

University of North Carolina at Asheville

“A Traitor That Should Have Been Ousted Earlier?” Tench Coxe and his Land
Speculation in Early America

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By

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Four hundred thousand acres of land.¹ Two million, four hundred and seventy thousand dollars. That's how much it would be today, the amount of money that Tench Coxe made by the buying and selling of the Speculation Lands; two million, four hundred thousand and seventy thousand dollars, five times his original investment.² Tench Coxe made most of his wealth and influenced North Carolina mainly through his role in helping to found what came to be known as the "Speculation Land Company." From descriptions of his friends and colleagues, as well as the conclusions of more recent authors, it becomes clear that Coxe had something of a mania about acquiring land; it was because of this mania that he went to the brink of bankruptcy several times, barely escaping with his land holdings (mostly) intact.³ By examining other contemporaries of Tench Coxe, as well as secondary source material dealing with the larger issue of land speculation, "colonial America's most popular game," a fuller understanding of the motives of Tench Coxe, and what drove him to such economic recklessness can be achieved, and needs to be achieved. Tench Coxe has influenced the lives of many who now live in Western North Carolina, by helping to create lasting settlement patterns throughout the early colonial period.⁴ It seems clear that, for Coxe, land speculation was not just a means to an end to obtain wealth or fulfill an ancient dream, but to allow for the

¹For primary source records of Tench Coxe's land holdings, as well as locations, see *Speculation Lands Collection*, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville, 28804, M2003.3.1, Series 1.

²For currency conversion, see Economic History Services, "What is its Relative Value?" n.d., <<http://eh.net/hmit/compare>> (28 April 2003) for currency conversions from 1789 to the present day. See also Lynn Roundtree, Appraiser's Report, *The Robbins Collection of Speculation Land Company Records*, June 2002, 3.

³For an excellent examination of early American land speculation, along with recommended norms of behavior for the land speculator, see Daniel Friedenberg, *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Land: the Plunder of Early America* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992).

⁴For an interesting discussion of the long-term effects of early land speculation, see Paul Wallace Gates "Role of the Land Speculator in Western Development," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History*, 66 (1942), 314-321, see also Wilma Dunaway, "Speculators and Settler Capitalists: Unlocking the Mythology About Appalachian Landholding, 1790-1860," In *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 50-63.

development and strengthening of the country that he devoted much of his life to making strong and successful.

Although Coxe was an influential figure in the direction of the early American nation, as well as knowing many more famous individuals who also fit that title, secondary source work on Coxe is mainly limited to two books. Jacob E. Cooke's *Tench Coxe and the Early Republic*, as well as Harold E. Hutcheson's *Tench Coxe: A Study in American Economic Development* constitute the backbone of secondary research on Tench Coxe.⁵ However, these books approach Coxe in different ways: the Hutcheson book looks at Tench Coxe more through his economic views and writings, specifically emphasizing Coxe's interest in cotton and other manufacturing interests.⁶ Cooke deals with Coxe very much as an active political figure, and with good reason.⁷ Although his name is not taught in elementary schools, Coxe worked with many people who shaped early America in profound and more well-known ways, such as Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison. Again, Cooke approaches Coxe more from the political angle and does not deal very much with his land speculation or economic views. When Cooke and Hutcheson do deal with Coxe's land speculation, they refer to his family history.⁸

⁵Cooke has published a number of articles on Coxe, before writing *Tench Coxe and the Early Republic*. See Jacob Cooke, "The Collaboration of Tench Coxe and Thomas Jefferson," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 100, (1976), 468-490. See also Jacob Cooke, "Tench Coxe, American Economist: The Limitations of Economic Thought in the Early Nationalist Era," *Pennsylvania History*, 42, (1975), 267-289. See also Jacob Cooke, "Tench Coxe, Alexander Hamilton, and the Encouragement of American Manufactures," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 32, (1975), 369-382. See also Jacob Cooke, "Tench Coxe: Tory Merchant," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 96, (1972), 48-88.

⁶Harold Hutcheson, *Tench Coxe: A Study in American Economic Development* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), chps. 3-4.

⁷Jacob Cooke, *Tench Coxe and the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), chps. 4-5.

⁸*Ibid*, chp. 1-2. Hutcheson, Introduction, chp. 1.

Cooke and Hutcheson attempt to use this family history to explain Coxe's atypical economic actions and political views. A critical issue for both authors is that Coxe's great-grandfather, Dr. Daniel Coxe, was granted a royal patent over the lands of "Carolana," and, like Tench, sought to improve life for the people there: "Both dreamed of carving vast empires from the American wilderness and sought to do so with a single-mindedness that bordered on mania. Both secured hundreds of thousands of acres of virgin land and, unable to resist the urge to buy still more, jeopardized peace of mind and material comfort by yielding to expansion."⁹ For Hutcheson and Cooke, it was this acquisition of royal lands by Coxe's great-grandfather that influenced Coxe and assisted him in developing his own appetite for land speculation, even though any personal use of the land itself would be difficult, because of the large amount of land involved.¹⁰ Both Hutcheson and Cooke seem to overemphasize the effect of Coxe's great-grandfather's land claims in shaping his later land speculation. They seem to focus on general comments dealing with land speculation similar to those provided by Friedenbergs, yet then speak of the Coxe family history, without necessarily connecting the two.

In order to more closely approximate his views, and understand his political writings, it is essential to note that Coxe considered the economic actions of individuals and the larger political scene directly linked; this pattern can also be seen in his own life, with his purchases and organization of the Speculation Land Company. Although it is true that looking at other land speculators, the line between their politics and economic

⁹Cooke, 3. It is important to note that the lands described as "Carolana" included what is now North and South Carolina, if their western borders would be extended to the Pacific Ocean with the north-south borders remaining the same; by any measure, a very significant amount of land. For more information on how Dr. Coxe viewed the lands of Carolana and his attempts to raise interest for these lands, see Daniel Coxe, *The Province of Carolana, by the Spaniards call'd Florida, and by the French La Louisiane, 1772* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1976). This description of the lands of Carolana also includes a map, at the end of the Introduction.

¹⁰Hutcheson, 2, see also Cooke, 11-15.

actions was very thin indeed, with some of them using their political offices to acquire land more easily.¹¹ It would seem to make more sense that, instead of focusing on Coxe's family history, since Coxe thought of himself so much as a political figure, a figure to serve his government, there should be more of a focus on his political views. For Coxe, his personal views on politics and the new American state were more responsible for what a relative two generations removed had done. It certainly seems clear from Coxe's political writings and letters that he associated the strength of the United States with its economy. He further equated economy with manufacturing and industry, since he believed that the United States could not survive as a country "devoted to agriculture."¹² In this way, Tench Coxe can be seen as someone acting out his political principles, through his economic life, in accordance with his ideas on the strength of the United States and the most effective use of its resources.¹³ This interpretation of Coxe fits more with what he actually wrote and felt about land acquisition during the colonial period, in that it should be used by more wealthy individuals primarily to help promote the strength of the newly founded United States. Coxe not only acted out these beliefs in his own private economic actions, but was a prolific writer, urging others to draw the same sort of linkages between politics and economics.

¹¹For excellent summaries of other examples of current land speculators, as well as their use of politics and political office to bring economic success, see Sarah Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* (Richmond: The Virginia Surveyors Foundation, Ltd., 1979), as well as Tom Costa, Paper presented to the Shenandoah Valley Regional Studies Seminar, "Paradise on the Clinch: Land Speculation and the Early Settlement of Russell County," Shenandoah Valley Regional Studies Seminar, 1996, 3.

¹²Tench Coxe, *An essay on the manufacturing interest of the United States: with remarks on some passages contained in the report of the Committee of Commerce and Manufactures / by a member of the Society of Artists and Manufactures of Philadelphia; to which is annexed, the memorial of that Society to Congress* (Hereafter *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*) (Philadelphia, Printed by Bartholomew Graves, 1804), microfilm, Early American Imprints, Second Series, no. 6092, 9.

¹³For Coxe's analysis of the power of economics during war and to strengthen the United States, see Tench Coxe, *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, 7. See also Tench Coxe, *An authentic view of the progress of the state of Pennsylvania: since the establishment of the independence of the United States of America* (Hereafter *An Authentic View*), 10-13.

The academic view of land speculation itself can be divided broadly into two large groups: scholars that believe that, although speculation was exploitative, landowners contributed vital capital to their communities, and helped make development possible. This view was very popular earlier in American history, when land speculation was first beginning in earnest. The second group, in contrast, argues that the policies of large land speculators priced many small speculators or land holders out of the system, by keeping land sale prices artificially high. This first group is classically represented by Frederick Jackson Turner, who argued that expansion of the West, even through land speculation, was necessary to help develop the American consciousness and a national spirit.¹⁴ The second group, represented by Wilma Dunaway, has broken down this thesis, arguing that large land companies and politicians were always much more able to control land out in the West, and the Turnerian concept of “frontier democracy” had never actually existed.¹⁵

Comparing Tench Coxe to other prominent landholders and speculators at the time of the Speculation Land Company make startlingly clear how different Coxe’s actions were than those of the typical land speculator. In particular, Coxe’s desire to hold on to the land would have been surprising to other land speculators.¹⁶ One of Coxe’s dreams was to establish a Southern manufacturing center on his land holdings in Western North Carolina; less altruistic motives can clearly be seen in other individuals that were in the same line of work.¹⁷ For example, Coxe stands clearly opposed to Edmund

¹⁴Gates, 314-319. Although Gates started off as a student of Turner, and believed in the expansion of the American West, Gates eventually differed from Turner on the level of control that individual settlers could have over the whole system. However, his early work echoes many of Turner’s concepts.

¹⁵Dunaway, 60-63.

¹⁶Friedenberg, 14-25.

¹⁷For a treatment of Coxe’s hopes for his lands, see the Lynn Roundtree and Gene Robbins reports, as well as Hutcheson, 21-25.

Pendleton, a wealthy Eastern land speculator active around the same time as Coxe, who “viewed his investment in western lands primarily as a cash-generating vehicle...”¹⁸

Tench Coxe holding his lands for so long set him apart from other, “average” speculators. His more long-term motives also set him apart from other political individuals active in land speculation at the time. Looking at the laws and legal regimes that other land speculators had to operate under help to show the creation of very calculated economic incentives for land speculators not to hold on to the land, to create and run their businesses in ways that were diametrically opposed to Tench Coxe and the Speculation Land Company.

The rather broad topic of land speculation can be approached through an examination of the laws concerning land speculation and sale at the time that Tench Coxe was active. These laws reveal deep societal and economic pressures for quick turnover of the land. Laws concerning land sale in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century made it very easy for one to obtain land; despite the many problems with organized mail service during this time period, most of the relevant paperwork could be processed by mail. Also, the actual signature of the person who was selling the land did not have to be present on the new lease, if it was already on file. This system, usually created by state legislatures, was clearly dominated by individuals of power and landed interest that, in most cases, had held their lands prior to the Revolution and wanted to ensure the potential for expansion after the military hostilities had ended.¹⁹

For excellent summaries of other examples of Coxe’s contemporaries engaged in land speculation, see Hughes, 10-15, as well as A.R. Newsome’s “John Brown’s Journal of Travel in Western North Carolina in 1795,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 11 (1934): 284-313.

¹⁸Costa, 3.

¹⁹For a discussion of land laws around this time period, see Lawrence Friedman, *Law in America: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library), 2002, 3-17. See also Billie McNamara, *Tennessee Land: Its*

One way in which the landed elites maintained control over the newly emerging public lands was to create these laws that allowed for absentee landholding and quick selling of their lands. This system and laws were clearly set up for the rich, because only those individuals with large amounts of liquid capital already available could enter the land market through absentee speculation and other types of land companies. The system helped to perpetuate those individuals that were in power prior to the Revolution, by giving them a first shot at lands that were just becoming open for private sale and use. Another method used was to set up their companies and the level of freedom that the agents for the companies enjoyed in very particular ways.²⁰ Generally, wealthy financiers involved in land companies arranged their charters in such a way that they would be able to fire their agents for not making a high level of profit, regardless of whether or not the market for land was good at the time. This allowed wealthy individuals (often Northern businessmen) to lock out smaller investors and individuals who wanted to own land, by keeping the value of the land high for individual plots, keeping the land within the relatively powerful and privileged class.²¹

A brief biographical sketch of Trench Coxe's life will highlight the many influences upon him, and helps to explain his early political stances and highlight relevant political and economic experiences. Trench Coxe was born in the city of Philadelphia, on May 22, 1755, the second of thirteen children to William and Mary Francis Coxe. The Coxe family's social position in Philadelphia was assured by the fact that Trench's father William was a successful merchant with a partner, Moore Furman.

Early History and Laws (Knoxville, B.R. McNamara), 1996, 2-9. See also Harold Oppenheimer, *Land Speculation: An Evaluation and Analysis* (Danville, Ill.: Interstate Printers and Publishers), 1962, 8-21.

²⁰Friedenberg, 45-58. See also Friedman, 8-11, Cooke, 55-67.

²¹Dunaway, 58-63.

The two men were involved in overseas trade, particularly obtaining raw goods from elsewhere and exporting manufactured or finished goods. Together the two strongly influenced the creation of the New Jersey Society for the Encouragement of Useful Manufactures.²² Coxe followed this particular facet of his father's interests throughout his life by joining numerous social and political groups devoted to philanthropic purposes. He further continued these activities once he became an independent social and political actor.

Coxe seems to have come out on his own into the turbulent Philadelphia political scene in May of 1772, when he became a full partner in his father's firm.²³ However, despite his age, it soon came to be accepted both within the firm and in larger Philadelphian circles that the young Coxe was actually the leader of the firm, since his father was often ill and Furman absent. Soon after this state of affairs became apparent, Coxe became involved in the larger issue of commerce in Philadelphia and was appointed to a standing committee of Philadelphian merchants to deal with such problems.²⁴ This

²²Cooke, 1-4. William Coxe's propensity to form and join community and political organizations as a means to influence and change unfavorable conditions in society does appear to have been passed down to his son. Hutcheson also points out that Coxe later joined the "United Company of Philadelphia for Promoting American Manufactures" (1775), 4, the "Committee of Philadelphia Merchants Interested in Economic Reform (1783), 9, "Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons" (1787), 13, "Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage" (1787), 13, "Philadelphia Society for Political Inquiries" (1787), 14, "Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and Useful Arts" (1787), 15. See also Tench Coxe to Benjamin Rush, January 13, 1788, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=DelVol25.sml&images=images/modeng&data=texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=420&division=div1>> (30 September 2003)

²³Cooke, 12-14.

²⁴This society eventually becomes the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and Useful Arts in 1787, but Coxe still maintains his integral role in the direction of the Society, and remains one of its more active members. See Tench Coxe to Samuel Griffin, December 2, 1783, reprinted in Cooke, 60-63. Although the Revolution had not yet occurred at the time of Coxe first joining the Pennsylvania Society, many colonial merchants were pushing for more open trade between the United States and England, as well as other international markets. There is some indication that Coxe developed and used contacts within the British bureaucracy to make this possible for his and his father's firm. See Hutcheson, 9-13.

committee, the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures, first established in 1768, soon became active in the political scene of Philadelphia as well as the emerging debates on national commerce during this period.²⁵ Coxe considered his membership in this group an important personal contribution, and remained one of its more active members. They eventually succeeded in gaining the passage of several laws that greatly increased the ability of merchants to conduct business.²⁶ The law mentioned in this letter to John Adams allows for any foreigner from a country not at war with the United States, to buy and hold lands in Pennsylvania. This is but the first example of Coxe's wider views about the potential for immigration and settlement of the more interior regions of the United States.²⁷ This helps to highlight another point of view that is critical in understanding why Tench Coxe risked bankruptcy to acquire his lands; he viewed economics and politics as integrally linked; he viewed action in one field requiring action simultaneously in the other field.

How land companies related to their possible sellers and buyers of lands was a way of seeing how those individuals involved in the company dealt with people of lower socioeconomic status. The Speculation Land Company, due to Tench Coxe, dealt with buyers and sellers of land very differently from other land companies active at the time, and helps to highlight the connections between his politics and personal economic choices. The Speculation Land Company was financed by a group of wealthy Northern

²⁵Cooke, 3-14.

²⁶Tench Coxe to John Adams, March 1, 1789, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=DelVol25.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=450&division=div1>> (30 September 2003)

²⁷For further information and clarification upon Coxe's views dealing with immigration and the American economy, see Tench Coxe, *A plan for encouraging agriculture, and increasing the value of farms in the midland and more western counties of Pennsylvania, applicable to several other parts of that state, and to many parts of the United States* (Hereafter *A Plan for Encouraging Agriculture*) (Philadelphia, 1793), microfilm, Early American Imprints, First Series, no. 25355-3-7.

bankers, including William Tilghman, Gold Hoyt, and Isaac Bronson.²⁸ Although this system was not in and of itself unusual, the critical point is that these individuals were relatively aloof from the company, leaving most of the actual running of the company to Coxe. This meant that he, through local agents he would hire on the ground, had much more discretion than was usual for subordinates within land companies. Although the Speculation Land Company still remained a business, where profit was the goal, Coxe could set plat boundaries and sell the lands at whatever price he saw fit. This organizational structure enhanced the opportunities for Coxe to attempt to buy lands for a particular use, instead of just for overwhelming amounts of profit.

Specific actions of Tench Coxe altered how the Speculation Land Company treated its potential clients. The Speculation Land Company as a whole, as well as Tench Coxe personally, maintained extensive correspondence with their land sellers. Such correspondence continued both before and after the sale. From letters written by Coxe, as well as recommendations in his political writings, it seemed that the purpose of this correspondence was to maintain the personal contacts that were first created in their business transactions.²⁹ In several circumstances, correspondence between the

²⁸For more information on these individuals, see “William Tilghman,” *Speculation Lands Collection, (1752-1930)*, n.d., <http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/speculation_lands/biographies/tilghman.htm> (11 November 2003), “Goold Hoyt,” *Speculation Lands Collection, (1752-1930)*, n.d., <http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/speculation_lands/biographies/hoyt.htm> (11 November 2003), “Isaac Bronson,” *Speculation Lands Collection, (1752-1930)*, n.d., <http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/speculation_lands/biographies/bronson.htm> (11 November 2003).

²⁹For a more explicit discussion on his views of the relationship between large land companies and the people they dealt with, see Tench Coxe, *A plan for encouraging agriculture, and increasing the value of farms in the midland and more western counties of Pennsylvania, applicable to several other parts of that state, and to many parts of the United States* (Hereafter *A Plan for Encouraging Agriculture*) (Philadelphia, 1793), microfilm, Early American Imprints, First Series, no. 25355, 3-7. See also Tench Coxe to Thomas Mifflin, February 26, 1789, Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer->

Speculation Land Company and its sellers led to delays in sales so individuals could put their financial affairs in order, and be ready for the sale of their lands.³⁰ For Coxe, the individuals that bought land from him were not simply consumers, but individuals who, in their own way, were contributing to the success and strengthening of the United States. It thus made sense for him to keep in contact with these people, and to treat them with more courtesy than other individuals in land companies, because he viewed their purchase of lands not only in a commercial light, but a larger political and economic one. This marked a clear departure from the “standard” land speculator, in that any correspondence that took place within a more typical land company generally dealt with increasing the number of wealthy backers for the company. Coxe’s actions were quite different, and his political views manifested themselves in how the Speculation Land Company interacted with those it was buying and selling from.

A more detailed and particular examination of Coxe’s economic views also strongly shows that they were inextricably linked with his political views and patriotism, accounting for his unusual behavior in his own business. In *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, as well as *A Memoir on the Subject of a Navigation Act*, along with *Reflexions [sic] on the State of the Union*, Coxe identified the growth of manufacturing with the economic and political security of the United States.³¹ In his

new?id=DelVol25.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=449&division=div1> (2 October 2003).

³⁰For other examples of prominent land companies, see Dennis East, “The New York and Mississippi Land Company and the Panic of 1837,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 33(4) (1971), see also Kevin Graffagnino, “‘The Country My Soul Delighted In’: the Onion River Land Company and the Vermont Frontier,” *The New England Quarterly* 65 (1992): 28-32, see also Charles Royster, *The Fabulous History of the Dismal Swamp Land Company: a Story of George Washington’s Times* (New York: Knopf), 1999.

³¹The full title of the articles dealing with a Navigation Act is Tench Coxe, *A memoir on the subject of a navigation act: including the encouragement of the manufactory of boats, and sea vessels, and*

discussion of the cotton trade with Great Britain, Coxe pointed out that thousands of dollars a year was going to Great Britain to ship American cotton, simply because America has not built up a sufficient naval manufacture to transport its own cotton. Coxe emphasized that “a nation can never be truly free from foreign influence unless it does not require the services of another for its most basic of economic functions.”³² This emphasis on the United States’ economic independence from Great Britain became a recurring theme in Coxe’s political writings, as well as his discussions of economic policy towards Great Britain. He connected this antipathy of economic dependence on Great Britain with a new emphasis on American economic independence; the American government should promote local industries whenever possible, as they were more stable for essential consumer and military goods than foreign trade.

Coxe also pointed out that many indigenous industries within the United States were created because of economic instability, immediately prior to and continuing some time after the Revolutionary War. “During the great war for our Independence the manufacturing potential of this country dramatically increased, and this with the constant threat of destruction over the creators of these vital goods. If only these skills and talents could be molded for times of peace, then the United States would surely be on the best of economic footing.”³³ Here we see again the link for Coxe between the economic development and the political strength of the United States. In fact, we can see that Coxe internalized this linkage not only in his official publications, but in private

the protection of mariners. (Hereafter *A Navigation Act*) (Philadelphia, 1809), microfilm, Early American Imprints, Second Series, no. 18065, 4-10.

³²Coxe, *A Navigation Act*, 8.

³³Coxe, *A View of the United States of America: In A Series of Papers Written at Various Times, Between 1787 and 1794*, (Hereafter referred to as *A View of the United States*) (New York: Reprints of American Classics,) 1965, 2-25.

correspondence. When thanking Alexander Hamilton for his appointment to the assistantship of the Treasury, Coxe wrote: “I write to you, sir, with the deepest respect and admiration for your allowing me to serve my country in this way. Matters of economics have been wantonly acted upon for too long, and we must act to counter this grave threat to our United States of America.”³⁴ Coxe clearly felt that active political agents as well as those individuals who had the economic resources to do so should develop their own views on economics, and work to assist newly created manufactures within the United States.

Coxe felt not only that he should take personal actions, but felt it his duty to explain his theories of economics and national security to others, in the hopes that they might begin similar development actions. For this purpose, Coxe further developed his linkages between economic prosperity and national strength in *Reflexions on the State of the Union*. Specifically dealing with the fact that the United States was able to produce almost all of the shoes required for its domestic consumption as a larger issue of national self-sufficiency, Coxe wrote: “If the manufacture of shoes in this country, were abolished, our annual debt to foreign countries would be increased to an amount equal to all our public contributions.”³⁵ In short, for Coxe, manufactures not only provided a way to support the economic prosperity of the United States without resorting to taxes, but also helped to ensure an uninterrupted flow of goods and services throughout the United States not dependent on foreign amity. Due to the extremely unstable situation in Europe

³⁴Tench Coxe to Alexander Hamilton, January 23, 1789, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=DelVol25.sml&images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=423&division=div1>> (30 September 2003)

³⁵Coxe, *Reflexions on the State of the Union, With Two Lines of Quotation in Latin*, (Hereafter *Reflexions on the States of the Union*), (Philadelphia, Printed by Matthew Carey, 1792), microfilm, Early American Imprints, First Series, no. 24230, 10.

that occurred after the American Revolution, Coxe's prudence certainly seemed warranted. In many other countries involved with Europe economically, predictable commerce and trade broke down completely. Coxe similarly urged other businessmen to support the new Bank of the United States, so that there could be a reserve of money always available to the government in time of need without having to obtain loans from foreign government and so become in their debt.³⁶

Importantly, Coxe did not consider his economic views, and their subsequent linkages with the strength of the United States, mere abstractions to be written about, but ideas to be put into practice. Even very early in his political career, (serving as Assistant to the Treasury, beginning in 1790) Coxe sought to acquire grants of and for himself and other land companies, not just in Pennsylvania, but beginning in 1795, Western North Carolina as well.³⁷ Coxe's first involvement with what would become the Speculation Lands began through Andrew Baird and Lewis Baird, who were serving as land agents for the group of wealthy Northern bankers mentioned earlier, including William Tilghman, Goold Hoyt, and Isaac Bronson. The Bairds represented what existed then as the Rutherford Land Company, holding approximately 100,000 acres of land in Western North Carolina.³⁸ Coxe, through loans from family and friends, as well as other business

³⁶Coxe lays out his economic hopes for the Bank of the United States and by extension the United States as a whole, in *Facts Representing the Bank of the North America*, (Hereafter *Facts Representing the Bank*) (Philadelphia, Printed by John Wyeth, 1799), microfilm, Early American Imprints, First Series, no. 48848, as well as in *An Enquiry into the Principles On Which A Commercial System for the United States of America Should be Founded; To Which Are Added Some Political Observations Connected with the Subject* (Hereafter *An Enquiry Into the Principles*) (Philadelphia, Printed by Robert Aitken, 1787), microfilm, Early American Imprints, First Series, no. 20306, 20870, 25-32.

³⁷For an excellent discussion of how individuals in early America used their political office to acquire land and influence, see Gordon T. Chappell, "John Coffee: Land Speculator and Planter," *Alabama Review* 22, (January 1968), 25-32. For a further discussion of Coxe's political attitudes and offices during this period, see Hutcheson, 18-21, as well as Cooke, 42-57.

³⁸William W. Erwin and Andrew Baird to Tench Coxe, September 17, 1795, *Speculation Lands Collection*, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville, 28804, M2003.5.039, Series 8.

associates, acquired all of the land owned by the Rutherford Land Company, inserting himself into the framework of what would become the Speculation Land Company; to do this, Coxe essentially mortgaged several years of his official salary in the process.³⁹

In 1794, Coxe published a pamphlet for the public in which he argued for the creation of a “manufacturing center along the banks of the Susquehanna (a main river in Pennsylvania).”⁴⁰ Coxe went on to mention this particular plan in several other published pamphlets, and also became a stockholder in the newly founded Susquehanna Development Land Company.⁴¹ This illuminates a prominent trend in the life and career of Tench Coxe. He did not simply write about what concerned citizens should do, but acted out the suggestions he wrote about in his articles. This became one of the main considerations of all of Tench Coxe’s activities, whether economic or political. Even beginning with his economic actions prior to the Revolution as well as immediately after it, Coxe always viewed economic development as a duty for individuals who had more economic resources to donate to this cause. Instead of simply writing about the Bank of the United States, Coxe became a shareholder; instead of just writing that a company should be formed to develop the Pennsylvania interior, Coxe became a shareholder in the

³⁹“Time Line,” *Speculation Lands Collection, 1752-1930*, n.d., <http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/mss/speculation_lands/time%20lines/time%20line.htm> (11 November 2003). For information on Coxe’s fundraising efforts and their subsequent effects on his finances, see Cooke, 320-332, Tench Coxe to John D. Coxe, February 10, 1797, quoted in Cooke, 323, James Madison to Tench Coxe, July 30, 1798, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=DelVol25.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=248&division=div1>> (14 October 2003)

⁴⁰Coxe first mentions this idea in *A Plan for Encouraging Agriculture*, and again in Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America: In A Series of Papers Written at Various Times, in the Years Between 1787 and 1794* (Hereafter referred to as *A View of the United States of America*) (New York: Reprints of American Classics), 1965, 2-25.

⁴¹For more information on the Susquehanna Development Land Company, see Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America*, ch. 10, see also Tench Coxe, *A Plan for Encouraging Agriculture*, 25-38.

Speculation Land Company. Coxe eventually used significant amounts of his own resources to invest in the Speculation Land Company.

Since Coxe always considered the politics and economy of the United States linked, this would seem to belie the previous secondary source material approach in separating the two. Coxe further viewed his public political views and his private economic actions in a similarly intertwined fashion. It is also because of this belief that Coxe first became involved in the Holland Land Company, which he subsequently mentioned in a letter to Robert Livingston, although Coxe had significant material investments in the Speculation Lands during this same time period, 1802-3.⁴² The main focus of the letter was the necessity of improved roads to allow access into more isolated areas of Pennsylvania, as well as opening up the land for human habitation, one of Coxe's measures of progress in his *An Authentic View of the Progress of the State of Pennsylvania*...⁴³ Coxe deplored the state of the interior of most of the states in the Union, and vigorously supported laws and acts that would increase the chances for citizens and even immigrants from other nations to hold land and make improvements upon it, to strengthen the new United States of America. Coxe became more precise in how individuals could contribute to the economic strength of their country in some of his articles dealing with manufacturing in particular and the United States more generally.

Coxe's plans for the creation of a "regional manufacturing center" are quite specific, and are laid out in one section of his *A View of the United States of America*, in

⁴²For more information on the Holland Land Company, see Charles Brooks, *Frontier Settlement and Market Revolution: The Holland Land Purchase* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁴³Tench Coxe to Robert Livingston, February 15, 1789, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=DelVol25.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=445&division=div1>> (1 October 2003). For further measures by Tench Coxe of "progress," such as increased population and manufactures, see Tench Coxe, *An Authentic View*, 4-15.

which he argues that private citizens should, as part of their political and fiscal duty to the United States, use whatever excess revenue they had to support the United States.

Although the Speculation Lands were not mentioned specifically in this article, their location in the south as well as geographic closeness to main rivers and natural resources, characteristics mentioned specifically in *A View of the United States of America*, does not seem coincidental. One of the important ideas that Coxe espouses in his proposal is simply the amount of land that was able to be cleared and made available for habitation by introducing roads and other improvements. Unlike other prominent land speculators active around this time, Coxe took an active interest in the improvement of his lands personally, instead of simply devolving responsibility down to the local landowner. Coxe very clearly connected the more general ideas of economic self-sufficiency and political independence with whatever actions individuals in and of themselves were able to accomplish.⁴⁴ It is because of these political beliefs that perhaps Coxe's willingness to risk bankruptcy can begin to be understood.

In his discussion of American economics, specifically in *A View of the United States of America* and *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, Coxe argued that the South especially had enormous economic potential for growth after the Revolution. "The southern states, being so full of every kind of material and natural resource, with the use of manufactures, can easily be improved by steps as dramatic as we have seen in Pennsylvania since the end of war and the restoration of peace."⁴⁵ From these and other economic statements it seems very clear that Coxe considered the development of the southern states critical to the viability of the Union. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson

⁴⁴Coxe, *A View of the United States of America*, 111-134.

⁴⁵Tench Coxe, *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, 4-7. See also Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America*, 129-151.

discussing the problem of manufactures, Coxe wrote: “I have heard from many a representative from the Southern states that they are unhappy with the increased prospect of manufactures in their territories. These gentlemen should not be fearful of manufactures, but instead embrace them, as their emancipation and development are a large part of the economic prosperity of the Union as a whole.”⁴⁶ Coxe certainly saw his land holdings in the South as contributing to this goal, as he had consistently advocated in previous writings.

It is under these circumstances that Coxe returned to the same tactics as his great-grandfather in promoting the Speculation Lands. Coxe strongly influenced the passage of laws by the North Carolina Assembly to allow for absentee speculators to buy up large amounts of land, which greatly facilitated his dealings with Andrew and Louis Baird.⁴⁷ The Bairds, through their Rutherford Land Company associations, were also able to influence the passage of these laws, as well as help to provide startup capital to Coxe, allowing him to buy far beyond his means (his official salary at the time only amounted to one or two thousand dollars a year, with an initial investment in the Speculation Lands of approximately five thousand dollars).⁴⁸ Also, again similar to Dr. Daniel Coxe, Tench Coxe used his personal and political writings, both in the form of letters, as well as political pamphlets or essays to encourage wealthier individuals to take a more active role

⁴⁶Tench Coxe to Thomas Jefferson, February 1, 1789, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=DelVol25.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=434&division=div1>> (30 September 2003)

⁴⁷For a fascinating discussion of how local politics influenced the eventual use of previously public lands for private use and investment, see Kenneth Pomeroy and James Yoho, *North Carolina Lands: Ownership, Use, and Management of Forest and Related Lands* (Washington: American Forestry Association) 1964, 14-20.

⁴⁸For further information on Coxe’s attempts to get other prominent political figures of the day involved, see Tench Coxe to Thomas Mifflin, January 26, 1789, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, <<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=DelVol25.sml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=425&division=div1>> (30 September 2003)

in the development of their nation's economy and manufactures.⁴⁹ Coxe's investments help to show his personal connection between his economic/political ideals and his own individual actions.

This helps to defuse the argument that Coxe only bought lands in Pennsylvania, which he could enjoy personally, for leisure or profit. The very areas that Coxe singled out for a need of economic activity he began massive economic activity in.⁵⁰ This helped to cement the connections for Coxe between individual action and the more general economic position of the United States. Coxe tirelessly used his pen to promote the newly opened land in the South, as well as their manufacturing potential: "These manufactures in the well endowed Southern states can only but increase in value; the Emigration of people to that area to assist in their development would be ideal. Once even the most basic of improvements begins, the quality of life of the southern states as well as their inhabitants will greatly increase."⁵¹ As has been mentioned, many of the lands that Coxe purchased in Western North Carolina, the Speculation Lands, share the characteristics that Coxe emphasizes in his more general writings.

It can thus reasonably be assumed that Coxe intended for the lands he purchased in Western North Carolina the same purpose as those that he encouraged others to purchase in Pennsylvania; ideal towns devoted to manufacture or industry that helped to improve the overall economic strength of the area and collectively strengthen the nation. In Coxe's view, the large amount of natural resources in the lands in Western North Carolina helped to make that location particularly amenable to industrial development.

⁴⁹Coxe, *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, 5-11, Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America*, 81-95, Tench Coxe, *An Authentic View*, 19-22.

⁵⁰Coxe, *An Enquiry Into the Principles*, 13-16.

⁵¹Coxe, *Reflections on the State of the Union*, 8-12. See also Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America*, 35-48, Tench Coxe, *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, 15-27.

Also, Coxe deplored the state of Southern manufacturing, and considered it critical to helping to support the larger national economy. In Coxe's *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest* there are several references to lands and natural resources that would apply to the lands of Western North Carolina but not necessarily the lands of Pennsylvania.⁵² Although generally containing such mundane topics as "amber sap for honey" and "good, oaken timber" these examples show that Coxe had thought carefully before he made his purchases, in contravention of the majority ideal, which was simply to care about the price and how much money one could make off the deal.⁵³

Although Coxe's plans never came to fruition, he strongly believed that the emigration of industrious people into new areas with abundant natural resources would take care of the problem naturally. Coxe had a fundamental faith in the ability of people to act both in an economically advantageous fashion for them while simultaneously consciously strengthening the economy of their new American nation. Many of the laws he urged the North Carolina Assembly to have passed were devoted to this goal. Promoting local manufactures by the use of inventive tax systems and other forms of encouragement to small-scale industry, as well as making emigration to uninhabited areas easier; this was to be the task of government. Coxe believed that people were naturally industrious, and as soon as it was more economically viable to do so, citizens within their local communities would promote their manufacturing and economic stability at the smaller level. The accumulation of "cottage industries" throughout the country would

⁵²Coxe, *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, 11-25.

⁵³Friedenberg, 116-182.

greatly increase the manufacturing potential of the United States as a whole, which is what he had been recommending all along.⁵⁴

Coxe makes his position and his political/economic connections very clear in *Respectful Observations on the Subject of the Bill in Relation to “the Establishment of a Quartermaster’s Department.”* This article, published in 1812, relatively late in Coxe’s political career, reaffirms his long-standing commitment to the maximum amount of economic independence possible for the United States from foreign countries, as well as the danger of being dependent on foreign sources of organization and supply for vital interests needed during times of war or peace. For Coxe, such dependence was antithetical to the very purposes of the Revolution, which was to free the American states to pursue their own political and economic independence. As he writes:

If our commercial difficulties are to continue or to extend, the objections to the new, untried and unexperienced agency of the quartermaster’s department, in the *diversified business of supplies*, will be the more great and numerous. How much more so numerous then, would the difficulties be of this quartermaster if, because of present political difficulties, a majority of the items needed to sustain our efforts are abroad, and he must therefore navigate the treacherous waters of foreign public opinion simply so that we can have the basic necessities? It is of a much more efficient proposal, that the quartermaster could draw upon the resources of his own country, as long as the promotion of manufactures continues as I have indicated elsewhere.⁵⁵

It seems clear from this and other articles that Coxe published throughout his career that the emerging state had to become as politically or economically independent as possible,

⁵⁴For particular suggestions about manufacturing and its development in the United States, see Coxe, *A View of the United States of America*, 12-25. See also Tench Coxe, *An Essay on the Manufacturing Interest*, 10-21. See also Tench Coxe, *Reflexions on the State of the Union*, 8-22. See also Tench Coxe, *Suggestions for Encouraging Agriculture*, 2-29.

⁵⁵Coxe, *Respectful Observations on the Subject of the Bill in Relation to “the Establishment of a Quartermaster’s Department,” in lieu of the Existing Military Agencies, so Far as it May Affect the Office of the Purveyor of Public Supplies* (Hereafter referred to as *Respectful Observations*) (Philadelphia, 1812), microfilm, Early American Imprints, Second Series, no. 26602. See also Tench Coxe, *An Authentic View*, 15-37.

in order to avoid perpetuating the old unequal colonial relationships. It is to this end that Coxe promoted the purchase of lands, and began his involvement in the Speculation Lands; to ensure that the United States, in the conduct of its most basic of economic functions, was beholden to no other country.

Although letters and writings specifically on the Speculation Lands themselves are not located in any of the collections cited, it seems clear that Tench Coxe tirelessly pursued an American atmosphere of manufacturing and improvement. It seems equally clear that these pursuits were not solely based on economic gain, although Coxe certainly made sure that he also benefited from that side of his land dealings. No, in examining Tench Coxe's landed activities, we see a major figure in the economic and political discourse of the formative times of this nation doing what most people today wish that more politicians would do: practice what they preach. Coxe could have sold off his lands after several weeks or even days of his ownership, when their value nearly trebled; but he did not, and helped to distinguish himself from other famous (or infamous) land speculators active at the same time he was.⁵⁶ Also, in all of Coxe's political writings, there is no mention of his great-grandfather, or of his family's previous land holdings. Instead, there is constant mention of the strength and economic prosperity of the United States. It appears that these are the ideals that motivated Coxe, even to the point of financial ruin. It seems much more appropriate then, to describe him as "one of the most strenuous and faithful laborers for his country," instead of "a traitor that should have been ousted earlier."⁵⁷

⁵⁶*Speculation Lands Collection*, M2003.3.1-12, see also Friedenber, 11-16.

⁵⁷The first quote is from a letter, George Cabot to John Adams, January 19, 1798, cited in Hutcheson, pgs. 39-42. The second quote is from a letter, James Madison to James Monroe, November 19, 1820, cited in Hutcheson, pgs. 45-48. The first letter is sent right after Coxe is dismissed from office due to

the triumph of John Quincy Adams' party; the second is after Madison receives a letter from Coxe, asking for a new official position, because of his "financial encumbrances." Coxe to Madison, November 12, 1820, *Papers of James Madison*, University Press of Virginia, <<http://www.virginia.edu/pjm/ms-171.jpg>> (2 October 2003)

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