

*Virginia's Western Visions: Political and Cultural Expansion on an Early American Frontier.* By L. Scott Philyaw. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004. 180 pages. Cloth, \$33).

Beginning with the earliest settlements, through the American Revolution; and into the New Republic Virginians always looked west. In *Virginia's Western Visions: Political and Cultural Expansion on an Early American Frontier*, L. Scott Philyaw describes how the focus on the west shaped Virginia's goals as a colony and Virginia's role in the New Republic.

When Virginians realized the importance of "buffer settlements" in the backcountry Philyaw describes how eastern elites wanted to control the settlement into the backcountry lest the region would be settled by runaway servants and slaves. These settlers would need to be loyal to the tidewater and passive towards eastern elite control in the region. Philyaw argues that controlling settlement would not only benefit the colony but elites such as William Byrd II also stood to profit from settlement in the region due to their massive land holdings and acted as middlemen. Property equaled economic opportunity for all since by this time tobacco was literally as good as cash in Virginia.

This control began to fall apart with the drawing of the Proclamation Line of 1763 which halted land speculating by eastern elites but did little to curb the flow of settlers into the region. As the population grew backcountry residents began to form their own government and began to challenge the authority of the tidewater elites; which Philyaw argues created sectionalism in the backcountry.

With the founding of the New Republic Virginia once again looked to the backcountry and by this time many Virginians felt that issues that affected Virginia were now national issues and the economic prosperity of the entire eastern seaboard lay in the backcountry. However; like before, the settlement of these territories needed to be controlled, the result of which were the various ordinances that were placed on the north western territories. Some even suggested that the frontier settlements should be treated as colonies of the eastern states. The fear was that like the American colonies had done against Britain, the western settlements would revolt against the east and political leaders hesitated to extend the full rights of citizenship to the west. This fear was increased by the many petitions coming out of the region and would be up start states.

The result of these tensions was that the west felt economically deprived and that the eastern elite had failed them as leaders. The elite still wanted to maintain control over their society by extending their culture westward. This culture included tobacco agriculture and slavery and the debate over the extension of slavery into the region foreshadowed the debates over westward expansion leading up to the Civil War.

What L. Scott Philyaw has added to the historiography is not a book about the backcountry, it is a book about how eastern elites viewed the backcountry and the role the backcountry played in the growth of the Virginia colony, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the New Republic as a whole. What is formed here is an excellent case study in how the outlying regions shaped and were affected by the political control of the eastern elites. This case study proves invaluable in the understanding of the sometimes tense relationships that developed between regions in early America.