Transatlantic Textiles: European Linen In The Cloth Cultures Of Colonial North America

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IT IS well known that American colonial markets became of increasing—even primary—importance for European manufactures during the eighteenth century and thereby contributed significantly to the onset of the Industrial Revolution. For no goods was this so true as textiles, the first sector to enter the age of mechanized factory production. In the New World, cloth makers and merchants found continuously buoyant demand that more than compensated for the shrinking of traditional markets as mercantilist barriers arose and newly competitive manufacturing centres proliferated across Europe. Shortly before the outbreak of the War of Independence, it has been estimated that about ‘half of all English exports of silk goods, printed cotton and linen goods, and flannels’, and between ‘two-thirds and three-quarters of all exported English . . . linen and Spanish woolen [sic] goods went to British America’. Although detailed figures are lacking, a few years

1 For a recent summary, see Robert DuPlessis, Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ch. 5. R. P. Thomas and D. N. McCloskey, ‘Overseas Trade and Empire, 1700–1860’, in Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey (eds.), The Economic History of Britain since 1700, i: 1700–1860 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 90–1, note that ‘English combined exports to the North American colonies and the West Indies’ multiplied an ‘astounding’ 23-fold during the 18th century, and conclude that the ‘Atlantic colonies at the end of the century took over half of all the goods exported from the mother country’.

2 John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, The Economy of British America 1607–1789 (2nd edn.) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 286. These figures include linens woven outside Britain but because of the Navigation Laws exported through England. In 1770, according to ibid., table 13.2, 284, 79.2% of all linen exported from England went to British America. This was the highest proportion of 27 items; calicoes (enumerated as printed cotton and linen), 58.9% of which ended up in the same destination, ranked sixth from the top.
earlier the Chamber of Commerce of Marseilles had reported that Canada ‘consumes a great quantity . . . of woollens of every type [and] of linens’ (so the anticipated loss of the colony as a result of the Seven Years War would be a harsh blow to the French textile industry).  

Less well understood, however, is colonial consumption of European products. Who bought what, and why? How did demand change over time? How did imported wares contribute to the developing New World material culture? The fortunes of linen fabrics provide an excellent perspective on these issues. From the earliest days of colonization, European linens, along with woollens, were widely deployed by settlers of all ranks and also served as markers of honour and prestige. Throughout the eighteenth century, however, imported linens faced strong challenges in colonial markets both from imported cottons and calicoes and from locally woven fabrics. Tracing demand for European linens can thus illuminate the attractions of Old World goods in the New World and the limits to that appeal.

Because the study of colonial consumption is in its infancy, it is not yet possible fully to describe the textile cultures of early modern North America, but we can discern some of their contours from a comparative analysis that spans the period of greatest development. This chapter, therefore, compares the trading areas of Philadelphia in British North America and Montreal in New France in the late seventeenth and again in the later eighteenth centuries. Across the interven-

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3 'Réponse de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille à Messieurs de La Rochelle touchant la conservation du Canada', 21 Dec. 1761, printed in Rapport de l'archiviste de la province de Québec, v (Quebec: Louis-A. Proulx, 1925), 205; producing this cloth, the Chambre noted, furnished a livelihood for innumerable workers in France. The ‘Lettre de la Chambre de Commerce de Guyenne au Duc de Choiseul’, 22 Dec. 1761 (ibid. 223), cites the importance of woollen and silk fabric exports to Canada and also remarks upon the many jobs thereby generated. Cf. Louis Antoine de Bougainville, ‘Mémoire sur l'état de la Nouvelle-France, 1757’, ibid. iv (Quebec, 1924), 57: New France gets all its linen and woollen fabrics from the mother country.

4 For clothing, see, e.g., Peter Copeland, Working Dress in Colonial and Revolutionary America (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977). In the mid-17th century, Jesuits in New France noted that Christianized Amerindian chiefs, seeking to impress the colonial governor when visiting Quebec City, ‘dressed in the French style’, with a shirt of ‘white Holland linen’ and a jacket of expensive escarlate (a woollen cloth that might be red, blue, black, or green); Frenchwomen received as nuns into the Ursuline convent in the same town were given 50 ells of linen and 9 ells of black serge for their habits; Le Journal des Jésuites publié d’après le manuscrit original conservé aux archives du Séminaire de Québec, ed. C.-H. Laverdière and H.-R. Casgrain (Montreal: Editions François-Xavier, 1973), 53, 266.
ing decades, both cities came to rank among the leading commercial centres of their respective North American colonial empires, supply-
ing imported cloth, among many other items, to settlers and aboriginal people alike. In addition, both were hubs of regions that were home to a veritable cross-section of the New World populace—merchants, administrators, military men, professionals, artisans, and farmers. The initial data reported here come from two decades just prior to 1700, the time when substantial documentation first becomes avail-
able; the later information is from 1770–4, at the end of the original British and French colonial regimes. The periods bracket the 1740s and 1750s, years during which, according to some scholars, there occurred substantial changes in colonial habits of consumption—perhaps even a consumer revolution.

Two types of probate inventories are the major sources for this study: those that catalogue merchant stocks of cloth (virtually all imported), and those that enumerate the clothing left by individuals at their deaths. Only for Montreal, unfortunately, do documents of the

5 Mary A. Hanna, Trade of the Delaware District before the Revolution (Northampton, Mass.: Dept. of History, Smith College, 1917); Arthur L. Jensen, The Maritime Commerce of Colonial Philadelphia (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963); Louise Dechêne, Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle (Paris: Plon, 1974), esp. table 16, 151: cloth and clothing constituted 30% of merchant stocks in Montreal before 1664 and more than half between 1680 and 1720. The Native American market loomed large both for individual merchants (nearly every inventoried Montreal merchant examined below participated in it) and for Montreal’s commerce as a whole. For example, sales to Indian traders and Indians represented three-quarters of the cloth and clothing transactions, and nearly half the total business, of the leading merchant Alexis Lemoine Monière in 1715–24; ibid., graph 11, 505. For trade with Native Americans see also Dean L. Anderson, ‘Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives on European Trade Goods in the Western Great Lakes Region’ (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1992).


7 For the Montreal area there are 12 merchant inventories from the years 1677–97, 8 from 1770–4. For the Philadelphia area, 9 have survived for 1682–1702, 8 for 1770–4. In each instance, the first period comprises the two decades following the first usable merchant inventory. For individual ownership of clothing, I use 88 New France inven-
tories from the years 1651–1700 and 80 from 1770–4. (These inventories of individuals are the source of all figures on the fabrics in garments cited below in text and notes.) All Montreal-area inventories are found in the Archives Nationales du Québec à Montréal, Notaries A. Adhémar, Basset, Bourgine, Closse, De Saint-Pere, Gastineau-DuPlessis,
latter sort exist in sufficient quantity, but for that area they encompass both genders and a broad range of ages, occupations, and wealth—in short, a representative although not a random sample of the settler population from which they are drawn. Inventories, of course, record possessions at death; they do not register sales over one’s mercantile career or purchases of garments during one’s life. Still, we can expect that merchants who stayed in business during their lifetimes, as these did (bankruptcy inventories have not been used), must have been reasonably well attuned to their markets; furthermore, comparisons with actual orders show marked similarity. For their part, besides thoroughly listing and valuing clothing, inventories of individuals’ property in New France frequently describe the age and condition of garments, imparting a sense of accumulation over time. To be sure, none of the figures presented here should be invested with an exaggerated degree of precision, but from all evidence they do indicate trends with a fair degree of accuracy.

Data regarding the cloth in deceased merchants’ stores and warehouses can be arrayed in two ways, by quantity (yardage or ellage) and by value as established by the decedents’ professional colleagues, who

Mauge, Moreau, Pottier (all for 1677–97); Bouvet, Chatelier, Duvernay, Foucher, Grise, Hantraye, Lalanne, Mezières, Panet, Sanguinet, Soupras (1770–4). Inventories for the Philadelphia area come from the collections of wills at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and the Chester County Archives and Record Services, West Chester, Pa., and from the 1774 wills printed in Alice Hanson Jones, American Colonial Wealth: Documents and Methods (New York: Arno Press, 1977), vol. iii.

8 English colonial inventories typically summarized and valued all clothing in a word or two (e.g., ‘purse and apparel’); increasingly across the 18th century, moreover, those inventories that did list garments failed to specify the fabrics of which they were made. Thus whereas in the late 17th century the fabric was not specified in about a fifth of all garments, by the 1770s the proportion was nearly three-quarters. And even when fabrics are cited, silk is listed very disproportionately, suggesting a concern with expensive and showy items that would radically skew conclusions.

9 Analysis of the Philadelphia merchant Daniel Wistar’s purchases from England in 1763 (17 orders) as compared to Philadelphia-area merchant stocks in the early 1770s (parenthetical figures) yields the following results: linens 33% (36%), woolens 28% (22%), cottons and calicoes 25% (23%), mixed 9% (8%), silks 2% (5%); Winterthur Library, Wilmington, Delaware, Joseph Downs Collection, Co. 94.

10 For more extended discussions of the issues involved in using these inventories and of the characteristics of the inventoried population, see Robert DuPlessis, ‘Was There a Consumer Revolution in Eighteenth-Century New France?’, French Colonial History, 1 (2002), 143–59. It should also be noted that the present study considers only wearing apparel made from cloth. It thus omits leather garments, notably the aprons worn by many artisans and the breeches that numerous males owned.
### Table 5.1. Cloth Quantities by Category (quantity as percentage of total merchant stocks)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of cloth</th>
<th>1680s-1690s</th>
<th>1770-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Montreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linens</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woollens</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottons and calicoes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Textiles insufficiently described to classify constituted the remainder.

Sources: See n. 7.

### Table 5.2. Cloth Values by Category* (values as percentage of total merchant stocks)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of cloth</th>
<th>1680s-1690s</th>
<th>1770-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Montreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linens</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woollens</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottons and calicoes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Textiles insufficiently described to classify constituted the remainder.

b Values denominated in pounds in Philadelphia; livres in Montreal.

Sources: See n. 7.

assessed shop goods for the notaries who drew up the inventories. This is done in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 respectively. A comparison of these tables indicates that at the end of the seventeenth century the two colonies had quite distinct textile cultures, each marked by the pronounced dominance of either linen or woollen fabrics, and by the insignificance of cloth other than linens and woollens. Weather surely explains some of the initial patterns. Long, hot summers made linens attractive in Pennsylvania, whereas the harsher climate of New France encouraged purchases of woollens, particularly among groups

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11 According to contemporary merchant account books, one ell equalled 1.25 yards.

12 A German pastor who visited Pennsylvania in the mid-18th century reported that because of the heat, 'light coats or jackets are worn which are neatly made of fine linen or dimity'; Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754*, trans. C. Eben (Philadelphia: J. Y. Jeanes, 1898), 118.
that were most exposed to the rigours of long, bitterly cold winters. Thus, although woollen garments predominated in the armoires of all Montreal-area colonists, farm families, indeed, all rural residents, held proportionately the largest share, followed by artisans. Conversely, urban dwellers, most notably merchants—who enjoyed more protected locations and occupations—felt less constrained in their clothing choices, as reflected in their larger holdings of garments tailored from linens and other materials.13

Because Montreal supplied the bulk of the European products that French fur traders exchanged on the western frontier, Native American consumption also significantly shaped the textile stocks of that city’s merchants. Well into the early eighteenth century, Indians favoured woollen items: blankets, capots (greatcoats), other pieces of outerwear, and lengths of woollen cloth (typically used interchangeably with blankets as draped garments).14 The earliest data (from the trading post of Detroit in 1711) thus include only lengths of woollen fabrics, along with some linen shirts that could only have been of much lower value.15 Philadelphia’s merchants, in contrast, had no significant trade with the Indians until several decades into the eighteenth century and consequently experienced no demand for woollens (or any other cloth) from beyond the frontier in this early period. Finally, it is worth noting that price played only a small role in structuring demand. Linens were on average nearly the cheapest fabrics on sale in Pennsylvania, but although they were the least expensive cloth in New France and woollens the most expensive, merchants held twice the quantity of the latter as of the former.16

13 In the area as a whole, woollens comprised about 45% of the value of individual wardrobes, linens 32% (most commonly shirts). In the countryside, woollens accounted for 68%, linens just 15%; among farmers, 61 and 27%; and among artisans (rural and urban), 49 and 24%. In Montreal, in contrast, woollen clothing represented 40% of total values, that of linen 32%; among merchants, the percentages were 33 and 30 respectively (both merchants and artisans owned significant amounts of garments made from silks and mixed fabrics but both groups formed too small a part of the populace appreciably to influence merchant stocks of these cloths).


16 In Montreal, the average price of linens relative to all fabrics enumerated (=100) was 63 in the later 17th century (lowest of all fabric types); in Pennsylvania it was 80 (second lowest; fabrics insufficiently described to classify were at 78). Woollens were respectively 128 and 149, making them the dearest materials in both places.
Although linens had a different significance in the overall textile cultures of each colony, the cheaper and coarser weaves predominated in both. In Pennsylvania, ozenbriggs (osnaburgs), dowlas, huckabucks, and garlix are the main inexpensive linens encountered in the documents. New France likewise imported ‘trade’ linen (toile de traite, the French equivalent of garlix), but also considerable amounts of melis, woven from hemp, along with Morlaix and Rouen, an unknown portion of which was actually made in and about those two towns. Late seventeenth-century Montreal sources mention as well linens from (or at least named after) other French towns, notably Laval, Beaufort, Paris, Lyon, and Nancy, together with Normandy; whereas Lancashire is the sole linen from the mother country geographically distinguished in Pennsylvania. Apart from these centres, the colonial records explicitly localize only German linens (with the added qualifier ‘Hamburg’ in Pennsylvania). Consumers seeking higher-quality (and more expensive) linen generally had to settle for holland types.

Remarkably enough, in light of their initial dissimilarity, the textile cultures of Philadelphia and Montreal converged during the eighteenth century. In each colony, linens and woollens, formerly the dominant fabrics, ceded significant market share—less to each other, however, than to cottons and calicoes, which by the early 1770s filled about as many merchant shelves and were worth about as much, as woollens and pure linens. In some respects, however, linens were less adversely affected than woollens by the rise of cottons and calicoes; in fact, linen consumption increased significantly in New France. Thanks to notable colonial population growth, together with rising per capita incomes (at least in British North America), the total amount of every variety of fabric sold in the 1770s—even those that registered a declining market share—was higher than in the late seventeenth century. In New France, however, linen consumption rose relatively as well as absolutely.

As in the later seventeenth century, most linens remained at the low

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17 Linens in Philadelphia may have been closer to those in Montreal both in quantity and in value proportions, because many of the ‘checks’ that are not otherwise defined (and thus are not cited in Tables 5.1 and 5.2) may have been linens (rather than fustians which were mixed cotton and linen).

end of the cost hierarchy in both areas; among them there continued
to be a good deal of ozenbrigg, dowlas, huckabuck, garlix, toile de
traite, melis, and Morlaix (Rouen, however, virtually ceased to be
mentioned, as did most other French centres).\(^{19}\) Holland cloth still
served the middle and especially the upper reaches of the market, but
now it shared these niches with new varieties: lawns and cambrics in
Philadelphia, platille royale in Montreal. Russian linen was frequently
noted among the less expensive varieties that had appeared in both
colonies, while tandems and prince’s (which merchant order books
often refer to as ‘princess’) could be bought in Pennsylvania.

The most striking change of all, however, was the major presence of
Irish linens on Philadelphia merchant shelves, in the homes and on
the persons of British colonists in town and countryside, and on the
western frontier. The Philadelphia merchant Daniel Wistar ordered
Irish linens specially from London merchants. In 1763 alone, Haliday
and Dunbar were told to ship him 561 pieces (between 12,000 and
14,000 yards), which he intended to sell for between 11d. and 3s. 6d. a
yard; ozenbriggs and prince’s linen, of which Wistar ordered consid­
erably less, were to be offered for as little as 7d. per yard, while fancy
lawns and cambrics would sell for up to 80s.\(^{20}\) From the port city, Irish
linens went on to the shops and dwellings of the entire settled area,\(^{21}\)
and well beyond: in 1761, thirty pieces of Irish linen suitable for tailoring
into shirts were tallied among the ‘Indian goods’ at the Pittsburgh
trading post hundreds of miles away on the Ohio river.\(^{22}\)

Perhaps, in contrast to the 1680s and 1690s, some of the linens’ rel­
ative success in the later eighteenth century can be traced to their low
average cost; the rise in consumption in New France, which, some
scholars believe, was becoming poorer in these years,\(^{23}\) may reflect

\(^{19}\) The average price of linens in Montreal, relative to all fabrics enumerated
(\(=100\)), stood at 62 in the 1770s (still the lowest); it was 83 in Pennsylvania (now second
lowest to mixed fabrics).

\(^{20}\) Winterthur Library, Wilmington, Del., Joseph Downs Collection, Co. 94. Other
merchants obtained smuggled linens directly from Ireland; see Jensen, *Maritime
Commerce of Colonial Philadelphia*, 135. Incidentally, among the raw materials
Philadelphia shipped to Europe was flax seed for Ireland, exports of which grew explo­
sively from 1,785 bushels in 1731 to 21,336 in 1749 and an annual average of just over
78,000 bushels in 1768–72; ibid. 86.

\(^{21}\) Cf. CCA, Wills 2691, 2711.

\(^{22}\) HSP, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossier 36.

\(^{23}\) Cf. David-Thierry Ruddel, ‘Domestic Textile Production in Colonial Québec,
Transatlantic Textiles

such a price effect. In Canada, changes in Native American markets, which during the eighteenth century diversified away from woollen cloth and clothing, seem of equal if not greater moment. Shirts fashioned of imported linens, along with lengths of linen fabric, came to form an ever-larger proportion of shipments to the frontier. This trend was already evident in the 1730s, when linens accounted for 30 per cent by quantity of the cargoes Montreal merchants sent to Detroit, woollens 60 percent. It reached its culmination two decades later: in 1758, when the last cargoes of the French era went out to the Detroit post, linens made up 47 per cent of the consignments, woollens 27 per cent.

Philadelphia's commerce with Native Americans, however, remained much more focused on woollens as it developed during the eighteenth century, so linens received no such impetus there. In the mid-1750s, the value of cloth and clothing held by western Pennsylvania Indian traders included 73 per cent woollens, 25 per cent linens. Again, gifts of fabrics and garments presented by 'The Friendly Association for Regaining & Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Means' in 1761 comprised (by value) 84 per cent woollens and 15 per cent linens; two years later, Indian trade goods

24 There may also have been a negative price effect, if the growing wealth of Pennsylvania—on a per capita basis one of the richest colonies of British North America in the late colonial era—made linens' low price of less concern to many consumers. On the colony's wealth, see McCusker and Menard, Economy of British America, 279–83.

25 MMR, 'Trade goods'. A shipment to the Illinois Indians (who lived just to the south-west of the Great Lakes) in 1736 included (in value), 53% woollen cloth, 32% linens; given price hierarchies, linens doubtless comprised a larger share in area, woollens a somewhat smaller. The cargo also included numerous linen shirts and considerable woollen clothing and blankets. Similar shipments were made between 1739 and 1746 to the Green Bay, Rainy Lake, and Micinilimackincac posts around the northern Great Lakes; ANQM, Fonds Château de Ramezay P 345, Monière, Journals 3 and 4; MMR, 'Trade goods'.

26 MMR, 'Trade goods'.


28 Ironically, we know about these shipments because they were regularly seized by the Indian allies of the French, who claimed the area; HSP, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossiers 7, 17, 20, 30.

29 HSP, Cox-Parrish-Wharton Family Papers, Box 18, Folder 13. For similar...
at the Susquehanna Valley frontier post of Fort Augusta included (by value) 78 per cent woollens and 10 per cent linens.  

Montreal evidence regarding individuals’ garments indicates that settlers did not join Native Americans in their turn towards linen garments. To be sure, colonists in New France owned more shirts and blouses in the 1770s (an average of some 13 per decedent) than in 1677–97 (about nine). Linens were also used in additional types of clothing as the eighteenth century wore on, including overcoats, capes, trousers, and petticoats. These developments seem to have enabled linen to retain its previous share of the aggregate clothing market. But changes in the social distribution of linen garments did not allow any growth in that demand and also boded ill for the future: although townspeople acquired more linen apparel than in the past, farmers (habitants) bought less, and they were becoming a larger part of the Quebec population.

The most important influence sustaining or even increasing demand for linens in later eighteenth-century North America was found, however, in colonists’ dwellings rather than on their persons or those of indigenous people. Across the eighteenth century, settlers came to enjoy a higher level of domestic comfort than their pioneer ancestors. Because they set fancier tables, put hangings over their (though unquantifiable) dominance of woollens, despite the presence of linen along with calico and some silk handkerchiefs, see ‘A List of a Large Assortment of Indian Goods Suitable at this Time at Pittsburg Nov 24th 1761’, HSP, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossier 36.

30 HSP, Gratz Collection, Box 10, case 14, ‘Invoice . . . from the Trading House at Fort Augusta’, 22 Aug. 1763. In all these cases, of course, linens would have comprised a greater share by area. Ironically, the continued hegemony of woollens in Pennsylvania’s sales to indigenous people may have had something to do with the rise of linens in New France’s Indian trade. For Native Americans (even those selling furs to the French) increasingly sought British strouts—heavy woollens used for blankets and draped garments—rather than their admittedly inferior French counterparts. French officials felt powerless to oppose this preference, lest furs be diverted to English traders. See, for just one example, Bougainville, ‘Mémoire sur l’état de la Nouvelle-France, 1757’, 63: the Compagnie des Indes (which held the Canadian fur staple) was forced to buy English woollens for sale to Native Americans, who refused cloth from Carcassonne.

31 Around 1700, about 32% of all garments were definitely made of linens; in the 1770s, 24%.

32 Habitants’ holdings dropped from about 27 to no more than 20%. For changes in Quebec’s population, see Alan Stewart, ‘Settlement, Commerce, and the Local Economy’, in Phyllis Lambert and Alan Stewart (eds.), Opening the Gates of Eighteenth-Century Montréal (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1992), 46.
larger and more abundant windows, cleaned themselves and their quarters more adequately, and slept in less vermin-infested beds, they used greater amounts of linens for napkins and tablecloths, curtains, towels, sheets, and pillow covers. Conversely, woollens were rarely employed for such purposes, bed curtains and blankets forming the main exceptions, and thus benefited little from the growing consumption of cloth to enhance the household environment.

These, then, were the foundations supporting the consumption of imported pure linens in the textile markets of colonial North America. Each, however, proved vulnerable. For one thing, if linens came to form an increasingly large proportion of Native American textile consumption, even in this market cottons and calicoes were catching up—most of all among shirts and blouses, to the making of which most linens sent to the frontier were always destined. Already in the 1730s, cottons and calicoes accounted for 10 per cent of the value of shipments to Detroit; they were just under a quarter in 1758. Although, as we have seen, the Indian trade of Pennsylvania was more traditional in composition than that of Montreal (in the mid-1750s cottons accounted for just 1 per cent of the value of cloth and clothing sent to western Pennsylvania), by 1763 more cottons and calicoes (12 per cent) than linens (10 per cent) were being offered at one trading post.

Again, while linens reigned supreme among household items, on occasion cottons were employed for towelling, curtains, even in blankets. More striking, although linens extended their range among settlers' clothing, cottons and calicoes did so to a much greater extent. By the 1770s, colonists in New France not only owned cotton or calico kerchiefs, ties, and the occasional shirt or blouse, as in the later seventeenth century. Now they wore skirts, vests, jackets, breeches, and yet


34 Cottons made up 15% of the value of the 1736 cargo to the Illinois Indians cited above in n. 25, and a few cotton shirts were included among the many made of linen. The same items were sent, in about equal proportions, to the other posts in 1739–46.

35 HSP, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossiers 7, 17, 29, 30; Gratz Collection, Box 10, case 14.
other garments tailored from cottons and calicoes, as these fabrics were transformed from novelties to widely and regularly used everyday products.\textsuperscript{36} Despite the continuing rigours of the Canadian winter, in fact, cottons displaced woollens in cloaks and capes (especially those worn by women) and even occasionally in greatcoats.\textsuperscript{37} It appears, moreover, that it was the rising generation most of all that was abandoning linens. Just 21 per cent (by value) of the garments of settlers aged 40 and younger was made from linens, as against 30 per cent of their elders’ clothing. Instead, the former favoured cottons and calicoes (21 per cent) much more than the latter (11 per cent).\textsuperscript{38} The fact that younger colonists also owned fewer woollen clothes (23 per cent by value) than did older residents (34 per cent) indicates that in New France, as in the British colonies, youthful consumers were coming to view clothing as fashion items, whereas older people bought garments for more utilitarian reasons such as comfort and durability.\textsuperscript{39}

Comparable information does not exist for the Philadelphia area. Still, that similar demand factors were at work there is suggested by the fact that cottons and calicoes at least quintupled their market share in Pennsylvania just as in New France, and that this occurred despite rising in average price in both places.\textsuperscript{40}

Although decreasingly successful with the fashion-conscious

\textsuperscript{36} That similar substitutions could have occurred in Pennsylvania is shown by Mittelberge’s report from the 1750s (above, n. 12) that dimity as well as linen was used in jackets.

\textsuperscript{37} Whereas in 1677–97 woollens had been employed in (by value) 78% of outerwear, cotton in none, in 1770–4 the proportions were 26 and 38% respectively.

\textsuperscript{38} Among inventoried decedents as a whole, garments made from cottons and calicoes were 18% of the total, linens 24%, woollens 27%. Unfortunately, I have not been able to ascertain the age of a sufficiently large number of inventoried decedents in the 1677–99 group to make a valid comparison.


\textsuperscript{40} Cottons and calicoes were priced at an average of index 69 in 17th-century New France, 107 in Pennsylvania; in the early 1770s they were at index 128 in both places. In the first period they were near the bottom of the price scale in New France, well below both silks (113) and woollens (128); in Pennsylvania they were at the middle, but also well below silks (131) and woollens (149). By the 1770s, cottons and calicoes were on average about as costly as woollens (125) in New France, but much cheaper than silks (266); in Pennsylvania, they exceeded woollens (107) but also lagged behind silks (149). For relative linen prices, see nn. 16 and 19.
crowd, imported linens were able to dominate the low end of the market. But even here they faced growing competition, in this instance from inexpensive textiles like drugget, linsey-woolsey, and hempen, flaxen, and tow linen produced within the colonies, most often by professional weavers using thread spun by farm families. Rarely cited in merchant inventories, and of minuscule significance in the wardrobes of townspeople, among Montreal-area farm families these fabrics were fashioned into some 11 per cent of all garments (5 per cent by value) in the early 1770s, the majority of them worn by young farm women. Their use for bedsheets and table linens appears to have been even more substantial, although the data in the inventories do not permit precise calculation. These were the most direct competitors for imported linens, and from all evidence they were increasingly commercialized in this period, whether directly by the weavers or by village shopkeepers.


42 Farmers (male and female) had 11% of the value of their clothing in homespun (all other professions had much less than 1%); women 7% (men 3%); those 40 and younger 6% (over-40s 2%). On average, the blouses and shirts (their predominant use in clothing) made of these fabrics ‘du pays’ (that is, locally made or homespun cloth) were valued at 2.64 livres per item; those tailored from imported linens had a mean value of 3.48 livres.

43 For example, when the farmer Jacques Taillefert died in early 1771 in Rivière des Prairies, all the linens he left (ten bed sheets and twelve tablecloths) were made of linen ‘du pais’ [sic] (his clothes were not inventoried); ANQM, Not. Jean Marie Chatelier, microfilm 2040, 26 Mar. 1771.

44 For two examples of sales of homespun by rural merchants in Chester County, west of Philadelphia, see Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa., Cadwalader Jones Account Book (1760s), and the 1772 inventory of Jonathan Trimble, CCA, Will 2711 (also printed in Margaret Schiffer, Chester County, Pennsylvania Inventories 1684–1850 (Exton, Pa.: Schiffer Publications, 1974), 368–74). The 1729 inventory of Nathaniell Newlin (who, like Trimble, had his shop in the village of Concord) mentions no homespun; printed ibid. 361–2. Schweitzer, Custom and
European linens thus filled a variety of crucial roles in colonial North America. They provided durable and often decorated wearing apparel (ruffled linen shirts were an eighteenth-century fashion) and raised standards of domestic ease, cleanliness, and attractiveness. They also contributed to the formation of an increasingly standardized transatlantic consumer society in which colonists had access to many, if not most, of the same goods as metropolitan residents. Equally significant, they helped form social as well as commercial links between Euro-Americans and indigenous people, creating at least a partially common cloth and clothing culture among them. To be sure, as its French designation discloses, trade linen was intended for Native Americans, and like garliks was so directed across the colonial period—and beyond. Yet colonists also bought garliks and toile de traite and largely for the same purpose as Indians—to make them into shirts and blouses. Ozenbringgs and dowlas, too, satisfied native as well as settler needs. Even expensive hollands had meaning across ethnic boundaries. Although destined mainly for colonists, they were also sold to Native Americans and, perhaps more important, regularly distributed as presents to their leaders. Evidently, linens served as visible and valued status indicators within and between communities.

Linen exports to North America likewise offered grand opportunities to European manufacturers, and from the Atlantic to the Urals they responded. In the expansive eighteenth century, Irish producers best exploited the possibilities of the transatlantic linen market.


The Swedish botanist Pehr Kalm, who travelled extensively in eastern North America, indicated that Native American men participated in the common cloth culture to a greater extent than women; it was men, of course, who more regularly came into contact with colonists as a result of the fur trade. See P. Kalm, Voyage de Pehr Kalm au Canada en 1749, ed. and trans. Jacques Rousseau and Guy Béthune, (Montreal: P. Tisseyre, 1977), 266, 348, 547.

For settlers, see the inventories; for Native Americans, see MMR, 'Trade goods', and 'Indians, gifts to'; as well as the documents cited in nn. 4, 25, 26, 28–30, 35, above.
Stimulated by British government bounties, they offered with great success an assortment of prices and qualities focused on the middling and lower segments of the price schedule, where linens were always most in demand. Daniel Wistar’s example was duplicated in other Philadelphia shops. To take just one of innumerable examples from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Philadelphia’s leading newspaper, on 4 February 1762, Garrett Meade, in his Walnut Street store, ‘opposite the Sign of the Elephant’, advertised that he had ‘just imported . . . a neat assortment of European and East India goods, suitable for the season, amongst which are . . . 7–8ths and yd wd [yard-wide] Irish linen, 9–8ths and ell wd [ell-wide] Irish sheeting.’ In fact, Irish linen even showed up on merchants’ shelves in Montreal.

The eighteenth century was the heyday of European linens in North America. Yet quantitative growth did not, in the event, mean that their market share was safe. Substitutes were waiting in the wings, and were, in fact, already stepping onto the stage. Even if cottons and calicoes cost more on average than pure linens, the garments tailored from them had become fashionable goods desired by younger buyers. And for duller, everyday textiles, purchasers across the Atlantic could with increasing ease turn to local wares—indeed, could often contribute to making them. Cottons, calicoes, New World fabrics—these players’ roles were destined to expand in the next act, when factory industrialization took centre stage. Imported linens—all linens—would always have a part in the drama of North American consumption, but never again would it be so major as during the colonial era.

49 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4 Feb. 1762. Although occasionally found earlier, Irish linens were prominently featured in the pages of the *Gazette* from mid-century onwards; during 1762, for instance, they were mentioned in at least three-quarters of all advertisements.
50 The research for this chapter was supported by a Fellowship for College Teachers from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by Swarthmore College.