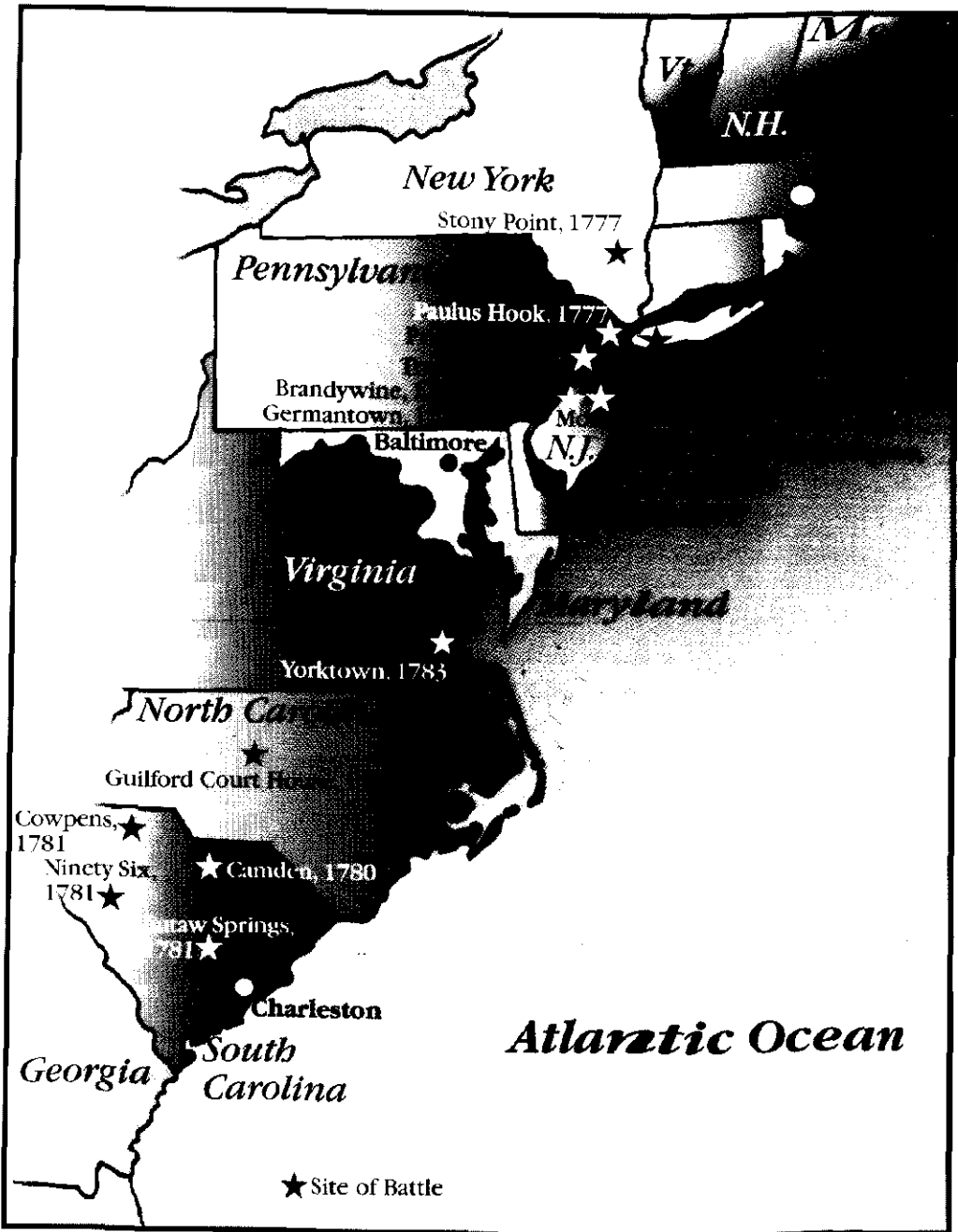


In Perspective:

William Smallwood



During the War for Independence, Maryland troops fought in 18 major battles, in five states, none of them Maryland. The experience of fighting outside their home grounds, an experience shared with soldiers from all the original 13 states, helped create a new sense of American nationalism among the veterans of the Continental Army.

In Perspective: William Smallwood

by
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Front cover:

*Major General William Smallwood, 1782, by Charles Willson Peale.
The artist later told his son that this portrait was thought by many
contemporaries to be one of his most successful likenesses.*

William Smallwood-

The Man

Early Life

While William Smallwood played a prominent role in the founding of the American republic, surprisingly little is known about his personal life. He never married and thus left no direct heirs to help perpetuate his memory. *If he kept records of his correspondence, as most men of his time and stature did, those records have been lost to posterity.* Therefore piecing together the facts of his life requires mining other sources of historical information. Starting from the time he entered public life as a mature adult, this is not too difficult, for there are numerous surviving records of the public affairs of the times in which he served in government and the military. These records, however, shed little light on his personal life as an adult, and very little is known about his formative years.

Sources agree that Smallwood was born in 1732, the same year as his future military commander, George Washington. And like Washington, Smallwood was born into the tobacco planting aristocracy of the colonial Chesapeake tidewater. Though some sources claim his birthplace to have



From an English map of the mid-18th century: this is an idealized view of a Tidewater tobacco wharf. The Smallwoods were prominent tobacco planters.

been Kent County on Maryland's Eastern Shore, it was more likely Charles County, the location of his family's estate in Southern Maryland. William's father, Bayne, was the third generation of Maryland Smallwoods, and by William's time the family had achieved status as large landowners, successful planters, and merchants. Bayne had presided over the Charles County Court during his career and had represented his county in the Maryland

Assembly at Annapolis. Bayne's father, Prior, and grandfather, James Smallwood, had also been wealthy landowners. James was the first of the Smallwoods to settle in Maryland, having arrived from England in 1664. He achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel in the colonial militia and served as a justice of the Charles County Court. William Smallwood's mother, Priscilla Heabard Smallwood, was a daughter of a prominent Virginia family. Besides William, the Smallwoods had five daughters, named Priscilla, Lucy, Eleanor, Margaret, and Elizabeth, and one son, Heabard. From the moment of their births, William and his siblings were destined to lives of wealth and social position. But in the American colonies much was expected from those to whom much had been given. Maintaining the family fortunes required constant attention and hard work. And men of William's prominence were expected to play active roles in public affairs. William would live up to these expectations.

Popular tradition holds that young William was sent to England for his schooling, first at the Kendal Grammar School in Cumbria, then later Eton College near Windsor. However Eton College has no record of his matriculation, and the records of the Kendal School are too sparse for the period of Smallwood's youth to confirm his attendance. There is also a tradition that, after his return to Maryland, he performed military service during the French and Indian War (1756-1763), but, again, no hard evidence of such service has been found. It is possible that, as his great grandfather James before him, William held a commission as a militia officer during the war and that his unit may have been called up, with no record surviving.

Smallwood's name first appears in official documents during the late 1750s, in the land records of his native Charles County, where he recorded a deed for a land purchase. Then, in 1761, records show that he was elected to the seat his father Bayne had held as a Charles County delegate to the Lower House of the Maryland Assembly. From this point on, we have good documentation for his public life. While in the Lower House, Smallwood served on important committees, such as the committee on arms and ammunition, the committee for grievances and courts of justice, and others. Toward the end of his tenure in the Assembly, we see Smallwood championing the patriot cause, which was growing in opposition to British taxation policies. Meanwhile he became more active in the affairs of his family's estate, known as "Mattawoman Plantation," in Charles County. He is said to have built his own house, the one now restored at Smallwood State Park, near his father's house (now lost), in about 1760. Bayne died in 1768 and William seems to have assumed primary responsibility for management of the family estate.

Mattawoman Plantation was originally part of a 1,000 acre manorial grant made by Lord Baltimore to Thomas Allanson in 1659. The property was registered as "Christian Temple Manor," but because the manorial system of landholding broke down in Maryland, the property was later sold off, with much of it being acquired by the Smallwoods. The Descendants of the Lords of the Maryland Manors have placed a marker at Smallwood State Park to memorialize the original manorial grant.

The Coming of the Revolution

Between the French and Indian War and the Revolution, Great Britain and her American colonies fell at odds over England's imperial policies. Smallwood found his sympathies lying with the disgruntled Americans. In 1769 he joined the Maryland Non-Importation Association, a group of merchants and planters protesting the English tea tax. In 1774 he joined the Charles County Association of Freemen, signing yet another non-importation agreement, this time protesting Parliament's Boston Port Act.

The wording of the Non-Importation Association's agreement offers us a window into the minds and motivations of Smallwood and his fellow



THE ALTERNATIVE OF WILLIAMSBURG

English cartoon lampooning American Non-Importation Associators as thugs coercing respectable - and loyal to the crown - Americans into signing a non-importation agreement. Courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

associators. Following the Boston Tea Party of December 1773, Parliament sought to punish and intimidate the colony of Massachusetts for its recalcitrance, with several harsh acts. Among these "Coercive Acts," as the Americans called them, was the Boston Port Act, which shut down Boston's overseas commerce until such time as restitution was made for the lost tea. Overseas commerce was Boston's major enterprise and the foundation of Massachusetts' economy. The act threatened dire economic hardship for not only Massachusetts merchants, but all the other tradesmen, sailors and consumers whose livings and sustenance were dependent upon Boston's thriving international trade. Massachusetts refused to yield, and the other colonies joined hands with her to resist British oppression. If Parliament could so easily

trample the rights of Bostonians, it could similarly trample the rights of Charlestonians, New Yorkers, Pennsylvanians, Marylanders and all British subjects in America. To the colonists' minds, the British Constitution, which was as dear to British subjects then as the U.S. Constitution is to Americans today, was under severe threat.

Reaction to the Boston Port Act was immediate and widespread throughout colonial America. In June 1774, a group of Charles Countians, including William Smallwood, gathered at Port Tobacco, the seat of Charles County. Similar groups of concerned citizens were gathering in public squares all up and down the East Coast. The Charles County freemen, as did their counterparts elsewhere, drew up the previously mentioned non-importation agreement which, they hoped, would exert gentle - but sufficient - pressure upon Parliament to rescind the hated law.

The wording of the agreement first condemned the Boston Port Act as a "violent attack upon the liberty and property" of fellow colonists in Boston. It furthermore stated the conviction that all Americans should champion Boston's cause, for after all, it was the cause of all Americans. Accordingly, the Charles Countians, and colonists elsewhere, agreed to cease receiving any trade goods, save medicines, coming from England until such time as the act was repealed. If the act were not repealed, they stated their intentions to join with all colonists in permanently severing trade ties with Britain, the West Indies, and any American colony which refused to boycott. Since England was the world's premier international trading power, this resolve was moderately threatening to the British economy because the American colonies were important markets for English trade goods.

Perhaps the most significant passage in the Charles County Non-Importation Agreement reads as follows: "The inhabitants of this county will adopt and steadily pursue such measures as tend to protect and secure the liberties of this county according to the true principles of the English Constitution, and thereby show themselves loyal and faithful subjects to his majesty, King George the Third."

No rabid revolutionaries were the men who expressed those sentiments. William Smallwood and the other Charles Countians saw themselves as the dutiful subjects of a rightful king. They wished only to protect themselves and the British Constitution from Parliamentary abuse. At this point, military resistance and political independence were far from their minds. Yet, while events swept them inexorably toward those drastic measures, Smallwood and his associates persisted in casting themselves as the defenders of the old and cherished order of things, not as repudiators of the established order. This, then, may be the central paradox of the American "Revolution." In its final outcome, at least, the Revolution was led by men of property, with stakes in the constitutional order of things, men like William Smallwood who would have much to lose in a real social revolution. If what they did can be called revolution, it was indeed a conservative one. Perhaps the American Revolution would better be called the American War for Independence.

The depth of outrage on the part of American patriots over the tea tax and other arbitrary acts of Parliament must not be underestimated. In October 1774, Maryland had its own "Tea Party." A group of Annapolis citizens discovered that Anthony Stewart, a merchant of that town who

himself had signed a non-importation agreement, nevertheless brought a cargo of tea to Annapolis aboard a ship named after his daughter, the "Peggy Stewart." Moreover, Mr. Stewart had quietly paid the tea tax in violation of his pledge not to do so. Patriots gathered about the harbor, where the "Peggy Stewart" lay at anchor. Merchant Stewart was called to account. He offered both to issue a public apology and to burn the contraband tea, hoping to spare the ship and its other cargo. Not satisfied, the patriots would settle for nothing less than the ship's being run aground and burned, tea, other cargo, and all. Stewart submitted, and applied the torch himself.

In any case, and without realizing it, Smallwood and the other colonists were taking the first tentative steps toward nationhood in 1774. The Charles County Associators appointed Smallwood, with more than a dozen other county freemen, to a Committee of Correspondence which was to "answer and receive all letters" from similar committees throughout the colonies. Smallwood was also among those selected to attend a Provincial Convention held in Annapolis the following year. While the Convention met to plan and implement the means of dealing with the growing crisis between England and the colonies, events elsewhere pushed the American cause inevitably toward the final break. The Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia as an extra-legal political body representing twelve of the thirteen colonies (Georgia demurred). Meanwhile the Massachusetts militia (the famed "Minute Men") fought two small actions against British soldiers at Lexington and Concord, then a large contingent of New England militia fought the British in a major battle at Bunker Hill, in Massachusetts. Congress thereupon assembled a 17,000 man army (which included 135 Maryland riflemen) to surround British forces in Boston. By the end of 1775, the Maryland Provincial Convention authorized a nine-company infantry battalion to be raised and supported by the colony to support the American cause. The Convention appointed William Smallwood commanding colonel of the unit. Meanwhile, the British governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, undertook naval raids against the American rebels in the Chesapeake Bay.

Smallwood's Battalion

By July 1776, as the Continental Congress considered the Declaration of Independence, the new Maryland Battalion, made up of volunteer companies from all over the state, was formed, equipped, trained, and ready to march. Among Smallwood's senior officers was his nephew Major William Truman Stoddart, an orphan whom Smallwood had helped rear. The Maryland Convention instructed Colonel Smallwood to take the battalion to Philadelphia to offer its services to Congress. In Philadelphia, John Hancock, president of Congress, received Smallwood's Battalion gratefully and ordered it to join the fledgling American army, now commanded by George Washington. Washington had moved the army to New York following the British evacuation of Boston. Meanwhile, on July 4, the Continental Congress proclaimed the Declaration of Independence to the world. The Marylanders took ships to New York, losing some of their

baggage in the process, and, early in August, joined the American army on Manhattan and Long Islands. There Smallwood's Marylanders were placed in a brigade with Pennsylvania and Delaware troops commanded by John Alexander, Lord Stirling, the American-born son of an English Jacobite expatriate.

Inevitably, illness and death from disease took its toll on the Marylanders, as it always did in eighteenth century armies, before they experienced enemy fire. Initially composed of about 700 men, the battalion was down to about 400 fit for duty at the end of August when it received its baptism of fire. Colonel Smallwood was away on court-martial duty and the battalion was under Major Mordecai Gist's command when Washington met the British for the Battle of Long Island. The Marylanders were in the center of Lord Stirling's line with Hazlet's Delaware Battalion. The British smashed into the American position with a vastly superior force. Lord Stirling detached Gist with 265 Marylanders and gave them the job of covering the retreat of the rest of the line. Stirling stayed with the forlorn Marylanders and personally led them in six successive jabs at the oncoming British and their German mercenary soldiers.

This and further incidents where Maryland soldiers stood up to British bayonets brought fame to Maryland Line troops. Maryland's nickname, the "Old Line State," derives from the bravery of the state's Revolutionary War soldiers.

Finally compelled to withdraw, the Marylanders broke into small parties, each seeking its way to safety. Only Major Gist and nine men succeeded. The rest, 256 Marylanders, were killed or captured. Lord Stirling was among the captured, though he was later exchanged. General Washington, who watched the engagement from a nearby hill, showed great emotion and is said to have exclaimed, "Good God! What brave fellows I must this day lose!"

Given invaluable time by the efforts of Lord Stirling's detachment of forlorn Marylanders, the rest of his brigade fought its way to Gowanus Swamp, a broad salt marsh. Plunging in, many of the men in water over their heads, the routed Americans waded or swam across the swamp while four enemy cannon and many muskets thundered at them. Colonel Smallwood arrived on the scene with reinforcements in time to cover the men in the swamp. Returning British fire with two cannon and muskets, Smallwood was able to save all but a dozen of the struggling men. Those who made it out of the swamp looked to one observer "like water-rats."

Though the Battle of Long Island was a disastrous defeat for Washington, he still had most of his army intact to fight another day. He knew he must abandon New York to the British and, in doing so, had to protect the rear of his army, a job always reserved for an army's best troops. In this case, it was Smallwood's Marylanders who received the arduous honor. Washington was to find throughout the war that his Maryland regulars were among his most reliable soldiers.

After Long Island

It was painfully obvious to any military man that the American army, made up largely of poorly trained and equipped volunteers, could not compete successfully with the professional British and German troops arrayed against them. Washington's strategy, therefore, was to keep his lines of retreat open at all times so that, if bloodied, he still had a means of escape and survival. This strategy resulted in more lost battles - though no total disasters - that fall, with the Americans being repeatedly drubbed, then ducking back for another try. The Marylanders played key roles in this strategy. At the Battle of White Plains, they were among the last Americans to leave the field at the cost of many wounded and killed. Among the wounded was Colonel William Smallwood, whose personal conduct in the battle won him a Congressional promotion to brigadier general.

At the end of 1776, the American cause looked bleak. Washington's army had dwindled from 17,000 to 3,000! It was able, however, to strike two telling blows against the British and Germans at Christmas when Washington boldly crossed the ice-tossed Delaware River to mount surprise attacks on the enemy at Trenton and Princeton in New Jersey, a campaign in which Smallwood's Marylanders participated. Meanwhile, Congress ordered Smallwood to turn command of his Maryland Battalion over to Major Gist and return to Maryland for the purpose of recruiting more soldiers while his wounds healed.

It is worth noting that one of Maryland's premier modern National Guard units, the 175th Battalion, Maryland National Guard, traces its lineage to Smallwood's Maryland Battalion. The 175th participated in the Allied landing at Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and thus has perpetuated the honorable service rendered by Marylanders in the War for Independence.

While Smallwood was in Maryland, rumors of a loyalist insurrection on the Eastern Shore alarmed the state. Since Smallwood was the most experienced senior military commander at hand, he was given command of some Virginia patriots and dispatched to the lower Eastern Shore to assess the situation. Once there, the general found the rumors exaggerated. He rounded up a few troublemakers and administered the Oath of Allegiance to the U.S. to those who would submit. The recalcitrants he turned over to local civilian authorities for prosecution in civilian courts. His management of the crisis shows again the essentially conservative nature of the War for Independence, for it demonstrates Smallwood's belief, shared by other military officers, that civil authorities were supreme to the military. He would countenance no drumhead courts-martial for civilians.

During the winter of 1776-1777, Congress reorganized the Continental Army. The remnants of the Maryland Battalion, as well as other Maryland troops, formed the basis of seven new regiments of infantry to be raised and supported by Maryland. These units, plus a battalion of German-American patriot volunteers, were divided into two brigades. Smallwood was to bring

his Maryland recruits to join the new Continental Establishment, but another scare, this time a supposed British assault on Baltimore, resulted in his personal recall to Maryland to command a hastily formed force of over a thousand militiamen to meet the threat, which never materialized.

By late summer 1777, with the Continentals actively campaigning against the British in southeastern Pennsylvania, Smallwood was again dispatched, this time with another militia force of about a thousand, to aid the patriot cause. His militia, being raw and untrained, retreated with the rest of the Americans when confronted by the enemy at the Battle of Germantown in September. Although the Pennsylvania campaigns of that year went badly for the Americans, with defeats both at Germantown and Brandywine, General Washington continued to show his genius for keeping his army intact to "rise and fight again." The Maryland Continentals comported themselves well at both battles, managing at Brandywine to capture part of the British camp. The campaign of 1777 ended with the British army comfortably occupying Philadelphia while the hapless Americans froze and starved at nearby Valley Forge.

In December, Congress gave command of the Maryland and Delaware Continentals, with some Canadian volunteers, to General Smallwood. Washington ordered Smallwood's command to garrison Wilmington, Delaware, an important supply depot for the American army. Thus Smallwood's force was spared the hardships of Valley Forge. While discharging their duty that winter, Smallwood's men captured a grounded British ship bound for Philadelphia and garnered many needed supplies, such as clothing, for the Americans. Smallwood's men also kept the local loyalist population in check.

Smallwood's Character

While many people knew William Smallwood, we have record of the comments of only two of them regarding anything personal about the man, and those comments are contradictory. The first dates from the waning months of 1777 and are the impressions of a teenage girl who seems to have become infatuated with the general. She was 14 year old Sally Wister, daughter of a Pennsylvania Quaker family. General Smallwood was quartered in the same country house as the Wister family while the British occupied Philadelphia. From young Miss Wister's diary of October 20, 1777: "The General is tall, portly, well-made; a truly martial air, the behaviour and manner of a gentleman, a good understanding and a great humanity of disposition constitute the character of Smallwood." Seven days later she wrote, "We had the pleasure of the General and suite at afternoon tea. He (the General, I mean) is most agreeable: so lively, so free, and chats so gaily that I have quite an esteem for him. I must steel my heart!" After her third encounter with Smallwood, she confided, "I declare this General is very, very entertaining, so good natured, so good humor'd and yet sensible I wonder he is not married. Are there no ladies formed to his taste?"

Sally Wister's complimentary descriptions of Smallwood contrast with the remarks of one of his military colleagues, Otho Holland Williams, another Maryland officer in the Continental Army. Writing after the war, Williams described Smallwood as a particularly unforgiving man who was flawed by "low ambition" and "the meanness of his resentments." It is not clear what events spurred Williams' comments, but he clearly saw Smallwood in a different light than did Sally Wister.

It is true that Smallwood felt resentment during the war at the high rank given to foreign officers who volunteered to serve the patriot cause. And though he achieved the highest rank of any Marylander in Continental service (major general) he did complain of his lack of advancement, which he found all the more galling in light of the rank given foreigners. Shortly after Sally Wister wrote so glowingly of him, Smallwood warned Maryland Governor Thomas Johnson, "Every Government is best served by its own Natives, this Observation our Countrymen have not sufficiently adverted to, nor will they I am afraid, till fatal experience has verified it in more instances." A year later he complained that many Maryland men who he thought should be volunteering for his command were instead joining the legion of Casimir, the Count Pulaski, a Polish volunteer officer in the Continental Army. On several occasions Smallwood complained that his native state was not getting its fair share of credit for its support of the patriot cause (and it is possible that he was right in the latter assertion).

Smallwood was correct in perceiving that some undeserving foreigners were given high rank. So were many Americans. It was done to curry favor with certain interest groups to give them a stake in the American cause. And there were many notable foreign officers serving in the American army. Beside von Steuben and Pulaski, already mentioned, the Marquis de Lafayette, the Baron de Kalb, and Thaddeus Kosciuszko may be cited as foreign officers who contributed conspicuously to the achievement of American independence, Pulaski and de Kalb giving up their lives in battle for it.

Which was the real Smallwood, the gallant general admired by Sally Wister or the resentful wretch described by Otho Holland Williams? Likely a bit of both, human nature being what it is. People seem different in others' perceptions of them, and people put on different faces to different people. Perhaps Smallwood projected himself one way to an admiring young lady and differently to a fellow officer with whom he competed for advancement and recognition.

The War Continues

Meanwhile the Maryland Continentals continued performing meritorious service, though under the command of officers other than Smallwood. At the Battle of Monmouth (New Jersey) in June 1778, the 3rd Maryland Regiment helped stem the British advance and prevented an American rout. In 1779 detached forces of Marylanders participated in the

captures of Stony Point (New York) and Paulus Hook (New Jersey), feats that were accomplished solely with the bayonet. The daring action at Stony Point earned the American commander, Anthony Wayne of Pennsylvania, the nickname "Mad Anthony" because he took away his soldiers' gun flints so no one could fire and give away the American strategy of a surprise bayonet attack.

In the spring of 1780, the Maryland troops were dispatched to the Southern colonies with a force of Continentals and patriot militia under the command of Major General Horatio Gates to resist British offensives in the Carolinas. The Southern Department, as this establishment was known, met the British under Lord Cornwallis at Camden, South Carolina, in August 1780. Things went badly for the Americans, though the Maryland and Delaware Continentals prevented total destruction of the American force.

Preparing for the battle, General Gates placed the brigade of Mordecai Gist, now a brigadier general, on the right of the American line. Gist's force consisted of three Maryland regiments and Hazlet's Delaware Regiment. In the center and on the left, Gates, perhaps unwisely, placed state militia. Smallwood, with another brigade of four Maryland regiments, was placed in reserve behind the main line. The Baron de Kalb, one of the foreign officers Smallwood resented, commanded both Gist's and Smallwood's brigades, but was up front with Gist. When the British attacked, the militia on the American left and center soon gave way, as militia almost always did in the face of the tough, veteran British regulars. De Kalb and Gist's right flank held on tenaciously, but with its left uncovered by the flight of the militia, the American cause was ultimately hopeless. De Kalb boldly led the force and was cut down by eleven wounds, from which he died three days later. Gist took over and managed an orderly retreat. In the confusion caused by the panicked militia retreating through the ranks of Smallwood's reserve brigade, Smallwood became separated from his men. One of his colonels, Otho Holland Williams, assumed command. When de Kalb called for the brigade's assistance, Williams closed in with the British in fierce hand-to-hand combat. But the British were successful in maintaining a wedge between the two Continental brigades. The reserve brigade crumbled and fled. Gist then retired his brigade in good order. The American army was thoroughly routed. General Gates abandoned it and fled many miles to the rear in terror. Smallwood, having the senior commission of officers still present, took command of the demoralized force and did much to keep it from totally dissolving in the days and weeks following the humiliating defeat. For this service, Congress voted him its official thanks and rewarded him with promotion to Major General, to replace the dead de Kalb.

But now Smallwood had to answer to another of the foreign officers whom he resented, the Baron von Steuben. Smallwood complained about this, but neither the commander-in-chief, Washington, nor Congress sympathized with him. When Major General Nathanael Greene assumed command of the Southern Department, replacing the feckless Gates, and

wanting no dissension among his officer corps, he sent Smallwood back to Maryland with instructions to raise more men and supplies for the Southern army, tasks at which Smallwood had shown himself very capable. Knowing of Otho Holland Williams' unflattering post-war characterization of Smallwood, one wonders what role the travesty of the Battle of Camden, and the interactions of the two men at that time, might have had upon their subsequent relationship and what role those factors might have played in Williams' dislike of Smallwood. The historical record is silent.

Smallwood had seen his last combat, though he would take to the field one more time before independence was achieved. By late summer of 1781, the British commander in the South, Lord Cornwallis, after winning many Pyrric victories against the Americans in the Carolinas, moved to Yorktown, Virginia, in hopes of being rescued by the British fleet. Despite Cornwallis' many victories, General Greene's successful use of Washington's strategy of fighting, getting beaten, falling back and rising to fight again had utterly worn the British army down. Seeing an opportunity to win the war, General Washington moved his army from the North to trap Cornwallis in Virginia. Meanwhile the navy of France, which was now openly aiding the Americans, raced the British fleet to the mouth of the Chesapeake. The French navy won the race and thus prevented the British fleet's relieving Cornwallis. While all this was transpiring, General Lafayette, in charge of a Continental force in Virginia, was forced to countermarch toward Maryland because of a British feint toward him. Smallwood and his old lieutenant, Mordecai Gist, raised a force of Maryland militia and set out to aid Lafayette. But the crisis passed without resort to arms; Smallwood and Gist returned to Maryland. Washington's Continentals, with much French aid, forced Cornwallis to surrender at Yorktown in mid-October 1781.

While the War for Independence was effectively over, it took American and British emissaries two years to conclude a treaty. Meanwhile, sporadic fighting continued and Congress kept the American army together in case serious hostilities resumed. Most Continental officers, like Smallwood, held onto their commissions for the same reason. When the British finally assented to the Treaty of Paris late in 1783, the Continental Army was disbanded, with the officers, including Smallwood, surrendering their commissions. General Washington resigned as commander-in-chief before Congress while it sat temporarily in the Maryland State House at Annapolis. Independence was now an accomplished fact, at least on paper. The task lay ahead for the new American republic to vindicate itself as a sovereign nation in the world community, a process that in many respects lasted until after the Civil War.

Back to Civilian Life

Although Smallwood could now return to civilian life, his career in public service was far from over. He and Mordecai Gist formed the Maryland Society of the Cincinnati, with Smallwood becoming president.

All the original 13 states had Societies of the Cincinnati and each state Society sent representatives to a National Society of the Cincinnati, for which George Washington served as first president. Thus the Society of the Cincinnati was organized much as were the 13 original states, with state representatives in Congress, and a national president (again, George Washington serving as first president).

The nature of the Cincinnati reveals much about how Smallwood and his fellow Continental officers felt about themselves and what they had helped accomplish. The Cincinnati were an organization opened for membership to men who had held officers' commissions in the Continental Army. The Cincinnati's three stated purposes were to preserve the rights and liberties for which their founders had fought, to promote the national honor and "dignity of the American Empire," and to reinforce the "cordial affection" among their members by providing aid and assistance to them and their families in time of need. The Cincinnati still exist and their emphasis is now on education and heritage preservation.

The Cincinnati took their name and inspiration from the ancient Roman hero, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, a prosperous farmer in the Roman republic who twice left his plow to lead Roman forces victoriously against foreign invaders. Though he wielded considerable power over Romans as their general and dictator during the crises, Cincinnatus twice voluntarily surrendered that power in favor of civil authority after the invaders were repelled. Many revolutions and other national calamities are subverted by strongmen who can not resist the temptation to use their military power to assume dictatorial political power. Oliver Cromwell did so in the English Civil War, Napoleon Bonaparte would thus exploit the French Revolution, and Vladimir Lenin, Mao Ze-dong, and Fidel Castro would do it in the 20th century. But, with Washington as the exemplar of the republican ideal during the War for Independence, efforts at military subversion of the American republic were foiled. When William Smallwood turned loyalist civilians over to civil courts for prosecution, he showed respect for the concept of the supremacy of civil authority over military. It was this republican ideal that the Society of the Cincinnati hoped to perpetuate. Figuratively, they returned to the plow after expelling the British usurpers of the British Constitution.

Besides the Cincinnati, Smallwood turned his immediate post-war attention to reinvigorating his land holdings in Charles County. We know from land records that he owned at least 4,000 acres of land, much of it leased to tenants. We also know he owned at least five slaves at this time and a large herd of cattle. His taxable assets in 1783 were the second most valuable in his part of Charles County. As Cincinnatus prospered after his public service, so did Smallwood. By 1790 he had increased his property in slaves to 56.

In 1785, Smallwood's fellow Charles Countians called upon him again to represent their political interests by electing him to Congress. At the

same time, the Maryland Assembly tendered him the governorship of the state, and that was the honor and obligation he accepted. He served the then-customary three one-year terms. The times were perilous for the new nation. The Articles of Confederation, which had served as America's first instrument of government from 1781, were proving to many people to be ineffectual. It seemed to many that the states retained too much power under the Articles and the national authority too little, especially in the areas of taxation, coinage and commerce. The situation was worsened by an economic depression, making credit scarce, especially for the small farmers who comprised the bulk of the national population. There was a considerable clamor for a new instrument of national government.

As a state governor, Smallwood exercised little real authority. Under virtually all the state constitutions of the time, governors were purposefully



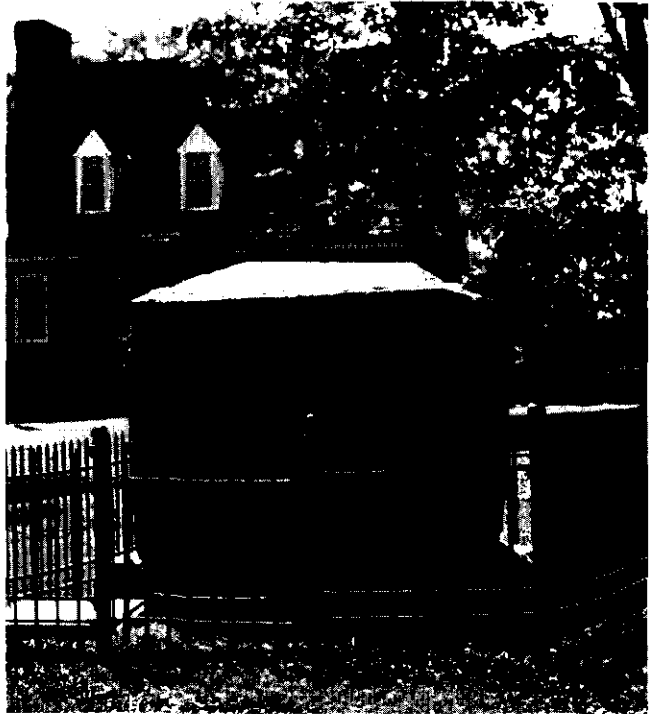
*Now known as Christ Church, Durham Parish Church, which William Smallwood attended and served, is still an active Episcopal church in Charles County, Maryland.
Photo by Charles Cadle.*

kept weak, Americans naturally fearing executive authority as had been exercised by the English governors of the colonies. Americans preferred to repose most power in their legislatures. During Smallwood's administration, Annapolis hosted a convention of five states which met ostensibly to discuss ways of bringing order to interstate commerce. Trade between the states was a mess due to different state systems of currency, states charging

tariffs on goods from other states, and the like. This convention concluded its business by calling for yet another convention, to be held a year later in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Convention would ultimately draft a new instrument of government, the United States Constitution, and present it for the states' approval to supercede the Articles of Confederation.

It took the Constitutional Convention all summer of 1787 to complete its work. The Maryland legislature dispatched six delegates to participate in the task. The Constitution was hotly debated by men of good conscience, both during its preparation and after its completion. Those who embraced it, called Federalists, viewed the document as a necessary tonic to invigorate the ailing American republic. Others, called Anti-Federalists, shunned it for concentrating, in their minds, too much power at the federal level. It seems that Governor Smallwood, in the company of other prominent Marylanders, was an

Anti-Federalist, for his name appears in a letter written by a Maryland Anti-Federalist as a prominent person who could be counted upon to oppose the Constitution, though we have *nothing written* or spoken by Smallwood himself that would confirm or disprove his opposition to the document. Nevertheless, as governor, Smallwood convened the meeting of a special Maryland Convention which ultimately ratified the Constitution for the state. By 1789 nine of the thirteen states had ratified, a sufficient majority for the document to go into effect. The last four states shortly ratified, so there was finally national unanimity for the new form of government.



In 1898, the Sons of the American Revolution erected this memorial stone to honor William Smallwood. Popular tradition holds that the stone marks the General's final resting place, but, as with so much of the man's life, this assertion about his place of repose after death can not be supported by documentary evidence.



Reconstruction of a soldier of Smallwood's Maryland Battalion during the New York campaigns of 1776 (see back cover). He wears a black cocked hat, a natural colored, fringed linen huntingshirt over a conventional linen shirt, a black neckstock, and knee breeches. Long bosc and buckled shoes complete his wardrobe. Armed with a Short Land model English musket left over from the French and Indian War, he also has a bayonet which, when not fixed on his musket, he can carry on his waistbelt. A leather pouch for cartridges, called a "belly box", is on the front of his waistbelt. For sustenance, he carries a wooden canteen and a waterproofed linen knapsack-baversack for rations, extra clothing and a blanket. Model John Rees. Photos by Charles Cadle.



Departure of Smallwood's Command from Annapolis to Join General Washington, July 10, 1776, by Wordsworth Thompson. Though uniform details are inaccurate, this dramatic painting captures the excitement that must have attended the Maryland Battalion's march out of Annapolis. Painting courtesy of the Maryland National Guard Military Historical Society, photo by Charles Cadle.



The Battle of Guilford Courthouse, 15 March 1781 by H. Charles McBaron. Though General Smallwood was not present at this North Carolina battle, the painting is an excellent depiction of Maryland troops during the latter part of the War for Independence. For the most part, the linen huntingshirt of the earlier period had been replaced by blue regimental coats with red facings.

Courtesy of the Center of Military History, Department of the Army.



The Battle of Long Island, painted by Alonzo Chappelle captures the desperation of Smallwood's Marylanders and Hazlet's Delawares struggling through Gowanus Creek.

Final Years

After his tenure as governor, Smallwood temporarily retired from public life, devoting his final years to his large estate and activities with the Cincinnati. He was also an active member of the Alexandria (Virginia) Masonic Lodge, which included his old commander George Washington, Freemasonry being popular among Southern gentlemen. In addition to these things, Smallwood showed keen interest in reviving his local parish church, Durham. Like most Southern gentlemen before the war, Smallwood had been an Anglican, that is, a communicant of the established Church of England. After political ties with England were severed, and with the *Federal Constitution prohibiting an established church in America*, American ex-Anglicans formed a new church and called it the American Episcopal Church. Though independent of the Church of England, the Episcopal Church retained the same liturgy. Now an Episcopalian, Smallwood sought to see Durham Parish Church, whose fortunes declined during the war, revived. A vestryman, he served on a committee whose members were given the charge to "restore the spirit of their religion and the flourishing state Durham Parish was in previous to the late glorious revolution." The committee raised over 30,000 pounds of tobacco notes and over 177 pounds of current money for this purpose. Smallwood personally donated 3,000 pounds of tobacco to help re-roof the church.

In 1791, Smallwood's 59th year, he was elected to the Maryland State Senate, and that body immediately chose him its presiding officer. But the old soldier had fought his last campaign. He died early the next year while visiting at the Woodyard in Prince Georges County. His personal estate had dwindled. The inventory taken of it after his death revealed that his slave holdings had declined to twenty, and there were so many debts outstanding against the estate that his executor, a nephew, sold it off to satisfy creditors. (This was not an uncommon scenario among Southern planters; they often mortgaged their future crops to fund present production, and thus died technically in debt. It happened to Thomas Jefferson). Nevertheless, William Smallwood had made conspicuous contributions to the state and nation which he had so tirelessly served. The Maryland Gazette memorialized him shortly after his death with the following eulogy:

*Prominent as a soldier, wise and decided as a statesman,
inflexible as a patriot,
he uniformly distinguished himself in the Cabinet and the field,
and through
the various vicissitudes of a long and doubtful war,
maintained and possessed
the confidence and applause of his country.*

William Smallwood and His Society

William Smallwood matured in a colonial agrarian society, that is, a society which was politically and economically dependent on a distant mother country (Great Britain) and had, as its chief means of economic sustenance, an agricultural base (tobacco). For the century or so before Smallwood's birth, England had, rather absent-mindedly, collected an odd assortment of colonies, including Maryland, stretching out along the Eastern Seaboard of North America and on some of the islands in the West Indies. Organized under different kinds of charters, for different purposes, governed independently of each other, and pursuing disparate and often antagonistic economic goals, England's American colonies were an orderly, efficiently-administered empire only on paper. In fact, they amounted to a disconnected commonwealth of semi-autonomous provinces. Therein germinated the seed of American independence.

The Theory of Empire - and the Reality

By the 1660s, when William's great-grandfather James was getting himself established as a tobacco planter in the Maryland tidewater, British imperial planners had articulated a clear set of assumptions about the relationship between mother country and colonies. The degree to which these assumptions worked out in reality - and the extent to which the colonists accepted them in the first place - help us understand the nature of colonial society.

The main concern of the imperial planners was the economic welfare of England. They wished to use the colonies to build English national wealth and thus the nation's strength on the world stage. The colonies were to serve as sources for essential raw materials not available in England and as markets for England's ever-growing industrial output. Under this theoretical system, which English economist Adam Smith later dubbed "mercantilism," the colonies were to remain economic and political subordinates of the homeland.

Some of the American colonies fit the scheme better than others. The West Indies island colonies, for example, fit the scheme ideally. Able to produce only sugar, an agricultural product for which there was great world-wide demand, the island colonies were totally dependent on England and the rest of the empire to supply them both with the necessities of life (including food), as well as the luxuries, for those who could afford the latter.

The New England colonies fit the scheme hardly at all. With rocky, barren soil, they were able to produce no raw products for which there was any particular external demand. Agriculturally self-sufficient, they relied on their sophisticated world-wide commercial network to supply them with the cash they needed to acquire other necessities and luxuries. Thus they did not conform very well to the mercantilist ideal.



This eighteenth century tobacco label offers a crude depiction of a tobacco plantation in operation. Courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

The middle and southern seaboard colonies, including Maryland and Virginia, fit into the British imperial scheme somewhere between the two extremes. Like the West Indies, these colonies developed staple crops for which there was great world-wide demand. North of the Mason-Dixon line the staple was wheat and flour. In Maryland and Virginia it was tobacco. Further south, rice and indigo prevailed. But, like

the New England colonies, the middle and southern colonies were agriculturally self-sufficient.

Tobacco and the Chesapeake

Geographic conditions in the region of the Chesapeake Bay were most congenial to the cultivation of tobacco. The soil of the tidewater was more abundant and fertile than the land of New England, and the growing season was longer. Moreover, the numerous inlets, rivers and creeks of the tidewater made access to tobacco lands relatively easy in an age of crude modes of land transportation. Consequently, shortly after John Rolfe of Virginia demonstrated the efficacy of tobacco as a money crop early in the 17th century, the course of future economic growth in the Chesapeake was determined. Planters scrambled to patent or buy land along the waterways of the tidewater to raise and market tobacco. Colonial authorities, who were eager to see the land settled and productive, made the land available on liberal terms. The geography of the tidewater, along with the system of tobacco plantations, resulted in patterns of settlement quite distinct from New England, where poor soil, a confining mountain barrier close to the sea, and natural coastal harbors combined to encourage numerous village settlements, with a major urban center at Boston. In the Chesapeake, with its fertile soil stretching endlessly into the interior and easily navigable interior waterways, settlement was more distended, with individual families establishing plantations which spread over a broad area, far from neighbors. The cheapness of land, and tobacco's propensity for exhausting fertile soil, rapidly encouraged the constant opening of new

land, and even more scattered patterns of settlement.

Tobacco was the life-blood of the Chesapeake. Not only was it the chief cash crop, but it also served as a medium of exchange and measure of value. Fearing a drain of precious metal, England would not permit the exportation of specie or bullion to the colonies, nor would it allow the colonies to mint coins. While this policy probably did help maintain the British domestic specie supply, it left the colonies in somewhat of a predicament, with no hard currency. To some extent colonists compensated with simple bartering, but that would not suffice for sophisticated financial transactions, so the colonies tried other expedencies to build up a domestic medium of exchange.

One ploy was to enact laws artificially boosting the value of foreign coins in the colonies. The idea was to encourage foreign merchants and seamen to spend their coins in the American colonies, where they had more buying power than elsewhere. Once the foreign coins had been attracted to the colonies, they would tend to stay there to circulate, because to spend them overseas would mean a reduction of their purchasing power.

Another ploy was to issue paper money in denominations based on the traditional English pound sterling, but valued in colonial currency. In other words, things could be valued at so many pounds of "current money," rather than so many pounds of good English sterling silver. This is known as "fiat" money, paper bills that are supposedly worth what the issuing government says they are worth, the system that is used throughout the world today. This kind of money can be highly inflationary because people do not trust it as much as silver or gold, and therefore demand more of it. Thus goods or services that would be intrinsically worth a pound in sterling might fetch five or ten pounds in colonial current money.

Maryland and Virginia tried another strategy, a sophisticated form of barter based upon tobacco notes. Tobacco notes were paper money, but they had backing, unlike fiat money. The way it worked in the Chesapeake was as follows: a tobacco planter would deliver so many pounds of processed tobacco ready for overseas shipment to warehouses run by the colonial government. The authorities would hold the tobacco for shipment and give the planters paper receipts called certificates of deposit. These certificates would represent pounds tobacco equal to the number of pounds of tobacco being deposited. Tobacco notes were legal tender and theoretically could be redeemed for a like number of pounds of tobacco. Such bills were more reliable than fiat money, but with the volatility of the tobacco market, their value could fluctuate, and throughout the colonial period the overall trend in tobacco prices was downward. The tobacco system of exchange survived the Revolution. When William Smallwood donated money to re-roof Durham Parish Church, he did so in the form of commercial paper to the value of 3,000 pounds of tobacco, not by actually delivering 3,000 pounds of tobacco to the church doorstep.

Land, the Basis of Society

In an agrarian society, such as colonial Maryland's, land was the basis of vested wealth, much like a stock portfolio would be today. And, without the artificial distinction of inherited rankings of nobility in the colonies, land ownership also became the basis of social prestige. The more land a man (or woman, in some cases) owned, the more lofty his (or her) social rank. Men who built up wealth by professional or mercantile pursuits usually put that wealth into the form of land holdings. Naturally, some men became more wealthy than others. The Smallwoods of Charles County were, by the measure of land holdings, very wealthy, and therefore enjoyed high social rank. However, with that prestige came the expectation of public leadership, which the Smallwoods assumed.

Benjamin Franklin observed that American society could generally be divided into three socio-economic levels. He called them the "better sort," the "middling sort," and the "meaner sort." While these terms have negative connotations to the modern ear, they do serve to illustrate the stratification of colonial society. The "better sort" were the wealthiest and most politically powerful, like the Smallwoods. The "middling sort" were what we today would call middle class, the moderately endowed and independent. And the "meaner sort" were those who were comparatively destitute and dependent. In Maryland during William Smallwood's time, the "meaner sort" made up the majority of the population. This group included black slaves at the very bottom of the segment, then white servants. Above the servile elements, but still among the "meaner sort," would be unskilled laborers and landless tenants, all of whom were technically "freemen," but made their livings doing other men's work on other men's land. Generally speaking, the "meaner sort" were not allowed to vote. Because slaves easily comprised a third of Maryland's population during Smallwood's time, the "meaner sort" outnumbered the two higher ranks. The nature of a staple crop economy, such as Maryland's tobacco enterprise, required a tremendous supply of cheap labor. Indentured and convict servants from England helped supply this demand, along with wage laborers. But these resources were inadequate, and thus black chattel slavery became widespread in the Chesapeake by Smallwood's time, and helps explain why the "meaner sort" were so numerous a segment of the population.

The "better sort" were the numerically smallest segment of colonial society, comprising perhaps a mere five percent, but they controlled most of the wealth and political power. However, unlike the ruling class of England and other European countries, the ruling class in Maryland (and the other colonies), was, for the most part, not made up of titled nobility. Except for an occasional governor or councilor of noble blood, most men of power and wealth, like William Smallwood, had earned their rank through hard work. True, Smallwood was born into wealth created by his forebears, but no inherited title guaranteed his prominence. He had to keep his estates profitable. The "better sort" were those whose substantial estates entitled them to preside over the county courts (as had William's father Bayne and

great-grandfather James), serve in important offices such as sheriff or attorney general, hold commissions in the militia (as had James Smallwood), be elected to the Lower House of the Assembly (Bayne and William Smallwood), or even go as high as appointment to the governor's council. Because the "better sort" won their power and position through their own abilities and effort, they seemed to be the logical leaders of society, men whom Thomas Jefferson would later refer to as the "natural aristocracy."

While these ideas of deference to one's "social betters" goes against the grain of American attitudes today, they were nevertheless fundamental to the nature of American society during and immediately after the War for Independence. The process of democratization of American society was in its infancy and would continue for some time afterwards, even into the present.

The "middling sort" in Smallwood's Maryland were the small landowners, skilled artisans (such as blacksmiths, coopers, shipwrights), professional people (such as teachers, physicians, and ministers). As free men possessed of modest estates, they paid taxes, voted for county delegates, served on juries and in the ranks of the militia, held minor public offices such as constable or overseer of roads, and generally pursued their own lives unencumbered by onerous dues and obligations to those above them. The vast majority of the "middling sort" were small planters. "farmers" might be a more applicable modern term. They lived at a subsistence level, raising enough foodstuffs to feed themselves, family and any servants or slaves they might have, and they produced a small tobacco cash crop to pay for things they were unable to produce for themselves. In areas beyond the tidewater, where tobacco was not feasible for cultivation, wheat and flour served as the cash crop. Despite their modest circumstances, the "middling sort," like the "better sort," were styled "freemen."

Women in colonial society were not accorded all the civil rights and privileges of men. They could neither vote, hold public office, nor sit on juries, and could own property in their own names only if they had no husbands. And there were many women who preferred to be landowners and slaveowners rather than wives. William Smallwood's sister, Pricilla, is an example.

When their mother bequeathed a large landholding of hers in Virginia to her son William, she attached a condition to the bequest. In return for 800 acres of Virginia land, William was to provide his sister with two plantations in Charles County, Maryland, that she might remain "adjacent to her friends and connections." William was bound to provide Pricilla these two estates so long as she remained unmarried. Pricilla preferred that arrangement to marriage and remained single during William's lifetime.

Despite what we today would perceive as limitations placed on the rights of women in colonial America, women at the time possessed greater

personal freedom than was the case in England and Europe, and, in an age yet untouched by industrialization and modern technological conveniences, they were immensely important factors in the economies of their own households. The raising, preservation and preparation of a household's food supply usually fell within women's purview, and these were responsibilities not to be taken lightly in an age before supermarkets and commercially canned or frozen foods. Many women took responsibility, either personally or by supervision of servants and slaves, for weaving cloth and sewing clothing for their households before the advent of cheap mass-produced clothing. In poorer households, women helped work the tobacco fields and thus contributed directly to the creation of wealth. Women, too, had primary responsibility for rearing children, a very important social function. And at all levels of society, when the men were called away to discharge their public duties, management of household and estate management often fell to the women. Despite their disfranchisement, women in American colonial society commanded a certain prestige and respect born of their essential roles in the welfare of their families.

William Smallwood's Plantation

William Smallwood's house and furnishings reflect the lifestyle of a member of the colonial "better sort." But, by no means was the General's life there an idle one. Besides the civil and military duties he assumed at various times throughout his career, his first and foremost occupation was that of a tidewater planter. Such a living, even for someone of Smallwood's high social position, required constant work and unflinching attention to every minutia of plantation economy. Rich he was, but not idle rich.

Tobacco Cultivation

The most important business of the plantation was, of course, the annual tobacco crop. Tobacco varieties of the colonial period were not as refined as they are today. Generally, colonial tobacco resembled today's burly leaf types, rather than the bright leaf types which are more familiar to the modern palate. And even in the colonial period, there was concern over tobacco's effects on health. King James I had branded it the "pernicious weed" and inveighed against its use as deleterious to smokers' health. Nevertheless, world demand for tobacco was insatiable, and planters of the colonial Chesapeake were anxious to



Tobacco leaves are cured by air drying them on stakes hung in special tobacco drying barns.

supply the demand.

Tobacco cultivation was a tedious and labor intensive task. The annual cycle of tobacco husbandry began in late winter when seed was sown in specially prepared seed beds to sprout. When the plants were still small, they were transplanted to the fields, usually in early June, and in synchronization with rain patterns. The plantation laborers had to tend the crop



Moved from Bryan's Road, Md., this early Tidewater tobacco barn was re-erected at Smallwood State Park. It houses exhibits on the life and times of General William Smallwood

carefully. Worming and weeding were regular and necessary tasks. Also, flowers and suckers had to be pruned to assure maximum nutrition for the valuable leaves. It was said that Chesapeake tobacco cultivators were easily recognizable by their unusually long and thickened thumbnails with which they pruned the plants. The crop was harvested by hand in August, and the plants speared on four-foot long sticks for curing. Curing was accomplished either by hanging the tobacco-laden sticks in direct sunlight or by hanging in special tobacco barns, such as are still commonly seen in Southern Maryland, for air curing. An early tobacco barn has been re-erected on the grounds near Smallwood's restored house, now known as "Smallwood's Retreat."

After curing, in early winter, the leaves were stripped from the stalks, sorted, and packed into hogsheads (large barrels) which held about 1,000 pounds of tobacco each. The hogsheads were hauled, or in many cases actually rolled along special "rolling roacs," to waterside warehouses to await shipment to England. It was at the warehouses that planters received their certificates of deposit, or tobacco notes, which could be used as

currency. Once the crop had been delivered to the warehouse, by late winter, it was time to start the process all over again for the next year's crop. By terms of Parliament's Navigation Act of 1660, the colonists were forbidden to ship their valuable weed outside of the empire. That could only be done after the tobacco had passed through the hands of English merchants/middlemen, thus assuring them a monopoly on the trade. Colonists often bribed British officials in America to allow shipment directly to foreign consumers. This assured the planters higher wharf-side prices and foreign buyers lower prices, even taking the bribes into account. The Revolution, of course, ended the charade. English merchants still competed for American tobacco, and American planters were free to sell to them or to non-English merchants, whoever offered the highest price.

Because tobacco was a hand crop requiring a year-long cycle of cultivation and preparation, it could not be raised in large quantities. It was calculated at the time that each tobacco hand on a plantation could only manage three or four acres of crop per year. Thus, if out of Smallwood's 56 slaves in 1790, 30 were available as tobacco hands, it is likely that the General could have produced no more than 120 acres of the crop in that year. And yet, the money return of tobacco was such that the effort to cultivate and harvest those 120 acres was worth the General's while.

Other Products

While tobacco provided the basis of the Chesapeake plantation economy, it was not the only commodity the system produced. Livestock and foodstuffs accounted for the major use of the land.

Smallwood no doubt raised grains, such as barley, oats, corn, and wheat, to feed his slaves and livestock. His inventory shows that he kept large herds of cattle and sheep which would have provided more food, wool for slave clothing, and leather for shoes, harness and other necessities. He may have kept hogs as well, but since hogs were allowed to range freely, inventory takers may have missed them when the General died. He may also have raised flax and cotton, which also could be processed on his estates for clothing. Vegetable gardens probably sprouted all over his plantation each spring to further supplement the domestic food supply. Although we do not know for sure, it is probable the General had orchards too. His inventory does enumerate a large number of horses, which indicates he may have bred them, a profitable sideline among the horse-happy gentry of the Chesapeake.

Providing the labor to raise all these crops and tend the livestock was the primary function of Smallwood's slaves. African Americans were accorded the lowest status in colonial society. On large estates like Smallwood's, they lived separately from their white masters in barrack-like quarters. While they could be bought and sold at their master's will, there was some degree of respect accorded to family units among the slaves, and masters often encouraged maintaining the social cohesion of the slave force as a means of promoting social stability. Nevertheless, a master could break up a slave family unit with impunity, if it suited his pocketbook and wishes to do so. Some slaves received specialized training outside the fields.

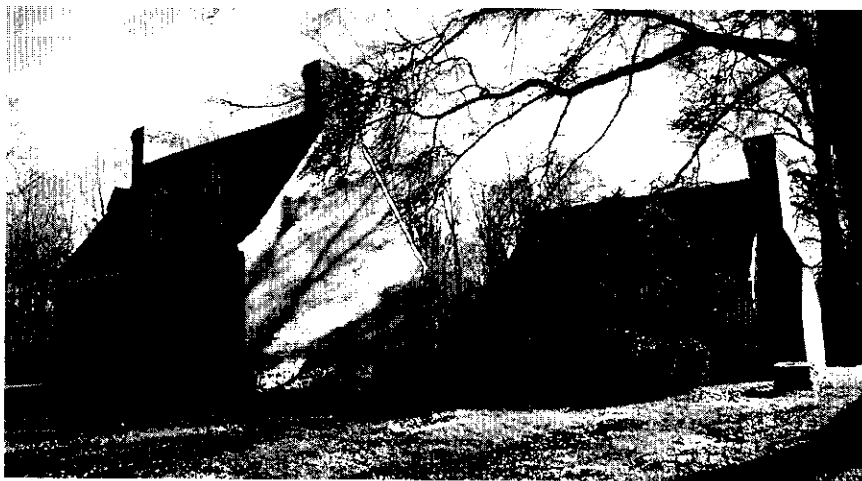
Smallwood's inventory lists one slave who was a blacksmith and another who was an apprentice carpenter. Such specialized craftsmen provided skills necessary in maintaining the plantation and could realize income for their master, should he decide to hire them out. To manage his large labor force, especially when he was away, Smallwood would rely on trusted subordinates and overseers, some of whom may have been slaves themselves.

Although an eighteenth century tidewater estate such as William Smallwood's was not a totally self-sufficient economic unit, its activities were far more diversified than is the case on large commercial farms today. It provided most of the labor force's basic needs. Supplementary activities, such as carpentry and blacksmithing, usually occurred somewhere on the estate.

Smallwood's House

The General's "mansion house" itself is an intriguing example of colonial tidewater plantation architecture. It is simpler in design and decoration than other more familiar houses built by wealthy planters. At a time when it was fashionable for rich planters to erect grand Georgian mansions to showcase their wealth, Smallwood was content with a small house which combined simple utility with graceful proportions and modest elegance. As a gentleman bachelor, he apparently was content to have nothing more than that.

Smallwood's house is brick, a sturdy and decorative building medium which was much favored in the tidewater. Contrary to myth, most of the brick used in colonial architecture was made in America, not imported as ship's ballast. Often a brick kiln was set up right on the construction



General Smallwood's house, now known as "Smallwood's Retreat," and its detached kitchen were reconstructed from ruins by the Smallwood Foundation in 1958, and donated to the State of Maryland.

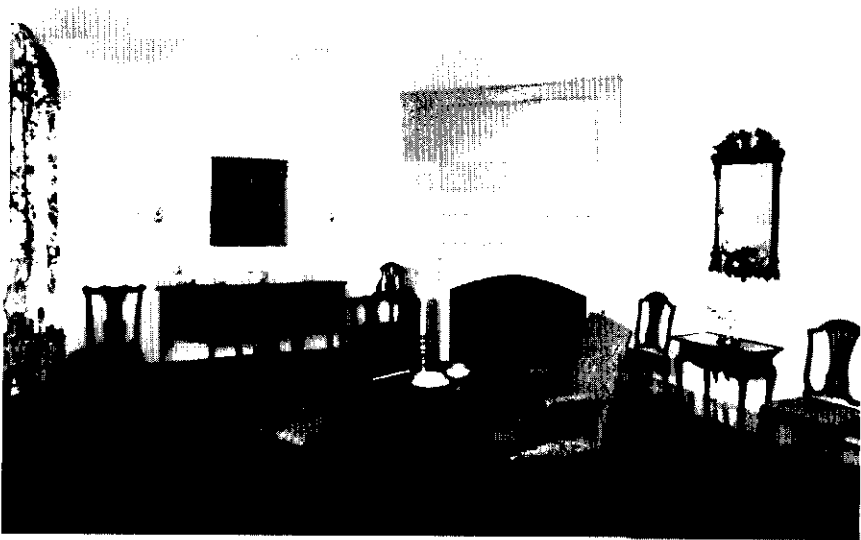
premises in order to exploit local clays and avoid high transportation costs. The sequence in which the bricks of Smallwood's house are laid is called "Flemish bond," though there is no evidence that the design originated in Flanders. In Flemish bond, each course of bricks is laid alternately lengthwise and endwise, or, as a mason would put it, "stretcher, header, stretcher." Each course of Flemish bond is laid on its lower course in such a way that each stretcher is balanced on a header and each header straddles the middle of a stretcher. The result is a very pleasing and sturdy pattern, often enhanced, as at Smallwood's, by glazing the ends of headers. Flemish bond is unusually strong because each header bonds into unseen brickwork behind it, thus strengthening the walls. The darker brickwork on the corners of Smallwood's house shows how little of the original structure stood when restoration occurred in 1958.



The outer walls of Smallwood's restored house are laid in Flemish bond, while the watertable is executed in English bond. This combination of brick bonds was popular in Southern Maryland colonial architecture.

The raised apron around the base of Smallwood's house is called a watertable. The original function of watertables was to throw off rainwater running off gutterless roofs, and by Smallwood's time had become decorative features as well. On Smallwood's house, the watertable combines fieldstone and brickwork laid in "English bond," a pattern characterized by one course of headers, one course of stretchers, another of headers, and so on.

The upper story of Smallwood's house is enclosed on front and back by the steeply pitched roof. While such construction reduced construction costs by reducing the need for brickwork in the upper story, it resulted in less headroom in the upper chambers of the house, a situation partially remedied by dormer windows. Wood shingles cover the roof. Chimneys in Smallwood's house are set inside the end walls, which is somewhat unusual in the tidewater, but offers the advantage of corner fireplaces in adjoining rooms.



Great room, photo by Charles Cadie

The Interior

The interior of Smallwood's house carries through the same simple elegance of the exterior. The walls are plastered and washed in muted and pleasing colors. There is considerable wood paneling, a popular interior finish in better houses of this period. Moldings are simple and functional. The built-in corner cupboards of the dining room are genuine antiques and were brought to Smallwood's during the restoration. The shell motif at the top of the cupboards was popular during the colonial period. Similarly, the bannister on the staircase is a genuine eighteenth century antique brought from another Southern Maryland house.

The furnishings are all antique and were selected on the basis of items mentioned in Smallwood's testamentary inventory. They range in date from the time of the house's original construction (1760) to the time of Smallwood's death (1792). They also range in style from simple country furniture to fashionable pieces. The gateleg drop-leaf table in the southeast room of the first floor, the ladderback chairs throughout the house, and the poplar beds in one of the upper chambers are typical colonial country pieces. The craftsmen who built them often painted them bright colors. Traces of original light blue-green paint can still be discerned on one of the beds.

In contrast to the country pieces, other furniture, such as the sideboard in the dining room, represent the pinnacle of the eighteenth century furniture maker's craft. Elements of the Chippendale style, fashionable

during Smallwood's youth, and the Heppelwhite style of his maturity are evident throughout the collection. While all furniture in the house is antique, and based on furniture Smallwood is known to have owned, only the three side chairs around the dining room table are known to have actually been owned by William Smallwood. John Shaw of Annapolis, a foremost colonial American furniture maker, crafted them for Smallwood. And we know from surviving correspondence that shortly before his death, the General had John Shaw make him a sideboard, presumably in the Heppelwhite style, as is the sideboard on display in the dining room.



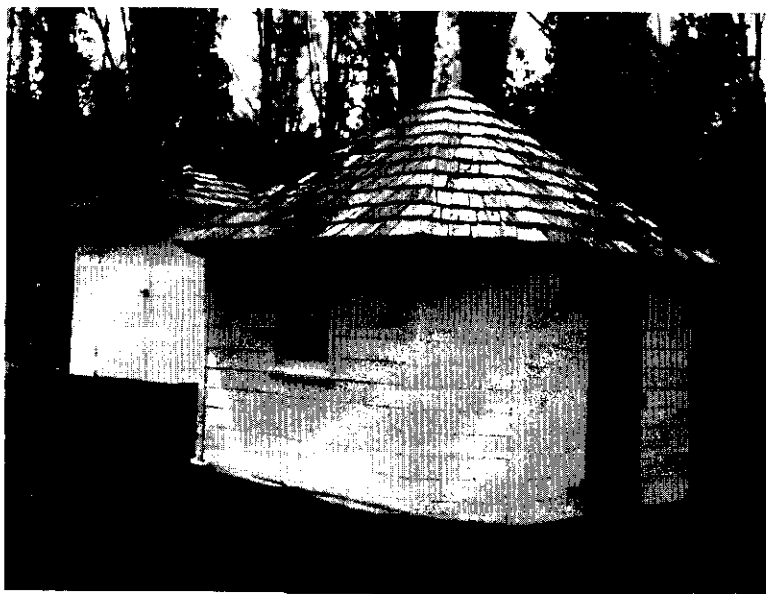
Kitchen

Outbuildings

Several outbuildings on the Smallwood estate illustrate structures known, or likely, to have stood there. Immediately adjacent to the house is a frame kitchen, built on the location of the original. Its huge chimney and fireplace are well-suited to the tasks of food preparation and laundry. Kitchens in the humid tidewater were often detached from the main houses to reduce summer heat in the main living quarters and to help protect the main house from fires likely to be sparked by cooking fireplaces. The furnishings and utensils of the kitchen are wholly functional, yet exhibit the natural charm of handmade, utilitarian implements.

South of the main house are reconstructions of a typical colonial smokehouse and a privy. Further to the southeast is a restored Southern Maryland tobacco drying barn. This structure originally stood at Bryan's Road in Charles County. It was dismantled and re-erected at Smallwood State Park to protect it from demolition. It houses exhibits on the life and times of William Smallwood and the tobacco culture of his time.

Smallwood's restored plantation combines the elegant with the utilitarian. Thus it reflects the lifestyle of a wealthy, but unassuming, eighteenth century planter and man of affairs such as William Smallwood.



*Smallwood's retreat:
On the left is the pumphouse and on the right the smokehouse*

History of Smallwood State Park

Because William Smallwood died without direct heirs and because his estate was broken up among other relatives to satisfy debts outstanding against it, his memory descended into undeserved obscurity. His house was used by tenant farmers who did not maintain it well. In 1898, The Maryland Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, seeking to memorialize the forgotten hero, erected the granite marker on the north lawn of the house. Some believe the spot to be the General's burial site, but even this can not be verified. At the time of the marker's placement, the Sons of the American Revolution pronounced the house to be in a "dilapidated condition."

In the 1930s, a group of concerned Charles County citizens formed the Smallwood Foundation for the purpose of restoring the house. Progress was slow but in 1958 the Foundation donated the reconstructed house and surrounding ten acres of grounds to the State of Maryland, under the Governorship of Theodore McKeldin, with the State agreeing to establish Smallwood State Park.

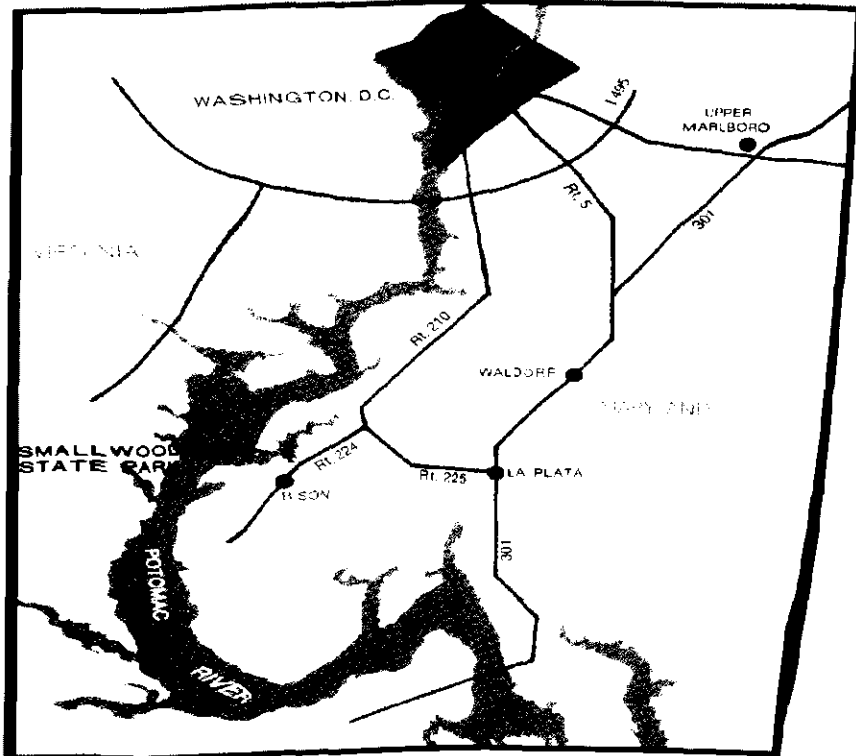
The Smallwood Foundation has generously donated to the people of Maryland the house's historic furnishings, all of which have been selected upon the basis of an inventory of Smallwood's possessions taken at the time of his death. The Foundation continues to advise and assist the State on matters pertaining to the operation of the Smallwood house and grounds, and coordinates public support for the site. In 1999, the Foundation was instrumental in Charles County's acquisition of a letter written by George Washington at Mt. Vernon to William Smallwood, dated December 28, 1783, regarding the first meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati, to be held "the first Monday in May next," in Philadelphia.

Volunteer support is an important component of Smallwood State Park. The tobacco barn was moved to the park and reconstructed entirely with volunteer help, and a corps of park volunteers helps maintain the house and open it for public visitation, especially for special occasions. The Charles County Garden Club has been dedicated to planting and maintaining the herb garden near the kitchen.

Smallwood State Park has grown considerably since 1958, with the addition of the Sweden Point Marina, the Mattawoman Creek Art Center, and a campground. Besides a cultural trip into Maryland's rich past, the park now offers modern recreational opportunities such as boating, fishing, camping, hiking and nature study. There are also facilities for small public meetings.

By preserving the Smallwood name, however, the park still serves its original purpose of perpetuating the memory of an early Maryland, and an American patriot whose contributions to State and national history are conspicuous.

Notes



Smallwood State Park is near Washington, D.C., and is easily accessible from US Route 301 or from Md. Route 210, Indian Head Highway.



Reconstruction of a soldier of Smallwood's Maryland Battalion during the New York campaigns of 1776.