

The Discovery and Development of the Southern Colonial Landscape: Six Commentators

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GRAPPLING WITH the problem of the landscape in history is inordinately difficult. John R. Stilgoe begins a recent and incisive work on the early American landscape with the flat statement, '*Landscape* is a slippery word.'¹ In a provocative essay Donald W. Meinig identifies ten ways of defining the same scene—as nature, habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, history, place, and aesthetic—and concludes that his list is not exhaustive.² This brief essay will at one time or another utilize at least seven of the ten in the course of making a fairly simple point about a pervasive influence on the shaping of the southern colonial landscape. Perhaps the only solution is to join Humpty Dumpty in his immortal statement to Alice that 'when *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more or less.'

That open invitation to confusion does not, however, diminish the importance of reading the historical landscape as perceptively as we can. Past landscapes are as much a means of understanding human thought and action as any other part of the historical record, especially in an age that once again believes the natural environment to be an extremely vital dimen-

An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the Society, October 19, 1983.

¹ John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1680 to 1845* (New Haven, 1982), p. 3.

² Donald W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York, 1979), pp. 33-48.

sion of the setting in which human affairs unfold. Yet, the difficulty of recovering a sense of past landscapes is formidable. More even than in the case of man-made structures modified through later additions and rebuilding, or of manuscripts whose texts have in some manner been partly lost or deliberately altered, changed landscapes obliterate almost beyond recovery what had existed before. Even when a landscape is very small, one is dealing with an artifact of enormous complexity and variety. It is no wonder that the most successful reconstructions of historical landscapes are often specific and local—a farm, even a single field, rather than an entire agricultural system; a village rather than an extensive countryside.

Colonial America presents a special problem. It is not one of antiquity—on the scale of world history the American landscape as it has developed since European colonization is exceptionally young. There are not a great number of layers of alteration and modification to be peeled back. Yet all the categories of evidence, whether documentary, iconographic, or physical, that might prove useful in recovering earlier landscapes, are scarce. Successive changes in the American landscape, too, have occurred with unusual frequency and completeness in such a rapidly developing country.³

The case can be made as well that from its inception the European shaping of the American landscape was unusual, arising out of the strong supposition of European colonizers that they were effecting a fundamental transition from 'wild' to 'settled' or civilized landscape and that they were beginning *de novo* in a pristine setting. In truth, the American landscape was being changed, not from unsettled to settled but from one that had long been shaped by the culture of Eastern Woodland Indians to one organized in quite another way by Europeans and their descendants. Yet the shift was dramatic, sudden, and sweep-

³ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), offers a recent and suggestive case study in ways of addressing the problem. See esp. chs. 1-2 and the bibliographical essay.

ing, sharply contrasting with the gradual transformation of landscape that has been more generally characteristic of migrations throughout human history. The European sense of a new beginning in a virgin landscape, however wrongly conceived, was, therefore, credible. It remained, moreover, a pervasive influence upon the actions of those who settled America.⁴

In a strict sense there was, of course, no single colonial American landscape. In both the pre-settlement and developed states a pattern of complex regional, subregional, and even more local variations produced many distinctive landscapes, based in the first instance upon climate, soil, topography, and the character of Indian occupancy, and in the second upon the influence of the cultural traditions of the predominant settlers in a given area. Even in the most general of terms the southern seaboard colonies, from Maryland through Georgia, comprised at least three major subregions, the Tidewater Chesapeake, the South Carolina–Georgia Low Country, and the vast interior area of the Piedmont stretching from north to south throughout most of the larger region.⁵

At the beginning of his magisterial study of colonial southern literary and intellectual life, Richard Beale Davis remarked that descriptions of the region composed the single most voluminous body of southern writing from the late sixteenth century to the settlement of Georgia in the 1730s. He contrasts this preoccupation with landscape and place with New England's concern with matters of religion, and opposes as well a southern view of the New World as terrestrial paradise, a new

⁴ There are brief discussions of various aspects of the large question of European preconceptions of the New World and their influence in George P. Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto, 1969), p. 17; Lewis Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power* (New York, 1970), pp. 3–24; David B. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York, 1977), ch. 4; and Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, 1967), ch. 2.

⁵ Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill, 1964), ch. 3, conveys an excellent impression of how complex the patterns of topography and vegetation could be in the southern colonies if the sectioning of the area were made more complex than a tripartite division into coastal plain, Piedmont, and mountains.

Eden, to the New England view that it was a howling wilderness.⁶ In reality, Davis, for all the splendid quality of his work, may have created a rather sharper dichotomy than actually existed; images of fear and terror and those of an earthly Paradise appeared in about equal proportions throughout the literature of exploration and colonization.⁷ New Englanders, moreover, were scarcely less preoccupied with the natural world than southern colonists. Descriptions of the New England landscape are, if anything, rather more detailed and precise, and the modern literature on the early New England landscape is far more extensive.⁸

Yet Davis was almost certainly correct in asserting that from the beginning there was a remarkable preoccupation with the southern landscape on the part of those who explored and settled it. For that region presented a far greater contrast to the Old World. Europeans were struck by the extremity of its heat, the prevalence of fatal diseases, the fury of its frequent storms, and the inhospitality of its soil to many basic European food crops. And yet these settlers were also attracted by the promise of easy wealth from minerals and exotic tropical products that the area appeared to offer.⁹ Those who came sometimes exaggerated that tropical character and thereby heightened their sense of its difference from Europe, just as those who went to

⁶ Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1685-1763*, 3 vols. (Knoxville, 1978), 1:4-5.

⁷ See esp. Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World* (New York, 1964), chs. 1-2.

⁸ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, is the most recent example of an informed treatment of the early New England landscape. Betty Flanders Thomson, *The Changing Face of New England!* (New York, 1958), is a classic popular account. Stilgoe's *Common Landscape of America* provides a much stronger treatment of the New England landscape than of the one part of the southern landscape, the Chesapeake, that he examines at all. Albert E. Cowdrey, *This Land, This South: An Environmental History* (Lexington, Ky., 1983), is a recent general treatment of the South, described in a jacket blurb as possibly 'the first book to explore man's cumulative impact on the southern landscape.'

⁹ Cf. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, 'The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early American Period,' *American Historical Review* 87(1982):1262-89, and 'Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. (forthcoming).

New England almost as easily assumed too much similarity between Old and New England, discounting the greater severity of New England winters and the relative infertility of its soil. Yet, there was no gainsaying the sharper divergence between southern landscapes and those that the settlers had left behind, or the greater psychological impact of its appearance on them.

In a brief discussion it is patently impossible to make more than a small beginning toward the examination of so complex a phenomenon as the discovery and development of that exotic, richly varied habitat we call the colonial South. We might begin, however, with a single objective, though a significant one, by attempting to isolate the attitudes and preconceptions with which Europeans approached the New World landscape and the manner in which those perceptions were reinforced or transformed by the process of settlement. Although that undertaking is a large one, we may begin to comprehend it—to identify at least one major, influential theme—by examining the work of a half dozen of the best observers of the early South. Thomas Hariot, Captain John Smith, John Lawson, and Robert Beverley would appear on almost anyone's list of major writers of the colonial South. Two others, William Stephens, secretary to the Georgia Trustees, and William Gerard De Brahm, an experienced engineer and surveyor who prepared a revealing official report on some of the southern colonies at the end of the colonial period, were neither as well known nor writing as consciously for publication. There are conspicuous absences from so brief a list, but the six afford a chronological spread from the beginning of colonization to the eve of the Revolution. Moreover, all of these men shared an unusual degree of accuracy and objectivity and a relative freedom from blatantly promotional purposes in their recorded observations. Together they make it possible to trace the evolution of a central influence in the shaping of the early American landscape as it relates to the colonial South.

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Although their careers came nearer the end than the beginning of the process, Thomas Hariot and John Smith speak effectively for that whole group of voyagers who carried out the initial discovery and investigation of an unknown shoreline from the early sixteenth to the early seventeenth century. The earliest North American explorers, even those like Giovanni Verrazano who were perceptive observers of the land and its aboriginal inhabitants, were still primarily concerned with sea routes to America and the character of its coastal lands. Neither they nor their backers had as yet faced the idea of living permanently in the New World. Others, especially European publicists who never came to America, were prone to depict an imaginary, terror-filled nature, 'a vague, rich jungle of repellent or terrifying things, animals, plants, and man' that scarcely resembled reality.¹⁰ Hariot and Smith were, however, part of a later, final generation of overseas adventurers. Coming after transatlantic routes were more established, and arriving with the knowledge that settlement was imminent, they appreciated the necessity for careful, detailed observation of a land that Europeans were about to occupy. They were, on the whole, realistic observers. Their curiosity about the new land outran their fears, and their sense of its potential was strong and focused.

Hariot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, first published in 1588 but based on his observations as a participant in the 1585 expedition sent by Sir Walter Raleigh to Roanoke, is the most justly celebrated of the accounts from that era of discovery.¹¹ We know it best perhaps in the Frankfort edition of 1590 that also included Theodore de Bry's engravings made from John White's drawings of the Indians of the Virginia-North Carolina coast. Together White and Hariot provided what remains a basic source of information

¹⁰ Jones, *O Strange New World*, p. 69.

¹¹ The authoritative modern edition is David B. Quinn, ed., *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590*, 2 vols. (London, 1955), 1:314-87.

about the native inhabitants of the region. Hariot was, however, hardly less concerned with the subject of two earlier sections of his work, the first a discussion of what he termed the 'Marchantable Commodities' of the region, and the second listing various sources of food that were indigenous to the area.

It is Hariot's 'shopping list' of 'Marchantable Commodities'—a catalogue of those products and resources from which investors and settlers might expect quick and ready profits—that sets the tone of *A Briefe and True Report*. The list was in some respects a reasonable one, omitting gold and silver but holding out hope for such lesser metals as copper and iron, and pointing correctly to the potential for producing naval stores and obtaining furs and skins. It laid great stress, too, on the hope of producing such tropical products as citrus fruit, oils, and sugar, and held out the promise of silk, once mulberry trees had been planted. But in general, the list was overly optimistic and unrealistic, even before Hariot concluded it with a vague promise of still other commodities that he left to the 'discret and gentle considerations' of his readers or for future discovery. In common with virtually all the early colonizers, Hariot placed his emphasis on what may be broadly termed extractive pursuits—minerals, naval stores, and other kinds of produce that depended less on cultivation alone than on simple processing, such as silk or wines. Indeed, for all his careful survey of the landscape, Hariot saw it essentially in terms of finding the right combination of such extractive pursuits.¹²

Hariot's emphasis on these specific forms of exploration exemplified the attitude toward the land and the expectations of its gifts that undergirded most of the literature of discovery. But equally deserving of attention is the effort of Capt. John Smith, the most observant and most versatile of this group of explorers, a man equally familiar with the Chesapeake and, after his later expeditions, with New England coastal regions.

¹² Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report*, in Quinn, ed., *Roanoke Voyages*, 1:325–37.

In little more than two years in Virginia—from his arrival with the first group of settlers in the spring of 1607 until his return to England in the fall of 1609—Smith not only did more than anyone else to keep the struggling colony alive but also carried out a nearly complete exploration of Chesapeake Bay and its major tributary rivers to their farthest point of navigation. He described his first ventures during 1607 up the James and Chickahominy rivers into the heart of Powhatan's empire in his first publication, *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Hapned in Virginia*, which appeared a year afterward.¹³ His account of the two major Chesapeake voyages, which took him to the head of the bay, first appeared as part of the text that accompanied his map of 1612 and was later subsumed in the second and third books of the 1624 *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles*.¹⁴ Like Hariot's, Smith's description of the Indians remains one of the most useful sources of evidence on native culture. His estimate of the land and its resources, although forming a surprisingly small part of the corpus of his extensive Virginia writings, revealed a point of view similar to Hariot's. The approach, as Richard Beale Davis remarked, was utilitarian, and Smith's list of potential resources, almost identical with that of *A Briefe and True Report*, was utterly pessimistic about silver and gold; but it was hopeful about copper and iron, and confident about furs, naval stores, flax, and silk. Smith added glass and fish but played down some of the more exotic tropical products and precious metals. Except for recording the routes by which he carried out his explorations and attempting to assess potential extractive resources, Smith was indifferent to the Chesapeake landscape. Detailed descriptions were rare and exultation at its beauty rarer still in Smith's writings.

¹³ Edward Arber and A. G. Bradley, eds., *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1910), 1:5–40. This is the most authoritative edition of Smith's collected writings, pending the forthcoming edition of the late Philip L. Barbour, scheduled to be published in 1985.

¹⁴ Arber and Bradley, eds., *Captain John Smith*, 1:47–64, 109–19, 343–60; 2:412–32.

A certain preoccupation with what might make colonization pay was to be expected from Hariot and Smith. For their explorations were, after all, the business ventures of Raleigh and his backers at Roanoke and the Virginia Company investors at Jamestown. Yet, for men who were inquisitive—the one by virtue of his scientific training, the other from a life of high adventure—and who now had the opportunity to examine a strange, intriguing land, Hariot and Smith were remarkably single-minded in their focus on America as a source of easily extracted wealth. While both spelled out precisely though briefly what they thought those resources were, the attitudes and preconceptions that they brought to the task were more often implicit in their writings than systematically recorded, or were revealed in the manner in which they acted. Still, a rather clear picture of those attitudes and the additional perceptions they gained in the New World emerges. These men thought themselves in a pristine wilderness, its vast riches not yet tapped in any significant way by savage Indians. A wilderness of such promise held no fear for either explorer. Smith ranged freely over the eastern portions of Virginia and Maryland, establishing contact with a large portion of its aboriginal inhabitants. Hariot participated in the expeditions that Ralph Lane, his commander, made northward and westward from Roanoke. He remained utterly scornful of those ignorant men who ‘were neuer out of the Iland where wee were seated, or not farre, or at the leastwise in a few places els, during the time of our aboade in the countrey.’¹⁵ For these adventurers, the New World wilderness was not a place of sensory delight any more than a place of terror. Neither was entirely oblivious to the physical beauty of the landscape, but the gentleman-adventurer George Percy was almost alone among the early chroniclers of the Chesapeake in his flights of pastoral imagery praising its garden-like beauty.¹⁶ Hariot and Smith were remarkably sen-

¹⁵ Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report*, in Quinn, ed., *Roanoke Voyages*, 1:323.

¹⁶ Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter, 1606–1609*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1969), 1:133–41.

sitive about the culture of the native inhabitants, providing accounts of the ways in which Indians had themselves shaped and transformed the land by agriculture, hunting, woodland burning, or established routes of travel. Yet neither observer could incorporate the meaning of that extensive aboriginal occupancy into their own view of the landscape. Finally, even though Harriot and Smith knew that settlers would have to feed themselves while engaged in more profitable pursuits, neither could conceive of colonization as an agricultural enterprise in any significant way. Only in the very last of his writings, *Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England or Anywhere*, published in 1631—the year of his death—did Smith offer a systematic examination of the agricultural possibilities of the American land; for by that time he knew agriculture could not be so easily discounted.¹⁷

The New World land, in the last analysis, was for both men primarily a vast cornucopia of untapped wealth, even though they shared none of the fanciful Edenic images that dominated so much of European thought about America. Any concern with the new colonies as a satisfying human habitat was, however, distinctly secondary. The exploitative drive of European colonizers was vividly expressed by the author of *Virginia's Verger* who likened Virginia to a 'modest Virgin . . . expecting rather ravishment than Mariage from her Native Savages,' but 'worth the wooing and loves of the best Husband' and presumably ready for fruitful wedlock with the European colonizer. Indeed, that drive was as strong, if scarcely so colorfully put, in Thomas Hariot and John Smith.¹⁸

Smith, whose cartographic and exploratory achievements quickly established a surprisingly complete knowledge of the lands and river systems in the Tidewater Chesapeake, foreshadowed a second stage in the exploration of the colonial South that

¹⁷ Arber and Bradley, eds., *Captain John Smith*, 2:949–53.

¹⁸ Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (Glasgow, 1906), 19:242.

is often overlooked in the greater appeal and higher drama of the earlier transatlantic voyages of discovery and the later opening of the trans-Mississippi West.¹⁹ Settlement spread slowly at first, from precarious beginnings at Jamestown through eastern Virginia and Maryland and then more rapidly after 1660. Expansion from Virginia into the Albemarle region of northeastern North Carolina and settlement of other parts of the Carolinas, largely from Charleston, soon followed. Even so, there remained a vast interior awaiting more complete discovery.

This exploration of the interior that lay behind the seaboard South did not lack important chroniclers. In the latter half of the seventeenth century twin thrusts from Virginia and South Carolina, both aimed mainly at opening up an Indian trade, had established a number of commercial links, and in the process had begun the discovery of the Piedmont and mountain regions. John Lederer was perhaps the dominant figure in the Virginia effort and probably the first European to ascend the crest of the Blue Ridge. Edward Bland, Abraham Wood, Robert Fallam, Cadwallader Jones, and others had also participated in similar expeditions.²⁰ Henry Woodward was the principal figure in the South Carolina explorations, though others like Maurice Mathews and James Moore joined in an effort that ultimately succeeded in establishing domination of the Indian trade by the Carolinians.²¹ Many of the Indian routes were familiar by 1700, but exploratory journeys in the southern colonies intensified in the first decade or two of the new century,

¹⁹ A notable exception is the careful and relatively detailed treatment of the exploration of the interior regions of Virginia, the Carolinas, and the lower South in W. P. Cumming, S. E. Hillier, D. B. Quinn, and G. Williams, *The Exploration of North America, 1630-1776* (New York, 1974), chs. 3-4.

²⁰ The standard collection of the early Virginia explorations is Clarence Walworth Alvord and Lee Bidgood, eds., *The First Explorations of the Trans-Allegheny Region by the Virginians, 1650-1674* (Cleveland, 1912). A more authoritative study of John Lederer, however, is *The Discoveries of John Lederer*, ed. William P. Cumming (Charlottesville, 1958).

²¹ Cumming et al., *Exploration of North America*, pp. 86-101.

and their organizers now placed somewhat more emphasis both on land that could be acquired and opened for settlement and on possible mineral resources. William Byrd's two classic accounts of his participation in the running of the North Carolina-Virginia boundary in 1728, as well as his briefer *Journey to the Land of Eden* and *Progress to the Mines*, reflected the newer exploitative interests of Virginians, as did Gov. Alexander Spotswood's expedition across the Blue Ridge with the group of compatriots he grandly dubbed the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe.²² A comparable series of South Carolina expeditions continued to emphasize the Indian trade and also sought to advance English interests against the Spanish and French in Florida and Louisiana. In one instance—Sir Alexander Cumming's thousand-mile penetration into Cherokee country—the purposes were scientific as well. But the eighteenth-century expeditions generally served to keep alive and expand the drive to exploit these newer regions.²³

None of these accounts from that period—when permanent settlement in the coastal regions of the southern colonies had become a reality, but the interior still remained largely unsettled and undeveloped—exceeded in the quality of their observations John Lawson's *New Voyage to Carolina*, first published in London in 1702.²⁴ After traveling west and north from South Carolina up the Santee and Wateree river basins, Lawson moved northward across central North Carolina through the region of the Uwharrie Mountains; subsequently, at a point not far from the Virginia border, he turned eastward, crossing the Haw, Neuse, and Tar rivers and headed toward Pamlico Sound. The expedition was described on the title page

²² *The Prose Works of William Byrd of Westover*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), contains the four Byrd accounts; Edward P. Alexander, ed., *The Journal of John Fontaine: An Irish Huguenot Son in Spain and Virginia, 1710-1719* (Williamsburg, 1972), pp. 13-19, 101-109, is the best edition of the only surviving account of the Spotswood expedition.

²³ Cumming et al., *Exploration of North America*, pp. 117-35.

²⁴ *A New Voyage to Carolina by John Lawson*, ed. Hugh Talmadge Lefler (Chapel Hill, 1967), is the standard edition.

of the published version as one of a thousand miles of 'Travels thro' several Nations of Indians.' A more accurate assessment of Lawson's fifty-nine-day journey fixes the distance at something between five hundred and fifty and slightly more than six hundred miles, still a remarkable trip.²⁵

Writing a century after Hariot and Smith, Lawson's work offers an interesting mixture of continuity and contrast with the accounts of Hariot and Smith, and presents some indication of just how slowly North Carolina had been peopled and how little developed its land remained as the eighteenth century opened. This explorer encountered still thriving Indian tribes, their lives not yet irrevocably altered by trade and other forms of contact with whites, tribes no less dependent on a prospering agriculture than on hunting. As earlier explorers had done, Lawson continued to cling strongly to a sense of confidence that Carolina could produce those tropical products such as wine, oil, fruit, and silk that the promoters of colonization had from the first anticipated. He remained optimistic about mineral wealth, though now claiming that it lay in the mountains to the west. Moreover, he still stressed the potential of such extractive products as furs, naval stores, and timber. To that extent, his vision of the future scarcely differed from that of his seventeenth-century predecessors.

Yet Lawson reacted differently to another aspect of the land he described. He now paid close attention to the soil, commenting on its fertility and promise for planting or livestock grazing. At times he even took an aesthetic delight in the landscape, nowhere more enthusiastically than in his description of an important Indian trading post and village on the Yadkin River. A 'delicious Country,' he called it, with the banks of the river 'fertile and pleasant.' Lawson went on to declare that no place in 'all *Europe*' could 'afford a pleasanter Stream, were it inhabited by *Christians*, and cultivated by ingenious Hands.' The

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xv; Cumming et al., *Exploration of North America*, p. 97.

'continual pleasant warbling Noise' of the stream, the sight of swans and other waterfowl, and the constant singing of birds echoing against nearby hills enchanted him, but so did the adjacent land that provided 'as rich a Soil to the Eye of a knowing Person with us, as any this Western World can afford.'²⁶ Before Lawson completed the *New Voyage to Carolina* he discussed the already settled region of eastern Carolina, stressing the yields from such crops as maize and most of the European grains, even while showing disdain for the prevailing agricultural methods.

There was a note of ambivalence, then, in Lawson's observations. The old objective of tropical products, simple extractive pursuits, and quick profits persisted. It represented, in fact, Lawson's highest hopes for Carolina. At the same time, his practical assessment of the landscape paid far more attention to the land's fertility and potential for an agricultural order based on food crops and animal husbandry. Although his promotional insights were strong and his larger vision remained that of a vigorous commerce based on extractive pursuits and exotic luxury products, Lawson recognized, too, that development of the landscape depended far more on raising traditional agricultural crops.

Those extractive ambitions that the explorers and promoters had entertained were, of course, not quite a total failure. A trade with Indians for skins and furs continued to be significant for some time, especially in South Carolina. The exploitation of the forests for timber and naval stores likewise remained important for large areas of the colonial South. Moreover, a small, but for a time lucrative, indigo production might be accounted as a simple extractive industry rather than an agricultural endeavor.

In a way the two major commercial crops of the southern

²⁶ Lefler, ed., *New Voyage to Carolina*, p. 52.

colonies—tobacco in the Chesapeake and its Albemarle extension and rice in the Low Country of South Carolina and Georgia—also appeared to depart from ‘traditional’ North European agriculture. Both were unfamiliar crops in the beginning, and both were grown on relatively large plantations for a world market. Once its cultivation in flooded fields began, rice demanded a technology that, while simple and age-old, required extensive manipulation of the landscape. Tobacco began as an exotic luxury commodity, one that invited inclusion with the wine, sugar, silk, and tropical fruit that the colonists hoped to produce. The importance of the two crops in the colonial economy and the character of their cultivation indicated that their success marked not a retreat from but the final culmination of the extractive and exploitative drive present in colonization.

Yet Lawson’s attention to the growing of both European grains and maize and the raising of livestock was an accurate reflection of southern agriculture not only in the emerging backcountry through which he mainly traveled but in the plantation regions as well. Specialization almost never reached a point at which agricultural laborers failed to grow their own food. Rice growing was concentrated in a relatively small, distinctive area, while tobacco, even on larger plantations, was cultivated by methods similar to those used for growing grain. John Lawson’s recognition of the new character of the landscape was grudging and incomplete, but he had accurately fixed the increasingly dominant influence of more traditional agriculture in the shaping of that landscape.

In the more developed regions of the colonies one might presume that an agrarian mentality—or several—prevailed over that earlier emphasis on more directly extractive pursuits. We might also expect such an outlook to have brought in its train an appreciation of the land as either a lasting resource, or a main support of the whole social and economic fabric, or

even as a resource to be husbanded rather than rapidly exploited for easy riches. Despite the existence of occasional farm and plantation journals and other documentation, nowhere is the early American landscape more unwilling to reveal itself than in the case of its farmlands, and in no part of the colonies more than in the South.

There are telling glimpses about that landscape here and there, including one from the perspective of the emerging Chesapeake planter elite in Robert Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia*, first published in 1705.²⁷ Beverley was primarily concerned with the colony's history over its first century and with the political and social institutions of his day. But he was also interested in Virginia's 'Natural Product and Conveniences' and its 'Husbandry and Improvements,' phrases from the headings of two of the four books of the *Present State*. In his lament at the destruction of the happy lives of the Indians, who had lived 'in their simple State of Nature, and in their enjoyment of Plenty' until the English made their 'Native Pleasures more scarce, by an inordinate and unreasonable Use of them,' Beverley became almost nostalgic about the easygoing Indian relationship with the land. But his work also reveals an appreciation of the land not only for its easily yielded wealth but also for its rich and varied soil, the quantity of fruit, fish, and wildfowl, a pleasing variety in the landscape, and an 'Abundance of most pleasant Streams of Pure and Chrystal Water.' He seemed to express a distinct aesthetic delight in his native landscape, along with regret at the exploitative manner in which the colonists had approached it. In a later section he seemed equally poised to praise the extent to which 'the extrem fruitfulness of that Country' had made possible a prosperous agriculture backed by the production of timber and naval stores. Beverley appeared, in sum, on the verge of subordinating the extractive, exploitative impulses of the earlier colo-

²⁷ Robert Beverley, *History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill, 1947).

nists to a pastoral ideal of a world inhabited by industrious husbandmen.²⁸

But we may leap too quickly to such a conclusion. In a contradictory but nonetheless deeply felt ending to his book, Robert Beverley suddenly shifted his ground to attack the defective husbandry of his fellow colonists, though more for their failure to exploit adequately the riches of nature than for neglecting to nurture and conserve them. He charged that Virginians made no use of the advantages the country offered, for they allowed a product like naval stores to benefit others and failed to produce flax, hemp, and other textiles. 'They depend altogether upon the Liberality of Nature, without endeavouring to improve its Gift by Art or Industry,' he complained. 'They sponge upon the Blessings of a warm Sun, and a fruitful Soil, and almost grutch the Pains of gathering in the Bounties of the Earth.'²⁹ Thus, in the end, Beverley, too, kept alive that exploitative instinct that governed the colonists' approach to the landscape. Although he accommodated that attitude more directly to an agrarian order, he succeeded in resisting his initial pastoral and aesthetic impulses.

The belated founding of the Georgia colony by James Oglethorpe and his fellow philanthropists in the early 1730s attested to the persistence of the vision of an extractive economy based on tropical products and on the production of silk and wine. Oglethorpe and the other Georgia trustees determined to fly in the face of the long record of failure of such endeavors and tried once again to promote the old extractive and tropical ideal of wine, silk, olives, and the like. And there *was* one dramatic turn in that direction. The trustees seemed equally determined to avoid the ruthlessly exploitative character of such efforts in the past and to base the new venture upon developing

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 156, 233, 121, 287.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 319. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1967), pp. 82-88, is an important discussion of similar themes in Beverley's *History*.

and supporting a strong sense of industry and husbandry among Georgia settlers. Large land grants were limited to 500 acres, smaller grants were made to ordinary settlers, and slave labor was forbidden. Settlers were expected, too, to manage these limited landholdings more carefully, to farm them more intensively, and to use them to grow adequate food crops as well as the more exotic commercial products.³⁰ If Robert Beverley had seemed to envision transferring the exploitative and developmental urges of the old extractive pursuits to more conventional agriculture, the Georgia trustees seemed to want to preserve the extractive drive but to combine it with a spirit of husbandry.

We know only too well that their efforts were all but doomed to failure, and the two decades of proprietary rule in Georgia marked an inexorable breakdown of Oglethorpe's plans. Even before the trustees' control came to an end in 1752 and the colony passed under royal administration, land and economic policy had undergone several changes: a shift towards freer distribution of land for both large planters and small farmers, an acceptance of slave labor, and an agrarian order not essentially different from that of neighboring South Carolina.³¹ An unintentionally perceptive chronicler of that slow failure was William Stephens, the loyal secretary to the trustees, whose journals for the early 1740s faithfully recorded his and others' futile efforts to promote the trustees' policies.³² The picture of still another abortive effort to capture the chimera of exotic tropical products for the European market emerged, not from

³⁰ The following titles in the extensive literature on proprietary Georgia are especially useful: James C. Bonner, *A History of Georgia Agriculture, 1732-1860* (Athens, Ga., 1964); Phinizy Spalding, *Oglethorpe in America* (Chicago, 1977); Paul S. Taylor, *Georgia Plan: 1732-1752* (Berkeley, 1972).

³¹ Milton L. Ready, 'Land Tenure in Trusteeship Georgia,' *Agricultural History* 48 (1974):353-68.

³² The earlier portions of the journal for the years 1737-41 were published in William Stephens, *A Journal of the Proceedings in Georgia*, 2 vols. (London, 1742). There is a modern printing in Allen D. Candler, comp., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, 4 (Atlanta, 1906), and 4th suppl. (Atlanta, 1908). The journal for late 1741 through 1745 is printed in *The Journals of William Stephens, 1741-1743, 1743-1745*, 2 vols., ed. E. Merton Coulter (Athens, Ga., 1959).

Stephens's ability to understand fully what was happening but rather from the diligence with which he recounted innumerable day-by-day small disasters on his own five hundred acres or on the lands managed for the trustees and tended, carelessly if at all, by servant laborers. His descriptions of the fat bunches of grapes that dropped from Stephens's vines just as they approached ripeness, the dying mulberry seedlings and orange trees in the trustees' public garden, the lands abandoned by servants or else 'over-run with Rubbish' and giving 'no Appearance of Cultivation,' and in Savannah 'the publick Squares, and most other Parts of the Town, . . . filled with an offensive Weed, near as high as a Man's Shoulders,' all attested to the failure of the trustees' vision. Stephens's efforts to report good news of flourishing mulberry trees or of new people willing to take up the efforts to make the trustees' policies work were insufficient to counter the general record of failure.³³

All the while, the advocates of slavery and larger private holdings, Stephens's own son among them, pressed for the change that ultimately came. Even Stephens himself, despite a chronic shortage of labor for his estate and the difficulty of clearing and cultivating new land, increasingly concentrated on his cattle and grain crops. He found others doing the same, perhaps adding rice if they owned suitable land that could be flooded. The colony was moving toward a more general agriculture, organized around larger and less ordered landholdings and based on methods that demanded less complete clearing of land and less intensive forms of cultivation than the trustees had sought. With the failure of the trustees' objectives, the principal developmental thrust was transferred from tropical agriculture, wine, and silk to traditional agriculture, while the spirit of husbandry that the trustees had sought to impart was lost in a landscape of randomly located farms and plantations chosen to take rapid advantage of fertile locations.

³³ Stephens, *Journal of Proceedings*, in Candler, *Colonial Records*, 4:59, 315, 433-34; Coulter, *Journals of William Stephens*, 1:95-96, 106, 175-176, 188; 2:124-25, 144.

One of the most precise descriptions of exactly how such agricultural lands were cleared and brought under cultivation—one that conveys a particularly vivid sense of the landscape being liberally shaped—occurs in the account of a sixth commentator, William Gerard De Brahm. A German-born military engineer and surveyor who moved to Georgia at the beginning of the 1750s, De Brahm served both that colony and South Carolina as surveyor-general for the next fifteen years; during that period, De Brahm acquired an intimate knowledge of the physical character of the two provinces. In 1764 he moved to Florida to serve the British government as surveyor-general of the entire Southern Department of North America, as the colonies extending southward from the Potomac through the newly acquired provinces of East and West Florida were designated. De Brahm wrote his report on South Carolina, Georgia, and the Floridas (he never reached the northern limits of his area of responsibility) while back in England in the early 1770s. In accordance with the main purposes of his assignment, De Brahm was at least as much concerned with fortifications, harbors, navigable streams, towns and cities, and population as he was with natural resources and the landscape. Consequently, the observations that we are primarily concerned about, graphic though they are, occur on a very few pages of the longer report.³⁴

In that brief account, however, De Brahm obviously drew upon his familiarity with the South Carolina countryside of a quarter of a century earlier, when the landscape remained markedly less developed than it had become by the eve of the Revolution. In the process he suggested one more vital link in the transition from the original exploitative outlook of the earliest colonists to agriculture, a development that we have already seen unfolding in the accounts of Lawson, Beverley, and, to some extent, Stephens. De Brahm's description of the clearing

³⁴ Louis De Vorse, Jr., ed., *De Brahm's Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America* (Columbia, 1971).

of South Carolina land—first by the harvesting of usable timber, followed by the burning over of the rest, and finally the cultivation of the land among the remaining stumps with the hoe rather than the plow—defines the classic farming methods of the earlier colonial era.³⁵ De Brahm's account pointed up, too, that at least one of all those hopes the colonists had initially entertained—that is, the exploitation of the forest for timber and naval stores—was realized through the clearing process necessary to the establishment of full scale agriculture in the woodland environment of eastern North America. Agriculture became, for all practical purposes, another form of extractive industry. The point gains some additional force from the emphasis that John Stilgoe places upon how much Americans moved toward the conception of 'making land' to describe their sense of how land was brought under cultivation.³⁶

In another section of his report outlining the character and potential of the Appalachian Mountain region, De Brahm again offered a curious litany to the old extractive and tropical ideal, as if the better part of two centuries of experience had not demonstrated that the southern colonies lacked both the climate and the labor supply to achieve such goals. Once Europeans controlled the mountain country, De Brahm observed, in words evocative of the original era of discovery, 'they may with Propriety call it the American Canaan.' 'It will,' he continued, 'fully answer their Industry,' not only yielding up European and American crops other than rice, but also supplying metals and minerals and making possible the production of silk, wine, oil, and the like. 'This Country,' he concluded, 'seems longing for the Hands of Industry to receive its Beginning.'³⁷ It is clear that even late in the period of southern colonization the old image of extractive wealth drawn from an exotic, almost tropical land died hard.

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³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81, 92, 94–96.

³⁶ Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America*, pp. 170–77.

³⁷ De Vorse, *De Brahm's Report*, pp. 104–106.

It may well be that we have asked these six commentators—Hariot, John Smith, Beverley, Lawson, Stephens, and De Brahm—to bring together too many disparate influences, to bridge too long a period of time, and to identify too many and too diverse landscapes.³⁸ But the extent to which a consistent thread runs through the writings of all six is striking. Its first strand is the utter domination of the early efforts at discovery and settlement by a vision of extractive wealth from minerals, timber, and comparable resources; bound with this was the vision of an equally lucrative return from the production of exotic products that also had the character of a simple extractive pursuit. Agriculture in a more traditionally European sense was a distinctly secondary concern. Farming was regarded as necessary to feed a population engaged in extractive industry and commerce, but it was not seen as a way of organizing the economy or as a primary means of using the land. That vision quickly broke down, however; the various forms of exploitation of timber resources and a few lesser pursuits persisted, but the colonies, above all the southern colonies, became as overwhelmingly agricultural as perhaps any land under European sway in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A surprising ingredient in that transformation, however, was the dogged persistence of the extractive ideal and the accompanying sense of rapid exploitation of the land and its resources. We may speculate on a number of reasons why that vision proved so durable, but its most important consequence was undoubtedly the extent to which it was transmitted and absorbed by the emergent agricultural order.

The substantive impact of that shift in attitude can only be measured by a long, painstaking investigation of the actual modification of the landscape. It must be measured, too, against the development and appearance of other differing perspec-

³⁸ H. Roy Merrens, 'The Physical Environment of Early America: Images and Image Makers in Colonial South Carolina,' *The Geographical Review* 59 (1969): 530-56, is an excellent discussion of the caveats that one should bear in mind when using contemporary literary material to document the historical landscape.

tives—for instance, a stronger aesthetic sense that brought Americans to delight in picturesque scenery, to become avid gardeners, and to idealize the pastoral landscape. That altered vision of the landscape must be weighed, too, against the influence of a developing scientific interest in American nature and a developing technology in agriculture. Yet through it all we may rightly suspect that the six authors and others like them recorded, however subtly or subconsciously, a transformation that fundamentally affected American agriculture and the American landscape in the South and elsewhere for a long time to come.

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