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THE CHARLESTON MECHANICS: A BRIEF STUDY, 1760-1776

By RICHARD WALSH *

Among the three influential classes in Charleston during the colonial and Revolutionary periods were the mechanics. These artisans were the first to move in the direction of revolution in 1765. Here were the men who with their retinue of apprentices, journeymen, and slaves formed the advanced guard of rebellion. But except for the work of E. Milby Burton on the cabinetmakers and silversmiths, little has been done on these small businessmen. No one has described their contributions to the economy of the province, and only Leila Sellers in her *Charleston Business on the Eve of the Revolution* mentions this in passing. Moreover, many statements by the general historian need correction. It has been said, for example, not only that Charleston artisans contributed little to the economy of the province, but that particularly because of the slave system, the mechanic arts were little developed. Also it is erroneously thought that no Southern class opposed Great Britain on the grounds of mercantilism.¹

Such statements need correction, which requires not only an explanation of the mechanics' political program, but also study of the plain mechanics, of those who were industrial artists, of their business operations and their interests which were affected by mercantilism, leading finally to their espousal of revolution.

I

THE PLAIN MECHANIC OF CHARLESTON

One of the many lucrative mechanic industries on the eve of the Revolution was shipbuilding. During the period, shipwrights of Caro-

* Dr. Walsh, assistant professor of history at Georgetown University, is also editor of *The Maryland Historical Magazine*. He will shortly edit for *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* the writings of Christopher Gadsden. This article is a fore-runner to his book on the artisans, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty*, to be published in the fall by the University of South Carolina Press.

¹ *The Charleston Directory, 1790*; E. Milby Burton, *Charleston Furniture, 1700-1825* (Charleston, 1955); *South Carolina Silversmiths, 1690-1860* (Charleston, 1942). Leila Sellers, *Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1934), pp. 102-103; also Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsmen* (New York, 1950), pp. 30-32, which fails to note that Charleston was an exception to the dubious statement that by the time of the Revolution no "class of 'Mechanicks' emerged to meet the South's wants except the crude artisans of the back-country."

lina, most of whom worked in or near Charleston, built vessels totaling over 6,141 tons—schooners, brigantines, sloops, and heavier craft. Great numbers of pettiaugers and small craft were also constructed for floating rice down river to market.²

The work of the Carolina shipbuilders was thought to be of high quality. Carolina-wrought vessels, while few in comparison to those of Massachusetts, were noted for their durability and strength; but they were also expensive, perhaps because of the shortage of labor. In 1751 the assembly had encouraged the development of the industry, inviting artisans to the province and extending a bounty as an incentive to shipbuilding. The act was repealed later, allegedly because few came, since no one applied for the grant. Yet by 1760, shipbuilding accounted for the employment of hundreds of men. Besides construction of new vessels there were endless repairs and alterations to be made in the very active commercial town, when during the busy season it was customary to see 200 to 300 vessels in the harbor awaiting cargoes of rice for Portugal, the Indies, and England. Carpenters were employed; painters, glaziers, ironwrights, sail and ropemakers, even cabinetmakers, found encouragement for their arts at the bustling port. Towards the close of the century, the trade declined, probably because the builders of eastern Massachusetts and Philadelphia greatly undersold the Carolina shipwright.³

Another important trade, supported by the commerce of the city, was barrelmaking. The entire countryside must have abounded in coopers. From Charleston were sent millions of staves, hoops and barrels for rice, pitch, tar, turpentine, indigo, beef, and pork. Much of the coopering was probably done on the plantations by slave artisans; there is no way of knowing what proportion of the work was Charleston's, for records are scanty. But a Charleston cooper like David Saylor maintained what amounted to a cooperage factory on the city wharfs, employing as many as thirty persons. Another, one Gabriel Guignard,

² Ship Registers, 1730-1765; 1765-1774; Journals of the House of Representatives, 1784, p. 31, Feb. 2, 1784, MSS, South Carolina Archives Department, hereafter cited S.C.A.D.; Sellers, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 64.

³ Ship Registers, 1730-1765; Victor S. Clark, *History of Manufactures in the United States, 1607-1928*, 3 vol. (New York, 1949), I, 138, III, 367; Richard Champion, *Considerations of the Present Situation of Great Britain and the United States* (London, 1784), pp. 73-74. Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 10 vol. (Columbia, 1836-1841). III, 742, IV, 10-11.

amassed a small fortune at the craft. Newspaper advertisements attest to a large number of these tradesmen at work in the city.⁴

Between 1760 and 1785, twenty-one chandlers supplied candles and soap for the provincials, and exchanged quantities of these items for the rare woods and sugar of the West Indies—a commerce which brought much needed specie into the province. However valuable, the chandler was constantly the target of Grand Juries who “presented” the craft as dangerous to the health and safety of the town. To the chandler was attributed many a city fire, and the boiling of tallow sent Charlestonians holding their noses and gasping for pure air. Complaints accompanied demands that chandlers be moved into the contry. Later, they were merely licensed, not removed, and with the bakers, they continued to be the unintentional incendiaries of the town.⁵

In tanning, the city possessed another small industry engaged in the overseas commerce. For example, 41,701 sides of leather left Charleston for the Indies and England during the revolutionary period. Some twenty-one tanners operated yards at the time. Men who labored at this “art” were apparently among the more substantial mechanics, as the wills of such tanners as James Darby and Samuel Jones evince. Tanning required large outlays of capital for land and tools, and a mill to grind bark. From workers in this industry were to come some of the most prominent South Carolina families. Such was the case of the saddler John Laurens, whose son Henry became one of the merchant princes of the American colonies.⁶

Because they were indispensable, tailors were numerous and powerful tradesmen. Tailors outfitted the provincial dandies with their scarlet coats with gold buttons and their velvet capes, and provided the livery for their servant men. Their cloth was imported from England, and,

⁴ Charles Joseph Gayle, “The Nature and Volume of Exports from Charleston, 1724-1774,” *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1937), p. 31; David Saylor Receipt Book, 1784-1787, MS, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, *Records of the Court of Chancery of South Carolina: 1671-1779*, Gregorie, ed., (Washington, 1950), p. 570. Saylor’s workmen were apparently slaves; see *Heads of Families, 1790*.

⁵ Gayle, *loc. cit.*, p. 33; *South Carolina Gazette*, June 8, 1765; Feb. 22, 1773, hereafter cited S. C. G.; Alexander Edwards, *Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston* (Charleston, 1802), p. 83.

⁶ Gayle, *loc. cit.*, p. 33; Charleston Wills, MSS, transcripts, S. C. A. D., Book A, XX, 74-75; Book A, XVI, 257-264; David Duncan Wallace, *The Life of Henry Laurens* (New York, 1915), pp. 7-9; *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, May 25, 1778, hereafter cited G.G.; *South Carolina Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, March 7, 1785.

dependent upon English trade, many became loyalists during the war; but not all, evidently, for the tailors' society which was formed in 1760 was still operating during the Revolution and complaining in the newspapers about the American economy. In turn, critics accused their society of monopoly and setting high prices.⁷

Also important plain mechanics were the shoemakers. Quantities of "Negro shoes" as well as fine shoes and boots for men and ladies' and children's pumps were made by cordwainers like John and Simon Berwick, Patrick Hinds, and John Potter. The former partners kept a tanyard which supplied them with leather for their shop in town, where were placed on sale at one time more than a thousand pairs of shoes which they had fashioned. Patrick Hinds and John Potter boasted ownership of a town warehouse from which they could serve the inhabitants of the low country.⁸

Saddlers often worked with the cordwainers and tanners. There were many in town, judging from the newspaper advertisements, and their services were greatly in demand, the horse being the chief means of transportation. The saddler manufactured his own riding equipment but frequently imported fine saddlery from England.⁹

The town also contained a number of coachmakers, among whom were the political cohorts of Christopher Gadsden, the radical revolutionary. H.Y. Bookless, John Laughton, Benjamin Hawes, and Richard Hart were chaisemakers who participated in a meeting at the Liberty Tree in 1766, at which time they and other mechanics listened to a "harrangue" by Gadsden against the Declaratory Act. These coachmakers, who built coaches and riding chairs "in the most complete and elegant manner," often found themselves reconditioning old models from England. As wheelwrights, they made spinning wheels for self-sufficient townsmen and planters, and gave force to the boycotts of the pre-revolutionary period by selling them to self-denying provincials.¹⁰

⁷ Petition, accounts, and other papers of Charles Atkins, petition of the Master Tailors' Society, MSS, S.C.A.D.; *Charleston Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1780. Also included in the clothing industry were milliners and mantuamakers, of whom there were many; see, for example, *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, Dec. 27, 1768, hereafter cited, *C. J.*; *S.C.G.*, May 2, 1761, June 28, 1760.

⁸ *C.J.*, Sept. 23, 1766, Nov. 20, 1770; *S.C.G.*, Jan. 21, 1773; petitions, accounts, and other papers of Patrick Hinds, Ms, S.C.A.D.

⁹ Charleston County, Clerk of the Court of Chancery, Judgment Book Records from Feb. 1767—Aug. 1768, Book DD, Ms, typewritten copies, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, pp. 130, 301, 302, 383, 384; also Judgment Book, 1770-1771, pp. 8-10.

¹⁰ *G.C.*, Nov. 14, 1766; *S.C.G.*, July 6, 1769; *Documentary History of the American Revolution, 1767-1776*, R.W. Gibbes, ed. (New York, 1855), pp. 10-11.

There were numerous gunsmiths on whom the military forces especially depended to repair arms. Almost every colonist owned a weapon of some kind, from blunderbuss to finely wrought pistols, since from the first settlement of the province most able-bodied men were enrolled in the militia. The whitesmiths seem to have made but few weapons, though during the war they were useful in manufacturing some for the army and in service to the rebel ordinance corps. In the years of peace, however, like many mechanics, they found themselves repairing imported English guns. Like the watchmakers, they were adept at making scales and other objects requiring a high degree of mechanical skill and the mind of the inveterate tinkerer.¹¹

A listing of plain craftsmen is nearly endless. There were barbers and hairdressers who provided the imposing eighteenth century styles of London and Paris for the provincial ladies. Perukemakers enabled this generation to change the color of its hair at the slightest whim. Powdermakers manufactured powder for the wigs of townsmen. Weavers made cottons, woolens, and "threadcloth". Dyers worked silk as well as homespun, and scoured gentlemen's garments. Seamstresses, embroiderers, and mantuamakers fashioned clothing for women and taught their skills to young girls. Confectioners concocted sweets. Tobacconists prepared delicate mixtures and kept "smoking shops" after the style of England. Brewers brewed beer and ale with "double brewed Spruce Beer," one of whom Mr. Speaker, Peter Manigault, praised highly for keeping "above £20,000 per year in the province." There were also upholsterers who hung drapery, repaired worn furniture, worked with the cabinetmakers, and made umbrellas and parasols after the best European fashion. Tinsmiths made "fire-buckets," covered roofs, and lighted the street lamps of the city. Bakers prepared fancy pastry, bread, and "ship-bread" or hardtack for seamen. And lowly butchers rose to wealth by purchasing meat from farmers and reselling it to townsmen, to the militia, and to ship captains. Indeed it seems that at no time was eighteenth century Charleston without the benefits of any kind of tradesmen. They were an integral and colorful part of the scene; some shipped their wares overseas and in a small way helped to balance the economy of the province. They made of Charleston a busy, bustling, hawking little London in America.¹²

¹¹ G.G., Dec. 30, 1774, Jan. 6, 1775; S.C.G., July 30, 1753, Oct. 4, 1760.

¹² See the Charleston newspapers which are the best source for the artisans of the period; also, more available but not complete, is Alfred Coxe Prime, *The Arts and Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South Carolina* (Philadelphia, 1929). However some examples of the above are the following: Richard Bell, wigmaker

II

THE INDUSTRIAL ARTIST

Foremost among the industrial artists of Charleston were the cabinetmakers. There were approximately 28 in 1760, 35 in 1790, and 81 by 1810. There were about 250 plying their trade between 1700 and 1825. Despite their numbers, almost no record of their production exists. But the account book of Thomas Elfe, apparently one of the leading cabinetmakers of Charleston, gives some insight into this problem. From 1768 to 1776, this artisan alone produced 1,500 pieces of furniture: bedsteads, chests, desks, clothes presses, all sorts of chairs, card tables, tea tables, sofas, clock cases, book cases, and so on.¹³

With so many cabinetmakers, there was apparently keen competition, as the following statement of Richard Magrath suggests: he wrote in the *South Carolina Gazette* that he had "Lately been so fortunate as to discover the wretch, who for some time past has been mean enough to attempt injuring him in his Business, and whose ill nature and Prejudice have extended so far as to induce him to go to several Gentlemen's Houses and find Fault with his Work," but he hoped "That his Customers for the future will pay no Regard to the words of such a low groveling Fellow, pregnant with impudence, Ignorance, and Falsehoods, and who is too insignificant a Creature to have his Name mentioned in a public paper, notwithstanding he has the assurance to call him *The Ladies Cabinet Maker*." He is "destitute of both Truth and Abilities."¹⁴

and hairdresser, *S.C.G.*, Sept. 7, 1775; powder and starch manufacturer, Robert Stringer, *ibid.*, Oct. 18, 1773; weaver, Anthony Parasteau, *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, June 9, 1777, hereafter cited *G.S.S.C.*; dyers, John and William Brown, *S.C.G.*, June 19, 21, 1773; *C.J.*, Mar. 18, 1766; seamstresses, mantuamakers, staymakers, milliners, John Burchett, *S.C.G.*, Dec. 7, 1767, Eleanor Chapman, *ibid.*, July 23, 1772, Sarah Damon, *ibid.*, Sept. 28, 1765, John Duvall, *ibid.*, Mar. 2, 1765; confectioneer, William Sandys, Charleston Wills, Book B, 1774-1779, XVII, 467-469; tobacconists, Stewart and Barre, *South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser*, Sept. 1, 1784; brewer, Edmund Egan, W. Richard Walsh "Edmund Egan, Charleston's Rebel Brewer," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* LVI (Oct. 1955), 200-204, hereafter cited *S.C.H.M.*; upholsterer, Richard Bird, *S.C.G.*, Sept. 11, 1762; bakers, Francisco Morrelli, *ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1773; butcher, John Baker, *C.J.*, June 3, 1766; tinsmith, George Ross, *South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser*, April 7, 1785.

¹³ E. Milby Burton, "The Furniture of Charleston," *Antiques*, XXI (Jan., 1952), 53-55; Jennie Haskell Rose, *loc. cit.*, II, 184-185. E. Milby Burton, "Thomas Elfe, Charleston Cabinet Maker," *The Charleston Museum Leaflets* (Charleston, 1952), pp. 14-15. Burton, *Charleston Furniture*, p. 6.

¹⁴ *S.C.G.*, July 9, 1772.

The cabinetmakers worked in the same styles as the English masters—Sheraton, Heppelwhite, Chippendale, and Adams. In some particulars, however, there were American peculiarities evolving. Elfe, who used the customary mahogany and for his secondary woods, the local cypress, cedar, and poplar, developed singularly graceful frets on his furniture, by which it can be accurately identified. Bedsteads of other craftsmen had removable headboards so that a sleeper might be cooled by the infrequent breezes of hot Charleston nights. On other pieces were carved rice ears and leaves after the staple of the low country.¹⁵

The silversmiths of Revolutionary Charleston were also noteworthy artisans. Men like Thomas You, Jonathan Sarrazin, James Askew, and Alexander Petrie sold imported trinkets and other baubles, but they also turned out many tankards, coffee and tea pots, punch bowls, ladles, strainers, and other handiwork which graced the great planters' tables and matched for their beauty the products of English smiths. They copied the rococo but executed it with more restraint.¹⁶

Engravers worked frequently with the silversmiths but performed on their own as well, producing coats of arms, ornaments, name plates, and so on. Often they made plates for the provincial currency. One of these men in the hire of the province, Thomas Coram, was apparently quite talented. He announced in 1776, thereby manifesting his political interests, that he had for sale a view of the engagement at Sullivan's Island on a copper plate 10 1/2 by 15 inches. Coram, like others in his trade, tried his hand at painting. A picture, which he did on wood, now in the Cherokee Place Methodist Church, Charleston, indicates that he had marked technical skill in the classical mode.¹⁷

Another important metal worker was the blacksmith. He was undoubtedly the most versatile craftsman of them all. He shod horses, of course, and repaired wagons. But the smithy also erected lightning rods. One, William Johnson, in fact, came to Charleston as a lecturer on electricity from the province of New York, where he was well received. He was apparently a popularizer of Franklin's findings. Johnson became one of the town's leading radicals, whom John Rutledge called the first mover of the ball of revolution. He was father of the historian Joseph

¹⁵ Burton, *Charleston Furniture*, pp. 13-15; "Thomas Elfe," pp. 13, 16-33; Rose, *loc. cit.*, Part I, 128, Part II, 185.

¹⁶ E. Milby Burton, *South Carolina Silversmiths, 1690-1860* (Charleston, 1942), pp. 14-16, 73-76, 146-149, 163-169, 203-206. Some works of these smiths are in the Charleston Museum.

¹⁷ Prime, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

Johnson and of the federal Justice William Johnson, another dissenter against centralized power.¹⁸

Blacksmiths were noted for their artistry in iron. They emulated English masters and apparently copied their style from worked iron imported from England, provided that these imports were simply done and within the Charleston smith's experience. The prosaic design of the imported altar rail of St. Michael's, for instance, set a standard which local smiths imitated in the countless grills, balconies, and gates for which the city is still famous. The influence of the ironwright of the West Indies was also evident. Another aid was the folios of engravings published by Robert Adam, the Scots architect. Thus such smiths as Johnson, Tunis Tebout, James Lingard, and John Cleator advertised that they performed scroll or plain work on railings for staircases, lampirons, "and many other branches that are manufactured in Iron too tedious to enumerate."¹⁹

Painters were also men of artistic abilities. Besides housepainting, they advertised that they rendered coats of arms on coaches and other objects of family pride. Among the painters were several artists and teachers of art. George Flagg and Benjamin Hawes taught drawing to the youth of the city for many years. One wonders if politics did not find a place in their lectures. Both were leading radicals of the Revolution and supporters of Christopher Gadsden.

Two other busy artists were John and Hamilton Stevenson, who maintained a painting academy where they offered the study of art, and of painting and drawing in the manner of the Roman school. Evenings they instructed mechanics with a bent for self-improvement in planning and architecture. This pair also gave lessons without charge each year to two young men recommended by the South Carolina Society, a benevolent organization. The paintings of the masters themselves comprised such works as landscapes, historical scenes, and portraits.²⁰

Of the many limners, painters, and gilders who labored in Revolutionary Charleston Jeremiah Theus was perhaps the finest of all—at least the one most preferred by low country planters and merchants. Ex-

¹⁸ G.G., Mayll, 1770; Alston Deas, *The Early Ironwork of Charleston* (Columbia, 1941), pp. 15-18; 27-30, fig. 8; William Johnson, *A Course of Experiments in that Curious and Interesting Branch of Natural Philosophy Called Electricity, Accompanied with Lectures on the Nature and Properties of Electric Fire* (New York, 1765); Donald G. Morgan, *Justice William Johnson, the First Dissenter* (Columbia, 1954), pp. 3-23.

¹⁹ G.G., Dec. 12, 1768, Jan. 2, 1769.

amples of his art are the prized possessions of many a present day low-country family which traces its forbears to the colonial and Revolutionary periods. He came from Switzerland about 1739 and commenced practicing his craft in Charleston a year later. From then onward, he illuminated books, parchment, and script. In his portraits the coloring is considered excellent; but, typical of the colonial artist, his work is primitive and his figures stiff, though he was trained in the early Northern school. His portraits of women represent his best style. He excelled in depicting their fine laces and draperies.²¹

The last group of industrial artists are the builders—carvers, plasterers, carpenters, bricklayers, and similar tradesmen. Housecarpenters and bricklayers often worked as architects—a profession not so well developed and organized then as now. Samuel Cardy, architect of famous St. Michael's Church, had as contemporary housewrights, John and Peter Horlbeck, Timothy Crosby, and Daniel Cannon—all of whom were, incidentally, decided rebels. Carpenters were very numerous and, like the tailors, united in 1782 to form the Carpenters' Society. They were also accused of raising the prices of their labor and materials to take advantage of the post-war boom in the reconstruction of plantation and town houses.²²

Men like these built the Exchange, an excellent example of colonial architecture, the Miles Brewton House (the Heyward Washington House), several churches, and various other landmarks of Charleston past and present. For example, in the case of the State House, undergoing construction on the eve of the revolt and a source of great artistic pride to Revolutionary Charlestonians, after the ordinary bricklayers, carpenters, joiners, and plasterers were dismissed, the artists went to work. The gilder, one Thomas Bernard, executed the King's arms, while Thomas Wooten carefully carved sixteen Corinthian columns in the Council Chamber. Similarly, some unknown artist planned and constructed the home of the rich merchant, Miles Brewton. Here, Ezra Waite, contracted as a carver but advertised as a joiner, civil architect,

²¹ *The Charleston Yearbook for 1899* (Charleston, 1899), appendix, pp. 141-142, 145-146; Margaret Simons Middleton, *Jeremiah Theus, Colonial Artist of Charlestown* (Columbia, 1953).

²² *C.J.*, Oct. 20, 1767; *S.C.G.*, Feb. 7, 1765; Rose, *loc. cit.*, Part II, 128; Prime, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222; House Journal, 1765-1768, p. 527, Feb. 23, 1768, p. 656, April 7, 1768; Albert Simons and Charles Lapham, Jr., *The Octagon Library of Early American Architecture, Charleston, South Carolina* (New York, 1927), p. 19; *South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser*, Oct. 18, 25, Nov. 4, 22, 1783, Feb. 28, 1784; *Rules of the Charleston Carpenters' Society . . .* (Charleston, 1805); *G.S.S.C.*, May 12, 1777, Oct. 8, 23, 1783.

and general housewright, worked the Ionic entablature, the carvings in front and around the eaves, the decorations in the principal rooms, and all the tabernacle frames except those in the dining room. A true artist, he guarded his reputation jealously, for when a rival claimed that Waite had not done the work, the latter exploded in his advertisement in the *Gazette* with an offer of one hundred guineas to anyone who could verify the statement of his competitor, for he knew certainly no one could.²³

The architectural styles of public buildings were Georgian, and their woodwork displayed the Chippendale mode of carving with skillfully blended Chinese and rococo motifs. For ordinary dwellings, the builders generally adopted the house-plan of northern Europe, but made it more suitable to the semi-tropical climate. In imitation of those of the old country, Charleston homes had thick walls of brick, which incidentally were manufactured locally; but piazzas were added for relief from torrid weather. Often town houses were characterized by wrought iron balconies after those of the West Indies. The relatively low price of town property permitted another alteration, in the shape of rambling servants' quarters, kitchens, and stables. Not infrequently nature added to the general effect, as flower and vegetable gardens were planted, even in the midst of town.²⁴

Thus did the mechanic enrich the life of Charleston and its environs. To say that the arts were undeveloped is ridiculous. Had such a claim been made of the Charleston mechanic of this era, it would surely have produced a denouncement such as an Ezra Waite or a Richard Magrath could handily deliver. The mechanic-artist even showed tendencies toward founding a Charleston style; such was the case with the builders, some cabinetmakers like Elfe, ironwrights like Johnson, painters like Theus, and silversmiths like Petrie or Sarrazin. They performed in the same manner as Englishmen generally, but a new environment was evolving innovations.

III

THE MECHANICS IN BUSINESS

As the small businessmen of the colonial and Revolutionary periods, the mechanics may be divided into two classifications. One was the manufacturing shopkeepers, like the saddlers, cabinetmakers, and shoe-

²³ *C.J.*, August 22, 1769.

²⁴ *S.C.G.*, July 12, 1773; Simons and Lapham, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-23; Julia Cherry Spruill, "Southern Houses before the Revolution," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XII (Oct. 1935), 329.

makers, who fashioned wares and placed them directly on sale at the shop. Rarely did they sell to merchants of the town who, as in England, then resold elsewhere. Charleston makers of goods, with the exception of tanners, chandlers, and coopers, did not usually export nor—like the Philadelphia or New York artisans—enter the coastal trade. The other mechanics, though masters, were essentially laborers. These included such groups as carpenters, bricklayers, carvers, joiners, and tinsmiths. They did not keep shop, except as headquarters for an extensive establishment—for example, a master housewright or ship-builder.

Two business forms were employed, the sole proprietorship and the partnership. Almost invariably the former was used, but it was not uncommon for the mechanic to take in a partner, by which means additional capital, a good name, or skill was gained, or perhaps a competitor eliminated. Such must have been the case in the partnership of John Fisher and Thomas Elfe. Elfe was one of the opulent mechanics of Charleston, who loaned money at interest. Some of the most prominent inhabitants, including the artisans, were indebted to him. Another partnership combining skills was that of Edward Weyman, a glazier and upholsterer, and John Carne, who advertised himself as a cabinet and chairmaker. An advertisement of the painter Hawes, the wheelwright, Laughton, and the coachmaker Bookless, refers to a "Company of Coachmakers." But this was not a company in the modern sense. The three were merely partners, the establishment unincorporated, and probably only skill the chief offerings of the trio. By means of the newly joined company, they write:

They can now advertise the publick, that they have brought all branches of the coach making business to such perfection, as not to exceed in quality the materials, goodness of the work or neatness, by any importation; so that they can make and finish, without any assistance, out of their own shop all sorts of Coaches, Chariots, Phaeton, Post Chaises, Landau, Currices, Sedans, Sleighs, in the most complete and elegant manner, and afford them at more reasonable rates that can be imported. . . .²⁵

There were no business corporations in Charleston. However, mechanics in the same trade and with similar economic interests united.

²⁵ Rose, *loc. cit.*, Part II, 184; Burton, "Thomas Elfe", pp. 11-12; S.C.G., Aug. 25, 1764, Aug. 17, 1765; Thomas Elfe Account Book, Ms, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston. A brief description of a partnership, Kensie Burden and Richard Muncrief, joiners and carpenters, in Gregorie, *op. cit.*, pp. 608, 613, 616, 617; G.G., Nov. 14, 1766.

The tailors combined in 1760, and the Grand Jury complained that Negro apprentice chimney sweeps had joined together to raise their wages. The latter probably represents one of America's oldest labor unions, but unfortunately nothing more is known about it than the Jury's grievance. After the Revolution, the Carpenters', the Barbers', and the Master Coopers' Societies were formed, and in 1794 various tradesmen began the Mechanics' Society, which admitted "any number of free white Mechanics, Manufacturers, and Handicraftsmen." These organizations tried to increase their wages or the prices of their wares, for which the legislature was reluctant to incorporate them. Only when it was convinced that they were not combinations for "forestalling and monopoly" and were benevolent and charitable societies were charters granted. Thus were the Master Tailors' and the Mechanics' Societies finally incorporated, the first in 1784, the other at its inception.²⁶

The mechanic of this day was ambitious, ever watchful of his interests, and always ready to improve and extend them. Sometimes his shop was the center of several activities which had nothing whatever to do with his trade but gave additional income. Thomas Nightingale, advertised as a saddler, serves as a case in point. He augmented his earnings by keeping a race track at which was run the "Mechanicks Purse," and prizes were also awarded for the fastest mounts owned by planters and merchants. Besides this, Nightingale also conducted cock fights, loaned money at interest, auctioneered, rented wagons for carting, "entertained Indians" for the province. A shop was also a family concern. For example, when Edward Weyman became immersed in Revolutionary politics, his wife conducted business as usual. Upon the illness of the blacksmith Bricken, his wife continued his work. As proof that not all of the mechanic businesses remained small, there were from time to time notices in the gazettes offering to bring to date and balance the books of tradesmen as well as merchants.²⁷

As with all colonists, land was the chief investment. If the artisan was only fairly prosperous, he speculated in town lots—often to a fault during the Revolution, when property changed hands repeatedly because of inflation. But if the mechanic were more cautious, he built

²⁶ S.C.G. Nov, 5, 1763; *Rules of the Carpenters' Society*; petitions of the Master Tailors; of the Barbers', of the Coopers', of the Mechanics' Societies, MSS, S.C.A.D.; *Constitution of the Mechanics' Society* (Charleston, 1811); *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, Thomas Cooper and David McCord, eds., 10 vol. (Columbia, 1836-1841), VII, 247, 336, 364.

²⁷ S.C.G., April 12, Oct. 15, 1763; Jan. 28, Feb. 25, 1764; House Journal 1764, p. 40, May 25, 1764; C.J., Dec. 15, 1767; Mar. 22, April 5, 1768; G.G., April 26, Oct. 28, 1774; Cooper and McCord, *op. cit.*, IV, 142; G.S.S.C., May 6, 1784.

on his land and rented the buildings. Buying plantations was also common among the artisans. Such a purchase was sound not only monetarily but also socially, affording entrance into the planter class, the pinnacle of Southern society.²⁸

Shipowning was another avenue of investment. To illustrate, Benjamin Hawes and George Flagg, the painters, bought a fifteen-ton vessel in 1763 with which to enter the West Indian trade in rice. Another of several shipowners was Walter Mansell, who with George Sheed, a plumber, acquired a sixty-five-ton vessel. They operated with such success that they rose to the rank of merchants. When the economy became rocky during the war, Jonathan Sarrazin quit silversmithing and with his son, Edward, used his ship to eke out a living. The examples of shipbuying were by no means few.²⁹

In his shop the artisan employed apprentices. These supplied him with cheap labor for at least four years, and each apprentice brought a fee of £ 20 sterling, in payment for which he was faithfully taught the craft. Apprenticeship had its disadvantages, however. As a worker the apprentice was but an irresponsible learner, usually beginning training at the ages of twelve to fourteen years. He found the town gaming houses more intriguing than the shop, and so pressing was this problem that in 1762 the legislature acted to prevent "excessive gaming" of servants, apprentices, and journeymen. By the frequency of such notices in the gazettes, runaways also plagued masters. Weyman, the glazier, once advertised in disgust for the return of a persistent perambulator: "Whoever shall deliver him to the master, shall receive a reward of Two Large Hand Fulls of Pine Shavings for their trouble."³⁰

Use was made of indented servants. Evidently these repeated all the woes of apprentices—running away, idleness, stealing, and whatnot. But often the "servant man" was as skilled as the master himself and having availed himself of one or more, the master might advertise that he had added another "branch" to his shop. For example, Alexander Learmouth, a tanner, boasted that since he had supplied himself with

²⁸ Sellers, *op. cit.*, p. 58; *South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser*, July 27, 1784; Burton, "Thomas Elfe," p. 10; Charleston Wills; Burton, *South Carolina Silversmiths*, pp. 12-210; *C.J.*, Sept. 1, 1767; *G.G.*, Dec. 5, 1768; "Letters to General Greene and Others," *S.C.H.M.*, XVI (Jan., 1916), 10.

²⁹ Ship Register, 1765-1774.

³⁰ See numerous advertisements concerning apprentices in the Charleston newspapers of the period; also, Burton, "Thomas Elfe," p. 11; Cooper and McCord, *op. cit.*, III, 544-546, IV, 158-161; *S.C.G.*, Sept. 27, 1768; Will of Robert Cripps, tailor, Ms, South Caroliniana Library.

tanners and curriers from England, he could sell leather cheaper than any yet done. The servant, like the apprentice, was impermanent and after his period of service, about five to seven years, departed. He then could, and frequently did, become his master's competitor.³¹

Journeymen and masters lacking tools or wealth to enter trade on their own account were also hired. One master often employed another, for there existed no agency, such as a guild, to set standards of workmanship or the rank of artisans. The customer determined quality and capital, rank. As soon as the free laborer saved sufficient funds, he began his own enterprise, making free labor so scarce that the newspapers record tradesmen sending as far as England to engage experienced workmen.³²

Because of this apparent scarcity of labor, and its instability, the artisan resorted to slavery. He gained from this system permanent workers whose wages and skill belonged to the owner. Among the numerous slave-holding artisans was Thomas Elfe, whose account book illustrates the system. Elfe kept six slaves valued at £ 2,250 sterling. They were trained as housepainters, cabinetmakers, and carpenters for use in the shop and for hire by town and countrymen. Elfe's income from the latter employment amounted to £ 632:16:2 in 1768, £ 405:19:00 in 1769, and £ 279, in 1770.³³

His is not the only example. A court record indicates that Nathaniel Scott, a carpenter and housewright, used himself, some white carpenters, and his Negroes Ben, Cudgoe, and Harry in building for one of the townsmen. David Saylor, the cooper, worked as many as thirty slaves in his packing house. At one time Hawes entered a typical advertisement in the *Gazette*, saying that he could undertake any job of house painting by the use of his white apprentices and Negroes. In 1785 a visitor to the city commented, though in somewhat exaggerated terms: "I have seen tradesmen go through the city followed by a negro carrying their tools—Barbers who are supported in idleness and ease by their negroes who do the business; and in fact many of the mechanics bear nothing more of their trade than the name."³⁴

³¹ For advertisements of indented servants, see *C.J.*, Oct. 24, Sept. 30, 1766; *G. G.*, Jan. 8, Feb. 12, Mar. 18, 1768.

³² See for example, Thomas Elfe Account Book; also S. McKee, Jr., *Labor in Colonial New York* (New York, 1935), p. 22.

³³ Thomas Elfe Account Book.

³⁴ Judgment Book, 1767-1768, pp. 224-226; David Saylor Receipt Book; *Heads of Families*, 1790; *S.C.G.*, Dec. 3, 1764; Joseph W. Barnwell, "Diary of Timothy Ford, 1785-1786," *S.C.H.M.*, XIII. (July, 1912), 142. See also Marcus W. Jernegan, "Slavery and the Beginnings of Industrialism in the American Colonies," *American Historical Review*, XXV (Jan. 1920), 220-240.

The census of 1790 listed 1,933 heads of families in Charleston, of whom 1,247 owned one or more slaves. Of the 79 mechanics who left wills between 1760 and 1785, 37 specifically mentioned ownership of slaves. Of the 194 artisans who worked during these years and who could be identified in the census of 1790 there were 159 slave-holders. In other words, the percentage of slave-holders stood at 80% of the total number. Slaves were trained for sale to the planters or townsmen at great profit. Sometimes he was chattel kept as a legacy for the family. In case of the death of the master, the negro became the wage earner or maintained the shop while some member of the family supervised the business, as was very probably the case with the lady blacksmith, Sarah Bricken.³⁵

Thus were the tradesmen of Charleston saddled with slavery. They were not happy with it and found that "jobbing Negroes" worked at low rates for some non-artisan townman, merchant, or planter, at times making employment scarce for whites. They had fashioned their own dilemma, however. Journeymen and poor masters hated the system more than the shop-keeping tradesman. It meant for labor only ruinous competition and low wages. In 1796, after the incorporation of the city, free labor secured a law to force masters to employ at least one white apprentice or journeyman for every four Negroes; yet the have-nots displayed human inconsistency. Upon acquiring enough capital to set up for themselves, they joined the slaveholders with a purchase or two. Such was the condition of Southern society.³⁶

Mercantilism aided many groups of mechanics. Hemp makers were given British bounties, and coopers were subsidized. Manufactories of potash were assisted by the removal of duties on the product upon its importation to Great Britain. The London Society of Arts also aided the fertilizer makers. Shipbuilders and those who produced naval stores were encouraged by the Empire with grants of money.³⁷

On the other hand, the spirit of mercantilism was an absolute discouragement to the artisan who competed with his counterpart in England. Artisans of Charleston daily saw English-made furniture,

³⁵ *Heads of Families*, 1790; pp. 38-44; Charleston Wills; Inventories to the Charleston Wills, S.C.A.D.

³⁶ Yates Snowden, "Labor organizations in South Carolina," *Bulletin of the University of South Carolina*, No. 38, Part IV (July, 1914), pp. 5-9. Senate Journal, 1783, Ms, S.C.A.D., p. 189, Feb. 22, 1783. Alexander Edwards, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston* (Charleston, 1802), 164; Jernegan, *loc. cit.*, 220-240.

³⁷ House Journal, 1765-1768, p. 348, April 8, 1767; 1772-1775, p. 204, Feb. 14, 1775. See for example, the tax act of 1764 in Cooper and McCord, *op. cit.*, IV, 200-206; Clark, *op. cit.*, I, 24, 25, 33, 36.

silver, guns, iron, coaches, saddles, and shoes unloaded at their port for sale to the provincials. English merchants consistently flooded the market with wares, thereby depriving Charleston artisans of customers and profits. Indeed, at times they were the forgotten men of the colony as their manufactures were passed over for English importations.

There were no laws passed by Parliament directly to curtail their manufacturing. The Hat Act did not, for example, immediately affect them, nor did the Iron Act. There is no record of a hatter in Charleston, and there was only one manufactory of iron, in York County, which was in a very poor condition. But the attitude which brought about such acts, the favoritism shown for Englishmen over Americans by the Parliament, did not sit well with the mechanics.³⁸

The Charleston artisan, mainly interested in the invasion of the local market by English mechanics, was very favorably disposed toward the boycotts and embargoes erected on the eve of the Revolution. Such antimercantilistic weapons brought the mechanic new and willing customers. The phrases in so many Charleston newspaper advertisements, "as good as imported", "as cheap as imported", were not written idly; these were aimed at England.

Monetary difficulties were also the result of the imperial system, affecting every mechanic industry. In general, acting in the role of creditor to the colonies, the British consistently tried to keep the value of money at a high level, forbidding or only grudgingly assenting to issues of Carolina paper money. The province employed the subterfuge of issuing certificates or bills of credit, to be used for the payment of taxes only but which circulated readily. When the province spent heavily, as during the war with France, money was plentiful and times were good. Correspondingly when less was spent and a large number of certificates were retired, times were exceedingly bad. Debtors and creditors were at one another's throats.³⁹

The mechanics and planters were in agreement over the merits of cheap money, which they wanted for buying tools, materials, and labor, and for expansion and payment of debts. On the other side, the merchants, being creditors, naturally leaned toward the hard-money policies of the British and were for this reason very hesitant to move

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 14-24; S.C.G., Jan. 21, 28, May 17, 1778. Burton thinks that the cabinetmakers were not hindered by English importations, since these goods took up too much space aboard the small vessels of the day: "The Furniture of Charleston," 44-45; John B. Pearse, *A Concise History of Iron Manufacture of the American Colonies* (Philadelphia, 1878), p. 94.

³⁹ See tax acts in Cooper and McCord, *op. cit.*, III, IV.

against the crown on the eve of the war. They carried on little or no clandestine trade, unlike their brothers in New England, and were only mildly annoyed at the political harpies, the customs collectors, who descended on their port as a result of the acts of trade of the 1760's.⁴⁰

But there were occasions when the mechanics could sympathize with the advocates of hard money, for they too were sellers of wares and services. During difficult times, unable to collect their dues from the planters, they were in turn squeezed by the merchants from whom they had purchased materials or borrowed money. At such times a mechanic might call "to those who have open accounts with him, to discharge the same immediately, else, when the courts open, their neglect may prove fatal to him," or as Sarrazin, the silversmith, warned his debtors, not to "take it amiss if I call often upon them, as I must keep up my credit." He added: "my worthy friends must also consider that the sun is very hot to walk in . . . I spend more time in collecting . . . money than earning it."⁴¹

IV

THE MECHANICS IN REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

Before the Revolution, the mechanics were apparently contented with their political situation in provincial society. To translate economic and social desires into legislative action, they employed the petition or the ballot. Most of them were property owners, and the suffrage act of 1721 required merely the ownership of 50 acres of land or the payment of 20 shillings taxes in currency in order to vote. They also used the Grand Juries of the two parishes which made up the town, St. Philip's and St. Michael's, to make their sentiments more directly known to the Commons House of the Assembly.

They also played a minor role in parochial affairs. As elected Anglican vestrymen together with two wardens, always planters and merchants, they oversaw the orphanage, pest house, the parish schools, and the securing of clergymen. Artisans served in the fire department, such as it was, and frequently performed as constables. Sometimes one was appointed by the Commons House as a wood and coal measurer of the market.⁴²

⁴⁰ Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina under the Royal Government, 1719-1776*. (New York, 1899), pp. 409-412.

⁴¹ *C.J.*, Jan. 21, April 1, 1766.

⁴² Cooper and McCord, *op. cit.*, III, 135-140; *S.C.G.*, Feb. 7, April 18, 1771, May 17, Oct. 31, 1774.

But no mechanic ever sat in the Commons House of Assembly representing the town and their interests, even though many could meet the necessary property qualifications. Before the Revolution, in aristocratic British and Charleston society they were regarded as socially inferior to merchants and planters and unfit to manage affairs of state. The attitude of William Drayton was typical: mechanics were "a useful and essential part of society . . . but every man to his trade: a carpenter would find himself put in an awkward situation on a cobbler's bench. When a man acts in his own sphere, he is useful in the community, but when he steps out of it, and sets up for a statesmen [*sic*], believe me he is in a fair way to expose himself to ridicule. . . ." ⁴³

And on the very eve of the Revolution, the assistant rector of St. Michael's church declared from the pulpit that "every silly Clown, and illiterate Mechanic [takes it upon himself] to censure the conduct of his Prince and Governor, and contribute, as much as in him lies, to create and foment those misunderstandings which . . . come at last to end in Schisms in the Church, and sedition and rebellion in the State . . . There is no greater Instrument or Ornament of Peace then for every man to keep his own rank, and to do his own duty in his own station . . .," all of which created an uproar leading to the minister's dismissal.⁴⁴

Lower class though they were, the mechanics became more articulate during the years of revolution. In 1762, the upholsterer Edward Weyman founded the Fellowship Society, a benevolent organization chiefly composed of mechanics and concerned with building a hospital and other charitable works. Although the founders were the very same group who supported Gadsden at the time of the Stamp Act, no political pronouncements emanated from the society—at least nothing like this is contained in the earliest records of the organization. Yet to conclude that not a word of politics was uttered in their meetings would be unwise. The founder was one of the leading radical townsmen. Later in the 1760's, merchants of more conservative temperament gained

⁴³ *Ibid.*, April 11, 1774; Edson L. Whitney, "Government of the Colony of South Carolina," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* (Baltimore, 1895), pp. 69-73, 73-74, 80-81; Cooper and McCord, *op. cit.*, III, 544; William Henry Drayton, *Letters of Freeman* (London, 1771), p. 61.

⁴⁴ Frederick Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina* (Charleston, 1820), pp. 200-203; George W. Williams, *St. Michael's Charleston* (Columbia, 1951), pp. 29, 33-38, 312.

admittance, but by then the mechanics appear prominently in such revolutionary societies as the John Wilkes Club or the Palmetto Society.⁴⁵

The mechanics vigorously opposed the Stamp Act. It was at this time that they cemented an alliance with Christopher Gadsden (the first man in the province to advocate independence), which lasted until 1778, when he broke with them for their continued rioting and other disturbances.⁴⁶

That they were enthusiastic followers of the program of the radicals of New England was reflected by Gadsden when he wrote Sam Adams that during the early days of the revolt many Charlestonians looked upon the "New England States with a kind of Horror, as artful designing Men altogether pursuing selfish purposes." "How often", he related, "I stood up in their Defence and only wish'd we would imitate instead of abusing them. . . . I thank'd God we had such a Systematical Body of men as an Assylum that honest men might resort to in the Time of their last Distress, supposing them driven out of their own States. I bless'd God there was such a People in America. That for my part I never look upon any danger from them . . ." ⁴⁷

In 1768, the mechanics supported John Wilkes for his *North Britain* No. 45 and the ninety-two anti-rescindors of Massachusetts Bay for their resistance to Royal authority. At a meeting which has been described as America's earliest political convention, they chose their political candidates for the Commons House, Gadsden among those selected, and then in the words of Peter Timothy, the rebel editor of the *South Carolina Gazette*: ⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Rules of the Fellowship Society, 1762; Minute Book of the Fellowship Society, 1769-1779; Treasurers Account Book, 1774-1815, MSS, Fellowship Society Building, Charleston. Edward McCrady, *Education in South Carolina prior to and during the Revolution* (Charleston, 1883), p. 33; Wallace, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155; *South Carolina Weekly Gazette*, May 10, June 28, July 5, Sept. 20, 1783; *South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser*, June 2, 1784; G.S.S.C., May 12, June 30, 1777.

⁴⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1928-1944); *South Carolina Miscellany*, MSS, Presbyterian College; William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 2 vol. (New York, 1802), I, 14; *Journal of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina, 1776*, J. Almon, ed. (London, 1776). Other artisans seated in the Provincial Congress were Peter Timothy, printer of the *South Carolina Gazette*, Cato Ash, carpenter, Theodore Trezavant, tailor, Mark Morris, house-painter, John and Simon Berwick, shoemakers, Joshua Lockwood, jeweler and watch-maker, Anthony Toomer, carpenter, Joseph Veree, carpenter, James Brown, carpenter.

⁴⁷ Christopher Gadsden to Sam Adams, April 4, 1779, Ms, Bancroft Collection, New York Public Library.

⁴⁸ S.C.G., Oct. 3, 1768.

. . . the company partook of a plain and hearty entertainment, that had been provided by some upon whom this assembly will reflect lasting honour. About 5 O'Clock they all removed to a most noble LIVE OAK, in Mr. Mazyck's pasture, which they formally dedicated to LIBERTY, where many loyal, patriotic, and constitutional toasts were drank, beginning with the glorious NINETY-TWO Anti-Rescindors of Massachusetts-Bay, and ending with, unanimity among the members of our ensuing Assembly not to rescind from the said resolutions [to boycott England], each succeeded by three huzzas. In the evening, the tree was decorated with 45 lights, and 45 sky-rockets were fired. About 8 O'Clock, the whole company, preceded by 45 of their number, marched in regular procession to town, down King-street and Broad-street, to Mr. Robert Dillon's tavern; where the 45 lights being placed upon the table, with 45 bowls of punch, 45 bottles of wine, and 92 glasses, they spent a few hours in a new round of toasts, among which, scarce a celebrated Patriot of Britain or America was omitted; and preserving the same good order and regularity as had been observed throughout the day, at 10 they retired.

As indicated in the above, they were the first party to take steps against the Townshend Acts. Their influence grew as America and Britain moved toward war. So great had their power grown in 1769 that they were given equal representation with the planters and merchants when thirteen mechanics were elected to the Committee of Enforcement of the boycott. During this struggle they were adamant proponents of action prohibiting importation of British manufactures. When the merchants offered a program of non-importation which did not contain this prohibition, it drew the prompt response of: "A Mechanic": "How can it be expected, that any Planter, Mechanic, or other inhabitant . . . will subscribe to their Resolution . . . when THEY do not contain a single syllable *Encouraging American Manufactures.*" The mechanics, with Gadsden's assistance, finally won their point at a meeting of the inhabitants under "Liberty Tree," and a non-importation program was accepted which satisfied them.⁴⁹

In 1775, with the colonies on the brink of war, and a British task force lying off Charleston harbor, the provincial radicals hoped to provoke attack. Two Tories were tarred and feathered by a mob turned loose by the rebellious aristocrat William Henry Drayton and upholsterer Edward Weyman. Gunner Walker of the British army received a "suit of Cloathes . . . without the assistance of a single Taylor," and as the mob carted its victim through the streets of the city, as a warning to everyone of royalist leaning, it passed by the Governor's house. There a

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, July 6, 13, 27, 1769.

bag of feathers was tossed to his balcony, and the mob "desired he would take care of it till his turn came." The unfortunate Gunner was forced to drink "Damnation to Lord North" with grog demanded of the chief magistrate. Walker was afterwards deposited at the door of his Majesty's surgeon general to Carolina forces, one Dr. Johnston-Milligan who had been pressed to declare his loyalty to the Americans by Weyman, Cannon, Johnson, and the carpenter, Fullerton.⁵⁰ Artisans were also prominent in attacking the royal arsenals.⁵¹

Why were the mechanics so enthusiastic in the cause of independence? In 1769, Gadsden answered this question: ⁵²

There are not wanting wealthy men amongst the . . . mechanics; yet in common their circumstances are but low; and opporession, when at its height, generally falls heaviest upon men, who have little beforehand, but depend, almost altogether upon their daily labour and industry, for the maintenance of themselves and families; it is no wonder, that throughout America, we find these men extremely anxious and attentive to the cause of liberty.

He continued that there was in America no great danger of starvation and that the mechanic here finds himself in a more comfortable situation than his European counterpart. "The distinctions . . . between the farmer and the rich planter, the mechanic and the rich merchant, being abundantly *more* here in imagination, than reality," but

When oppression stalks abroad, then the case is widely different: For in arbitrary governments, tyranny generally descends, as it were, from rank to rank, through the people, til' almost the whole weight of it, at last, falls upon the honest, laborious farmer, mechanic, and day labourer. When this happens, it must make them poor indeed! And the very apprehension thereof, can not but cause extreme uneasiness. This, therefore, naturally accounts for these people, in particular, being united and steady, everywhere to prevent, if possible, being reduced to so dismal a situation: Which should it be unhappily the case, they can not but know, they must then see it out, and feel it out too, be it what may.

It was not entirely a question of forestalling poverty that motivated the ambitious Revolutionary mechanic, particularly the master. He

⁵⁰ John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 2 vol. (Charleston, 1821), I, 273-274, 285-286, 300-302. Joseph W. Barnwell, "Correspondence of Arthur Middleton," *S.C.H.M.*, XXVII (July, 1926), 126-127, 129; *Colonial South Carolina*, Chapman J. Milling, ed., *South Caroliniana No. 1*, R. L. Meriwether, ed. (Columbia, 1951), pp. xix-xxi.

⁵¹ J. Drayton, *op. cit.*, I, 221-225; Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences* . . . (Charleston, 1851), p. 44.

⁵² *S.C.G.*, Nov. 9, 1769.

wanted his man in the Assembly; this he won. When the first Provincial Congress convened, George Flagg, William Johnson, Edward Weyman, and Daniel Cannon were therein seated, active in guiding the rebellion with radical planters and merchants. He desired "encouragement" for his manufactures. This he achieved in the form of a tax exemption on his profits in trade.⁵³ The Revolution, it seemed to him, eliminated his overseas rival in London, Glasgow, Manchester, and other English cities. In later years, he found himself again forgotten, as cotton tied the South to the factories of England. But during the Confederation, the Charleston mechanic identified himself with fellow artisans in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York in their intensive program for the support of manufactures, just as he had agreed with the associations emanating from those cities on the eve of the war.⁵⁴ In 1788, at the ratifying convention for the Constitution, the delegates Johnson, Cannon, and Sarrazin voted for the Constitution. One suspects they were as favorably disposed toward tariffs as Hamilton himself.⁵⁵

Thus were the Charleston mechanics a very important element. To the economy and to society in general, they were essential, and in the history of the period they are significant.

⁵³ Cooper and McCord, *op. cit.*, IV, 729, V, 25, 58, 130, 150, *et passim*.

⁵⁴ In 1783, Ann Timothy, her husband now dead, reprinted an article from the *Pennsylvania Journal* stating that manufacturing should be encouraged by the passage of the general duty law, G.S.S.C., Nov. 6, 1783; other articles in *South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser*, Aug. 23, Sept. 8, 1785; *Columbian Herald and Patriotic Curier of North America*, Sept. 19, 1785; *Charleston Evening Gazette*, Aug. 15, 1785.

⁵⁵ *Debates . . . in the House of Representatives of South Carolina on the Constitution of the United States . . . Notices of the Convention* (Charleston, 1831), pp. 380, 398.