

enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world. This prosperity ushered in a revolutionary transformation in consumption habits. Common folk, whose ancestors' lives had been shaped by a constant struggle for subsistence, turned to purchasing what had been hitherto considered luxuries reserved for the rich. The availability and affordability of furniture, tools, and clothing to the vast majority of white residents of New England and Mid-Atlantic colonies dramatically altered their daily lives and raised their economic expectations. Initially, local artisans and handcraft industries met the demand, but they could not keep pace with the growing appetite of consumers who quickly turned to imports. Manufactured goods accounted for more than 80 percent of imports to the colonies in the third quarter of the century.¹⁵

The colonists' appetite for European culture and goods seemed insatiable. American architects copied models from English books. American magazines devoted their pages to informing their readers of the most recent mechanical developments in Europe. The practice of getting education in Europe was a prominent feature of late eighteenth-century America. More than half of the founders of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia were educated in Europe, primarily in Edinburgh and London, including future physicians of the Continental Army John Morgan and Benjamin Rush. The men who returned with this knowledge became the founding fathers of the American medical profession and turned Philadelphia into the medical capital of North America.¹⁶

Americans increasingly recognized their intellectual and technological deficit and looked to emulate Europe. Foreign origins became synonymous with superior quality. Advertisements in newspapers boasted of products made by English-trained artisans. Immigrants capitalized on the perception that superior products were made in Europe and by Europeans and demanded higher wages than natives. Upon their arrival many European artisans used their places

of origin in their advertisements to distinguish themselves from local craftsmen. English migrants to Philadelphia, for example, looked for local investors to put up the necessary capital for erecting textile factories and promised that they were acquainted with the most recent European developments.¹⁷ Peter Hasenclever, a German ironmaster, established in northern New Jersey the largest and most successful industrial enterprise in the colonies, which employed hundreds of skilled ironworkers he imported from Germany. Hasenclever resented his continued dependence on foreign workers. "They made bad work; I complained and reprimanded them; they told me they could not make better work at such low wages and, if they did not please me, I might dismiss them. I was, therefore, obligated to submit, for it had cost me a prodigious expense to transport them from Germany; and, had I dismissed them, I must have lost these disbursements, and could get no good workmen in their stead."¹⁸

Some investors decided to capitalize on the growing consumption of industrial goods in America and establish local manufacturing. Hindered by chronic labor shortages, entrepreneurs who sought to produce industrial goods in a competitive market environment scrambled for artisans who knew the most advanced and labor-saving production methods. Recruiting skilled industrial immigrants, however, was problematic. While European farm laborers came to the New World with a realistic expectation of improving their lot by becoming independent landowners, skilled workers were in high demand in industrializing Europe. A European craftsman who moved to the New World was, in effect, cutting himself off the professional network that had taught him his trade and sustained his status in the Old World. And since most masters in Europe were well compensated, few took the physical and economic risk of crossing the Atlantic and setting up shop in the colonies. Even those who came found duplicating European production processes next to