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JAMES CROKATT'S "EXCEEDING GOOD COUNTING HOUSE": ASCENDANCY AND INFLUENCE IN THE TRANSATLANTIC CAROLINA TRADE

HUW DAVID*

JAMES CROKATT HAS LONG OCCUPIED A FOOTNOTE IN histories of colonial South Carolina. From his conspicuous career as a trader in Charles Town, London's leading Carolina merchant of the 1740s and 1750s, and the colony's agent in London between 1749 and 1756, historians have focused their attention on three episodes. First, Crokatt is noted as mentor to the young Henry Laurens in mid-1740s London. In this role, he is known chiefly not for what he did, but for what he did not do: he denied partnership in his London firm to Laurens in 1748. Laurens later considered the rejection "one of the most Fortunate Episodes in the History of my Commercial Life," and it led the future patriot to return to Charles Town and make his business and political fortunes there. Thus, Crokatt has served to elucidate Laurens's life and career path.¹ Second, Crokatt is known for his activism in London to promote indigo as an agricultural staple in the province.² Third, the controversy surrounding his attempt to resign as South Carolina's agent in London, beginning in 1753, has been identified as a seminal moment in the political

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¹ Henry Laurens (hereafter cited as HL) to John Lewis Gervais, March 4, 1774, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, ed. Philip M. Hamer et al., 16 vols. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968–2003), 336 (hereafter cited as *PHL*). Several studies of Laurens relate the episode. See, for example, C. James Taylor, "A Member of the Family: Twenty-Five Years with Henry Laurens," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 106 (April 2005): 123–125 (hereafter cited as *SCHM*); Joseph P. Kelly, "Henry Laurens: The Southern Man of Conscience in History," *SCHM* 107 (April 2006): 104–106; David D. Wallace, *The Life of Henry Laurens* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), 15–18; Daniel McDonough, *Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens: The Parallel Lives of Two American Patriots* (Selinsgrove, Penn.: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 17–18. For Laurens's contemporary letters describing his disappointment, see *PHL*, 1: 178–185. Crokatt's career in Charles Town is also mentioned in light of his links with another leading Charles Town merchant and cautious patriot, Benjamin Smith, in George C. Rogers Jr., *Evolution of a Federalist: William Loughton Smith of Charleston, 1758–1812* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962), 9–11.

² On Crokatt and the 1748 indigo bounty, see among others Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 192–193; S. Max Edelson, "Colour and Enterprise: South Carolina Indigo and the Atlantic Economy, 1745–

aspirations of the Commons House of Assembly.³ Invariably, Crokatt himself is sublimated to the wider historical trends that each episode illustrates: the dynamics of colonial South Carolina's transatlantic trade, the diversification of its agricultural base, and its growing political power struggles.

Crokatt merits closer scrutiny, however. Reconstructing his commercial ascendancy and transatlantic advocacy on South Carolina's behalf reveals how he both embodied and shaped the province's Atlantic connections in the mid eighteenth century. To borrow historian David Hancock's phrase, he was a true "citizen of the world," moving between imperial periphery and metropolis, managing a diverse portfolio of investments on either side of the Atlantic, and actively promoting as well as participating in the trade that made him rich.⁴ Probably the wealthiest and certainly the most prominent figure in the London–South Carolina trading axis before the Revolution, Crokatt's success was based on shrewd commercial and political strategies that set him apart from most merchant contemporaries. At the same time, he exemplified broader currents in transatlantic agency that shed new light on the operation and dynamics of South Carolina's colonial trade and development. Unlike the twenty-three "associates" examined by Hancock, Crokatt actively sought to shape the political, institutional, and legal determinants of his trading orbit through engaging with the apparatus of the imperial state.

Through an examination of Crokatt's career, this article addresses notable historiographical lacunae. Important biographical studies have demonstrated colonial South Carolina's commercial dynamism using the lives and careers of individual Charles Town traders—men such as Gabriel Manigault, Robert Pringle, and John Guerard.⁵ Conversely, their trading correspondents in London, specialist "Carolina traders" who controlled a sizeable share of

1795" (Master's thesis, Oxford University, 1994), passim. For Crokatt's promotion of a range of colonial produce as agent, see Ella Lonn, *The Colonial Agents of the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), passim.

³ Here again Crokatt has largely been treated incidentally to the wider constitutional matters his actions raised. For example, see M. Eugene Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina: A Political History, 1663–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 301–305; Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 61–65; Jonathan Mercantini, *Who Shall Rule at Home? The Evolution of South Carolina Political Culture, 1748–1776* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 91–95, 111–112.

⁴ David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵ Maurice A. Crouse, "Gabriel Manigault: Charleston Merchant," *SCHM* 68 (October 1967): 220–231; Walter B. Edgar, "Robert Pringle and His World," *SCHM* 76 (January 1975): 1–11; R. C. Nash, "Trade and Business in Eighteenth-Century South

South Carolina's Atlantic trade, have hitherto remained obscure.⁶ Study of James Crokatt helps illuminate this group. For two decades, Crokatt was at the forefront of London's Carolina trade, the province's most effectual advocate in the mid-century metropolis and a mainstay in the informal channels of influence and information that underpinned South Carolina's commercial and political links to Britain. This article follows his geographic and professional trajectory, which represented a well-trodden path in the eighteenth-century Carolina trade from an upbringing in Britain, to an early career in Charles Town, and then to commercial fruition in London. In so doing, it exposes the lifecycle of an elite Atlantic merchant in the Hanoverian imperium—a figure superficially familiar to historians, but one rarely scrutinized in his private or public capacities.⁷ Throughout his career, Crokatt demonstrated the traits of an elite Hanoverian merchant, cultivating an array of associative, affective, and ethnic ties to enhance his commercial and personal status. In his investment and dispersal of wealth, Crokatt again typified contemporary tropes. But his formative experiences in South Carolina remained essential to his commercial ambit, and through his interaction with the state—in both informal and official capacities—and landholdings, he retained deep ties to the province as well as a continuing stake in its economic development.

COMMERCIAL ASCENDANCY

Crokatt's early career in Charles Town evinces many of the traits and strategies that explain his later prominence in London commerce. Like many contemporaries in South Carolina's Atlantic trade, he had Scottish origins. He was born in Edinburgh in July 1701, though the first twenty-five years of his life, including his upbringing and business training, remain obscure before he arrived in South Carolina sometime prior to 1728.⁸ It was perhaps a family migration. One brother, Daniel, owned land in Jamaica; other siblings, John and Elizabeth, were both in Charles Town by the late 1730s. Like James

Carolina: The Career of John Guerard, Merchant and Planter," *SCHM* 96 (January 1995): 6–29.

⁶ As noted, for instance, by R. C. Nash, who observes that "knowledge of the role of British merchants and capital in the South Carolina trade is very limited." Nash, "The Organization of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670–1775," in Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of Colonial South Carolina's Plantation Society* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 75.

⁷ On this point, see Perry Gauci, *The Politics of Trade: The Overseas Merchant in State and Society, 1600–1720* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63.

⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette* (Charles Town), February 26, 1732 (hereafter cited as SCG); Walter B. Edgar and N. Louise Bailey, eds., *Biographical Directory of the South*

Crokatt, they were drawn to trade: Elizabeth married merchant William Woodrop, while John also traded, though the two brothers were apparently not formally connected. Another John Crokatt, possibly a cousin, traded in Charles Town by the 1730s, as well.⁹ Family ties facilitated commercial progress. Marriage to Esther Gaillard linked Crokatt to some of the province's most influential planters and owners of extensive land in Saint James Santee Parish. Esther Gaillard's step-father, James Kinloch, was an active merchant, politician, and major planter.¹⁰ Crokatt's marriage produced six children, five of whom lived into adulthood. The two eldest were born in Charles Town: Charles, who followed his father into transatlantic trade, in June 1730, and Mary in 1733; another child, James, died in infancy in September 1736. After moving to London, the marriage produced three more children: Daniel, Jane, and David.¹¹

Operating from 1731 in a grand counting house and store on Broad Street, Charles Town's foremost commercial thoroughfare, Crokatt built up one of the town's leading trading firms. His customers and credit extended across the low-country parishes, from Saint Bartholomew's in the south to Prince Frederick's in the north.¹² Complementing his counting house, Crokatt owned a prime waterfront lot containing three houses, a "low water lot" in Unity Alley, and five tenement houses "on the Bay" with ninety-three-and-a-half

Carolina House of Representatives, vol. 2, *The Commons House of Assembly, 1692-1775* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), 2: 213.

⁹ Will of James Crokatt, March 11, 1777, Prob. 11/1029, National Archives, London (hereafter cited as NAL); will of John Crokatt, June 28, 1740, Prob. 11/703, NAL. The John Crokatt will appears in Lothrop Withington, contrib., "South Carolina Gleanings in England," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 6 (July 1905): 121-122 (hereafter cited as SCHGM). William Woodrop married Elizabeth Crokatt (born in 1708 in Edinburgh) on May 3, 1737. Mabel L. Webber, comp., "The Mayrant Family," SCHGM 27 (April 1926): 83; PHL, 1: 46n, 130n; *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, vol. 2, October 9, 1742-April 29, 1745, ed. Walter B. Edgar (Columbia: Published for the South Carolina Historical Society and the South Carolina Tricentennial Commission by the University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 699 (hereafter cited as LRP).

¹⁰ Edgar and Bailey, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, 2: 265-268, 379-380.

¹¹ Registers, 1714-1810, Saint Philip's Parish, Charleston, 9, 12, 14, 91, 93, 95, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia (hereafter SCDAH); PHL, 1: 5n.

¹² South Carolina Court of Common Pleas, Judgment Rolls, 23A/58A, 24A/1A, 2A, 26A, 24B/2A, 19A, SCDAH. Notices in the SCG in 1739, when Crokatt left South Carolina, advertising the sale of his household slaves, fittings, and goods give an impression of the scale and luxury of his Broad Street premises, which hosted "an elegant Dinner" for Crokatt's fellow councilors and visiting Choctaw and Chickasaw chiefs as well as "a Ball and Entertainment . . . performed with much Grandeur and

feet of frontage on the Cooper River.¹³ Crokatt's ownership of one of only eight wharves—or "bridges," as they were known locally—in Charles Town in the 1730s further denotes the large scale of his commercial concerns.¹⁴ Crokatt eschewed the slave trade, though apparently for commercial rather than moral reasons—there were less risky, albeit more gradual, ways of making money. (Indeed, he owned and employed slaves in his house and warehouses and defended slavery as an economic necessity in the Lower South, later advocating its introduction into Georgia.)¹⁵ He instead concentrated on the dry-goods retail trade, most likely receiving imports from British firms on credit and making remittances in the province's agricultural staples.¹⁶ He was particularly active in the deerskin trade, shipping more cargoes of pelts from Charles Town between 1735 and 1739 than any other trader. In return for the deerskins, he offered the regular range of goods for frontier traders to exchange with the Indians who supplied them—"guns, hatchets, caddis, beads & most other kind Indian trading goods." Crokatt also provided items to the provincial government for trade with the Creeks and Chickasaws.¹⁷

Incidental references in the *South-Carolina Gazette* further indicate his commercial prominence in the town. Unlike most other retailers, Crokatt seldom printed his address beneath his notices in the *Gazette*, suggesting that

Decoration" for the town's Masonic Saint John's Day festivities in December 1738. SCG, December 28, 1738, January 4, February 1, April 19, June 2, 1739.

¹³ Conveyance Books (Charleston Deeds), Public Register, vol. K, 215, 361, and vol. HH, 87, SCDAB.

¹⁴ George C. Rogers Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 56. Six of the other wharves were named after local merchant-planters: Rhett's Bridge, Elliott's Bridge, Motte's Bridge, Pinckney's Bridge, Lloyd's Bridge, and Brewton's Bridge. Jeanne A. Calhoun, Martha A. Zierden, and Elizabeth A. Paysinger, "The Geographic Spread of Charleston's Merchant Community, 1732–67," *SCHM* 86 (July 1985): 185.

¹⁵ SCG, June 14, 1735; John Perceval, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont: Diary of Viscount Percival* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1923), 3: 201–202. On Charles Town merchants' commercial decision making in regard to the slave trade and its inherent risks, see also Crowse, "Gabriel Manigault: Charleston Merchant," 220–221, 225.

¹⁶ On the organization of the South Carolina commodity-import and produce-export trades, see R. C. Nash, "Organization of Trade and Finance," 74–107; Nash, "Urbanization in the Colonial South: Charleston, South Carolina, as a Case Study," *Journal of Urban History* 19 (November 1992): 3–29.

¹⁷ CO5/367/61, 80–81, 87a, NAL; CO5/365/37–40, NAL; W. O. Moore Jr., "The Largest Exporters of Deerskins from Charles Town, 1735–1775," *SCHM* 74 (July 1973): 144–147; SCG, September 18, 1736; J. H. Easterby, ed., *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 10, 1736–June 7, 1739* (Columbia: Historical Commission of South Carolina, 1951), 174. On the public provision of goods to native Indians, see Peter C. Mancall, Joshua L. Rosenbloom, and Thomas Weiss, "Indians and the Economy of Eighteenth-Century Carolina," in Peter A. Coclanis, ed., *The Atlantic*

his premises were so well known by customers as to make further advertisement superfluous. Paradoxically, his Broad Street counting house was used as a geographical reference point by other traders. Several denoted their own locations by advertising their propinquity to Crockatt's premises.¹⁸

An assertive commercial strategy set Crockatt apart from mercantile competitors. If his merchandize was fairly typical in its range, he showed an uncommon degree of boldness and self-promotion in advertising his wares in the *Gazette*. While other merchants simply listed their goods in formulaic ads of single font size, Crockatt was more innovative. His ads were comparatively sophisticated in their layout, employing varying text sizes and other visual devices to arrest the reader. To be most eye-catching, they regularly appeared at the top of the page, above those of his competitors, in space that was presumably more expensive. The more aggressive marketing strategy continued in the content of the ads, which featured boastful claims of the goods for sale: "The greatest variety of ornamented Goods that ever was for Sale in this Province" was one example. Other advertisements drew more explicit comparisons with rival traders, as Crockatt differentiated his offerings in both range and price. "Whereas there is a great variety of European goods advertised to be sold by several in [this] *Gazette*," he informed readers, "not only all those kinds of goods there named, but above 500 Articles not mentioned there, nor to be had of others, are to be sold at the lowest price by James Crockatt."¹⁹ Never missing an opportunity, Crockatt even used his role as executor of a will to push his business in one *Gazette* notice, reminding the creditors and debtors of one decedent that he was selling "for Ready Money, good Butter in Firkins, at 2s. 6d. per pound." Beneath another executorial notice he added, "N.B. A New one horse chaise to be sold by said Crockatt."²⁰

His adroit use of the press was additionally evident when he advertised his intention to leave South Carolina. From November 1738, ads announced he had ceased all business in Charles Town and was leaving for Britain with his family the following May, delaying his departure only to recover outstanding debts. The length of notice given indicates the complexity of Crockatt's business, the number of his customers, and the scale of debts owed him. The extent of his departure advertising attests further to his prominence and his flair for self-promotion. No other merchant who left the town in the 1730s publicized their departure so long in advance: by the time he sailed in June 1739, notices to this effect had been carried in every edition of the *Gazette* for

Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, Personnel (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 304–306.

¹⁸ SCG, May 8, 1736, April 20–May 4, 1738; Calhoun, Zierden, and Paysinger, "Geographic Spread of Charleston's Merchant Community," 193.

¹⁹ SCG, January 13, 1733, November 8, 1735.

²⁰ SCG, April 7, 1733, January 8, 1737.

nearly eight months. The notices themselves stood out from both the other advertisements in the same editions and other departure notices. Standing at the top of the page and spanning two column widths, they were among the most striking advertisements the newspaper had ever carried.²¹

Readiness to take legal action against defaulting debtors marked Crokatt's aggressive approach in another way. Poor rice harvests limited customers' ability to make their remittances to retailers, saddling the latter with extensive debts. While the crop losses of customers were widely reported in traders' notices in the *Gazette*, Crokatt was distinct in alleging a number of planters were using this as a ploy, claiming in one ad that "several have made Excuses for not paying me last year, by losing, or pretending to have lost their crops."²² His cynicism perhaps explains his eagerness to litigate, placing notices more direct, even threatening, in tone than those of his contemporaries and announcing his readiness to sue. As he prepared to leave South Carolina in 1736—a plan he eventually postponed for another three years—he ratcheted up his threats. A June 1736 notice typifies his approach: "And whereas many who were indebted to me before last January, have not yet paid or settled their Accounts, either by cash, bond or otherways, which it is in every Man's power to do, all such as don't settle their Accounts due to me some time in this Month, may depend they will be sued for the same the 1st week in July, having now had *six months* notice in the most publick manner from James Crokatt."²³

Other repayment notices with a more conversational tone carried a threatening subtext. Starting the following year with an ostensibly gentle prompt to his debtors, the legal consequences of failure to pay were thinly veiled: "Whereas I have been and am now a very great Looser [*sic*] by my indulgence to such as are indebted to me, I desire none would make any Dependence on it for the future, being resolved to take such Measures as will in the short term recover what is due." Crokatt's actions matched his rhetoric, and he employed Charles Town's leading attorneys, Charles Pinckney and James Wright, to recover his dues through the courts.²⁴

²¹ SCG, November 16, 1738–June 16, 1739. Crokatt's gift for advertising apparently rubbed off on his young partner Benjamin Smith. Smith's three-column spread in the largest type to announce the formation of his new firm, Benjamin Smith & Co., in 1752 was itself "the boldest advertisement that had yet appeared in the *Gazette*." Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, 14.

²² SCG, April 5–25, November 22, 1735, March 5, 1737.

²³ SCG, May 15 and 22, June 5, 1736. For further examples of his assertiveness in reclaiming debts, see SCG, February 9, April 15, 1738. Emphasis in original.

²⁴ SCG, January 15, 1737 (quote). See also Judgment Rolls, 23A/58A, 24A/1A, 2A, 26A/78A, SCDAH; SCG, May 12, 1733, May 26, 1746, January 21, 1751. Not all of Charleston's merchants resorted as keenly to legal proceedings as Crokatt. Robert Pringle was at the other end of the spectrum, only suing debtors twice between April

Commercial success and wealth were reinforced by civic responsibility: office holdings, associative ties, and club memberships reflected Crokatt's eminence in Charles Town. Appointment to the Royal Council in 1738 translated his commercial and social standing into political status.²⁵ As one of Charles Town's leading merchants, Crokatt was privileged by both his profession and his connections. Following the controversy over the provincial assembly's issuance of £210,000 currency in bills of credit in 1736, disallowed after vociferous merchant lobbying, the British Board of Trade sought to bolster mercantile influence during the late 1730s by appointing only sympathetic merchants to the council. Familial and business connections likewise endorsed Crokatt's membership: he was connected to three councilors—James Kinloch, his father-in-law, as well as Joseph Wragg and John Fenwicke, with whom Crokatt was linked commercially.²⁶

In addition, Crokatt was prominent within Charles Town's Scottish mercantile community—part of an association with Scottish causes that lasted throughout his life—as treasurer of the Saint Andrew's Society, which offered a social forum to formalize ethnic networks and a channel for their philanthropy.²⁷ Further enmeshing his social and commercial connections, and attesting to his status, Crokatt was second master of the Charles Town Masonic lodge. In 1735 he helped establish the Friendly Society, the first fire insurance company in North America, and acted as one of its five joint directors.²⁸

Parochial duties were a more public means of cementing status. In April 1737, Crokatt was appointed churchwarden of Saint Philip's Parish in Charles Town and the next year turned his organizational skills to refashioning urban poor relief. Under his watch, the parish moved from a system of "outdoors" relief, with its poorest residents provided for in their own homes,

1737 and April 1745, the period covered by his surviving letterbooks. For Pringle legal proceedings were "very disagreeable," and he declined pursuing one debtor through the courts over concern that he might "be thought Litigious." Robert Pringle to Andrew Pringle, March 9, 1744, and February 2, 1745, *LRP*, 2: 663, 809.

²⁵ CO5/366/105-6, CO5/381/262, CO324/37/112, NAL. The SCG reported Crokatt's appointment on June 1, 1738.

²⁶ Eugene M. Sirmans, "The South Carolina Royal Council, 1720-1763," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 18 (July 1961): 379, 384; Henry D. Bull, "Kinloch of South Carolina," *SCHGM* 46 (April 1945): 63.

²⁷ SCG, December 2, 1732, November 13, 1736; Hennig Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 17-18. For other examples of Crokatt's links to Scottish causes, see SCG, September 29, 1738, April 19, 1739; *A Short Account of the Institution, Progress, and Present State of the Scottish Corporation in London* (London, 1777), 39.

²⁸ SCG, December 27, 1735, January 31, 1736, December 22, 1737.

to "indoors" provision. He notified residents that given the increasing number of poor and infirm and the cost of catering for them, he had hired a house and "proper Attendance" for "all such as are real Objects of Charity." The vestry's own minutes offer a starker reality, noting in November 1738 that "all the Poor that are at present on the Parish, be remov'd from their Several Lodgings to the Work House immediately."²⁹ In addition, the parish mandated Crokatt to use his transatlantic connections to its advantage. Recognizing his particular links with the metropolis, he was asked in August 1737 to "write to his correspondents in London concerning the Purchase of a new Clock for the use of the Parish Church of St. Philip's...not exceeding the price of Thirty Guineas; to purchase and send over the same by the first good Opportunity."³⁰

With commercial prosperity came the impulse to acquire land. It offered the surest means of asserting status in the province and represented a rational economic diversification from a reliance on trade. Crokatt's Broad Street premises were part of a dynamic property portfolio in South Carolina. Besides his counting house and Cooper River wharf, both integral to his mercantile operations, other properties, including a prime waterfront lot on the Cooper River and two small plantations on Charles Town Neck, were bought and sold quickly, apparently for speculative gain.³¹ As the 1730s progressed, Crokatt invested in larger tracts of land, and shortly before leaving the province in June 1739, he bought two additional plantations: one of twelve hundred acres in Granville County, and another of one thousand acres in Craven County. Both of these plantations were purchased from colleagues on the Royal Council. The Granville and Craven tracts bounded new townships in the interior, and their purchase at this moment suggests they were intended as strategic investments that would rise in value as the province's population spread westward. In settling his affairs before returning to Britain, Crokatt also acquired mortgages on two properties in lieu of debts and would take joint ownership of two more tracts in this way once in Britain.³² His retention of urban properties and plantations after his return to Britain served as a powerful connective force to supplement his commercial interests in the province.

²⁹ SCG, April 9, 1737, August 3, 1738; Vestry Minutes, 1732–1774, Saint Philip's Parish, Charleston, SCDHAH, 31–32, 42, 50. On poor relief in Charles Town, see Michael D. Byrd, "The First Charles Town Workhouse, 1738–1775: A Deterrent to White Pauperism?" *SCHM* 110 (January–April 2009): 35–52.

³⁰ Vestry Minutes, Saint Philip's Parish, 34 (quote), 60, 150, SCDHAH.

³¹ Conveyance Books, I: 640, K: 223, M: 163–181, Q: 102, SCDHAH; Memorial Books, 1731–1778, 3: 175, SCDHAH; SCG, October 14, 1732, June 14, 1735.

³² Conveyance Books, S: 450, T: 110–119, X: 314, BB: 120, CC: 507, SCDHAH.

Crokatt had long intended to return to his native Britain after accruing expertise, connections, and capital in the Carolina trade in Charles Town. He possessed the capital, but unlike many of his mercantile counterparts, Crokatt never had the inclination to become a resident merchant-planter in South Carolina. Upon withdrawing from trade in Charles Town, R. C. Nash has observed that Carolina merchants tended to follow one of two paths late in their careers. The most common route, particularly among native-born merchants, was to become landowners and planters. This track was pursued by traders such as Gabriel Manigault and John Guerard, both contemporaries of Crokatt, and later by Henry Laurens. Another cohort, including Laurens's partner George Austin, withdrew from trade altogether to retire to country estates in England.³³ Crokatt fell into a third category, common among mid-career merchants born in Britain and drawn to Carolina between the 1720s and 1740s. This group returned to Britain with their mercantile profits to re-enter the Carolina trade in London and comprised most of London's principal Carolina traders between the 1740s and 1760s, including John Beswicke, the brothers-in-law John Nickleson and Richard Shubrick, and Charles Ogilvie.

Crokatt's care in settling his commercial affairs before leaving South Carolina illustrates the complexity of mercantile relocation. He appointed an agent to manage his property investments in town and an attorney to oversee the collection of debts.³⁴ In a shrewd commercial move—and following a trend of departing merchants who retained a commercial presence in Charles Town—Crokatt entered partnership with two local merchants, Ebenezer Simmons and Benjamin Smith, each taking an equal share in the firm. Crokatt made a considered choice in his partners, both of whom were native-born South Carolinians. Simmons was already a trader of some status; Smith, just twenty-one years old in 1738, had worked in Crokatt's counting house for at least three years and would become one of Charles Town's foremost merchant-bankers and Speaker of the provincial assembly. The parties agreed to terms in February 1737, and the partnership became effective for seven years from September 1, 1738.³⁵ Having partners in Charles Town offered Crokatt consistency—an outlet to which he could convey dry goods from Britain and

³³ Nash, "Trade and Business," 13.

³⁴ SCG, December 29, 1739. Crokatt's relationship with his Charles Town property agent, Robert Raper, continued for nearly thirty years. When they settled their account in 1767, Raper expressed his hope that "we may finish our Concerns as amicably as we began which I think was in the year 1739." Robert Raper to James Crokatt, February 14, 1767, Letterbook of Robert Raper, microfilm, Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter cited as LRR).

³⁵ Smith was at Crokatt's trading house as early as June 1735. SCG, June 21, 1735; Miscellaneous Records, 1749–1751, 292–301, SCDAH.

a supplier of Carolinian export produce. The new firm operated from Crokatt's old premises in Broad Street, retailing a conventional range of imported goods and offering the same terms Crokatt had given as a sole trader—that is, produce in receipt of goods sold and up to two years' credit. This commercial continuity helped retain existing customers in the province.³⁶

“AN EXCEEDING GOOD COUNTING HOUSE IN LONDON”

Back in Britain, Crokatt became London's dominant Carolina trader.³⁷ He established his first business premises on Coleman Street, north of Saint Paul's Cathedral. This location was probably chosen because of its proximity to the trading house of his long-time associate Samuel Wragg, London's foremost Carolina merchant of the 1720s and 1730s. As he supplanted the elderly Wragg, Crokatt himself triggered a clustering of Carolina merchants, a movement that attests not only to his significance, but more importantly to London's growing volume of trade with South Carolina and the Carolina trade's greater prominence in London's overseas commerce. Traders in older branches of American commerce had long congregated in particular city wards—Virginia traders in Tower and Aldgate Wards, for example—valuing proximity since it allowed them to relay market intelligence and arrange shared cargoes easily. After Crokatt moved in 1747 to premises in Cloak Lane, nearer the Thames River, the vicinity of Dowgate, Vintry, and Walbrook Wards became the nexus for London's Carolina merchants. The area gave easy access to Thames-side wharves and the Royal Exchange, the hub of London trading and a vital stop on a merchant's daily rounds. By 1760 the growth of the Carolina trade had necessitated a specialized “walk” in the Royal Exchange, alongside dedicated walks for Virginia and New England traders, for specialist commodities, and for other geographic trades. The Carolina Coffee House, a locus for Carolina traders to meet, receive correspondence, and conduct business, was nearby in Birch Lane.³⁸

Crokatt's commercial interests stretched into the West Indies trade, notably with Jamaica and, during the Seven Years War, with the Caribbean islands captured from France.³⁹ As with London's other leading Carolina

³⁶ Miscellaneous Records, 1749–1751, 292–301, SCD AH; SCG, October 19–November 9, 1738.

³⁷ On his “exceeding good Counting house,” see HL to Mathew Robinson, May 30, 1764, PHL, 4: 295.

³⁸ Perry Gauci, *Emporium of the World: The Merchants of London, 1660–1800* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 32, 43; *Complete Guide to . . . London*, 2nd to 6th eds. (London, 1740–1755), 2; *Kent's Directory*, 9th ed. (London, 1742).

³⁹ *Crokatt v. Muilman*, 1770, C12/540/24, NAL; CO5/65/27–29, 30–34, 37–39, 40–42, NAL.

traders in the thirty years before American independence, though, the South Carolina trade remained his overwhelming focus. During the early 1740s, the numerous legal suits through which Crockatt pursued debtors in Charles Town reveal that he confined his export trade to the port almost exclusively to his partners, Simmons & Smith. As noted earlier, the co-partnership provided a steady outlet for European manufactured goods and a reliable supplier of rice, naval stores, and pelts for British and continental European markets. The partnership ended as planned and harmoniously in September 1745 (Crockatt and later his son-in-law John Nutt would continue to look after the Smith family's interests in Britain, both commercial and personal, for the next fifty years). On final liquidation of the firm's assets, each partner received just under seven thousand pounds sterling and a share of the firm's outstanding bonds, designated "good," "dubious," and "bad" according to their likelihood of repayment. "Desperate debts"—those with little chance of recovery and which amounted to some 43 percent of the firm's final assets—were to be pursued by Benjamin Smith. The termination of the partnership prompted a shift in Crockatt's trading strategy.⁴⁰ From 1745 he shipped goods, ranging from textiles to building materials, on credit directly to Charles Town's independent traders and storekeepers in a fleet of vessels either co-owned with Charles Town merchants or owned solely.⁴¹ Further penetrating interior markets, Crockatt sent merchandize directly to low-country planters in South Carolina and Georgia, for domestic use rather than for resale.⁴²

Like most of the main London export merchants to South Carolina, and following his practice in Charles Town, Crockatt avoided the slave trade. Given his slave ownership while in South Carolina, his evidence to the Georgia Trustees in 1740 (when asked whether slaves introduced to Georgia would flee to Spanish Florida, he responded that "if negroes are well used, they never run"), and his complicity in the province's slave system through his trade in commodities and produce, it is clear that commercial rather than moral reasoning determined his choice.⁴³ Timing also may have been a factor. His rise to preeminence in London's Carolina trade during the 1740s coincided with a decade-long hiatus in the province's Atlantic slave trade, following the

⁴⁰ Miscellaneous Records, 1749–1751, 92–94, 292–301, SCDAH.

⁴¹ On Crockatt's shipping interests, see Charleston Naval Office Lists, CO5/510, NAL; HL to James Crockatt, April 13, 1748, *PHL*, 1: 126–127; Converse D. Clowse, *Measuring Charleston's Overseas Commerce, 1717–1767* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 151; R. Nicholas Olsberg, "Ship Registers in the South Carolina Archives, 1734–1780," *SCHM* 74 (October 1973): 212, 225.

⁴² On recipients of goods conveyed by Crockatt in the late 1740s, see Judgment Rolls, 32A, 65A, 43A, 50A, 139A, 171A, SCDAH; *PHL*, 1: 68–70, 74–76, 121–122, 130–131, 191–192.

⁴³ Perceval, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont*, 3: 201–202.

introduction of prohibitively high import duties after the Stono Rebellion of 1739. Between 1740 and 1748, just nine slave ships, disembarking 1,858 enslaved Africans, arrived in South Carolina, of which only two were registered in London. The previous nine years (1731–1739) had by contrast seen eighty-nine slave ships arrive in the province, disembarking 21,542 enslaved Africans. Of these, thirty-four had come from London. Having already made a fortune through commodity trading by the time the Atlantic slave trade to South Carolina effectively reopened in 1749, Crockatt was not inclined to diversify into an altogether riskier field. When Henry Laurens proposed a joint slaving venture to him, he responded that he was “fully employ’d with Business on Commission & chuses to be confin’d in that way,” although he willingly gave Laurens letters of introduction to slave traders in Bristol and Liverpool.⁴⁴

Crockatt’s aversion to the slave trade was echoed by his counterparts in London’s Carolina commodity trade between the 1740s and 1760s. While an earlier generation of Carolina traders in the capital had combined commodity and slave trading, Crockatt’s contemporaries, who together dominated the goods-export trade to South Carolina, confined themselves to this branch. Six firms or individuals were listed as “Carolina merchants” in 1763 in *Mortimer’s Directory*, the first London directory to classify traders by specialty: James & Charles Crockatt, John Beswicke, Richard Shubrick, Sarah Nickleson, John Nutt, and Grubb & Watson.⁴⁵ Only Nutt, as part of an eight-man consortium of owners of the ship *Cape Coast* in 1758, is recorded as having had a stake in a slaving voyage to South Carolina. Among the other merchants who specialized in London’s commodity-export trade to South Carolina between 1749 and the American Revolution, during which time sixty-three ships departed on slaving voyages from London and completed their journeys in South Carolina, only Benjamin Stead was active in the slave trade. A prominent slave trader in Charles Town before relocating to London in 1759, even Stead’s participation in the slave trade once in London was concentrated in just three years, when he had a stake in five slave voyages between 1763 and 1765.⁴⁶

In exchange for the British and European manufactured goods sent on credit to South Carolina and Georgia, rice, deerskins, and naval stores were

⁴⁴ HL to James Crockatt, January 2, 1749, *PHL*, 1: 200–201; HL to Isaac Hobhouse, March 21, 1749, *PHL*, 1: 226–227.

⁴⁵ *The Universal Director [Mortimer’s Directory]* (London, 1763).

⁴⁶ All figures on slave voyages in the paragraph are compiled from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, available online at www.slavevoyages.org. See also David Richardson, “The British Slave Trade to Colonial South Carolina,” *Slavery and Abolition* 12 (December 1991): 125–172. Since Richardson’s important article, however, further statistical sources have come to light, which have been included in the database.

Crokatt's chief imports from the region, supplemented from the late 1740s by indigo. Given his personal role in promoting the crop by securing the bounty on it, he was ostensibly well placed to claim the bulk of Britain's indigo imports, particularly since Carolinian indigo was imported overwhelmingly into London.⁴⁷ That he did not testify to the increasing competition within the Carolina trade by the 1750s. "You may Possible think the Mercantile Men ought to consign all their Indigo to him [Crokatt]," Henry Laurens explained to London correspondents, "but as every one has his Perticular [*sic*] Freind [*sic*] that sends out all his goods it cant [*sic*] be expected that they would send part of their Remittance to a different hand."⁴⁸ By the 1750s, the Carolina trade formed the core business of several London trading houses: more merchants were sharing a larger pie, and a Wragg or a Crokatt could no longer dominate. London's Carolina traders arranged the transshipment of Carolinian rice to other European ports and supplied the capital's wholesale grocers with rice, indigo, and other commodities in exchange for export goods. Payments in cash and bills covered shortfalls on either side, with traders typically running two accounts with the grocers, one for "six months" (credit) and the other for "present money." Surviving accounts of one wholesale grocer confirm that London was more significant as a supplier of exports to South Carolina than as a recipient of its agricultural output. Crokatt, for example, generally ran an account deficit with the grocers, mostly settling his account with cash rather than produce.⁴⁹

Crokatt's place in London commerce bespeaks the wealth conferred by the Carolina trade and the growing status of its traders in the city. While in Coleman Street, he paid the fifth highest tax rates in the precinct; in Cloak Lane, he was the second-highest rate payer in the precinct and at one time employed at least four apprentices as clerks and bookkeepers.⁵⁰ While he eschewed political positions, twice refusing the aldermanship of wards in the city, he played an active role in London's civic life. His diverse philanthropic interests

⁴⁷Nash, "Organization of Trade and Finance," 93. On the development of indigo as an export commodity and its place within Crokatt's trade, see, for example, HL to James Crokatt, July 29, October 23, 1747, January 18, March 17, 1748, *PHL*, 1: 36–38, 66–67, 101–102, 122.

⁴⁸HL to Rawlinson & Davison, September 24, 1755, *PHL*, 1: 343–344.

⁴⁹Apparently unexplored by scholars of American trade, the ledgers of Rawlinson, Davison & Newman, leading London wholesale grocers, illuminate the capital's colonial import-export trade in the 1750s. They contain accounts with the principal London Carolina trading houses—James Crokatt, John Nutt, John Beswicke, Sarah Nickleson, and Richard & Thomas Shubrick—and reveal the firm's direct trade with independent Charles Town houses, including Austin & Laurens. Rawlinson, Davison & Newman Account Book, esp. 77, 455, 498, Guildhall Library, London.

⁵⁰City of London Land Tax Assessments, MS11316/132–97, Guildhall Library.

included a governorship of the Foundling Hospital for poor children and a directorship of the Magdalen Hospital for penitent prostitutes.⁵¹ Reflecting the mid-century concerns of commercial patriotism and national revival typical among elite London merchants, Crokatt also donated to the Marine Society, which funded boys to join the Royal Navy, and subscribed one thousand pounds sterling to the Free British Fishery Society, which earned him a place on its twenty-member committee. Created to promote Britain's herring fishery, the organization neatly matched Crokatt's own interests: its aims appealed to his ethnic attachment to Scotland, the overseas merchant's concern for British maritime strength, and a broader altruism towards Britain's underemployed poor. Furthermore, it promised (though never delivered) reliable profits—an element particularly alluring to Crokatt and his fellow merchants.⁵² South Carolinian causes offered an added outlet for Crokatt's philanthropy and a means of demonstrating his continuing affinity to the province, as shown by an April 1741 donation to sufferers in Charles Town's recent devastating fire.⁵³

Crokatt's wealth was such by the late 1740s that he was able to bestow ten thousand pounds sterling on his son at his marriage, a union portrayed by no less an artist than Thomas Gainsborough. He spent some £19,500 on a grand country estate in Essex, Luxborough Hall, located about fifteen miles north-east of London, and an additional ten thousand pounds repairing and furnishing the property.⁵⁴ Besides the classical mansion itself and its eighteen acres of garden and forty-three acres of pasture, the Luxborough estate included the freehold in six farms covering 520 acres, with an estimated annual rental return of £575. "I think he has Grandour enough for his Money," one Carolinian visitor wryly remarked.⁵⁵ If the path from counting house to landed estate was well trodden in South Carolina, it was rarely achieved in one generation among London's traders—and then chiefly by the wealthiest West Indies merchants. London's leading Carolina merchants, however,

⁵¹ *Whitehall Evening Post; or, London Intelligencer*, October 2, 1750; *The Rules, Orders, and Regulations, of the Magdalen House, for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes* (London, 1760), 24.

⁵² Bob Harris, "Patriotic Commerce and National Revival: The Free British Fishery Society and British Politics, c.1749–58," *English Historical Review* 114 (April 1999): 285–313.

⁵³ SCG, April 7, 1741.

⁵⁴ *Crokatt v. Hicks*, C11/200/23, NAL; Will of James Crokatt, March 11, 1777, Prob. 11/1029, NAL; Maurie D. McInnes, ed., *In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad, 1740–1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 91–93.

⁵⁵ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, February 20, 1751, Peter Manigault Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston; *Public Advertiser* (London), March 9, 1767.

accomplished comparable journeys; James Crokatt was just the most notable and by all accounts the wealthiest. With the proceeds from trading careers begun in Charles Town, reinvested and augmented in London, eminent Carolina traders such as John Beswicke, John and Sarah Nickleson, and Richard Shubrick each acquired landed estates in England's Home Counties. Their outlays point not only to the profits achievable in the Carolina trade, but perhaps also signify the transmission of Carolinian cultural traits. Like Crokatt, for Beswicke, the Nicklesons, and Shubrick, time spent in South Carolina had been commercially formative: their investment of mercantile profits in country property, aping the landholding strategies of their Charlestonian counterparts, suggests a similar influence of the province's social tropes.

As his trade—and the diversions of landed gentility—grew, Crokatt became “desirous of easing himself of some part of the Fatigue of so great a concern.”⁵⁶ He made two of his apprentices, Richard Grubb and Alexander Watson, junior partners in his firm in 1748, himself investing sixteen thousand pounds sterling, or four-fifths, of its total stock of twenty thousand pounds, with his co-partners each investing two thousand pounds for one-tenth stakes. This was the moment when Henry Laurens, who had been an apprentice at Crokatt's firm in the mid 1740s, but who had temporarily returned to South Carolina to settle family affairs, was deprived of his expected share.⁵⁷ Crokatt's treatment of Laurens seems to typify his hard-headed business approach. It was an approach that gained him trade, wealth, and prestige, elevating him to the front rank of London's overseas traders within a few years of setting up in business in the city.

Crokatt's rapid rise in both Charles Town and London, coupled with a keenly litigious handling of debts and assiduous self-promotion, had apparently aroused widespread envy and resentment among his peers. In a report suggestive of his methods, Charles Town merchant Robert Pringle noted in May 1743 that “there has lately come over here a printed Paper by way of Satyre or Invective, & it is supposed to be on James Crokatt Calling him a Scotch Jew Lately Come from So. Carolina, & it is said was handed about at the Coffee

⁵⁶ *Crokatt v. Muilman*, 1770, C12/540/23, NAL.

⁵⁷ *Crokatt v. Barclay*, 1748, C12/2203/55, NAL. Grubb and Watson's appointment as partners was, Laurens wrote at the time, “news to me indeed.” HL to James Crokatt, February 13, 1749, *PHL*, 1: 211. He later attributed blame for his failure to be taken on as a partner to his fellow apprentices, “who through Sheer Envy, defeated a plan for Copartnership which I had Entered upon with a principal Merchant [Crokatt] of this City London,” and reflected that they “were Mortified by Conviction of having been the Instruments of my prosperity.” HL to John Lewis Gervais, March 4, 1774, *PHL*, 9: 336.

houses in London."⁵⁸ This was clearly a comment on Crokatt's supposedly sharp practices, rather than his religion.

Crokatt's role in a joint venture in 1744 to commission the privateer *Recovery* to prey on Spanish and French shipping confirmed his reputation among many Charles Town traders. The thirty-five Charles Town merchants who each subscribed fifty pounds sterling to the project were divided from the outset on whether Crokatt should be one of its London agents. Doubts about his reliability were confirmed by a lack of communication from London. Unaware what type of vessel had been bought, its tonnage, or the size of its crew, rumor began to spread among subscribers that the privateer was cruising in European waters for the benefit of its London managers. As each week passed without the *Recovery's* arrival, Charles Town opinion became more convinced that the London managers—and Crokatt, in particular—were plotting against them. "Some here, who are no Well Wishers to Mr. Crokatt especially," wrote Pringle, "think that they are not Well used & Seem to be a sort of a party here . . . & some Seem to Insinuate tho' falsely that the Recovery is kept in Europe purposely that Mr. Crokatt . . . may have the Commissions on the prizes." Little did they know that the vessel had been lost in an English Channel storm during its second cruise in September 1744. Nonetheless, the episode seems to have confirmed Crokatt's reputation among his critics—that he pursued personal gain with little regard for his correspondents' interests.⁵⁹

The hostility towards Crokatt in South Carolina presents a conundrum. In a system of trade as reliant on trust as Atlantic commerce, how did he continue to prosper and maintain his transoceanic connections? His close attention to South Carolina's economic development certainly bolstered—and perhaps resurrected—his reputation in the province. Both before and after he was appointed South Carolina's metropolitan agent in 1749, Crokatt acted as *de facto* expert witness on Britain's southern colonies, invariably called upon to give evidence when Parliament investigated their condition or trade. His status reflected his personal experience in South Carolina, particularly the distinction conferred by being a royal councilor, and the extent of his commerce with the region.⁶⁰ Through his commercial and political eminence,

⁵⁸ Robert Pringle to Andrew Pringle, May 19, 1743, *LRP*, 2: 551.

⁵⁹ *Crokatt v. Pringle*, 1749, C12/1523/33, NAL. Letters from Robert Pringle to his brother Andrew between February 1744 and March 1745 relate the Charles Town consortium's perspective on the progress and ultimate failure of the venture. *LRP*, 2: 642–643, 661–664, 739–741, 742–743, 745–746, 747–748, 760–763, 789–791, 794–797, 803–805, 821–823, 827–830, 830–832, 833–836.

⁶⁰ [Great Britain], *Journals of the House of Commons, 1688–1834*, 89 vols. (London, 1688–1834), 23: 682, 25: 997–998, 1032–1035, 26: 239–241, 267 (hereafter cited as *Commons Journals*); Perceval, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont*, 3: 200.

Crokatt also assumed effective leadership of London's Carolina traders during the late 1740s, supplanting the province's official but ineffectual agent, Peregrine Fury, and representing the colony and its trade in the capital's political forums.⁶¹ He thus lobbied for continuing military protection for South Carolina, organizing a petition from London's principal Carolina traders to the king "praying that the Forces in Georgia & So. Carolina be kept in Pay & continued"—a protest against the disbanding of the Forty-Second Regiment of Foot.⁶² More significant were his efforts to diversify the colony's agricultural and economic base. After encouraging the introduction of indigo as a supplementary staple in South Carolina in two widely circulated pamphlets in 1746 and 1747, he most famously led a campaign in 1748 that saw a bounty placed on South Carolinian indigo.⁶³ "He is indefatigable in the service of this Province & I think every Inhabitant indebted to him," Henry Laurens—evidently bearing Crokatt no ill will for failing to take him into partnership in London—reflected in June 1748.⁶⁴ Besides his commercial experience and effective representation of the province's interests in the imperial metropolis, Crokatt's orchestration of the indigo campaign was instrumental in his

⁶¹ Peregrine Fury has been an opaque figure to historians, but research for this article has unearthed further evidence on his career and the reasons why South Carolina's assembly was so keen to remove him from the agency during the 1740s. He was a bureaucrat by profession, with strong military connections. He worked in the War Office and in an administrative capacity as agent both for South Carolina and for several military regiments. *Parker's Penny Post*, a London newspaper, reported on May 7, 1725, that he had been appointed "Agent and Solicitor to the six Independent Companies of Foot that are to be raised in the Highlands of Scotland." His position as agent to the army regiments occasionally conflicted with his role as South Carolina's London agent. This was at least how his South Carolinian employers interpreted his actions in 1742–1743, when Fury was believed to have suppressed the provincial government's highly critical report of James Oglethorpe's 1740 expedition against Saint Augustine in defiance of explicit instructions to publish it in London. As Robert Pringle commented: "Our assembly think that their agent Mr. Fury is more a Friend to Generall Oglethorpe than to this Province and they find fault with him for not Publishing the Report of Our Committee of Assembly of the Siege of St. Augustine sent him under the Broad Seal of the Province on Purpose to publish, and Instead thereof it seems he Quash'd it. If so think he did not Deal Candidly by them and acts too much like a Courtier." Fury died in London in 1759. *LRP*, 2: 577–578; *Whitehall Evening Post*; or, *London Intelligencer*, October 20, 1759.

⁶² HL to George Austin, December 17, 1748, *PHL*, 1: 185, 190n.

⁶³ [James Crokatt], *Observations Concerning Indigo and Cochineal* (London, 1746); [James Crokatt], *Further Observations Intended for Improving the Culture and Curing of Indigo, &c. in South-Carolina* (London, 1747).

⁶⁴ HL to Richard Grubb, June 15, 1748, *PHL*, 1: 148.

appointment as provincial agent in London the following year, despite opposition from Governor James Glen.⁶⁵

Crokatt's role in securing the indigo bounty was the most notable achievement in a career of promoting agricultural innovation and diversification in South Carolina. Dating back to his days in Charles Town, Crokatt had urged planters and traders to take advantage of the imperial stimuli on offer. In February 1737, the *South-Carolina Gazette* devoted its front page to a letter from Crokatt reminding readers of the bounty on Swedish-style pitch and tar. Two weeks later, he backed up his advice with a personal pledge to buy any tar made in the Swedish manner for at least fifty shillings a barrel.⁶⁶ With his customary eye for profit, Crokatt saw both the economic benefits for South Carolina of a revitalized naval-stores trade and commercial opportunity for himself. From London, he continued to promote a more diverse agricultural base in the province, urging experimentation with cochineal, cotton, hemp, and tar. In 1747 he sent a model of a mill for extracting sesame oil and the next year, a model of an all-purpose plow for cultivating grain or indigo. Both were displayed at the treasurer's office in Charles Town.⁶⁷ Diversification, with its potential for personal dividends, remained a constant objective during his agency. For example, he encouraged planters in March 1752 to capitalize on a recent law removing the duty on American pot and pearl ashes. He expressed hope to the Commons House of Assembly's Committee of Correspondence that "some Planters in South Carolina would soon turn their Thoughts and Hands that Way" and enclosed a pamphlet on how to make the ashes.⁶⁸

So highly was his agency regarded by the assembly that it refused in 1753 to accept his resignation. Relations had not been universally harmonious. He had stood accused of prioritizing his own interests above those of the colony in his opposition to the issuance of paper currency and in his support for rogue

⁶⁵ Glen's hostility to Crokatt, which continued throughout his agency, was no doubt compounded by Crokatt's intervention in the case of the *Vrouw Dorothea*. This Dutch ship was impounded in Charles Town in 1748 by the vice-admiralty court on a charge of illegal trading in Jamaica. Crokatt's pressed the case of the ship's owners—the Hopes, a leading Amsterdam banking house—at the High Court of the Admiralty in London. The high court reversed the vice-admiralty court's decision, and as a consequence, Glen lost the share of the ship's cargo that he would have received. *PHL*, 1: 198–200.

⁶⁶ *SCG*, February 5 and 19, 1737.

⁶⁷ [Crokatt], *Further Observations*, 10; *SCG*, March 23, 1747, August 15, 1748. See also Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 134–159.

⁶⁸ Terry W. Lipscomb and R. Nicholas Olsberg, eds., *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina, November 14, 1751–October 7, 1752* (Columbia: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1977), 369.

Indian trader Charles McNair, whose claims for financial reimbursement from the crown were opposed by the assembly and governor, but which Crokatt—allegedly owed money by McNair's partner—supported.⁶⁹ These blemishes on his record were outweighed, however, by his diligence in commercial matters. Crokatt was “not lightly esteem'd by the People,” Laurens duly noted, and on the former's eventual retirement from the post in 1755, the latter considered that “a good deal was due from this Province to Mr. Crokatt for his unwearied Endeavours to serve us in Promoting the Culture of Indigo beside other matters . . . but its impossible in such a Country as this to get all the People to be of one mind. He has some very strong Opponents in the Councill who wont allow him that Merit as the Commons House thought his due.”⁷⁰ Crokatt's final resignation and attempts to reclaim two years' unpaid salary precipitated constitutional wrangles in South Carolina that paralyzed government for nearly three years. Together with the longstanding antipathy of Governor Glen, these disputes have colored historians' perceptions of his agency as a whole.⁷¹ In trying to resign the agency in 1753, Crokatt complained that “the Service and Duty required is more than is Compatible with my Present Plan of Life.” He had never wasted so much time as in waiting on the Board of Trade, he told his provincial employers, and would have resigned the post long before if only he could have found an adequate replacement.⁷² His pique typified the frustrations inherent in colonial agency, with agents caught between the irregular, conflicting, and often unrealistic instructions from their employers across the Atlantic and the bureaucracy of Westminster. Agents regularly attended the Board of Trade to find too few commissioners present to reach a quorum, that vital documents had been lost or not read, or other inexplicable delays. Crokatt's extensive commercial concerns made time wasted in official provincial business—chiefly routine administrative matters such as providing data on South Carolina's exports, detailing provincial laws, and seeking remuneration for gifts made to local Indians—all the more galling.⁷³

⁶⁹ James Abercromby to James Glen, April 6, 1752, *The Letterbook of James Abercromby, Colonial Agent, 1751–1773*, ed. John C. Van Horne and George Reese (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1991), 32–34; Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina*, 301; Mercantini, *Who Shall Rule at Home?* 80, 91.

⁷⁰ HL to Rawlinson & Davison, September 24, 1755, *PHL*, 1: 344.

⁷¹ The ramifications of Crokatt's resignation and salary controversy within the provincial government are discussed at length in Mercantini, *Who Shall Rule at Home?* 94–117, and Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina*, 303–309.

⁷² Terry W. Lipscomb, ed., *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752–September 6, 1754* (Columbia: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1983), 93.

⁷³ [Great Britain], *Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, 1704–1782*, 14 vols. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920–1938), 9: 277, 334–335.

His resignation allowed him to concentrate on his commercial and landholding interests, though he continued as de facto leader of London's Carolina traders, organizing and signing petitions on the province's trade, economy, and defense as well as continuing as an expert witness to Parliament on the southern colonies and their trade.⁷⁴ His son Charles entered the firm in January 1754, though James Crockatt remained majority partner with a twelve thousand pound sterling investment, giving him a three-fifths share. Operating from Crockatt's London house and now entitled James & Charles Crockatt & Company, the partnership continued until January 1760. The partners drew freely on the joint stock for their subsistence, with these deductions reckoned in the annual accounts.⁷⁵ By now entering his sixties, James Crockatt gradually retired from the Carolina trade.

In common with many—if not most—London trading houses, the transition from one generation to another was fraught with difficulty. Rarely, though, are the fissures as exposed as in the unraveling of Crockatt's firm. On liquidating the accounts of the dissolved partnership, he discovered to his horror that Charles had secretly siphoned some seven thousand pounds from the firm. When Charles promised "to alter his conduct in Business," his father allowed him to continue trading under the name of James & Charles Crockatt from January 1760 "as if they were actually in partnership together," in the hope this would allow his son to clear his debts. Crockatt had, he later swore, "only lent his name to support the credit of his son," who was alone entitled to any profits made and any losses suffered. By 1761, however, Charles's conduct had not improved, and his father instructed him to stop using his name in association with the business. Crockatt wrote to all of his overseas correspondents, informing them that he and his son were no longer connected in trade.⁷⁶ Instead, Crockatt's principal legatee in trade was his son-in-law John Nutt, who had married Crockatt's daughter Mary in 1755.⁷⁷ Nutt inherited many of Crockatt's commercial connections in Charles Town and became one of London's chief Carolina traders in the decade before the Revolution.

By the mid 1760s, Crockatt had almost completed his withdrawal from commerce. He spent just Wednesdays and Thursdays in London and resided

⁷⁴ For example, see the July 25, 1760, London merchants' petition to Secretary of State William Pitt "on the present distressed state of our affairs in Carolina & Georgia." Calling for an attack on the French at Fort Mobile to cut off supplies to hostile Indians, it was written by Crockatt and signed by him and nine other London firms in the Carolina trade. CO5/65/1-3, NAL. See also *Commons Journals*, 29: 605-606.

⁷⁵ *Watson v. Crockatt*, 1760, C12/907/77, NAL; *Crockatt v. Muilman*, 1770, C12/540/24, NAL.

⁷⁶ *Watson v. Crockatt*, 1760, C12/907/77, NAL; *Crockatt v. Muilman*, 1770, C12/540/24, NAL; *Public Advertiser*, January 2, 1760; SCG, May 3, 1760.

⁷⁷ *London Evening Post*, April 15, 1755.

principally on his Luxborough estate, where he adopted the lifestyle and interests of a novice gentlemen farmer. With the same "improving" spirit that he had used to promote diversification in South Carolina, he grew wheat, beans, potatoes, and fodder crops for his horses and cattle, erected dams on the local river for irrigation canals, and encouraged likeminded agricultural innovators to visit Luxborough to see his trials of a new drill plow.⁷⁸ At the same time, seeking to simplify his portfolio, Crokatt began to wind down his investments in South Carolina. He did so with customary assiduity, castigating his agent in the province for minor errors in his accounts and taking the unusual step of bypassing him altogether to harass his Charles Town debtors personally. "You should have left this Affair intirely [sic] to myself, or any other," the agent replied in exasperation, "as you cannot be a judge of people's circumstances here so well as me."⁷⁹ Some of his Charles Town properties sold quickly; intractable tenants and the extensive repairs needed by several of the properties made it harder to dispose of others. They at least continued to bring in a steady rental income: Crokatt's bay houses, comprising both retail and residential space, were collectively let for nearly two hundred pounds sterling. For Crokatt, as for other absentee owners of South Carolinian properties living in Britain, his fixed assets in the province had served both to demonstrate a continuing attachment to South Carolina and provide an income stream to supplement mercantile profits.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

After selling Luxborough in 1767, Crokatt moved to Richmond, Surrey. Ten miles southwest of London on the south bank of the Thames, he was closer to his youngest daughter, Jane, and her family. South Carolina still figured in his thoughts—as late as 1770, he joined fellow London Carolina merchants in contributing to a fund for the bells at Saint Michael's Church in Charles Town. Coming after his retirement from commerce, it seems to have been a donation motivated by altruism rather than commercial expedience.⁸¹ In 1772 he was visited by his former apprentice Henry Laurens, who was himself largely retired from transatlantic trade and was supervising his sons' educa-

⁷⁸ *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale; or, Select Papers on Agriculture, Commerce, Arts and Manufactures . . . Volume the Fifth* (London, 1765), 133–137, 281–288 (quote, 282).

⁷⁹ Robert Raper to James Crokatt, June 11, 1759, July 8, 1762 (quote), March 2, November 26, 1763, LRR.

⁸⁰ Robert Raper to James Crokatt, June 7, 1762, August 18, 1763, LRR.

⁸¹ Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, 60.

tion in Europe.⁸² Two men who had led South Carolina's transatlantic trade, grown rich on it, and together epitomized the province's mid-century Atlantic connections, once again came face to face. Any resentment after Crockatt's failure to offer Laurens a place in his business twenty-five years earlier had long since passed. For his part, Laurens reflected that Crockatt had been "misguided" by the other apprentices also seeking partnership. His former mentor was contrite: "with great affection pressing my hand in his, [Crockatt] declared he was Sensible he had used me very Ill," Laurens recalled, "& that he Should never forgive himself."⁸³ Laurens's moving report of the encounter suggests a mellowing in Crockatt's notoriously brusque demeanor. Moreover, their meeting embodied the personal and commercial bonds that had yoked province and metropolis, but were being increasingly tested in the early 1770s by political and ideological divergences. Crockatt would not live to see the final rupture between South Carolina and Great Britain. His death in Richmond in March 1777, "in the 76th year of his age," was reported widely in the London press.⁸⁴ Perhaps more than any other figure, James Crockatt had cultivated and capitalized on the commercial potentialities of the mid-century Carolina trade. Through his mercantile assiduity, he had propelled himself to the forefront of the trade. Using the civic and political status his commerce conferred on him, he evolved from merely an active participant in the networks of transatlantic trade to a determinative builder and shaper of both his own commercial orbit and a broader Atlantic polity.

By considering his life and career beyond the confines of the three episodes with which he is most readily identified—Laurens's commercial genesis, the indigo bounty, and the agency disputes between assembly and governor—Crockatt's presence in each becomes less anomalous. All were characteristic of traits he honed within the Atlantic trading world and that he displayed on both sides of the Atlantic: a ruthless commercial streak that brought not only hostility from peers but also personal fortune, status, and influence; the foresight to use this status and influence to interact with the state to remodel the commercial conditions in which he operated; and an impatience with constrictive political structures when they impeded his mercantile ends. Through these—and through a holistic study of Crockatt himself—the complexities of Britain's mid-eighteenth-century Atlantic empire are thrown into sharper focus. In addition to revealing the commercial choices and strategies that "made" elite Hanoverian merchants, Crockatt's career specifi-

⁸² HL to James Crockatt, March 3, 1772, HL to William Cowles, March 26, 1772, HL to James Crockatt, April 20, 1772, HL to William Cowles, April 20, 1772, *PHL*, 8: 208, 231, 277.

⁸³ HL to John Lewis Gervais, March 4, 1774, *PHL*, 9: 336.

⁸⁴ For example, see *Public Advertiser*, March 8, 1777.

cally shows the elevating opportunities that Atlantic commerce offered to those who could grasp them. Few grasped the opportunities, turned them to their advantage, and in so doing, influenced South Carolina's colonial development more profoundly than he did.