Far from being isolated backwaters, the Chesapeake colonies (Maryland and Virginia) were a vibrant part of the world economy, trading extensively within the British empire and with some foreign ports. Tax officials documented that trade in Naval Officer Shipping Lists (NOSLs) that recorded all the ships entering or clearing from Chesapeake ports along with detailed lists of their cargoes. Manuscript NOSLs survive for 8 of the 11 ports of entry, mostly for the years 1725-1771. For his research for a doctoral dissertation at UMCP, the late Stephen Hardy transcribed the NOSLs into a relational database and then created summaries for each port for entrances (that is, imports) or clearances (that is, exports) for each full year for which NOSLs survive. Using price indexes and exchange rate indexes, he also generated values for the imports or exports from each region with which the ports traded. Finally, using several different means, he estimated the value of imports or exports for each of the 11 ports of entry for each region for each year for which the NOSLs are missing. Between the values generated for real data and the estimates, he was able to create spreadsheets with values for the trade of each port with each region for every year from 1725 to 1771.

The dataset contains two types of files. The largest number of files are spreadsheets for each of the 8 ports for each year for which NOSLs survive with either entrances or clearances. The data include the type of good (tobacco, wheat, wine, etc.), the quantity and type of measurement (this varied by the type of good, but it could be pounds, barrels, pipes, etc.), prices, and the destination (for clearances) or the port of origin (for entrances), organized by region (North America, West Indies, Great Britain, Ireland, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Africa, Unknown). The second type of file are spreadsheets for each of the 11 ports with the real or estimated values of either entrances or clearances for every region the port traded with for every year from 1725 to 1771/1772.

These data could be used in a variety of ways. For example, the quantities of goods exported and imported from one or more ports could be matched by year to measure the ups and downs of the economy of those areas over time and to note any shifts in what was being produced in those areas. Given the real and estimated values available, a “balance of trade” could be determined. Another area to explore could be the variations in trading partners among different Chesapeake ports; which ports traded more with other American colonies, which with the West Indies, and which with European destinations, and how did that change over time? What goods were shipped where? What goods were imported and from where? And how much did this vary by Chesapeake port and over time? And the data certainly could yield other insights, such as the effects of war—there were several major wars in this time period—on trade.

**Abbreviations in file names**

The general format is a four-letter abbreviation for the Naval Officer Shipping district followed by either CL for clearances (that is, exports) or EN for entrances (that is, imports). Here are the abbreviations for the Naval Officer Shipping districts:

ACCO: Accomack District, Virginia (all of Virginia’s Eastern Shore)

ANNA: Annapolis District, Maryland (from the mouth of the Patuxent River around the north end of the Chesapeake Bay to, but not including, the Chester River, including Annapolis and Baltimore)

JRLO: Lower District, James River, Virginia (the 35 lowest miles of the James River, including both Hampton and Norfolk)

JRUP: Upper District, James River, Virginia (the rest of the James River, north of Lyons Creek, including both Bermuda Hundred—Richmond—and Williamsburg)

NPOT: North Potomac, Maryland (north side of the Potomac River, including Georgetown in what is now Washington, D.C.)--please note, there are no individual sheets for NPOT, just the Region Summary, which is based on estimates

OXFO: Oxford District, Maryland (from the Chester River to the Choptank River, inclusive)

PATU: Patuxent District, Maryland (the Patuxent River)--please note, there are no individual sheets for PATU, just the Region Summary, which is based on estimates

POCO: Pocomoke District, Maryland (Maryland’s Eastern Shore from the Virginia border up to, but not including, the Choptank River)--please note, there are no individual sheets for POCO, just the Region Summary, which is based on estimates

RAPP: Rappahannock District, Virginia (Rappahannock River, including Urbanna and Fredericksburg)

SPOT: South Potomac District, Virginia (south side of the Potomac River, including Alexandria)

YORK: York District, Virginia (York River, including Yorktown)

**For more information**

See the other informational files provided that explain more about the Naval Officer Shipping Lists, estimation methods, early American price indices, and price series information. There also is a list of the ports by region with which the Chesapeake colonies traded.