, forbidding any grants or settlements to the westward of the Allegheny mountains." 120 Thus here at the very beginning of his solicitation or agency in London, he ran headlong into a serious frustration, one which was more ominous than he could have anticipated. It would seem to many that the circumstances mentioned when added to the bad situation of John Mercer's finances, the losses and failures of the Ohio Company and the terms and words of his instructions should have led George Mercer to return to Virginia in October 1763. In his own words, "This proclamation being a total bar for the present to the company's design, their agent [George Mercer] hoping it was only intended to remedy some temporary inconveniences, which would of themselves be immediately removed, thought it advisable to wait that event, and therefore took no farther steps till the year 1765." 121

120 The Case, loc. cit., 31.
121 Ibid., 31.
Written several years after 1763 this statement seems to be tinged with both sincere truth and neat apology.

There have been located by the writer of this sketch, only two letters of George Mercer which were written in the first twelve months of his stay in Europe. One of these, to Captain Thomas Rutherford of Winchester, Virginia, was written October 28, 1763. While somewhat reasonably it says nothing about his role in Ohio Company business, it embraces some military matters, some regional items and gossipy information about himself, his work and London society and politics.  

A much more extended and confidential letter to his brother, March 11, 1764, has been found in the Kentucky Collection of the Western State College, Bowling Green, Kentucky, a letter which may have been left behind in Kentucky by Charles Fenton Mercer who once resided for some years at Carrollton, Kentucky. This rambling letter about himself and London politics and society furnishes the best information available on George Mercer in London in his first year of residence there. In it he mentions the “Great Difficulties I have met with already” and the “Delays the Ohio Company oblige me to make by not sending me the proper Papers.” He pronounced that “Nothing shall engage me to take a Winter’s Passage, they are both dangerous and disagreeable.” His most descriptive statement about his agency was that “During the Session of Parliament the Great ones will meddle with Nothing but Parliamentary Matters: so soon as it rises, they go into the Country for a Recess, and in Summer ’tis known little Business is ever done, so that I think the month of October seems already pointed out to me as the soonest they’ll think of my Affairs.”

In this letter he also mentions “two Packets from My Father and you” but says, “I have not received a Letter from a man in Virginia out of our Family, my Father and yourself meaning, except from Mr. Yates recommending me to his Mother . . .”

Among more personal matters Colonel Mercer said he was negotiating for a brewer for his father, that he had shipped a “Groce of Bottles, two pair of large millstones, iron work and Boulting Cloths” for his mill in Frederick County, a pair of small millstones for the mill on Little River, and two fine young rams, one for his own plantation and the other to be kept at Marlborough. London he

claimed to dislike, saying, "... London — the Lord send me safe out of it I say."

London merchants he pronounced the "most conceited, upstart, impertinent Fellows I ever saw." With Samuel Athawes he got into a quarrel about Virginia financial legislation, calling him a liar for denouncing the legislators as thieves. At this date, Mercer could say, "Messrs. Hanbury . . ." have been "tolerably civil to me." Athawes was sharply criticized for delaying many weeks packets sent George Mercer by John Mercer in October 1763 and James Mercer in November 1763. Future mail he wanted sent to Wm. Hunter of London.

The life of George Mercer in London is at least partly revealed. He follows another statement, "... upon my Honour no poor Wretch was ever tired of Captivity more than I am of London," with the additional data, "... I have been obliged to attend here all this Time, without pleasing or even amusing myself, or doing any one else any Kind of Service I sit at Home and read all Day, at Night I shut the Book and go to Bed, as I own twice is as much as ever I choose to see a play and some have pleased a Number, and been continued for 40 or 50 Nights together."

As a mercantile center, Colonel Mercer preferred Bristol to London. As a place of residence he preferred Bath. "I passed my Time tolerably at Bath where I continued upwards of two months, but here it hangs heavy on my Hands." About London he wrote, "... I believe too it is the dearest place in the whole World: I can not even sit at Home under a Guinea a Day, and if you go and keep Company 5 or 6 [guineas] sometimes are melted." Enclosing a bill for a dinner, he stated it cost three friends 16 guineas, his share of which he escaped by being indisposed and absent.

After a brief discussion of tobacco shipments and prices Colonel Mercer took up the matter of old military accounts. He sharply condemns Colonel Lewis (presumably Fielding Lewis) for protesting George Mercer's order in favor of Dr. Sutherland, saying of Lewis, he "must have imbibed from Contact some W—sh— Principles." Mercer claimed he had been forced to meet payments from "the very money too for which I gave Dr. Walker my bond and you know I pay interest for."

A long paragraph deals with the relations of Colonel Mercer and George Washington. The pronouns are so indefinite as to produce uncertainty. Mercer claimed he had trouble about settlements for a
period of eight years. The last sentence is both striking and revealing. "The Services I was of to Col. Washington the Country in some measure rewarded me for — though he might have afforded to have done it himself out of his Allowance and the Reputation he obtained by it — but thank God, I have done with him, and if he will pay off the Account, I am sure I never desire to deal with him again." In this matter one may find a partial explanation of George Mercer's failure to return to America on the outbreak of war in 1775.

In the latter half of the letter, he mentions his mills, saying, "I expect they will clear me a good Income when they are finished." He claims to have initiated legislation in England providing bounties of importance for hemp; and to have pressed the Board of Trade for the free importation from Portugal of salt for colonial cattle.

A short paragraph says, "As I hope and expect so much to be at Home this Fall, . . . Let me beg you in the mean Time to make me all the Remittances my Estate will afford, as there is no breathing here, scarce without Money," a significant request in that the writer at this date, in early 1764, says nothing about claims on members of the Ohio Company.

Referring probably to lands in Fairfax County, tracts held in common by George and James Mercer, he wrote, "I am glad Carlyle and you did not conclude the Bargain about the Land as it certainly must be worth more than £ 415 — but whatever you do I shall approve of in every particular."

Domestic matters are found in a short paragraph in which he first felicitates James Mercer on his marriage, saying, "I give you Joy on commencing Housekeeper, and hope you may always be as well pleased with it, as you appear to be at present," then says, "I am much obliged to you for your kind offer, and think it is probable, I may billet myself upon you when I come over," a statement indicating that George Mercer had no residence of his own, in Fredericksburg.

The third item is on the familiar theme of marriage, saying, ".. . I have not the least Suspicion of importing a Female with me, as I have conceived a greater Aversion if possible than ever to Matrimony since I came to England." A long paragraph deals with American colonial boys sent to school in England but there neglected alike by the merchants who placed them and by the schools in which they were placed.

Some attention is then given to some personal property left behind in Virginia, some of it "Leather Stocks" and "Bottles of per-
fume, jars of raisins and almonds, boxes of candles and 100 lb. of Chocolate." More important, "Also were left there, I mean at Colo Lewis' house my property a Mahogany Desk and Book Case, and a Set of Steel Springs for a Chariot, these last Articles (the Steel Springs) I desire may be sent me here," this last an interesting request in the light of his proposed early return to Virginia.

London weather, a perennial topic of travellers, is roundly condemned in the statement, "I intend over to Ireland as soon as the Weather is settled, if ever it will, to see my Aunts. There never was such a Season known to me I assure you — on my Honor the Sun has not shone two Days together since I have been in England and it rained above two months without a single hour of clear Weather the Whole Time."

"With Compliments and greetings to all Friends" he wanted them assured that he was well.

Of George Mercer's activities and life from March 1764 to April 1765 little is definitely revealed by documents available. He had written that he was going to Ireland and he may have gone there in 1764 and spent the winter there. In his several memorials of later years he claimed he was in Ireland when the Stamp Act was under consideration by the ministry and parliament. But that he had returned to London before April 4, 1765, is revealed in his letter of that date to Benjamin Franklin about answers to queries sent from the Stamp Office to him and to Franklin, and asking permission to peruse Franklin's answers to the queries and somewhat strangely pleading his own incapability and professing his ignorance about answers to the queries. At the time Mercer's address was Poland Street No. 9. In a later memorial Colonel Mercer claimed he was in London, acting in connection with the production of stamps, from April 6 to September 1765.

But meanwhile, he was not unmindful of his position as agent of the Ohio Company, and contemporary with his attention to stamps, he was alert about his regular responsibility. As he himself stated the matter, "... being informed that several families in Virginia within the limits described by that proclamation [of October 7, 1763], who had been in actual possession, obtained grants, paid quit rents, and every demand of government for several years, had petitioned the general assembly to represent their case to his majesty, as being under

that proclamation, deprived of their property, he judged it proper to present the following humble memorial, as well as that which the company had sent over with him in 1763 to his majesty.”

Though based, possibly, on documents in his possession, this memorial of George Mercer of June 21, 1765, was his own work buttressed as it was by his own knowledge and experience.

In the first paragraph the memorialist introduced the imperial problem of possession of the interior of North America and relations with the Indians. As printed in the Case, of 1770, (pp. 32-33), the paragraphs carry marginal annotations. Among these are found the following: “Ohio Company raise a stock”; “Apply to the king for a grant of land”; “Bounds within which the company pray to take land”; “To settle 100 families in seven years, and erect a fort”; “Lord’s report, Feb. 23, 1748-9”; “16 March, 1748-9”; [Instruction to grant], “above 10,000 [spent]”; “Obstructions from the French forces”; “1,350,000 acres granted” [to rival companies]; “Fort begun by the company, destroyed by the French,” etc.

In a later paragraph he mentioned his mission and the acceptance of any royal decision. Then in a final petition he “Prays that instructions to the governor may be renewed or that it may be recommended to parliament to reimburse them their expenses or that lands may be given them in some other part of America.”

This memorial of George Mercer, though based on the Company Memorial of July 4, 1763, and possibly influenced by Charlton Palmer and others, shows that George Mercer was willing to do something more than merely hand in papers of others and solicit their reception and fulfilment.

Another frustration was in store for Colonel Mercer. As he put it, “These memorials his majesty in council, 21st of June, 1765, was graciously pleased to refer to the right honourable the Lords for trade and plantations, with directions to report what might be advisable to be done thereupon; and their lordships, for reasons assigned, did not take up the consideration of them till the year 1767 . . .”

This of course meant four years of frustrating delay and four years of equally troublesome expenses, little or none of which were met by the Ohio Company but fell mainly upon George Mercer.

After two years in London, George Mercer should have realized that the frustrations of Fort Necessity, 1754, Braddock’s campaign,
1755, and the subdivision of lands of 1763 were simple and clear, compared with the intricacies and whirlpools of British politics. But such was seemingly not the case. In 1765 he became involved in the most notorious and probably the dominant frustration of his life and career.

In 1764 a new British imperial policy was put forward. The customs service was reinvigorated, new revenue acts were passed and a stamp act was projected, but delayed in enactment for about twelve months. Then on March 22, 1765, the famous Stamp Act was approved by Parliament and assented to by the King. News of the passing of the Act reached America in a few weeks. With the opposition to the Stamp Act all students of American history are familiar. But with the course of events in London they are less so. George Grenville doggedly went ahead with the program, which to him and most residents of England seemed reasonable. But as a conciliatory matter, he proposed to appoint colonials as stamp distributors and asked the colonial agents at London to nominate candidates. It has long been known, or at least suspected, that the Franklins of Philadelphia and the Lees of Stratford Hall were trapped by such enticement. More direct information is that of Jared Ingersoll of Connecticut. In a newspaper item of September 1765, he reported, "There happened but three instances of persons then on the spot belonging to the old Continent Colonies to whom ye offer was made, who were in a Condition to accept it personally. These were Colo Mercer from Virginia and Mr. Massarve, Son of ye late Coll Massarve from New Hampshire, who happened accidentally in London at that time on business of their own and myself." 126 The names of the stamp distributors were announced in London in early August. George Mercer, in a memorial of April 11, 1766, said, "my Commission was made out on the 2d of August." 127 He may have been, as he said later in Williamsburg, absent from London on a trip to Ireland at the time of the passage of the Act, but he did accept the position of stamp distributor and, by his own statement a decade later, was promised it as early as April 6, 1765. No explanation by him of his reasons is very specific. He probably thought the Act was constitutional and the position of stamp distributor one of honorable governmental service. Probably he thought this service to the Ministry and the King might result in more favorable consideration of the interests and rights of the Ohio Com-

126 Papers of the New Haven Historical Society, IX, 331-334.
127 Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LX, 412.
pany. And he was in need of money and personal income, a matter mentioned by his father in 1768.\textsuperscript{128} Probably if it had not been for his financial distress he might have escaped this trap and much of the later frustration of his life. From his portrait and from remarks of his friends, one may suspect that George Mercer was somewhat naive.

George Mercer sailed from England, September 12, 1765, on board the \textit{Leeds}, bringing with him stamps for Virginia and also for Maryland and North Carolina.\textsuperscript{129} He arrived in Virginia October 29, 1765, and reached Williamsburg the following evening. He probably did not fully realize that the Stamp Act had aroused a fury which had spread throughout the colony, since Patrick Henry’s resolutions of late May. The events of the next twenty-four hours were the dramatic crisis of his life. The old army officer was not intimidated by the crowd which came to his quarters asking him to resign. He promised to consider the problem and make a later reply. He recognized the crowd as representative of the society of the region and the time. His situation, however, was probably more unfortunate than critical.

As revealed in contemporary accounts, notably in the newspapers of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, his behavior under the circumstances was not unworthy. And the behavior of Governor Francis Fauquier was equally worthy and highly honorable. The governor’s position was in the balance. He joined Colonel Mercer in facing the crowd. His duty was to promote the enforcement of the Act as well as to maintain order and peace. But Colonel Mercer, while maintaining the rectitude of his position and behavior, recognized the strength of popular opposition and in a declaration or address to the crowd, in a genteel manner declined “to act in an office so odious to his country.”\textsuperscript{130}

In the confusion and uproar, several discrepancies of statement and fact are recorded. In his memorial of April 11, 1766, Mercer stated, “I embarked seven Days from my Arrival in America.”\textsuperscript{131} But elsewhere he says he sailed on November 28, 1765, a full month after his arrival. He may have meant that he left Williamsburg probably by boat, for Annapolis and a northern seaport. Governor Fauquier had Colonel Mercer before himself in Council and, in a Certificate,

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{G.M.P.}, 209.
\textsuperscript{129} Memorial of April 11, 1766, \textit{Va. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.}, LX, 412.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Pennsylvania Mag. of Hist. and Biog.}, II, 299-302.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Va. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.}, LX, 412.
said Colonel Mercer "declared before me in Council that he did not bring with him, or was ever charged by the Commissioners of Customs in England with the care of any Stamps," while all the time the stamps were on shipboard off the shore. Colonel Mercer himself later said his action was motivated by a desire to conceal the location of the stamps and thus prevent their destruction. By the action of both Colonel Mercer and Governor Fauquier the stamps were removed from the Leeds and "lodged . . . for Safety, with Captain Stirling on board the Rainbow." Mercer in his letter of November 10, 1765, to Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland stated flatly, "I had the Stamps for three Provinces in Charge, and dared not let any one know where they were." Here one finds necessity as the mother of deception, possibly justifiable deception. The cherry tree story comes to one's mind.

From Williamsburg, George Mercer, eleven (not seven) days after his arrival, wrote November 10, 1765, to Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland. He mentions having seen Philip Sharpe, the Governor's brother, just before leaving London for Williamsburg; he discussed his trouble in Williamsburg; comments on the stamps on board the ship and intended for Maryland, and says, "I find myself under a Necessity of returning immediately to England." Yet George Mercer issued a Power of Attorney to his brother James Mercer to act in his behalf in regard to the safety and distribution of the stamps on board the Rainbow and endorsed it "Given at Williamsburgh, under my Hand and Seal, this 18th day of November 1765." According to his memorial of April 11, 1766, George Mercer left Virginia on November 28, 1765, four full weeks after his arrival. He did not go to Marlborough to visit with his father, who in 1768 wrote his son George, "But your Letter which, to my great surprise, informed me of your intentions of going to England, before I had an opportunity of one days conversation with you . . ." Posterity may well be equally surprised. The issue was settled the last of October. One wonders why in four full weeks he could not make a short trip to visit his old friends and his relatives. The reasons were probably psychic and emotional rather than a matter of filial impiety. Actually he had seen his father in Williamsburg on his arrival late in October. Yet another problem of his biography is why he returned to England.

By declining to carry on his work as distributor of stamps, he had regained the good will of the populace. His military career was unsullied. He held possession of several large tracts of land and additional pieces of real estate. By the gubernatorial proclamation of 1754 and the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763, he was entitled to many thousands of acres of military bounty land. He had remained a burgess for Frederick County even when staying abroad. Seemingly he had much to gain by remaining in Virginia. But his decision was otherwise. Prospects of a "Winter's Passage . . . both dangerous and disagreeable" did not, on this occasion, deter him. Sailing on November 28, 1765, he arrived in England at the end of the third week in January and appeared before a Committee of the House of Commons January 31, 1766, and February 12, 1766. An interesting historical statistic is found in his testimony that "The Scheme I had formed for distribution would have required 25 Distributors." Ten years later he put in an expense account for three clerks employed for a three year period. He must have projected more than a score of American assistant distributors.

"Why did you leave Virginia?" was a question asked him by the Committee. His answer was: "Findg. an opposition — The Govr. wod. not let me Resign and the people wod. not let me Execute it. I thot. it my Duty to return to inform the psons appointing me." 135 John Mercer, in January 1768, wrote his son, "I fully approved of your Resolution and Reasons" for going back to England. It is not difficult to sympathize with this sense of honor and duty. Like the soldier that he was, he had to make his report and render his account, however unfavorable it would seem to those whom he served. And there are indications that friends had bonded him for the stamps and he wished to save losses to them by explaining to the government what had happened. It is reasonable also to conjecture that his 1763 hopes of imperial employment and preferment may not have died out at this time.

To one familiar with the history of the Ohio Company as recently revealed by additional materials, it is obvious that he still hoped to get lands or recompense for the Company. The two memorials handed in June 21, 1765, were still before the Board of Trade and Plantations. No one could know what might happen, that yet another year would pass before any action would be taken. His future was a gamble. In a

sense he hung between two worlds, the world of the British Empire and the, as yet merely imaginative, world of nascent American nationalism. It would seem that he acted unwisely, that he gambled and lost. But politically his motives may have been beyond ethical reproach.

John Mercer, writing in January 1768, about the letter to him by George Mercer, November 1765, said it "assured me that you would not stay in England an hour longer than was necessary to justify your own conduct and Indemnify your Securities." This understanding was in vain. The available records indicate that George Mercer never again returned to America.

For three or more years, George Mercer in London was busy with Ohio Company matters. He seems also to have been emotionally involved with English women, one of whom he married in 1767 as will be mentioned later. He doubtless had a stable, for he "fell off" his horse, though fortunately without "ill consequences." And he probably felt himself, as he actually was in America, discredited by the stamp distribution episode. Regardless of his financial trouble, London with its faint hope of political preferment may have seemed to him better than a life of unpopularity in Virginia.

Probably George Mercer wrote to his brother James Mercer in February 1766, as indicated in an item in the Virginia Gazette, April 11, 1766, announcing a letter from George Mercer in the post office. He also wrote to his father March 27, 1766. On April 11, 1766, after the repeal of the Stamp Act, he put in an application to the Marquis of Rockingham whose government had ended an episode by the repeal. "The Memorial which Mercer submitted is now in the City Library at Sheffield, England, among the letters and papers of this same Marquis of Rockingham." A long document, it involves the customary introduction, a statement that Mercer was in military service until the Proclamation of Peace in 1763, that he was made a Colonel in July 1761, that he settled the Virginia accounts with Stanwix and the Cherokee accounts with Amherst, that Grenville in 1765 appointed him "Chief Distributor of the Stamps in Virginia" and he was commissioned on August 6, 1765. His request for recompense for his trouble and service was just, but its consideration was delayed and never carried through. The Rockingham ministry was

136 G.M.P., 186.
137 Ibid., 210.
138 Mentioned, G.M.P., 186.
quickly displaced. In June 1766 Colonel Mercer put in a similar memorial, now found in the Dartmouth Manuscripts, Volume II.\footnote{Ibid., XVII, 325-328.}

Bearing not upon the life of George Mercer in 1766 but upon his career in 1765 in connection with stamp trouble, there appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in the summer and autumn of 1766, a violent controversy between the Mercers and the Lees. Richard Henry Lee had led the criticism of George Mercer in October 1765 and George Mercer's father and brother James took up the cudgels in his defense. Writing on July 18, 1766, James Mercer claimed Richard Henry Lee had tried through friends to secure an appointment as stamp distributor but failed to get it and then turned to opposition and headed an attack on George Mercer. A few facts are revealed in the bitter items printed in the newspapers. He claimed that George Mercer went to Ireland in the fall of 1764, intending to return to Virginia in a spring passage, that friends secured the position for him during his absence and that he returned to London three months later. The burning of his effigy in Westmoreland County was condemned. It was alleged that in September or October 1765, Richard Henry Lee published his defense, or "Confession," in a Maryland newspaper. The implication is that Lee sheltered himself behind a vicious attack on George Mercer. On July 25, a short item, seemingly by John Mercer, continued the attack on Lee. A signed item of great length by John Mercer, September 26, 1766, furnishes some historical data of uncertain reliability. It says George Mercer entered military service in 1754 under Colonel Fry, that he stayed in military service until the peace treaty of 1763, that he spent £ 500 of his own money during the decade of military service, that the Virginia agent in London was responsible for his appointment as stamp distributor, that he arrived at Hampton on October 29, 1765 and reached Williamsburg at 5:00 p.m. the following day. There is a vague implication that rather than either law or military service, George Mercer may well have gone into the use of "the plumb line and the square" and become a "Carpenter," so-called (now called architect) and possibly a surveyor.

A long letter of James Mercer, October 3, 1776, gives the text of George Mercer's declaration on his abdication of his position as distributor of stamps, October 31, 1765.

An anonymous item, from Fredericksburg, Virginia, October 10, 1766, contains bitter reproaches upon John Mercer and James Mercer

On the very day of the appearance of the defense of George Mercer in the Virginia Gazette, George Mercer in London wrote, September 26, 1766, to his father. This letter like numerous others written by him has not survived, but it is mentioned by his father in January 1768.\textsuperscript{141} The same is true of a similar letter of December 11, 1766. As John Mercer wrote, nearly a year later, one of the letters "came very opportunely to prevent the sale of the Shenandoah land and pursuant to your desire I and my wife and your brother executed a conveyance to you of the whole tract, which together with my wife's privy examination and acknowledgement of it was recorded the last general court, the deed bearing date the first of June to precede your marriage." The regard of his father, his brother and his stepmother for George Mercer certainly had not dimmed, for they were all financially embarrassed at that time.

George Mercer in June 1767 again put forward the claims of the Ohio Company. He evidently went first to John Pownall, the secretary of the Board of Trade. As its Journal, under date June 11, 1767, states (p. 395), "The Secretary acquainted the Board that he was desired by Colonel Mercer, of Virginia, to move their lordships to take into consideration a petition to his Majesty, in behalf of the Ohio Company, praying either that directions may be given to the Governor of that colony to carry their plan of settlement into execution, or that they may be reimbursed the Expenses they have been at which petition was reported to this Board on the 21st of June 1765, but no person appearing to prosecute the same, was not proceeded with." Under date June 18, 1767, the Journal (p. 397) mentions the "Report to the Lords of the Committee of Council upon the petition of Colonel Mercer, in behalf of the Ohio Company." But although ready on June 18th, the report was not submitted until June 26, 1767, and is commonly given that date. George Mercer was obviously in London in the summer of 1767, dancing attendance upon imperial authorities. He also found time, July 8, 1767, to write another letter to his father.\textsuperscript{142} Unfortunately this and other similar letters have not been found and probably have not survived.

In these lost letters of George Mercer to his father, John Mercer, and to his brother, James Mercer, hints of romances, courtships and

\textsuperscript{141} G.M.P., 186.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
marriage must have been given by George Mercer. Rumor had it that the young lady, the fiancée, was “Miss Smith of Scarborough,” but as the Gentleman’s Magazine, XXXVII (August 1767, p. 429), had it, under “List of Marriages for 1767,” “Colonel Mercer of North America to Miss Neville of Lincoln.” One commentator has stated, “George Mercer married on August 18, 1767 at Scarboro England, Mary Neville, daughter of Christopher Neville [Nevell] of Lincoln, who died without issue, in Richmond, Virginia, June 4, 1768. It is said to have been a runaway match.” Another writer says, “he revisited his native land, bringing with him an English bride. This lady died in Richmond the following year and Colonel Mercer soon after returned to London.” As will be shortly revealed, much of this is inaccurate, high proof that neither relatives nor scholarly research historians can be fully relied upon. It is as certain as any historical fact that George Mercer was in London in 1767 and 1768. It is unreasonable but not impossible that his new and perhaps young wife may have come to America to meet her husband’s relatives and look into her husband’s financial situation and that on a visit to Richmond, possibly to be with or near William Byrd III, she may have died there. Highly specialized research would be required to prove or disprove this. The fact that such a visit by Mary Neville Mercer was not indicated in his ledgers by John Mercer, nor commented upon in his letters, seems to disprove the fact. If so, it was a romantic tragedy, for most certainly her husband was not with her. For her, death and burial would then have been on soil, distant and almost foreign and strange.

As for Colonel Mercer, he wrote his father September 18, 1767; he possibly had sheets printed about the Case of the Ohio Company; he wrote and handed in to Lord Shelburne, October 8, 1767, a well organized and well stated document on the “Company’s Affairs”; he wrote, October 10, 1767, a long letter to the Committee of the Ohio Company; wrote a letter to his father November 15, 1767; wrote on November 21, 1767, to the Ohio Company;

143 Ibid., 207.
145 Rowland, Mason, I, 297.
146 G.M.P., 186.
147 Shelburne Papers, I, 93-97.
148 MS., AC 2203, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.
149 G.M.P., 222, 641n.
150 William and Mary Quarterly, series one, I, 200-203.
wrote another letter to his father November 25, 1767;¹⁵¹ and, late in November, put out and presented another memorial to the King in Council,¹⁵² a document which was not taken up for consideration for two years and is therefore commonly dated as of November 20, 1769. No one in those days could have crossed the Atlantic while engaged in such activities. The situation remained the same in 1768. John Mercer wrote George three (and probably more) letters in early 1768. The first letter, finished January 28, 1768, is endorsed by George Mercer (presumably in London), "Letter from my Father dated January 28th 1768 — Rec'd at Bristol April 20th 1768." ¹⁵³ A second letter of March 3, 1768, is endorsed, "Letter from my Father dated March 3d 1768 reced. 4th June . . . ," ¹⁵⁴ which probably means received at London the fourth of June 1768, the day his wife is supposed to have died in Virginia. The third letter of March 9, 1768, carries no such endorsement of date received but may well have been received more than a week later, probably in mid-June.¹⁵⁵

Better evidence, if needed, that George Mercer was not in Virginia but in London in early 1768 is an item of May 31, 1768, in the Journal of the Board of Trade and Plantations (pp. 29-30) as follows:

Colonel Mercer attending likewise pursuant to Order, was heard upon the subject matter of the address of the House of Burgesses for leave to settle westward of the Alleghany Mountains and after stating to their lordships the improvements that had been made by the settlers under grants, prior to the Proclamation of October 1763 and the hardships they had suffered by being removed from their settlements, he withdrew.

Probable in August 1768, he wrote to Mr. Nickolson¹⁵⁶ and on August 16, 1768, he wrote a long letter, probably to James Mercer.¹⁵⁷ It begins with praise of Lord Botetourt as the incoming successor of Francis Fauquier, suggesting that he be well received and saying he has as "I know, one of the prettiest seats in England, as I have often visited it with great pleasure," subtle suggestion that Colonel Mercer in England associated with the gentry as well as with merchants and possibly with adventurers like himself.

He asked his brother to let it be known to the people of Virginia,

¹⁵¹ G.M.P., 221.
¹⁵² Case of 1770, loc. cit., 34-35.
¹⁵³ G.M.P., 186-220.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 221-229.
¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 297-310.
¹⁵⁶ Letter mentioned, Rowland, Mason, I, 133.
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 132-135.
“I have a promise that the accounts due them, since the campaign under Braddock, and all claims on the Crown shall be paid them,” adding to this the statement, “Lord Botetourt can tell you the steps I have taken in that business.” Definitely autobiographical data are furnished in his statement, “If you receive any money for me, it will not be disagreeable to me to have it remitted, as the difficulty of getting money here is inconceivable.” This is buttressed by the remark, “If a gentleman merchant lends you, after begging, praying, beseeching, importuning, etc., etc., he is sure to tell it to all the trades, and though you tell him you cannot pay him under six months, he will be sure to ask you for it every week of the time.” Not then, probably, but nearly two centuries later, the remark seems little creditable to Colonel Mercer. A colonel and a scion of colonial aristocracy, he should have avoided “begging, praying, beseeching, importuning, etc., etc.,” as unworthy of his class and calibre. He had already begun to think of selling his Virginia assets and think in terms of raising money both in Great Britain and in Virginia by mortgages. In this letter he wrote, “You mention the difficulty you were in about fixing the price of the Shenandoah land, which from my father’s letter I think very easily to be got over. Colonel Lewis, he writes me, was to purchase it.” To his brother he confided that he had been appointed “a Lt. Gov.” “He was appointed in 1769 to succeed Governor Tryon, who was sent to New York. But Colonel Mercer did not go to North Carolina after all and Major Martin, a British officer, became governor of that colony in 1771.” The Virginia Gazette, November 24, 1768, carried an announcement of his appointment as Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina and March 23, 1769, carried an item announcing the arrival of George Mercer “at New Bern N. C.” If so, George Mercer took another dangerous and disagreeable mid-winter passage across the Atlantic. Did he really come back to America in 1769? Newspapers can be mistaken or inaccurate. Before the coming of the telegraph, the telephone, radio and television and the emergence of news agencies, such error, in journalism, was more likely than now. Mary Mercer, the second wife of George Mercer, stated later that though Colonel Mercer got the appointment to be Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina, the appointment was “without any salary or Emolument whatever, not even so much as to defray the expense of making out his Commission.” In his straitened financial circumstances George

158 Ibid., 136.
Mercer could not accept appointment under such conditions.

In the autumn of 1768, October 14, John Mercer who, as stated above, was born in Dublin, February 6, 1704, came to America in 1720 and married Catherine Mason in 1726, died at Marlborough. His son George was then in Europe, was unavoidably not at his funeral and seems never to have come back to Marlborough.

One reason, very likely, why George Mercer of the Ohio Company did not become Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina was competition in London with other colonial land-grant petitioners. Arthur Lee and fifty associates, including Presley Thornton and Thomas Ludwell Lee, members of the Ohio Company, put in a petition for a vast acreage in the Mississippi Valley, and the Pennsylvania group around Thomas Walpole put in a petition in June 1769 for the territory once actually settled by the Ohio Company. On November 20, 1769, the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council submitted George Mercer's Memorial of 1767 to the Board of Trade and Plantations for their consideration and advice. But the Pennsylvania group (variously known as Suffering Traders, Walpole Company, Indiana Company, Vandalia Company and Grand Ohio Company), having received in 1768, at Fort Stanwix, large land cessions from the Indians, offered the British government £10,000 for much of the lands ceded by the Indians and thus secured the good will not only of the King in Council, of some in the Board of Trade and Plantations, but also of the important Treasury officials. Success for this group was so imminent that it seemed guaranteed.

The European holders of shares in the old Ohio Company, having become disillusioned or indifferent or both, George Mercer was nevertheless in late 1769 an alert watch dog of the interests of the Americans who had appointed him their agent six years earlier. On December 18, 1769, he put in a last desperate memorial, in the nature of a legal caveat. Overtly sincere, this document said, "Your memorialist . . . most humbly prays your lordships not to make any grant, within the limits prescribed by the royal instruction to the company [March 16, 1749]; as they are, and have ever been willing and desirous to proceed in their undertaking, and fulfill their engagements to government." He ends the memorial with the statement, "And that no unnecessary delay may be offered to the petitioners, on behalf of the Ohio Company, your memorialist begs leave, humbly to represent,

that he is fully prepared whenever your lordships shall be pleased to command him, to justify the company's pretensions, and show, they have, through no neglect on their part, been delayed upward of twenty years, from executing a plan, which would have contributed as much to the public, as their own private interest.\textsuperscript{161} This is a brilliant statement, based upon the study of law, acquaintance with the past facts, possession of copies of many of the documents of the company, and long experience with memorials.

George Mercer at this time had in his possession copies of many of the records of the Ohio Company. They are, probably most of them, found in the so-called George Mercer Papers and in print under that title. The Company's old London attorney, Charlton Palmer, on December 27, 1769, addressed Colonel Mercer, at Holles Street, Cavendish Square, saying, "All the papers I rec'd except what I gave you I delivered to Mr. Jackson (who then lived in the Temple but now in Southern plan Buildings Chancery Lane) which I understood were redelivered to you."\textsuperscript{162}

The slow moving wheels of government in London are seen in an item of the Board of Trade and Plantations of January 3, 1770, "Order of the Lords of the Committee of Council, dated November 20, 1769, referring to this board, for their consideration and report, the petition of George Mercer in behalf of the Ohio Company . . ."\textsuperscript{163} In competition, much like a typical horse race, the so-called Vandalia Company presented its memorial to the British Treasury.\textsuperscript{164}

On March 8, 1770, George Mercer wrote Richard Conway Dobbs, son and heir of Arthur Dobbs, an old member of the Ohio Company. He asked what had happened to the share and what disposition would be made of it.\textsuperscript{165} A statement of the account of the Ohio Company with Arthur Dobbs was probably sent in this letter.\textsuperscript{166} It indicated not only that more than £ 100 had not been paid, but that probably all payments had been in the form of promissory notes. George Mercer perhaps was making an effort either to collect the balance and payment of the notes with interest or else to acquire the share himself at its low market value of 1770. In his letter of reply, March 26, 1770, Dobbs made a later appointment and wrote, "It gives me Pleasure to Hear

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 1331/307-310.  
\textsuperscript{162} G.M.P., 310.  
\textsuperscript{163} J.B.T., 1768-1775, 159.  
\textsuperscript{164} Plain Facts, 149.  
\textsuperscript{165} Mentioned, G.M.P., 311.  
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 183.
that You are appointed Lieut. Govr. of North Carolina."  

On March 28, 1770, George Mercer wrote to his first military commander, George Washington. Probably throughout April 1770, Colonel Mercer was doubly engaged in watching the activities of Thomas Walpole, Samuel Wharton and others in what had come to be called the Grand Ohio Company, and in compiling the now famous Case of 1770. As has so well been shown in "Commentary on the Case of the Ohio Company Extracted from Original Papers" (George Mercer Papers, 393-458), some of the contents of the sixty-two page imprint came from the head and pen of George Mercer. Most of it came from Ohio Company records or materials already in his possession. It is more than a conjecture that some of the sheets may already have been printed in 1767 and, with other sheets added, put out as a bound imprint in late April or early May 1770.

As far as George Mercer's agency of the Ohio Company was concerned, he had reached the end of his rope in May 1770. He was so much frustrated as to be ready to throw in the sponge of defeat. On May 7, 1770, he came to terms with the gentlemen of the Grand Ohio Company, surrendering the old Ohio Company claims while agreeing to accept and meet the expenses of a small fractional share in the larger grant asked for and expected by the Grand Ohio Company. This acknowledgment may have been logical under the circumstances, but it was nevertheless an indication of the final frustration of seven years of solicitation and of as many years of his career. On May 8, 1770, Thomas Walpole put in another petition to the King, and on the same day George Mercer transmitted a memorial, cancelling his past memorials, which on May 10, 1770, was before the Board of Trade and Plantations. His position in London, which from the beginning had been troublesome and questionable now became deplorable. To his unpopularity as distributor of stamps in 1765, was now to be added repudiation by the very members of the Ohio Company who had empowered him and sent him over as agent in 1763. He was likely to remain in the dark shadows of rejection, disrespect and disrepute. For a time friendly relations could be and were maintained with prominent individuals such as George Mason, Robert Carter,
George Washington, and James Mercer, his brother, but one after another of these old friends became critical, pitying, scornful, and in the case of his brother, unfriendly. A letter, July 24, 1770, of George Mercer to George Mason is mentioned by the latter in a letter to an unnamed relative, December 6, 1770. Mercer is reported to have spoken very doubtfully of the Ohio Company affairs and to have written that he expected to return to Virginia in September 1770.

Possibly already in the depths of frustration and despair, George Mercer, September 1, 1770, drew up a Last Will and Testament, making his brother James his main heir and the executor of his estate in Virginia, but with provisions (believed to have been later voided in codicils) for two or more patrons and friends in England.

Unlike so many Last Wills, this one was not followed soon by the death of its maker. George Mercer was to live nearly fourteen years longer.

In October 1770, George Mercer seems to have sent a small packet of materials to George Mason who complained that they contained only old data. In December he made a trip to Dublin, Ireland, possibly in connection with matters mentioned by his father in his abnormally long letter of January 28, 1768. From Dublin, Colonel Mercer wrote George Washington, December 18, 1770, about the long promised military bonus lands. He mentioned his agreement with the Grand Ohio Company and, it is said, "He notified Washington that the 200,000 acres claimed by the Virginia soldiers had been accepted by the company as valid" and that these claims would be respected. And he announced that he planned to go to England in a few days and then to Virginia as soon as he could.

George Mercer in 1771 still had assets and prospects. He had title to vast tracts of land in Virginia. On his plantation on the Shenandoah he had a tenant, slaves, horses and general equipment. He had claims by military service, by purchase and by inheritance from John Fenton Mercer, to nearly fifteen thousand acres of military bounty lands. He had a share in the Grand Ohio Company, as well as in the seemingly defunct Ohio Company, of Virginia. And he and his brother James thought he had claims to the extent of £3000 against members

173 Rowland, Mason, I, 151.
174 Mentioned, William Waller Henning, The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia . . . (11 vols., Richmond, 1875-1893), XII, 366.
175 Va. Mag. of Hist. and Biog., XVIII, 218.
of the older company. There was also a rumor as late as February 7, 1771, that he would be the next governor of North Carolina.

That he was in 1771 the George Mercer of old is seen in a letter to his brother James, March 27, 1771, in which he not only mentions shipping songbirds, mares and colts, but also his latest romance, saying, "I believe she is a good girl — yet I want to see a greater Parity of Sentiments between us." His financial and probably emotional distress at this time is apparent from the pages of a long and tortuous letter by him to Richard Conway Dobbs, May 28, 1771, the main subject of which was the old Arthur Dobbs share in the Ohio Company.

In this letter of May 28, 1771, George Mercer revealed himself as at the lowest ebb in health, spirit and finances. As an excuse for delay and neglect in writing, he said that he had been so "torn to Pieces with the Remains of my Fever and the Beginnings of a Rheumatism, that it is but seldom I can find myself capable of doing business. Lowness of Spirits prevents me from attempting it often, and Pain of my Limbs from going through it." This is the language of a valetudinarian, not unlike his brother, James Mercer, as described by John Mercer in his letters of 1768.

George Mercer offered to buy the Dobbs share at the price of the money advanced on it, but not including any interest. In this connection he wrote that he could not bind the Ohio Company to pay for it, but said, "I will take the Risque on myself as the Company have no Right to find Fault with me for the Disposal of my own money and purchase your Share for my own Account . . . ." Commenting on the Ohio Company and any letter of credit from them, he wrote, "I can not raise a Shilling here on their Credit . . . .," and mentions "near £ 1000 which I have already advanced" and that he expected "to be called on this week for upwards of £ 400 more for the Grant" (from the Grand Ohio Company). The language, even the grammar and rhetoric, of the eighteenth century is not entirely clear two centuries later and, as a result in this letter of a convalescent, shares in the two companies are not sufficiently distinguished from each other.

From the rather scanty records which have been found, it is very evident that George Mercer had risked everything on the prospects of success of the Grand Ohio Company. He boasted in a

176 *Virginia Gazette*, February 7, 1771.
letter that no step of that Company was taken without himself being acquainted with the proceedings. Possibly this was wisdom, but his circumstances were compulsory. In debt, indeed impoverished, in low spirits, sometimes sick and in pain, the Grand Ohio Company must have seemed to him his only way out, his last hope of preferment, promotion, prosperity and success.

The letters of Mercer to Thomas Adams, an old American colonial who had become a successful London merchant, and a benefactor of needy or stranded Americans, have been in print for many years. On one unfamiliar with the career of George Mercer, they produce an unfavorable impression, reminding an old Oxonian of some of the almost unbelievable situations at Oxford of some young aristocrats of similar status in England.

In one of the letters, undated but thought to be of 1771, a distressing financial situation is depicted. He writes:

My dear Adams You must by some means or other procure me £ 50 by Tuesday morning or I must go to the Dogs. The note I mentioned to you formerly falls due on that day it has already been renewed about six times, and is in the Hands of a Lawyer who has sent me word he can't lay out his money any longer, d—in the Fellows Conscience he has added 6 s. 8 d. for a Fee for writing to me besides interest every Time it has been renewed, and yet yesterday sent to remind me of the notes falling due with the addition I mention and that I must take up.

That he was now a drowning man grasping at a straw is seen in the next sentence, "I shall ask no more from you till Anderson [a shipmaster] arrives who I hope will bring me half a hundred puncheons of Shenandoah [tobacco] which will honestly pay all my debts."

His straitened circumstances are set forth in two last sentences as follows:

I know both you and B's poverty, and yet I cannot help, and I am sure you will both do me the Justice to believe I would not trouble you if it was possible to avoid it. If you can by any means negotiate the note I send I shall be strong enough by the time it falls due, tho' at present I give you my oath I have not a Brace of pounds in the world nor do I know where to get them unless you or Brown will help me.

It is only a slight defense of this revelation to point out that men of George Mercer's class and type, especially in England but also in America, have often lived unproductively and extravagantly, remaining in debt and ever chasing the pot of gold at the end of rainbows.

Another letter to Adams, from Yarmouth, August 6, 1771, re-

178 Va. Mag. of Hist. and Biog., XXII, 326-328.
veals the same financial distress, involved with romantic adventure or adventures. In the language of an editor or commentator, he was “trying to marry a young lady whose parents or guardians oppose the match.” He writes:

I am obliged to be in town on Sunday if it is possible to settle this affair beyond Doubt, but as I have two bills amounting to £ 60 which fall due on Tuesday (for fear of Disappointments) I must beg the favor of you to get me the money by Hook or by Crook for the interest Bills, and leave it with my House Keeper on Monday, as will not appear quite so decent should I be arrested on my Return Home with Madam, for such a sum as £ 60.

Acquaintance with similarly involved individuals in England and America would lead one to suspect that as roomer and boarder, Colonel Mercer had not paid his “House Keeper” for many months and possibly faced the loss of his personal property. He concludes the letter with “Adieu till we meet, dont’ tell any one where I am or my Business, till I tell you the Knot is tied and you must never mention a syllable of this scuffle to Maria, as she says she shall never be able to look any one except myself in the face who knows it.” As an addendum rather than as a postscript, although it follows his signature, he says as an afterthought, “I have told her [presumably the young lady with him] I am writing to a particular Friend — she desires for Heaven’s Sake and for the sake of my own character, that I will not mention to him that I have a giddy hot head runaway young girl with me, especially if the friend has anything serious about him.”

Whether the “Knot” was tied, and there is little proof that it was, George Mercer, on August 8, 1771, was back at his old quarters on Holles Street, Cavendish Square, London, for from that address he wrote that day a long letter to George Mason. In it he discussed, first, his eight year agency for the Ohio Company and their neglect of him; secondly, the low rating of the Ohio Company in 1771; thirdly, the failure of the members to correspond with him and honor their agreement of 1763; and, fourthly, his bad financial circumstances. Among quotable phrases may be mentioned “not one word of answer . . . no money, no Credit, no approbation of my past Conduct, or orders for my future”; “I have given them Notice at least twenty times that I was half that sum [£ 2,000] in advance and have never been able to get 12 s. in Return, or even an Answer to one of my Letters”; and “The curse of dancing attendance on the ministers and

179 Ibid., XVII, 327-328.
180 Virginia State Library, MS. 20624.
public Boards I have frequently mentioned though with less than a thousandth part of the humiliating Circumstances that are forced upon the poor wretch who is obliged to cringe and ask a Favor of them.” The document is doubly endorsed as “Complaining of want of Instructions and Remittances.”

In the light of similar frustrations of George Croghan, William Trent, Samuel Wharton and others of the Grand Ohio Company and in view of the promises made to George Mercer in 1763, this emotional outburst is not surprising, for the failure of the old Company in the New World, as well as in the Old, has to be taken into consideration.

Another letter to the Company enclosed with the above missive was probably of the same purport. It probably reached Williamsburg, Virginia, in October and possibly was responsible for the James Mercer papers included in the *George Mercer Papers* (pp. 312-23). When Robert Carter, who was in Williamsburg, got the information found in the letter, he, on October 24, 1771, wrote George Mercer, saying he had not known the terms of George Mercer’s appointment in 1763, that he had just heard of George Mercer’s letter of October 10, 1767, and four other letters of that year. “I will patronize you,” he said, “tho’ the measures have not succeeded wch you adopted.” He sent Mercer permission to get, on his bond, £200 from Carter’s London agents and said he had advised Lee and Tayloe to give Mercer further credit.\(^{181}\) Much belated, this was an evidence of good will on the part of one who himself had dallied in London as a young man but it should be noticed that he required a bond. He may have realized the situation and been uncertain about George Mercer’s estate in Virginia.

In financial desperation, Colonel Mercer, September 30, 1771, made out a mortgage deed to Richard Gravatt, covering title to 6,500 acres of land in his Shenandoah River tract in Frederick County, Virginia. Three years later this deed was sent to Virginia and recorded in the files of the General Court, but since neither the original nor its recordation have been found, it is impossible to state how much money was involved. It may well have been several thousand pounds sterling.\(^{182}\) And it should not be overlooked that in 1771,

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\(^{181}\) Original not found, but seen extensively excerpted in Carter to James Mercer, December 11, 1771.

\(^{182}\) There is much information about this in many deeds of November 1774, made out in Frederick County.
George Mercer, by bounty claims was, in 1771, allotted 13,552 acres of western land.

George Washington wrote George Mercer, November 7, 1771, saying, "Since you first left this Country, I have been favored with two letters from you, one of them dated the 28th of March 1770, the other of the 18th of December" [1770]. One sentence said frankly, "I have just been told by Mr. [James] Mercer that you remain in London for some advices from him respecting the Affairs of the Ohio Company." Only military lands policy and proceedings are found in Washington’s second letter of November 22, 1771.183

A letter of Robert Carter to James Mercer, December 9, 1771, was mainly an excerpt of his letter of October 24, 1771, to George Mercer. But James Mercer probably took the occasion of this correspondence to put his brother’s case before Carter, saying he had written each resident member of the Company, mentioning his brother’s expenses and claims against the Company. James Mercer wished to know if Carter approved the agreement made by George with the Grand Ohio Company and wished a share in the agreement. If so, he hoped Carter would send him £ 200 for each two-fortieths share in the old Ohio Company he might own.184

It is certain that George Mercer, by February 1772, in exchange for his bond, received £ 200 from Thomas and Rowland Hume, London agents of Robert Carter.185 Probably this money strengthened his morale and encouraged him to seek other and additional relief. On February 20, 1772, he handed in a memorial to the Earl of Hillsborough requesting some reward for his services in North America during the late war, and he accompanied it with a copy of his memorial of 1766 about his work as distributor of stamps.186 Late in February, Robert Carter was duly notified that George Mercer had drawn the money "on signing 2 bonds (both of the same tenor and date)." 187

Not only George Mercer himself, but some of his friends in Virginia and in England believed, at the time, in the eventual success

183 G. W., III, 66-70, 72.
184 James Mercer to Robert Carter, December 31, 1771. This letter was once in the possession of Mr. W. Garnett Chisolm, who very kindly gave his permission to publish it. Shortly before his death, in 1955, Mr. Chisolm deposited his collection of Garnett and Mercer papers in the Virginia Historical Society.
185 Thomas and Rowland Hume to Robert Carter.
187 Tench Tighman Papers, Maryland Historical Society.
of the Grand Ohio Company. Jonathan Boucher, the well known clergyman, so expressed himself to George Washington, March 5, 1772.\textsuperscript{188} And Samuel Wharton, August 5, 1772, accepted a draft of Mercer upon him for £ 250. A short document, it tells much, for the things in connection with and sometimes behind statistics are frequently significant if not profound. In full the document is as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
London August the 5th 1772
Three Months after Date pay to my Order Two hundred
and fifty Pounds, Value received, as advised.
To Samuel Wharton, Esq.
Geo: Mercer
Accepted
Saml. Wharton

New Suffolk Street
London
[Endorsed:]
Geo: Mercer
Recd. Novr. 8 1772 of Samuel Wharton Esqr. the full Contents
of the within Draft.
Edwd. Blackshaw.\textsuperscript{189}
\end{verbatim}

This draft has the appearance of a payment, by its means, for a share in the Grand Ohio Company, an item which Wharton sold to Edward Blackshaw, but had to redeem himself on the last possible date. But there is at least the possibility that George Mercer actually got the £ 250 and Wharton sold the draft, but later had to redeem it.

In this same year, 1772, George Mercer gave a deed mortgage to "Mary Wroughton, spinster of Bath." It was on some of his Virginia lands, seemingly mainly in Fauquier County. Since it also was recorded in the General Court of Virginia and not seemingly today extant, but only mentioned in recorded deeds of sale, November 1774, it is, again, impossible to state the amount of mortgage money received, though it was probably a few thousand pounds. The likelihood of overlapping claims to George Mercer's estate necessitated appeal to the Virginia Court of Chancery and an interlocutory decree of November 4, 1773.

On August 20, 1772, Wharton announced to George Mercer a belated report of the Committee of the Privy Council in favor of the Grand Ohio Company, addressing George Mercer as still at Holles Street, Cavendish Square. It is, therefore, not wholly astounding that George Mercer stayed on in Europe, awaiting the outcome of this matter.

\textsuperscript{188} G. W., IV, 113-117.
\textsuperscript{189} G.M.P., 324.
It was in the midst of this uncertainty and expectancy in London, that George Washington, from Mount Vernon, December 23, 1773, announced the final distribution of military bounty land claims, a division in which George Mercer got claims to 6,000 acres of his own right and another 6,000 as the heir of his brother, John Fenton Mercer, killed on the frontier in 1756.\textsuperscript{190}

After nearly a decade abroad with no governmental employment and with little, if any, income from more than 10,000 acres of good land and another 15,000 acres of wilderness land from military bounty lands, George Mercer, temporarily abroad in flight from English creditors, on November 4, 1772, turned to his old friend, William Trent, then in England, for assistance.\textsuperscript{191}

It was in early 1772, that James Mercer tried earnestly to raise money for his brother George, by appeals to members of the old Ohio Company who had sent him over in July 1763. But, by 1772, some of the members had forgotten the circumstances. Probably few, if any, sympathized with George Mercer after his so unpremeditated long stay abroad. Some of them had been alienated by the stamp distribution episode and its resultant quarrel. And many were discomfited and aggravated by the surrender of the old Ohio Company claims by George Mercer in 1770, with the attempted merger with the Grand Ohio Company. While satisfactory contemporary documentation is lacking, it appears that James Mercer's appeals and proposals were entirely rejected.\textsuperscript{192}

Defeated in his direct appeal to the Ohio Company for additional funds so badly needed and so strongly requested by George Mercer, James Mercer, with powers of attorney given him in 1763 and supplemented in 1765, and seemingly unaware of prior mortgages by George Mercer in England, gave, November 13, 1772, to James Hunter and Albert Dick of Fredericksburg, a mortgage deed on the land of George Mercer. Here overlapping claims were unmistakable. And since cash money was scarce and credit was almost invariably given in the acceptance of bonds, George Mercer probably did not receive, quickly, even a pittance of cash or of negotiable credit.

Another letter of George Mercer to William Trent, March 10, 1773, reveals the same but possibly more distressing financial situation. It shows Colonel Mercer arrested and thrown into prison for

\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Va. Gazette}, January 14, 1773.
\textsuperscript{191} Ohio Company Papers of the Etting Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
\textsuperscript{192} \textit{G.M.P.}, 512-524, a group of paper forming a veritable James Mercer archive.
debt. "My Ruin," he wrote, "dear Major is at Length compleated." He stated he had ordered his "Housekeeper" to pack up his clothing and asks Trent to get it while she was away visiting "my dear little Girl Patty . . .," at the Boarding School. The nomenclature here is vague but important. "Housekeeper" was earlier used by George Mercer as term for wedded mate. The reference to "my dear little Girl Patty" seems to have been one to Martha Mercer, daughter of Mary Neville Mercer and from birth, about 1768, a hopeless cripple. The letter closes with the exclamation, "Heavens — What . . . do I feel to see myself inclosed within strong Iron Bars . . . I cannot write more . . . my Heart is so full . . . it overflows . . ." Another short note, probably of the same day, indicates that he was again in flight to Dover and the continent.

At this time James Mercer began to sell slaves and negotiate for the sale of George Mercer's landed property in Fairfax County. And George Washington was then, as usual, in the market for slaves and for tracts of land near Mount Vernon. His writings reveal much attention to this, and full information about the lands may be found in old deed books of Fairfax County. On July 19, 1773, Washington wrote James Mercer for a "fresh mortgage," having neglected to have the earlier one recorded.

In this letter Washington, frankly but somewhat bluntly, said, "I have been told that both your Father's and Brother's Affairs are a good deal involved in perplexity and distress," a completely accurate impression, somewhat ameliorated by the fact that inventories of the estates of other local men, supposed to be wealthy, showed, at times, assets equivalent to less than a tenth of outstanding obligations.

George Mercer, in Europe, must have been early informed that the Board of Trade and Plantations had drawn up, May 6, 1773, a constitution for Vandalia. And soon rumors of a governorship of a western colony began to appear in American colonial newspapers. Colonel Mercer was reported to have been nominated for the position of governor of an Ohio Valley colony and, later, to have been appointed governor of Pittsylvania.193 In 1773, he was badly in need of some position and emolument. He had mortgaged his Virginia property to Richard Gravatt and Mary Wroughton in England and, on May 15, 1773, there was sent over, as is stated in deeds of November 1774, a power of attorney, dated May 1, 1773, to John Tayloe, George Mason and George Washington to sell his Virginia estate.

and pay off the mortgages. Also in his distress in London, George Mercer put in yet another memorial to British authorities asking some reward for his services in the army 1754-1763 and for his expenses and troubles as stamp distributor in 1765.

Two significant statements about George Mercer's bad financial management and circumstances, are seen in a letter of George Mason to George Washington, December 21, 1773. One of them says, "When Colo. Mercer was first married and thought in affluent circumstances by his Friends here, considerable purchases of Slaves were made for him at high prices (and I believe mostly upon Credit) which must now be sold at much less than the cost." Since only his brother, James Mercer, had then the power of attorney for George Mercer, this is a criticism, however indirect and gentle, of James Mercer, and this transaction may well have been responsible for the later unfriendliness between the brothers, a trouble deplored by George Washington who endeavored to ameliorate and, if possible, end the bad situation.

The second statement is, "He was originally burthened with, a proportionable part of his Father's Debts, most of which as well as the old Gentleman's other Debts, are not only still unpaid, but must be greatly increased by Interest so that, even if Colo. Mercer had not incurred a large Debt in England, He would have found his Affairs here in a disagreeable Situation." Probably the bond of November, 1759, if actually negotiated, had not yet been satisfied and evidently George Mason was cognizant of George Mercer's situation in London. The remainder of the letter deals with George Mercer's tracts "on Polick Run and on Four-mile Run in Fairfax County," some or all of which were later acquired by George Washington.

George Mercer, in early 1774, must have written George Washington again about the sale of his Virginia lands, for Washington wrote to this purport, March 28, 1774, saying, "... Colo. Mercer, of all things ... desires a speedy Sale of his Land etc., that the Mortgages may be satisfied, let his suffering, under it, be as it will, expecting, on this occasion, to encounter considerable loss." The letter giving Tayloe, Mason and Washington powers of attorney

196 G. W., IV, 286-288.
197 Ibid., III, 197.
inevitably became known and was given publicity in the newspaper. In April 1774, George Mercer was seen in London by Captain Robert Mackenzie who mentioned him in a letter from Boston to George Washington, September 13, 1774, saying he had a detail of grievances but his health and spirit seemed to have suffered little.

In the late summer, August 6, 1774, George Mercer wrote a long letter to Robert Carter, enclosing copies of the Case of the Grand Ohio Company, complaining of the old Ohio Company's neglect of him, upholding his agreement of 1770, and flattering the prospects of the Grand Ohio Company. He did not know that two weeks earlier, Robert Carter had written John Taswell [sic] about Mercer's bonds of 1771 and had inquired about his estate with a view probably of attaching some part of it as repayment.

An undetermined matter is that of George Mercer's interest in imperial and colonial politics. There is found no evidence of such profound analysis of factors as appears in the writings of George Mason and others. It may be that George Mercer approved the lull in the storm of imperial-colonial relations 1770 to 1774. But it is hard to understand how he could be unaware of the renewal of discord with the Tea Act of 1773, the opposition to it in the American colonies and the break in amity caused by tea parties in Boston and elsewhere in 1774. Samuel Wharton saw the handwriting on the wall, the doom of further royal grants and eventually returned to Philadelphia. It would seem that George Mercer made another blunder when he failed to leave London in 1774 and return to Virginia before his estate had been sold at public auction in November 1774. Bad as his credit was at that stage, both in the New World and in the Old, he might have bid in for some of his holding and saved himself considerable money. It seems highly probable that he was so much and in so many ways involved in England that he could not get away without loss of his own self-respect as well as the respect of others. Possibly he was at heart an imperialist or imperial unionist. His father was born and reared in Dublin, Ireland, then in the English Pale. George had relatives there with whom he was in contact for more than a decade, staying at times with them on extended visits. And from 1757 his contacts with British military figures such as Bouquet, Forbes, Stanwix, Monckton and Amherst were frequent.

199 Letters to G. W., V, 49-50.  
200 Robert Carter Papers, Duke University Library.
and close. In addition he was from 1763 in touch with high imperial officials in London. He may have been a loyalist in principle as was stated in various petitions and letters which have survived. His seeming sycophancy had at least a veneer of principle.

It was widely known that George Mercer's Virginia assets would be up for sale in November 1774. William Crawford, writing George Washington from the Ohio Valley, November 14, 1774, stated that "... when Those Negroes of Mercer's are Sold and they are Sold at Credit (12 months) I would be Glad to Purchase a boy and Girl about 14 or 15 years old Each or older if Such are Sold." 201 Since George Mason, by reason of kinship, declined to serve, and John Tayloe neglected his responsibility, the entire burden of this sale fell upon the gentleman from Mount Vernon.

Writing to Captain Robert Mackenzie, October 9, 1774, Washington remarked sympathetically, "poor Mercer! I often hear from him; much cause has he, I fear, to lament his having fallen into the accursed state of attendance and dependence," 202 a statement which hit the nail on the head. Others, referring to George Mercer, were to use this same adjective "poor," which really had a double meaning.

Soon after the Interlocutory Decree of November 5, 1773, items about the sale of George Mercer's estate began to appear in the newspapers. 203 Washington, in a legal paper many years later, February 15, 1789, claimed the sale was well advertised. 204 Probably posters were also printed and circulated as was customary then and later. They, or other statements, may have been displayed on court days at the courthouses of Fauquier and Frederick counties. It is probable that, as in Frederick County, a survey of the entire George Mercer tract, in Fauquier County, was made in October 1774. The survey probably included a plat and separate surveys of individual lots to be sold. Since it is not recorded in Fauquier County, it is not impossible that it is a part of the plat of twenty-two surveys later filed and recorded in Frederick County, though it may have been lost or recorded in the Virginia land-office.

George Washington either had an able lawyer with him immediately to write bonds, and possibly deeds, or he had prepared forms for each of the parcels of land. He appears to have gone first to Fauquier County, where he began individual sales on November 21,

201 Letters to G. W., V, 61-64.
202 G. W., III, 244.
203 Virginia Gazette, November 25, 1773.
204 Library of Congress, Division of Manuscripts Acc 5464.
1774. The deeds given were unusually complex, for they ran in the names of George Mercer . . . Mary Wroughton . . . John Tayloe and George Washington, all of whose signatures had to be secured after identification of the indenture and of the signatures, before it could be recorded. In some cases recordation was long delayed. Eight of the deeds were made out on November 21, 1774, and, here highly abbreviated, were: To John Peyton Harrison, 306 acres for £ 132 (Deed Book 6, f. 117); to John Monday, 470 acres for £ 99 (Ibid., f. 120); to George Sullivan, 522 acres for £ 355 (Ibid., f. 135); to Peter Bryant, 100 acres for £ 81 (Ibid., f. 138); to William Owen, 120½ acres for £ 111 (Ibid., f. 140); to Owen Powell, 184 acres for £ 40 (Ibid., 10, f. 127); to William Picket Sanford, 358 acres for £ 200 (Ibid., 10, f. 129); to Nathaniel and Cornelius Skinner, 1057 acres (Bull Run Mountain) for £ 61 (Ibid., 15, f. 248). A later deed of November 30, 1774, was to James Lewis, 139 acres for £ 61 (Ibid., 13, f. 144), or a total of 3256½ acres, for £ 1,140 Virginia currency, or about seven shillings per acre.

After the Fauquier County sales, George Washington, the acting attorney-in-fact for George Mercer and his creditors, proceeded to Frederick County where in the last week of November he sold to the highest bidders, the property of George Mercer in that jurisdiction. Recorded are the sales: To Thomas Berry, 357 acres for £ 221 (Deed Book 16, f. 636); to Benjamin Berry, 560 acres for £ 270 (Ibid., f. 642); to Colin Campbell, 235 acres for £ 127 (Ibid., 17, f. 1-4); to George Noble, 650 acres for £ 493 (Ibid., f. 4); and to Francis Willis, (blank) for £ 632 (Ibid., 18, f. 681). In addition must be mentioned as found recorded, 320 acres sold to Fielding Lewis for £ 322, and 591 acres, not found recorded, to George Washington and James Mercer. This superior Shenandoah Valley land seems to have sold for a price averaging about twelve shillings per acre.

In addition, George Mercer's slaves, horses, cattle, farm implements, etc., were sold. Those in Fauquier and Frederick counties who bought on bonds numbered at least forty-four. The total paid for land seems to have been about £ 3,796. The slaves, live stock, implements and crops probably increased the total to about £ 6,000. A potential estate of great future possibilities thus fell under the hammer of some auctioneer, and was scattered under many holders.

In writing about the sales, George Washington, November 30, 1774, informed John Tayloe, his inactive fellow attorney-in-fact for
George Mercer, "We closed the matter this day to the amount of £ 1412.0.2, which is a greater Sale than I expected, as there were only 90 instead of 110 Negroes and a proportionate deficiency of Horse and Stock; and few or no Plantation utensils." 205 It may well be that £ 1412.0.2 was only for these items found on the plantation in Frederick County, for Washington added, "the land in this County (that is, Frederick) sold for much less than it was valued at in the year 1767; and yet I do not think it sold much under the intrinsic worth as there is a good deal of exceeding poor and broken ground in it." But, as stated above, Washington himself bought some of the land, Lots 5 and 6, totaling 591 acres.

Other property of George Mercer seems to have been sold in the same period. In the manuscript papers of George Washington is a deed of sale by George Mercer and others to George Washington of 1,168 acres of land on Four Mile Run, Fairfax County, Virginia, for £ 900. It is signed by George Mercer, James Mercer and two others and endorsed as proved before a General Court, April 15, 1775. There also is a photostat of Rough Field Notes taken by George Washington in running the sources of land bought from George and James Mercer. The undated field notes probably date from the winter of 1774-1775. To James Mercer, Washington wrote, December 12, 1774, "... enclosed you have my Bond ... for £ 450 for your Brother's moiety in the four mile run Land [in Fairfax County] as also receipts £ 40-11.11 the balance due him on account of the Ohio Lands under the Proclamation of 1754." 206

Exactly two weeks later Washington wrote James Mercer, "the whole of your purchases in Frederick amounted to £ 2385.14.2." 207 He added, "I have wrote to your Brother since I came home," and, though the letter has not been found, it presumably reported the results of the sales of November 1774 in Fauquier and Frederick counties.

In a long letter to Edward Montague, a Virginia agent in London, Washington, April 5, 1775, discussed many matters relating to George Mercer, whose friend, Montague, probably passed its contents on to Colonel Mercer. Washington mentioned the discord between George and James Mercer, the overlapping mortgages and powers of attorney, and stated, "That Colo. Mercer has been a con-

205 G. W., XXXVII, 507-508.
206 Ibid., III, 249.
207 Ibid., 252-255.
siderable loser in the management of his Estate here, nobody will deny." 208

As indicated in the bond of George Mercer to William Trent, April 14, 1775, George Mercer on that date resided at Curzon Street in the "Parish of Saint George and County of Middlesex." On April 18, 1775, the day before the conflict at Lexington and Concord, Washington again wrote George Mercer. 209

William Trent, who himself was in London, in bad financial circumstances, but had nevertheless advanced money to George Mercer, 210 hearing about the sales of November 1774, wrote Washington, August 4, 1775, to learn if he could expect any payment out of the proceeds. Evidently he was dubious about the prospects of settlement of the penal bond of £ 400. Washington's reply was not cheerful. "His Estate ... ," Washington reported, "sold for upwards of £ 14000 and was thought scarce sufficient to answer the Mortgages upon it in England and America; it was sold at 12 months Credit in November last, so that no money will be due till next Novr." 211 Not only George Mercer himself, but his many creditors could get no money in early 1775, and with the outbreak of the War of American Independence in April 1775, probably would not get it for some time, if ever.

As suggested above, Colonel Mercer made a bad blunder in not returning to Virginia in the summer of 1774. He blundered again by not returning as Franklin and others did on the outbreak of war, whether looked upon as revolution as in America, or as rebellion as in official circles in London. But, his Virginia estate first mortgaged and then liquidated, Colonel Mercer now turned to the British government for rescue. He put in again an application for reward for his expenses and services in connection with the Stamp Act of 1765. 212 He put in an elaborate account to the Treasury. It throws much light on the episode of 1765 and on George Mercer himself. Dated November 28, 1775, the account contains sixteen items, each of them significant. Abbreviated here, they were: Attending at the Stamp Office from the 6th of April to August 29, £ 200--; bonds for security 22-1-0; iron chests for stamps, 6-6-0; stationery 105--; two clerks

208 Ibid., 283.
209 Ibid., 409.
211 G. W., III, 401.
212 Mentioned under September 1775, in Treasury I, Bundle 445, folio 136.
and passage 70--; office at Williamsburg 70--; alterations in his house at Fredericksburg 140--; travelling in Virginia (588 miles) 29-8--; expresses 12--; sloops 30--; return passage 40--; travel from Milford Haven to London 21-9-5; attendance upon Parliament 55 days 166-13-4; a year’s salary for 2 clerks 150--; three year contract with the clerks 60--; articles not recollected 30-5-8, a total of £ 1131-14-0. In the document he mentions having already sent his papers back to Virginia, an important fact in the provenance of most of the so-called George Mercer Papers, which may not be, therefore merely what he had retained in London, at the time of his death in April 1784, for all but two of the papers antedate 1775.

A striking financial aspect of this old Stamp Act account is that the total sum so anxiously sought was less than a tenth, probably, of the mortgages he had placed on his Virginia estate and still less of the gross net sales of the property.\(^{213}\)

Highly valuable biographical information is found in a letter of Colonel Mercer, December 22, 1775, to a Treasury official,\(^{214}\) a letter in which he mentions “... the present situation of my Affairs.” He claimed that promises made to him since his Application of September, “have detained me here from that Time; and though I had twice absolutely engaged a Passage to Virginia, in the last Ship great Part of my Baggage, my purpose was changed by assurances of immediate Relief.” He adds, “But the cruel Disappointments and Delays I have met with have reduced me to the last Extremity and I must go with the Pacquet tomorrow unless I am assisted by Government.” His address was given as “Mrs. McCleods Gardens.” He reiterated his old stamp distributor account of 1765-1766, and begged for at least a part payment on it. “This Sir with the quarterly Allowance Lord North proposed to give me,” he wrote, “will enable me to face my Enemies and to live free from their Persecution. If this can be granted me, I know you will tell me so, and if it can not I beseech you dear Sir 1st to let me know it immediately, that I may take Advantage of the Pacquet Boat bound to Virginia.” This letter, especially the discussion of persecution, implies that what Washington sagely had called “attendance and dependence,” added to debts, had finally produced a bad emotional state on Colonel Mercer’s part, as early as 1775.

George Mercer, both literally and figuratively, “missed the boat”

\(^{214}\) *Ibid.*
in 1775. A statement of his account with the Grand Ohio Company handed or sent him by Thomas Walpole, February 26, 1776, was duly endorsed by Colonel Mercer. On March 22, 1776, he wrote John Robinson, of the Treasury, a short revealing note, saying, "I am compelled to trouble you again. I need not remind you that my Account has been ten years at the Treasury, but I do assure you on my Honour that since Lord North was pleased to promise my Business should be settled in a few days, I have expended above a fourth Part of the Amount of my original Claim on Government," adding, "... I have lived above six months open to every Charge that Suspense could draw me into. For Heavens Sake Sir, relieve me from this cruel and expensive State! You will ever find me grateful." It was at this time that Thomas Pownall consulted George Mercer about American wild rye, obtained an excellent statement about it from Mercer and dubbed him Lieutenant Governor Mercer.

After the Declaration of Independence by the United States of America, George Mercer occupied the embarrassing position of a hanger-on of a government with which his native land, now organized as a nation, was at war. This embarrassment superimposed on other hardships, was possibly responsible for his letter of August 1, 1776, to a British Lord (probably Germain), saying, "As it is impossible for me to live in England on the Generosity of Government, the only Subsistence I can at present expect, I shall be forced to use the Indulgence your Lordship was pleased to grant me, to retire to the Continent." He said he would leave London the next Tuesday. There is no unmistakable evidence of secret service activity in his remarks, "[I] shall think myself happy if I can be useful to your Lordship in the Execution of any Commands" and, "My Lord I do most humbly recommend myself to your protection; and I take the Liberty to assure you, that in whatever Sphere your Lordship shall permit me to move, my chief Study will be to merit your Approbation." It would seem that he anticipated the necessity of making contact with Lord Stormont, the British Ambassador to France, for he asked a letter of introduction to him.

An expatriate from his native America, and now an exile from Great Britain, George Mercer, in August 1776, took up residence in Paris, France. It is somewhat mysterious that he at that time was on the payroll of the British Government. From Paris, where he did

213 G.M.P., 325.
not escape the notice of Silas Deane, of the Lees and of the Franklins, he wrote, June 3, 1777, a typical letter to his old Lord [Germain].

In this greatly revealing letter he said, "I beg your Lordships Permission to remove to Plombieres, as the Faculty [Doctors of that day were commonly called 'gentlemen of the Faculty'] have recommended those waters to me," and followed this in the typical style of one in his circumstances saying, "I have written to Lord North, requesting his Lordship will enable me to undertake and support the Journey by advancing me a Sum of Money, and at the same time I have petitioned his Lordship to increase my Allowance, which is at present, as I am informed by very good Authority, much lower than that of any Attorney General of the American provinces who certainly are inferior Officers to the Lieutenant Governors; . . .," a statement which causes American posterity some misgivings. He admits being a pensioner; he thinks of the then independent states of the United States as provinces and of British-appointed Attorney-Generals and Lieutenant Governors as potential political realities in America, and he implies that, at the time, he was a duly appointed Lieutenant Governor. The last part of the letter contains now familiar but nevertheless remarkable data. He hoped his "Requests" for a lump sum and an increased allowance would be thought reasonable for two stated reasons: "... I recollect that Government has been indebted to me near twelve years a larger Sum than that I pray his Lordship to lend me" and "... I undertake too to repay it when Affairs in America are settled, and I am allowed to repossess my Property there . . ." One wonders, but does not know, what settlement of "Affairs in America" he had in mind. It would seem from the last half of the statement of this reason that he envisioned forced restitution of the empire. Probably his circumstances and the position of the one addressed made this statement necessary. But his remark about repossessing his property in Virginia cannot be condoned. He was not politically but voluntarily and legally dispossessed of his estate. He had really spent it in England; and the thought of retaking it was both illegal and immoral. A possible excuse is found in his statement, "Without these Aids . . . it will be impossible for me to quit Paris, as my miserable State of Health has forced me already to run into Debt." It should not be forgotten that the outbreak of war had prevented any money for him being sent from Virginia.

218 Ibid., 155/40.
The printed letters of Edward Bancroft, Arthur Lee and Silas Deane reveal contemporary allegations that George Mercer in 1776 was dubbed Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina, granted an annuity or pension of £ 400 per annum and suspected of being sent to France to watch and report upon the secret activities of American agents and French politicians. Only the historical disrepute of his critics saves Colonel Mercer from severe criticism and some condemnation by posterity.

George Mercer was probably in France when Samuel Wharton, winding up the affairs of the Grand Ohio Company in London, drew up, July 17, 1777, a statement of George Mercer's Account with the Grand Ohio Company. Information about him in the last seven years of his life is very scanty. He did write George Mason, April 23, 1778, but the letter has not been found but only mentioned. In his reply, mainly about the American Revolution and about politics, Mason said he had not heard from Mercer or of him for two years. At the time Mason was heavily engaged in securing if possible 200,000 acres surveyed for the old Ohio Company in Kentucky in the summer of 1775. He mentions it, partly no doubt out of his interest at the time, but also as a statement of prospects of shareholders like George Mercer. He may have mentioned it as a ray of light for his relative stranded abroad and so badly frustrated.

George Mercer continued writing to American friends. On September 15, 1779, in the midst of the war, General Washington wrote Joseph Wharton, "Your favor of the 25th Ulto. from Philadelphia came safe to my hands a few days ago, as did the letters you were so obliging as to bring from my old acquaintance and friend Colo. Mercer." (Mercer's letters not found.) At this late date Washington paid tribute to him as "A Gentln. for whom I always had a sincere regard." More cautiously, he wrote, "What walk of life he has been in the last four or five years and what line of conduct he has observed in this great contest I am totally uninformed of, but from the opinion I entertain of his honor, his justice, and his love to this country I would feign hope that it has been altogether unexceptionable," a statement of great generosity, worthy of its author.

The life of George Mercer, 1780-1784, is not fully revealed by any evidence as yet found. A letter, October 13, 1780, of Silas Deane,

219 G.M.P., 326.
220 Virginia Historical Register, II (1849), 28.
221 G. W., XVI, 292.
himself discredited and in exile in Paris, says, "Sir, Yours of the 8th I received last evening," implication that at the time George Mercer was back again in London. But a letter of Le Grand de Costelle to Franklin, November 2, 1781, asked his "advice as to removing his friend, Col. George Mercer of America, who is ill in a French inn," 222 supposing that an order from Congress was necessary.

The year intervening between these two letters must have been decisive for George Mercer. In disregard of the French alliance in war, he seems to have returned to France in 1781 and became a problem of Benjamin Franklin. The petition of his second wife, March 25, 1784, states flatly that reason forsook him in 1781. His illness at the French inn was probably mental as well as physical.

Without further documentary evidence, it is impossible, nearly two hundred years later, to more than imagine what must have been his confused condition, when Virginia was harassed by British troops, 1780-1781. By the last of October 1781 he was probably insane and unaffected by the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. It is known that while he retained his 1776 annuity of £ 400 per year until 1782 this was reduced by £ 100 in 1782. This pension was not enough to maintain a sick insane man, his second wife and a crippled daughter in the style once maintained by George Mercer, though it should not be ignored that Loyalists such as Joseph Galloway were awarded a pension of only £ 200.

George Mercer died in London, England, in April 1784.223 At the time of his death he still owned certain small parcels of land in Virginia. They were under the control of his brother James Mercer as his attorney-in-fact. Also it was established that in case of the intestacy of George Mercer, James Mercer, as his heir, would inherit these parcels of land.

But George Mercer was known to have made out his will in London, September 1, 1770. A copy of this old will, not attested, nor probated, nor recorded, was in the possession of James Mercer, having doubtless been sent him earlier from London. It was said in 1786 the parcels of land "yield no profit, being unimproved, and were subject to certain loss for public taxes." 224 And an act of the legislature was passed that year, for vesting in James Mercer, Esq. "certain lands whereof George Mercer died seized." 225 James Mercer was by the

222 Calendar of Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society, IV, 442.
223 Hening, Statutes, XII, 365.
224 Ibid., 366.
225 Ibid., 365.
Act, required to enter into bond with sufficient security, to be approved by the corporation court of the Town of Fredericksburg in such penal sum as the said court shall direct. The bond had to be recorded. And provision was enjoined for “a certificate for obtaining administration on the personal estate of George Mercer deceased . . . the said court taking bond and security as in ordinary cases.” A proviso stated that the law was to be void if the original will was located, proved and recorded.

Very unfortunately, intensive research in the records of Fredericksburg and of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, has disclosed no further light on George Mercer’s estate, real or personal. No copies of the Will of 1770 nor of its codicils, no record of the bond prescribed by law, no inventories of the estate as administered, 1786-1792, could be found where expected. But a few items about the once large estate of George Mercer are found in documents of the two decades after his death. James Mercer, January 30, 1787, wrote his half-brother, John Francis Mercer, a vague letter about it, saying “the matter is unsettled for years.” Colonel Charles Simms of Fredericksburg called on George Washington, October 29, 1788, “respecting the affairs of Colo. Geo. Mercer and his mortgages, but Washington disclaimed any further responsibility.”

George Washington put out a “Statement of Facts,” February 1, 1789. Two weeks later he put out his answer to a bill of William Owens against him. In his last will of May 23, 1791, James Mercer left to his executors, “the Trusts reposed in me by the Act of Assembly respecting my late Brother, George Mercer.” The signatures completing the deed of November 24, 1774, to Francis Willis, Jr., were not completed and the deed recorded, until February 6, 1793. The Richard Gravatt mortgage of 1771 was not recorded in Frederick County, Virginia, until October 10, 1803. John Francis Mercer, as late as February 6, 1804, was writing to Alexander White and Charles Simms about bonds given at the sales of 1774, and Charles

226 Ibid., 367.
227 Ibid., 368.
228 MS., Virginia State Library.
230 G. W., XXX, 190-194.
231 Copies in Virginia Historical Society and in the Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
232 Will Book, Spotsylvania County, Virginia.
233 Deed Book XXVI, 681, Frederick County, Virginia.
234 Ibid.
235 MS., Virginia Historical Society.
Fenton Mercer, son of James Mercer, wrote John Francis Mercer, March 30, 1805, about compromises to be negotiated with the old creditors of George Mercer in England. It is in fact impossible to say when the final settlement of the affairs of George Mercer was reached.

The life of George Mercer was unique mainly in three respects. He was closely related to the Ohio Company and was the instrumentality through which many important documents were preserved, a fact which of itself justifies a short accompanying biography. He unwisely became a distributor of stamps in 1765 and his later career illustrates the penalty of the mistake. Unlike most others he remained abroad and became an expatriate. Possibly more important was the matter of types of which George Mercer was a well documented illustration. Like other American colonials he was an extravagant aristocrat. Throughout his life he lived beyond the family means and his personal income, as did, however, many of his more staid and serious contemporaries.

As was the case with many tidewater Virginia gentlemen, George Mercer was an accumulator and manipulator of landholdings. But here, as elsewhere, he was a user of wealth, not a creator of additional values and not an earner of profits or over-all net income. Like many of his friends and associates, George Mercer was restless, fond of change and enamored of travel. Town life and its culture appealed to him. He and many others were allured by European travel and residence, but where most of them were merely captivated, George Mercer may be said to have been actually captured rather than merely attracted.

The career of George Mercer may be explicable. That it was one featured by frequent frustrations was then and still can be clearly seen. And it is equally apparent that it ended in complete and final frustration, with mental and physical breakdown as feature or result. Some of all this seems to have been avoidable. It may be that one value of his biography is that of indication to posterity of how inimical to a successful life and career are certain ideals and policies.

The historical biographer cannot wisely depart from the factuality of the documented record. But a measure of imagination may well be added. In places in this sketch it has been suggested that ideals, decisions and events might have been otherwise. If one waive the matter of determinism and conjectures that his mental state was a result as well as a factor it is possible to imagine and picture a career far different for George Mercer than that actually revealed by docu-
mentary evidence. The things which George Mercer conceivably might have done, and possibly should have done but actually did not do, are numerous.

George Mercer might have pursued the study and practice of law. John Mercer, James Mercer and John Francis Mercer did this. George Mercer, if it had been necessary, might have as a lawyer settled down along the Blue Ridge Mountains after the manner of Gabriel Jones or in distant Kentucky, as did Henry Clay.

As already indicated, earlier above, George Mercer might have followed the career of a surveyor, architect or builder, whether in tidewater Virginia or in the up country. And he might have assumed the management of the real estate of his overworked father and possibly saved the family fortunes. In any of these three cases he might have avoided rambling around and might have married some worthy colonial girl such as the daughter of James Wood of Winchester whose husband Lawrence Augustine Washington left to her, and to posterity, an incomparable tribute. And George Mercer might well have lived less well at all times and particularly might have avoided his economically artificial life abroad.

George Mercer also might well have settled after 1759, on his Shenandoah plantation. Had he surrendered more quickly his position under Bouquet and Stanwix, he might not have made the significant change from America to Europe in 1763. Then he would have escaped the discredit of the stamp distribution episode. He might have stayed in Virginia in and after 1765, or he might well have returned home after the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. He might well also have come back to Virginia after his marriage of August 1767 and established a home on the Shenandoah. Possibly he might have avoided the agreement with the Grand Ohio Company in 1770. Financially at least he should have come back home in 1770 to superintend the affairs of his then extensive estate. The logic of his return after the Boston Tea Party of 1773 may not have impressed him, but seems today beyond serious question. More certainly he should, it seems, have returned to Virginia on the outbreak of war in 1775.

Had George Mercer done some one or more of the things here imagined and suggested, he might, as indicated above, have gone into the military service of the United States and risen to high rank. If he perchance should have survived the war, he might have settled down in old age in either Virginia or Kentucky and left to history a career of honor and distinction. It is not impossible that under such cir-
cumstances he might have lived to a ripe old age and not died abroad at the early age of fifty, after eighteen years of trouble and worry and three years of mental and physical collapse.