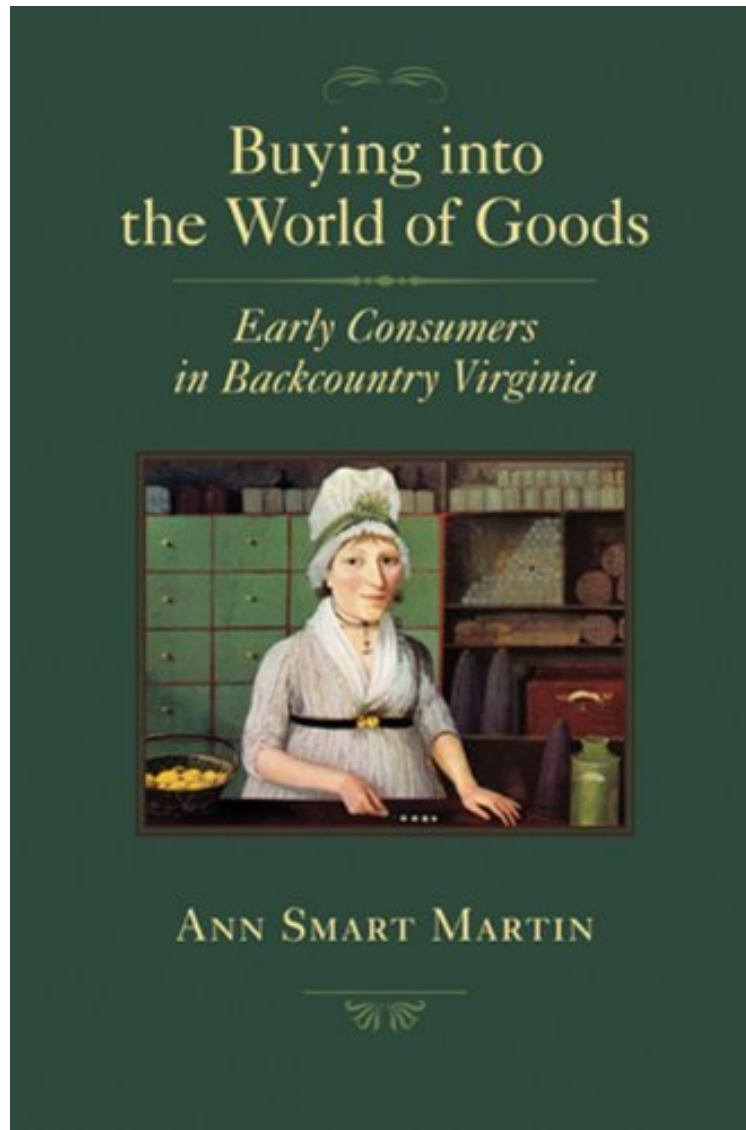


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Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia (Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia)

Ann Smart Martin

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Ann Smart Martin : Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia (Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia (Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of*

Philadelphia):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Opening up the real backcountryBy giI confess I'm a little surprised this book was such an enjoyable read. I honestly found myself disappointed when I turned the last page. I couldn't bring myself to shelve it, but kept it in my bedside reading stack of books. Given the subject, I had not anticipated such a response. But by the time the reader turns that last page, he has become part of the very real world whose citizens move in and out of the backcountry Virginia store of storekeeper John Hook between 1758 and 1810. He has watched as the barter system, based on tobacco is gradually augmented and almost replaced entirely by cash purchases. He has seen the merchant's stock change with the fashions of the time and has come to appreciate the significance of the store's location and the disposition of its goods. And the simple idea of a self-sufficient frontier is replaced by a far more complex reality of a world where even the enslaved used manufactured goods to define and distinguish themselves. Hook's account books and business correspondence are the basis for Smart's study of the way consumerism both reflected and changed the values and ideals of propriety in the backcountry of Virginia, mainly Bedford and Franklin Counties. Using the methods of material cultural analysis, Martin opens up a complex world that proves the backcountry to be much more sophisticated and involved in the world of material goods than one might imagine. Hook was what many in his day called a "sojourner," a young, educated eighteenth-century Scotsman who saw few prospects for financial success in his homeland. His hope was to find work in the colonial world that would give him a comfortable, respectable life---back in Scotland. Hook's father was a small manufacturer in Scotland who could only provide his sons with connections in the mercantile world. It was up to them to use those to advantage. He sent John to Virginia to work for the Donald family, one of the largest families operating in the Chesapeake tobacco business. By opening stores on the fringes of the backcountry, the Donalds and others gained access to tobacco that otherwise would be costly and difficult to procure. In time Hook would own his own stores, and unlike most of his Scottish competitors, he would not return to Scotland after the Revolution, but would acquire land and a plantation and a comfortable, respectable life in the new state of Virginia. The quality, variety, and fashion of his store's stock surprised me. Quantities of queensware china from England; bolts of fashionable textiles and sundry sewing items; a wide variety of ribbons; house paints in Spanish brown, Prussian blue, and yellow; quality tools and garden implements; clocks; modish hats; copies of "The Spectator" and Dr. Johnson's "Dictionary" --all might be had for trade, cash, or credit. And Hook was ever demanding his suppliers understand that his customers wanted the current styles and patterns in Britain, not last year's styles and colors. This is a rich, textured look at a particular backcountry world and the ideals and styles of living that characterized it. What emerges is a culture that does not fit the notions of tobacco country. Too few people had too few slaves to grow a large tobacco crop. But neither does it fit prevailing notions of the frontier or backcountry. Hook stocked bed curtains, green silk hats, fancy feathers, porcelain cups and plates, knives and forks, leather-bound books. The reality that emerges is of a culture that still looked to European ideas, but appropriated only what was useful in that place and revised and reinterpreted the rest. Martin's writing style is lively and crisp, easily understood by the common reader. And although the logic of the book is not strictly narrative, still it has the feeling of narrative. I wanted to know what that gaggle of girls purchased, how Hook would deal with the fierce competition, and how he would handle the experience of the Revolution. I wanted him to succeed. I wanted his customers to be able to afford a table on which to put the plates they purchased. I was happy they had not bought into the preference for tea that was commonplace in the tidewater areas. I admired the enslaved customers who dared to purchase clothing that would establish them as individuals. Such a richly textured world Martin gives us! Those who want to know what the moving frontier communities were really like will enjoy this book. And the methods employed will make them more sensitive readers of the culture of their own time as well. The book has many significant awards, and I think it deserves every one of them. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent and well-researchedBy Thomas P. MyersExcellent and well-researched. Worth study rather than merely a read. Provides considerable insight in a county of the Virginia Piedmont. If you want to know the Piedmont, you must have this book. If you wish to compare the Piedmont with the Tidewater or the Valley, you must have this book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The web of tradeBy richard t fieldI am really enjoying the insights into the back country trade nets that went into settling this country. very well written.

How did people living on the early American frontier discover and then become a part of the market economy? How do their purchases and their choices revise our understanding of the market revolution and the emerging consumer ethos? Ann Smart Martin provides answers to these questions by examining the texture of trade on the edge of the upper Shenandoah Valley between 1760 and 1810. Reconstructing the world of one country merchant, John Hook, Martin reveals how the acquisition of consumer goods created and validated a set of ideas about taste, fashion, and lifestyle in a particular place at a particular time. Her analysis of Hook's account ledger illuminates the everyday wants, transactions, and tensions recorded within and brings some of Hook's customers to life: a planter looking for just the right clock, a farmer in search of nails, a young woman and her friends out shopping on their own, and a slave woman choosing a looking glass. This innovative approach melds fascinating narratives with sophisticated analysis of

material culture to distill large abstract social and economic systems into intimate triangulations among merchants, customers, and objects. Martin finds that objects not only reflect culture, they are the means to create it.

"A wonderful book. It is impressively researched, logically organized, and well written. And far more than most accounts of the colonial backcountry, it introduces real people making choices about how to construct their worlds and how to present themselves to their neighbors and friends." (Daniel B. Thorp *Journal of Southern History*) "By salvaging and examining the transactions of one merchant operating in the Atlantic economy of the period, [Martin] reveals much that is valuable about the world of goods and indicates several possible directions for future study." (Michelle Craig McDonald *Business History*) "The writing is lively and easily understandable, and the mixture of methods used to study the accounts of Hook and the vast variety of topics addressed result in a book that would have broad appeal to antique and historic house enthusiasts, re-enactors and local historians." (Mary Ferrari *Roanoke Times*) "The best study we have to date of early American consumerism." (Paul G. E. Clemens *in American History*) "An important contribution to the study of consumption in early America that also provides wonderful insight into the significant role of objects in illuminating the past." (Adrienne D. Hood *William and Mary Quarterly*) "This is a book that quite forcefully offers an interdisciplinary analysis based on the abilities of the art historian and the economic historian, a person at ease with artifacts and dusty will books and skilled at describing local vernacular architecture and long-distance consumer behavior. It joins the list of must-read books for anyone interested in economic behavior and consumer practices in the early modern Atlantic basin." (Peter C. Mancall *Winterthur Portfolio*) "Exceptional. An analytical model that will advance the field of material culture." (Trudy Eden *The Historian*) "An impressive example of what thinking in multidisciplinary ways about the uses and meaning of material culture can reveal about past lives... Martin has melded several approaches to her subject to great effect, and this work will be incredibly useful not only to those interested in the eighteenth-century Virginia backcountry, but also to any historical scholar who wishes to understand consumerism and its relationship to things and individual identity." (Jamie C. Brandon *Enterprise and Society*)

Winner, Hagley Prize in Business History, The Business History Conference
Covinner, Fred Kniffen Book Award, Pioneer America Society/Association for the Preservation of Landscapes and Artifacts

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