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"Smole Trifeles":
The Itinerant in British North America

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

The earliest attempt to form a confederation among the British colonies in North America occurred with the creation New England confederation in 1643. For the next one hundred thirty-four years various attempts would be made to organize British America colonies into a confederacy. *"Smole Trifeles": The Itinerant in British America* moves beyond traditional histories which analyze how the social and political elite worked to bring the colonies together. This work focuses on the peddlers, the hawkers, petty chapmen, and the itinerant preachers who roamed the primitive roads and highways of early America. These wanderers knit together a nation and helped each unique colony communicate with its neighbors. The itinerant traveler is celebrated in folklore, but largely ignored by historians. *"Smole Trifeles": The Itinerant in British America* works to alleviate this oversight by pulling from travel narratives, criminal cases against vagabonds, and merchant records that chronicle their travels. Looking at itinerants and their world opens new windows on early American business practices, social networks, entertainment, and community-building.

INTRODUCTION

Defining Itinerants

In his eighty-third winter John Adams wrote a letter to Hezekiah Niles meditating on the meaning of the American Revolution. Adams emphasized the widespread differences between the colonies and wrote with great satisfaction that "thirteen clocks were made to strike together." Adams sepia-toned nostalgia distorts the real work that went into binding the early nation together. Intercolonial cooperation did not arise out of the exertion of will of a handful of political and society elites. Intercolonial cooperation grew out of a long process of effort and failure, trial and success, until finally networks of transportation, communication, and social alliances bound the colonies together which allowed them to coordinate their resistance to English rule and ultimately win the American Revolution.

The earliest attempt to create a confederation among the British colonies in North America occurred with the New England Confederation of 1643. For the next one hundred thirty-four years various attempts were made to organize British America into a confederacy until the Articles of Confederation finally succeeded. There is a connection between itinerancy and confederation. Each reinforced the possibilities of the other. Because the colonists built roads between colonies instead of walls opportunities were opened to move from community to community. Those who made these travels spread news, gossip, information, and knowledge among the colonies. It is this shared world of

information that gave the colonists common bedrock on which to build new alliances. The history of this desire to build colonial confederacies contradicts historians who argue that the colonists came together in a few short years before the revolution.

Itinerancy is a special form of travel. For the purposes of this work itinerancy encompasses both the regular routes traveled by various groups; the preaching circuit, the postal route, the peddler's territory, etc., and the people who traveled those routes; the preachers, post riders, and peddlers. One itinerant who will not be addressed in this paper is the sailor. Maritime trade, crucially important to the topic of colonial networks, occurs necessarily only on the coast. Network analyses and the role of social networks are often given a nod in historical research, but it is rarely the main point of investigation. Much travel writing has the aura of spectacle about it. Travel writing receives much attention, but this attention is directed toward the personality of the traveler and the details they provide of the world through which they travel. Travel writers are simply spectators, not people for whom travel was a quotidian part of their existence. An itinerant is someone who travels a circuit in connection to a vocation, employment, trade or calling.

Itinerancy can be distinguished from other forms of travel. Some of this travel, like internal migration, went in only one direction. Itinerants are people who made rounds, or circuits, and became a regular source of information about neighboring villages or colonies. Itinerant movement was along a route, or circuit, and helped build the communication and intercolonial networks that eventually brought together a nation. Understanding how and why people moved across the colonies helps us understand how colonists sustained dispersed communities. Two fundamental facts about humans are that they are social animals and that they move frequently. The centuries of focusing on

settlements in the New World by historians have distorted the dynamic world in which colonists lived.

Itinerants are a part of a communication and social ecology, carrying news, rumors, and ideas in the form of jokes, songs, scriptural interpretation, and material goods. Itinerants are the agents of distribution, moving information, knowledge, and ideas from place to place. Studies of the diffusion of knowledge, like Richard D. Brown's *Knowledge is Power,* address the development of print environment, and ignore the methods by which these works moved around the continent. Overviews of book history always mention distribution as an element of print history, but then promptly ignore it.[1] Robert Darnton in his studies of the influence of print dissemination before the French Revolution is one of the few historians to seriously address the influence of print distribution networks.[2] There has been no similar analysis of printed matter in North America. Itinerants play a key role in these early distribution networks.

Historical work that addresses the creation of social, commercial, and knowledge networks of the colonial era has tended to focus on the Atlantic world, and how colonists and colonizers constructed and maintained relationships between the metropole and the periphery. The historiography of the continental British colonies can be roughly divided into three broad areas of interest; the Atlantic rim, the frontier, and settlement studies. Research and analysis of intercolonial networks has either been dismissed upon the belief that the colonies were too divided and disinterested in intercolonial efforts, or simply asserted to exist without further explanation or analysis. The few studies that have been done tend to look at only a single network. There is no study of how these networks worked in combination to bring the colonies together in a shared "manner and

character."[3]

In *A New England Town* Kenneth Lockridge argues that each town was a "self-contained social unit," that was "hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world."[4] This is not an uncommon refrain in British American colonial history. While villages might often seem isolated from each other, Lockridge, and others, have overstated the case. Villages spawned more villages, and people moved frequently between colonies.[5] While understanding village and colony autonomy is essential to understanding the colonial experience, so is understanding the dynamic movement that existed between villages and between colonies. In the century and a half from the settlement of Massachusetts Bay to the Declaration of Independence, the political elite made many attempts to organize the colonies into a confederacy. The United Colonies of New England, first organized in 1643, lasted nearly a half century. Not only did the politically elite work to bring the colonies together but the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are replete with "newspapers, pamphlets, sermons, and other public records" appealing to "intercolonial union."[6] Lockridge profoundly misstates the isolation of New England towns. Not only did the colonial elite appeal for intercolonial union, but there existed a dynamic movement of non-elites between the colonies.

In *Pursuits of Happiness* Jack Greene asserts that within the colonies formed "densely interconnecting societal networks."[7] Greene describes networks based on "kin, neighborhood, and economic ties."[8] Once asserted, however, he fails to illuminate the "societal networks" despite their critical importance for a "shared sense of mutual interdependence and locally felt community."[9] Greene follows the pattern of most historians of once acknowledging that these networks exist, turns to the task of

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delineating regional histories, isolating each region from its neighbors. This paper investigates more fully the assumptions behind Greene's assertion, and demonstrates a more complex web of communication and "interconnecting societal networks." The itinerant served as a sort of connective tissue between the communities. This connectivity can be scaled. Itinerants worked within the village, between villages, and intercolonially. Greene goes so far to write that "until the crises that preceded the American Revolution there was virtually no common political life among the colonies."[10] Greene's definition of political life here is very narrow. By the time of the revolution there had been one hundred fifty years of political elites working to form various confederacies for purposes of commerce and defense and one hundred fifty years of non-elite movement between the colonies. Greene's (and other historians') focus on regional settlements blinds them to the interregional networks that developed for the century and a half prior to the Articles of Confederation. Without these networks no amount of elite demand that the colonies suddenly coordinate to overthrow British rule would have worked.

In *Albion's Seed* David Hackett Fischer makes the same mistake as Greene. Once acknowledging that social elements are carried from England to the Americas he stops. He does not take the next step of demonstrating how people continued to disperse these regional beliefs across the British colonies. The idea of the remarkable distinctness of each colony aggrandizes the enormity of the cooperative efforts of the revolution. The incommensurability of each colony's social and political life is part of the revolutionary myth as portrayed by John Adams in his letter to Hezekiah Niles in 1818 about the American Revolution.

"The colonies had grown up under constitutions of government so different, there was so great a variety of religions, they were composed of so many different nations, their customs, manners, and habits had so little resemblance, and their intercourse had been so rare, and their knowledge of each other so imperfect, that to unite them in the same principles in theory and the same system of action, was certainly a very difficult enterprise. The complete accomplishment of it, in so short a time and by such simple means, was perhaps a singular example in the history of mankind. Thirteen clocks were made to strike together -- a perfection of mechanism, which no artist had ever before effected."[11]

Adams sets this myth in motion, but it appears through the history of the United States appearing in the works of eminent historians from Carl Becker to Gordon Wood.[12]

This work is tangentially related to the widespread interest in Atlantic history and is of a kindred spirit. Like Atlantic history this work strives to decenter the subject. The central focus of so much history has been the settlement, but the last half century, and especially the last quarter century, has seen historians turn to relationships rather than fields. Atlantic history is really about the relationship between the empires that moved across the Atlantic and the people, goods, and ideas that were carried across this network. This essay is also about networks of relationships and the people, goods, and ideas that moved across those networks. Like the transnational history that sprung out of Atlantic history, this work looks at how multiple places are linked together and how that relationship develops and changes. Bernard Bailyn's *Atlantic History* provides an overview on the value of adjusting the focus of research. In order to move beyond nationalist histories it is essential to look at the relationships between nations. Because so much of United States historical interest is focused on the cooperation necessary to

create a successful revolution, scant attention has been paid to the relationship between the colonies, though that is slowly changing. A recent example of this change is April Lee Hatfield's *Atlantic Virginia*. Hatfield, however, analyzes only a few networks, simply suggesting others. This essay expands on the types of networks that still need to be analyzed and synthesized under a new rubric. Much of the intercolonial work like Hatfield's addresses economic issues since trade is such a significant part of movement and motion across borders. While this work also addresses trade its emphasis is on the sharing of ideas. Like Bailyn's definition of Atlantic history, itinerant history is a history of a "world in motion," and it is the historian's responsibility to "grasp its history as process."[13]   It is this interest in the motion and the dynamics of movement that research into itinerancy shares with Atlantic history.

In the introduction to the collected essays from their trailblazing seminar on itinerancy Peter and Jane Benes define itinerant as "a style of entrepreneurship that involved travel and speculative risk."[14] Benes's category of itinerants covers "artists, teachers, and professional people," and others "who journeyed overnight" to find "customers, clients, or converts."[15] Closely aligned with the itinerants who went house to house are those who operate from a tavern or museum and depend on their "reputation to bring clients to them."[16] Benes focuses on the itinerant as an economic actor. This narrow focus neglects the broader social impact of the itinerant which this paper addresses. Benes recognizes that "migrant farm workers, traveling mendicants, and wandering military and maritime personnel" are "genuinely itinerant," but excludes them because they are "non-entrepreneurial."[17] The itinerants that Benes excluded are important if the focus of study becomes the creation and maintenance of itinerant

networks, rather than the rise of a capitalist *mentalité*. Benes also excludes "clergymen exchanging pulpits with their colleagues."[18] Just as Benes had to disregard some important itinerants to clarify his argument of the itinerant economic actor, this essay must also overlook some important itinerants in the interest of time and space. To narrow the focus of this paper some important itinerants are neglected, though they fit within the definition of itinerant. Most significant among those neglected are maritime itinerants. Sailors moved freely from colony to colony, ranging up and down the coast from the West Indies to Newfoundland. These seamen spread news, songs, gossip and other information throughout the colonies. To keep the focus narrow this paper looks at the profusion of itinerant movement on land and between the colonies and villages of British America. Benes makes his itinerants necessarily entrepreneurial. For the purposes of this essay itinerancy is a means of creating and maintaining social networks, and entrepreneurship is not as important as the regularity of travel. Anyone who helped create and maintain a social or communication network by moving between places plays a role as an itinerant. The quality of itinerancy emphasized in this work and neglected in Benes's is the role of itinerancy in spreading ideas. Itinerants shared songs, jokes, news, and gossip, and did so regularly.

Some work has been done on itinerancy beyond the Benes edited volume of seminar papers already mentioned. Timothy Hall wrote an important book on religious itinerancy, *Contested Boundaries*, but his story begins where this one ends.[19] Hall begins with the travels of Reverend George Whitefield, and this essay ends with those travels. The two most common itinerant classes studied are preachers and peddlers. While both of these characters play important roles in the story that follows, one point this essay will

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demonstrate is that many people traveled in circuits or routes, and these people helped

establish and perpetuate networks. Most of the work on intercolonial cooperation has

focused on political elites that helped create confederacies organized for defense and

trade. Many people beyond the political elite worked to knit together a nation.

The easiest place in the historical record to locate itinerancy is in the legal code.

Many of these laws are not to be trusted as reflections of real itinerancy. Some of the

earliest laws in the new colonies address the legality of "all Juglers Tynkers Pedlers and

Petty Chapmen wandring abroade" and other itinerants. This Elizabethan-era law lists

quite a catalog of criminal itinerants, or the crimes the strolling poor were often accused

of:

> All persons calling themselves Schollers going about begging, all
> Seafaring men pretending losses of their Shippes or goods on the sea
> going about the Country begging, all idle persons going about in any
> Cuntry eyther begging or using any subtile Crafte or unlawful Games or
> Playes, or fayning themselves to have knowledge in Phisiognomye
> Palmestry or other like crafty Scyence, or pretending that they can tell
> Destenyes Fortunes or such other like fantasticall Inagynacons; all persons
> that be or utter themselves to be Proctors Procurers Patent Gatherers or
> Collectors for Gaoles Prisons or Hospitalls; all Fencers Bearewards
> common Players of Enterludes and Minstrells wandring abroade (other
> then Players of Enterludes belonging to any Baron of this Realme…); all
> Juglers Tynkers Pedlers and Petty Chapmen wandring abroade; all
> wandring persons and common Labourers being persons able in bodye
> using loitering and refusing to worcke for reasonable wages as is taxed or
> conomly given in such Parts where such persons do or shall happen to
> dwell or abide, not having lyving otherwise to maynteyne themselves; all
> persons delivered out of Gaoles that begg for their Fees, or otherwise do
> travayle begging; all such personos as shall wander abroade begging
> pretending losses by Fyre or otherwise; and all such persons not being
> Fellons wandering and pretending themselves to be Egipcyans, or
> wandering in the Habite Forme or Attyre of counterfayte Egipicians."[20]

Laws in Virginia against these itinerant classes use the same language as the laws in Massachusetts or Connecticut or New York, all of which draw from English law. These laws are taken almost word for word from their counterpart laws in London from original Elizabethan law and so reflect English concerns more than colonial concerns. They seem to be put in place in case of itinerancy and not because of it. There are occasions when colonial law goes out of its way to specifically deal with local problems of untrustworthy travelers. Several of these moments are mentioned within this paper.

One of the elements that makes the period covered in this essay unique is the synchronic balance between an oral world and a print world.[21] The following essay demonstrates the importance of face-to-face communication, and the human role of print distribution. People carried the newspapers, letters, broadsides, pamphlets, and other printed material so critically important in British North America. Humans who in turn capitalized on their possession of this material, whether it be a post rider sharing the news with the guests at a tavern, or an itinerant peddler quoting jokes and stories from the chapbooks he carried in his bag. The category of itinerant contains both the oral world and the printed world simultaneously.

Coordinating these "thirteen clocks" did not take place overnight, or even over the course of a decade or two, but over the course of a century and a half. Nor did the colonies differ as much as Adams suggests. At the end of his recounting of his peregrinations through the colonies in 1744 Dr. Alexander Hamilton wrote "I found but little difference in the manners and character of the people in the different provinces I passed thro', but as to constitutions and complexions, air and government, I found some variety."[22] Adams exaggerates the colonial differences to make the revolution seem that

much more incredible. One reason Hamilton found little difference in "manners and character" is because slowly, road by road, person by person, itinerants and itinerancy helped establish and maintain communication and social networks across the continent. Itinerants traveled these roads, helped maintain them, and reinforced social contacts between towns and colonies. The forgotten travelers and the routes they traveled brought a nation together. It did not have to be this way. Throughout history evidence exists of separate regions, regions as diverse as Adams would have Niles believe the colonies were, that fought each other, or possibly even found themselves splitting into smaller political units. The national myth that has sprung up around the revolution tells us that a handful of heroic men, many of them political and commercial elites, flexed their broad muscles, both of mind and shoulder, to bring a radically diverse nation together. These heroes trod over a road smoothed by the feet and pack mules of generations of peddlers, preachers, tinkers, acting troupes, post riders, and a plethora of travelers who left little trace on the historical record. This is their story.

While this paper frames itinerants as key communication figures that helped establish common social networks throughout the colonies, itinerancy can also be placed in a broad, complex history of human movement. One fundamental feature of humanity is the persistent movement in which it engages. People are tremendous walkers and have managed to walk across most of the Earth's solid surface. The act of walking permeates every society throughout history. There has yet to be a rewarding synthetic pedestrian history. It is this compulsion to move that is behind the roads and pathways, the migrants and itinerants, exploration and tourism. Using walking as the organizing metaphor for a work of history allows a reframing of many categories; business, religion, entertainment,

and community are all functions of walking. Many itinerants, better documented in British history than North American history, worked in many categories at the same time. The nineteenth century traveling medicine show for example was a business that offered an abundance of religion and entertainment. The antecedent of this was the English and European mountebank who might travel with a collection of acrobats and jugglers, who also act in brief dramatizations, often of a both bloody and moral character. They all spread news and gossip, as well as the new songs, jests, and stories they have heard on their travels.

The following essay falls into three sections. The sections are roughly chronological, with the first section covering the last half of the seventeenth century, the second section covering the turn of the century until the travels of George Whitefield, and the third section covering the period from Whitefield until the composition of the Articles of Confederation. Each section deals first with the built environment that aided and enabled itinerancy, second with examples of the variety of itinerants found during the period, the third portion focuses on key itinerant classes (section two deals with three important itinerant types), the fourth portion examines forces that opposed itinerancy and the reasons why they were opposed, and each section concludes by looking at the developing efforts of confederacy, and the connection between itinerants and confederation.

CHAPTER 1

Early Itinerants in British America 1648-1699

Before there could be itinerants there had to be roads for them to travel on and places for them to travel to. Early British colonial roads developed in two distinct ways, they adopted roads from Indian pathways and they built in the English/European model.[23] As settlements grew colonists created roads in more traditional British methods. Pathways could often be winding and erratic, the result of a long history of moving around obstacles instead of over them or through them. British surveyors worked to create European style roads between their villages. The growth of roads and pathways connecting the villages and colonies helped create an "architecture of participation." Without these travel corridors villages would have truly been hermetically sealed.[24] The better the roads, the more people who traveled them. The more people who traveled the roads, the more maintenance that was done on the roads. This helped create a dynamic movement across the colonies. Historians often neglect this movement because the people traveling these roads are difficult to locate in the historical record.

One key hurdle to itinerancy was the wilderness separating the various colonies. Without roads or rivers there could be no regular movement between two regional areas. Fortunately a robust network of paths and trails already existed along the eastern portion of the continent to which European settlers arrived. European interlopers adopted these

pre-existing paths and adapted them to European use. Village to village paths might be laid out by surveyors and speculators, but intercolonial pathways followed the Indian trails for decades before being rationalized in a European manner. For many early settlers road maintenance became a part of their responsibilities to the colony. Before building their farms in Salem in the 1630s Lawrence Leach and Richard Ingersoll had to "promise to make a sufficient cart way."[25] In 1633 in Newtown (i.e. Cambridge) Simon Bradstreet received a land grant on the condition that he "make a sufficient cartway along by his pales and keep it in repair 7 years."[26] The building and responsibility for maintaining cartways, pathways, roadways, and highways were often linked to land grants in the settlement of New England. Road building was important when Rhode Island established their colony-wide government in 1642. The "Organization of Government" included a directive that "a Line be drawn and a way cleared between the Townes of Nuport and Portsmouth."[27] One person from each town was selected, and paid, to create the road with the help of the townspeople.

How and why villages developed helps us understand the background necessary for an itinerant class to develop. Anthropologists who study the reasons communities split refer to this phenomenon as village fissioning. In his essay "Fissioning, Scalar Stress, and Social Evolution in Early Village Societies" Matthew Bandy offers some possible explanations for village fissioning.[28] Bandy studies Bolivia's Titicaca Basin, but the early British colonies provide a historical laboratory to examine some of Bandy's ideas about how towns come to fission, and what relation they maintain afterwards. The social relations that persist after a community has fissioned lay the groundwork for itinerants. Bandy argues the spawning of daughter settlements eases intravillage stress.

Understanding the dynamic behind fissioning is the first step to understanding the underlying social dynamic that leads to itinerancy. If harmony could be maintained, there would be little reason for the development of new communities. It is only because new villages are being created that some form of long-distance communication springs up to share personal, and political ideas. As new communities developed from old, family and social ties remained. Towns were not created as self-sustaining units located in a vacuum. There were a multitude of reasons to maintain contact with the township the majority of the new population came from, not the least of which were for ties of family and friendship. Nor did the same logic drive the establishment of every colonial settlement. Founders of some new towns created them to escape intravillage stress, as in Bandy's model.[29] Roger Williams is a well known example of village fissioning that arises out of intravillage stress, but Williams was not the only person to leave one colony to start his own. As we can note from communications between Williams and Winthrop, people moved between settlements.[30] Speculators developed new communities to contain new immigrant populations.[31] In addition to the dissent that spawned new villages, lands were developed for settlement. William Penn, for example, planned out the townships and villages well in advance of arriving immigrants.[32] As immigrant families moved into these planned communities, they did not always live in the same town or village. These personal connections helped create an intervillage web of travel and communication. Regardless of the reasons for the split, social and communication networks persisted. The earliest European itinerants of the British Americas moved between these daughter villages. Geography also played a role in township creation. When Salem ran out of land, farmers moved to Salem Village, which eventually became the town of Danvers.

Locating traces of itinerant life can be difficult, but the first step includes realizing that each community began with social ties to other communities.

Intercolonial ties existed from the colonies' initial establishment. The coastal linkages of shared maritime connections created the strongest ties. Overland ties took longer to create. Many of the irritants that might prompt someone wanting to move from an established village to a new village are of the sort that would not be documented. A husband might want to separate his wife or daughter from the unwanted attentions of a neighbor. Perhaps cross words have been exchanged, leaving one uncomfortable visiting the town square. The reverend may have unintentionally insulted someone with their sermon. People are fickle and the possible irritants that might prompt someone to want to move are manifold. But moving does not necessarily end friendships, families, or commercial relationships. For this early network structure to form it is necessary that the new villages not place a significant geographical obstacle between themselves and the old village which most did not. Geography and distance did allow some villages to isolate themselves from the connective infrastructure, but these isolated towns were the exception rather than the rule. The point of discussing village fissioning is to show that early itinerants probably were not strangers wandering from town to town, but friends and associates. This is one reason why laws that continued to be passed against itinerancy met with little success. Communities passed laws to restrict potentially criminal strangers, not friends, family, or known travelers.

Skilled artisans were among the first itinerants traveling these intervillage networks. Cordwainers, and other skilled laborers who needed a larger market than their local village could provide, moved back and forth between villages and towns.[33] The

national creation myth relies heavily on colonists' and settlers' self-reliance, but a few

moments reflection raises sharp questions about the tremendous gifts early settlers must

have had to be so completely self-reliant. Carole Shammas finds, for example, that only

one percent of probate records for households in Virginia between 1600 and 1676 show

ownership of a spinning wheel.[34] Shammas's research indicates the necessity of an

abundance of trade in early British America. In addition to trading for goods, many items

had to be maintained. Repairing shoes, making barrels, and shaping tin are skills that

take years to learn and skilled craftsmen helped repair those worn goods. Shammas

suggests in her analysis of eighteenth century Massachusetts that "itinerants often came

to do the work."[35] While some households had the equipment for repairs and crafting

they did not all have the necessary skill. It seems unlikely that the colonies filled with a

slew of omnicompetent workers and farmers who did not need the aid of skilled artisans.

The sparse population did not provide enough of a demand on some skilled labor to keep

them in a single location and occupied. This line of logic suggests the necessity of some

itinerancy among the early generations of settlers. Those who had important, but not

often used, or easily exhausted skills, like cordwainers, probably moved from place to

place, perhaps seasonally, to practice their craft. The itinerancy of a skilled or semi-

skilled worker was not a full-time occupation, and many worked their own farms.

Traditional peddlers moved alongside itinerant skilled craftspeople. As Shammas

determines, a completely self-sufficient household meant that the housewife needed to

"possess the knowledge of the flax spinster, wool spinster, weaver, dyer, fuller, tailor,

knitter, miller, baker, gardener, dairy maid, chandler, and soapmaker," as well as

knowing how to brew beer.[36] Colonists imported significant amounts of hats, stockings

and other clothing accessories. While some settlers purchased these goods at markets and fairs, the possibility of peddlers carrying these goods into the hinterlands should not be dismissed. As early as 1663 New London issued a warning about "strange young men" (transients) in the community pursuing business and mercantile opportunities.[37]

Thomas Stanton was one such early itinerant and also an example of someone for whom itinerancy was only part of his manifold identity. Stanton served as an Indian interpreter for the New England Confederation, and an envoy to the Dutch.[38] He also helped in the "printing of Indian catechisms," and presumably distributed these works to the Indians.[39] Stanton frequently moved around the colonies. Not only did he participate in "nearly every important Indian transaction on record," but he also worked closely with the New England Confederation.[40] One source speculates that Stanton walked from Virginia to Cambridge shortly after arriving on the continent. It was on this journey through Algonquian country that he learned the language that aided him in his colonial life as interpreter.[41] Stanton was part of a fissioning village when he followed Reverend Thomas Hooker from Cambridge to the new colony of Hartford.[42] One of Stanton's earliest appointments was as interpreter for the Connecticut General Court which meant he had to travel to any sessions where an interpreter was needed.[43] After fifteen years in Hartford Stanton moved again, this time to the Pawcatuck River which separated Rhode Island from Connecticut to establish a trading post.[44] Stanton anticipates a not uncommon pattern for merchants to follow, an early career of travel which transitions to an established place of business. Stanton continued to travel for purposes of trade even after establishing his trading post.[45]   During this era when English settlements lay in close proximity to Indian settlements, the interpreter and fur trader were types of

itinerants.[46]

Itinerants are most commonly thought to be preachers or peddlers, but the word actually has roots in the roving nature of early judges and courts. Roving judges were a part of British history, but do not play much of a role in colonial history. This does not mean that elites did not travel regularly. Elites among the British colonists composed another part of the itinerant class. Intercolonial efforts to organize for justice, trade, and defense occurred within the colonies almost from the beginning. Perhaps the earliest attempt to organize several colonies for their mutual benefit was the New England Confederation established in 1643. This desire for large-scale cooperative behavior is a persistent refrain in British American colonial history. Defense against indigenous and European powers, an effort to organize the merchant class, and a desire to reduce opportunities for crime created three overwhelming drives for cooperation. This confederation required the appointed members to travel between the colonies in order to arrange their cooperative missions. The men who served as Commissioners of the Confederation did not travel alone when they traveled to other colonies. Initially the local governing body provided Commissioners with "two troopers and four horses" to make their journey to the meetings.[47] These troopers are part of the military itinerants ignored by Benes. While silent in the historical record, we may safely speculate that at least some troopers did not maintain this silence while alive, and made social contacts in their travels and exchanged gossip, news, jokes, and songs. The organization for John Adams' thirteen clocks begins here.

Movement between villages by clergy, merchants, and justices helped coordinate villages within the colonies. The clerical elite managed the various churches within their

denomination to keep a unified front in the face of contradictions and potential heresies. Merchants organized to keep a fair price. Local leaders based their political decisions partially informed by knowledge of events in other villages that had faced similar problems. In 1639 the colony of Connecticut and the colony of New Haven drew up the "Fundamental Orders of Connecticut" to organize the quickly growing number of new communities within the colonies. Not only were deputies expected to attend "every Generall Courte," but were expected to meet regularly with each other in order to "advise and consult" all things "as may concerne the good of the publike."[48]

Some of these concerns of the "publike" were pirates, Indian attacks, both offensive and defensive, attacks from, and on, the Dutch, the French, and the Swiss, as well as resolving intercolonial disputes, regulating trade, and reducing criminal behavior, including the abandonment of debts. These concerns appear in the New England Confederation and also in William Penn's plan for confederacy a half century later.

In 1696 William Penn published "Mr. Penn's Plan for a Union of the Colonies in America."[49] Penn's "Briefe and Plaine Scheame" included Boston, Connecticut, "Road Island," New York, New Jersey, "Pennsilvania," Maryland, Virginia, and Carolina.[50] The colonial leaders met to determine the manner by which they could make themselves "more useful to the Crowne."[51] High on the agenda, and foremost for the purpose of the confederacy, was a desire for "peace and safety."[52] Colonial legislators imported laws against vagabonds from English law unchanged. Penn's Plan more likely reflects a real concern about uncontrolled internal movement. People in the colonies abandoned their debts, which motivated the creditors to work together to end this economic drain. Evidently this happened often enough to be of as great a concern as coordination against

indigenous and European attack.

Penn's plan contained seven points, including annual meetings, and more frequent meetings during times of war. Penn also recommended that each colony send two representatives to create a congress of twenty people. In addition to coordinating during times of war, Penn suggested these provincial congresses would be of value to address "where persons quit their own Province and goe to another" to avoid debts, and when "offenders fly Justice."[53] To create these plans and coordinate took a class of itinerants.

To understand colonial life it is not enough to study settlements in isolation as researchers who adopted the Atlantic rim as a framework for situating their research have demonstrated. While histories of settlement are important in achieving an understanding of the past, a more robust understanding can be created by examining the exchanges and relationship between colonies, not only among the political and clerical elite, but also among the non-elite.

CHAPTER 2

Moving Between Colonies 1700-1740

The rapidly increasing population of the early eighteenth century created more travel, and more travel increased the demands for better roads. In her popular history *Historical Gleanings* (1899) Ellen Larned writes about the development of roads connecting Connecticut and Rhode Island. Before Connecticut and Rhode Island established connecting roads travelers traveled over "the 'old Greenwich path,' an Indian trail."[54] In 1711 the "General Assembly of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations" met to discuss the highway that would be "laid out through Providence, Warwick, and West Greenwich to Plainfield."[55] The plans called for the road to be constructed to allow commercial travel. The road had to be "a good and sufficient causeway" built to be "four rods wide."[56] At points the road was expanded to "eight rods wide" to allow "for the convenience of loaded carts in passing each other."[57] This road helped establish a communication corridor between Boston, Providence, and New York and provided "the best and nearest rout that had then been opened between those business centres, and aiding much in the development of these towns and the intervening country."[58] Historians have a tendency to overstate the poor quality of colonial roads. While it is evident that intercolonial roads must have been bad during inclement weather, the weather conditions of the past are not always poor, nor does rain always make a road impassable. One

traveler in 1747 writes that the roads were "exceeding good in summer."[59]

The increase of travelers of all sorts helped invigorate the growing tavern system as well. Taverns, ordinaries, and other houses for travelers maintained themselves thanks to the rapidly growing necessity of travel. Not just itinerants, but tourists, internal migrants and other travelers also began to fill the roads. Taverns served as social hubs and communication nodes. The first post depot in Massachusetts was located at Richard Fairbanks tavern.[60] In the 1660s Connecticut passed laws requiring every new town to establish an inn or ordinary house.[61]

Some evidence of the conversations had at taverns can be gleaned from the travels of Sarah Knight, and the travels of Dr. Alexander Hamilton. Sarah Knight, for example, stops at an ordinary where a woman shares gossip about a recent wedding.[62] At her stay in York she recounts hearing stories about "Brittan," one of which she reproduces in her narrative.[63] Dr. Hamilton's mentions tavern guests, and some of their conversations, at almost every stop along his long perambulation.

In 1689 the Glorious Revolution brought with it a new tolerance for nonconformist Protestantism. The Tolerance Act opened up the British colonies to a new generation of religious itinerants as well as a charter that "authorized the public observances of Baptists, Quakers, and the Anglicans."[64] Quaker itinerancy in the colonies and within the British Empire is well-documented.[65] This new swell of itinerant preachers also caused some alarm among the established Protestant sects in New England. In his "Warning to the Flocks" delivered in 1700 Cotton Mather explicitly warns against itinerant preachers. While the itinerant preacher that raised Mather's agitation was neither itinerant, not a preacher, he embodies the broader phenomena that

alarms Mather. Mather was concerned with the devaluation and contamination of his

own religious philosophy by uncontrolled agents who might spread heresy in the name of

Protestant belief. This sort of uncontrolled behavior, as well as the blatant heresies of

Quakers and Baptists, was understood by Mather to be a real and serious threat to his

power and influence.

Anglican itinerant George Keith provides an example of the disruption to this

power that alarmed Mather. Keith traveled to New England for "Missionary Travels and

Services."[66] Keith, a reverend visitor to Boston in 1702, writes that he had his sermon

distributed across the colonies. Keith had copies printed in New York, then shipped to

Boston, as well as the rest of New England and "other Parts of North America."[67] Since

Keith criticized Mather in his sermons he wrote that no Boston publisher would publish

his work. That this method of publication and distribution was possible indicates the

regional distribution network that was in place. Not only did someone carry the original

work to the printer in New York, but someone also had to carry the finished copies back

to Boston. It seems unlikely that the printer sealed these pamphlets and they remained

unread until purchased, but more likely that the printer, the distributor, and their

acquaintances read the pamphlets at the print shop and at stops along the road. Copies

may have even been hawked.[68] Keith does not specify where copies were distributed,

only that they were "dispersed both over New-England and the other parts of North

America."[69] Once Keith established this pattern of publication and distribution, he

repeated it as he traveled around New England, sending his ecclesiastical critiques to his

printer in New York, which were subsequently printed and distributed "over New-

England and other parts of North America."

During the early part of the eighteenth century theatrical itinerants first began to make their mark on the historical record. Seventeenth century Europe and England had a variety of traveling entertainment troupes. These troupes might consist of small collections of theatrical entertainers, traveling from village to village to perform various plays. Other troupes consisted of jugglers, slack-rope walkers, ventriloquists, clowns and contortionists who performed to attract attention to a mountebank's harangue. Closely associated with these entertainment (and health in the case of the mountebank) troupes are individual teachers. Some peripatetic teachers moved around teaching traditional lessons in reading, writing, classics and other arts. The roving preacher is a form of itinerant teacher. Other teachers generated even less acceptance in Puritan North America. A dancing master appears in Boston in 1685, promoting "mixt Dances," and scheduling his lessons on "Lecture-Day."[70] This attempt to teach "Gynecandrical Dancing" appalled town leaders and they dutifully preached against such wickedness. Not only did the dance master teach "mixt Dances" on "Lecture-Day," but he attempted to put on plays as well. Judge Samuel Sewall writes in his diary that the dance master argued that by the performance of one play "he could teach more Divinity than Mr. Willard or the Old Testament."[71] Dancing masters, both sedentary and peripatetic, can be located throughout the colonies during the first half of the eighteenth century.[72]

The mountebank, while prevalent in England and Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth century is difficult to locate in the colonies. Colonial health care is still a largely uncharted historical area. Most works of medical history are mired in great man, progressive narratives which dismiss the health care efforts of the mass of people to focus on the few proto-scientific medical researchers. A tremendous amount of exposure to

education and new ideas (as well as misinformation, rumor, and gossip) came from people moving through the town or village. It seems likely that people in the colonies were also exposed to ideas of health in this manner, just as they were in England or Europe, but the trace of these mountebanks on the Americas remains faint. However, anything that could draw attention would be used to gather a crowd. Some itinerant entertainers showed off their caged "Lyon" through the 1720s. Generally the lion resided in Boston, but went on the road in 1727 and 1728 "drawn in a cart pulled by four oxen."[73]

The stagecoach also saw its establishment during this time. One of the earliest intercity stagecoach lines was established between "Orange-Tree in Boston, to Newport in Rhode-Island, and back again, once a Fortnight" in 1716.[74] Those driving this route, and those who utilized it regularly may all be considered itinerant. New Jersey also saw development of wagoning lines during the early eighteenth century. The chief business of these early wagoners was "conveying goods back and forth between depots at New Brunswick or Perth Amboy on the eastern waters and Trenton, Bordentown, or Burlington on the Delaware River."[75] Wagoners carried mostly freight while stages or stagecoaches carried freight and passengers. Some wagoners also would carry willing passengers for a fee.

Aside from the traveling preachers the most well-known historical itinerant is the peddler. Folklore even identifies the Yankee peddler as a unique and specific folklore character.[76] The rise of the Yankee peddler coincided with the rapid changes in consumerism affecting the colonies as a whole during the early eighteenth century, as well an increase in intercolonial commerce.

Intravillage traders like the "Butter-cart," which was the "first public attempt to

trade with Providence" anticipated these intervillage networks of the peddler.[77] The

Butter-cart, "ran about the town from house to house," picking up "such small products

as housewives could spare, and bringing back in exchange those minor luxuries."[78]

There is no guarantee that the person moving the butter cart also carried information,

gossip, and news, but the existence of such a person moving around the village indicates

the possibility that such a vehicle for communication existed.

Those who started with intravillage trade scaled the model up to cover larger and

larger territories. The Larned history provides one example of the role of peddling

itinerants and how itinerancy in a small community changed over time.[79] Daniel Larned

and John Mason began as itinerants traveling through the local region engaging in

"primitive barter-trade."[80] This eventually led to the establishment of a store "opened

under the Great Elm," and "filled with all manner of tempting West India goods and

useful articles."[81] The itinerancy of these two entrepreneurs did not end here. Larned

and Mason hired people to drive carts "all over the country" to collect "marketable

products to sell in their store."[82] Once Larned and Mason established the social network

and network of commercial exchange, it was continued and maintained by hired proxies,

each of whom also brought their own social network to interact with the commercial

network created by Larned and Mason.

Larned and Mason were not the only large merchants to rely on itinerants to

promote their business. In 1721 large Boston merchant Thomas Hancock utilized

peddlers for a significant portion of his trade volume.[83] Hancock did not have the

peddlers as employees, but allowed them "Creditt" to carry his goods to the country.[84]

Traveling on their route these itinerants sold "Lase for a Cap," and other "smole trifeles,"

including penny chapbooks.[85] Hancock and his peripatetic merchants peddled along these routes even after peddling had been prohibited by the local government. These Boston peddlers ranged as far as Berwick, Maine, where we have a record of William Moore being arrested and having his "bagg or pack of goods" confiscated.[86] Peddlers were not the only members of the commercial class who traveled extensively, merchants did as well. Dr. Alexander Hamilton writes about meeting John "Rhae," a merchant who had "travelled most of the continent of English America."[87]

Peddlers sometimes peddled their skills as well as, or in the stead of, peddling goods. William Moraley, an indentured servant and journeyman watchmaker, traveled outside Burlington in the colony of New Jersey after gaining his freedom. Prior to his stint as an itinerant Moraley's master "often detached" him "into the Country to clean Clocks and Watchs."[88] Moraley touches on one explanation for the difficulty in legislating against itinerants. People in semi-isolated rural areas delighted in welcoming visitors. Writing about his journeys through the countryside Moraley writes that he traveled "some hundreds of Miles at no Expense."[89] According to Moraley the countryside was filled with people attempting to "out-do one another in Works of good Nature and Charity" by providing food to "all subjects of Great Britain."[90] After his indenture ended, and without money or a job, Moraley turned to itinerancy, peddling his skills. In addition to taking up the trade for which he had training, "cleaning Clocks and Watches," Moraley also "follow'd the Occupation of a Tinker."[91] Demonstrating that it took some skill to be a tinker, even more than a trained clock repairman could muster, Moraley claims "where I mended one Hole, I was sure to make another."[92]

Moraley also gives us some insight into his role as intelligencer. Note that when

he writes that he has a "Reputation of an intelligent Man," he is not using intelligence in the twentieth-century definition of high cognitive power, but intelligence in the eighteenth-century manner of being well-informed, as reflected in the names of newspapers as *Intelligencers*.[93] Moraley's role as tinker included the roles of entertainer and intelligencer. Moraley's account also gives us some insight to the social role of the peddler, or in his case, the itinerant tinker. Moraley endeavored to "ingratiate myself into the People's Favour" by utilizing a "Variety of Entertainment."[94] Moraley related "Stories when desir'd," and gave people news of England.[95] By doing so he gained the "Reputation of an intelligent Man."[96] As an intelligent man Moraley knows the news from other regions, colonies and villages, as well as England and its satellites.

Historical analysis often misses this role of peddlers peddling their skills. In her essay "'WANTED: A Blacksmith Who Understands Plantation Work': Artisans in Maryland, 1700-1810," Christine Daniels correctly points out that "planters were unwilling to travel far to obtain basic, inexpensive services, including common smith's work; the effective cost of the service increased with distance."[97] This suggests one reason even such a poor tinker as Moraley managed to get work. This also indicates why rural households welcomed itinerants. Few plantations or rural homesteads possessed all the skills necessary to keep their enterprise in top working order. A visit from a skilled worker could turn out to be a great boon if they had the skill they claimed. Daniels also describes how "smithies dotted the rural landscape." Daniels correctly perceives the multiplication of smithies as evidence of the rural smithy operations spread, but she misses a larger point. The itinerant circuit is scalable. Some, like John Rhea, a merchant Hamilton meets, traveled circuits that took them to nearly every colony along the eastern

seaboard including the West Indies and Newfoundland. Others traveled shorter distances

in order to not be away from their primary location of business. Smithing and milling, of

course, are different than other skilled laborers because of their reliance on difficult-to-

move mills or forges. Some tools a blacksmith could carry, like the tools necessary to

sharpen plows, or to make minor repairs to carriages. Artisans who needed less to do

their work were more likely to engage in some itinerancy. Tailors and shoemakers could

carry the tools of their craft with them, whereas saddlers and cabinetmakers could not. If

the farm or plantation had the necessary tools then the itinerant only needed his skills.

  The success story of Larned and Mason further helps clarify why local

communities and colonial legislations passed laws against peddlers. As Bushman

observes in *From Puritan to Yankee* "peddlers prospered so well that larger merchants

complained."[98] These larger merchants had the political pull to place hurdles before the

peddler. In 1717 in Connecticut "hawkers, pedlars" could be fined twenty shillings for

every one hundred pounds of goods they carried.[99] The ambivalence toward roving

salesmen can be seen in the sporadic attempts by local legislations to control them. Laws

against itinerant retailing existed in Connecticut from 1721 until 1757 when new

legislation scrapped the old laws and instituted peddler licenses which sold for five

pounds each.[100] Itinerant peddlers were easy to spot. They were also easy to hear.[101]

They were impossible to stop. Once reason probably rests on their welcome presence by

many in the town who found it easier, or more satisfactory, to buy from a roving peddler

than from the local businesses the legislatures attempted to protect.

  In the first half of the eighteenth century dozens of new roads linked towns east of

the Connecticut River to markets in Boston, Hartford, and Providence.[102] This rapid

expansion of travel networks allowed the itinerants to move easily and quickly from place to place, avoiding areas where they might be unwanted by local authorities. If an itinerant has an established clientele it also makes it easier to avoid unwanted attention from authorities. Newspapers of the era give a long litany of the attempts to bring the traveling peddler under control. The fact that local legislatures had to pass these sorts of acts over and over suggests their lack of success. Around the same time Connecticut and New York passed laws against peddlers, so did Boston. The April 23, 1722 *Boston News-Letter* carries a report of an "Act against Hawkers and Peddlers."[103]

Despite passing laws in the 1720s New York again confronted the problem of peddlers in 1738, when it once again passed a law forbidding "Hawkers and Pedlers" from carrying "any Goods or Merchandizers for Sale."[104] The fine had been changed to twenty shillings per offense, rather than per one hundred pounds. Another change in the law allowed the "informer" to split the fine with the Church-Warden with the expectation that the Church-Warden would give his portion "for the use of the poor."[105] While Bushman correctly asserts that the competition peddlers might provide to merchants made merchants wary, another element of hawking and peddling existed that could be bothersome to other citizens—their cries. The cacophony of cries could be a nuisance in urban environments.[106] This clamor might go on late into the night and start before dawn. England passed several laws restricting the hours for peddlers' cries.[107] The change in the law also addresses two other problems. People liked peddlers and wanted to trade with them. By offering the informer a portion of the fine, officials hoped to overcome that barrier. And by spending the rest on the poor they also hoped to reduce peddling by the impoverished.

Evidently the fining did not work, or others saw a better way to profit. A year later "Mr. Abraham Lot, from the Committee" gave the report to the council that "the Act for Licensing Hawkers and Pedlers in this Colony should be revived and continued."[108] The council took the committee's suggestion and "ordered that said Acts should be revived" decriminalizing peddling as long as the appropriate license was purchased.[109]

More evidence of the deep ambivalence toward peddlers comes from New Jersey in the 1750s. The person writing in 1750 complained that the people and leaders of the community frequently ignored a 1730 law forbidding the "Business or Implyment of a Hawker, Pedlar or petty Chapman."[110] The law makes clear that peddlers, hawkers, and petty chapmen ranged "from Town to Town."[111] The law was not concerned just with people moving around within the community, but with people that moved between communities. The law's concern with the "Honesty of the Person" demonstrates the community concern with travelers who misrepresent their identity.[112] As seen with Moraley, itinerants misrepresented themselves sometimes, leaving "one hole after they had mended another." The law required that those found guilty be fined fifteen pounds, for hawkers, peddlers and petty chapmen with "one or more Horses, or other Beasts of Burthen," and ten pounds "if traveling on foot," a substantial increase over the twenty shilling fines of decades earlier. Laws to restrain peddlers who worked without a license passed the following year in 1751 and again in 1758, and again in 1770 in New York.

Concerns about false identity, deception, and misrepresentation prompted New Hampshire to pass a law against peddlers selling "Foreign Linens, under pretense that they were made in Londonderry in this Province."[113] The problem of defrauding the customer was not as much a problem to the creators of this legislation as the concern that

the fake linen caused "Damage" to "those who really make and sell the Linen in Londonderry."[114] In addition to passing laws against peddlers the New Hampshire lawmakers created a seal that official linen makers could use to distinguish their authentic product from cheap knock-offs.

Along with preachers and peddlers, post men regularly traveled the early roads and routes working their way from colony to colony. There has been little interest in the colonial postal service, and most interest in the postal service in general is in the institutional nature, and in its role in maintaining the letter networks necessary to sustain communities of knowledge. The postal service did more than carry letters, they also helped reinforce the roads, and the necessity of roads, and ways of moving about the country. The development of the Postal Service was a critical early communication network. The outbreak of war between the English and the Dutch in 1672 prompted the first effort to create a wide-ranging communication network among the colonies. Charles II ordered New York Governor Francis Lovelace to create an intercolonial postal service.[115] The key road for this artery of information was to be between Boston and New York. The postal service was halted when New York was captured by a Dutch fleet, and forgotten in the aftermath of the town being returned to the English in 1674 and the end of the war.

A few years later, in 1683, Pennsylvania established a weekly post, carrying letters from Philadelphia to Delaware, as well as Chester, Newcastle, and Maryland.[116] The following year a postal route between New York and Boston was again attempted. This attempt sprang from a conference at Albany which included representatives from all the colonies and the Iroquois.[117] Records from the meeting show that someone suggested

that the colonies cooperate in building a "line of post-houses along the coast from the Acadian boundary to Carolina."[118] The next year, in 1685, New York passed an ordinance to support this postal scheme.[119] The historical record does not reveal what happened to this scheme, except to show the arrest of a post rider traveling from Boston to New York in 1690, which suggests that some form of postal service existed.[120] The postal service employed itinerant riders to carry the mail, though the postal carriers are not usually considered within the category of itinerant.

A "Crown patent granted by William and Mary" given to Thomas Neale in 1691 established the postal system that eventually would be inherited by Benjamin Franklin.[121] Neale's patent called for him to deliver mail "between Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New York, New England, East and West Jersey, Pennsilvania, and Northward as far as our Dominions reach in America."[122] William and Mary awarded Neale a twenty-one year grant and broad powers to establish "within every or any of the chiefe Port of the severall Iselands or Colonies...in America...an office or Offices for the receiving and dispatching away of letters and Packquetts."[123] Neale's first established route linked Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.[124] Since information about postal service is so vague it is unclear what happened to the earlier posts. There is some suggestion that colonies acquiesced to Neale's charter, but not always so happily.

In 1695 Maryland began resisting Neale's monopoly. Despite Neale's claim to the King and Queen that the colonies had no intercolonial post, a postal route had existed between Maryland and Pennsylvania for the past decade. In 1695 Maryland created a new post, unhappy with Neale, re-establishing their connection with Delaware and Pennsylvania.[125]

A letter from Lord Cornbury suggests that by 1708 Neale's postal service did not include Virginia. In 1708 Lord Cornbury, Governor of New York, wrote to the Lords of Trade that there was "noe post" in Virginia, so he could not know when the Virginia fleet sailed. The lack of an official post did not mean that letters did not get delivered, only that they were erratic and carried by travelers, and might take six weeks or longer to arrive in New York.[126] Virginia continued to isolate itself long after other colonies had begun to build intercolonial networks. But by 1711 Neale's successor, John Hamilton, worked to establish regular routes linking Virginia with Philadelphia and Williamsburg.[127] Benjamin Franklin took over the Postal Service in 1737, and, as others before him, used it to deliver his newspaper at no cost to himself. The route from Philadelphia to Virginia and back took twenty-four days.[128]

Not everyone believed the post to be an unfettered good. Governor William Berkeley of Virginia pronounced the wickedness of a free press which only brings "disobedience" and "heresy."[129] Presumably a post, and post riders, would then be spreading these heresies and disobedience as they carried news throughout the colonies. In 1690 Benjamin Harris, editor of the first colonial newspaper *Publick Occurences Both Foreign and Domestick* has his press shut down after one issue. The postal service was a contentious arena because of its potential to inspire disobedience and spread heresy.

While the development of the post service is important because it shows the development of a communication network, one forgotten element of this service is the courier who carried the mail. More attention is paid to the relay system of the mails rather than the mail carriers, the people who traveled routes regularly and became entrusted with the mails. Mail carriers are types of itinerants, unwritten about, but the

evidence of their existence is the growth of the mails. The post relied on regular carriers. Without regular carriers responsible for the transportation of the mail the postal service would have been too unreliable to maintain. Nor could the postmaster carry everything from place to place. The postal service used reliable carriers regularly, and paid them for their work. They traveled over the same intervillage, and intercolonial, routes again and again. They did not travel these routes silently. Postal riders were immersed in social networks, and shared some of the intelligence they carried. While some letters may have been sealed, it is certain that not everything carried by the post riders remained concealed. People meeting the post rider expected him to share the intelligence he carried.

Like the itinerant tinker the post carrier was expected to be an entertainer and educator as well, carrying information and gossip from place to place, along with the mail, magazines, and newspapers. Being a postal carrier demanded playing a social role with certain social behaviors expected, like the sharing of information and entertainment. In his *Itinerarium* Dr. Hamilton writes that he "returned to my lodging att eight o'clock, and the post being arrived, I found a numerous company att Slater's reading the news."[130] The tavern guests find the news so compelling that "their chit-chat and noise kept me awake 3 hours after I went to bed."[131] In this passage Hamilton points out what happens when the post arrives. What cannot be determined from his passage is whether the tavern is the final stop for the post, or if it is simply a way station along the road and the news that they are reading has a destination further along the trail. Just as post riders read their printed matter aloud so did newsboys.

Newsboys and hawkers were intravillage itinerants that did more than simply

walk from house to house attempting to sell broadsheets, "Lase," and buttons. They read

printed matter aloud in order to induce people to buy it. Some simply listened, but they

got the news. This suggests the synchronic nature of the world. The oral world and print

world twinned together in ways quite unfamiliar to us today. One newspaper letter writer

complains "I have heard of a Speech, cried about the Streets by Hawkers, in which there

was not a Word said."[132] While this anonymous author may have been displeased with

the contents of the speech he heard that day he does reveal to us that newsboys and

hawkers read aloud the speeches contained in the newspapers.

Most print history focuses on the content of the printed matter and pays scant

attention to how people moved this material from person to person and place to place.

One element largely missing from print history is recognition that the people distributing

printed matter engaged in translating print into speech. The synchronicity of the oral and

literate worlds is evident in the names of the newspapers. The name "Post Boy" used by

so many papers (*Boston Post Boy*, *New Haven Post Boy*, *Weekly Post Boy*, *Post Man*)

was a common appellation for newspapers because of the close association with boys (as

well as adult hawkers) reading from the newspapers they sold. The iconic image we have

of the newsboy screaming out headlines on a city corner would have been familiar to city

resident in Boston or Philadelphia over three hundred years ago. These boys were the

hawkers found in the city. This role of the hawker to read from the paper to sell copies is

another example of the synchronic print/oral environments of the era. Chapmen carried

printed material to sell and it seems remarkably unlikely that they kept the ballads,

broadsides, and newspapers to themselves. They built relationships with their clientele

by sharing this information as a way to promote it and to promote themselves.

Cotton Mather wrote in his diary in June 1683, "there is an old Hawker, who will fill this Countrey with devout and useful Books, if I will direct him."[133] From this we know that in 1683 Mather knew of hawkers in his town, and that the hawker could, if he did not already, promote the purchase of books and pamphlets. We also see from some insight into Mather's library the availability of jest books in the New England colonies.[134] There is no reason to believe that the sale of printed material in the colonies approached the cascade of popular literature available in England, but neither is there any reason to believe that an interest in ephemeral print did not exist in the colonies. It is to be expected that this sort of printed material would be ignored by high-minded chroniclers of the era, and serious historians to follow. Samuel Pepys library shows us that a tremendous amount of ephemeral literature has been lost to the historical record.[135] Perhaps the colonies contained less printed matter because of the shortage of printing presses, but it seems likely that printed materials may have been more abundant than is generally recognized. The perceived frivolous nature of this material is enough to keep it out of the historical record. Nonetheless, we know ephemeral literature existed in England in abundance and it seems likely that much of it found its way to the colonies through personal belongings and small shipments that were shared and passed from friend to friend, family member to family member, acquaintance to acquaintance.

Bookdealers and printers sold books, pamphlets, papers, and magazines by subscription, "but Pedlars and Hawkers may have them cheaper by the Dozen" indicating sales by hawkers and peddlers played a significant role in distribution.[136] In 1748 **we** again see the important role these individual agents of distribution play. Hawkers and peddlers are offered discounted rates, because they are able to sell sufficient copies to

make discounts profitable to the printer.

Hawkers merely amplified already existing social networks of knowledge. News-letters that circulated among society's elite during the late seventeenth century anticipated the newspaper. The newsletter is important to this story because it demonstrates the type of information that interested the elite. This information, and format, in turn influenced the creation of the newspaper. Thanks to the synchronic nature of those who carried printed matter, post riders, peddlers, and hawkers, what was once the intelligence of the elite found ways to work itself into the regular discourse of a large percentage of the colonists. The letter writers passed these letters along from person to person, creating a small distribution network. Letters that contained news were not the private letters we are familiar with today. Recipients amended, commented upon, and passed on news letters. An example is a news-letter composed by Mather in which he relied on four other newsletters (copying pertinent information into his own) and intelligence from an overseas traveler, a ship's captain, and three visitors.[137] Mather did not send this letter just to his daughter-in-law, but gave explicit instructions that the letter should also be forwarded to his "son, Barnstable's minister, Jonathan Russell, Elder Lathrop," and the extended community of his son and daughter-in-law in southeastern Massachusetts."[138] Each reader layered on their own information before passing it along, and rewrote it when it became too unwieldy or some new information came to light or had to be corrected.[139]

In addition to spreading jokes, songs, stories, news, and gossip, peddlers also spread more tangible elements of the burgeoning consumerism. While the western edge of British settlement may have seen little itinerant commerce, the more established rural

areas had access to "chairs, clocks, books, and portraits," all carried by itinerant travelers.[140] More than elite assertions of political, social, or religious homogeneity, these small exchanges each acted like a tiny connection, spreading and creating norms and expectations with every joke, song, bit of gossip, or novel good purchased and sold.

These newsletters of Mather's anticipate the newspaper of the mid-eighteenth century and the synchronic world that brought elite discourse to an unlettered population. The *Boston News-Letter,* the first North American paper of significance, published its first issue in Boston in April 1704.[141] There is a truism that the colonies knew more about what happened in London than what happened in neighboring colonies.[142] Reading the colonial newspapers of the first half of the eighteenth-century dispels this canard. Events in England were important, and relatively easy to access thanks to English news-letters and newspapers, but a non-trivial portion of every colonial newspaper included news from around the colonies. A *Boston Weekly Post Boy* from 1745 includes news from "Williamsburg, Virginia, ... Philadelphia, Maryland, New York, Rhode Island," and "Nova Scotia."[143]

CHAPTER 3

Knitting Together a Nation 1741-1776

In Bennett's *History of America* (1740), he notes that the roads around Boston were "exceedingly good in summer," and that "it is safe travelling night or day, for they have no highway robbers to interrupt them"[144] Bennett may overstate the case about highway robbery, but his comment suggests that the roads in New England could be traveled with some safety. And that they were not substantially different than the roads in England on which much trade was carried.

There is a myth among American historians that a British middling class dominated the immigration to the areas that would become the United States. Gordon Wood argues that even the poorest who came to British North America could soon afford land, whereas this is contradicted by Abbot Emerson Smith's analysis suggesting only about twenty percent of indentured servants obtained land or found work as artisans.[145] Those who did not die or return to England became part of the strolling poor. While the rush of immigration in New England during the second quarter of the seventeenth century might fairly be said to be composed of this middling class, the rest of the history of immigration to the colonies shows an abundant number of the impoverished, many of whom the courts expelled from England and its kingdoms precisely because of their

ambulatory nature; they were vagrants and vagabonds. The previous argument against

the presence of lower classes was that they could not afford the price of a ticket, much

less the tools necessary to start up a farm, or the skills. Impoverished people could find

themselves arriving in the colonies, their journey paid for by the British government,

after the passage of the 1718 Transportation Act. Indentured servants came with jobs in

hand, and their transport paid by their new owners. The courts removed nearly thirty

thousand criminals from England due to the Transportation Act and transported them to

the American colonies from 1718 to 1775.[146]   The criminal class was often a mobile

class. Ireland banished vagrants and vagabonds, and Britain, Scotland, and Ireland all

banished grand larcenists and larcenists, i.e. thieves and petty thieves. Both mobile

groups, and one reason to give concern to the colonists about strangers moving through

town.

R. Malcolm Kier places the beginnings of Connecticut tin peddling in 1740 with

the arrival of William and Edward Pattison.[147] Kier, writing in 1913 also provides

several unwarranted assumptions about life on the road in the eighteenth century. He

writes "they were brave, for no coward would venture alone on the long journeys at that

time." While there is some truth to this, it is also true that peddlers would occasionally

travel in groups, and that the population was not as thin as Kier might imagine. Tin

peddlers are not traveling through sparsely populated western lands still inhabited by

potentially antagonistic natives. They are moving about in the rural areas of a British

colony. Travel narratives of this time constantly speak of meeting travelers on the road.

The road could occasionally be lonely, but it could also be a place for social interaction,

even a place to run into old friends and acquaintances whose business also took them on

itinerant routes. Kier also helps perpetuate the fabrication that peddlers could not be

trusted. Perhaps some could not be trusted, but people like the Pattison brothers were

embedded in a community network. Dishonest behavior by them, or by agents acting on

their behalf, could result in damage to their business and reputation. Many peddlers, and

itinerants, did not simply appear once and never again, they returned season after season,

year after year, and counted on repeat business.

That community leaders saw hawkers and peddlers as potentially anti-

authoritarian can also be seen in a newspaper article from the February 24, 1737 *Boston*

Weekly News-Letter. In an account of how a conspiracy of slave rebels had been

uncovered slave-owners were lectured that to avoid future insurrection owners should

make sure their slaves are "disabled from being Handicraft Tradesmen, Overseers,

Drivers or Distillers, Shop-keepers, or Hawkers and Pedlars, or Sailors, nor suffered to

keep Houses."[148] The author of this warning understood that hawkers and peddlers could

create and maintain a social and communication network capable of resisting authority.

The *Itinerarium* of Dr. Alexander Hamilton offers another hint that the sight of

slaves as peddlers was not uncommon. Accompanying Dr. Hamilton on his famous

perambulation around the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century was his slave Dromo.

Hamilton writes upon arriving in Newport "my man, upon account of the portmanteau,

was in the dark taken for a pedlar by some people in the street."[149] Within the context of

the *Itinerarium* and the phrase "in the dark," it may seem as if those who approached him

did not notice Dromo's complexion. This idea of the black peddler is further supported

by the newspaper article cautioning slave owners to restrict their use of slaves when it

comes to hawking or peddling. This raises some interesting questions about the

movement of the enslaved, and the existence of slave communication and social networks during the colonial period. What little work that has been done on black itinerants focuses on the religious itinerant.[150]

Itinerants like the Reverend George Whitefield do not represent the only religious networks in the colonies. Denominations spread themselves throughout the colonies. Representatives met to achieve ecclesiastical unity and internal migrants stayed within their denomination as they moved about the eastern seaboard and interior. Churches thereby shared with taverns the role of communication hub, bringing together information from a wide array of locations. These hubs also served as a source for distributed literature and played an important role in creating intercolonial unity.[151]

By the time George Whitefield, the Grand Itinerant, arrived in the colonies all the pieces were already in place for a national social and communication network. Whitefield's arrival in October 1739 and subsequent intercolonial movement that followed, demonstrated clearly for the first time that a communication network had been put into place that encompassed most of colonial British America.[152]

There is an explicit connection between commerce and the success of George Whitefield.[153] Both commercial success and Whitefield's success relied on the same information networks. Whitefield used more than the network of news and the post; he also drew on the world of the merchant and peddler. Like contemporaneous commercial endeavors, Whitefield promoted himself, often writing reviews of his services in the third person to make them seem as if they came from an unbiased and happy consumer. Whitefield also sent out agents in advance, his own peddlers in divinity.[154]

Followers of Whitefield, in anticipation of his arrival, procured from a Scottish

traveler a "book of his sermons preached in Glasgow and taken from his mouth in short Hand."[155] They were able to obtain these sermons because speech had been turned into print. Thus Whitefield's publications circulated through unexpected routes and with surprising consequences. Through reading Whitefield's sermons, the Virginians spread the revival. Acting as a surrogate preacher, one Reverend Morris began to read the sermons aloud at meetings attended by "ten to twelve faithful souls."[156] In places in the South where Whitefield did not visit, surrogates took it upon themselves to read his sermons aloud to their peers, turning print into speech.

The mistrust that had draped the itinerant peddler also covered the itinerant preacher, just as it had in Mather's "Warning to the Flocks" a half century before. Established preachers vilified Whitefield and his fellow itinerants Gilbert Tennent and James Davenport because of their movement. Itinerant preachers could not be trusted because of their itinerance which placed them outside the traditional hierarchy of power.[157] It was not only their preaching that caught the public's attention, their ability to move so quickly and easily across the colonies captured popular imagination. The reverends repeated their sermons, but the tales of travel were constantly novel and changing. The itinerancy of George Whitefield captured more interest, and represented something more important than his ecclesiastical message.

Itinerancy upset stable society. It upset the established world of merchants and preachers. The arrival of Whitefield in Long Island caused great anxiety to pastor Daniel Wadsworth. Wadsworth's anxiety caused him to see "irregularities and disorders" in the town.[158] The following year the Hartford Association issued their official opposition to itinerant preachers.[159]

Writing about the itinerants of the mid-eighteenth century Timothy Hall and T. H. Breen wrote "itinerancy in religion, like counterfeiting in currency, raised the problem of authenticity and value to new levels."[160] Authenticity was not just a problem with religious itinerants during the mid-eighteenth century; Mather had voiced similar concerns about inauthenticity a half-century earlier. The problem of potential deception by itinerants is seen as a concern. Yet, itinerants persisted and continued to be supported by the populations they visited. This raises the question of who condemned these itinerants as inauthentic and who supported them in their travels. One of the key reasons for early intercolonial cooperation was to halt a criminal element that benefited from lack of intercolonial communication. "In counterfeiting as in itinerancy, mobility exacerbated the problem by enabling confidence men to remain one jump ahead of the law, traveling 'from Colony to Colony, personating different People, forging Bills, Letters of Credit, &C.'"[161] More important than the ways itinerants found to challenge authority, was their success at ignoring authority, thereby diminishing its power.

These hawkers and peddlers, itinerants and post-boys, can be thought of as the connective tissue necessary for any larger plan of state formation to work. Theories of state formation almost exclusively take a top-down approach.[162] Benjamin Franklin's Albany Plan is an excellent example of this top down approach. For Franklin's plan to work an elite would have to be gathered who would write rules and impose them on the colonies. With the Albany Plan, Benjamin Franklin tried to bring together a proto-nation. In 1754, the same year Franklin introduced his Albany Plan, the Reverend Mr. Peters also introduced his "A Plan for a General Union of the British Colonies of North America." Peters presented his plan as a way to organize against French incursions and attacks.

Peters' union would also rationalize Indian trade among the colonies, create a militia, draw a tax to support the militia, and put the militia to work building roads and forts.[163] That same year also saw a "Plan Prepared by the Lords of Trade" to serve as a template for "mutual and common Defence."[164]

All of these efforts culminated in 1777 with the "Articles of Confederation." The colonies did not come together solely because of the will of the political elites, nor did it rapidly assemble into thirteen clocks striking at once. An army of dusty travelers who relied on a network of trails to bring them from one face-to-face interaction to the next brought together a nation one road at a time. The oral world of the itinerants helped spread the growing interest in print of the era. Their movements helped maintain and establish routes of communication that would be essential to moving militias and armies across the revolutionary landscape. George Whitefield was the first to show that this infrastructure had reached a point where a national experience could take place, but it took another generation to turn that national experience into a revolutionary war.

CONCLUSION:

Periphery-to-Periphery Communication

It is a historical canard that Virginia knew more about what happened in London than they knew about what happened in Massachusetts. Carl Becker makes this argument in his 1920 work *The United States: An Experiment in Democracy* "the only bond of union between the colonies was the British government, and the people of the various colonies had usually but little intercourse with one another."[165]

The Platonic itinerant was someone who traveled a circuit over a long period of time and shared news among neighbors, villages, and colonies. Parson Mason Weems is an example of this sort of itinerant. Weems had a regular route and knew people on his route. Not only did he entertain them with stories, but he sold them printed books. In the colonial era however, it is difficult to locate someone who meets the definition as well, but there is much to suggest such people existed. A wandering artisan, peddler, or music teacher might not be able to share news about someone you knew, but could provide intelligence about the world beyond.

These networks demonstrated a rich periphery-to-periphery communication, and material and idea sharing. As James C. Scott has pointed out, one form of resistance by colonial people is to simply ignore authority.[166] Colonized people acknowledge the power of the colonial masters, but covertly they simply work in the peripheral networks,

and work to subvert colonial authority. Once a periphery-to-periphery network is established the core loses its importance. The metropole loses its importance when the colonies turn to each other.

Historical work in England and Europe suggests there is more to be done on North American itinerancy. There is a rich history of English peddlers, European mountebanks, and dissenting preachers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which suggests, but does not assure that similar types of itinerants can be found in the colonies. Work by American historians like Gary Nash and Billy Smith has uncovered large populations of the strolling poor, which have been largely neglected in British American history until recently. Because of previous historians refusal to acknowledge an impoverished class in the American colonies research on groups of people like itinerants can only now begin. Long meditation on the colonial world suggests a peripheral world which allowed a variety of populations to exist outside the eye, and the pen, of the state and its minions.

The early Republic era saw a marked increase in the amount of intercolonial movement. Those years gave rise to the first circuses and menageries and an astonishing increase in the number of postal routes and postal stations. This was the era of Parson Weems. The following century brought cattle drives, railroad engineers, the medicine show, and the ever present itinerant preachers continued in abundance, as did migrant workers. The telegraph also arrived, which changed the nature of interstate communication, as did the expansion of the railroad. America remained a synchronic nation, rooted in both speech and print, but the oral world narrowed with the arrival of electronic communication. The itinerant remained important, but if wires can carry news,

gossip, songs, and jokes, then the importance of the itinerant is diminished. And as reliance on electric communication rose, the necessity of travelers to maintain distant social networks faded.

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¹¹ John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, 13 February 1818, in *The Works of John Adams*, ed. C. F. Adams, 10 vols. (Boston, 1850-56), X, 283.

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[23] See April Lee Hatfield "Indian and English Geographies," *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 8-38; Phillip Levy "Introduction: Setting Off on the Trail" *Fellow Travelers: Indians and Europeans Contesting the Early American Trail* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 1-10; Helen Hornbeck Tanner, "The Land and Water Communication Systems of the Southeastern Indians," *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast,* edited by Gregory A. Waselkov, Peter H. Wood & Tom Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 27-47 for discussion about the native trail system and its adoption by British settlers.

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[34] Ibid., 255.

[35] Ibid., 257.

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[38] Harry M. Ward, *The United Colonies of New England 1643-90* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 75.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Radune, *Pequot,* 50.

[41] Ibid., 53.

[42] Ibid., 54.

[43] Ibid., 55.

[44] Ibid., 57.

[45] Ibid.

[46] See James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999) for more about the role of the itinerant interpreter.

[47] Ward, *United,* 69.

[48] Drake *States',* 15.

[49] Ibid., 19.

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