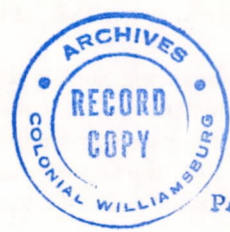


“These Boisterous Times...” THE WEEK IN '76

Alexander Purdie, *Virginia Gazette*,
January 1, 1776

AUGUST 1776
August 15-21, 1776



PAMPHLET FILE



August 16, 1776

From undoubted authority, we can assure the publick that 15,000 wt. of pure lead have been got from our mines in the back country; which, after being cast into bullets, we hope will be unerringly directed against our enemies.

The mines in southwest Virginia (present-day Wythe County) were the only lead mines in the colonies capable of large-scale production. At the beginning of the Revolution the mines were taken over by the state and were operated with slave labor. The lead was of critical importance to the war effort, especially in the defense of the frontiers.

The mines were opened about the middle of the eighteenth century and were owned by a partnership consisting of John Chiswell, who owned the controlling interest, William Byrd III, and John Robinson, speaker of the House of Burgesses.

John Chiswell, a resident of Williamsburg, became the center of a constitutional crisis in Virginia when, in 1766, he murdered Robert Roulidge at a tavern in Cumberland County. The county examining court bound Chiswell over for trial in the General Court and committed him to the jail in Williamsburg without bail. But when Chiswell reached Williamsburg in the custody of the Cumberland sheriff, three members of the General Court released him on bail. The issue became a double-barreled one. First was the question of partiality; that is, did Chiswell receive favored treatment because he was a member of the aristocracy? The second point, just as important, was the question of freedom of the press. Did the *Virginia Gazette* fail to report the murder because it was committed by an aristocrat related to a member of the Council and to Virginia's attorney general as well as the fact that he was a member of the House of Burgesses? Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* was firmly under the control of the governor and council, but at some risk Purdie printed Robert Bolling's query as to whether the judges of the General Court could legally release Chiswell on bail. Bolling believed that the judges acted in a partial manner and overturned "the laws and constitution of the country." A war of words began in the two local newspapers involving writings by many prominent Virginians that resulted in libel suits against both gazettes. In the end, the grand jury, after being charged by Governor Fauquier to "punish the licentiousness of the Press," returned the indictment "Not True Bills." The freedom of the press was upheld and the grand jury repudiated the governor's high-handed tactics.

The case against Chiswell ended when, as reported in the *Virginia Gazette*, Chiswell died of "Nervous fits, owing to a constant uneasiness of mind." It was generally believed that he had committed suicide rather than face the common hangman. Combined with the Robinson scandal, the Chiswell case tended to loosen the grip of the aristocracy on the colonial government.

The lead mines continued operations and produced large quantities of the valuable material for the defense of liberty during the Revolution.

August 22-31, 1976

August 23, 1776

The Manufacturing Society in Williamsburg are in want of a person to superintend the works, purchase materials, etc. and to keep the necessary accounts. Any who are qualified to undertake that business, and comes well recommended, will be treated with by the managers, and good wages will be given.

As the making of SAIL-CLOTH is one of their objects, the Society will give good encouragement to spinners and weavers acquainted with that branch.

Ready money will be given for HEMP and FLAX, either fully prepared for spinning, or from the break or swingle.

As soon as the works are erected, the Society propose taking a number of boys and girls as apprentices to SPINNING, WEAVING, etc.

The Manufacturing Society was one of several efforts to establish industries in Virginia now that supplies from Britain were cut off. The chairman of the Society was Robert Carter Nicholas, and John Crawford, a weaver from Prince George County, managed the factory.

By spring 1777 the factory was producing enough linen to offer it at auction "before the Raleigh." In July more linen was sold at auction:

On Thursday the 31st Instant, at 4 o'Clock in the Afternoon, will be sold at public Auction, before the Raleigh, for ready Money, about four hundred Yards of Hempen Linen, and a Piece of fine Linen, wove with a Satin Stripe, in Imitation of Corduroy, very proper for Summer Breeches, made at the WILLIAMSBURG MANUFACTORY. For the Conveniency of the Purchasers the above Linens will be cut into small Pieces.

The Williamsburg Manufactory continued operations until 1784, when it was dissolved. The high cost of labor in Virginia probably prevented the profitable operation of the factory in time of peace.

Compiled by Harold B. Gill, Jr.