

Warren R. Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. Pp. 410.

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In his deeply researched account of the settling of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, Warren R. Hofstra explores questions of process and agency – how did it happen, and who made it happen? Hofstra argues that the region's "town and country" landscape evolved over several decades, and was the result of many different forces, including government policies directed from Williamsburg and London; settler preferences; and the paths already blazed by Native Americans who had once inhabited the area and still traveled through the Valley for purposes of trade and war. Although the white settlements west of the Blue Ridge began as isolated and widely dispersed rural communities, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the area had evolved into a town and country landscape that was integrated into the Atlantic economy.

Hofstra identifies three phases in the development of the Shenandoah Valley's town and country landscape. The first phase began in the 1730s, when Europeans moved onto the land west of the Blue Ridge at the behest of colonial officials. Settling this country had as much to do with imperial needs as it did about individuals' desires for new lands. Virginia's colonial officials wanted to place white settlers in the valley as buffers to threats from the French and Indians, and to alleviate planters' fears that the mountains would become havens for escaped slaves. Colonial officials preferred that these settlements be comprised of white "foreign peoples," and they invited Scots-Irish, German, and English Quakers to the area known as the Opequon settlement.

The first settlers scattered over the countryside, producing widely dispersed patterns of settlement. This dispersal of settlements generated rural communities and, despite the absence of towns, a vigorous exchange economy developed in the backcountry. Neighbors traded goods with neighbors over time, keeping accounts of credits and debits. Hofstra emphasizes that settlers were after competency, not profit. The cooperative economic climate was crucial to the evolution of the backcountry, and working toward competency required some dependence on their neighbors.

Although the Shenandoah Valley was settled as a result of colonial policy, the settlers themselves drove the early colonization process. Believing that those of higher rank would not attract the kinds of settlers they wanted, colonial officials chose to grant large tracts of land to “persons of a low degree” who were “morally Honest and Industrious.” In return, they promised to attract families to the area. These men often gave settlers a free hand in selecting their claims and defining their boundaries. Already-established Indian paths and natural contours of the land gave them a template, but the settlers themselves made decisions about the boundaries of their claims. Newcomers cast their land claims to capture a diversity of landscapes, soils, and resources so that they could diversify their economic activities. Thus, Shenandoah colonists created what Hofstra describes as a “vernacular landscape,” meaning that the occupants fashioned it largely free of the influences of government officials or other elites.

Although barely noticeable at first, symbols of the colonial government’s authority grew with the population, signaling the advent of the second phase of settlement. In 1738, Virginia established Frederick County. With the county came a court and other visible signs of imperial authority, such as stocks and the ducking stool.

At first, Frederick Town, renamed Winchester, was a sleepy hamlet with a courthouse and a few taverns. Authority remained decentralized, and even the authority of colonial appointees like justices of the peace had to be negotiated in the frontier communities. The countryside remained the center of economic life, and the exchange economy remained the norm. Shops in town provided some goods, but most farmers satisfied agricultural needs through exchanges with their neighbors. Because an exchange economy works fine without a town, Winchester functioned only as an extension of the rural economy.

While Winchester was not the center of the region's economy, it became a strategic location in the 1750s and during the Seven Years' War. The town's location on a transportation route to Fort Pitt, and Colonel George Washington's successful efforts to establish a fort at Winchester, brought people and economic opportunities to the area. Military demands for food provoked Winchester farmers to change traditional subsistence farming practices. Soldiers needed other trade goods and services, Winchester's economy expanded to meet those needs, and Shenandoah residents broadened their trade activities into the Atlantic economy. During this second phase of community development, residents could capitalize on more concentrated settlements, transportation improvements, and opportunities for new sources of money that military demands created. But money was only one part of an exchange economy in which many other goods and services circulated.

Access to more distant markets increased during the third phase of growth in the Valley. European demand for flour increased substantially after 1760, and as prices rose and transportation improved, farmers found it profitable to have their wheat milled

locally and then transported to Alexandria for exportation to Europe. The Revolution temporarily slowed growth, but victory over the British eventually brought political stability that facilitated more widespread market participation for Shenandoah farmers. As the countryside became more integrated into the commercial economy, profits increased; increased profits meant greater consumer demand for imported goods, which came to Winchester through Philadelphia and Baltimore. As markets grew, town and country became integrated into the Atlantic economy.

Hofstra describes changes to the visible landscape that corresponded with the region's extended economic networks. Roads took on new patterns, linking rural communities with market towns. Industrial enterprises, especially mills and iron furnaces, increased. Transportation improvements also brought more people with ties to eastern plantation economies, which in turn changed the Valley's social world. Whereas before there had been little socio-economic difference among the residents of the Shenandoah, eastern planters brought their culture of wealth, deference, and slavery to the region.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the dispersed settlement population had evolved into a complex system with integrated town and country networks. The landscape was transformed from one of subsistence to one of improvement. Farmers built new houses in the trendy Georgian style, and outbuildings on farms became more specialized and sophisticated. Although locals still did not rely solely on cash, the commercial economy slowly overtook exchange practices. The contributions of the countryside were too important to the Shenandoah's economic well-being for towns to

usurp all political and economic power, but by the end of the eighteenth century, town and country had come to depend on one another.

Hofstra's economic and environmental analysis of process and agency gives us a much clearer, but still incomplete, picture of the Shenandoah's development. His rich descriptions of the Shenandoah Valley's landscape create the backdrop for his depiction of the area as an inclusive, harmonious place, where settlers cooperated in mutually-beneficial exchange networks. But throughout the book we glimpse the dynamics of difference at work. First, in the midst of such ethnic and religious diversity, one wonders whether relations really were so harmonious. Hofstra mentions a few minor ethnic and religious conflicts, but were other tensions brewing? We see class friction in the court cases involving Lord Fairfax and Jost Hite's conflicting land claims. What other class conflicts existed in this "inclusive" community? And finally, Hofstra acknowledges the presence of women and slaves in the exchange economy, but would further exploration uncover more details about how women and slaves interacted in this frontier society? As is typical of fine scholarship, Hofstra's study opens up a variety of possibilities for further inquiry.

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