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# "The Bare Necessities:" Standards of Living in England and the Chesapeake, 1650–1700

## ABSTRACT

The domestic environment had a profound influence on the texture of everyday life in early modern England and America not only in terms of family interaction but also as a tangible reflection of broader social attitudes towards hierarchy, status and consumerism. This article compares standards of living in England and the Chesapeake between 1650 and 1700. Three regions are analyzed in detail: the Vale of Berkeley, Gloucestershire; St. Mary's County, Maryland; and part of the Northern Neck of Virginia. It is argued that a comparison of material culture and living standards reveals important aspects of the advantages and disadvantages of emigrating from England to the Chesapeake, and suggests significant differences between the two societies in this period.

## Introduction

What were the gains and losses involved for the tens of thousands of men and women who left England in the 17th century to live "beyond the seas" in the Chesapeake colonies of Maryland and Virginia? Many factors influenced immigrants' adaptation to their new society: their own backgrounds, the environment they encountered, the timing of their arrival, the ebb and flow of the tobacco economy, and plain luck. This paper investigates one aspect of adaptation through a comparison of standards of living reflected in the household inventories of selected communities in England and the Chesapeake. It will focus on items of material culture not normally recovered by archaeologists, but which were central in determining the quality of life experienced by settlers. Analysis of probate inventories not only provides a means of drawing broad comparisons of living standards across time and place (Shammas 1980, 1982; Main 1982; Carr and Walsh 1985), but also suggests exciting possibilities for co-operation between historians and archaeologists engaged in the study of material culture in early America.

Standards of living, as examined in this paper, relate to the dwellings and domestic furnishings of householders who have been divided into five wealth groups: less than £10, £10–£49, £50–£99, £100–£249, £250 and over. Wealth is defined as the sum total of a decedent's moveable estate, including debts receivable: land is not included (Horn 1981; Main 1982; Carr and Walsh 1978, 1985). No attempt is made to assess living standards using other criteria, for example, work patterns, health or recreational opportunities. This paper is concerned only with the domestic environment. Dividing households of both societies into the same wealth categories raises problems about comparability. Does a person worth £100 in England occupy roughly the same social position as a person worth the same amount in Maryland or Virginia? Are we comparing like with like? Adjustments have been made for differing exchange rates, as will be explained later, but the subjective problem of comparison remains. It was decided to adopt the same wealth groups for the English and Chesapeake data because using different categories would raise even greater problems of comparability. Since these categories are approximations of social status, rather than precise definitions, distortions caused by this approach should not invalidate general conclusions.

Three regions are analyzed in detail: the Vale of Berkeley, Gloucestershire; St. Mary's County, Maryland; and Lancaster and Northumberland counties, Virginia. Two characteristics of the Vale of Berkeley make it suitable for this analysis (Figure 1). First, the Vale is representative of one of the main types of community from which colonists emigrated, that is, a wood-pasture district in the southern half of England (Horn 1979; Salerno 1979). Conclusions drawn from an analysis of living conditions in the Vale can be placed in the wider context of woodland parishes within Bristol's hinterland. Secondly, compared to other rural areas in England, the region provided large

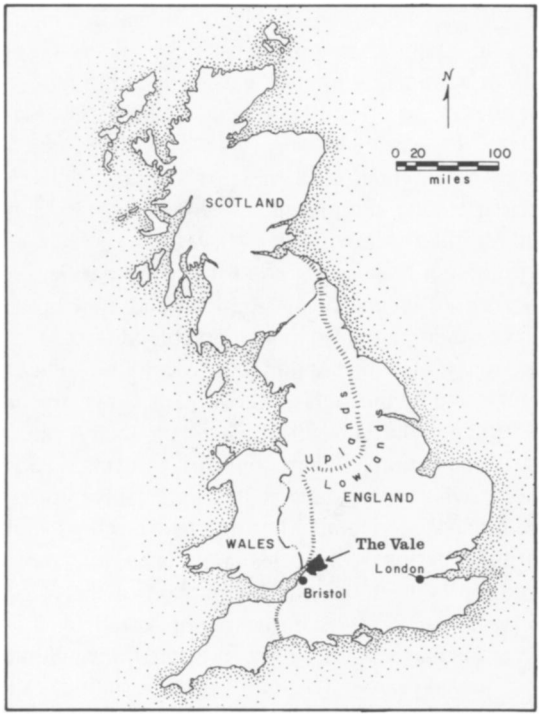


FIGURE 1. Location of the Vale of Berkeley in England

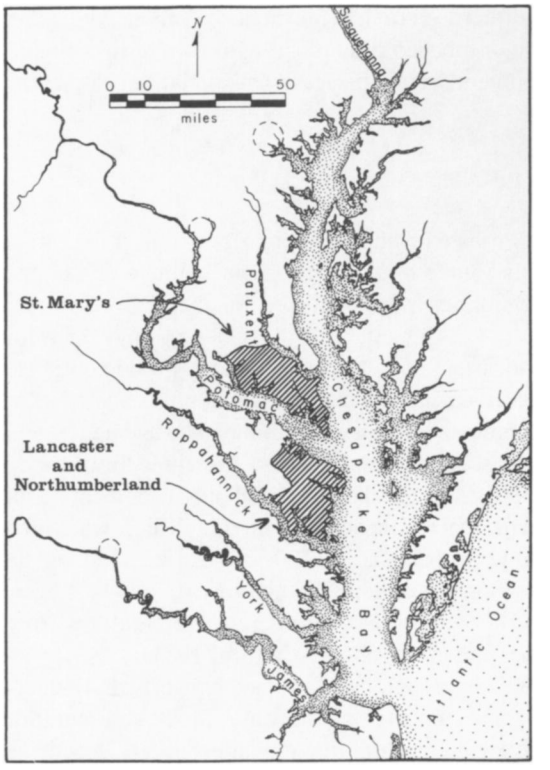


FIGURE 2. The Chesapeake Region showing the locations of St. Mary's County, Maryland and Lancaster and Northumberland Counties, Virginia

numbers of emigrants to the Chesapeake in the 17th century; several hundred between 1619 and 1690. The great majority of these were indentured servants who emigrated from Bristol during the second half of the century but there were also significant numbers of free emigrants who were connected to Bristol's mercantile community.

Because there is insufficient evidence to link the geographical origins of English immigrants in particular Chesapeake communities, two regions with especially complete local records were chosen as representative of mainstream social and economic developments along the tobacco coast (Figure 2). St. Mary's County, Maryland is one of the most intensely studied areas of the colonial Tidewater (St. Mary's City Commission). During the middle decades of the century, immigrants poured into the region from London, Bristol and other ports. Low to medium quality tobacco was produced locally and the county appears, on the basis of both historical and archaeological evidence, to have had close links with Bristol merchants (Harris 1978; Miller 1983:83). Lancaster and Northumberland counties had closer ties with London merchants, but Bristol ships also traded along the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers. The region was a major receptor of immigrants in the 1650s and 1660s and produced medium to high grade leaf (Morgan 1975:227–28). No claim is made that these areas represent the entire range of regional variation in the early Chesapeake. Virginia and Maryland historians are aware of significant differences in local economic and social structures. However, while it is important not to overlook local variation, there can be little doubt that society in St. Mary's County and in the

Northern Neck had much in common with other major tobacco producing regions in terms of environment, economic base and social development.

## Sources

Probate inventories comprise the most important data source in this study. Four hundred and eighty inventories were analyzed for the Vale of Berkeley, 372 for St. Mary's County, and 150 for Lancaster and Northumberland. Using probate records in a comparative context poses a number of technical difficulties relating to provenience and consistency of data across the three inventoried populations. At best, only about 30 percent of all adult male decedents from the Vale, who died between 1660 and 1700, are represented by an inventory. Periodically the proportion is far lower, and there are also considerable fluctuations from one parish to another (Horn 1981). As far as English probate sources are concerned, there is nothing unusual about this. Most communities have only a fifth to a quarter of all decedents appearing in probate records. Poorer groups in early modern England are grossly underrepresented and hence most of the surviving evidence relates to middling and wealthy householders (Riden 1985:18).

Inventory coverage was much higher in Maryland during the second half of the 17th century, possibly about 70 percent of the total decedent population (Menard 1976). People at all levels of society in Maryland appear to have been more assiduous than their English counterparts in having inventories drawn up for their kin, friends, or debtors (Carr and Walsh 1978). There are no reliable estimates for Virginia, but coverage appears closer to the English level than that of her sister colony.

In both England and the Chesapeake, probate inventories followed a similar format: a list with valuations of the decedent's clothes, household possessions, livestock, crops or shopwares, and debts receivable. Apart from leasehold properties, real estate is rarely mentioned and was not required to be included (Horn 1981:82; Main 1975:89–99). In both societies the production of an inventory was an essential step in the process of proving a will or administration, and was designed to reduce the likelihood of embezzlement of the deceased's estate. Probate was supervised by the Church courts in England until the 19th century, and by secular county and prerogative courts in Maryland and Virginia (Main 1982:48–49).

Although there are a good many similarities in the form of inventories in England and the Chesapeake, there are also some notable differences. The importance of bound labor in colonial society is reflected by the high levels of planter investment in servants and slaves, which in monetary value sometimes comprised the bulk of an estate. Secondly, whereas valuations in English inventories are always in pounds sterling, in Maryland and Virginia various currencies were used, the most common being tobacco. Comparison of the price of particular items is further complicated by different exchange rates which fluctuated throughout the colonial period. To control these variations, all valuations in tobacco have been converted to sterling equivalents using Russell R. Menard's data on tobacco prices throughout the 17th century (Menard 1975: 465–79). Inflation and fluctuations in exchange rates were adjusted using data supplied by the St. Mary's City Commission. Wealth levels and values of individual items are standardized to the English rate of exchange.

Thirdly, Chesapeake inventories are frequently more detailed than English sources. It was customary in England for appraisers to value commodities of small worth together under general categories such as "For things unseen or forgotten" and "other old lumber." Small items, such as knives and spoons, or relatively inexpensive goods such as earthenware appear in Chesapeake inventories with much greater frequency than in the English sample. Undoubtedly householders in England owned these items, but they went largely unrecorded. Firm conclusions therefore can only be drawn from comparisons of goods that were normally included in inventories in both England and the Tidewater. These items are furniture, cooking equipment, linen and cloth, and expensive possessions.

Finally, English and Chesapeake inventoried

populations reflect the different age structures of the two societies. On average, men and women living along the tobacco coast died ten years earlier than adults in England (Walsh and Menard 1974; Smith 1978; Rutman and Rutman 1979). They therefore had less time to accumulate household goods and other possessions. Relatively short life spans account, in part, for the poverty exhibited in the inventories of most 17th century settlers (Main 1982:49).

## Dwellings

The Vale of Berkeley was an important pasture-farming district in the 17th century and had much in common with dairying regions in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset (Thirsk 1967). Characterized by numerous family farms, scattered settlement and a good deal of rural manufacture, the Vale was considered a particularly fertile area (Smyth 1889:4; Defoe 1971:364). Although much of the region was enclosed, there were still pockets of commonland, generally on marginal soils, where villagers raised cattle and sheep. Availability of commons was vital to smallholders who earned a living partly from farming and partly from various by-employments, notably woollen manufacture (de Lacy Mann 1971; Perry 1945; Smyth 1902).

Housing in the region was characterized above all by diversity. In the upper part of the Severn valley, timberframe dwellings in the square-panelled tradition of the West Midlands remained common throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries (Hey 1974:122; Smith 1985;691). Further south, stone and rubble were the most common building materials, with bricks being generally reserved for chimneys. Roofing was usually of stone, tiles or thatch (Hall 1983:1, 3, 29, 33–34). Dwellings with a through-passage were the dominant type until the mid-17th century but thereafter, as rebuilding went on apace, other floor plans were adopted or adapted to suit local needs. Within the three basic types found in the area—through-passage, central-passage and no-passage—there were literally scores of different floor plans (Hall 1983).

Little evidence survives about the dwellings of the poorest people living in the region. The most rudimentary were shacks and hovels erected on commons, heaths and woodlands which housed itinerant laborers and vagrants. A squatter's cottage dating from the late 17th or early 18th centuries found in the parish of Iron Acton, just north of Bristol, measured 10-foot square and had two stories (Hall 1983: 183–84). Eighteen cottages erected on wasteland in Urchfont, Wiltshire, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries ranged in size from 10 by 18 feet to 15 by 15. The average was fourteen by ten feet (Bettey 1983: 28–30).

It is improbable that these tiny, and often flimsy, structures were numerous by the post-Restoration period. It has been suggested that the two or three-roomed cottage was the smallest form of housing common in central and southern England in this period (Barley 1967: 762). Inventory evidence, although slight, bears out this view. Of 10 people who died in the Vale of Berkeley between 1660 and 1700 worth less than £10, 4 lived in two rooms, 2 in three rooms, 1 in four rooms and 3 in five rooms. The mean average was 3.3 rooms. People living in two rooms may have inhabited shacks such as those described above but, more likely, lived in parts of bigger tenements. Agricultural laborers from the Frampton Cotterell area, to the south of the Vale, usually lived in three-roomed cottages (Moore 1976: 35–36). Despite their small size (20 by 20 or 20 by 35 feet) such dwellings were often well constructed by local craftsmen and built to last (Hall 1983: 22).

The commonest housing in the region had between five and seven rooms. Two-thirds of the inhabitants who died worth £10 to £49 lived in dwellings of five or more rooms, while those worth £50 to £99 lived in houses of six to seven rooms. The mean number of rooms per house was 5.3 and 6.4 respectively. Room names provide clues to the layout of the dwellings. The larger number of different room names emphasizes the great variety of housing in the Vale but certain common features emerge. A 'typical' five-roomed

house had a hall, kitchen and buttery on the ground floor and two chambers above, probably over the hall and kitchen. Larger dwellings usually had a hall, kitchen and buttery on the ground floor with three chambers over them, and possibly one or two lofts. Extra rooms did not necessarily imply greater domestic comfort since larger dwellings may have contained more storage rooms necessary for keeping foodstuffs, raw materials and working tools.

There was no sharp distinction between the dwellings of middling groups and those of rich householders. Parish gentry and substantial yeomen lived in houses of between eight and 15 rooms; wealthy retailers and artisans in dwellings of nine or 10 rooms. Many appear to have had a similar layout to smaller houses with the addition of a parlor, cellar, whitehouse, and extra lofts. They usually had more hearths, providing warmth and light to a larger range of chambers and ground floor rooms than in humbler structures. There was also greater potential for more specialized use of domestic space, but building materials and styles did not differ significantly from other housing. Only at the very pinnacle of society were differences in terms of style and size of dwellings striking. Smalcombe Court, owned by the Smyth family, stewards to the Lords Berkeley, had at least 27 rooms. Few but the county elite could afford to keep up with the latest fashions in architecture and ornamental gardens. Not only were their building materials different—dressed stone or brick—but the architecture owed as much to metropolitan taste as vernacular tradition.

A number of points from this brief survey of housing in the Vale of Berkeley are worth stressing. As in other parts of central and southern England, the medieval open hall house had given way during the 15th and 16th centuries to the multi-roomed, two story dwelling, allowing greater specialization in the use of domestic space and also more comfort (Smith 1985: 689–90). Apart from makeshift structures on wastes and in woodlands, the smallest houses were generally three-roomed cottages; sturdily built of local materials by village craftsmen. Most of the Vale's inhabitants, however, probably lived in larger dwellings of between four and seven rooms. Houses were made to last. Given reasonable maintenance they would stand for centuries. Built of rubble, stone, brick and tile, they were sufficiently well-constructed to be durable, but also sufficiently flexible in plan and structure to allow the addition of new rooms when necessary (Hall 1983).

The contrast with Chesapeake housing is stark. Typical Chesapeake dwellings were about 20 by 16 feet and, as Walsh points out, were very unlike vernacular buildings in England (Walsh 1977: 248–50). Settlers developed a structure appropriate to their needs and available materials. Houses were constructed entirely of wood with the whole of the outside covered with riven oak clapboards (Figure 3). Clapboards not only provided the exterior surface but also constituted an essential structural element of the dwelling. Such dwellings, termed "Virginia houses" by the third quarter of the 17th century, were easy and cheap to construct but did not last as long as English buildings (Carson 1974).

This latter aspect of Chesapeake housing has led some architectural historians to characterize the vernacular buildings of the region as "impermanent" (Carson, et al, 1981). "Tobacco barns and dwelling houses", says Walsh, "were intended by the builders to last only for a few years, and their construction was apparently such that it was almost invariably easier to put up a new building than to repair the old one" (Walsh 1977: 252). The nature of tobacco culture and land ownership also contributed to an "architecture of transience." When fields became exhausted, the owner sometimes simply moved to another part of the tract where a new dwelling could be quickly erected. The old building would be left to decay. Local building materials, the development of a distinctive Chesapeake form of architecture, ravages of climate, and the demands of tobacco culture all contributed to the short life-span of housing; perhaps no more than 20 to 25 years.

As far as domestic living standards are concerned, the most important aspect of the typical Chesapeake dwelling was its small size. The vast majority of houses had only one or two rooms.

FIGURE 3. Recreation of a 17th Century Chesapeake House in St. Mary's City, Maryland based upon historical, architectural and archaeological evidence.

Fewer than 50 out of a sample of over 1400 householders along the lower Western Shore of Maryland, between 1658 and 1705, owned dwellings with more than two rooms (St. Mary's City Commission). Except perhaps in summer when people could live partially outside, these were the physical constraints placed upon the daily domestic routine of the great bulk of planters. This factor in itself has a considerable bearing on a comparison of living standards in England and the Chesapeake.

## Material Possessions of Poor and Lower-Middle Class Households Worth Less than £50

In both societies, poor and lower-middle class householders constituted the majority of the population, accounting for about 60 percent of inhabitants in the Vale and between 50 and 60 percent in Maryland and Virginia (Horn 1981:93, 101; forthcoming). There is little evidence concerning the standard of living of the very poor worth less than £10. In England, they included the aged, poor widows, paupers and laborers, but the vast majority did not go through probate (Horn 1981: 85–94). Planters who had not lived sufficiently long to get started or who had simply failed to make a living from growing tobacco comprise the majority of the very poor in the Chesapeake. Since the numbers are small, conclusions must remain tentative but the contrast between the Vale of Berkeley poor and the Maryland and Virginia samples is nevertheless striking. The most impressive feature of Table 1 is the difference in the proportions of people owning furniture in England

Table 1
STANDARDS OF LIVING OF HOUSEHOLDERS WORTH LESS THAN £50, VALE OF BERKELEY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE; ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND; LANCASTER AND NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTIES, VIRGINIA, 1650-1700

| | Vale of Berkeley | | St. Mary's County | | Lancaster and Northumberland | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Household | < £10 (N = 37) % | £10–£49 (N = 155) % | < £10 (N = 15) % | £10–£49 (N = 134) % | < £10 (N = 9) % | £10–£49 (N = 69) % |
| Boiling Equip. | 73.0 | 63.9 | 86.7 | 86.6 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Frying Equip. | 10.8 | 23.2 | 53.3 | 53.7 | 44.4 | 63.8 |
| Roasting Equip. | 29.7 | 63.2 | 6.7 | 24.6 | – | 34.8 |
| Other Cooking Equip. | – | 3.9 | 6.7 | 0.7 | – | – |
| Brass | 81.1 | 94.8 | 20.0 | 30.6 | 33.3 | 47.8 |
| Pewter | 83.8 | 96.1 | 53.3 | 70.9 | 66.7 | 79.7 |
| Earthen/Stoneware | – | 9.7 | 13.3 | 35.1 | 33.3 | 36.2 |
| Fine Ceramics | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Glassware | – | 2.6 | – | 0.7 | – | 1.4 |
| Knives | – | – | – | 0.7 | – | 2.9 |
| Forks | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Spoons | 2.7 | 4.5 | 26.7 | 29.9 | 44.4 | 26.1 |
| Table/Tableboard | 81.1 | 92.3 | 6.7 | 34.3 | – | 37.7 |
| Tableframe | 35.1 | 52.3 | – | – | – | – |
| Chair | 40.5 | 79.4 | 26.7 | 28.4 | – | 33.3 |
| Bench/Form | 40.5 | 63.2 | – | 9.7 | 0 | 23.2 |
| Stool | 24.3 | 61.3 | – | 9.7 | – | 5.8 |
| Settle | 10.8 | 21.9 | – | – | – | – |
| Couch | – | – | 6.7 | 9.7 | 44.4 | 23.2 |
| Other | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| No Seats | 35.1 | 6.5 | 73.3 | 55.2 | 55.6 | 49.3 |
| Table Linen | 8.1 | 40.6 | 6.7 | 9.7 | 44.4 | 23.2 |
| General Linen | 29.7 | 74.2 | 33.3 | 36.6 | – | 46.4 |
| Beds | 97.3 | 100.0 | 66.7 | 87.3 | 66.7 | 92.8 |
| Bedsteds | 81.1 | 94.2 | 6.7 | 21.6 | – | 30.4 |
| Sheets | 29.7 | 47.1 | 20.0 | 20.1 | – | 30.4 |
| Curtains/Valances | – | 13.5 | 6.7 | 5.2 | – | 14.5 |
| Warming Pan | 5.4 | 23.9 | – | 5.2 | – | 7.2 |
| Cupboard | 29.7 | 33.5 | – | 9.0 | – | 4.3 |
| Clothespress | – | 20.6 | – | – | – | 1.4 |
| Sideboard | 10.8 | 29.0 | – | – | – | – |
| Chest of Drawers | – | 1.3 | – | – | – | – |
| Desk | 5.4 | 5.8 | – | 2.2 | 11.1 | 2.9 |
| Chest/Trunk/Coffer | 81.1 | 92.3 | 80.0 | 82.8 | 66.7 | 89.9 |
| Lighting | 2.7 | 29.0 | 20.0 | 26.9 | 11.1 | 30.4 |
| Chamberpot/Closestool | 5.4 | 13.5 | – | 10.4 | – | 5.8 |
| Pictures | – | – | – | 0.7 | – | 1.4 |
| Books | 5.4 | 20.6 | 27.7 | 17.2 | 11.1 | 49.3 |
| Plate/Jewels | – | 9.7 | – | 0.7 | – | 7.2 |
| Clocks/Watches | – | 1.9 | – | – | – | – |

Sources. Vales of Berkeley; GRO Probate Inventories, 1660–1699 PRO, PCC Inventories, PROB 4 and %; St. Mary's County inventories, 1658–1699 courtesy of SMCC; Lancaster and Northumberland; Probate inventories, 1650–1699, (copies), Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

and the Chesapeake. Although at the bottom of the social and economic ladder, the majority of the very poor in the Vale possessed what were considered the basic necessities of life. Virtually everyone had a bed (97.3%) and over 80% had bedsteads. People without bedsteads probably slept on mattresses on the floor in a similar fashion to that described by William Harrison in the 16th century (Harrison 1968: 201). Beds and bedding were cheap and unsophisticated. The mean value of a bed, bedstead and "appurtenances" (coverlets, rug, blankets, and possibly sheets) was £1.17, compared to £1.93 for all groups. Most of the very poor possessed tables and seats. Over 80% had a table or table board and two-thirds had some kind of seating. Chairs and forms were most common. Other furniture, however, was less frequently owned. Thirty percent had cupboards, although most of these must have been of crude construction since in no case were they worth more than a few shillings. Only 11% had sideboards, while more elaborate case furniture such as presses and chests of drawers were entirely absent. Very few poor owned goods that were not essential to everyday domestic life. Some possessed a few books, while chamberpots, lighting untensils, and warming pans—items which, although not essential, made home life a little more comfortable—were scarce.

If the very poor in the Vale owned the basic necessities, the poor in the Chesapeake did not. Seventeenth century colonists' standards of sufficiency, comfort and luxury were not simply more modest versions of those in England, they were different standards altogether. Apart from a few chairs and couches, furniture of any kind was entirely missing from the households of the very poor in Maryland and Virginia. Virtually all householders at this level were without bedsteads, and only two-thirds even owned a proper mattress. Rags or piles of straw perhaps served those who could not afford bedding. Over 70% of the St. Mary's group and 55.6% of the Virginia sample were without seating. They had to make do by sitting on the floor or using up-turned barrels, pails and chests. Other common domestic furniture was non-existent. Cooking equipment, for the most part, was limited to an iron pot or two for boiling mush and stew. Inventories less commonly mention a frying pan. As one might expect, non-essentials and luxury goods, with the important exception of books, were completely absent.

Living standards of the very poor have been described as "remarkably, almost unimaginably primitive. . . . Equipment of any kind was so scarce that we must look to aboriginal cultures to find modern analogies that even approximate these pre-consumer living conditions of the seventeenth century" (Carson and Carson 1976: 17). Barbara and Cary Carson provide a graphic illustration of the living conditions of the poor in southern Maryland:

> It is suppertime. A wife, husband, two children, and perhaps a servant are gathered together in the perpetual dusk of their shuttered cottage. This evening, like most evenings, their dinner is cornmeal mush boiled in an iron pot. The food is ladled into five plates or porringers, one for each person. The father sets his down on a large storage trunk which he straddles and sits on. His daughter is perched on the edge of a small chest, the only other piece of furniture in the room. The rest either stand or squat along the walls. They spoon up the food from the plates they must hold in their hands or place on the floor. They drink milk or water from a common cup, tankard or bowl passed around. No candle or lamp is lighted now or later when the room grows completely dark except for the glow of embers on the hearth. Nightfall puts an effective end to all the day's activities. While someone rinses the bowls in a bucket of water (there being only one pot), someone else drags out a cattail mattress and arranges it in front of the fire. The husband, wife, and daughter lie down there, covering themselves with a single canvas sheet and a worn-out bed rug. The son and servant roll up in blankets on the floor. For warmth all sleep in their clothes. (Carson and Carson 1976: 9–10).

As the Carsons point out, this is a fictional and in some respects an unprovable recreation of the most wretched conditions in which poor planters lived. But on the other hand, conditions such as these, or similar to them, were to be found among the poor throughout the Chesapeake. Evidence from Charles County, Maryland, and Lancaster and Northumberland counties, Virginia, confirms the Carsons' findings for St. Mary's County. Moreover, these conditions were not merely confined to the very poor. The above reconstruction could almost equally apply to a planter in the £10 to £49 wealth group.

Although it is possible to detect improvement in the standard of living of lower middle class compared to the very poor, the primitiveness of domestic conditions is nevertheless remarkable. In both Maryland and Virginia, half of the decedents worth between £10 and £49 lacked any seating, and between 70% and 80% were without bedsteads. Tables were to be found in only a third of the households. Other furniture was even less common. In the Virginia sample, there does appear to have been an important increase in the number of householders owning linen. Linen of any kind was missing from the under £10 group whereas nearly one-half of the £10–£49 group owned either table linen, sheets or both. This pattern is not repeated in the St. Mary's County sample. These differences may reflect regional variations in marketing by English manufacturers or possibly in living standards, but it is important to remember that in both samples the size of the under £10 group is small (15 in the case of St. Mary's and nine in Virginia) and therefore might be unreliable.

Sitting down at meals on furniture, or even standing at a table, as the Carsons suggest, was not yet a convenience that most planters worth less than £50 could afford. Sleeping arrangements were similarly crude. Few householders had the pleasure of sleeping on a bed and bedstead with proper bedding. In short, "these were people living at a subsistence level. In a life-time of hard work many were no better equipped than newly arrived indentured servants . . ." (Carson and Carson 1976:15).

Again, the contrast with householders in the Vale of Berkeley is striking. Houses of weavers, clothworkers, poorer artisans and smallholders, who comprised the majority of the lower-middling groups worth between £10 and £49, in every case contained beds, bedsteads and bedding and generally had tables, chairs and other forms of seating. Mary Martimore, widow in the parish of Berkeley, died in the spring of 1663 worth about £16. She owned two beds and bedsteads, with pillows and sheets; two large tableboards with frames; a side cupboard; three coffers; a chair and another tableboard with a frame. Judging by the cooking utensils, she mainly boiled her food in a "brasspot" or iron kettles, and ate her meals from pewter dishes. Charles Smyth, a tailor also of Berkeley, died in the same year worth about £20. His house had at least five rooms: three on the ground floor, including his shop, and two chambers. He owned three beds, bedsteads and "appurtenances", several tables, and a range of seating consisting of chairs, forms and stools. He kept his clothes in a "presse" and stored household linen in a chest in the chamber over the hall. Both chambers appear to have been used solely for sleeping and storing of clothes and linen. The hall was probably Smyth's main living room, while the buttery served as a kitchen (Gloucestershire Records Office, Probate Inventories, 1663/51, 1663/67).

Cupboards, sideboards, and clothes presses—items of furniture rarely found in the households of Chesapeake planters worth less than £50—were much more commonplace in the Vale. These items provided a more convenient means of storing goods than the ubiquitous chest or trunk. There was also a greater readiness to invest in non-essential items. Nearly a quarter of the Vale of Berkeley sample possessed warming pans, testifying to the superiority of beds and bedding in the English sample, and just under 10 percent owned a small piece of silver or jewelry—perhaps a family heirloom. The main luxuries that poor and lower-middling Chesapeake planters allowed themselves were lighting equipment and books. Titles are not usually mentioned but most books appear to have been bibles and devotional works. Given the low incidence of apparent book ownership in the Vale, it may be that books, like other small items, were not generally appraised in English inventories. Discrepancies between the English and Chesapeake samples for small objects might possibly reflect differing recording practices in the two societies, rather than different consumer patterns.

## Material Possessions of Middle and Upper-Middle Class Householders Worth £50 to £249

The living standards of Chesapeake planters worth above £50 show a gradual improvement

(Table 2). Householders of between £50 and £99 (better off leaseholders and small landowners) appear to have formed an intermediate group between the living standards of the poor and those of the middling and rich. There was generally more furniture. Between a half and three-quarters of decedents in the Maryland and Virginia samples owned tables and most householders (70% to 80) had seating of some kind. There was also a marked improvement in beds and bedding. Nearly 60% of the Virginia sample and 40% of St. Mary's householders in this wealth group owned bedsteads. A similar proportion (40% to 60%) were able to cover their beds with sheets, while approaching a third had curtains and valances.

Diet also appears to have improved. Most householders were equipped with boiling, frying and roasting implements. John Baley of Lancaster County, Virginia, who died in 1695 worth about £56, owned 2 brass kettles, 1 small spit and dripping pan, 2 iron kettles, 1 frying pan, 2 pots, potracks, and a pair of pothooks (Lancaster County Records, Wills 8:49). John Pearse, who died in neighboring Northumberland County in 1667 worth about £83, had 2 iron pots, 1 frying pan, 2 spits, 1 dripping pan, 1 brass pot and kettle "all very old", 2 pair of pothooks, and 1 pair of potracks (Northumberland County Records 1666-72: 220, 228). Along with a greater variety of cooking equipment, there was also a greater number of implements, in contrast to the one or two iron pots and occasional frying pan commonly found in the inventories of planters worth less than £50.

Another notable improvement was in dining habits. About half the householders of the £50–£99 wealth group in Maryland and Virginia were able to cover their tables with tablecloths, and almost everyone could set their tables with pewter plates and dishes. Nearly half the sample in both colonies owned earthen or stoneware, and few possessed glassware.

Non-essential items are also found in greater numbers in the households of the £50 to £99 group. Lighting equipment (candles, candlesticks, snuffers) was present in half the inventories of this group, compared to between 27% and 30% of the £10–£49 group, and 11% to 20% of the under £10 group. Being able to light the house artificially in the evenings must have made a substantial difference in the quality of life by lengthening the day's activities. The daily routine need no longer be circumscribed by the hours of daylight.

If the £50 to £99 group represents a transitory stage from poor to rich, the £100 to £249 group displays the first substantial improvement in living standards in both colonies. At this level most people owned basic furniture such as tables, seats, beds and bedsteads. The great majority owned sheets, as well as table linens, and between half and two-thirds possessed curtains and valances. More elaborate beds and bedding were reflected by their rising value. The average value of beds, bedding and bedsteads of all wealth groups in St. Mary's County across the period 1658 to 1700 was around £2.50 (SMCC, Inventories 1658-1700). Planters in the £100–£249 category, however, commonly owned beds of twice this value. Edward Fishwick, for example, owned six "feather beds and furniture" valued at £30 (SMCC Inventories, 637). John Tennison of the same county, who died in the following year worth £209, possessed "2 old feather pillows, 1 bolster, 1 feather bed, 2 blankets, 1 Worsted Rugg, Reg serge curtaines and vallens, and bedstead" appraised at £4 10s. 6d. (SMCC Inventories, 632). Clearly, as wealth and status increased, so there was a greater investment in more expensive and comfortable bedding.

Similarly, there were notable improvements in other aspects of everyday home life. Most people had boiling, frying and roasting equipment, but there was also a few specialized implements for preparing sauces, pastries, and fish. Almost everyone ate their meals from pewter dishes, and there is more evidence of the use of knives at the table. Furnishings were also more varied, with larger numbers of people owning cupboards and chests of drawers. The incidence of non-essential items also increased significantly in this wealth group. Warming pans, lighting equipment, chamberpots, books, plate, jewelry, and timepieces all become common.

A number of contrasts with English households stand out. In the Vale of Berkeley, middling and upper-middling wealth holders—mainly husband-

Table 2
STANDARDS OF LIVING OF HOUSEHOLDERS WORTH £50–£99 and £100–£249, VALE OF BERKELEY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE; ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND; LANCASTER AND NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTIES, VIRGINIA, 1650–1700

| | Vale of Berkeley | | St. Mary's County | | Lancaster and Northumberland | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £50–£99 (N = 103) | £100–£249 (N = 111) | £50–£99 (N = 98) | £100–£249 (N = 67) | £50–£99 (N = 41) | £100–£249 (N = 19) |
| Household Item | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Boiling Equip. | 6.2 | 67.6 | 94.4 | 95.5 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Frying Equip. | 12.6 | 14.4 | 64.0 | 67.2 | 80.5 | 89.5 |
| Roasting Equip. | 73.8 | 77.5 | 44.9 | 73.1 | 68.3 | 78.9 |
| Other Cooking Equip. | 2.9 | 5.4 | 7.9 | 13.0 | – | – |
| Brass | 98.1 | 99.1 | 62.9 | 82.1 | 75.6 | 68.3 |
| Pewter | 98.1 | 96.4 | 89.9 | 95.5 | 92.7 | 100.0 |
| Ironware | 92.2 | 92.8 | 91.0 | 94.0 | 97.6 | 94.7 |
| Earthen/Stoneware | 8.7 | 11.7 | 49.4 | 64.2 | 46.3 | 31.6 |
| Fine Ceramics | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Glassware | 1.0 | 2.7 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 5.3 |
| Knives | – | – | 2.2 | 16.4 | 2.4 | 15.8 |
| Forks | – | – | – | 1.5 | – | – |
| Spoons | 1.9 | 7.2 | 23.6 | 29.9 | 41.5 | 42.1 |
| Table/Tableboard | 95.1 | 97.3 | 52.8 | 88.1 | 75.6 | 84.2 |
| Tableframe | 48.5 | 61.3 | – | – | 2.4 | – |
| Chair | 86.4 | 86.5 | 52.8 | 82.1 | 63.4 | 68.4 |
| Bench/Form | 77.7 | 74.8 | 32.6 | 41.8 | 43.9 | 42.1 |
| Stool | 62.1 | 78.4 | 10.1 | 22.4 | 4.9 | 26.3 |
| Settle | 22.3 | 27.0 | – | – | – | – |
| Couch | – | 0.9 | 30.3 | 38.8 | 46.3 | 57.9 |
| Other | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| No Seats | 2.9 | – | 30.3 | 10.4 | 22.0 | 10.5 |
| Table Linen | 49.5 | 60.4 | 46.1 | 74.6 | 58.5 | 78.9 |
| General Linen | 75.7 | 84.7 | 64.0 | 83.6 | 82.9 | 89.5 |
| Beds | 100.0 | 100.0 | 97.8 | 98.5 | 95.1 | 100.0 |
| Bedsteads | 95.1 | 95.5 | 40.4 | 61.2 | 58.5 | 78.9 |
| Sheets | 45.6 | 40.5 | 43.8 | 67.2 | 61.0 | 84.2 |
| Curtains/Valances | 23.3 | 27.9 | 28.1 | 49.3 | 31.7 | 68.4 |
| Warming Pan | 31.1 | 38.7 | 20.2 | 35.8 | 24.4 | 57.9 |
| Cupboard | 40.8 | 37.8 | 12.4 | 31.3 | 9.8 | 31.6 |
| Clothespress | 33.0 | 29.7 | – | – | 2.4 | 5.3 |
| Sideboard | 28.2 | 38.7 | 1.1 | 3.0 | – | – |
| Chest of Drawers | 1.9 | 14.4 | 6.7 | 11.9 | 4.9 | 15.8 |
| Desk | 4.9 | 10.8 | 3.4 | 9.0 | 2.4 | – |
| Chest/Trunk/Coffer | 92.2 | 88.3 | 78.7 | 98.5 | 97.6 | 100.0 |
| Lighting | 36.9 | 40.5 | 48.3 | 61.2 | 53.7 | 63.2 |
| Chamberpot/Closestool | 15.5 | 17.1 | 15.7 | 34.3 | 17.1 | 26.3 |
| Pictures | – | 1.8 | 6.7 | 10.4 | – | 15.8 |
| Books | 22.3 | 26.1 | 39.3 | 52.2 | 58.5 | 68.4 |
| Plate/Jewels | 21.4 | 27.9 | 12.4 | 22.4 | 4.9 | 36.8 |
| Clocks/Watches | 6.8 | 13.5 | – | 10.4 | – | 5.3 |

Sources. See Table 1

men, yeomen, wealthy artisans and retailers (Horn 1981:93)—lived in houses of between five and eight rooms compared to the three to five rooms inhabited by their counterparts in the Chesapeake (Moore 1976:36; Main 1982:152). Problems of space accounts, in large part, for the smaller incidence of domestic furniture among middle class and relatively affluent Maryland and Virginia planters. Whereas basic furniture, such as chairs and tables, are to be found in virtually every household in the £50–£99 category in the Vale, between a half and a quarter of planters in this group still had to make do without (Table 2). Among the upper-middle class (£100–£249) the gap between the English and Chesapeake samples closes, but it is notable that the range of case furniture is usually less in Maryland and Virginia inventories. On the other hand, curtains and valances appear more frequently in Chesapeake households and were perhaps more important in providing privacy in a crowded dwelling than in England, where separate chambers were set aside exclusively for sleeping. Finally, there appears to have been a greater predisposition among tobacco planters to invest in non-essential items such as pictures and books, which may have helped to brighten up the home or perhaps served as reminders of England.

## Material Possessions of Rich Householders Worth £250 and Over

The economic elite, as here defined, comprised about 10 percent of the population in the Vale of Berkeley and between 10 and 15 percent in Maryland and Virginia. Table 3 suggests that their domestic furnishings were quite similar. Ordinary furniture was present in every household and in larger numbers than lower wealth groups. Substantial wealth brought a more varied diet, greater comfort in dining and sleeping, and also a higher investment in non-essential items, particularly silver plate. Nearly three-quarters of the St. Mary's County elite and two-thirds of the Virginia elite owned plate, jewelry or both. Like the rich in England, wealthy Chesapeake planters bought plate both as a sound investment and as a sign of high social status. "I esteem it as well politic as reputable," William Fitzhugh of Westmoreland County, Virginia, commented, "to furnish my self with a handsom cupboard of plate which gives my self the present use and credit, is a sure friend at a dead lift, with out much loss, or is a certain portion for a child after my decease" (Walsh 1979:12). Few gentry in the Vale of Berkeley would have disagreed.

Some members of the Chesapeake's elite enjoyed much more elaborate housing than the five to six rooms common at this level (Main 1982:152). Benjamin Solley, a leading merchant of St. Mary's County died in 1675, inhabited a dwelling with four or five ground floor rooms, three chambers and a loft (SMCC Inventories, 281). The largest dwellings probably had about a dozen rooms. It is difficult to visualize the appearance of these houses. Most were likely to have been rambling wooden structures; there were very few brick or stone dwellings built in the 17th century (Carson *et al* 1981). The point to stress, however, is that for every example of a wealthy householder living in a "multi-room Great house," one can cite other examples of the rich living in typically small Chesapeake cottages (Walsh 1977:258-59). Apart from the exceptionally wealthy, the homes of Chesapeake planters tended "to be small, inconspicuous, and inconsequential" (Main 1982:153). In Maryland and Virginia, the vast majority of the homes of leading merchants and planters "might be mistaken for modest farm cottages in England" (Walsh 1979:7-8).

Table 3 tends to obscure important qualitative differences between furnishings in the two societies, since the data merely indicate the proportion of wealth holders owning certain items, not their value or quality. Hence, there might be a world of difference between an old wooden chair belonging to a Chesapeake planter and a great 'turkey work' chair owned by one of the Vale of Berkeley's wealthiest gentlemen. In the great parlor of John Smyth's house in North Nibley, Gloucestershire, there stood "one ovill table board [with a] Turkie Karpett, a dozen and a halfe of Turkie Chairs, one Turkie worke Couch, . . . " worth, with a few

Table 3
STANDARDS OF LIVING OF HOUSEHOLDERS WORTH £250 AND OVER, VALE OF BERKELEY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE; ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND; LANCASTER AND NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTIES, VIRGINIA, 1650–1700

| | Vale of Berkeley | St. Mary's County | Lancaster and Northumberland |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (N = 74) | (N = 58) | (N = 12) |
| Household Item | % | % | % |
| Boiling Equip. | 59.5 | 94.8 | 100.0 |
| Frying Equip. | 13.5 | 72.4 | 83.3 |
| Roasting Equip. | 81.1 | 77.6 | 91.7 |
| Other Cooking Equip. | 9.5 | 34.5 | – |
| Brass | 98.6 | 94.8 | 91.7 |
| Pewter | 98.6 | 94.8 | 100.0 |
| Ironware | 95.9 | 94.8 | 100.0 |
| Earthen/Stoneware | 14.9 | 75.9 | 50.0 |
| Fine Ceramics | – | 5.2 | 8.3 |
| Glassware | 8.1 | 29.3 | 25.0 |
| Knives | 2.7 | 22.4 | 33.0 |
| Forks | – | 5.2 | – |
| Spoons | 4.1 | 44.8 | 50.0 |
| Table/Tableboard | 95.9 | 89.7 | 100.0 |
| Tablefra me | 62.2 | – | 8.3 |
| Chair | 98.6 | 94.8 | 91.7 |
| Bench/Form | 71.6 | 34.5 | 50.0 |
| Stool | 85.1 | 31.0 | 25.0 |
| Settle | 43.2 | 1.7 | – |
| Couch | 5.4 | 34.5 | 41.7 |
| Other | 5.4 | – | – |
| No Seats | – | 1.7 | – |
| Table Linen | 73.0 | 94.8 | 100.0 |
| General Linen | 95.9 | 96.6 | 100.0 |
| Beds | 100.0 | 98.3 | 100.0 |
| Bedsteads | 100.0 | 77.6 | 91.7 |
| Sheets | 54.1 | 93.1 | 83.3 |
| Curtains/Valances | 40.5 | 72.4 | 66.7 |
| Warming Pan | 44.6 | 62.1 | 50.0 |
| Cupboard | 39.2 | 37.9 | 50.0 |
| Clothespress | 47.3 | 12.1 | – |
| Sideboard | 51.4 | 5.2 | – |
| Chest of Drawers | 24.3 | 36.2 | 25.0 |
| Desk | 6.2 | 15.5 | 16.7 |
| Chest/Trunk/Coffer | 100.0 | 96.6 | 100.0 |
| Lighting | 47.3 | 75.9 | 83.3 |
| Chamberpot/Closestool | 24.3 | 36.2 | 25.0 |
| Pictures | 4.1 | 17.2 | 8.3 |
| Books | 37.8 | 51.7 | 91.7 |
| Plate/Jewels | 55.4 | 74.1 | 66.7 |
| Clocks/Watches | 28.4 | 22.4 | 8.3 |

Sources. See Table 1

other furnishings, £17 (GRO Inventories, 1692/159). Among the wealthy in the Vale, beds worth £5 or more were commonplace. Elaborate case furniture was usually valued at between £1 and £2, while tables and chairs might be three or four times more expensive than the normal value (GRO, Inventories, 1660-1699; PRO.PCC, PROB 4 and 5).

Expensive furniture is also to be found in the inventories of wealthy planters such as Colonel John Carter of Lancaster, James Bowling and Captain Joshua Doyne of St. Mary's (Lancaster County Records, Wills 8, 22-29, 32-34; SMCC Inventories, 1067, 1315). But old, broken or worn out goods are also commonly mentioned among the possessions of leading planters. Captain William Brocas of Lancaster County, a justice of the peace and former member of Virginia's Council, owned at his death in 1655, "a parcel of old hangings, very thin and much worn," "a parcel of old Chairs, being 7, most of them unusefull," "an old broken Cort Cupboard," "1 old rotten couch bedsteads," "1 old broken trunk, 7 guns most unfixt," and so on (Lancaster County Records, Deeds, 202-04; Deeds 2, 40). Similarly, many of the household possessions of John Godsell, a merchant who died in 1676 worth over £300, were described in his inventory as "old," "damnified," "motheaten," and "rotten" (Lancaster County Records, Wills 5, 19-22). Virtually all the furniture owned by Mr. Thomas Wilks, who died ten years later worth about £1000, is described as "old" (Lancaster County Records, Wills, 5 104-08).

Comparing the data presented in Tables 2 and 3, it is perhaps surprising that there were not greater differences between the living standards of the rich and other wealth groups. Like most householders, the Vale's rich ate their meals from pewter plates and drank from pewter flagons. Inventories show no evidence that wealthy persons owned fine ceramics, and less than a tenth of the £250 plus group possessed glassware. (It is, of course, possible that appraisers missed or failed to individually list these items.) Although the wealthy tended to have a greater range of furniture, articles such as couches, chests of drawers, and desks were far from common. Even case furniture, such as cupboards, presses, and sideboards were to be found in barely half the inventories. These considerations apply also to the Vale's gentry. Of seven gentlemen worth over £250, none apparently possessed any special cooking equipment—fish plates, pastry dishes, pudding pots, apple or bread toasters—and there was no evidence of fine ceramics. Only two men owned glassware and only four had elaborate case furniture. The gentry had more expensive tastes in clothing and they tended to invest a larger proportion of their money in plate, but generally their domestic furnishings differed little from wealthy non-gentry. An altogether different *style* of living only becomes apparent among the top rank of gentlemen (country gentry), who built, or rebuilt, large country houses and furnished them with the most expensive and luxurious items (Atkyns 1712). What seems to be missing in the second half of the 17th century are upper class rituals such as tea, coffee, or chocolate-drinking, eating from tables set with fine porcelain, knives and forks. These developments awaited the 18th century.

Differences in the standards of living between the rich and the middling wealth groups were therefore a matter of degree rather than kind. Mildred Campbell's comments concerning the English yeomanry are just as applicable to the majority of middle and upper class householders in the Vale: "the inventories show . . . that the standard of living, in so far as the quality and variety of household furnishings reveal it, was remarkably similar among the yeomen of greater and less wealth. The difference lay in the numbers of rooms to be furnished rather than the style, variety and quality of the furnishings" (Campbell 1967: 238-39). Neither the economic elite in general, nor the gentry in particular, comprised a "Venetian oligarchy" in the 17th century. Class divisions were fluid and distinctions between middle and upper classes remained ill-defined (Wrightson 1977: 33-47).

Despite important differences in living standards between rich and poor, historians of the 17th century Chesapeake have tended to stress the essential similarity of the domestic environment. "All in all," the Carsons conclude, "there was a decided sameness about material life in southern Maryland throughout the 17th century. Partly it

was a result of a limited choice of available consumer goods and partly a reflection of a community that was still more homogeneous, still less attenuated by extremes of wealth, than it became fifty years later." "Being rich," they suggest, "meant having more, not being different" (Carson and Carson 1976:17, 21). Research by Walsh supports this view and she notes that "while families in higher wealth levels enjoyed a greater degree of comfort than did poorer households, until the end of the period (1720), most did not use personal possessions to create a markedly different way of living from their poorer neighbors." The Chesapeake was "a place where social elites did not develop distinct identities based on patterns of consumption very different from those of groups somewhat below them" (Walsh 1979: 7-8).

This view should be qualified, however. The elite in Maryland and Virginia were no more monolithic than in England. Even at a relatively early stage of Chesapeake social development there were some individuals who, by virtue of their office, inherited status, or wealth, stood head and shoulders above the rest of the gentry. These men, such as the Carters, Lees, Wormeleys and Byrds of Virginia, ranked with country magnates in English society (Bailyn 1959) and clearly *did* develop a different style, as well as standard of living appropriate to their high status. As in England, therefore, a comparison of middle and upper class material possessions suggests a gradual rather than dramatic improvement in living standards, with a sharp break occurring only at the very pinnacle of the social order. In both societies, the distinction between top gentry and the rest of the squirarchy became clearer in the 18th century with the growth of magnate power (Plumb 1967; Speck 1977; Bailyn 1959; Morgan 1975).

## Conclusion

The most important conclusion to be drawn from a comparison of material possessions in the two societies is the great poverty experienced by most Chesapeake planters during the 17th century. Even the lowest economic group in England had living standards comparable in many respects to those of householders of middling wealth in Maryland and Virginia. To put it another way, only householders belonging to the two upper wealth groups in the Chesapeake had living standards that would be accounted quite ordinary in England. Not only were essential items of furniture such as tables, seats, beds, and bedsteads often missing from the households of most planters, but there was also an important qualitative difference in furnishings. In general, the value of furniture in both societies was similar. Beds and bedding were commonly valued at between £1 and £5, tables between two and five shillings, chairs and stools a shilling, bedsteads five shillings, and more elaborate case furniture from a few shillings to over £1. Yet there was a much greater range of values in Maryland and Virginia than in the Vale of Berkeley; a consequence of a great number of very low valuations found in Chesapeake inventories.

A qualitative difference between furniture in the two societies is also suggested by descriptions used by appraisers. In English inventories, it is very rare for items to be described as "new" or "old," but in Chesapeake inventories the term "old" is extremely common. Old, broken, and worn goods still retained a certain value in the Chesapeake because it was cheaper to mend them, or use them for something else, than to buy new goods. Planters had to rely on English merchants to import manufactured goods, especially metalwares, which always seemed to be in short supply, hence the value of second hand items. Poverty was therefore reflected not only by an absence of essential furniture, but also in the often poor condition of the limited items that were owned. Housing was greatly inferior in Maryland and Virginia compared to England. While impermanent structures—squatters' shacks or pauper dwellings—existed in England, they were increasingly rare in the second half of the 17th century and did not house the majority of poor. Single or two-room farm cottages were also becoming less common in southern and central England as a consequence of the substantial rebuilding which occurred throughout the late Tudor and Stuart periods (Barley 1967; Smith 1985). Thus, in the

Vale of Berkeley, the poor and lower middling groups lived in houses of three to five rooms, built by local craftsmen of durable materials. Whereas in England, the trend during the previous two centuries had been towards more specialized room use and permanent structures, in the early Chesapeake, these developments were reversed: dwellings were not expected to last more than 20 to 25 years and a single or two rooms served a multiplicity of functions (Carson et al, 1981). Consequently, in most dwellings, there simply was not enough space for much furniture. The most useful item for the small planter was the versatile chest, which could serve as a table or seat as well as for storing goods.

The social and psychological implications of this transformation in living standards have yet to be fully considered by social historians or archaeologists. Obviously, important changes in domestic lifestyle must have resulted from the cramped living conditions experienced by the vast majority of planters along the tobacco coast. A division of domestic space according to gender and status could not be enforced in humble Chesapeake structures where men and women, masters and servants, parents and children all lived in close proximity. Were family tensions exacerbated by lack of privacy? To what extent did the "decided sameness" of material life in the 17th century Chesapeake erode traditional English social distinctions and alter perceptions of status? Did low standards of living contribute not only to an "architecture of transcience" but also to a *mentalite* of transience; an easy-come, easy-go attitude whereby people packed up their goods and moved on when debts became too great or the going too hard (Horn 1987)?

For the majority of English people who emigrated to the Chesapeake in the 17th century, one of the most important differences they would encounter in their new environment was a substantially lower standard of living. This was a consequence not of their own humble origins and lack of aspiration to create a better way of life, or of the relatively short life-span that most of them experienced but rather of the peculiar demands of tobacco culture, the increasingly unfavorable economic climate, particularly after 1680, and the general difficulty of acquiring manufactured goods from England. Only the top 30% of planters, who managed to acquire over £100 in personalty at death, approached living conditions commonplace in England. Whatever advantages moving to the New World may have brought, for most settlers it did not bring domestic comfort. During the second half of the century, most planters endured a standard of living little different from that of the lowest levels of society in England.

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