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ABSTRACT

GRAZING THE MODERN WORLD: MERINO SHEEP IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE UNITED STATES, 1775-1840.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Benedict Carton

The Merino sheep produces an extraordinarily fine wool that is unrivaled by other breeds. Between 1775 and 1840, the breed was carried from its Spanish homeland across oceans and hemispheres to Africa, the Americas, and even distant Australia. This dissertation compares the effects of this remarkable migration in two regions, the Cape Colony of South Africa and the northeastern United States. A cast of characters including merchants, politicians, and gentry farmers embraced the Merino breed in response to several transnational forces: namely, the expansion of the British Empire, British industrialization, and the European Enlightenment. White settlers in South Africa and the United States looked to Merino sheep and wool to exploit or challenge these processes. They viewed fine Merino wool as both a valuable commodity and a symbol of refinement. By examining archival material in South Africa and the United States, this dissertation describes the successful Merino industries that developed in these two countries. By the mid-nineteenth century, Merino sheep flocks in both countries numbered in the millions.
In South Africa, Merinos largely replaced indigenous sheep breeds, which had played a significant role in the colonial economy. By the mid-nineteenth century, Merino wool comprised more than half of all exports from the Cape Colony. In the United States, Merino sheep entered an established wool economy and eventually became the young country’s most popular sheep breed. Merino wool helped to fuel an innovative textile manufacturing sector that increasingly relied on water power and complex manufacturing. Despite developing very different wool industries, Merino enthusiasts in South Africa and the United States utilized similar language when promoting the breed. By analyzing the extensive historical discourse on Merino sheep, this dissertation explores a culture of animal breeding influenced by notions of improvement, as well as social and racial anxieties. This study of the Merino sheep industry exposes vastly different economic, demographic, cultural, and environmental realities in South Africa and the United States. It also reveals the significance of transnational forces in the shaping of these societies.
INTRODUCTION

“The Governments of Europe had long perceived the advantages, which would result to agriculture and commerce from the introduction of fine-woolled sheep into their several states; but their views being opposed by the ignorance and prejudices of the time, many years elapsed before they endeavored to realize an idea, which had, at first, appeared chimerical. At length, however, men appeared, equally to be admired for their patriotism and knowledge, who have endeavored with zealous perseverance to enlighten their fellow-countrymen, and prove by facts that nature, far from opposing any exertions to preserve fine-woolled sheep in certain climates, appeared, on the contrary, ready to assist the attempts of industry.”

These are the first lines to Charles Philibert de Lasteyrie’s 1802 Account of the Introduction of Merino Sheep into the Different States of Europe, and at the Cape of Good Hope. His treatise celebrates the efforts of European men who fanatically pursued a particular breed of sheep, the Spanish Merino, at the dawn of the nineteenth century. The Merino, known for its exceptionally fine wool, had been confined to the pastures of Spain since the Middle Ages. But beginning in the eighteenth century, European merchants, scientists, and government officials sought to acquire Merino sheep and raise flocks in their home countries and colonies. In 1775, this special breed was nearly contained to Iberian fields and valleys. Thirty years later, Merino sheep were not only pastured throughout Europe, but also thriving in Australia, South Africa and the United States.¹

This remarkable global migration did not occur by chance. Rather, Merino sheep followed a tide of European settlement, which James Belich termed the 'Settler Revolution,' that poured out of Europe, colonizing foreign territories and connecting them

through new networks.\(^2\) During this 'Age of Revolutions' in the late eighteenth century, a convergence of political, economic, and cultural changes, often (but not always) emanating from Europe, transformed much of the globe. C.A. Bayly's *Birth of the Modern World* identifies "the rise of the nation-state," a "massive expansion of global and intellectual links," and "the international spread of industrialization" as factors in the emergence of a new world system during the long nineteenth century.\(^3\) While these processes fostered the development of "global uniformities in the state, religion, political ideologies, and economic life,"\(^4\) they also produced the "Great Divergence," a "huge gap in the levels of wealth, development and growth between various parts of the world."\(^5\)

This dissertation compares the unprecedented growth of Merino husbandry in the Cape Colony of South Africa and the northeastern United States in the context of these global transformations, namely, the growth of imperialism, industrialization, and a culture of improvement. As the British Empire spread across the entire world, it provoked varied responses from colonized people or those threatened by colonization. The rise of industrialization, first in Britain and then in the United States and elsewhere, disrupted systems of production while also creating opportunities. Concerns over progress, improvement, and modernity, stemming from the European Enlightenment, plagued people in South Africa, the United States, and beyond. The Merino sheep offered solutions to the questions posed by these global processes.

\(^4\) Ibid., 1.
Merino sheep arrived in South Africa and the United States during a period of great change for both territories. In 1775, the Cape Colony was a small and impoverished Dutch outpost on the far southwest corner of the African continent. Outside the port of Cape Town, European settlements were scattered and curtailed by powerful African neighbors. Early European attempts to colonize North America were similarly limited. When the United States declared its independence in 1776, its white settler population was mostly confined to coastal areas east of the Appalachian Mountains.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, these small settler enclaves had been transformed. The borders of the now-British Cape Colony had expanded hundreds of miles to the east and north as an increasingly aggressive settler population leveraged British military might to wage war against African people and appropriate African land. Commercial and mercantile institutions extended well into the colony's interior, connecting rural areas to global circuits of trade and communication. Meanwhile, the United States had expanded to the Pacific Ocean in pursuit of its manifest destiny, accelerating the process of Native American subjugation. In the northeastern states, especially the states of New England, powered factories introduced an industrial revolution that transformed the United States into an economic powerhouse. These dramatic changes were not isolated incidents. Rather, they reflected global transformations occurring in the early years of the nineteenth century.

It was no accident that the first Merino sheep to cross the Atlantic landed in South Africa and the United States in 1779 and 1793, respectively. The two countries, on course to develop very different relationships with the British Empire, were engaged in a slow negotiation with the effects of growing British power and industry. As nodes of imperial
and commercial networks, South Africa and the United States shared knowledge and value systems that informed agricultural development. Merino enthusiasts in both territories emphasized the elite and exclusive nature of the breed to stake their claim as modern, enlightened men in the shadow of British imperialism.

But the divergent trajectories of the Merino sheep industry in these places also reveal fundamental differences in the history and development of South Africa and the United States. In the Cape Colony, wealthy landowners with mercantile interests hoped to establish a valuable export commodity that could raise their isolated colony from poverty. In the process, they hoped to counter pernicious stereotypes about their character and their modernity. In the northeastern United States, wealthy businessmen (many of whom were power brokers in the young republic) used their influence to obtain and promote Merino sheep. Unlike their South African counterparts, American entrepreneurs did not export raw wool to supply English markets and factories. Instead, they established a domestic woolen industry that could compete with English textile manufacturers. The distinct goals of South African and American wool raisers reflected the two territories’ respective positions in the emerging world system and foreshadowed changes to come in modern South Africa and the United States.

**Grazing the Modern World: Empire, Industry, and Enlightenment**

The concept of the 'modern world' is problematic. Even champions of the term, like Alan Macfarlane, are forced to admit that "its very nature is a mystery." Scholars who favor the term have put forth many reasons why the Industrial Revolution occurred in

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Europe (specifically Britain) rather than other strong economies like China and why Europeans alone formed global empires at the end of the eighteenth century. David Landes credited "private economic enterprise" and "the rise of trade" in the West; Jan de Vries posited an 'Industrious Revolution,' driven by changing beliefs of work and leisure; and Peer Vries emphasizes "the importance, role, and function of the state." Some, like Kenneth Pomeranz, argue that Europeans only diverged from other regions after forming empires and extracting wealth, labor, and resources from colonized lands and peoples. Others have questioned the very existence of the Great Divergence, arguing, like Andre Gunder Frank, that "Europe belatedly joined, or at least cemented its previously looser ties with, an already existing world economy and system" centered in East Asia.

Despite these globalist challenges, much recent scholarship has actually narrowed in focus, identifying industrialization and other measures of modernity as solely British, rather than European, developments. This dissertation, which focuses on the transplantation of animals from Europe into European overseas settlements, is open to attack for its Eurocentrism, or even Anglocentrism. But while the story of Merino sheep in

10 Eric Hobsbawm argued that "no other country was as well-prepared for the Industrial Revolution," citing the absence of a peasantry and the presence of "a monetary and market economy." See Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 14-19. James Belich argues for an 'Anglo divergence,' though not occurring until the nineteenth century. See Belich, Replenishing the Earth, 4. See also Robert C. Allen, The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
South Africa and the United States is closely tied to British expansion, the principle actors in this story are not British. Merino sheep were brought into the Cape Colony by Dutch colonists, who relied on the knowledge and labor of indigenous Khoi people and slaves captured from the Indian Ocean world. In the United States, Merino sheep did not attract interest until after independence from Great Britain. Still, the British Empire was a motivating factor behind both experiments with Merino sheep and deserves to be recognized as such. It is telling that, prior to 1810, the only Merino sheep outside of Europe were found in current or former British colonies.

Alison Games has traced the roots of the British Empire to English networks of diplomacy, commerce, and trade forming in Elizabethan times. The early modern English empire was fiscally and militarily weak, limited to "parasitic settlements" surviving from the spoils of more successful empires. But during a critical century between 1750 and 1850, Great Britain emerged as a global, merchant empire backed by a powerful industrial society. The dramatic growth of the British Empire preceded the Industrial Revolution and was instead fueled, as James Belich notes, by a "Non-Industrial Revolution" based on the expansion of existing technologies. Settler societies in Australia, South Africa, and the

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11 Alfred Crosby claimed that Merino sheep were introduced into Mexico by Antonio de Mendoza, the viceroy of New Spain (1535-1549), see Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood, 1972), 93. But if Merino sheep were introduced at this early date, they did not survive as a distinct breed and were instead absorbed into the more common Churro breed, see William Dunmire, *New Mexico's Spanish Livestock Heritage: Four Centuries of Animals, Land, and People* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 15-17. There are also reports of Merino sheep imported into Argentina as early as 1794. Even if true, these sheep were not preserved as a distinct breed. Merino wool did, however, become a major Argentine industry during the mid-nineteenth century. See Simon Hanson, *Argentine Meat and the British Market: Chapters in the History of the Argentine Meat Industry* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1983), 14-15.
United States, the "Neo-Europes" described by Alfred Crosby, expanded rapidly in an age of sail and oil lamps.\textsuperscript{13}

The ascendancy of the global British Empire affected South Africa and the United States in seemingly opposite ways. A British invasion in 1795 wrested control of the Cape Colony from the ruling Dutch East India Company, or Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), a quasi-state trading company. After a brief interregnum, Great Britain would again rule the Cape Colony from 1806 until the creation of the South African Union in 1910. During this same period, the British Empire was pushed out of the colonies of North America by a political revolution in the United States in 1776. Great Britain recognized American independence in 1783 and retreated to the marginal expanses of the continent.

The British expansion in South Africa and retreat in America may be best understood, however, as symptoms of an evolving empire. Beginning in the eighteenth century, British imperial ambitions expanded dramatically, reaching outside the Atlantic world to India and beyond. During the Seven Years War with France (1754-1763), British military resources were severely taxed by defending America and conquering parts of India.\textsuperscript{14} Faced with high debt and growing military expenditures, Britons called for new imperial systems to "unequivocally assert metropolitan authority" in the colonies. These new systems privileged stability, achieved through colonial defense and trade regulation, over the rights and liberties of colonial subjects. P.J. Marshall’s \textit{Making and Unmaking of


\textsuperscript{14} Maya Jasanoff writes that the end of the Seven Years War heralded "the beginning of a modern British Empire that was global and land-based, one that needed enormous resources - human, economic, and cultural - to keep going." See Maya Jasanoff, \textit{Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850} (New York: Knopf, 2005), 21.
Empires, a comparative study of British India and British America, argues that the equal application of these policies led, simultaneously to rebellion in the American colonies and the creation of a despotic colonial state in India.  

Marshall proposes that the different outcomes of imperial transformation in India and America "depended to a large extent on the responses of elites" - a model that may be useful in explaining divergent reactions to British hegemony in South Africa and the United States as well.  

The British shift toward the Indian Ocean created an Empire that was "both Atlantic and Asian, commercial and conquering" and the Cape Colony, positioned at the entrance to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, stood to benefit from this reorientation. While some South African colonists bristled at the specter of Anglicization and the disruption of established ways of life, the presence of a British garrison in the Colony, as well as on the islands of St. Helena and Mauritius provided consumers for Cape export markets. The United States, having escaped from Britain’s empire, embraced imperial ambitions of its own. By waging war against Native Americans and nearby

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17 Maya Jasanoff, Edge of Empire, 21.

colonies, the United States sought to challenge Great Britain and other European powers on the world stage.  

Concurrent to the growth of its imperial possessions, Britain’s economy grew dramatically. This was, at least in part, due to the advances in mechanized production referred to as the Industrial Revolution. As summarized by David Landes, the “substitution of machines - rapid, regular, precise, tireless - for human skill and effort” and “the substitution of inanimate for animate sources of power” allowed British factories to make dramatic increases in production. The effects of industrialization were first felt in the textile industry, with global implications. By the end of the eighteenth century, British wool manufacturers were exporting large numbers of woolen goods across the globe, including to the United States. By the early nineteenth century, factory-made British cotton goods were beginning to outcompete locally-made cottons in India, long a pillar of the global textile trade.

British industrialization influenced economic developments within South Africa and the United States in divergent manners. The Cape Colony’s economy depended on slave labor to produce wine, wheat, and meat for the colonial garrison and sometimes for

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99 Eliga Gould argues, in *Among the Powers of the Earth*, that the justification for American empire was, paradoxically, rooted in its democratic ideal. By proclaiming unlimited sovereignty for all (white and male) people, “Americans created a government whose leaders were far more effective than their colonial predecessors had ever been in terms of the taxes and soldiers that they could raise, the internal improvements that they could sponsor, and the popular allegiance that they could command.” See Elija Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 216. See also Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c.1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Chapter 7.

20 Landes, *Unbound Prometheus*, 41.

sale to passing ships. Small craft industries were lacking and the Colony imported nearly all finished goods from Europe or India. Colonists in South Africa showed little interest in mechanization or factory production until the late nineteenth century, after this dissertation’s period of study. Merchants, landowners, and capitalists in the Cape Colony did, however, adapt to the industrial economy by supplying Great Britain with raw industrial commodities, namely Merino wool.

In the United States, industrialization was viewed as both a threat and an opportunity. Agrarian politicians expressed a deep “suspicion of urban commerce (and later manufacturing) as illegitimate, destructive, and debilitating;” the antithesis of American yeoman independence. As Tamara Thornton explains, they were influenced by “major strands of American thought - the legacy of the Puritan ethic, economic theory, republican ideology, and contemporary notions of historical progress and decline.” But others feared British manufacturers’ economy of scale and worried that the United States, despite its recent independence, would remain dependent on British industries. Merino wool raising appealed to these Americans as a step toward industrialization and economic self-sufficiency. Rather than feed British factories, Americans hoped to defeat them.

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23 Ibid., 253. Countering notions of a lethargic colonial population, Ross wrote that “South African farmers’ actions were not limited by anything other than the availability of capital and markets.” Cape Colonists eagerly participated in the global industrial economy once they were provided the opportunity.
In addition to the geopolitical challenges of British imperialism and industrialization, South Africans and Americans were confronted by a wave of cultural changes emanating from Europe. This is not the time or place to recount debates over the amorphous "Enlightenment" and its significance. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is sufficient to say that Enlightenment ideals influenced and were influenced by imperialism and industrialization. The idea of "improvement," a belief that rational actions could permanently change conditions for the better, was particularly significant. The idea of improvement was closely connected to the development of agricultural science and what has sometimes been characterized as an "Agricultural Revolution" in eighteenth-century Great Britain. Peter Jones draws this connection explicitly in Agricultural Enlightenment: Knowledge, Technology, and Nature, 1750-1840, arguing that "not only was agriculture susceptible to improvement, it could actually be perfected with the aid of human reason and ingenuity." The vast opportunity for improvement in agriculture attracted even the most urbane intellectuals, ensuring that "agriculture was placed on the scientific agenda of enlightened Europe."

Discourse on sheep was laden with the language of improvement. Alexandre Henri Tessier's 1811 Complete Treatise on Merino Sheep, for example, describes Merino enthusiasts as "improvers," who wished to propagate the breed "through motives of

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28 Mokyr, Enlightened Economy, 185.
South Africans and Americans who read this literature used it to frame their interest in sheep. In time, they composed original literature engaging with the latest science on breeding and husbanding flocks. The American diplomats Robert Livingston and David Humphreys, both of whom served as US ambassadors in Europe, published essays on Merino sheep that were read in their country and across the Atlantic. William Stephenus van Ryneveld, Chairman of the Commission of Agriculture at the Cape of Good Hope, penned a book-length manuscript on the promise of Merino sheep-raising in South Africa.30

But the decision to pursue Merino sheep reflected broader questions unrelated to agriculture or improvement. Anthony Pagden's *The Enlightenment* describes a movement that was, above all, "deeply cosmopolitan." At a time when European nationalism was in its infancy, philosophers of the Enlightenment were already "sensing the need for an ecumenical vision that would reach out beyond the limits of the slowly evolving nation-states."31 By the late eighteenth century, the acceptance or rejection of cosmopolitanism was causing rifts in the white settler communities of South Africa and the United States.

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31 Robert R. Livingston, *Essay on sheep; their varieties--account of the merinoes of Spain, France Reflections on the best method of treating them, and raising a flock in the United States; together with miscellaneous remarks on sheep and woolen manufactures* (New York: T and J Swords, 1809); David Humphreys, "Dissertation on the breed of Spanish Sheep known as Merino" in *Miscellaneous Works of David Humphreys* (New York: T and J Swords, 1804); William Stephenus van Ryneveld, *Concise Remarks on the present state of this Colony, and Observations therefrom deduced on the most suitable methods whereby an improvement in the Live-stock could be effected, chiefly by the speedy conversion of our Sheep into the Spanish or Woolled variety*, trans. H.B. Thom (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1804).
In Cape Town, the reputed 'tavern of the seas,' a transient population of sailors, soldiers, merchants, and government officials was, by definition, highly cosmopolitan. But in the rural interior, a pastoral frontier population known as the Boers resisted metropolitan authorities and the trappings of the Enlightenment. Largely separated from the seat of government, "the micro-societies of the pastoral farmers" resented the imposition of new laws or cultural attitudes.32 A small but significant community, the Cape Gentry, lay between these two extremes both geographically and ideologically. It was the Cape Gentry, attentive to agriculture but also to notions of Improvement, who first pursued Merino sheep.33

In the United States, independence produced a variety of reactions ranging from rejection to emulation of European and, particularly, British culture. Americans were outwardly critical of British sensibilities and yet they aspired toward luxury and refinement.34 Competing needs to display social status and patriotic loyalty were most pronounced among the northeastern elite, who had "a difficult time trying to reconcile their innate Anglophilia with values of republicanism."35 Merino sheep attracted Americans because they bridged this divide. As an exotic and well-respected breed, they represented an elevation toward European standards. By supporting the creation of a new domestic industry, Merinos became a sign of American independence and a challenge to the world order.

35 Sam Haynes, Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 12.
South Africa and the United States Compared: a Historiography

South Africa and the United States have proven fertile ground for comparative historians. As sites of permanent and extensive European colonial settlement, the two regions have been consumed by similar struggles. As Peter Alexander and Richard Halpern concluded, "the root of these similarities probably lies in the fact that, in both settings, racially-divided, settler-capitalist societies underwent industrialisation at approximately the same time." These common features of South African and American history have spawned particularly deep comparative scholarship concerning the settlement frontier, race relations, and, more recently, the environment.

The Settlement Frontier

South Africa and the United States were first colonized by European powers in the seventeenth century, though these initial colonies were weak and limited in territory. In the first half of the nineteenth century, aggressive European settler populations in both countries forced their way into the interior, appropriating lands from the native people by violent means. The first European settlement in South Africa, the Cape Colony, expanded steadily to the east and north as European settlers expelled or subjugated African inhabitants. The brutal expansion of the frontier has been variously celebrated or critiqued by different segments of South Africa. Americans have been equally engrossed by the history of their own settlement frontier. The popularity of the 'western' genre in

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film, television, literature, and music testifies to the importance of this idea in American culture.  

The frontier was central to the work of George McCall Theal, an amateur historian, who produced innumerable volumes of South African history near the end of the nineteenth century. He proposed that South African settlement progressed along two frontiers, one African and one European, that began to clash during the eighteenth century. His erroneous 'empty lands thesis' justified white supremacy in South Africa by claiming that land colonized by whites had already become depopulated by African invaders. In Theal's narrative, this contest was not fought between equal colonizers, but between "invincible" white men and black men carrying a "tidal wave of rude barbarism."  

Theal's thesis remained dominant in South Africa until the 1970's, when it was challenged by a rising generation of eclectic scholars exploring pasts from a variety of perspectives. Marxists, led by Martin Legassick, challenged Theal by arguing that class conflicts, rather than race or culture determined the course of the South African frontier. Other historians chipped away at Theal by demonstrating that colonial expansion was variable and inconsistent. Hermann Giliomee, for example, proposed the model of 'open' and 'closed' frontiers, contrasting "the change from abundant land resources and near-

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subsistence farming to a shortage of land leading to more intensive exploitation of the land resources and the gradual rise of commercial farming.”

Frederick Jackson Turner, an American historian, unconsciously echoed Theal’s ideas at the American Historical Association in 1893 in his now famous ‘frontier thesis’. Turner’s frontier was not merely a phase in American history but the wellspring of American character and culture. He proposed that in their westward expansion, white settlers in the United States shed European culture through "perennial rebirth" resulting from their "continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society." Much like Theal, Turner visualized the frontier as "the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization.”

In the American academy, Turner’s thesis was challenged during the 1980’s by new Western historians like Patricia Nelson Limerick, William Cronon, and Richard White,

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who countered the triumphalist Turner thesis in an attempt to demystify the frontier as an exceptional place and time. They drew upon the experiences of women, Native Americans, and others excluded from the "creation myth centered on the frontier," while considering changing ideas about land use, resource commodification, and property. American historians began to see the frontier as a shifting and contested space, much as Legassick, Guelke, and Giliomee had done in South Africa.41

The path-breaking edited volume The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared provided a valuable framework linking these settlement frontiers. The Frontier in History outlined two regional models of white settler expansion that produced very different outcomes in South Africa and the United States. Editors Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson argued against the exceptionalism of either history, instead seeing the frontier as "a phenomenon with common basic characteristics wherever and whenever it has existed." More importantly, they described the frontier processes of South Africa and the United States as, not only similar, but related to a common process, the "expansion of Europe and of commercial and industrial capitalism in the modern age."42

Frontier histories of South Africa and the United States would be incomplete without considering patterns of racial division and oppression. In the United States, frontier governments worked to "protect white interests, control the Indian majority, and maintain the established pattern of race relations." The "underlying current of violence" between racial groups was ever present in the Cape Colony as well, where white farmers fixated on the "fundamental 'otherness' of blacks as "a necessary condition for their own material survival." Christoph Strobel's 2008 book, *The Testing Grounds of Modern Empire*, complements *The Frontier in History* through a focused comparison of racial hierarchies on the frontier. Strobel argues that "two different systems of racial supremacy - one of indigenous exclusion, the other of partial non-white inclusion - became increasingly entrenched" in the United States and South Africa, respectively. Racial Conflict

Investigations of race feature prominently in the history of South Africa and the United States because the two countries developed remarkable systems of racial division and oppression. The long history of slavery in South Africa and the United States led to the creation of strict racial hierarchies, which persisted well beyond abolition. In the twentieth century, the United States and South Africa became internationally known for their policies of racial exclusion and the struggle to end those policies. The longevity of

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racial division in these two countries was unparalleled, drawing the attention of contemporaries and historians.

The first historians to consider the role of race in South African history emerged from the Cape Liberal movement, a progressive political tradition. Writing in the 1920s and 30s, William Macmillan and C.W. de Kiewiet revisited frontier racial conflicts to express a black perspective on colonization and conquest. Unlike Theal and other settler historians, Macmillan and de Kiewiet "stressed co-operation rather than conflict in the nineteenth century." Following the creation of independent states throughout most of Africa in the 1950s and '60s, liberal Africanist historians focused on the role of black South Africans in the nation's history, seeking "to recover the history of the black experience in the South African past." Since the 1970s and especially since the fall of the apartheid regime, scholars in a wide variety of traditions have debated the origins of South Africa's racial division. Revisionist historians working in the Marxist tradition challenged the liberal position that racism was a relic of colonial slavery and frontier conflict. In recent


47 Christopher Saunders, The Making of the South African Past, 95 and 143.

48 Marxists like Martin Legassick instead argued that racial divisions could not have emerged prior to industrialization, as "economic and political conditions in which racial categories could be established did not yet exist," see Martin Legassick, "The Northern Frontier to c.1840: The rise and decline of the Griqua people," in The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840, revised edition, ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, 363. Timothy Keegan staked something of a middle ground by arguing that while racial division has always been at the heart of South Africa history, "the scope, the intensity, the ideological underpinnings of racial hegemony changed dramatically. Keegan, Colonial South Africa and the Making of the Racial Order (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 13-14.
decades, scholarship of race in the Cape Colony has been greatly strengthened by monograph studies on the slave trade, slave resistance and social resurrection, gender politics, and the ideology of white supremacy.49

American histories of racial conflict date back at least to W.E.B. du Bois, who presaged much later scholarship by emphasizing the agency and identity of blacks in America. A counter stream of apologist histories, such as Ullrich Phillips' *American Negro Slavery*, focused on the paternalism of slaveholders and minimized the brutality of slavery.50 In the post-WWII era, histories of racial conflict were dominated by progressive historians like C. Vann Woodward, who emphasized economic forces over racial ideologies. By the 1970s, the importance of race had been revived by a diverse group of historians.51 Over the last four decades, scholarship on slavery and race in America has diversified significantly. The emergence of transnational histories focused on the 'Atlantic


World’ has forced historians to consider American racial divisions in relation to events on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵² Some, like Ira Berlin and Michael Gomez have focused on the foundational years of American slavery and the cultural perseverance of African slaves.⁵³ Others like Walter Johnson and Edward Baptist have examined slavery in the pursuit of a new history of capitalism, which shows that global commercial growth was tied to conquest and forced labor.⁵⁴

George Fredrickson’s boldly titled *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* was released in 1981, the same year as *The Frontier in History*. This book addressed the origins and changing natures of structural racism in the two modern countries. While Fredrickson identified common, global processes that influenced both countries, he also explored the divergent reactions that led to the development of Apartheid and Jim Crow.⁵⁵ James Campbell augmented Fredrickson’s comparative approach in *Songs of Zion* by examining the African Methodist Evangelical Church as a Transnational body through which “Africans and African-Americans examined one another.” Robert Vinson continued this tradition in *The Americans are Coming!*, a study of the ways in which black South Africans embraced African-American

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liberation movements, notably Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, "to fashion a dream of African liberation that resonated throughout the world." 56

The depth and diversity of scholarship on race and racial conflict in South Africa and the United States is too extensive to discuss here. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is sufficient to show that profound racial inequalities shaped the formation of the two modern countries. The development of their respective Merino sheep and wool economies was also influenced by the presence of slavery and oppressive racial orders. This pernicious influence could be seen in the labor regimes used to produce wool, the motivations of wool growers, and the complex culture of sheep breeding.

Environment

In both South Africa and the United States, frontier expansion and the development of racial ideologies were linked to environmental conditions and constraints. Frontier mythologies alternately invoked the quest for bountiful lands or the conquest over forbidding landscapes. Behind the frontier, plantation slavery was inherently tied to climatic conditions that either permitted or precluded the growth of cash crops like cotton, tobacco, and wine grapes. The centrality of the land to the major conflicts in South African and American history has encouraged the development of strong traditions of environmental history in both countries.

South African historians have long considered the strategies employed by Africans, white settlers, and, later, the colonial state to exploit and manage the region’s natural resources. PJ van der Merwe’s *Trekboer* trilogy, written in the 1930s, analyzed the lifestyle of Dutch-speaking frontier colonists, known as Boers. His work was unusual (for its time) in recognizing substantial transfers of knowledge from indigenous people to white colonists and favorably evaluating indigenous ways of life in an environmental context.57 Since the 1980’s William Beinart has been a leading voice on the history of conservation in South Africa. He and many others have noted that as whites and people of color competed over resources during the colonial period, "agrarian accumulation and colonial development [became] linked to environmental regulation." Colonial conservation measures invariably favored whites and removed Africans' access to natural resources. This scholarship has been complemented by Lance van Sittert, who has considered the social consequences of enclosure and the 'commodification' of wild game.58

Several recent monographs focus on introduced species at the Cape. Frederik Lilja’s 2013 dissertation "The Golden Fleece of the Cape," considers the role of technology in the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist labor systems on Merino wool farms.59 Luvoyo Wotshela and William Beinart’s study of the Opuntia, or Prickly Pear cactus, concerns the varied responses to a species alternately classified as introduced or invasive.

By looking at Opuntia’s use by black, Afrikaner, and English communities over time, they show "that categories of alien, bio-invader, weed, useful plant and crop are rather fluid." Sandra Swart’s *Riding High* argues that the horse, a non-native species at the Cape, was employed “as a signifier of difference and a marker of social status. It emphasized the difference between native and settler, to facilitate the psycho-social subduing of the indigenous population.” Her dual focus on the natural and cultural landscape has helped to shape this dissertation.  

The United States also has a deep tradition of environmental history. Alfred Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange* brought mainstream attention to the transformative impact of invasive species when it appeared in 1973. In addition to plant, animal, and microbe invasions, European hegemony over American landscapes introduced "new human uses of the land," leading to dramatic patterns of ecological succession. Moving away from the focus on white settlers’ environmental impacts, Shepard Krech’s *The Ecological Indian* recognized Native Americans as human actors on the environment, a part of the natural landscape. Expanding the borders of environmental history even further, historians like Virginia Anderson have succeeded in gaining recognition for

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62 Considering wild and domesticated plants and animals, as well as microbes, Crosby’s sweeping study exposed how dramatically "the ecology of vast areas of the Americas has been changed by the arrival and propagation of Old World life forms." See Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 211.
64 While Native American ecology emerged from "dynamics unfamiliar to Western scientists," they did indeed manage a wide range of natural resources for their benefit. See Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: Norton, 1999), 212.
domestic animals as active participants in ecological change. These historians significantly broadened the scope of environmental history, and their influence has been felt far beyond the United States.

As with histories of the frontier and race relations, South Africa and the United States have been united as the subjects of pioneering comparative environmental histories. William Beinart and Peter Coates’ 1995 book *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* built on existing comparative studies of the settlement frontier by focusing on hunting, deforestation, agriculture, and the rise of conservationism in both countries. Seeking to balance "political economy and ecological change," they argued that "environmental history lends itself to a comparative approach that transcends the boundaries of history written from the standpoint of the state or nation." Discussions around the merits of 'Indigenous Knowledge Systems' and 'Traditional Environmental Knowledge' also provide opportunities for environmental comparison.

The wealth of comparative literature that addresses South Africa and the United States should not, however, obscure their vast differences. Alfred Crosby, who famously

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66 Just as they were attentive to Turner’s frontier thesis, South African historians have been influenced by American environmental historians. See for example Beinart, *Rise of Conservation*, 330 for a discussion of 'new environmental history' in America, as well as deeper traditions of conservationism in American thought.
designated temperate areas of white colonization as 'Neo-Europes,' did not include South Africa alongside Australia, New Zealand, Anglophone North America, and the Southern Cone of South America. James Belich did include South Africa (at least post-1820) as part of his settler 'Angloworld,' though the nation is significantly less important to his central thesis than the United States or Australia. It seems, therefore, that there is a degree of uncertainty about the parallels of South Africa and the United States.\textsuperscript{69}

The Cape Colony was an isolated and tenuously held outpost at a time when the northeastern United States was the political and commercial hub of a young nation. European settler populations grew rapidly and gathered into dense settlements, even in rural areas. In 1800, the entire Cape Colony contained a mere 60,000 inhabitants, while the state of Massachusetts alone supported a population of more than 400,000, despite having one-fifth the land area.\textsuperscript{70} While South Africa and the United States were both connected to global trading networks, the scale of those connections was not equal. Merchant vessels stopped at Cape Town on long voyages between the ports of Asia, Europe, and the Americas, but the Colony was rarely a destination in its own right. Commerce within the Colony was limited and Cape merchants did not generally launch outgoing expeditions. The American merchant economy, in comparison, was much more robust. American-flagged ships plied the waters of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific


Oceans, trading American produce for foreign goods. finally, these territories faced very different political situations. The Cape Colony was directed by an imperial bureaucracy in the Netherlands, and later Great Britain. Most of the population, either enslaved or free people of color, were denied political rights. The United States also severely restricted political rights and participation. Nevertheless, political culture was strong among the limited free population and Americans pursued geopolitical ambitions that South Africans did not dream of. These distinctions powerfully shaped the Merino wool industry in these two countries.

**Conclusion**

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed major global transformations stemming from the growth of British imperialism and industry. The first South Africans and Americans to show interest in Merino sheep did so in the context of these rapid political, economic, and cultural changes. A common obsession with the idea of improvement led to striking parallels between the two Merino industries to 1810. In both regions, interest in Merino sheep was initially confined to cosmopolitan aristocrats and gentry farmers, who aggressively publicized their work and published lengthy treatises. Their attempts to promote the breed among practicing farmers, however, were met with resistance. In South Africa, pastoral farmers were deeply loyal to the fat-tailed

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71 When the American merchant Elias Derby sent out a trading vessel to Cape Town in 1786, he was disappointed to learn that the port was "calculated only to Supply Ships bound too and from India and not purchases of Cargoes," see Jonathan Eacott, *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America, 1600-1830* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2016), 247; also Caroline Frank, *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011), 42, Ward, *Networks of Empire*, 133 and Ross, "The Cape and the World Economy," 246.
Cape sheep, which had sustained farmers for millennia. In the United States, existing long-wool sheep breeds met most farmer's needs by producing meat and wool that could be sold in local markets. As a result, Merino sheep populations in both regions initially grew slowly.

After 1810, however, the Merino industries in South Africa and the United States diverged significantly. Between 1810 and 1850, Merino sheep populations increased from less than 20,000 to more than 5,000,000. But South African Merino raisers never attempted to produce woolen textiles domestically. Instead, they were content to export raw wool to England, despite the low value of this product. By 1850, the Cape Colony exported five million pounds of Merino wool annually, a full 60% of the colony's exports. In the wake of this Merino explosion, indigenous animals (including native breeds of sheep) were pushed to the brink of extinction. African people were pushed off the land and into migratory labor. Although wool farming in the Cape Colony did not lead to urbanization or industrial growth, the restrictions placed on African laborers foreshadowed trials to come during the development of the mining industry.\footnote{Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation*, 9; Keegan, *Colonial South Africa*, 158; Saul Dubow, *Land, Labor, and Merchant Capital in the Pre-industrial Rural Economy of the Cape: The Experience of the Graaff-Reinet District, 1852-72* (Cape Town: Center for African Studies, 1982), 34-36, 41.}

In the United States, a massive importation of pure-bred Merino sheep in 1810 established the breed as a household name. Merino sheep were integrated into rural economies, where American workers with experience shearing, spinning, and weaving wool quickly adapted to the new breed. A dynamic economic system based on skilled hand labor and augmented by powered machinery and large factories emerged in the northeastern states. By mid-century, the northeastern United States' raised about 11
million sheep (mostly Merinos or Merino crosses) and produced more than 20 million pounds of wool. With an abundant supply of wool, labor, and machinery, the United States was finally able to break its reliance on foreign powers for fine woolen goods. The expansion of wool raising and wool manufacturing, however, forever changed rural life. Established textile trades were changed or eliminated by powered factories and a wide range of rural residents were drawn into an emerging industrial economy.

This dissertation is primarily a comparative project that seeks to identify similarities and differences between the early Merino wool industries in South Africa and the United States. But the Merino sheep that appear in this project are themselves Transnational actors. Originating on the Spanish plains, they migrated (with help from human handlers) across vast distances to inhabit North America, South America, Africa, and Oceania. This remarkable migration was accomplished over the course of three decades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Furthermore, this project hinges on processes with a global reach. The spread of the British Empire across the entire world provoked varied responses from those colonized or threatened by colonization. The rise of industrialization, first in Britain and then in the United States and elsewhere, demanded a global supply chain of industrial materials. And concerns over progress, improvement, and modernity, stemming from the European Enlightenment, plagued people across the globe. The Merino sheep, which took root independently in South Africa and the United States, offered solutions to the questions posed by these global processes. South Africans and Americans looked to

73 John Minto, Ezra Carman, and Hubert Heath *Special report on the history and present condition of the sheep industry of the United States* (Washington: Bureau of Animal Industry, 1892), 696-697.
Merino wool, a valuable industrial material, to either exploit or contest Great Britain’s rise as an imperial and industrial power. In the process, they hoped to stake their claim as modern men.

**Chapter Summaries**

Chapter one of this dissertation introduces the Merino sheep breed and explains its growing celebrity in the eighteenth century. This chapter also traces the rise of natural science and agricultural science in relation to European colonial projects. Proliferation of agricultural literature, including that related to Merino sheep, strongly influenced the gentry farmers in South Africa and the United States. They adopted a distinct language of wool, based on the writing of European agriculturalists, which emphasized the primacy of pedigree and breed purity in animal husbandry.

Chapter two delves into the history of Merino sheep in South Africa from 1779 to 1810. Following their importation by the Dutch adventurer, Robert Jacob Gordon, Merinos at the Cape were controlled by a small group of colonial and private actors. Successive colonial governments endeavored to promote the breed but met resistance from white frontier farmers (known as Boers) who favored an indigenous breed called the Cape sheep. Although the Merino breed did become popular with some of the Cape gentry, their absolute numbers remained low.

Chapter three examines the role of sheep and wool in the United States from the colonial period to 1810. In 1802, several wealthy men with diplomatic ties to Europe successfully imported Merino sheep in support of plans to expand wool manufacturing in the United States. While these importations were celebrated by gentry farmers, most
small farmers ignored the breed. When the Peninsular War led to the collapse of the Spanish government in 1810, thousands of valuable Merinos were diverted to buyers in the United States. The unexpected arrival of these sheep attracted the attention of American speculators and sent the price of Merino rams skyward.

Chapter four traces the emergence of Merino wool production as an important industry in the Cape Colony between 1810 and 1840. This chapter evaluates the efforts of Dutch and English settlers, as well as the British colonial government, in pursuit of Merino sheep. It also considers the underreported growth of intra-colonial shipping that connected much of the Cape Colony to commercial markets. From 1830 onward, several developments including the abolition of slavery, frontier warfare, and an increase in African migrant labor aided the spread of Merino farming.

Chapter five describes the complex Merino wool economy emerging in the United States between 1810 and 1840. Merino breeding became professionalized as breeders became more integrated into the process of manufacturing wool into cloth. Increases in wool and wool textile production transformed rural and urban landscapes across the northeastern states. The American Merino wool industry diverged greatly from the South African wool industry by incorporating more small producers and artisanal wool workers. The greatest divergence, however, involved the development of water-powered factories and a factory system of labor.
CHAPTER ONE: A MOST IMPROVED BREED: SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE, AND MERINO SHEEP

Alexandre Tessier’s 1811 Complete Treatise on Merinos and Other Sheep describes seven "distinct races" of sheep. On the Faroe Islands in the far north Atlantic, a very small and mostly wild race of sheep provided wool of a variable quality. The Island of Crete in the Mediterranean was inhabited by sheep with straight and grooved horns. The unusually long and tall sheep of Holland, Tessier claimed, were members of the "Indian Race," imported by the Dutch. And perhaps unsurprisingly, the Frenchman described the familiar "Indigenous Race of France" as a normal sized breed carrying "ordinary wool."

Tessier also categorized more exotic breeds not commonly found in Europe. The "African Race," a hornless animal with short hair, sported a "mane, in which grow tufts of wool which successively fall in order to make room for others." And Tessier identified the Cape sheep of South Africa as part of the "Arabian Race," so called for their presence in Egypt as well. Arabian sheep could be easily identified by their "thick, broad, and heavy" tails.  

But Tessier ranked one particular sheep, the "Merino Race" or the "Spanish Sheep," above and beyond all the others of Europe, Africa, and Asia. This "most esteemed" breed was principally distinguished by its luxurious fleece. Merino wool, "very fine, abundant, soft to the touch," possessed qualities unmatched by other breeds of sheep. The exceptional fineness of Merino wool allowed for the construction of "silky and supple"

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garments that could not be replicated with other wools. The difference between Merinos and other sheep was so remarkable that Tessier classed all six of the other "races" as "common sheep." Only the Merino captivated Tessier, prompting him to pen more than one hundred pages on managing the breed.75

Tessier’s system of classification reflected a significant development in European science. Over the previous century, the adoption of Carl Linnaeus’ taxonomy had led to the detailed categorization and ordering of plant and animal life in European academies. In time, this system of natural order and ranking was applied to domesticated animals and even to human beings. Tessier’s distinction between the various "races" of sheep would not have seemed strange to his contemporaries, who perceived many inherent divisions within both human and animal populations.

Nor was there anything unusual about Tessier’s admiration for the Merino sheep. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, numerous treatises and volumes promoting the breed appeared throughout the European world. Sheep enthusiasts debated the breed’s origin, its characteristics, its value, and the best practices for its management. Authors from France, Britain, the United States, South Africa, and elsewhere contributed to the global conversation. In time, the efforts of these sheep enthusiasts would carry the Merino breed out of Europe, to South Africa, the United States, and beyond.

Why did this breed of sheep suddenly capture the attention of intellectuals, scientists, and government officials? As mentioned in the introduction, geopolitical challenges rising from British expansion buoyed worldwide interest in Merino sheep. But

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75 Tessier, Treatise on Merinos, 9-10.
schemes to introduce the breed, including to the United States and South Africa, were also informed by an overarching principle of "improvement," rooted in the European enlightenment. "Improvement," in this context could imply a more efficient use of resources, a general increase in production, or even moral betterment. This chapter will consider how the idea of improvement was expressed through trends in the natural sciences – and how the natural sciences were intimately tied to European colonial ventures. Keeping pace with developments in botany, ecology, and other environmental sciences, Europeans adopted new attitudes toward agricultural science and stock breeding during the eighteenth century. These discourses greatly influenced efforts to introduce Merino sheep in South Africa and the United States. But to understand the appeal of Merino sheep in such diverse parts of the world, it is first necessary to understand the breed’s origin and its evolution from an exclusive treasure to a giant of the global wool industry.

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76 Slack, Invention of Improvement, 2; Mokyr, Enlightened Economy, 46.
The Spanish Merino: Origins and Significance

Domesticated sheep have existed in Spain since prehistoric times and Spanish wool was well regarded in the Mediterranean region through the Phoenician, Greek, and Roman classical periods. By the seventh century CE, Spanish shepherds were practicing transhumance, a system of long-distance seasonal migration. In winter, when rain is plentiful, shepherds led their sheep to graze on the warmer plains of southern Spain. During summer, heat and drought prompted shepherds to retreat with their flocks to
more well-watered highland areas to the north. A very similar method of shepherding was employed by the Khoi people of South Africa, and later by white colonists in the interior of the Cape Colony.  

The massive migrations created tension between pastoralists (herders) and agriculturalists (planters), who "viewed flockowners with suspicion and hostility" in a dry country with limited arable land. The migrations also led to conflicts between flock owners who competed for access to pastures and water. Over the course of the middle ages, these conflicts led to the formation of local shepherding guilds, known as mestas. In the late thirteenth century, King Alfonso X of Castile established a single guild, the Mesta Real, to govern the movement of all the country's flocks.

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77 Carla Rahn Phillips and William D. Phillips Jr., *Spain's Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 8. PJ van der Merwe asserted that, in the Cape, "before the end of the seventeenth century the farmers had already begun to migrate periodically with their livestock - a practice that the climate and soil conditions of our country makes necessary up to the present day." See Van der Merwe, *Migrant Farmer*, 21.


79 Ibid., 24-36.
Little is known about the origins of the merino sheep prior to its arrival or development in Spain. The first references to Merino sheep appear in the early fourteenth century although, as Phillips and Phillips have noted, this may not have referred to the same Merino breed that later gained global recognition. By the early sixteenth century, however, a breed called “Merino” was well known throughout Spain as a valuable wool producer, with up to three million Merinos under the jurisdiction of the Mesta Real.

By the end of the medieval period, the Spanish Merino was known to foreign wool merchants and manufacturers as a valuable source of fine wool. Draperies and factories in the Low Countries, which had previously relied on English wool imports, began to favor Spanish wools in the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century, Spanish Merino wools were

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recognized for their quality in all the major textile producing regions of Europe, including Flanders, Northern Italy, and England.\footnote{Phillips and Phillips, \textit{Spain's Golden Fleece}, 179; John Munro, “Spanish Merino Wools and the Nouvelles Draperies: An Industrial Transformation in the Late Medieval Low Countries,” \textit{The Economic History Review}, New Series 58, no.3 (2005): 471.}

Rather than a first-class wool among equals, Spanish Merino fleece was designated as "fine wool," a distinction withheld from other breeds. Adam Smith testified to the position of Merino wool in \textit{The Wealth of Nations}, declaring that "fine cloth is made altogether of Spanish wool... English wool cannot be even so mixed with Spanish wool as to enter into the composition without spoiling and degrading, in some degree, the fabric of the cloth."\footnote{Quoted in Munro, "Spanish Merino Wools," 431.} To preserve their monopoly on fine wool, the Spanish government prohibited the export of live Merino sheep for centuries. Spanish law even required sheep migrating between Spanish Castile and the neighboring territories of Aragon, Navarre, or Portugal to be registered with the Mesta. According to popular legend, violating the export ban was punishable by death.\footnote{The death sentence for Merino exportation is mentioned in many works, including contemporary academic books. It was not, however, mentioned by either Julius Klein or Carla and William Phillips, the authorities on the Merino sheep in Spain. See Julius Klein, \textit{The Mesta: A Study in Spanish Economic History}, 1273-1836 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1920), 36 and Phillips, \textit{Spain's Golden Fleece}, 84.}

During the eighteenth century, however, the Spanish state began to relax prohibitions on exporting Merinos. In 1723, a Swede by the name of Alstroemer became the first foreigner to legally obtain and import a flock of Merinos. The next international transfer occurred in 1765, when 300 Merinos (100 rams and 200 ewes) were sent to the Elector of Saxony, brother-in-law of the Spanish King Charles III.\footnote{Lasteryrie, \textit{Account of the Introduction of Merino Sheep}, 6 and 25.} The Spanish decision
to allow the exportation of live Merinos was based on the widespread belief that the breed “would degenerate or even perish outside of Spain.”

Those governments who could procure Merinos, however, invested heavily in replicating Spanish success with fine wool. The Swedish government founded a school for shepherds, awarded premiums to Merino breeders, and reduced taxes on fine wool. Within 40 years of the first introduction, Sweden boasted a flock of more than 60,000 Merinos and produced more fine wool than it imported from Spain. In Saxony, Merinos were kept at a government farm, Stolpen, where their breeding was carefully managed to protect the pure-bred sheep. When Empress Maria Theresa received a gift of 300 Merinos in 1775, she likewise installed them at a government farm in Hungary and established a shepherding school nearby.

By the year 1775, Merino sheep could be found in several European territories. But the exportation of sheep from Spain was still tightly regulated and the overall number of Merinos in other countries remained low. Merino flocks outside of Spain (mostly in Sweden) did not yet pose a threat to the five million sheep in Spanish transhumant flocks. During the next three decades, however, global interest in Merino sheep expanded dramatically. European agriculturalists who coveted the breed published extensively in favor of importation. With state support, the most prolific advocates for Merinos in France and Great Britain soon succeeded in carrying the Merino breed into their respective countries.

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The French government established its first Merino stud in 1786 after the Spanish King granted them a flock of about 300 sheep. Four Spanish shepherds led the Merinos across France to an experimental farm, Rambouillet, on the grounds of Louis XVI’s chateau near Paris. The inspectors of this farm, Louis-Jean-Marie-Daubenton and Alexandre Henri Tessier, became authorities on the breed and their published works were circulated throughout Europe.

Great Britain’s King George III established a Royal Merino flock at the Kew Botanical Gardens by illegally importing sheep from Portugal in 1788. The flock’s manager, Sir Joseph Banks, operated a yearly public auction to encourage experimentation with the breed. Although these auctions were lively and well-attended, very few Britons established significant Merino flocks. While the British government never succeeded in raising a large national Merino flock, they eventually freed themselves from dependence on Spain by supporting Merino raisers in Australia and, to a lesser degree, South Africa.

88 A flock of 367 sheep was granted by the King following a request from the French Government. About 60 of these sheep perished on the journey, see Lasteyrie, An Account of the Introduction of Merino Sheep, 53.
89 Tessier’s detailed description of Merino fleece and skin was copied, verbatim, by the English sheep specialists John Southey, Baron Somerville, and George Cully. See Tessier, Complete Treatise on Merinos, 9; John Southey, Baron Somerville, Facts and observations relative to sheep, wool, ploughs and oxen: in which the importance of improving the short-wooled breeds of sheep, by a mixture of the merino blood, is demonstrated from actual practice: together with some remarks on the advantages which have been derived to the author’s flock, from the use of salt, &c, (London: J. Harding, 1809), 12; George Cully, Observations on Live Stock: Containing Hints for Choosing and Improving the Best Breeds of the Most Useful Kinds of Domestic Animals, 4th Edition (London: J. Harding, 1807), 226.
90 Sir Joseph Banks, the manager of the flock, purchased them from a sea captain “with no receipt taken or asked.” See Harold Carter, His Majesty’s Royal Flock: Sir Joseph Banks and the Merinos of George III of England (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1964), 79.
91 Harold Carter, His Majesty’s Royal Flock, 380-384.
92 It is important to note that of all the European states that experimented with Merino sheep, only the British endeavored to spread the breed to their colonial possessions.
Natural Science in the Age of Empire

On April 28, 1789, about 35 miles south of the Polynesian island of Tofua, British sailor Fletcher Christian led the notorious "Mutiny on the Bounty" against the ship’s captain, William Bligh. This episode, retold through novels, plays, and multiple blockbuster films, has been cast as a tragedy, a morality tale, or a clash between order and rebellion. But the Bounty’s mission, while sometimes ignored, is the most fascinating part of the saga. Under the direction of Sir Joseph Banks, head of the Royal Society and manager of Britain’s royal Merino flock, the Bounty was dispatched to Tahiti in 1787 to collect specimens of the breadfruit plant, a productive food source. Banks believed that, if transplanted to British colonies in the West Indies, the breadfruit could provide a cheap and reliable food source for the colony’s slaves. Christian’s mutiny derailed the Bounty’s mission but, remarkably, it did not deter Banks or Captain Bligh. Following a harrowing journey in an open lifeboat, Bligh eventually made his way back to England only to set course for Tahiti again in 1791. Bligh’s second ship, the Providence embarked more than 1600 breadfruit plants in pots and tubs. Through careful management, more than 600 of these plants survived the hemispheric ocean voyage to be landed at St. Vincent and Jamaica.93

This mutiny in the South Pacific, occurring two days before George Washington was sworn in as the first president of the United States, has more to do with the transatlantic movements of Merino sheep than may be immediately apparent. The Bounty’s mission, to alter the ecology of a colonized territory through environmental engineering, represents the height of imperial science during the late eighteenth century.

Guided by the impulse of what Richard Drayton has coined 'Nature's Government,' Europeans believed that they alone possessed the natural knowledge to manipulate environments to their advantage. The efforts to carry Merino sheep into South Africa and the United States stemmed from this same belief. But the idea of environmental engineering did not emerge spontaneously or organically. It formed over generations of sustained contact and exchange between the people, plants, and animals of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas – and it was directed by powerful members of the scientific elite.

No one did more to advance imperial science than the Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus. His Systema Naturae, published in 1735, proposed a universal taxonomy for living creatures based on classes, orders, genera and species. It created the system of binomial nomenclature (homo sapiens, for example) that is now a familiar convention. Seeking to classify as many species as possible, Linnaeus dispatched a generation of voyager naturalists, who scoured the earth looking for species previously unknown to Europeans. Two of his ‘apostles,’ Anders Sparrmann and Carl-Peter Thunberg, conducted extensive surveys of the Cape Colony in South Africa. In addition to his academic interests, Linnaeus "wanted to collect plants not for their interest as rarities, but for their value as commercial commodities." He sent for tea from China and Mulberry trees from America in the hope that Sweden could free itself from the need to import luxury goods.

As knowledge about exotic and potentially valuable plants flooded into Sweden, other European governments began to patronize extensive overseas collecting projects.

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95 Patricia Fara, Sex, Botany, and Empire: The Story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 35-36. Linnaeus’ efforts were generally supported by the Swedish government and perhaps it should be unsurprising that Merino sheep flourished in the country.
Captain James Cook’s famous voyage to Tahiti on the *HMS Endeavor* between 1768 and 1771, tasked with recording the transit of Venus, also allowed young Joseph Banks’ team of botanists to collect specimens from Australia and the South Pacific. Specimens from these voyages were housed in central botanical gardens in Europe. Linnaeus and his apostles gathered them at the University of Uppsala, where the great botanist himself led public tours and lectures. For Joseph Banks, the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in London became the central repository. Botanical gardens became a fixture of European capitals and, in time, were reproduced in overseas colonies.  

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Figure 3: Chart from Carl Linnaeus’ *Systemae Nature* (1735).

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The expansion of botany and other natural sciences was directly tied to European colonialism overseas. The extension of European hegemony over foreign lands aided naturalists, who were "dependent on the colonial infrastructure in order to pursue their travels." At the same time colonized people shared substantial amounts of natural knowledge with visiting Europeans, who generally employed local guides. In South Africa, Khoi, San, and other African people supplied much of the information recorded by naturalists like Anders Sparrman, Francis Masson, Carl Peter Thunberg, and William

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Burchell.98 A similar process unfolded in the Americas, where European scientists relied on Native American and enslaved African guides who they viewed “paradoxically as both primitive and generative of a modern empiricism.”99

Just as colonized people transferred knowledge to traveling naturalists, white colonists inserted themselves into European scientific discourse. By participating in scientific discussions, white settlers sought to assert their position within the wider European world and bridge gaps between colony and metropole. In South Africa, white settlers displayed scientific knowledge to argue for equal status with metropolitan Europeans. The ‘Nature's Government’ proclaimed in the Cape Colony gave whites “the power to identify, pronounce upon, and control South Africa’s indigenous inhabitants.” By claiming natural knowledge as a requirement for “rights-bearing citizens”, white South Africans distanced themselves from people of color who were being stripped of their rights. To bolster their position, whites conveniently buried African contributions to natural science.100

The white colonists of the early American republic also used science to form and project their identity. American scientists paid homage to their colleagues across the Atlantic and “modeled their techniques on European precedents.” But American science, personified in the character of Benjamin Franklin, was as much a rejection of Europe as an assertion of knowledge. By emphasizing a practical or ‘common sense’ approach to his

100 Saul Dubow, *Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 4.
experiments, Franklin proffered an American ethic of science that contested the pedantic and hierarchical academies of Europe.\textsuperscript{101}

In South Africa and the United States, familiarity with scientific theories and participation in scientific debate provided another avenue for self-affirmation. Whites in the Cape Colony displayed scientific achievements to differentiate themselves from blacks and other people of color. Science became a symbol of European-ness and, thus, a position atop the colonial racial order. White Americans, in contrast, embraced an idiosyncratic scientific approach that rejected the European scientific establishment in many ways. By flaunting the success of their common-sense approach to scientific questions, Americans cemented their separate identity. These divergent approaches to scientific discourse ultimately played a role in elite efforts to breed Merino sheep in South Africa and the United States.

As colonial settlements expanded, European and creole naturalists began to note disturbing changes in colonized landscapes. Drawing on "conservationist ideas and on romantic language," metropolitan visitors began to express concern over potential degradation of natural resources in the colonies.\textsuperscript{102} Often, they were reacting to very real crises caused or exacerbated by European settlement. Throughout the colonized world, farmers erected fences, cleared land for pasturage, and hunted local species. New England's deer and wolves were decimated by colonists' rifles and "by losing their ecological habitats to new human uses of the land."\textsuperscript{103} Old-growth hardwood forests were

\textsuperscript{102} Beinart, "Men, Science, Travel and Nature," 789.
cut and cleared for firewood, timber, and to make way for livestock. In Mexico, the unchecked spread of Spanish "Churro" sheep resulted in an "ungulate irruption" leading to environmental degradation. In South Africa and Australia, where sheep pastoralism dominated the colonial economy, observers quickly noticed "the displacement not only of Khoisan and Australian aboriginal people but also" of indigenous grazing animals like "the springbok and kangaroo." These obvious changes likely played a role in colonists' adoption of conservationist principles.

In many cases, however, colonizers attributed the denuding of natural resources to native land management practices. The assumption that colonized environments have steadily declined over time has been stubbornly pervasive from the colonial era to the present. This fallacy, which assumes the existence of "an African Eden" before colonization has often been used to predict coming catastrophes. Fears of decline during the colonial period prompted Europeans to use the colonies as proving grounds for various theories of environmental management. This was especially true of island colonies, which were both easy to monitor and prone to environmental disruption. The first colonial conservation measures were guided by fear of degradation and distrust of native land management

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104 Anderson, *Creatures of Empire*, 185.
107 James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800-1990* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 4-5. See, for example, the near universal praise given to the 2010 documentary *The Man Who Stopped the Desert*, which chronicles a Burkinabé farmer's efforts to fight degradation of the Sahel.
practices. Restrictions on resource use invariably placed stricter limits on natives than colonizers, privileging introduced methods of land management.\[^{109}\]

But colonial environmentalism was not simply reactive. Many Europeans scientists and academics hoped to re-engineer colonial environments through the introduction of exotic species. By replacing local species with more economically valuable plants and animals, they sought to buoy colonial economies. The effort of the *HMS Bounty* to transplant the breadfruit tree is perhaps the most striking example. When the ill-fated journey’s architect, Joseph Banks, concocted that scheme, he was equally interested in advancing natural science and in generating revenue for the British economy. These goals were fully compatible with each other and with the expansion of colonial rule. The effort to carry Merino sheep into colonized lands, pursued by no less than Joseph Banks himself, must be considered within this framework.\[^{110}\]

**Parallel Revolutions: Science and Agriculture**

European endeavors to modify colonial landscapes were concurrent with drastic changes to the lands of Europe itself. Agricultural "improvers" experimented with novel crop strains, animal breeds, and farming practices in search of greater yields and consistency. This process became most visible in Great Britain during the eighteenth

\[^{109}\] In South Africa, for example, deforestation became associated with decreased rainfall, leading to the first forest protection measures. Overstocking devastated colonized grasslands, leading to early rangeland management. William Beinart and Jacob Tropp, among others, have shown that these protections usually served the interest of colonial landholders while limiting colonized peoples’ access to natural resources. See Jacob Tropp, *Natures of Colonial Change: Environmental Relations in the Making of the Transkei* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006) and William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment, 1770-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

\[^{110}\] Grove contends that Banks’ interests were largely academic, though he was forced to present them “concealed in a cloak of commercial justification,” which he ultimately approved of. See Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 311.
century, where agricultural improvement became the subject of national conversation. Historians have long debated the timing, form, and significance of an 'Agricultural Revolution' that preceded the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Nineteenth century authors constructed an enduring narrative in which a generation of 'Great Men,' Jethro Tull, Robert Bakewell, and 'Turnip' Townshend, "triumphed over a conservative mass of country bumpkins and single-handedly transformed English agriculture." Under this historical model, the technological and horticultural innovations of these men, combined with the enclosure of formerly common lands, led to miraculous growth in British agricultural production.\(^{11}\) Revisionist historians like Eric Kerridge and Robert Allen have found evidence for a long period of agricultural innovation dating to the late middle ages. They describe a 'yeoman' agricultural revolution' in which 'small farmers in the open fields' achieved impressive gains.\(^{12}\)

Irrespective of these debates, by the eighteenth century, intellectuals, scientists, and landowners in Europe perceived great advances in the science of agriculture. Whether


agricultural change was driven by erudite savants or common farmers, it’s inarguable that even the most practical and mundane agricultural questions were vigorously debated within the high society of the 1700s. As Peter Jones writes, "the literature on the rural economy and the literature on the Enlightenment may belong to different historiographies, but in the second half of the eighteenth century they were closely intertwined." This is seconded by Joel Mokyr, who claims that "agriculture was placed on the scientific agenda of enlightened Europe" from 1750 onward.\textsuperscript{13}

The leading agriculturalists of the eighteenth century certainly considered themselves scientists. Arthur Young, author of the seminal four-volume \textit{Course of Experimental Agriculture}, paid homage to Francis Bacon as a pioneer whose theories of agriculture, "as far as they extend, are worthy of his immortal genius - purely experimental, and related with a philosophical precision." As his title suggests, Young emphasized the need for experimentation, writing in deprecation that "where I imagined two or three trials would have proved decisive, forty have been conducted in vain." Despite his exasperation, he was ultimately optimistic that enlightenment principles would provide boundless opportunities for improvement in agriculture and that "every year of a man’s practice will open new worlds of enquiry."\textsuperscript{14} Young’s vision of agriculture fits Anthony Pagden’s definition of the Enlightenment as "an open-ended, continuing progression, subject to scrutiny and reevaluation."\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Peter Jones, \textit{Agricultural Enlightenment}, 5. Jones continues that "For a generation which could have had no inkling of an 'industrial revolution' waiting in the wings, the capital value of land and the primacy of agriculture were self-evident truths." Mokyr, \textit{Enlightened Economy}, 185.

\textsuperscript{14} Arthur Young, \textit{A Course of Experimental Agriculture} Vol. I (Dublin: J. Exshaw, 1771), v and xi.

\textsuperscript{15} Anthony Pagden, \textit{The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14
Agricultural discussions raged within public and private institutions and across local, national, and international communities. The royal institutions and botanical gardens that housed exotic plant specimens became sites of experimentation with crop strains and livestock breeds as well. These institutions were replicated in the colonies where, for example, the Calcutta Botanical Garden maintained crop species to guard against famine. The French colony on modern-day Mauritius, where landscapes were cleared and replaced with sugar cane, was also a site of intense horticultural experimentation. And at the Cape Colony, both Dutch and British rulers maintained ‘government farms’ where they eventually conducted experiments with Merino sheep.116

Privately run agricultural societies were equally important to the development of agricultural science. Since its founding in 1660, the Royal Society of London, an elite institution presided over by Sir Isaac Newton and Sir Joseph Banks, took an interest in agricultural subjects. Small agricultural societies flourished in the English countryside, mostly drawing members from the gentry classes. These societies played an important social function, allowing members to share practical farming advice and to discuss politics. Organizations like the Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, along with many other state or local societies, played a similar role in the early United States. On both sides of the Atlantic, agricultural societies provided an arena for discussion and often a platform for the distribution of published literature.117

Animal breeding was one of the most well-researched areas in agricultural science. At the start of the eighteenth century, the Merino sheep was one of the few recognizable livestock breeds in all of Europe. By the end of the century, however, agriculturalists had developed a wide variety of distinct horse, cattle, and sheep breeds had been developed. This revolution in animal breeding was initially focused in England, where Thoroughbred horses, Leicester Longwool sheep, and Devon cattle all emerged as respected breeds. Some, like Nicholas Russell, view their creation as the result of an English obsession with livestock production dating from the early sixteenth century. Others, like Harriet Ritvo in The Animal Estate, place the expansion of livestock breeding firmly in the eighteenth century. She emphasizes the role of prominent breeders like Robert Bakewell, who employed close inbreeding to produce larger animals yielding more meat per carcass.¹¹⁸

In England, Merino enthusiasts clashed with Merino skeptics, who favored British long wool breeds. Rebecca Woods’ cleverly titled dissertation, "The Herds Shot Round the World," explores the contours of this lengthy and nasty debate. Merino enthusiasts were mostly drawn from the landholding classes, who entertained agricultural experiments in the name of improvement. Merino opponents claimed to represent the ‘practical farmers’ of the country, who did not have time or money to waste on foreign curiosities. According to Woods, appeals to patriotism abounded as "each side of the debate professed to have the interests of the nation at heart, but what these were, and how they were best to be defended, were open to interpretation."¹¹⁹

The vigorous field of animal science quickly spread beyond Britain's borders. Bakewell's method of inbreeding was written into agricultural textbooks and lectures throughout France, Austria, and Germany by the end of the eighteenth century. Experimental breeding was especially robust in Saxony and Moravia, where agricultural societies played an important role in growing the Merino sheep population and increasing wool yields. One meticulous Moravian wool breeder, Ferdinand Giesslern, became affectionately known as the "Moravian Bakewell." The Saxon royal Merino flock at Stolpen, meanwhile, flourished as well. By 1800 it contained 3400 sheep, 500 of which were auctioned to the public annually. These private and public initiatives swelled Merino flocks in Central Europe and by 1802 there were four million fine-wool 'Saxon' sheep east of the Rhine. Most of this wool was exported to Great Britain, supplanting Spanish imports.

New livestock breeds were exported from Europe nearly as soon as they were developed or recognized. William Duckitt, the first Agriculturalist of the Cape Colony, carried the Devon cattle breed with him to South Africa in 1800. By 1803, the van Reenen family (the first private citizens in South Africa to raise Merino sheep) had imported both an English dray horse and a bull from the Dutch, or Friesland breed into the Colony.

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123 Francis William Reitz, *Cape Agriculture: In Two Lectures. Delivered at the Cape Town Mechanic Institute on the 1st and 15th May, 1857* (Cape Town: Solomon and Co. 1857), 9; Henry Lichtenstein,
the United States, pure-bred European animals were rare, a fact bemoaned by American agriculturalists. George Washington, the country's premier sheep breeder of the eighteenth century, did manage to import 'Bakewell' ewes from England as well as a 'Persian' ram. He used these to develop his own breed, known as the 'Arlington sheep,' that was renowned for its extraordinarily long wool. By 1810, it appears that other English sheep breeds like the Southdown, Lincolnshire, and Devonshire sheep had been imported into the country as well.\textsuperscript{124}

Merino sheep, therefore, became established in South Africa and the United States at a time when distinct livestock breeds were still something of a novelty, even in Europe. Despite their recent recognition, livestock breeds (including sheep) were widely circulating by the beginning of the nineteenth century. In some cases, animals were sent abroad by European governments. The first Merino sheep in South Africa and Australia, for example, arrived this way. But colonists and former colonists were also active participants in the effort to propagate European breeds abroad. White settlers in South Africa and the United States learned about European sheep breeds through the published works of European agriculturalists and, in some cases, through direct correspondence with them. They used European agricultural discourse as a model when constructing their own agricultural theories.

\textsuperscript{124} Livingston, \textit{Essay of Sheep}, 58; After Washington's death, the Arlington breed was maintained by his step-grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, who named his premium ram 'Bakewell' in homage to the Agriculturalist. See Minto, Carman, and Heath, \textit{Special report on the history and present condition...}, 52-59 and 92 for other English breeds.
The Language of Wool

The first Merino enthusiasts in South Africa and the United States used strikingly similar language because they drew from similar sources. South Africans like W.S. van Ryneveld and Dirk Gysbert van Reenen were familiar with the French writers, Lasteyrie, Daubenton, and Tessier. The American sheep breeders E.I. Du Pont and Robert Livingston personally visited the French government farm at Rambouillet and conversed with the managers of that institution. E.I. du Pont even ordered copies of French texts, including Bellin’s “Observations on Wool Bearing Animals,” Pictet’s “Facts and Observations on Merinos,” and the 13-volume “Dictionarie d’Agriculture,” sent to his home in Delaware.

Through these conversations and exchanges, Merino breeders in South Africa and the United States became exposed to what can be described as the 'Language of Wool,' a distinct set of beliefs and arguments shared by Merino enthusiasts worldwide. The Language of Wool was a dialect of improvement ideology that deemed Merino sheep as the most advanced breed, with fleece far superior to all others. As such, Merino enthusiasts privileged breed purity and pedigree over all other factors. The emphasis on heritage led breeders to obsess over the authenticity of their sheep and to fear the degradation of their stock.

125 D.G. van Reenen, Journal of a Journey to the Interior of Africa, situated to the east of the Cape of Good Hope, undertaken in the year 1803 by his honour the Governor and Commander in Chief, JW Janssens (Cape Town: van Reibeeck society, 1937), 283; Edmund Burrows, Overberg Outspan: A chronicle of People and Places in the South western Districts of the Cape (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1952), 144-145.
The Language of Wool and the emphasis on breed purity was forged through contentious debate. Eighteenth-century agriculturalists had only a tenuous understanding of genetics and heritable traits, which led to the development of competing approaches to animal breeding. Some believed that the qualities of an animal's human owner could influence their offspring. Others invoked astrology or alchemy when making breeding decisions. A perhaps more reasonable theory supposed that an animal and its offspring could be altered through transplantation to a different climate. A related school of thought maintained that animals were most affected by their feed, the soil, and their owner's method of management. If these conditions could be controlled, then livestock characteristics could be improved.127

In the case of Merino sheep, many agriculturalists believed that the fineness of the wool was owed to the Spanish climate and the practice of transhumance, rather than from the animal itself. Lord Somerville, a leading British writer on Merino sheep, attributed their fine wool to the Spanish "code of sheep-laws, the Mesta" and to the practice of transhumance "by changing their climate with the season, so as to preserve an equal temperature of air."128 Writing in 1800, Caleb Hillier Parry lamented that most Englishmen, "except those who have been acquainted with actual experiments or experimentors," believed "that the wool of Spanish sheep would degenerate out of their

127 Russell, Like Engend'ring Like, 20-22.
128 Cited in George Cully, Observations on Live Stock, 233. Somerville was later convinced by Lasteyrie that transhumance was not necessary for growing fine wool. See Somerville, Facts and Observations Relative to Sheep, 44.
own country.” Even Joseph Banks, head of the British Royal Society, believed that Merino wool would turn to coarse hair if raised in the wrong climate.

By 1810, however, leading Merino experts railed against these suppositions. While noting the importance of proper management, they held breed purity as the overriding concern. George Cully, for example, criticized farmers who focused on size and physical characteristics while ignoring "the more essential properties" of heritage. Disregarding theories of improvement based on climate or management, Cully wrote that animals could only be improved "in proportion to the degree of perfection existing in the rams" that had sired them. Organizations like the Merino Society in England endeavored to convince the agricultural public that pure-bred sheep retained inherited qualities, regardless of the climate, soil, or conditions in which they were raised. The French writers Lasteyrie and Tessier echoed this opinion, disavowing earlier French breeders who did not privilege breed purity above all else.

Within breeding circles, the distinction between cross-bred sheep (descended from Merino and other breeds) and pure-bred Merino sheep was severe. Sheep that contained even a drop of non-Merino blood were considered "impure." Parry criticized

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129 Caleb Hillier Parry, *Facts and observations tending to shew the practicability and advantage, to the individual and the nation, of producing in the British Isles clothing wool, equal to that of Spain: together with some hints towards the management of fine-wooled sheep* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1800), 10.

130 After meeting with Banks prior to his journey to South Africa, William Duckitt recorded in his journal that "Sir J thought that the wool of the sheep would soon turn to hair." See Cape Archives (CA) Acession (A) 393 William Duckitt Journal, Saturday Dec. 14th, 1799.


Herefordshire farmers who crossed their sheep only once with Merino rams and yet called themselves "perfectly masters of the subject." He boldly challenged, "Let no man hereafter flatter himself in this respect, till his sheep have, at least, five-sixths of the Spanish blood." 133 This obsession with breed purity led to anxieties over possible contamination of bloodlines. Cully feared that the improvement of the breed could be "totally impeded, or at least greatly retarded" if crossed with inferior animals. 134 It is not surprising, then, that Merino breeders were pressured to certify the bloodlines of their animals and to closely monitor their breeding experiments. Lord Somerville was careful to mention that his sheep were "selected from a Transhumante, or travelling Merino flock, of undoubted high blood." 135

Tessier was the most absolute in his insistence on breeding, arguing that as "the merino is a distinct breed... cross-breeds may afford individuals more or less approaching to the species, but never the species itself." Crosses could be bred to fool even experienced agriculturalists, but they would always remain "mongrel[s]." Though he forgave his predecessors who created cross-breeds out of necessity or ignorance, Tessier warned that the practice "has eventually become a real evil." For while some crosses may not show their inferior parentage, they would always carry "in their blood a germe of maternal baseness." If such animals were allowed to procreate, their coarse characteristics would "sooner or later be visible, and degeneration will be the consequence of it." He therefore

recommended a careful system of earmarking through which flock owners could remove all undesirable blood from their flocks.\textsuperscript{136}

Tessier's language is notable for more than just its severity. He referred to sheep as a "class" of ruminants, rather than a single species and used the word "race" to distinguish sheep from different geographic areas. Historians have not been oblivious to the fact that obsession with animal breeding among European societies mirrored a rising interest in the science of race. From the eighteenth and through much of the nineteenth century, the Linnaean preoccupation with taxonomy was increasingly applied to human beings, who were categorized by physical appearance.\textsuperscript{137}

In many agricultural treatises, the rhetoric of breed purity drifted into theories of racial difference among humans -- sometimes with striking directness. Parry, seeking to make a point about breed purity, employed the analogy of "a young European female, with flaxen hair" left "on the shores of the Niger." Presuming that she procreated with a local, the first child born to her would "probably have a dark skin, and black curly hair." In time, her descendants would resemble other local inhabitants.\textsuperscript{138} The American Robert Livingston employed a somewhat similar, if cruder, comparison when discussing African sheep breeds. He argued that African sheep sported hair rather than wool because of selective breeding, rather than as a function of climate. As Africans did not manufacture

\textsuperscript{136} Tessier, \textit{A Complete Treatise on Merinos}, 2 and 10-12.  
\textsuperscript{138} Parry, \textit{Facts and Observations}, 12.
wool clothing, they had little need for wool-bearing sheep: "Half savages themselves, they are content that their domestic animals should resemble them."139

These racial analogies were especially meaningful to European settlers abroad, who agonized over the implications of living in alien lands among non-Europeans. Just as Agriculturalists had worried about the degeneration of sheep in different climates, some European theorists expressed doubts about the prospects of creole settlers in their overseas colonies. Building on the work of the naturalist Comte de Buffon, who hypothesized that American plants and animals had degenerated from European ancestors, the philosophe Abbé Raynal claimed a similar effect on the "race of whites, transplanted from Europe."140 White settlers in Africa and America were forced to defend against suspicion that "transplantation to a new environment altered the temperament, the corporeality, and the mental disposition," and not for the better.141

These fears were especially strong in South Africa where rural Boers were criticized for their crude customs. The German traveler O.F. Mentzel, who visited the Cape in the 1780s, warned that without an influx of new Europeans "the African nation would degenerate and become uncivilized." Even the colonists feared that their more rural brethren would "become a completely savage nation."142 When the British government sent emigrants to the Cape Colony in 1820, they placed the settlers in clusters, lest they be

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139 Livingston, Essay on Sheep, 21.
140 Quoted in Yokota, Unbecoming British, 187.
141 Parrish, American Curiosity, 91.
142 O.F. Mentzel, A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope Part III, trans. G.V. Marais and J. Hoge (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1944), 120.
"corrupted" by the native land and customs. In this environment, fears of degradation among livestock were surely equated with human insecurities.\footnote{Robert Ross, "Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape," in \textit{Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930}, ed. William Beinart, Peter Delius, and Stanley Trapido (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 62; William Burchell, \textit{Hints on Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope} (London: J Hatchard and Son, 1819), 16-20.}

**Men of the Highest Pedigree**

The Language of Wool did not appeal to all segments of white society in South Africa and the United States. The exorbitant price of pure-bred Merinos ensured that they could only be obtained by the wealthiest members of society. Less wealthy farmers, often referred to as 'practical farmers' in agricultural literature, were likely oblivious to the Merino breed. Most merino breeders, therefore were drawn from the aristocracy or the mercantile gentry. Gentry farmers were particularly important in pioneering Merino sheep husbandry in South Africa and the United States and they are among the most prominent actors in this dissertation. They became fascinated by the Merino sheep as it symbolized wealth, sophistication, and practicality. The rare and exotic nature of the breed made it a curiosity, which only the most erudite scholars of agriculture would know and understand. In both South Africa and the United States, Merino enthusiasts posed as experts on the breed to illustrate their exceptionalism.\footnote{English Merino breeders tended to be drawn from the landholding classes as well, see Woods, "Herds Shot Round the World," 60.}

In South Africa, the Dutch-speaking 'Cape gentry' formed as an established class during the eighteenth century. The Cape gentry settled in the arable regions near Cape Town and directed plantations of wine grapes, wheat, and other crops. They owned significant numbers of slaves, whom they oversaw personally while living on large country...
estates. The wealthiest of the gentry lived permanently in Cape Town and could afford to employ managers over their rural landholdings.\textsuperscript{145} Following the British conquest, members of the gentry embraced the new government that "did all it could to make the conditions for commercial farming as favourable as possible."\textsuperscript{146} The pioneering families of Merino wool in South Africa, the van Reenen, van Breda, and Reitz families, among others, were wealthy members of the Cape gentry. As such, their economic interests tied them to the Cape Town merchant trade as well as rural meat and wine operations.

Most early American Merino enthusiasts would have identified as merchants or gentleman farmers. However, the American mercantile gentry were not such a uniform class as the Cape Gentry. Robert Livingston, one of the first Merino importers, was the patriarch of an established aristocratic family and one of the largest landholders in New York State. E.I. Du Pont, another innovator, was a recent French immigrant with a fortune drawn from international finance. But this diverse group did share important characteristics. Most importantly, they were connected through merchant trade to urban commercial centers in the United States and abroad.\textsuperscript{147}

Agricultural improvement attracted gentry for a variety of reasons. In eighteenth-century England, amateur agriculturalists gathered in local agricultural societies to discuss theories and practices. But, as Harriet Ritvo showed in \textit{The Animal Estate}, the attraction of these gatherings was primarily social, rather than intellectual. Societies that emphasized camaraderie over pure science were more successful because "in toasting their noble

\textsuperscript{147} Thornton, \textit{Cultivating Gentlemen}, 74-77.
animals, the elite livestock fanciers were celebrating themselves. Members of the gentry also showed their agricultural bona fides through the curation of rural estates. These estates expressed complicated cultural associations. On one hand, they existed to display wealth, dazzling visitors with manicured lawns, gardens, stables, and other amenities. On the other hand, they were sites of conspicuous achievement in agriculture, where gentlemen could exhibit their agricultural improvements.  

These trappings of the English gentry were replicated in both South Africa and the United States. The colony’s first agricultural society was established by the merchant-gentry elite of Cape Town in 1803. By the 1820’s smaller agricultural societies appeared in many small towns and country districts. Although the Cape gentry did rely on their rural lands to generate income, they also curated country homes for the visiting public. European travelers in the Cape Colony recorded the grand hospitality with which they were received by their Cape gentry hosts. Aside from feasts and music, they were also given tours of wheat fields, vineyards, orchards, and of course, the prized stallion, bull, or ram.  

In the United States, agricultural societies and country estates appealed to a rising urban elite that wished to commune with the ideal of a rural, yeoman republic. Through experimentation with agriculture, they sought to "appropriate some of the moral prestige" bestowed upon the nation's farmers. American elites also joined agricultural societies to express American improvement, as Eric Stoykovich has argued. Rather than paying

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149 Tamara Thornton, *Cultivating Gentleman*, 33-34.  
151 For example, the traveler Henry Lichtenstein visited no less than five estates owned by the van Reenen family during his time at the Cape, see Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa*, 29-30, 38, 114-115, 203.
homage to past conceptions of aristocracy or yeomanry, the American mercantile gentry “were deeply invested in visions of material and economic progress.”

Gentry welcomed opportunities to publicly display their agricultural knowledge, cited to support the “vision of the commercial class as the appropriate, natural leaders of society.” This attitude was apparent in the writings of animal breeders, who unanimously agreed that the strict regimen of pure breeding was too complex and important to be left in the hands of the public. George Washington, in a 1792 letter to Arthur Young, lamented that “if trusted to a common bailiff,” his sheep “would, I apprehend, soon degenerate, for want of that care and attention which is necessary to preserve the breed in its purity.” Ten years later, Washington’s step-grandson was still worried that “the race might degenerate for the want of proper keep.”

W. S. van Ryneveld, leader of the first Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society, predicted in 1804 that it would take fifty years for South Africans to breed quality Merino sheep, if “left to private individuals.” Similar arguments were still being made at the Cape two decades later.

Gentry farmers in South Africa and the United States embraced Merino sheep as part of their broader interest in improvement. By mastering the science of agriculture, they hoped to cement their place as luminaries in largely rural societies. South African and American breeders used similar language because they drew on similar sources and shared

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152 Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*, 74; Stoykovich, “The Culture of Improvement,” 58.
154 Minto, Carman, and Heath *Special report on the history and present condition...*, 55 and 59.
similar goals. A discourse that instructed farmers to preserve the purity of Merino blood appealed to South Africans and Americans desperate to measure and announce their agricultural achievements.

Conclusion

Merino enthusiasts worldwide were united by a global discourse of progressive agriculture – the Language of Wool. This international conversation produced a volume of instructional and promotional literature that strove to align agricultural practice with ideas of science and improvement. Early promoters of Merino sheep in South Africa and the United States were attentive to this conversation and monitored the royal Merino flocks at Kew, Rambouillet, and elsewhere in Europe. Before long, they became conversant in the Language of Wool. American diplomats Robert Livingston and David Humphreys, both of whom served as ambassadors in Europe, published essays on sheep that circulated throughout the United States and across the Atlantic. William Stephenus van Ryneveld, Chairman of the Commission of Agriculture at the Cape of Good Hope penned a book length manuscript on the promise of Merino sheep raising at the Cape.  

The appeal of Merino sheep in these two territories also reflected the aspirations and anxieties shared by white settlers in colonized lands. Far from the opulence and erudition of metropolitan Europe, they struggled to escape reputations of poverty and ignorance. Isolated from familiar lands and peoples, they feared environmental, cultural, and even racial degradation. In this climate of insecurity, Merino sheep offered a golden

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156 See Robert R. Livingston, Essay on sheep; David Humphreys, "Dissertation on the breed of Spanish Sheep known as Merino"; W.S. van Ryneveld, Concise Remarks on the Present State of this Colony...
opportunity to aspirational farmers and statesmen in the Cape Colony and the United
States. Interest in the breed also reflected the desire of white people to separate
themselves from populations that were considered culturally inferior. At their most
benign, Merino promoters spoke of elevating their native country toward greater industry.
At their worst, they equated the selective breeding of animals with familiar hierarchies of
race.

The successes and failures of Merino advocates say much about South Africa and
the United States in the early nineteenth century. The language they used to promote
themselves and their sheep illustrates how deeply they embraced notions of improvement
stemming from the Enlightenment. For certain farmers and landholders in these two
regions, the Merino sheep's golden fleece offered more than economic opportunity, it also
offered social and intellectual elevation toward the ranks of Europe. The surprising
lengths to which gentry farmers in both South Africa and the United States went to
introduce Merino sheep suggests that, above all, they were seeking to establish their own
pedigree.
CHAPTER TWO: FAT TAILS AND FINE WOOL: MERINO SHEEP IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1779-1810

When Anders Sparrman's first visited the Cape Colony in 1772, the Swedish naturalist was struck by the harshness of the landscape. He found rural farm families struggling to grind an existence out of the dry and barren ground. Milk was in short supply, grain was difficult to grow, and the wine produced by the farmers "was such wash as to not be sold in town." Sparrman noted a single exception in this land of scarcity. After spending a night in the forbidding Karoo region, Sparrman awoke with the "greatest astonishment" to find impressive flocks of sheep. He was surprised, not only by the number of the sheep, but by their "unparalleled fatness," considering the "horrid drought and aridity of the land." Sparrman described some of these sheep as "intolerably fat," and was surprised by the size of their tails, which weighed from "eight to twelve pounds; and mostly consists of a delicate kind of fat." Farmers used this rich tail fat for cooking, as a butter substitute, and even for making soap and candles. Observing the large and diverse fat-tailed sheep economy against a backdrop of hardship and scarcity, Sparrman might have praised the rural inhabitants of the Cape for their ingenuity and resourcefulness. Instead, he formed the opposite opinion.157

To Sparrman, the bountiful sheep herds and diverse uses of sheep fat were beside the point; where was the wool? Sparrman found families with hundreds of sheep who went without stockings, even on the coldest nights. In his travels, he found only a single farmer who had taught his wife and slaves to spin wool into “tolerably good stockings.” Astonishingly to Sparrman, most farmers simply left the wool on the sheeps’ skin to be later sold as cloaks to local Khoi people. To explain the glut of sheep and dearth of wool, Sparrman offered a criticism, not only of the sheep, but of the colonists who raised them. He argued that wool production had failed to develop at the Cape only due to the colonists’ laziness and ignorance. He lamented that factories had not been set up “for the purpose of working up the wool of the country, (which is now quite thrown away,) at least into coarse cloth and stockings.” Sparrman was not surprised that the Boers of the interior, who had neglected so many promising industries, managed to squander their sheep and wool as well.\textsuperscript{158}

Sparrman was not alone in his criticism of the Cape colonists. As sheep were central to rural South African life, they frequently appeared in metropolitan critiques of the Colony. Visitors were fascinated by the large, fat tail of the Cape sheep and equally disgusted by its culinary usage. Many became sick at the thought of spreading viscous tail-fat onto their bread in place of butter. Others turned their noses at Boer delicacies that amounted to little more than “indifferent bread and vegetables, stewed in sheep’s fat.” Beyond the animal itself, however, visitors to the Cape condemned the pastoralist lifestyle of the Boers as simply wasteful. Disregarding the ecological limitations on agriculture in the arid region, they assumed that Boers pursued migratory pastoralism out of sheer

\textsuperscript{158} Sparrman, \textit{Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope}, 265-266.
laziness and a lack of determination. Many visitors remarked that the Boer lifestyle resembled that of Africans like the Khoi, rather than of more civilized Europeans like themselves. Attacks on pastoralism reinforced stereotypes about the Cape colonists and their primitivism.\textsuperscript{159}

While rural colonists at the Cape were likely oblivious to the sharp criticism laid against them in European travel narratives, the metropolitan population in Cape Town was not. Stung by the words of Sparrman and others, gentry farmers were eager to demonstrate their sophistication, status, and civility – and cultivating Merino sheep seemed an ideal foundation for their cosmopolitan aspirations. By replacing Cape sheep with Merinos, elites could both create wealth in the form of exported wool, and transform their uncultured image by adopting a well-regarded European breed.

The coalition who pursued Merino wool at the Cape was diverse. Visiting European scientists and imperial administrators prescribed the Merino as a means of improving the colony and even favored state intervention to establish the breed. Under the influence of European writings on agriculture and improvement, these groups sought to transform the Cape’s agricultural landscape by introducing European animal breeds and farming practices. Furthermore, they hoped to change the character of the Cape interior, its land and its people, by replacing African animals with European ones.

\textsuperscript{159} Robert Percival, \textit{An account of the Cape of Good Hope: containing an historical view of its original settlement by the Dutch, its capture by the British in 1795, and the different policy pursued there by the Dutch and British governments} (London: C&R Baldwin, 1804), 204-205.
European Shepherds and African Sheep

Sheep have been herded in the Cape region of South Africa for centuries. The first pastoral people of South Africa, the Khoi, brought sheep with them when they entered the region two thousand years ago. These sheep, known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as 'Cape sheep' possess several characteristics that set them apart from European sheep breeds. Cape sheep are generally smaller than European sheep but they possess an unusually large and fatty tail, which can weigh up to 10 pounds (4.5 kgs) or more. The tails are so prominent that the first Europeans to encounter the breed described them as "sheep with five quarters." Cape sheep are also distinguished by their lack of wool. Instead, they are covered in a coat of loose hair, which is routinely shed by the animal.\(^\text{160}\)

Figure 5: Ronderib Afrikaner (top) and Namaqua Afrikaner (bottom); modern descendants of the Cape sheep. Photo Credit: Ida Vale Farms.
While strange and inferior in the eyes of European visitors, the physical characteristics of Cape sheep allow the breed to thrive in the arid conditions of the Cape region. The large fat deposits in the sheep's tail allow it to store water, much like a camel's hump, in times of drought. During hot weather, Cape sheep can regulate their body temperature by shedding their loose hair. Khoi herders coveted the Cape sheep as remarkably hardy animals that provided a reliable source of meat in an unpredictable environment. The sheep's tail fat was an especially versatile commodity, serving as a calorie-rich food source, insect-repellent, and sun-block. But Cape sheep weren’t just a natural resource, they also served as a nexus of interaction between Europeans and Southern Africans.

The first encounters between Europeans and Southern Africans, occurring from about 1500 onward, involved livestock. As European sailors rounded the Cape of Good Hope, they often stopped to barter with Khoi people for beef and mutton. After the establishment of the Dutch colony at Cape Town in 1652, European colonists began raising the Cape sheep themselves. As the colonial population grew, colonists looked further into the interior in search of lands for grazing livestock. These pastoral farmers, who became known as Boers, pushed the boundaries of the colony to the north and east. Boer farmers invariably caused competition and conflict with entrenched Khoi pastoralists. Mounted Boers armed with guns, launched a series of raids, known as "commandos,” against Khoi people and the hunter-gatherer San people. Often launched in retaliation for stock theft, the commando raids resulted in the expulsion of Khoi and San people from the most
desirable pastures and water sources. Those who were not killed or expelled were enslaved or coerced into serving as labor on Boer farms.\(^{161}\)

Despite this brutal violence, substantial cultural exchange did occur between Africans and Europeans along the Cape frontier. Such exchanges often began with agricultural technologies, but resulted in new elements of language and lifestyle between the two groups. As they settled along the countryside, Boers eschewed European-style enclosed grazing for the transhumant practices of the Khoi, which somewhat resembled the migrations of the Spanish Mesta.\(^{162}\) This practice became known to Boers as the "trek," a custom so central to their lifestyle and identity that they were sometimes referred to as "Trekboers." Similarly, Boers observed that Khoi herders gathered their herds nightly into stone enclosures as a preventative measure against the Cape's many wild predators. The Boer term for these structures, "kraal," eventually became synonymous with the Boer homestead itself. According to William Beinart, although Khoi people were decimated by the encroachment of Boer pastoralists, "their knowledge and to some degree their language were absorbed into the dominant colonial culture and survived in many facets of the pastoral economy."\(^{163}\) The significant transfers of knowledge that occurred between Khoi and Boer pastoralists should not, however, obscure the general hostility that characterized their interactions. Alan Lester has cautioned that "however much Afrikaner farmers and Khoesan came to resemble one another in clothing, language and material

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culture... relations between these self-defined groups in the late eighteenth century were 'founded on violence' and 'shot through with fear.'

As the Boers moved farther away from the temperate and well-watered regions of the southwest Cape, they encountered more arid and challenging landscapes. Rather than "tame the wilderness," they adapted to the harsh conditions, often by imitating the Khoi pastoralists they displaced. Success in stock raising provided the Boers with subsistence as well as commercial opportunities. They quickly supplanted the Khoi as suppliers in the colonial meat trade, selling beef and mutton to the colonial garrison, urban dwellers in Cape Town, and passing ships in need of provisions. The Boers learned to fashion sheep tail fat into candles, soap, and a substitute for butter, all of which were sold in Cape Town as well. These trades provided Boers with European currency and manufactured goods, and tied them to commercial trading networks that extended across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Laura Mitchell's Belongings, for example, documents the extensive material wealth assembled by one prominent Boer family – the Lubbes – in the remote Cederberg Mountains.

Many Boer pastoralists, however, continued to live a lifestyle that was unfamiliar to Europeans and not dissimilar from their African neighbors. Their pastoral life was frequently criticized by European travelers to the Cape, who perceived them as "indolent and ignorant, slipping back from civilization to barbarism." John Barrow, an Englishman

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64 Alan Lester, Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain (London: Routledge, 2001), 31.
who visited the Cape in 1801, described the Boers as "unwilling to work and unable to think; with a mind disengaged from every sort of reflection." Robert Percival, who visited in 1804, described the Boer lifestyle as "lazy, listless, and inactive," and found the rural Boer homesteads "poor, mean, and incommodious." Unlike Khoi people, who were presumed to be in their 'natural state,' the Boers were said to have fallen from a more enlightened position, earning them greater derision.

Most Cape colonists, however, did not live a pastoral life based on cattle and sheep herding. Many were urban dwellers who worked as merchants, artisans, laborers, or civil servants in Cape Town. In the rural areas immediately surrounding Cape Town, a temperate, Mediterranean climate supported agricultural systems that differed greatly from the pastoralism of the arid interior. Colonial farmers in the mountains, valleys, and plains of the southwest Cape raised crops including wheat, citrus, and, most importantly, wine grapes. Harvesting these crops was a labor-intensive process that was usually performed by slaves imported from throughout the Indian Ocean region. The more favorable climate, coupled with the exploitation of slave labor, allowed landowners in these regions to live more secure and comfortable lives than their countrymen in the arid interior. By the late eighteenth century, these prosperous landholders had emerged as a distinct class known as the Cape gentry.

Compared to the Boers, the Cape gentry more closely emulated European manners, customs, and material culture. They were ashamed by the Colony’s reputation

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168 Lester, *Imperial Networks*, 16.
169 Robert Ross, "Rise of the Cape Gentry," 204-207.
for backwardness and sought to distinguish themselves from their rural countrymen. Many of these colonists even joined foreign visitors in criticizing and ridiculing pastoral life. As the Cape gentry built their livelihood on European crops, they did not rely on the adoption of African farming practices. This allowed the gentry to criticize Boer trekking, kraaling, and use of African breeds like the Cape sheep. When European livestock breeds, such as Dutch sheep and cattle, appeared at the Cape, gentry farmers embraced them as a superior alternative to African breed. When the famously refined Spanish Merino arrived from Europe, it was the Cape gentry who first showed interest in the exotic animal.770

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Figure 6: Rainfall distribution in the Cape region.

Galbraith, Reluctant Empire, 37; Beinart, Rise of Conservation, 31.
Figure 7: Arid landscape in the Cape Interior.

Figure 8: High rainfall zone in the extreme Southwest of the Cape.
Robert Jacob Gordon: Glory, Tragedy, and Spanish Sheep

The first person to introduce Merino sheep to the Cape of Good Hope was the explorer, naturalist, and amateur scientist, Robert Jacob Gordon. Gordon was a Dutch soldier of Scottish descent with a long and celebrated history at the Cape. He undertook six separate journeys into the interior of Southern Africa, four of which are documented by surviving journals. Gordon traveled to Algoa Bay on the far eastern frontier of the colony (where he encountered the stone cross erected by Bartholomew Dias on his 1488 journey) and to the Orange River on the northern frontier. A staunch supporter of the Dutch royal house of Orange, Gordon is credited with giving the river its present name. His travel journals contain geographic and botanical sketches, and he kept a detailed meteorological journal as well.\(^{77}\)

Gordon did not possess formal training in agriculture but he did show a determined interest. As early as April 1778, Gordon had expressed his desire to bring Merino sheep to the Cape. At some point prior to 1780, Gordon was sent a small number of "Spanish Sheep" by Hendrik Fagel, the long-serving Clerk of the Netherlands Estates-General. Upon their arrival, Gordon held the flock on Robben Island, presumably to protect them from predators and to preserve their bloodline. On March 10, 1780, Gordon wrote to Fagel that the flock had grown to thirteen and, having tested the wool of one of the lambs, found it "as fine as the original." Gordon planned to populate all of Robben Island with Spanish sheep, promising Fagel that "something great awaits." Gordon was also keenly aware that Boer farmers were "strongly against short, thin tailed sheep," and

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seemed interested in creating a cross breed between Merinos and Cape sheep. Three years later, Gordon reported that the flock of Merinos had grown to forty in number.\(^{172}\)

This first flock of Merinos attracted little attention and has been overlooked by historians. Edmund Burrows and Patrick Cullinan have placed the arrival of the first Spanish Merino sheep in 1789. According to their account, the flock that eventually arrived in the Cape of Good Hope was originally a gift from the Spanish royal crown to Holland as a sign of good will. But the Merinos, developed on the plains of the open and dry Spanish Meseta, struggled in the cool, wet, climate of Holland. In 1789, Holland forwarded the Merinos to the colony at the Cape of Good Hope, where more arid grasslands prevailed. The shipment was organized and conducted by the *Hollandsche Maatschappij to Nut van het Algemeen*, or *Nut*, which translates to "Society for Public Welfare."\(^{173}\) For unknown reasons, the *Nut* recalled the Merinos to Holland within a few years of their arrival. Gordon, however, shrewdly returned the number of sheep in the original flock, but kept the purebreds that had been born at the Cape. While the original stock sent by the *Nut* were meant for the public benefit, their offspring became Gordon’s private property.\(^{174}\)

It seems likely that two different flocks were sent to the Cape a decade apart. It is possible that historians have conflated the flock sent by Fagel with the later efforts of the

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\(^{172}\) These letters in the Dutch National Archives (NA) were brought to my attention by Dr. Laura Mitchell. Her discovery shows that Merino sheep were introduced into the Cape a decade earlier than previously supposed. See NA Fagel collectie: 1.10.29/2543 # 2, “Letter from Gordon to Fagel 10 March 1780” and NA Fagel Collectie: 1.10.29/2581 # 17, “Letter from Gordon to Fagel 14 April 1783.”

\(^{173}\) Formed only five years prior, the *Nut* still operates and is mostly known for efforts to further public education. Even in the 1780’s, the *Nut* was primarily focused on improving education, so their involvement in the spread of Merino sheep is a departure from their primary function.

Nut, or that the earlier event has simply been overlooked. Regardless of this discrepancy, certain aspects of Merino history in South Africa are certain. The first Merino sheep in South Africa were given to Colonel Gordon on the behalf of the Dutch government, either by the Estates-General or the Nut. By 1790, Gordon had moved the sheep to Groote Post Farm in the Groenekloof, about 75 kilometers north of Cape Town. These Merinos were the first of their kind to be landed on the African continent, or any place outside of Europe.¹⁷⁵

Gordon’s Merinos thrived in the dry Swartland climate. They must have been bred at Groote Post near the beginning of 1790, because on June 13, 1790 Gordon recorded that “Seven of the Spanish pedigree ewes have lambed during the last two or three weeks, among them ewes, rams, and twins.” It is not known who managed the flock, but it certainly was not Gordon. The Commandant was in ill health and confined to Cape Town for nearly the whole of 1789 and 1790, and part of 1791. In 1792, Gordon either sold or gifted three purebred Merino rams to the van Reenen brothers, Jacob, Johannes Gysbertus, and Sebastiaan Valentyn, all of whom were prominent landholders in the Groenekloof.¹⁷⁶

Gordon’s career as a sheep breeder was cut short by his suicide in 1795. Following quickly on the heels of the first British invasion of the Cape, Gordon’s demise reflected deep tensions within the colonial community at the Cape. At the time of the invasion, the Netherlands was in the midst of political revolution. Gordon, along with most other aristocratic officers, supported the Prince of Orange, whose government was then in exile in England. But many Cape colonists, including the rural farmers of the interior, tended to

¹⁷⁵ Cullinan, Robert Jacob Gordon, 167.
¹⁷⁶ Robert Jacob Gordon, Meteorological Journal, 38 and 118; Cullinan, Robert Jacob Gordon, 167; and Burrows, Overberg Outspan, 88.
support the radical government ruling at home. Though he felt it too dangerous to openly declare his sympathies, Gordon nonetheless aided the British by scuttling the Dutch defense of the colony. Many colonists viewed this as treason. In the days following the surrender, Gordon was openly insulted and attacked by his former soldiers in the streets and public squares of Cape Town. Disgraced, Gordon took his own life with a gunshot to the head while sitting in his garden on October 10, 1795.177

Robert Jacob Gordon’s death ultimately had profound implications on Merino farming far from the Cape. At the time of his death, Gordon possessed a flock of thirty-two Merinos. These passed to his widow, who quickly sold the flock before leaving the colony for good. Twenty-six of the pure-blooded sheep were purchased by two English sea captains who had stopped at the Cape on their way to New South Wales: Captain Waterhouse of the Reliance and Captain Kent of the Supply. Each paid the widow Gordon four pounds per head for thirteen sheep. An additional three sheep, to be included as a gift to the new British governor, were also put aboard the Reliance. These twenty-nine sheep became the first Merinos introduced to the continent of Australia. The final three sheep were given to a Captain Paterson and ultimately sent to Sir John Sinclair, a Scottish Baronet and agriculturalist.

The descendants of Gordon’s small flock have, in time, played an outsized role in world history. In Scotland, Sinclair’s experiments with sheep farming played an important part in justifying the highland land clearances. In Australia, twenty-nine Merino sheep from the Cape multiplied into a national flock that numbered in the millions by the 1820’s. From the mid-nineteenth century until the present, Australia has been the world’s largest

177 Cullinan, Robert Jacob Gordon, 185.
producer and exporter of Merino wool. Most pieces of Merino cloth produced today are likely to carry genetic material from Gordon’s sheep.\textsuperscript{78}

**The Van Reenen Family: Kaapse Patriots or Crony Capitalists?**

The only Merino sheep remaining in the Colony after Gordon’s death were those belonging to the three van Reenen brothers. The patriarch of the family, Jacob van Reenen (1703-1764), emigrated to the Cape from Holland and settled in Constantia. His eldest son, also named Jacob van Reenen (1727-1793), was an important figure in the Kaapse Patriot movement, a group of free colonists who called for greater local control over the Colony. By the end of the eighteenth century, the van Reenens enjoyed both wealth and status as powerful players in the Cape livestock and butchering markets. In addition, the family managed a successful merchant operation "centered on the import of agricultural tools." With vast landholdings and commercial interests, the van Reenens have been described by Robert Ross as "the most diversified, enterprising and successful entrepreneurs in the colony."\textsuperscript{79}

Jacob the second made an extended trip to Europe with his son, also named, Jacob (1755-1806) between 1772 and 1775, visiting Paris and Amsterdam among other places.\textsuperscript{80} The father and son returned from Europe with a rare luxury never before seen at the Cape: a Friesland bull. A forerunner of the now ubiquitous Holstein breed, Friesland cattle were especially prized for their milk production. Though native South African cattle breeds


\textsuperscript{79} Ross, "The Cape and the World Economy," 256. Ross referred to Jacob van Reenen (the second) as "the Colony's major butcher," see Ross, "Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape," 62.

produce milk as well, they were not highly regarded by European colonists. Friesland cattle, with their larger build, greater milk production, and familiar appearance, were coveted by gentry farmers at the Cape. For years, various members of the van Reenen line cited the Friesland Bull to bolster the family’s reputation as agricultural innovators.\textsuperscript{881}

Several sons of Jacob van Reenen (1727-1793) relocated to rural parts of the colony, where they became prominent stock raisers. Jacob (1755-1806) established himself at Ganzekraal, in the Groenekloof, not far from where Colonel Gordon held his flock of Merinos. Sebastiaan Valentyn initially tried growing wine grapes in Constantia but, when this failed, he too headed north to join his brother. Johannes Gysbertus (also known as John) eventually established a farm in the Hantam Mountains, though it seems he spent much of his time in Cape Town as an import/export trader. Dirk Gysbert operated a brewery at Newlands, though he also managed a farm, Rhenosterfontein, near Swellendam.\textsuperscript{882}

In 1789, the same year that Colonel Gordon introduced the first Merino sheep, Jacob, Sebastiaan, and John van Reenen entered a partnership to fulfill valuable meat contracts issued by the VOC. The van Reenens butchered and sold their own stock but also acted as middle men for frontier farmers who wished to send meat to market. These cattle were driven to Cape Town, where they were slaughtered to provision the colonial garrison as well as passing ships. Each brother raised stock on their individual farms north of Cape Town, while John was responsible for managing the corporation’s accounts. In 1792, the three brothers decided to expand their enterprise to include woolen sheep and


\textsuperscript{882} Van Reenen, \textit{Van Reenen Family History}, 23, 42, 51-53.
obtained three pure-bred Merino rams from Colonel Gordon. It is possible that Jacob van Reenen had encountered Merino sheep during his trip to Europe twenty years earlier. It is equally possible, however, that the brothers were unaware of the breed until the arrival of Gordon’s flock. 

To breed the Merinos, the brothers first sought to obtain land on Dassen Island, just off the coast from the van Reenen farms in the Groenekloof. Their selection of an island for grazing ground was unsurprising, as islands provide complete protection from predators. But islands were popular with Merino breeders for another reason: they helped guarantee the purity of Merino stock by excluding less valuable breeds. This was surely a concern for the van Reenens whose small Merino stud was surrounded by a large population of indigenous Cape sheep.

The government denied the van Reenens request to use Dassen, and the brothers instead kept the sheep on their existing farms in the Groenekloof. To increase their flocks, the brothers carefully crossed their three pure-bred Merino rams with ewes of the native fat-tailed Cape breed. They selected 300 of their best Cape ewes and then isolated the resulting cross-bred lambs. The cross-bred ewe lambs were then bred to a nonrelative purebred ram upon reaching maturity. Through selective breeding, the van Reenen brothers gradually steered the cross-bred sheep toward a wool-bearing breed that mimicked the qualities of pure-bred Merinos.

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183 Van Reenen, *Van Reenen Family History*, 54.
184 Ibid., Richard Grove has argued that islands were especially symbolic in early conservation efforts, both as a fragile system and as a de facto laboratory. This analogy adheres to experiments with Merino sheep on Robben Island and Dassen Island, as well as to conservation projects in the isolated Cape Colony as a whole. see Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 14, 54-55.;
The brothers’ partnership dissolved in 1795, perhaps for political reasons. Like their father, younger brothers Jacob and Sebastiaan supported the *Kaapse Patriot* movement and resented the authority of both the VOC and British colonial administrations. Soon after the arrival of the British occupation forces, Sebastiaan was accused of conspiring with the enemy. The acting Governor, General Craig, put out a warrant for his arrest and brought him to Cape Town. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary, Henry Dundas, Craig described the van Reenens as “turbulent in the extreme and distinguished even in Govn. Sluysken’s time as foremost amongst the Patriots and violent opposers of us.” He did, however, make the point to "except one of them, John, who is represented as of a very different disposition and who has dropped all connection with the rest on that account."
The General also vouched for a fourth brother, Dirk Gysbert van Reenen, who he described as "more moderate."\(^{186}\)

Though all four of these van Reenen brothers would continue to play an important role in the development of the Merino industry, their different relationships to the British authority would shape their successes and failures. Jacob and Sebastiaan seem to have disinvested from Merino sheep in favor of their reliable meat contract monopolies. The brothers' prospects were eventually diminished, however, by their troubled relationship with the colonial government. John and Dirk Gysbert took a different approach. They chose to work with the government and to diversify into different products, including Merino wool. Colonial officials praised these two brothers as innovative, progressive

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thinkers and model colonists. The division between the van Reenen brothers reflected the choices available to the Dutch-speaking gentry at the end of VOC rule. Some sought to preserve a pastoral lifestyle that had, ironically, depended on state monopolies. Others looked to align themselves with metropolitan values emanating from Europe and Cape Town. The embrace of Merino sheep over native Cape sheep was a powerful symbol of this realignment.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{187} William Stephenus van Ryneveld, the most detailed chronicler of Merino sheep at the Cape, clashed frequently with Jacob and Sebastiaan van Reenen. For this reason, he rarely mentioned the brothers in his writings, despite their role in advancing the breed.
Politics of Wool: The First British Occupation (1795-1803)

The British Invasion of 1795 marked the start of twenty years of political instability at the Cape, during which control of the Cape Colony was transferred between Dutch and English governments three times. These transfers of power can be used to mark three distinct periods. The First British Occupation lasted from 1795-1803, during which the British Military ruled the Colony. Following the Treaty of Amiens, the Colony was transferred to a Dutch government known as the Batavian Republic, which ruled from 1803-1806. Another British invasion in 1806 started the Second British Occupation, which lasted until 1814, when the Colony was formally recognized as part of the British Empire. This turbulent period, marked by a series of invasions, rebellions, and military rule, stunted the economic growth of the Cape Colony.

Despite these political changes, the successive rulers of the Cape shared fundamentally similar ideas about how to best govern the Cape. The transitional governments generally dismissed the Cape Colonists as ignorant and useless and chose to rule by decree. William Freund assessed the transitional period of government as "rather uniform in the problems it faced, the solutions it offered, and the lack of results it witnessed." Freund’s statement certainly applies to the transitional governments’ approach to agriculture and the management of the Colony’s sheep. Both English and Dutch rulers viewed the Cape Colonists’ pastoral lifestyle, based on fat-tailed Cape sheep, as primitive and uneconomic. These colonial administrations dreamed of introducing Merino sheep to transform the colony into a cash-based export economy. 88

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The First British Occupation has been described as even more authoritarian than the VOC and characterized by an “indifference to the needs of the colonists.” The British government was lukewarm in its desire to retain the colony and therefore hesitant to actively administer it. Furthermore, the occupying government faced revolts from multiple groups on the Colony’s frontiers— the Khoi, Xhosa, and the Dutch settlers. Under these circumstances, the military government of the First Occupation did not show much interest in fostering the Colony’s Merino sheep flocks. The British plan to improve agricultural practices at the Cape was implemented by Governor George Yonge, whom George McCall Theal once referred to as “the most incompetent man who has ever been at head of affairs in the colony.”

One of Yonge’s first actions was to request that an Englishman, William Duckitt, be sent to serve as chief agriculturalist at the Cape Colony. Duckitt came from a family of agricultural innovators. His brother was a noted breeder of Devon cattle and his father may have invented the double furrow plough. Prior to departing for the Cape, Duckitt met with experts, including Sir Joseph Banks, to plan improvements in the colony. Banks advised him not to bring sheep to the Cape, as he was certain that the soil and climate would degrade the wool until only hair remained. Duckitt, undeterred, procured sheep and brought them on board for the journey to the Cape. To Duckitt’s surprise, their passage was revoked on a special order prohibiting the export of sheep out of England. That order was presumably designed to protect the monopoly on English long-wool

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190 CA Accession (A)393 "Journal of William Duckitt" (JWD), December 16, 1799.
breeds, as well as the newly acquired royal flock of Merinos.۱۹۱ Sheep-less, Duckitt sailed to the Cape with an entourage of skilled smiths and carpenters, which suggests that his primary interest was making agricultural implements.۱۹۲

Duckitt’s initial surveys of the Cape were bleak, and he was especially critical of the local farming practices. Echoing the assessment of other European visitors to the Cape, he found that the ploughs were “astonishingly clumsy” resulting in the waste of much potential farm land.۱۹۳ He wrote that the government farm, Klapmuts, near Stellenbosch, was “shockingly out of order and wears the appearance of a tenant robing the landlord to the utmost extent.” The garden was in a “riotous condition” and the whole place showed signs of “infamous mismanagement.”۱۹۴ Regarding the livestock of the Cape, Duckitt reported that well-bred cattle were nearly impossible to find and that Dutch farmers were willing to pay any price for English breeds. He disparaged the horses of the Cape as well as the sheep, which he described as "half of the goat kind."۱۹۵

Duckitt’s fortunes at the Cape brightened when he was introduced to the van Reenen brothers. For nearly a month, he visited with Jacob and Sebastiaan, surveying the countryside and pastures of the western coast. Duckitt was impressed by the Friesland cattle that the van Reenens had introduced to the Cape twenty years prior. The brothers returned the compliment by admiring the Devonshire Bulls Duckitt had brought from

۱۹۱ CA A393 JWD, December 14, 1799. See also Rebecca Woods, "The Herds Shot Round the World" (PhD Diss: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013).
۱۹۲ CA A393 JWD, September 12 and 23, 1800.
۱۹۳ CA A393 JWD, September 30, 1800.
۱۹۴ CA A393 JWD October 13, 1800.
England. Duckitt never mentioned the van Reenens’ experiments with Merino sheep, and his silence on the subject suggests a lack of interest in sheep and wool.\textsuperscript{196}

Soon after their first meeting, Duckitt and the van Reenens formed a lucrative business partnership. Using Duckitt’s connection to Governor Yonge, the partners acquired a monopoly on meat sales to both the colonial government and the private citizens of Cape Town. As part of their contract, they shrewdly negotiated a price structure which allowed them to charge a floating rate for meat supplied to the government. This price was tied to a market rate that was determined solely by the partnership.\textsuperscript{197} This system allowed the partners to charge exorbitant rates to both the government and private citizens. Before long, Secretary Dundas, became suspicious of Duckitt’s high salary and his charges to the government account. In April 1801, Governor Yonge was recalled and a full inquiry was made into his tenure at the Cape.\textsuperscript{198}

The Commission of Inquiry found that Governor Yonge had allowed Duckitt and the van Reenens to occupy government grazing farms and to take possession of cattle purchased with public funds. The Governor had further provided the partners with an advance of 64,000 rixdollars from the public treasury. Worst of all, Duckitt and his partners had still been unable to fulfill their contract. The government was forced to enlist John van Reenen to supply the government troops. To make things worse, Duckitt’s agricultural endeavors turned out to be as incompetent and corrupt as his butchery. The

\textsuperscript{196} CA A393 Journal of William Duckitt: October 15 to November 24, 1800. Duckitt did gleefully report the discovery of a large flock of Spanish sheep in a letter to Henry Dundas but provided no details about their owner. See “Letter from William Duckitt to the Right Honourable Henry Dundas, Simons Town, Cape of Good Hope, October 9th 1800” in RCC Vol. 3, 305-306.


\textsuperscript{198} “Letter from William Huskisson to Maj-General Dundas, Downing Street, 16 March 1801.” in RCC Vol. 3, 442-444.
Commission found that Duckitt had received suspect land grants and illegally employed
government slaves. Though employed chiefly to encourage and improve agriculture at the
Cape, he had not even set a plough to the ground or sown a single crop of grain. Duckitt
never recovered in the eyes of the government. He lost his position as an agriculturalist
and spent the next decade trying to extract the generous grants promised by his original
contract with Governor Yonge. William Duckitt’s disastrous attempts at reform was, in many ways, representative
of colonial agricultural policy at the Cape. Yonge and Duckitt were outsiders who
considered themselves experts, blessed by one of the highest authorities in European
science, Sir Joseph Banks. Their preconceptions about the Cape colonists were confirmed
by a surface-level analysis of the local economy, leading them to harshly critique the state
of the colony. They sketched a vision for transforming colonial agriculture by introducing
new species and tools. The actions taken toward fulfilling that vision, however, were
defferred through incompetence and malfeasance. Duckitt, like the van Reenen brothers
who shepherded him through the colony, quickly realized that the archaic system of meat
contracts that had flourished under the VOC was still more attractive than an untested
economy based on Merino wool.

999 “Report of the Commissioners Appointed to investigate certain charges against Sir George
Yonge, October 21st, 1801.” in RCC Vol. 4, 228-252.
200 CA CO 3863 376 “The Memorial of William Duckitt, Agriculturalist to His Excellency, the Right
Honorable Earl of Caledon,” August 22nd, 1809; CA CO 3867 27 ”The Memorial of William Duckitt,
Agriculturalist to His Excellency, the Right Honorable Earl of Caledon,” January 12th, 1808.
Politics of Wool: The Batavian Government (1803-1806)

In 1803, the Netherlands, at the time known as the 'Batavian Republic,' recovered control of the Cape Colony following the treaty of Amiens. The new colonial administration, known as the 'Batavian Government,' was unable to affect meaningful policy at the Cape before its removal by a second British invasion in 1806. However, during their short reign the Batavian rulers gained a reputation as ambitious reformers set on modernizing the colony. The architect of the Batavian Government, Commissioner Jacob Abraham de Mist, began his tenure with an epic journey through the remote areas of the Cape. De Mist’s daughter, Augusta, accompanied him and recorded a detailed account of the expedition. The only Batavian Governor, Jan Willem Janssens, conducted a similar journey. Dirk Gysbert van Reenen served as a guide on this journey and left an insightful journal documenting its progress.201

The Batavian Republic was politically aligned with Napoleon and the revolutionary government of France. In this sense, the Batavian rulers of the Cape should have been natural allies with the Cape colonists who had earlier supported the Kaapse Patriot movement. But the Batavian rulers were far more cosmopolitan than the average Boer, and they tended to disparage their uncouth colonial subjects. Furthermore, the Batavian administration’s policies were often contradictory, vacillating between liberalism and authoritarianism. The Batavian Government ultimately proved to be more practical than radical, though many of its initiatives were clearly derived from enlightenment ideals emphasizing order and rationality. The Batavians, for example, divided the Cape Colony’s

vast districts into smaller divisions to improve administration and extend governmental power. The Batavian Government was also committed to improving agriculture at the Cape, including through the promotion of wool-bearing Merino sheep.202

William Stephenus van Ryneveld, a seasoned Cape bureaucrat, was the most powerful voice pushing for agricultural reform. Van Ryneveld had been an Orangist ally of Colonel Gordon and a liaison between the First British Administration and the VOC. In this role, he worked with Governor Yonge to reform land tenure policies and generally sought to maintain and protect existing institutions established under the VOC.203 Like Governors de Mist and Janssens, or Colonel Gordon before him, van Ryneveld was a native Hollander. He was well-educated, aristocratic, and sympathetic to Great Britain. Van Ryneveld likely became acquainted with Merino sheep through his association with Colonel Gordon, as his politics put him at odds with the radical van Reenen brothers. His passion for the breed was most fervently expressed in a lengthy treatise, Concise Remarks on the present state of this Colony, and Observations therefrom deduced on the most suitable methods whereby an improvement in the Live-stock could be effected, chiefly by the speedy conversion of our Sheep into the Spanish or Woolled variety, written in early 1804.

202 Commissioner De Mist, for example, enacted religious freedom for all who worshipped a higher being, including Jews and Muslims, see The memorandum of Commissary J.A. de Mist: Containing Recommendations for the Form and Administration of Government at the Cape of Good Hope, 1802, trans. Kathleen Jeffreys (Cape Town: Van Reibeeck Society, 1920), 186. Governor Janssens sympathized with the plight of Khoi and Coloured people at the Cape and successfully negotiated with Khoi rebels on the frontier, and yet the Batavians also enacted strict measures enforcing Khoi servitude and distrusted evangelical missionaries who preached racial equality. See Van Reenen, Journal of a Journey, 81-87 and Freund, “Transitional Governments,” 325, 336-342. Elizabeth Elbourne describes a “rocky relationship” between Janssens and the missionary J.T. Van der Kemp, symbolic of a clash between “Enlightenment and evangelicalism,” see Elbourne, Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 148.
In his treatise, van Ryneveld painted a grim picture of the colony's "poverty of the people amid plenty," and "want suffered in the midst of luxury." He identified two major barriers to success. First, there were too few inhabitants for the vast territory. Second, there was insufficient trade and commerce to encourage agriculture. On the first issue, he blamed the weakness of the VOC for “a colony with so few inhabitants having expanded so haphazardly.” On the second issue, he pointed to a “lack of industry and cooperation” among the settlers. Van Ryneveld argued that the Cape’s only valuable products were corn and wine, though neither offered much promise. There was barely enough corn to support the settler population and Cape wine was poorly regarded. Neither product promised to be profitable without government protection or assistance. He summarized the problem, "in one word, the Colony has nothing suitable to export."\(^{204}\)

Van Ryneveld saw only one course of action to remedy this problem, "the alteration of our livestock... chiefly, in a change of our sheep." He then proceeded to unveil a lengthy argument in support of Merino sheep that he believed would persuade the Boers to abandon the native Cape sheep. As the climate and geography of the Cape Colony superficially resembled North Africa (where the Merino allegedly originated) van Ryneveld posited that the breed would thrive at the southern tip of Africa just as well. Furthermore, he claimed that the Merino was not susceptible to diseases that plagued the Cape sheep, such as "schurft, lice, and the so-called geilziekte." And though Merino sheep lacked the valuable tail fat of the Cape sheep, they made up for it with greater "inside fat" and a heavier overall weight. The most obvious advantage of Merino sheep, however, was their valuable fleece. Unlike the Cape sheep, who "do not yield wool and are only raised

\(^{204}\) Van Ryneveld, *Concise Remarks*, 37-39, 47.
for slaughter purposes, [Merinos] on the contrary yield wool of very good quality.” Though Cape farmers held more than one and a half million Cape sheep, they contributed, in van Ryneveld’s estimation, "at best annually, nothing beyond 150,000 wethers for slaughter and benefits the country in no other way.” If these flocks were replaced with a similar number of Merino sheep, the colony could export three or four million pounds of wool per year, in addition to the same number of slaughter sheep.205

Van Ryneveld’s plan for replacing Cape sheep with Merinos faced one serious obstacle: the Colony’s farmers. Like other visitors from Europe, van Ryneveld found the rural farmers stubborn and indolent, accusing them of "prejudice against everything with which they are not acquainted.” This attitude was especially strong regarding the exotic Merino sheep. Cape farmers complained that the Merinos were ugly, their wool unsightly and their tails too thin. Ironically, the Boers had become so accustomed to fat-tailed sheep that they were repulsed by wool sheep, much as European visitors detested the Cape sheep. In the face of such resistance, van Ryneveld estimated that it would take a full fifty years for the frontier Boers to embrace the Merino. He found this unacceptable and concluded that the promotion of Merino sheep "must most certainly be entrusted to the Government itself.” To this end, he suggested creating a Merino breeders’ society, offering premiums for prize animals, and issuing certificates of authenticity for pure-bred animals. He also recommended a special commission to fund the purchase and distribution of Merino sheep.206

205 Van Ryneveld, Concise Remarks, 53-67.
206 Van Ryneveld, Concise Remarks, 73-87.
Governor Janssens took these recommendations to heart and created an agricultural commission – headed by van Ryneveld. Though the commission focused on a variety of agricultural activities, their foremost concern was the introduction of Merino sheep. The commission assembled more than one thousand Merino sheep at Groote Post Farm, the site of Gordon’s original flock. Representatives of the commission then led missions into rural areas to preach the values of Merino sheep and offer the use of Merino rams for breeding. In October 1805, Janssens sent a lengthy circular to his Landdrosts (regional magistrates) outlining the administration of rural districts. This circular included, among other agricultural initiatives, "the exchange of the native Cape Sheep for those that give wool." Citing previous successful experiments, the Governor asserted that "the want of proper direction alone" prevented the success of Merino wool raising. The shortcomings of the Cape colonists, therefore, were responsible for depriving the colony of this "inexhaustible source of prosperity."  

The Batavians were fundamentally critical of the Cape colonists and generally pessimistic about the Colony's future. Rutger Schimmelpennick, the Grand Pensionary of the Batavian Republic (roughly equivalent to Prime Minister), concluded that "the Cape is not such an Eldorado as it has been considered by some," citing the lack of rainfall and natural harbors. More importantly, he characterized the colonists as "not naturally industrious, not even in those objects of the first importance for their own country." In labeling the Cape colonists as lazy and ignorant, Batavian officials mimicked the descriptions of European visitors before them, whose works they had likely read. Despite

207 “Ordinance for the Administration of the Country Districts, Publication by Governor Janssens, October 23rd 1805” in RCC Vol. 24, 373.
their pessimism, however, the Batavians were determined to transform the backward colony. Although Schimmelpennick believed it "impossible to make the Cape into what we wished," he nevertheless felt "obliged to do as well as we can." The Batavian plan for improvement, therefore, disregarded the traditional Cape economy based on wine, wheat, and meat, and searched for alternatives. These included exotic crop species, new agricultural implements, timber conservation, and improvements in cattle breeding. Above all, the Batavians saw promise in Merino wool. In Schimmelpennick's words, "the propagation of the Spanish Sheep is not only necessary, but may also contribute in a great measure to make [the colonists] industrious." By promoting the Merino breed, the Batavians hoped to alter the economy of the Cape and the character of the Cape colonists, both of which they considered in desperate need of improvement.208

The Cape Gentry and the Batavian Administration

While the Batavian government contemplated efforts to promote Merino sheep, a small group of Cape gentry farmers led by the van Reenen family independently experimented with the breed. Jacob and Sebastiaan van Reenen, the two brothers who had quarreled with the British invaders, seem to have formed their own agricultural society to rival van Ryneveld’s. The brothers bred Arab draft horses, Friesland cattle, and Merino sheep. They also introduced alfalfa in the hopes of improving pastures at the Cape.209 The German traveler, Henrich Lichtenstein visited the two brothers in 1803 and recorded their efforts in detail. Lichtenstein described Jacob and Sebastiaan’s farms as some of the most fertile and well managed land in the entire colony, arguing that "no people deserve more

209 Reitz, Cape Agriculture, 16. Van Reenen, Van Reenen Family History, 54.
credit for the great pains they have taken in the improvement of agriculture than the van Reenens." At the time of Lichtenstein’s visit, Jacob had 240 acres of cropland under manure, carefully fertilized using a three-year cycle. His field of alfalfa could be mowed eight times in a single summer. Jacob also managed a small but well-renowned horse stud, including an imported English Thoroughbred stallion. Despite this array of agricultural undertakings, Lichtenstein made no mention of Merino sheep at Jacob or Sebastiaan farms. Perhaps these sheep were kept at a different location, or perhaps the brothers had diminished their Merino wool enterprises.210

The older van Reenen brothers, John and Dirk Gysbert, chose to work in cooperation with the Batavian government. Perhaps for this reason, more was written about their exploits. After breaking ties with Jacob and Sebastiaan in 1795, John van Reenen took his share of the Merino flock (2 rams and 150 crossbred ewes) to the Hantam mountains, where his grazing operations were based. Through continued and controlled breeding, van Reenen managed to reproduce very fine wool by the fifth generation of crosses. When Lichtenstein visited his farm in 1803, he estimated the flock at around 1600 head. A year later, van Ryneveld estimated van Reenen’s holdings at more than 2700 wool sheep, not to mention the 600 that he had slaughtered over the intervening years. Lichtenstein’s estimate is likely lower because it did not include the wool sheep held at van Reenen’s other principal farm, Teefontein. By 1804, John van Reenen was actually profiting from the sale of Merino wool. He sheared up to three pounds of wool per year

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from his rams and up to two pounds from his ewes, all of which was carried and sold at market in Cape Town.\footnote{Lichtenstein, \textit{Travels in Southern Africa}, 114; Van Ryneveld, \textit{Concise Remarks}, 59.}

Dirk Gysbert was the van Reenen brother most intimately involved with the Batavian Government. When Governor Janssens embarked on his grand tour of the interior, van Reenen accompanied him as a guide and kept a detailed journal documenting the journey. Van Reenen’s political persuasions, like many of the Batavian administrators, were conflicted. He was a slaveholder who criticized the humanitarian efforts of missionaries and believed Africans should be prohibited from owning guns or horses. In other ways, however, his views were in line with the Cape Liberal movement. He was sympathetic to the plight of Khoi people and prided himself on his role in negotiating a peace with the Khoi leader Klaas Stuurman.\footnote{Van Reenen assisted in peace negotiations with Stuurman on May 12th, 1803 and visited the Bavianskloof Mission station on April 5th, 1803, where he commented on the “idleness” of the inhabitants. See Van Reenen, \textit{Journal of a Journey}, 21, 81-87.} He even lobbied the governor to provide agricultural and veterinary education to Khoi and Xhosa people.\footnote{Van Reenen, \textit{Journal of a Journey}, 25-29.}

Dirk Gysbert’s economic relationship to his brothers was limited. While his name appears alongside them on a meat contract from 1789, he was not involved in his brothers’ purchase of Merino sheep from Colonel Gordon. His own landholdings, however, were considerable. At times, van Reenen held no less than thirteen separate farms ranging from the Swartland to Swellendam and beyond to the Gamtoos River. He made his living from the standard occupations of the Cape Gentry: winemaking and stock farming. But he also operated a brewery at Newlands and an experimental farm, Rhenosterfontein, in Swellendam. At Rhenosterfontein, van Reenen kept a collection of imported stock breeds,
including Friesland cattle, Arabian horses, and a small stud of Spanish Merino sheep. With the cattle, van Reenen supplied a cheese factory, which exported the first cheese from the Cape in 1804.214

Of all the van Reenens, Dirk Gysbert showed the greatest breadth of agricultural experimentation. His journal is filled with descriptions and evaluations of farms, pastures, and forage plant. For example, he noted that the Sourveld farms were not good for raising sheep as they must have “saltish shrubs.” Van Reenen also recorded his theories on the causes and treatments of common animal diseases. He believed Lamziekte was caused by “stagnant, saltpetreish waters” and the shrubs growing near them, and that Horsesickness was a contagious disease. While van Reenen was incorrect in many of his assumptions, he was acutely aware of how stock-farming at the Cape was limited by numerous diseases. Though Dirk Gysbert van Reenen played a lesser role than his brothers in the Merino sheep trade, his writings on the subject have been better preserved. His journal, clearly intended for the public, provides several prescriptions for the improvement of agriculture in the colony. Among these was the encouragement of wool-bearing sheep, “from which alone an export trade to Europe can be developed.” Van Reenen recommended generous financial incentives “to dispel prejudices with which the farmer is imbued here, as he is almost everywhere.” Other recommendations included the establishment of a fishing industry supported by Chinese laborers, a meat salting operation at Algoa Bay, and the adoption of Friesland cattle. In each of these recommendations, Dirk Gysbert sought viable export commodities. With his wealth, large landholdings, and merchant

214 Burrows, _Overberg Outspan_, 144-145; Lichtenstein, _Travels in Southern Africa_, 203; Van Reenen, _Van Reenen Family History_, 37; CA CO 3865 481 “Memorial of Dirk Gysbert van Reenen,” November 12th, 1807.
connections in Cape Town, van Reenen had the resources to invest in, and potentially profit from, his various ideas.\footnote{Van Reenen, \textit{Journal of a Journey}, 29, 77, 283, 295.}

But Dirk Gysbert also aimed his prescriptions at the average white stock farmer, who may be rich in land and animals but cash poor. He lamented that “at present a young man starting to farm cannot expect to make a living... He drudges, toils, and moils himself nearly to death but makes no progress whatever.” In his opinion, the plight of the small farmer resulted from “paper currency, high exchange rates, premiums and the high cost of commodities.” He argued that the best remedy for these woes would arise from raising Merino sheep “on as large a scale as possible.” Van Reenen estimated that the colony could support more than two million Merinos and that, even by conservative estimates, each could be expected to yield two pounds of wool per annum. Such a yearly profit should have certainly been enticing to the average cash-strapped farmer of the frontier.\footnote{Van Reenen, \textit{Journal of a Journey}, 139.}

Some Cape gentry followed the van Reenen’s example and began to experiment with Merino sheep. The most enthusiastic of these was Antonie Faure, the \textit{Landdrost} of Swellendam. Faure, like John and Dirk Gysbert van Reenen, was sympathetic to the two British governments at the Cape as well as the Batavian regime that ruled in the interim. During the \textit{Kaapse Patriot} rebellion of 1795, Faure remained loyal to the Dutch royalist government and was removed from his post by the rebels. Following the establishment of British control over the interior, Faure was reinstated as \textit{Landdrost} and did not hesitate to persecute those who had supported the patriot movement.\footnote{Burrows, \textit{Overberg Outspan}, 51-57.}
Faure acquired his first Merino flock prior to 1803, when von Buchenroder visited his home, Rotterdam, on the western bank of the Breede River. The traveler marveled at his Merino sheep and commented that “the contents of his kraal, rather than the size of his stable, pronounced the farmer’s wealth.” The opgaaf (a taxation record) of 1804 recorded Faure’s flock of Spanish sheep at 749, though van Ryneveld estimated that he held nearly 1,000 sheep in the same year. He most likely acquired his first Merinos from John van Reenen, a neighbor and political ally. Faure had established a system in which he rotated the stock between his two farms. While most of the flock was kept on marginal grazing land, the sheep were bred and shorn at his home. In this way, Faure’s guests and Swellendam neighbors could more easily view his best breeding stock as well as the produce from his shearing. Van Ryneveld reported that Faure averaged three pounds of wool per year from each of his sheep and that he always found a ready market in Cape Town.\(^{218}\)

For the Cape gentry, Merino sheep were a powerful symbol of sophistication. Some farmers, like John van Reenen and Antonie Faure, cited their work with Merino sheep as evidence of a progressive agenda in line with the metropolitan governors of the Cape. Others, like Jacob and Sebastiaan van Reenen, sought to prove they could advance agriculture without intervention from the state. In both cases, Merino sheep were proudly displayed for visitors, who marveled at the efforts of such country people. Despite these experiments, the Cape gentry continued to make their living from the production of wine,

wheat, and meat. Merino sheep farming remained largely an intellectual exercise and social display, rather than a way of life.

Though the Batavian Government and the Cape gentry recognized the potential of Merino wool as an export, they never aspired toward the domestic production of wool cloth. One notable exception is found, however, in the journal of Dirk Gysbert van Reenen. Upon visiting the Bavianskloof mission station, van Reenen witnessed a group of Khoi children engaged in spiritual song. His first thought was to imagine the children as laborers in an economy dominated by Merino wool: “I told the Governor that in the event of farming with Spanish Sheep becoming more general, these boys and girls might, in course of time, be of much value to the Colony by spinning, knitting, etc. either for their own use or by taking service with others.” He asserted that such an arrangement would allow the children to make a living in an “honourable manner,” but surely the shrewd capitalist saw an opportunity for cheap labor as well.219

It is significant that more South African Merino enthusiasts did not share van Reenen’s ambitions to produce wool. As will become apparent in chapter three, wool manufacturing was always the primary motivation behind Merino enthusiasm in the United States. Perhaps this is because the United States already had a strong tradition of wool manufacturing prior to the introduction of Merinos, whereas South Africa did not. To be sure, no wool-bearing sheep were found in South Africa prior to Colonel Gordon’s introduction. But it is also necessary to consider that the Cape’s colonial status actively discouraged the development of local industry. Under the VOC, Boer pastoralists’ main commercial activities were directed by the colonial government through the granting of

meat contracts. This system persisted, virtually unchanged, through the Batavian administration. Furthermore, wool manufacturing would have required types of labor that did not exist within the Cape Colony’s slave and servant based economy. In the arid regions where sheep raising dominated, labor of the kind necessary to process wool was in short supply. The technological, demographic, and social barriers to industrialization in South Africa were, therefore, very strong.

Politics of Wool: The Second British Occupation (1806-1810)

In 1806, Great Britain launched a second invasion of the Cape Colony. After a short, successful campaign, the colony changed hands for the third time in little more than a decade. The Colony’s pastoralists, who depended on the government for protection from frontier conflicts, were especially hard hit by the turbulent political situation. Between 1798 and 1806, the total number of livestock in the Colony decreased as frontier farmers suffered from stock theft and insecurity. Established Merino raisers at the Cape, despite their wealth and security, were also hurt by political instability. Sebastiaan van Reenen, already notorious for his rebellious activity, was accused of spying for the Dutch government and sentenced to prison. John van Reenen’s farm at Teefontein was ransacked by invading British troops, who stole or destroyed 3000 pounds of Merino wool. His friendly relationship with the British government deteriorated, his requests for additional land grants were denied, and he even had difficulty obtaining a survey of his existing farms. There is little evidence that van Reenen continued to farm Merino sheep after

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220 Van Ryneveld, *Concise Remarks*, 57-59; CA CO 3857 214 "Memorial of J.G. van Reenen and O.M. Bergh to his Excellency sir David Baird," February 8th, 1806.

221 CA CO 3878 297 "Memorial of Johannes Gysbertus van Reenen," November 22, 1809; See also CA CO 3883 246 and CA CO 3883 247.
1806. Even Dirk Gysbert van Reenen, who kept the closest relationship to the colonial government, saw his fortunes reversed after the second British invasion. His applications for additional lands were denied, and the removal of government monopolies on wine and beer production made his brewing operations unprofitable. Though he remained active in the Cape agricultural community, his wealth declined steadily, leaving his estate insolvent at the time of his death. 222

The Batavian Agricultural Commission’s Merino flock at the Groote Post farm was confiscated by British ‘prize agents’ who hoped to re-sell them at public auction. Van Ryneveld pleaded with the leaders of the occupation force to prevent the sale. He wrote to the Lieutenant Governor, Sir David Baird, arguing that the Merino flock must remain in public trust and warning that, if distributed freely, "unskilled farmers will degrade the breed and ruin chances for export." 223

The Batavian government’s program to promote Merino sheep had been predicated on the belief that the Cape colonists lacked the skill and foresight to preserve the valuable Merino breed. Handing control to farmers who favored the coarse Cape sheep would surely lead to degradation and ruin. Despite his unfamiliarity with Merino or Cape sheep, Baird was persuaded by van Ryneveld’s arguments. He purchased the entire confiscated flock, nearly 1200 sheep, for 25,000 rixdollars and then promptly reappointed the members of the Agricultural Commission to manage the sheep. Baird justified the

222 Van Reenen, Van Reenen Family History, 38. CA Government House (GH) 1/4 105 and CA CO 3865 481 "Memorial of Dirk Gysbert van Reenen," November 12th, 1807; CA CO 3941 134 "Michiel van Breda to His Excellency, the Governor Sir Lowry Cole," March 17, 1829.
223 "To David Baird Lt. Gov. from W.S. van Ryneveld, President of the Agricultural Society, Memorial of the Agricultural Society" in RCC Vol. 5, 357.
decision to his superiors by arguing that the success of Merino sheep was of "highest importance to the future prosperity of the settlement."  

Despite the disruption caused by the invasion, the second British government paid more attention to Merino sheep in the colony than during the first British occupation. More detailed agricultural returns were collected, which distinguished Merino sheep from Cape sheep. In 1806, there were 14,233 "Spanish" sheep in the colony, compared to 1,223,330 Cape sheep. The number of Merino sheep grew steadily, if slowly, over the next years, while the population of Cape sheep increased as well. The colony's governor, the Earl of Caledon, threw his support behind the Agricultural Commission, restoring its funding and its land at the Groote Post Farm. With support from his superiors, Caledon launched the most aggressive attempt at agricultural reform in the Cape Colony to date.

In March of 1809, Caledon sent an extensive circular to his Landdrosts with instructions for spreading awareness of agricultural improvements. They were to promote alternative food and export crops, as well as cattle-raising improvements like winter stables and artificial pastures. The Landdrosts were further "recommended to encourage in the strongest manner the breed of Spanish Sheep." Caledon noted that past experiments had yielded fine wool at the Cape and the industry was retarded only from "want of proper attention." With effort and constructive regulations, Caledon believed that Merino sheep could become an "inexhaustible source of prosperity" for the colony.

225 "Letter from the Earl of Caledon to the Right Honourable William Windham, Castle of Good Hope, 7th of June 1807" in RCC Vol. 6, 150; "Letter from Viscount Castlereagh to the Earl of Caledon, Downing Street, 9 September, 1807" in RCC Vol. 6, 199.
226 "Instructions for the Landdrost of the Cape District, Given by the Governor, Castle of Good Hope, 31st March 1809" in RCC Vol. 6, 472.
The execution of Caledon’s plan, however, was less than successful. One remarkable surviving account from the district of Tulbaugh, north and east of Cape Town, illustrates the problems that plagued government efforts to introduce Merino sheep into the rural Cape. In 1809, the Agricultural Commission provided the Landdrost of Tulbaugh with 600 Merino rams to be distributed to farmers in his district. The Fieldcornets of Hex River, Warm Bokkeveld, and Cold Bokkeveld (smaller divisions within the district) were instructed to offer the rams free of charge, with one outstanding condition. Farmers who accepted a Merino ram were to castrate all their native Cape sheep, thus affecting a general conversion of their flocks to the Merino breed. This requirement proved objectionable, and not a single farmer accepted the offer. In early 1810, the Fieldcornets of the district penned a lengthy memorial to Caledon, expressing their constituents’ objections to the initiative. This document provides a rare window into the reasoning of Cape sheep farmers, whose thoughts were rarely put to paper. The grievances recorded reflect a conscious rejection of Merino sheep based, not on ‘indolence’ or ‘ignorance,’ but on a firm understanding of environmental and economic conditions.227

By 1810, farmers in this remote and impoverished area were already acquainted with the Spanish Merino. During the time of the Batavian government, the Agricultural Commission had sent Merino rams to the region along with a proclamation that "the wooly sheep would afford a more ample advantage to the Breeders." In addition to their fine fleece, these sheep were touted by the commission for their "prolific tendency, of their eating heartily all kinds of herbs and plants and of their hardiness of constitution, not

227 CA CO 3876 145 "Memorial of the Field Cornets in the Cold and Warm Bokkeveld and of the Divisions on and behind the Hex River in the District of Tulbaugh to His Excellency, Du Pré Earl of Caledon," received February 19th, 1810.
being subject to the variety of diseases to which Cape Sheep are.” This strong endorsement led area farmers to breed many Merino sheep into their flocks in the hope of improving the local breed.  

After several years of carefully monitoring their experiment, however, farmers in Tulbaugh had become disillusioned with Merinos. Rather than being prolific breeders, the farmers found the Merino sheep to reproduce more slowly than Cape sheep, leading to a decrease in the size of their flocks. As farm families subsisted mainly from the meat of their sheep, the decrease presented an enormous obstacle. Additionally, the reduction in Cape sheep deprived farm families of the valuable tail fat, which was used as a substitute for butter and to produce tallow candles and soap. And while the sheep did produce a fine wool, farmers found that "the very low price paid for the wool is not even adequate to the expenses of the carriage.” In the absence of adequate roads and bridges, carting wool to Cape Town (the only market for wool) proved so "long and tedious” as to be unprofitable. Finally, in the arid and often grassless regions of Tulbaugh, it proved impossible to keep the Merino sheep alive. The Merino sheep would not eat the shrubs and bushes that Cape sheep found palatable. As they lacked the ability to store water in their thin tails, the Merinos were immediately at risk when water was scarce. The Fieldcornets concluded that "the Spanish Sheep cannot be reared with any prospect of success and this, with very few exceptions, is the case in all these Fieldcorneties.”

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228 CA CO 3876 145 "Memorial of the Field Cornets in the Cold and Warm Bokkeveld and of the Divisions on and behind the Hex River in the District of Tulbaugh to His Excellency, Du Pré Earl of Caledon," received February 19th, 1810.
229 Ibid.,
Despite rural farmers’ sincere attempts to raise Merino sheep, the Fieldcornets’ report hints at resentment toward both the foreign breed and the metropolitan officials who promoted it so strongly. The farmers asserted that "they as well as their ancestors have hitherto always been able by rearing the Cape Sheep to gain a moderate subsistence for themselves." Near the conclusion of the letter, the Fieldcornets reiterated the farmers’ willingness to experiment with new breeds and practices. They also warned, however, that "the inhabitants of Cape Town, of the Country Districts, and even government itself would soon be obliged to feel the bad consequences which are to be foreseen, were the breed of Spanish Sheep to become general." The Fieldcornets, therefore, requested that Spanish sheep not be forced upon their constituents.230

Cape farmers in the Tulbaugh district rejected the Merino sheep, in part, because they represented a departure from the lifestyle that had supported them and their ancestors. They felt deceived by the Agricultural Commission’s promises and resented attempts to force their adoption of the breed. Most of their objections, however, reflected simple environmental or economic realities. Cape sheep thrived in arid conditions with little water and sparse vegetation. They supplied meat, shortening, soap, and tallow that were of great use to Boer households unable to purchase these items. When farmers did have to make the long and tedious journey to Cape Town, they could drive their flocks to market on the hoof. In town, they could sell these animals, as well as the few compact goods (soap, candles, and hides) that they carried in their wagons. The Merino sheep, in contrast, withered in many of the Cape’s dry interior regions. They proved difficult to

230 CA CO 3876 145 "Memorial of the Field Cornets in the Cold and Warm Bokkeveld and of the Divisions on and behind the Hex River in the District of Tulbaugh to His Excellency, Du Pré Earl of Caledon," received February 19th, 1810.
manage and led to a decrease in herd size. After shearing, farmers were required to carry
the bulky, inexpensive, and difficult to sell wool over treacherous mountain roads. With
this context, it is obvious why many of the Cape’s practical farmers chose to continue
breeding the native Cape sheep instead of the foreign Merino. 331

The response of the Tulbaugh farmers illustrates the fundamental weakness shared
by all the transitional governments in their efforts to introduce the Merino breed. The
various efforts of the Agricultural Commission were top-down initiatives directed by
outsiders, people born outside of the Colony and, in many cases, only recently arrived. The
leaders of these efforts generally disparaged the farmers of the Cape and did not seek their
input when developing their plans. This was important for several reasons. First, colonial
administrators failed to understand the Boers’ attachment to the Cape sheep. Though they
did not produce wool, these sheep had sustained generations of Boers and thus gained
cultural significance. Heavy-handed efforts to eradicate the Cape breed led farmers to
resent and distrust efforts to introduce Merinos. Second, the Boers’ extensive knowledge
of the Cape environment was ignored by the Agricultural Commissions. Had they sought
the guidance of frontier farmers, they may have better understood the challenges posed by
the harsh and arid Cape. Third, architects of the government initiatives failed to consider
the incentives, or lack thereof, for Cape farmers to produce Merino wool. Given the poor
state of colonial roads and the absence of good markets for wool, raising Merino sheep
was not practical for many interior farmers. Each of these factors contributed to Cape
farmers’ skepticism of the Merino breed.

331 CA CO 3876 145 "Memorial of the Field Cornets in the Cold and Warm Bokkeveld and of the
Divisions on and behind the Hex River in the District of Tulbaugh to His Excellency, Du Pré Earl of
Caledon," received February 19th, 1810.
Conclusion

In 1810, Merino sheep remained a relatively inconsequential component of the Cape Colony’s flocks, perhaps amounting to less than one percent. Infrastructure for producing woolen goods was absent from the Colony and most Cape farmers thought little about wool raising or wool production. Although successive governments dedicated land and resources toward introducing Merino sheep to the Cape Colony, they failed to promote the breed among the general population. Some private stock raisers managed to raise large flocks of Merino and actively worked to improve the quality of their fleece. None, however, supported themselves from the sale of Merino wool. Those few private citizens who embraced the Merino were members of the Dutch-speaking gentry with enough disposable wealth to entertain agricultural experiments. Even the van Reenen brothers, Jacob and Sebastiaan, who decidedly opposed the arrival of metropolitan power at the Cape, were themselves atypical Boers. Their wealth, status, and location near Cape Town set them apart from more typical Boers, who lacked the financial flexibility needed to experiment with Merino sheep.

Merino enthusiasts were baffled by colonists who preferred the unsightly Cape sheep, which did not produce any wool at all. Boer farmers, however, realized that Cape sheep were well adapted to the arid climate and sparse vegetation of the interior Cape. Merino sheep were less suited to the Cape environment and they did not produce valuable tail fat. Working with wool required specialized skills (shearing, wool washing, spinning, and weaving) that were virtually unknown at the Cape. And transporting large, bulky, and low value loads of wool over difficult roads hardly justified the risk and expense. Cape
farmers understood these conditions and, in response, resisted or ignored efforts to promote Merino sheep and wool.

In light of the difficulties inherent in raising Merinos on the Cape, why did a diverse group of scientists, bureaucrats, and a few practical farmers, choose to pursue Merino sheep? With a few exceptions, these Merino enthusiasts shared several important traits. Many were familiar with European literature on agricultural improvement and livestock breeding. Robert Jacob Gordon was an amateur naturalist and collector while William Duckitt conferenced with Joseph Banks, the leading authority on biological transformation. Jacob van Reenen had visited Europe in his youth, becoming acquainted with Friesland cattle and, perhaps, Merino sheep. Dirk Gysbert van Reenen somehow obtained a copy of Lasteyrie's global account of Merino sheep introduction. Most early Merino enthusiasts at the Cape were born in Europe and even those born at the Cape did not identify as Boers. Gordon, van Ryneveld, and the Batavian Governors, de Mist and Janssens, were Dutchmen, while George Yonge and William Duckitt were Englishmen. All were sent to the Cape to improve the colony and its people. The van Reenens were an exception to this rule, although individual members of the family identified in very different ways.

The question of identity was central to the decision to raise Merino sheep. Attacks on the native Cape sheep as uneconomic went hand in hand with criticisms of the Boer colonists as lazy and uncivilized. Those who adopted Merino sheep at the Cape were seeking to counter these critiques. They raised Merino sheep to impress their neighbors and metropolitan actors sent to the Cape, either to govern or to write about it. Like the

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governors of the Cape, they accepted the symbolism of Merino sheep as a modern and advanced breed. Wool farming signaled sophistication, progressive thinking, comfortable status, and, often, alignment with the political establishment. By raising Merino sheep, Cape gentry farmers allied themselves to cosmopolitan actors who promoted the breed. More importantly, they separated themselves from the traditional, transhumant Boers of the interior, who were so maligned by European visitors. Though they genuinely hoped for success, their efforts were driven by the symbolic pedigree of Merino sheep. As a European breed considered the most sophisticated and desirable, it stood in stark contrast to the native Cape sheep. By adopting Merino sheep, cosmopolitan figures at the Cape positioned themselves as modern and enlightened, rather than traditional and crude.
CHAPTER THREE: FOUNDING FATHERS OF WOOL: MERINO SHEEP IN THE UNITED STATES, 1793-1810

In 1794, the American soldier and statesman, David Humphreys, penned “A Poem on the Industry of the United States” while on a diplomatic mission in Lisbon. This epic poem praised the American landscape and work ethic, while also offering a path to further greatness. Humphreys called on Americans to promote domestic industry, especially the production of textiles, as an assertion of true independence from Great Britain. He envisioned flowing fields of cotton, "the vegetable wool" and acres of mulberry trees to supply that "curious artist," the silk worm. Humphreys' strongest praise, however, was reserved for wool, "the boast of Britain's proudest hour... the basis of her wealth and pow'r!" He dreamed of American fields teeming with flocks of a thousand sheep and issued the call, "up! Men! Increase, in every vale, on every hill the fleece!" No ordinary sheep, however, could satisfy Humphreys' vision. From "the downs of Spain," a great white flock of Merino sheep offered to lift the young United States to new heights. Humphreys believed he was destined to play a role in their journey and would someday carry the precious Merinos across the Atlantic in a vessel "fam’d like the bark that bore the Argonaut." Remarkably, Humphreys would fulfill his prophecy nearly a decade later, bringing a large shipment of Merino sheep to the United States in 1802.333

Humphreys was not alone in his admiration for the exotic breed. Many Americans, including statesman, merchants, and wealthy landowners, saw promise in the introduction of Merino sheep. Three of the first Americans to introduce Merino sheep, David Humphreys, Robert Livingston, and E.I. Du Pont, were prominent figures in the early American Republic. Although they controlled large landholdings, these men were not 'practical farmers' in the parlance of the day. Instead, their curiosity about the Merino breed reflected interest in animal science and, most importantly, mechanized textile production. These three men, the founding fathers of wool, collaborated and even conspired in their quest to birth an American Merino industry. In speeches, letters, and published works, these men exchanged information on sheep, promoted personal theories of agricultural science, publicized their achievements, and moralized on the state of the country. Considered within the context of the early American Republic, their treatises and letters offer much more than practical farming advice. They provide fascinating insights into the hopes, dreams, and anxieties of the early American elite.

Like their counterparts in Europe and in South Africa, American Merino enthusiasts embraced the concept of improvement, emerging from the Enlightenment. In the tradition of naturalists like Joseph Banks, Merino enthusiasts believed that natural environments could, and should, be improved by human intervention. Humphreys' Poem on Industry praised the first colonists, who had "subdu'd the wild" and erased "dark deserts" and "barren heath" under the plough. He felt little remorse over the loss of the "coeval" landscape, for when "forests fell, houses rose, and beautiful scenery succeeded." Humphreys' America was "a garden of enchantment" endowed by the works of men, not by their creator. In the United States, Improvement also reflected what Max Weber would
later refer to as the 'Protestant Ethic.' Echoing Protestant missionaries who celebrated the
redeeming value of agricultural labor, Merino enthusiasts found virtue in the large
amounts of labor needed to process Merino wool. An economy based on wool required
shepherds, shearers, wool washers, carders, spinners, dyers, and weavers. Such an array of
trades served to occupy idle hands and prevent both moral and financial ruin. Such was
Humphreys' belief when he wrote that “indigence, and the calamities that flow from it,”
could be halted by the spread of industry. 234

In addition, American Merino enthusiasts adopted a distinct Language of Wool
that justified their interest in Merino sheep. The Language of Wool described a hierarchy
of breeds, in which some animals were more developed and more useful than others.
Improved breeds, the Merino being chief among them, were contrasted with 'coarse' or
'common' breeds. Following the lead of agriculturalists in Europe, particularly Great
Britain, American Merino enthusiasts agonized over the breed purity of their animals. As
in South Africa, breeds developed in Europe were considered more desirable. In the
United States, however, where nearly all livestock breeds were of European origin,
divisions were less pronounced.

The United States' position as a formerly colonized nation fueled a uniquely
American attraction to Merino sheep. Despite independence, Americans had failed to
escape the shadow of an economically dominant Great Britain. With both jealousy and
disgust, Humphreys wrote of British manufacturers sending cloth “Round half this idle,
poor, dependent globe.” Dependence on British cloth was viewed as an attack on

234 Humphreys, "Poem on Industry," 93-98; Max Weber, The Protestant ethic and the spirit of
American sovereignty and certainly a wound to American pride. While British manufacturing reigned supreme, just laws and freedoms would not safeguard Americans from becoming "vassals of her [Britain's] wiser plan." At the same time, the development of domestic manufacturing was a fraught topic in the early United States. Many feared the economic and cultural upheaval that had buffeted England during the Industrial Revolution. Others wished to preserve American agrarianism. As an agricultural product with industrial applications, Merino wool appealed to both pastoral and industrial impulses. This led an unlikely coalition of Americans to back Merino wool in search of the economic independence that had not been achieved through political revolution.  

Figure 10: The Northeastern United States.


**Founding Fathers of Wool**

Although several species of sheep are native to the Americas, none of these have ever been domesticated. European colonists were the first to introduce domestic sheep to what is now the United States. The very first were likely Churro sheep, carried into present-day New Mexico by the Spanish conquistador Juan de Onate in 1598. In the eastern United States, the first sheep arrived with English colonists at Jamestown. And although they suffered from predation by wolves and other wild animals, sheep became established along the eastern seaboard by the middle of the seventeenth century. Sheep became especially important in New England where colonists enacted a variety of measures to promote sheep raising. Town ordinances encouraged wolf hunting and brush clearing to create more suitable pastures. Coastal islands like Nantucket and Fisher's Island were naturally isolated from predators and became important sites of sheep cultivation.  

Colonists on the Atlantic coast initially raised long-wool sheep that were used for both mutton and wool fiber. These sheep were of European origin but rarely identified as members of a specific breed. By the second half of the eighteenth-century, however, American colonists were becoming attuned to differences between breeds of sheep. Often, they exhibited self-conscious concern over the undistinguished heritage of their own sheep. On October 22, 1764, a contributor to the *Boston Gazette and Country Journal* lamented that wool manufacturers in the colonies struggled because "their wool is inferior to that of Britain; and as there are severe penalties incur'd upon carrying sheep or wool

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from England." American wool sufficed to produce simple garments but was too coarse to produce fine cloth. A Rhode Island wool buyer lamented that "the first and second sorts of fine English broad cloths cannot be made without foreign wool." In a letter to the Newport Mercury, he explained that he purchased large quantities of "English wool" only to "adjust the quantity of Spanish and other country wools in a due proportion" prior to spinning and weaving. 238

References to Merino sheep and wool in the colonies were rare. Americans associated Spain with high quality wool, but no more so than England. Merchants occasionally advertised "Superfine" Spanish broad cloth, but did not refer to the Merino breed. Instead, the quality of wool from Spain was attributed to better management, rather than to differences in the breed. A contributor to the Pennsylvania Ledger asserted that "if the same pains were bestowed in the culture of our sheep which are used in England and Spain, I have no doubt but in a few years our wool would equal the wool of Segovia itself." 239

Information about the Merino breed began to circulate in the United States more widely following independence. Foreign treatises on Merino sheep, often from British writers were excerpted in American newspapers and pamphlets. An "Account of the Spanish Sheep and Wool" from Sir John Talbot Dillon's Travels through Spain, published in London in 1780, was reprinted in Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania in the late 1780s. The account introduced American readers to "those remarkable sheep known in

238 "Last Saturday Evening Arrived Here Capt. Bruce in a Ship Form London and but 26 Days," The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal, October 22, 1764, 3; "Letter from 'O.Z.,'" Newport Mercury, November 26, 1764, 2.

Spain by the name of "the Merino flocks" as well as the practice of transhumance that distinguished them. Dillon described, in detail, Spanish shepherds' routines for "conducting those numerous tribes from the northern and southern provinces, to which they attribute that peculiar fine quality of wool." Dr. James Anderson's "Disquisition on Wool-bearing Animals," read before the American Philosophical Society in 1799, argued that "the influence of breed in over-ruling that of climate." Through these foreign accounts, Americans became exposed to debates about the relative effect of climate and breed on wool.

As Americans became more familiar with the principles of breeding, they expressed a growing interest in acquiring foreign sheep breeds. The first explicit attempt to introduce Merino sheep into the United States was launched by the South Carolina Society for the Promotion of Agriculture. In 1785, the newly minted society offered a premium for the first person to carry a breeding pair of Merinos into the country. Although South Carolina pioneered formal incentives for Merino imports, it was the northeastern states who ultimately developed a successful wool industry. Other state agricultural societies, most notably the Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, soon followed suit by offering their own incentives to introduce the breed.

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Several Americans claimed to import Merino sheep prior to 1800, but these claims are uncertain at best. The ill-fated adventure of Andrew Cragie, who killed and ate his sheep in 1793 without realizing the value, has been recounted in several histories. If true, then these were the first Merinos successfully imported into the country. The fabulous nature of the story and the lack of surviving evidence, however, make it impossible to verify. Thomas Jefferson also claimed to have imported a Spanish Merino from as early as 1795. In that year, Jefferson was gifted a ram from Robert Morris, who claimed it was a Merino smuggled from Spain. Jefferson had doubts about the sheep’s authenticity, however, as did others who saw the sheep and its wool.\(^{242}\)

The first person to import a verified Merino sheep into the United States was not an American. It was Pierre Samuel du Pont, a Frenchman whose descendants would form one of the world’s largest corporations. While the du Pont family is well known today for their chemical empire, they had their beginnings in the agricultural and natural sciences. Pierre Samuel du Pont himself was the son of watchmaker and a minor noble who rose precipitously through the social and political ranks of the old regime. He became known as a political economist and a founding member of the influential Physiocratic school. The Physiocrats, a termed coined by du Pont himself, held agriculture to be the central element of national economies and privileged production over commerce.\(^{243}\)

Du Pont’s position as an adviser to the French Government granted him access to one of the largest flocks of Merino sheep outside of Spain. Since the 1780s, the French had


\(^{243}\) Boatman, The Agricultural Establishment at Eleutherian Mills, 1-3.
been experimenting with Merinos at the government farm, Rambouillet, near Versailles. The botanist Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton managed a small royal flock that gained the attention of agriculturalists throughout Europe and even across the Atlantic. The project received an enormous boost in 1795 following the Treaty of Basel, which ended a Franco-Spanish war. Under the terms of the treaty, the Spanish government agreed to transfer four thousand of its prized Merino sheep to the French royal flock.²⁴⁴

Du Pont fled France for the United States in 1799 under political pressure. Despite his exile, however, du Pont maintained strong ties in France and even returned periodically. During an 1801 visit, du Pont coordinated with a prominent financier named Etienne Delessert to acquire four Merino rams from the Rambouillet flock. Under their agreement, two of the rams were intended for Delessert, who had recently purchased land in New York State, one ram was intended for du Pont, and the last was intended for Thomas Jefferson, a frequent correspondent. Du Pont accompanied the four rams on board the ship Benjamin Franklin, which set sail from Le Havre on May 1, 1801. The journey was a hard one: the ship was detained by the British and further delayed by poor weather. Three of the four Merinos perished on board before reaching Philadelphia. The sole survivor, who was given to Delessert, was named ‘Don Pedro.’ In addition to being the first Merino sheep in the United States, Don Pedro would, in time, become the nation’s first celebrity sheep.²⁴⁵

The next person to import a Merino sheep into the United States was Robert R. Livingston of New York. Livingston, often referred to as ‘the Chancellor,’ came from one of

²⁴⁵ Ibid.,
the richest and most powerful families in New York State. Livingston served as Chancellor of New York, the highest judicial office in the state, from 1777 to 1801 and administered the first presidential oath to George Washington in 1789. Livingston also served in a variety of diplomatic roles, including Secretary of Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation. In 1801, he was appointed the United States Minister to France, a post he held until 1804. As Minister, Livingston helped to negotiate the Louisiana Purchase.\(^{246}\)

Livingston’s interest in agriculture was driven by explicitly patrician concerns. By his own account, Livingston accepted a diplomatic post abroad to gather knowledge that could improve the lives of citizens in the United States. He was particularly interested in the fine arts and agriculture, hoping “to distinguish the truths from the falsehoods contained in the infinity of books that treat of those subjects.” While in Paris, Livingston encountered agriculturalists with an interest in Merino sheep and was drawn into debates over whether the breed could be successfully raised outside of Spain. After seeing large Merino flocks in France, he became convinced that they would prosper in the United States as well. French protections on the royal flock and Livingston’s busy diplomatic schedule initially thwarted his efforts to acquire Merinos. But Livingston’s persistence was rewarded, and in the spring of 1802 he acquired two breeding pairs of pure-bred Merinos and shipped them to his rural estate at Clermont Manor.\(^{247}\)

Like the Cape gentry in South Africa, du Pont and Livingston were cosmopolitan figures attuned to developments in Europe. The American mercantile gentry relied less on


agricultural income than the van Reenens and other Cape families, but they shared an interest in agricultural improvement. By maintaining manicured estates, producing agricultural literature, and experimenting with rare breeds Americans like du Pont and Livingston could demonstrate their sophistication as well as their commitment to improving the lot of everyday Americans. They were motivated to experiment with Merino sheep by a mixture of patriotism, social competition, curiosity, and profit.

Du Pont and Livingston's initial importations were small, one or two animals at a time, and they attracted little attention. The first large-scale and well-publicized importation of Merinos was conducted by David Humphreys, author of "A Poem on Industry." By 1802, Humphreys had already cemented his place in the history of the American republic. He served as George Washington's aide de camp during the revolution and wrote a popular biography of the general, published in Jedediah Morse's *American Geography*. He served in the Connecticut General Assembly and in 1791 was stationed in Lisbon as the American Minister to Portugal. Humphreys likely first encountered Merinos while in this post on the Iberian Peninsula. He was clearly familiar with the breed and the reputation of its wool by the time he wrote the "Poem on Industry" in 1794. Humphreys was drawn even closer to the Merino flocks in 1796, when he was transferred to Madrid as the new American Minister to Spain.²⁴⁸

Using the access and power granted by his new position, Humphreys somehow obtained a flock of pure Spanish Merinos in 1802. With the full approval of the Spanish crown, Humphreys' flock of 100 Merinos, including 25 pure-bred rams, were guided by

three Spanish shepherds across Spain and Portugal. In Lisbon, they were loaded on to the
ship Perseverance and sailed out of the Tagus and across the Atlantic. Ninety-one of the
sheep survived the journey to Derby, Connecticut, where Humphreys had recently
purchased farmland.\textsuperscript{249} By his own account, Humphreys was exceedingly lucky. A
slowdown in merchant activity allowed Humphreys to secure passage for the animals. Fair
weather and a rare window of peace had allowed the sheep to travel unmolested across
the Atlantic. Most remarkably, Humphreys acquired the sheep legally, despite Spanish
prohibitions on the exportation of Merino sheep.\textsuperscript{250}

Upon his return to the United States, Humphreys was warmly received by his
fellows. The Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, which had offered a
premium to the first person to import a Merino sheep, presented him with a gold medal.
The Connecticut Legislature also recognized Humphreys for his "patriotic exertions."
Humphreys was also a prodigious self-promoter who penned a "Dissertation on the breed
of Spanish Sheep known as Merino" describing his accomplishment. He claimed to be
motivated by the benevolent and patriotic impulse to promote manufacturing and aid
practical farmers. In his writing, Humphreys paved the way for later Merino importers
seeking to publicize their work.\textsuperscript{251}

\textsuperscript{249} Humphreys, "Dissertation on the breed of Spanish Sheep known as Merino," 345.
\textsuperscript{250} Humphreys, "Dissertation on Merino Sheep Breed," 346.
\textsuperscript{251} Humphreys, \textit{Life and Times of David Humphreys} Vol. 2, 343.
Outside of these three initial imports, very few Merino sheep arrived in the United States prior to 1810. Seth Adams of Boston claimed to have imported a pair of French Merinos from in 1801, for which he applied to the Massachusetts Society for a premium and award. Ultimately, Adams received a fifty-dollar premium but not the gold medal, which was given to Humphreys. There may have been doubts about the origin of Adams’ sheep and he did not receive the same attention as du Pont, Livingston, and Humphreys. In 1807, Adams introduced the first Merino sheep into Ohio, although these may have been descendants of Humphreys’ flock, as the two men later became associates.  

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**Figure 11:** Medal presented to David Humphreys by the Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture. New Haven Museum.

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Pierre Samuel du Pont, Robert Livingston, and David Humphreys were all prominent figures prior to their involvement in Merino sheep. Fortunately for historians, they were all prolific writers on a variety of subjects, leaving behind clues to explain how they became involved with Merino imports. Each man was closely connected to either the Spanish government, which held a near monopoly on Merino sheep, or the French Government, which managed to build an impressive Merino flock from the late 1790s. Humphreys and Livingston had connections to both countries from serving several years as European diplomats. Pierre Samuel du Pont was employed by the French government and later acted as a liaison between the United States and France.

These were wealthy men who possessed large agricultural properties, though they did not rely on farming for their livelihood. The du Pont family estate, Boie de Fosses, was an elegant show-place, sporting a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, fodder crops, and trees. In the United States, the du Pont family established large landholdings in Delaware, as well as New York State. Robert Livingston’s family owned as much as thirty-five percent of the land in Columbia County, New York. The land, divided into two manors, sustained more than 700 tenant families. Robert Livingston’s manor, Clermont, was home to 120 families, probably totaling around 500 people.253

Du Pont, like Livingston and Humphreys, had a passion for industry that would ultimately eclipse his work with Merino sheep. While Pierre Samuel du Pont was a well-

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253 David Humphreys’ background was less aristocratic. When searching for a farm upon returning to the United States, Humphreys ordered his friend, Dr. Dwight, to recommend him a practical, rather than beautiful or impressive plot of land. He quipped, "I have seen too much money expended on fermes ornees, fine gardens and idle water works, to entertain any idea of imitating what we cannot equal." Even so, Humphreys did ask for land "susceptible to improvements," suggesting a gentleman farmer’s interest in renovation, see "Letter to Dr. Dwight from Madrid, Nov. 6 1801," in Humphreys, The Life and Times of David Humphreys, 335-337.
known figure in France, it was his son, Éleuthère Irénée (E.I.), who established the du Pont company that became a household name in America. In July of 1802, E.I. Du Pont established a farm on the banks of the Brandywine River near present-day Wilmington, Delaware. The eponymously named “Eleutherian Mills,” featured an orchard, a garden plot, nut trees, and seven sheep, supposedly the cross-bred offspring of the pure-bred Don Pedro. In 1805, E.I. du Pont acquired Don Pedro and began to enlarge his flock, which increased to 400 by the end of the decade.

Despite its agrarian trappings, however, Eleutherian Mills was never intended to be a farm. E.I. du Pont selected the land, little of which was arable, because of its access to water power on the Brandywine. He established his first factory at the site, a gunpowder mill, almost immediately. Du Pont only began to take Merino breeding seriously after mulling-over plans to open a woolen mill at the site. Based on a small sample of fine wool cloth from his Merino flock, du Pont believed that fine wool cloth could be made profitable. He consulted with Pouchet Belmare, a relative who owned a woolen mill in Rouen, about equipment needed for the mill and enlisted foreign engineers, including the Englishman, William Clifford, to design the factory works. The Eleutherian Woolen Mill was launched in late 1809 as a joint venture between E.I. du Pont, his brother Victor, and two other French immigrants.

David Humphreys’ home town of Derby, Connecticut, in contrast, had already developed into a manufacturing center when his flock of Spanish Merino sheep arrived. By

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1800, a fulling mill, sawmill, and iron works operated on the banks of the Naugatuck River flowing through town. In December of 1803, only a year after his return, Humphreys purchased the iron works and converted it into a woolen mill. Like most woolen mills of the time, Humphreys’ mill only finished cloth, rather than produce it. Local spinners and weavers produced cloth at home and sent it to the mill, where it was fulled into a smoother fabric. In June of 1806, Humphreys opened a new factory that used machinery to spin and weave woolen cloth. Humphreys enlisted John Winterbotham, an experienced mill engineer from Manchester, to design the equipment.\textsuperscript{256}

As very few Merino sheep were yet in the area, Humphreys’ mill mostly processed wool from the long-wooled sheep that were locally available. After one year of operation, Humphreys could proudly claim to have sent thousands of yards of woolen cloth to market. In addition, Humphreys promised an additional several hundred yards "fabricated entirely by machinery, from pure Merino fleeces." The machinery employed at Humphreys’ mill, much of which was rarely seen outside of Britain, exceeded the capacity of existing American woolen mills.\textsuperscript{257}

The operation was equally innovative in its social organization. An experimental community, aptly named Humphreysville, was constructed around the Derby woolen mills. Unlike most early New England mills, Humphreys’ mill was powered by child labor. The mill operators secured wayward orphan children, mostly boys, and housed them near the mill. Rather than being criticized for his use of child labor, however, Humphreys was lauded as a shepherd for the poor. An 1808 report by a committee of the Connecticut

\textsuperscript{256} Humphreys, \textit{Life and Times of David Humphreys}, 360.

\textsuperscript{257} "Letter to the Massachusetts Society for the promotion of Agriculture, Boston, Nov. 28, 1807," in \textit{Life and Times of David Humphreys}, 367.
Legislature praised Humphreys for his efforts "to render the exertions of women and children more useful." The report described these workers as "persons who otherwise would be idle, and in many instances a burthen to the community." The committee noted the training received by the children and the schoolmaster paid for at Humphreys’ expense. The social engineering that guided Humphreysville would prove to be pioneering. Both the increased mechanization and the use of child labor found at Humphreysville would soon come to fruition at the cotton mills of Waltham and Lowell. In time, the adoption of these processes would transform American life and labor.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Humphreys, Life and Times of David Humphreys, 372.
Humphreys' mill was most significant, however for the symbolic victory it provided to a young nation fearful of foreign dependency. Since George Washington, American presidents had chosen to attend their inaugurations wearing American-made cloth instead of higher quality imports. With the appearance of luxury-grade American wool, the sitting President, Thomas Jefferson, eagerly sought it for his own wardrobe. In late 1808, Jefferson wrote to Humphreys requesting enough broadcloth for a suit to wear for his final New Year’s Day reception in the White House. Humphreys, who only had broadcloth made from the wool of "Half-blooded Merinos," scrambled to fill the order. Faced with a delay, Jefferson informed Humphreys that the cloth did not have to be of the best quality, so long as it was made from pure, *American* Merino wool. Humphreys accordingly sent the president a length of pure Merino cassimere, a simpler cloth that could be produced on short notice. The cloth arrived just in time for Jefferson to ring in the new year, draped in a symbol of American independence. When James Madison was inaugurated as President three months later, he too wore a Humphreys coat. The Washington Monitor reported that "Mr. Madison looked extremely well: he was dressed in an entire suit of American manufacture, made of cloth from Merino wool, presented by col. Humphreys and chancellor Livingston, being the production of their respective patriotic establishments."

Aside from his Merino wool venture, Robert Livingston contributed to American industrialization in a more dramatic way. While in France, Livingston became acquainted

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with Robert Fulton, a fellow American who was working for the French Navy. Fulton had plans to develop a steam-powered ship but he was unable to find financial backing for the project. Livingston supported Fulton and after several months of construction witnessed the revolutionary vessel’s maiden voyage in the Seine. When Fulton returned to the United States, he married Livingston’s niece, Harriet, and the two men embarked on a commercial steamship line. The North River Steamboat, powered by James Watt’s steam engines, plied the Hudson River between New York and Albany. The vessel passed directly through Columbia County and often stopped at the Livingston’s home. For this reason, the boat adopted the unofficial name, Clermont, after the estate where Livingston raised his Merino sheep.260

**Speaking the Language of Wool**

American Merino enthusiasts shared more than similar backgrounds and interests. They also shared a common language about the virtues of Merino sheep and wool. In their writings, E.I. du Pont, Robert Livingston, and David Humphreys frequently extolled the industry, progress, and growth derived from adopting Merino sheep. Like their South African counterparts, they believed that trade and industry were necessary to grow the economy and to prevent poverty. In the preface to "Poem on Industry," David Humphreys argued that industry reduced "indigence, and the calamities that flow from it," in addition to increasing "public and private riches and enjoyments." Compare this to the words of W.S. van Ryneveld, who blamed "the poverty of the people" at the Cape of Good Hope with "the lack of industry and cooperation." To promote industry, both Humphreys and

van Ryneveld suggested that government intervention was needed. The "high office of a wise and just government," wrote Humphreys, is to present "employment to protected and provident industry." Similarly, van Ryneveld opined that catalysts for industry "must not be left to private individuals but must most certainly be entrusted to the Government itself." It is not surprising that American Merino enthusiasts, like their South African counterparts, favored government protection of industry. Their involvement in both merchant trading and manufacturing positioned them to benefit from tariffs and other protections.\(^\text{261}\)

The language employed by Merino enthusiasts to promote the breed expanded far beyond broad celebrations of industry. In their writings on sheep American Merino enthusiasts, like their Cape colonial counterparts, presented the Merino as an exceptional animal that surpassed other breeds. Robert Livingston testified that "the wool of these sheep is so much finer and softer than the common wool, as to bear no sort of comparison with it."\(^\text{262}\) Just as Cape Merino boosters like van Ryneveld denigrated the fat-tailed Cape sheep, American breeders disparaged the long-wool breeds known as "coarse" or "common" sheep. In describing the American breed known as the 'Otter sheep,' Livingston remarked "to me there is something so disgusting in the sight of a flock of these poor lame animals, that even a strong conviction of their superior utility could hardly induce me to keep them."\(^\text{263}\) Merino enthusiasts feared the degeneration of their Merino flocks through breeding with less desirable animals and went to extreme lengths to guarantee the

authenticity of pure-bred animals. The scarcity of pure-bred Merinos and the difficulty of verifying ancestry only increased these anxieties. Breeders fretted over the percentage of Merino blood in their flocks and emphasized the importance of controlled breeding to improve stock.264

American Merino enthusiasts benefitted from this obsession with breed purity in two ways. First, by shedding doubt on amateur breeders, they protected their reputations as authorities on breeding and livestock management. Second, the focus on purity justified the high price of Merino breeding stock, which were in short supply. It is no surprise, therefore, that American Merino enthusiasts embraced the call for breed purity. The du Pont family staked their claim as breeders on a single sheep: the famous Don Pedro. As the first true Merino sheep to enter the United States, Don Pedro was initially used as a stud ram by Etienne Delessert, the business partner of Pierre Samuel du Pont. In the spring of 1805, however, Delessert, abandoned his attempts at Merino farming and auctioned his flock at a public sale. Neighboring farmers showed very little interest in the animals and Delessert was forced to sell them at low prices. Don Pedro was the only animal to fetch a large price. Pierre Samuel du Pont paid sixty dollars for the pure-bred ram, which he sent to his son at Eleutherian Mills.265

Robert Livingston had wanted to buy the famed Pedro as well, but he was overseas and missed his opportunity. He quickly purchased much of Delessert’s remaining flock.266

As two of the most well-known Merino breeders in the United States, du Pont and

264 “Du Pont de Nemours to President Jefferson, November 28, 1808,” in Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1808-1811, 112-113.
266 Livingston, Essay on Sheep, 7-8.
Livingston developed a friendly rivalry over the quality of their sheep. When Livingston began marketing his sheep to Delaware farmers, E.I. du Pont began searching for more pure Merino stock from Europe. As Don Pedro’s reputation grew, so did the interest from farmers and breeders. By the decade, Don Pedro had sired hundreds of lambs. One Wilmington farmer’s flock counted 400 of Pedro’s offspring. By 1814, up to 3,000 of Don Pedro’s descendants grazed near Wilmington. Merino enthusiasts, many of whom had perhaps never seen a Merino sheep before, hailed Don Pedro as a perfect specimen. One admirer wrote “every part of his fleece is nearly of equal fineness; even the wool of the hind legs and thighs, which is long and coarse upon many Merino sheep, is short and fine upon Don Pedro. As a testament to his national renown, the first image to appear in Dr. James Mease’s 1811 “Archives of Useful Knowledge,” a collection of articles on agricultural, commercial, and other subjects, was a portrait of the famous ram.

268 Du Pont wrote his father on June 4, 1808 that “I have only twenty half-bred sheep and their lambs will this year bring me more than 400 Doll.” In private, du Pont conceded that it was “possible, though unlikely, that they were bred by another ram.” See “E.I. du Pont to Du Pont de Nemours, June 4, 1808,” in Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1808-1811, 74-76. Also “E.I. du Pont to Samuel du Pont de Nemours, June 10 1807,” 304-307 and “G Pearce to E.I. du Pont, March 1 1808,” 31-33 in Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1808-1811. Ezra Carman, H.A. Heath, and John Minto, Special report on the history and present condition of the sheep industry of the United States (Washington: Bureau of Animal Industry, 1892), 135-6.
Lacking a celebrity sheep, Robert Livingston relied on the foreign origin of his stock and their superior traits. Livingston began to market his Merino stock outside of New York as early as 1803, advertising them as superior to any others in the United States and even in Europe. In his correspondence with E.I. du Pont, Livingston boasted of the exceptional size and fleece weights of his prized rams. After he obtained "a very beautiful ram" from the French flock at Rambouillet in the summer of 1808, Livingston was careful to mention that the animal had cost him 700 Francs. He bragged about the reputation of his flock, claiming that "numbers have been sold a second time at twice the price at which they were purchased from me." Encouraged by the growing interest in Merino sheep,
Livingston expressed confidence in his goal of "rendering wool a more valuable staple in the northern, than cotton is now in the southern [states]."\textsuperscript{269}

Livingston also positioned himself as an authority on sheep husbandry. In 1809, he published a lengthy “Essay on Sheep,” which was mostly devoted to the Merino breed. In this essay, Livingston sought to convince American farmers that Merino raising was practical and profitable pursuit. In terms of environment, he argued that “The United States, particularly those which lay north of the Chesapeake, appear to me to possess advantages in the breeding of sheep which are unequalled by those of any part of Europe which I have seen.” Furthermore, Merinos, with their small size and rangy legs, would thrive on the light grass and scrubby plains of America.\textsuperscript{270} Livingston claimed to write, not for the benefit of other wealthy men, but for practical farmers who could not afford to fail in their experiment with Merinos. He vowed to "treat the subject upon so economical a scale as to be within the means of every man that keeps a flock."\textsuperscript{271}

Livingston’s essay was a vehicle to promote his operation and advertise the outstanding size, quality, and fleece weight of his sheep. The nearly two-hundred-page tome also served to advance Livingston’s theories related to the history and biology of sheep. Livingston echoed the assertions of British agriculturalists, who argued for the supremacy of breed purity over other factors in determining quality. He challenged the idea that climate, forage, or management could affect breed characteristics, declaring “when nature forms a change in any species of plants or animals, it does so very slowly,

\textsuperscript{269}Duplanty to E.I. du Pont, New York, June 22, 1807” in \textit{Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1804-1807}, 308-309; “RR Livingston to E.I. du Pont, Clermont, September 27 1809” in \textit{Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1808-1811}, 197-199.
\textsuperscript{270}Livingston, \textit{Essay on Sheep}, 66 and 120.
\textsuperscript{271}Livingston, \textit{Essay on Sheep}, 62.
and always in such a way as better to adapt them to the climate in which they are to be naturalized.” He cited, as an example, the Merino flocks of Sweden, which had not deteriorated despite the cold climate. Livingston was almost certainly referencing Lasteyrie, who had written about these flocks in his 1802 treatise.²⁷²

Livingston’s writing demonstrated an impressive knowledge of Merino sheep management in various parts of the globe. He discussed sheep-raising in Australia, the Middle East, and Africa, including South Africa where fat-tailed Cape sheep were predominant. He was clearly familiar with the work of agriculturalists of several nations and fluent in the Language of Wool. Livingston used this fluency to participate in the discourse of sheep breeding, critiquing and adding to the work of other theorists. Livingston sparred, for example, with George Washington Custis, a noted American agriculturalist and relative of President Washington. After Custis claimed that the Smith Island sheep, an American breed, produced wool as fine as the Merino and in greater quantity, Livingston was quick to discredit his findings. Though Livingston saluted Custis for his patriotism, he was unwavering in his belief that “no doubt can be entertained of the preference that should be given to the Merino breed.”²⁷³

Unlike their South African counterparts, American Merino breeders limited their criticism to the breeds of sheep themselves, not the farmers who raised them. In South Africa, Merino breeders mercilessly attacked the native Cape sheep as well as the rural colonists who had embraced the breed. They labelled these rural farmers as stubborn and ignorant for their failure to recognize the superiority of wool-bearing Merino sheep. In his

²⁷² Livingston, Essay on Sheep, 127.
²⁷³ Livingston, Essay on Sheep, 64 and 70.
1804 treatise on livestock, W.S. van Ryneveld complained that Cape farmers resisted the Merino due to their "prejudice against everything with which they are not acquainted." A more serious charge was the implication that Boer farmers were themselves primitive, even non-European. These accusations of African-ness were devastating to a settler population intent on separating themselves from Africans.

In the United States, debates over sheep were not so racially or culturally charged. While domestic sheep were an integral part of the American landscape by 1800, they were not indigenous and they did not dominate rural economies. Furthermore, American sheep resembled the long-wool breeds of Europe and they served rural homesteads in a similar way. While American Merino enthusiasts believed the Merino to be superior, they did not denigrate other breeds as ugly, wasteful, or uncivilized. Nor did they harshly criticize farmers who preferred to raise other types of sheep. American breeds of sheep were derogatorily referred to as "common" or "coarse." These terms were not wholly inaccurate. Most American sheep did not belong to an identifiable breed and their wool was relatively coarse. Furthermore, coarse wool was central to the American wool economy and remained so after the introduction of Merino sheep. Homespun garments were made from coarse wool, as were many of the first industrial woolen goods.

An illuminating example of the difference between American and South African Merino breeders can be found in Robert Livingston’s *Essay on Sheep*. Surprisingly, for

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274 John Barrow for example had written that the Boers objected to their children learning "useful trades," while Robert Percival summarized the Boer lifestyle as "smoaking all the morning, and sleeping after dinner." See Barrow, *Travels from the Cape*, 44 and Percival, *Account of the Cape*, 205.  
someone who never visited the region, Livingston offered an insightful discussion of the
fat-tailed Cape sheep so treasured in South Africa. He recognized that, rather than being
primitive and wild, the breed had likely been developed through centuries of careful
management, just as the Merino had been. Sheep with unusually large tails were selected
by breeders as they produced more valuable fat and proved hardier in arid regions. This
characteristic made the Cape sheep invaluable to its herders as a source of meat and fat
that could persevere through drought. Livingston, therefore, acknowledged the Cape
sheep as a domestic breed that was "adapted to the necessities of the people."²⁷⁷

Compared to their South African counterparts, American Merino breeders were
milder in their criticism of other breeds and people who raised them. If American farmers
resisted the Merino breed, it was not from loyalty to another breed or way of life. The elite
gentry who extolled Merinos and the American farmers who raised coarse long-wool
sheep groups both valued sheep for their wool, which could be manufactured into a
durable trade good. In South Africa, European settlers had adopted an African sheep breed
that did not produce wool but was vital to rural subsistence. The indigenous Cape sheep,
and the transhumant pastoralist lifestyle it supported, became essential markers of Boer
settler culture. Metropolitan Europeans and colonists, however, considered the Cape
sheep economically useless, as it did not produce wool. They considered the semi-
nomadic Boers, who were largely isolated from global markets, primitive and uncivilized.
When South African Merino enthusiasts advocated for Merino sheep, they were arguing
against the Cape sheep and an established way of life. This hostility between metropolitan
and rural sheep farmers had no parallel in the United States.

The Language of Wool united American Merino enthusiasts around common principles. Through this discourse, derived from the writings European agriculturalists, breeders signaled their knowledge and expertise about a subject in which they had little practical experience. Their rhetoric was not very convincing to most American sheep farmers. When Robert Livingston returned from France in 1805, he was appalled to find cross-bred Merino sheep selling at the same price as common sheep. And when E.I. du Pont carried the famous Don Pedro ram to his Delaware farm, his neighbors rejected it as inferior to "the genuine American breed." Although the language of wool did not convince many practical farmers, it still served the wealthy American breeders who employed it. Writing about Merino sheep allowed Americans to converse with agriculturalists throughout Europe and, by extension, to South Africa and other regions with Merino sheep.²⁷⁸

The Politics of Wool

Though gentry farmers in many regions were attracted to Merino sheep, there were particularly American motivations for promoting Merino wool. In the early American Republic, agriculture and manufacturing represented competing and politically charged visions of development. Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson, celebrated agrarianism as central to the American character, elevating the small-holding yeoman farmer as the ultimate symbol of self-sufficiency and independence. This vision of a rural America constituted a break from industrial England, which Americans saw as politically, morally, and environmentally polluted. Jefferson and his allies argued that by avoiding the

²⁷⁸ Livingston, Essay on Sheep, 8; Boatman, Agriculture Establishment at Eleutherian Mills, 26.
concentration of money and capital, a diffuse agrarian republic could resist corruption and remain virtuous. Federalists, on the other hand, recommended bolstering domestic manufacturing as a bulwark against British industrial power. They feared that an agrarian United States was doomed to dependency on British manufactured goods and would ultimately succumb to British domination. Without domestic industry, the young nation would remain a minor player on the world stage. These fears impelled Humphreys to write that support of domestic industry should be “the high office of a wise and just government.”

Textiles lay at the intersection of agriculture and industry and appealed to both the Federalist and Agrarian visions. Since before the revolution, homespun cloth was a source of pride for the American colonies. These ubiquitous, coarse garments, the mainstay of all but the wealthiest Americans, were first lauded as a sign of industriousness and progress. Following the revolution, and in opposition to European pretension, coarse home-spun evolved into a symbol of American humility and practicality. The young United States managed to meet basic domestic clothing demands through the production of homespun cotton, flax, and wool. Despite this capacity, Americans remained dependent on European manufacturers for luxury garments, including fine woolens.

Under these conditions, Merino wool appeared politically popular to diverse constituencies. Federalists like David Humphreys and his contemporaries at the Massachusetts Society of Agriculture coveted Merino sheep for their potential to support domestic manufacturing. These industrialists were keen to leverage the water powered

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279 Humphreys, "Poem on Industry" in *Miscellaneous Works of David Humphreys*, 94.
textile mills that were popping up throughout the northeastern states. If the United States could develop a national flock of Merino sheep, it was poised to compete with European manufacturers of fine wool garments. Many gentry farmers, who were eager to invest in manufacturing as well as shipping, stood to gain significantly from wool-related commerce. However, such would-be industrialists were forced to temper their excitement to appease a largely agrarian public that feared industrialization. Tamara Thornton has noted the irony that these men “should have endeavored so assiduously to identify themselves with things rural and agrarian.”

Surprisingly, agrarian politicians were also drawn to the promise of Merino sheep and even Merino wool manufacturing. Experimental agriculture appealed, not only to the educated and profit-minded elite, but to those who embraced the ideal of the practical and economically disinterested Yeoman. Agrarian support for Merino sheep was exemplified by the personal involvement of the leading Republican, Thomas Jefferson.

As Margaret Rasmussen has shown in "Waging War with Wool," Jefferson's association with rural causes belied his persistent commitment to bring Merino sheep and wool manufacturing to the United States. Jefferson showed interest in acquiring Merino sheep from as early as 1786 and corresponded with Humphreys, Livingston, and the du Pont family in search of Merino breeding stock. Like northern Federalists, Jefferson was worried by English domination of the global textile trade. He defended his support of manufacturing with the charge that "who is against domestic manufacture must be for reducing us either to dependence on their foreign nation, or to be clothed in skins and live

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281 Thornton, Cultivating Gentlemen, 1.
282 Ibid., 69.
like wild beasts.” Jefferson was deeply influenced by Pierre Samuel du Pont, who advocated merging agricultural and industrial production. By proposing to “place the manufacturers by the side of the agriculturist,” Jefferson nullified a potential dispute over the value of Merino sheep and wool manufacturing.

Escalating warfare in Europe, however, would eventually cause problems for American Merino enthusiasts of all political persuasions. In response to the impressment crisis and other insults to American sovereignty, the United States passed the Embargo Act of 1807, which prohibited trade with both Britain and France. The passage of the Embargo Act only further imperiled the delicate process of importing Merino sheep into the United States. When E.I. du Pont wished to import more Merino breeding stock in October of 1808, he was blocked by both American and French authorities. Du Pont suggested that his father enlist Jefferson, then the sitting president, to intervene. Though he had not consulted the President, Du Pont felt confident that he would not object, “for the importation of such a flock would be of great service to the country.”

In February of 1809, an impatient E.I. du Pont wrote Jefferson a letter illustrating the political appeal of Merino sheep in the early American republic. Du Pont opened his letter by establishing manufacturing as the foremost issue, not only of the American economy, but of American sovereignty as well. Perhaps channeling his father’s physiocratic roots, or perhaps appealing to Jefferson’s agrarianism, Du Pont argued that

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283 While the British government strictly prohibited the exportation of breeding sheep and prohibited the emigration of machinists and engineers, correspondence between French and American enjoyed a somewhat more congenial relationship. Jefferson’s frequent correspondence with Pierre Samuel du Pont convinced him that American production of Merino wool could form a significant check on British power. See Rasmussen, “Waging War with Wool,” 21-22 and 28.

284 “E.I. du Pont to Du Pont de Nemours, Brandywine, Eleutherian Mills, October 1, 1808” in Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1808-1811, 98-102.
domestic manufacturing could only succeed when supported by high quality domestic raw materials. This was especially true of woolen manufacturers “who never should be able to rival those of the old Country, if they were to employ only the coarse wool of our country Sheep.”

Jefferson had recently received news about French progress with Merino sheep from the Marquis de Lafayette. In his reply, Jefferson remarked that "the weight of your fleeces ... astonishes me" and assured his old friend that "we are all eager to get into the Merino race of sheep." This news, perhaps, convinced Jefferson to risk a political scandal by aiding du Pont. To circumvent the embargo, Jefferson agreed to transport a small flock of twelve sheep aboard the Mentor, his official dispatch vessel. Simultaneously, Robert Livingston secured a flock of twenty-five French Merinos and had received permission from Napoleon to export them to the United States. These two were to be loaded on to the Mentor and slipped past the American embargo. In addition to these two flocks, Jefferson planned to smuggle a prototype spinning machine and Pierre Samuel du Pont, who lacked the passport necessary to enter the country. Jefferson and du Pont conspired with William Thornton, the head of the Patent Office, to land the contraband animals.

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285 Du Pont reminded Jefferson that only Merino wool was suitable for fine cloth and therefore had “no doubt but the intention of the Government is to remove that inconvenience by promoting the importation of the Spanish Sheep.” See “E.I. du Pont to President Jefferson, February 11, 1809” in Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1808-1811, 149-151.
287 “E.I. du Pont to Du Pont de Nemours, March 21, 1809,” in Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1808-1811, 156-160.
Thornton suggested that, if need be, the sheep could be clandestinely unloaded along the Delaware River before the ship officially disembarked at Philadelphia.\(^{288}\)

The operation was a failure. The French government seized both Du Pont’s and Livingston’s Merinos and Jefferson was shamed in the press for violating the embargo that he had signed as president. A demonstrably upset Livingston wrote to E.I. du Pont, complaining that the transaction had run counter to his directions. Livingston also vented his frustration to the sitting president, James Madison, who later became a Merino breeder himself. Despite his disappointment, however, Livingston assured the President that, within a decade, "wool will be as important a staple of the northern [states] as cotton now is of the southern states."\(^{289}\)

Jefferson’s and, later, Madison’s interest in Merino wool is surprising as southerners rarely showed interest in wool raising or manufacturing. In part, this may have been due to the hot and humid climate of the southern states, which were not well suited to wool grazing. More importantly, the southern states were developing a fiber economy of their own, based not on wool, but on cotton. Initially a minor crop in the American south, cotton production expanded rapidly following the appearance of Eli Whitney’s cotton gin in 1793. Between 1790 and 1800, American cotton production soared from approximately 5,000 bales to near 100,000 bales. Cotton output nearly doubled again


between 1800 and 1810. Much of this production occurred in upland areas of South Carolina, Georgia, and other states in the deep south that were on the frontier of white settlement. The introduction of cotton to these regions resulted in dramatic changes in the landscape and was accompanied by a large influx of white free settlers and black slaves.290

In some ways, the culture of Southern cotton growers paralleled their Merino-raising neighbors to the North. While Northerners were desperately trying to acquire foreign breeding stock, Southerners had their eye on foreign cotton strains. In 1806, a Mississippi Planter, Walter Burling, encountered an impressive variety of cotton while on a diplomatic mission in Mexico City. Burling hid some of the plant's seeds in the body of a doll and smuggled them back to the United States. He distributed the seeds to local planters and amateur scientists, who experimented with them. Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode have shown that by 1820, American cotton planters had crossed Mexican cotton with several American strains of the plant. The resulting hybrids, which offered "superior yield, quality, picking, and disease resistance," led to dramatic increases in cotton yields.290 The interest and pride that Southern planters took in their cotton strains reflected earlier traditions in Southern tobacco culture, where "the quality of a man’s tobacco often served as a measure of the man."292

Despite these parallels, the southern cotton economy was fundamentally different from the northern wool economy in several ways. The most important of these differences was the use of slave labor. While enslaved people were rarely involved in the production of wool, they were central to the production of cotton. Cotton pioneers in the deep south were often migrants from the upper south or coastal regions, which had already developed plantation economies around the production of tobacco, rice, and indigo. These economies, marked by the intensive use of slave labor, served as a blueprint for cotton production in the deep south. The rise in cotton output was matched by an explosion in the slave population as many enslaved people were forcibly transported from the upper south and coastal areas. The strict divisions between free whites and enslaved blacks led to the development of the nation’s most racially oppressive laws at a time when northern states were moving toward the abolition of slavery.\(^{293}\)

Beyond slavery, the southern cotton and northern wool industries produced fiber for very different markets. American wool was rarely exported to foreign markets and was mostly used to manufacture wool garments domestically, either at home or in early factories. Most American cotton, however, was destined for foreign markets. From 1800 onward, most American cotton was exported, primarily to English factories. At a time when American Merino enthusiasts were preaching the dangers of dependence on English textiles, their cotton-growing counterparts in the South were growing rich from just such an arrangement.\(^{294}\)

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And while Merino enthusiasts in the North showed a determined interest in manufacturing, Southern cotton growers were more ambivalent. It was not predetermined, however, that the southern states would turn away from industrialization. Homespun cloth was as common in the South as in the North, and there were several significant attempts at industrialization in the South during this time. South Carolina, the first state to incentivize the importation of Merinos, also sought to introduce mechanized spinning equipment as early as the 1780s. The patriotic rhetoric of domestic manufacturing sometimes resonated in the South, where Thomas Jefferson’s decision to wear a homespun wool suit, for example, was celebrated. During the uncertain years after the Embargo Act, Southerners showed an increased interest in manufacturing. In 1808, the “Carolina Homespun Company” of Charleston imported equipment and skilled workers from Rhode Island to start local cotton textile production.295

Despite the slight parallels between the Northern and Southern textile economies, Merino sheep never attracted significant attention in the South. Southern identity became increasingly tied to cotton and the slave system that sustained its production, leaving little room for interest and investment in a wool economy that was less labor and land intensive. While Merino sheep appealed to both sides of the Federalist-Agrarian political divide, they did not manage to bridge the growing sectional divide between North and South in the United States.

Merino Mania

To 1810, Merino sheep remained rare in the United States, despite significant interest from gentry farmers. Obtaining breeding stock from Europe was extremely difficult, requiring both wealth and connections. Only a few high-profile Americans had been able to achieve the feat and since David Humphrey's importation in 1802, very few Merinos had been brought into the country. The National flock of pure-bred Merinos was very small and, consequently, extremely expensive. The high price and scarcity of Merino sheep left them unattainable to most working farmers.

But soon, political events in Europe led to a rapid and permanent transformation of the Merino wool industry in the United States. On the Iberian Peninsula, tension had been brewing between French, Spanish, British, and Portuguese forces. In 1808, the Peninsular War rapidly escalated as the Spanish state disintegrated. Large numbers of French and British troops became committed to the fight and much of the Spanish countryside was enveloped in a new and brutal style of combat, known as guerrilla warfare. The fall of the Spanish monarchy and the advance of French troops dispersed the precious Merino flocks that had enjoyed state protection for centuries. Within weeks, many thousands of Spanish Merinos had been captured by the French army, and many large flock owners declared their loyalty to Napoleon. The Spanish government that formed in opposition to the French, known as the Junta, moved quickly to prevent the defection of Spain's most valuable natural resource. In the summer of 1808, the Junta confiscated all Merino sheep belonging to landholders who had declared loyalty to
Bonaparte. The *Mesta*, the royally sanctioned guild that had managed Merino sheep for over five hundred years, was dissolved.\textsuperscript{296}

Merino enthusiasts outside of Spain, who had long coveted the pure Spanish flocks, sensed opportunity in this destruction. In the fall of 1808, a contingent of Spanish shepherds fled Gijon for the safety of England. They carried with them nearly 1800 Merino sheep, most of which were added to the British Royal flock managed by Sir Joseph Banks and King George III. By late 1809, the Spanish Junta had lost its ability to maintain the Merino flocks. French army advances had made the customary seasonal migrations impossible. When the 12,000 strong Negretti Cabana was besieged near Cadiz, the desperate Junta sold the prize flock to a Scottish adventurer named Andrew Cochrane-Johnstone.\textsuperscript{297}

Cochrane-Johnstone was a former Member of Parliament known for corrupt practices, including voter fraud and stock market manipulation. According to Harold Carter, historian of the British royal flock, Cochrane-Johnstone had a knack for "turning almost any predicament in which he found himself to some dubious form of monetary advantage." His adventure with Merino sheep was no different, as he lacked the knowledge and resources to manage the sheep. Though some of the Negretti sheep were eventually sold in Great Britain and the United States, most were lost, killed in transit, or never sold.\textsuperscript{298}

Americans watched the collapse of the old Spanish Merino herds with rapt attention. Robert Livingston cautioned E.I. du Pont that "the probable destruction of the


\textsuperscript{297} Carter, *His Majesty's Royal Flock*, 326.

\textsuperscript{298} Carter, *His Majesty's Royal Flock*, 337-360.
Merino sheep in Spain renders their preservation a very important object here.” Du Pont, in contrast, was almost gleeful about the prospect. His excitement was palpable when he declared to his father that “the source of the fine wool that supplied the mills of England and France has been destroyed.” With English and French competitors cut off from their former supply, du Pont confidently predicted that “the industry and thrift of our farmers” would shift Merino wool production and manufacturing to the United States.299

Americans on the Iberian Peninsula hurried to grab what they could of the disintegrating Cabanas. None was more persistent or successful than the American Consul to Portugal, William Jarvis. Jarvis was a Boston merchant born into one of the city’s Brahmin families. He relocated to Lisbon in 1802 and was soon appointed Consul by President Jefferson. Over the next decade, Jarvis maintained a merchant trade in wine, lemons, salt, and other sundries, on top of his consular duties. On September 13th of 1809, Jarvis wrote to a Mr. Irving in Seville regarding the possibility of acquiring Merino sheep. Irving replied one month later with a confidential note. Apparently, Irving was already besieged with requests for Merinos, but he had no way of obtaining them. He assured Jarvis that "if it was in my power to oblige you and my other friends on this point, I should readily do so." Irving understood that “a flock of these sheep would be a fortune in our country” but the complicated situation in Spain made it extremely difficult for him from getting any sheep for himself, let alone his friends.300 By early 1810, however, Jarvis

managed to acquire small numbers of Merinos. An early consignment was lost when the
ship Nancy foundered near Madeira in April 1810, but others quickly followed.301

Jarvis' importations generated immediate and unprecedented interest in Merino
sheep. On June 5th, Captain George Dickinson of the ship Maria Theresa arrived in New
York carrying seven of Jarvis' sheep. A public auction was held the next day by the
merchants Hicks, Jenkins, and Co. In the first sale, six of the sheep were sold for a total of
$7500, more than $1200 per head. The last sheep, which looked sickly from being “affected
with the scab” was still sold for $750. At a time when farm laborers could expect one dollar
a day and common sheep were sold for a couple of dollars, these prices were
extraordinary.302 The auction “far exceeded” the sellers’ expectations and they cautioned
Jarvis not to expect such prices in the future. Yet only week later, the same merchants
received five more Jarvis sheep on the ship Traveler and sold them for a total of $3500. The
four best sheep brought $800 each and the fifth, badly afflicted by scab, still brought
$300.303

The United States entered the throes of a "Merino Mania," as it was called by
contemporaries. Unlike the earlier ventures of du Pont, Livingston, and Humphreys,
Jarvis' importations attracted a wide variety of buyers. The rampant buying and selling of
sheep angered some longtime Merino enthusiasts, who resented the economic, rather
than patriotic, motivations of the new speculators. Thomas Jefferson, who had been
thwarted in many attempts to acquire the breed wrote to James Madison that "I have been

301 Vermont Historical Society (VHS), William Jarvis Papers (WJ) (Box) 63- (Folder) 17, "Ward
Blacklee and Parker Blake, Madeira to William Jarvis, Lisbon," April 23, 1810.
303 VHS WJ 63-18, "Hicks, Jenkins, and Co., New York to William Jarvis," June 6, 1810; VHS WJ 63-18,
"Hicks, Jenkins, and Co. New York to William Jarvis," June 14, 1810.
so disgusted with the scandalous extortions lately practised in the sale of these animals, & with the ascription of patriotism & praise to the sellers.' Jefferson accused the new Merino dealers of a false patriotism, "the strongest feature of which is to enrich the patriot himself."304

In Lisbon, Jarvis was besieged with requests for sheep from American investors. On June 30, George Bates of Boston wrote to Jarvis asking for a ram and a ewe as "there appears to be a rage in our country for these kind of sheep." Ezra Werten of Duxbury applied for "six full Blooded Merino Sheep... two rams and four ewes" on July 11. Stephen Howell of Sag Harbor wrote on July 21 that he was "desirous of importing a small number of real Merino Rams and Ewes if they can be procured at a reasonable price." Anxious investors were, quite literally, knocking on Jarvis’ door in search of sheep. On August 10, Jonathon Allen of Boston wrote to Jarvis from quarantine in Lisbon Harbor, stating that he "came out for the sole purpose of obtaining a few Merino Sheep and have calculated on your assistance." Having made a month-long transatlantic voyage for the sheep, Allen wrote that he “shall feel a satisfaction in paying you any commission you may think proper to charge. I will be obliged to you for any information you can give me on this subject.”305

Although many of Jarvis’ customers were relative amateurs caught up in the speculative frenzy, experienced sheep farmers were interested as well. Jarvis’ uncle, Samuel Gardner Jarvis, already owned a flock of more than 100 quarter-blood Merino

sheep. On July 20, he wrote to his nephew, requesting a breeding pair of pure Merinos and boasting that “could I procure a full Blooded merino Ram I flatter myself that my flock would equal any in the country.” On the following day, July 21, Benjamin Shurtleff of Boston sent a bill for one thousand dollars to Jarvis with detailed instructions. Shurtleff wanted two-thirds to be ewes if possible and requested that they be "young and the wool is fine; There is a great difference in the quality of the wool even among the full blooded." Shurtleff also mentioned that he hoped to receive the sheep by mid-October, “which is about the time that Rams are put to Ewes in this country.” Shurtleff was careful to demonstrate his experience with sheep, perhaps to avoid being swindled. Or perhaps, he was simply another Boston merchant trying to pass as a practical farmer. Even David Humphreys vouched for the quality of Jarvis' Merinos, though he worried about the possibility of fraudulent stock slipping into the country.\(^{306}\)

Unbeknownst to his suitors, Jarvis was on the verge of flooding the American market with Merino sheep. On June 24th, Jarvis had coordinated with the British Commissary-General, Colonel John Dowdie, to jointly purchase the remnants of the famed Paular Cabana from the Spanish Junta. This flock totaled nearly 4000 sheep, of which Jarvis received 1400. Jarvis' portion of the flock was sent to Lisbon and then onward to various ports in the United States. A further 1000 of Dowdie's sheep were also sold to American buyers.\(^{307}\)


The United States was inundated with Merino sheep during the fall of 1810. On August 29th twenty-five of Jarvis’ sheep arrived in Philadelphia aboard the ship *Unity* and were put into the care of Levi Hollingsworth. Hollingsworth’s expectations were low, however, as a ship carrying 150 Merinos from Cadiz had arrived in the city only a few days prior. Luckily for Hollingsworth and Jarvis, a bidding-war between two local gentry farmers drove the price as high as $400 per head and the whole lot fetched nearly six thousand dollars. When Hollingsworth received a further shipment of 190 sheep in September, he sold the entire flock for $150 dollars per head. With so many sheep now arriving at Baltimore, Boston, and other ports, Hollingsworth was afraid that they could not all be sold at individual auction.308

Jarvis was no longer the only player in the game. One competitor, Charles Hall of New York, entered an agreement with Richard Hackley, the American Consul in Cadiz, to ship “as many Merino sheep as can be placed on board with safety.” In early September, Hall and Hackley obtained a flock of 420 Merino sheep from one Don Felix Merino. Though the flock consisted of both middle-grade rams and certified Infantado ewes, the sale was registered at a standard price of $55 dollars per head for a total of $23,000 dollars. Hall and Hackley employed Captains Ward and Ingraham of the ship *Maria Theresa*, the same ship that had recently ferried some of Jarvis’ Merinos to New York.309

Although Charles Hall made joking references to his "sheepish consignment" and "sheepish speculation," he did not take the subject of Merino sheep lightly. In a letter to

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Ward, he described the sheep as "not unlike one delivered in times of old by Father Noah, upon the top of Mount Ararat." Hall and Hackley provided meticulous instructions to Ward and Ingraham, including a complete description of the breed and best practices for their management. Hall crafted these instructions from advice he had received from a Spanish shepherd by the name of Ferdinand Inguez.310

Upon landing in New York, Ward and Ingraham were to sell the sheep for between $300 and $1000 per head. If such prices could not be had, Ward and Ingraham were to entertain an advantageous barter. To ensure the high price demanded, Hall and Hackley obtained certificates of breed from the Duke of Infantado, one of the most well-known breeders in Spain. Hall even colluded with one William Rogers of Providence to fix prices.311 These efforts could not, however, buoy the price of sheep against the flood of Merinos entering the American market. In December, Robert Livingston bought thirty-seven of Hall and Hackley’s sheep for just $100 per head. In March of 1811, Hall instructed Ward to sell any sheep at any price over $100. By April of 1814, Ward had still not sold all the Merinos and Hall instructed him to liquidate the flock.312

Soon after William Jarvis returned to the United States in December of 1810, the Spanish Junta attempted to re-criminalize the export of Merino sheep. The damage, however, had already been done. In a single year, William Jarvis had used his diplomatic post to personally send 4000 Spanish Merinos to the United States. In the years 1810 and

1811, up to 26,000 Merinos were sent to the United States, 19,000 of which survived the journey. The centuries-old Spanish monopoly on Merino sheep was broken and Spain would never again be a major player in the global sheep or wool markets. Though the crash in Merino sheep prices in late 1810 was dramatic, many American farmers and investors remained interested in the breed. Major importers shifted their attention from speculation to the growing manufacturing sector, which kept demand steady. Following the crash, Merino sheep still routinely sold for $50 per head and some pure-bred rams fetched more than $300. The Merino had cemented its position in the United States as an elite breed, rather than a passing fad.

Conclusion

As in South Africa, early American Merino breeders were wealthy members of the mercantile gentry with access to elite Transatlantic networks. They were guided by the Language of Wool to preach the virtues and value of pure-bred Merino sheep. Through vigorous self-promotion, they introduced their peers to the breed and won praise for their efforts. They succeeded, in this respect, because American and South African gentry shared common fears about the development of their countries, as well as a common desire to affirm their position as local elites. Their efforts to promote the breed among the general farming population, however, were unsuccessful. Most American farmers were indifferent to the breed, and many South African farmers were resistant to it.

Carter, His Majesty's Royal Flock, 362.

Despite these broadly similar motivations and outcomes, by 1810 important differences between American and South African Merino wool farming had emerged that foreshadowed a great divergence in the coming decades. Though limited, early attempts at manufacturing fine Merino wool in the United States were promising and well-publicized. And despite a crash in prices following the brief “Merino Mania,” Merino sheep continued to attract attention and quickly became established in the United States after 1810. A budding wool manufacturing industry and a large supply of high quality breeding sheep allowed for the emergence of a dynamic Merino wool economy in the United States after 1810. In South Africa, these conditions developed much more slowly if at all. This crucial distinction reflects the vast economic, demographic, and political divides between the United States and the Cape Colony of South African in the early nineteenth century.
CHAPTER FOUR: A PASTORAL FRONTIER? MERINO SHEEP IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1810-140

In June of 1819, the English botanist William John Burchell was called to testify before the House of Commons on a plan to place British settlers in the Cape Colony. Burchell’s career had taken him from the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, near London, to the island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic, and finally to the Cape Colony. Between 1810 and 1815, he traveled through the colony’s remote eastern districts in search of rare species. Burchell ultimately collected more than 50,000 plant specimens and formed a number of opinions about the Cape Colony and its people. Following his return to England, he published an account of his travels and a guide for future settlers, "Hints on Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope." Burchell’s experience at the Cape made him a natural candidate to testify before the House Select Committee. 315

In his testimony, Burchell was enthusiastic about placing settlers in the Colony’s isolated eastern regions. Like other British visitors to the Cape, he argued that the Colony had been mismanaged under the Dutch, who encouraged unproductive grazing rather than commercial farming of grain and vegetables. 316 Burchell disdained the Dutch settlers

316 Burchell, Hints on Emigration, 9.
of the Colony, who he considered actively opposed to progress, industry, and advancement. He lamented the fact that few Britons had settled outside of Cape Town and he hoped that the emigration scheme would help to change the character of the backward rural districts. Burchell suggested clustering British settlers close together so that they would not be "corrupted" by Dutch customs. In time, he argued, the colonists must become united "in speaking the English language, and in adopting English customs and laws." His chief concern was that the Dutch Boers, unable to match their new neighbors, might become "jealous" of "a new description of people, whose superior industry and methods may place them in the background." 317

Burchell described a Cape landscape ripe for development by industrious English settlers. He crowned the Albany region, the intended location of the new settlement, "the most beautiful, and probably the most productive part of Cape colony." Albany was situated within a grassland known as the Suurveld, which the Boers and Xhosa primarily used for grazing. Burchell, however, predicted that breaking the ground would be easy and farmers would soon turn a profit. He foresaw wine farms, tobacco plantations, corn fields, and peach orchards on the newly colonized land. Though the Suurveld had been a site of violent conflict between Boer and Xhosa herders for half a century, Burchell painted a rosy picture where new settlers could barter for native cattle and solve differences through solidarity and good manners. 318

It is surprising that Burchell, in his boosterism, said little about the promise of sheep and wool. Burchell's travel journal is littered with references to the native Cape

sheep and, unlike many European travelers, he did not shy from eating sheep tail or bundling in sheep skins. In the karoo region, Burchell had seen flocks of Cape sheep numbering in the thousands, and was amazed by the rapid increase and availability of these animals. Burchell addressed these flocks during his testimony to parliament, but only mentioned wool to describe its impracticality. In the massive, two-volume travel narrative that Burchell wrote for the general public, he never once mentioned Merino sheep.39

The year after Burchell’s testimony to the House of Commons, the British government did, in fact, sponsor an emigration program to the Suurveld region. Following the advice of Burchell and others, the British placed the emigrants in dense, agricultural communities designed to impart an English character on the landscape. Their efforts to grow grain, wine, and other crops, however, ended in disaster. Like the Boers before them, British settlers found that much of the Cape Colony was unsuitable for agriculture. Unable to farm a living, many settlers retreated into towns or quit the Colony altogether. But within little more than a decade some of these desperate colonists found their fortunes reversed. In fact, from the 1830's onward, the previously impoverished eastern regions of the Cape Colony accrued a greater and greater share of the Colony's wealth. This stunning reversal resulted almost entirely from the growth of Merino wool.

The success of Merino wool at the Cape must have come as quite the surprise to William Burchell. A fierce critic of Dutch-speaking settlers of the Cape, he was apparently unaware of their decades-long effort to introduce Merino sheep. He did not realize, for example, that several large Merino raising operations had been established by Dutch

settlers before and during his time at the Cape. Nor was he familiar with the efforts of successive Dutch and British colonial governments to promote the Merino breed. In fact, the improvements in trade and infrastructure created by the Dutch and British were slowly removing major obstacles to wool production at the Cape. Finally, Burchell failed to foresee the major political and demographic changes that would shape the Colony’s economy and society in the decades after his visit to the Cape. Each of these processes played a vital role in establishing the Merino wool industry in South Africa.

In 1810, there were perhaps 20,000 Merino sheep in the Colony. While this constituted a precipitous increase from just a few years prior, the national Merino flock was dwarfed by the roughly two million fat-tailed or Cape sheep that roamed the plains. The Cape Colony exported roughly 30,000 lbs of wool to England in 1810, but this clip barely registered against the six million pounds that London merchants annually imported from Spain, Germany, Australia, and elsewhere. Wool exports from the Cape were greatly overshadowed by exports of wine, wheat, meat, and hides. By 1850, however, the Colonial Merino flock numbered in the millions. In that year, the Cape Colony exported five million pounds of Merino wool, virtually its entire wool clip, accounting for 62% of all colonial exports.\(^{320}\)

The massive increase in wool production reflected and reinforced ongoing transformations in the economy, society, and environment of the Cape. Infrastructure and merchant trade within the Colony developed slowly, but significantly, over the first decades of the nineteenth century. Rural regions of the Cape became more connected to Cape Town and to the global economy. A wide range of events, including the abolition of

\(^{320}\) Keegan, Colonial South Africa, 116.
slavery, an influx of settlers from Europe and Africa, and violent colonial expansion, conspired to shift power away from Cape Town and toward the Colony’s eastern districts. These changes allowed for Merino wool farming to emerge as a commercial venture. And in turn, the stunning growth of Merino wool farming accelerated those same social and political developments. Eastern and interior districts of the colony suddenly became prosperous, attracting investment and new immigrants. Once desolate settlements turned into bustling towns and commercial centers almost overnight. The growth of wool also accelerated economic inequality as white settlers along the eastern Cape frontier pushed for the conquest of grazing land held by black South Africans. Within the Colony, black-owned land was increasingly expropriated and transferred to white owners. As blacks in the Colony were excluded from land ownership, many were increasingly forced into labor migrancy. Only a small number of blacks benefitted by entering wool economy as skilled laborers. For most, the growth of Merino wool only exacerbated their struggle to retain land and wealth. 321

The dramatic growth of wool production in the Cape has mostly been attributed to the arrival of the settlement party referred to in Burchell’s testimony, which arrived in the Albany district in 1820. Historians have correctly noted that, for a variety of reasons, most Boer farmers of the interior were uninterested in Merino sheep and preferred the native Cape sheep. William Beinart, for example, argued that environmental conditions and established production regimes in the colony favored Cape Sheep. Robert Ross and Saul Dubow both identified the Boers’ lack of capital, resulting from a pastoral economy that

relied on promissory notes and barter rather than cash, as an impediment to the wool market.³²²

Many of these same historians have been too quick to identify the 1820 settlers as the sole agents of transformational change in the Merino sheep industry. Alan Lester, for example, has argued that British settlers carried a model of "capitalist paternalism" into the Colony, resulting in a noticeable shift away from Dutch "slave paternalism."

Mordechai Tamarkin describes a stable 'moral economy' being supplanted by a 'Darwinian' English model based on efficiency and capitalist principles. According to this theory, the development of a global market economy and commodity trading served as the catalyst for the wool economy. William Beinart’s interpretation is more nuanced, acknowledging that early British settlers did, in fact, borrow significantly from the experience of established Boers. But Beinart ultimately agrees with Lester that the Albany settlers' attachment to British agricultural practices resulted in the adoption and growth of Merino sheep.³²³

These interpretations fall short of addressing the most central factors contributing to the growth of the Merino wool industry. Most importantly, historians have failed to recognize the role played by Dutch-speakers in spreading the Merino breed. Dutch officials introduced the breed prior to the British conquest and Dutch-speaking farmers established agricultural societies dedicated to promoting wool. These farmers, along with their servants and slaves, selectively bred and managed Merino flocks for three decades.

³²³ Beinart, Rise of Conservation in Southern Africa, 40-41; Lester, Imperial Networks, 60; Tamarkin, Volk and Flock, 209.
prior to 1820. They continued to play a central role in the Merino sheep industry in the decades following 1820 as well. The success of the wool industry was equally dependent on the development of intra-colonial trade and transportation, especially shipping. This branch of commerce was pioneered by Dutch and British colonists prior to, and independent of, the arrival of the 1820 settlers. These underreported efforts paved the way for an explosion in Merino wool production following profound political and economic developments in the Colony during the 1830s.

British settlers and governors in the Cape Colony quickly sought to cast themselves as modernizers who introduced capitalism, industry, and civilization to a backward and neglected land. They built upon existing European stereotypes that labeled the Colony's Dutch colonists lethargic and unsophisticated. Robert Ross, Timothy Keegan, Laura Mitchell and other historians have done much to counter this view. Dutch settlers at the Cape, including the most remote, rural Boers, were intricately tied to the global economy. Natascha Visser, in a critique of persistent misconceptions about the Boer economy, contends that "Trek farmers were not self-sufficient and had to interact with the market to acquire, for instance, wagons, firearms, clothing, worked metal, and tobacco. There is therefore no evidence for the existence of a trek farmer moral economy that withstood market pressures during a purported 'pre-capitalist' period at the Cape." Even in the absence of currency or capital markets, Cape farmers were acquisitive and entrepreneurial, often to the detriment of Khoi and other African people. Keegan, rejecting the idea that traditionalist Boers were victims of colonial expansion, counters
that the transhumant pastoralists "were not fleeing from the colonial nexus, but carrying it into the interior of Africa."\(^{324}\)

The limited success of South African Merino enthusiasts in the early nineteenth century was a consequence of demographic, economic, and environmental challenges at the Cape, rather than a lack of initiative. Unlike the United States, South Africa lacked the capital and infrastructure to support a large Merino wool market, not to mention wool manufacturing. South Africans did, however, encounter the same economic and cultural forces that prompted Americans to pursue Merino wool. Some colonists in the Cape Colony believed Merino sheep to be a worthwhile pursuit. Others found the security of the established Cape sheep economy more appealing than the uncertainty of raising Merino wool. When conditions became more favorable for Merino farmers, as they did from the 1830's onward, most farmers transitioned into the Merino wool economy.

**Wool Barons: Reitz, Breda, and Joubert**

In 1810, all Merino sheep in the Cape Colony could be loosely placed in two categories: the private flocks of the Cape Gentry and the public flocks of the Government experimental farms. Only a handful of Cape Gentry farmers dabbled in Merino wool, and they all shared several important traits. They were wealthy and Dutch-speaking, with land holdings in regions close to Cape Town, such as Overberg or Swartland. They were almost invariably connected to the van Reenen family, who had raised and bred Merinos at the Cape since 1792. The Government flock was concentrated at the Groote Post Farm in the

Groenekloof, near present-day Darling. This flock was directly descended from Gordon’s original sheep and was publicly owned and managed until 1826. Both government officials and private individuals at the Cape saw great promise in the Merino sheep and yet the growth of the breed was rather limited until the late 1820’s. Several significant developments occurred during this period, most notably the refinement of commercial wool operations. The wool industry, however, remained confined to the small, cosmopolitan world of the Cape gentry and the colonial government. Merino wool was pursued within an economic regime that had changed little since the time of the VOC.

Most private flocks of Merino sheep during this period were small, numbering a few hundred or less. Virtually all of these flocks contained Merino-Cape sheep crosses that produced wool of varying quality. These early Merino flocks were viewed more as curiosities than serious economic endeavors. The first private citizens to attempt raising Merino sheep on large scale were Jan Frederik Reitz, Michiel van Breda, and Josua Joubert, who formed a partnership for raising Merino wool in 1817. This partnership proved that wool farming could be profitable at the Cape and established breeding practices and measures that were followed throughout the colony, leading to the professionalization of wool farming. Like the van Reenens before them, Reitz, Breda, and Joubert came from wealthy, established, Dutch-speaking Cape families with merchant connections. But unlike, the van Reenens, these three partners had no prior experience with livestock. They were firmly metropolitan, their politics were moderate, and they were friendly toward the colonial government.

Jan Frederik Reitz was a former sea captain from the Netherlands who tried his hand at many maritime trades after settling in the Cape. In December of 1807, Reitz, along
with PL Cloete and William Anderson, established a whaling operation in False Bay, only the second whaling operation to open at the Cape. By June of 1809, Reitz was granted a lease to hunt seals along the southern Cape Coast. In September of 1809, Reitz and Cloete entered the merchant trade with the purchase of a vessel, the *Isabella*. Although the *Isabella* was most likely limited to short sorties around False Bay and along the southern coast, it was one of the first merchant ships based in the Colony. Reitz’s early business ventures showed an interest in establishing a viable export commodity, in the form of whale or seal oil, from the Cape region. Like wool, these products were demanded by the industrial economy of Great Britain. It is unsurprising that Reitz, with his naval background, was attuned to trends in global merchant trading.  

Michiel van Breda led the life of a more typical Cape Burgher. Van Breda was born in Cape Town to an old and established Cape Gentry family. Van Breda inherited the large family estate, Oranzejicht, now the site of an exclusive Cape Town suburb. He remained at the estate through his entire life and never left the Colony. Later in life, he served in the Burgher Senate, the Colonial Legislature, and, finally, as the Mayor of Cape Town. In

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325 Reitz’s whaling venture quickly ran into trouble when the first shipment of whale oil was turned away at the London Customs house and the partners were required to present further documentation of its legality. See CA CO 3864 427 “The Memorial of John Frederik Reitz to his Excellency, the Honourable Lieut. General Grey,” February 12th, 1807; CA CO 3866 533A “The Memorial of P.L. Cloete, J.F. Reitz, and Wm. Anderson to his Excellency the Earl of Caledon,” December 5th, 1807; CA CO 3869 275 “The Memorial of P.L. Cloete, J.F. Reitz, and Wm. Anderson to his Excellency the Earl of Caledon,” June 21st, 1808; CA CO 3873 405 “The Memorial of P.L. Cloete and J.F. Reitz to his Excellency the Earl of Caledon,” September 19th, 1809; CA CO 3873 256 “The Memorial of J.F. Reitz to his Excellency the Earl of Caledon,” June 5th, 1809; CA CO 3874 420 “The Memorial of P.L. Cloete and J.F. Reitz to his Excellency the Earl of Caledon,” October 4th, 1809.
politics, he was seen as a moderate. He was a vocal defender of slavery and slaveholders at the Cape, but avoided conflict with the British Government.\textsuperscript{326}

Reitz and van Breda had much in common, beyond their stature as members of the Cape Gentry. In February of 1810, they became neighbors when Reitz purchased a piece of wasteland adjacent to van Breda’s Oranjezicht Farm. They were also in-laws. Both Reitz and van Breda married daughters of Dirk Gysbert van Reenen, the pioneer of Merino wool at the Cape. Their father-in-law, whose Overberg farms were known throughout the Cape and even to international travelers, almost certainly introduced them to Merino sheep.\textsuperscript{327}

Furthermore, both Reitz and Breda used conservationist language to curry favor with the Cape government. In an application to renew his sealing license, Reitz wrote that his principle concern had always been “to preserve these islands as a continued source of supply.” By restricting the number of seals captured each year, he hoped avoid the fate of nearby islands, whose seals had been hunted to extinction. Reitz argued that he was taking a large risk by not taking the seal population en masse, but that his careful approach might allow the success of this “new and doubtful branch of export.”\textsuperscript{328}

Van Breda also leveraged his conservationist impulses for personal gain. After viewing van Breda’s garden of exotic plants, the Colonial Secretary, William Bird, described him as “the most experimental horticulturist at the Cape.” Given his botanical

\textsuperscript{326} Martina Louw, "Family History of Martina van Breda," unpublished, 1995, held by the South African National Library.

\textsuperscript{327} Dirk Gysbert van Reenen’s farm, Rhenosterfontein, was visited by William Burchell, Lady Anne Barnard, and the German travelers Friedrich von Buchenröder, and Henry Lichtenstein. See Burrows, \textit{Overberg Outspan}, 144-145. Lichtenstein wrote that Dirk Gysbert’s son, Daniel, kept the nicest estate in the District and that “the horses bred there are so fine, that they are very much sought for at the Cape Town as riding horses” See Henry Lichtenstein, \textit{Travels in Southern Africa in the years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806} (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1928), 203.

\textsuperscript{328} CA CO 3873 256 “The Memorial of J.F. Reitz to his Excellency the Earl of Caledon,” June 5th, 1809.
interest and his close relationship to Colonial officials, it is no surprise that van Breda was appointed to the reconstituted Cape Agricultural Commission in 1812. Van Breda leveraged his reputation to petition the government for land grants on several occasions from 1807 onward. Van Breda's petitions refer to “waste lands” on the edges of his property—parcels that were not claimed by other Burghers. In asking for such “waste lands” van Breda promised to elevate the soil into productivity through careful management, thus raising the value of the land and benefiting the Colony. Van Breda proposed to divert streams on Table Mountain to power watermills and allow grazing on dry tracts of land. His ideas were well received by British Colonial officials like Bird, who noted van Breda’s “progress in promoting agriculture.”

In December of 1812, Reitz purchased 5500 morgen of land from Louis Taillard near Cape Agulhas. The farm, Zoetendalsvlei, was named for its lake, the southernmost in Africa. Reitz added adjacent land the following year and set a flock of 1200 merino sheep to graze on the sandy plains. Reitz acquired these sheep from his in-laws, the van Reenen family, who had been refining their Merino-Cape crosses for 20 years. Reitz owned the farm by himself for the next four years, making the difficult journey from Cape Town only occasionally. It is unclear who was responsible for managing his flock, shearing his sheep.

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330 CA CO 3872 227 “The Memorial of Michiel van Breda to his Excellency Du Pré Earl of Caledon,” August 15th, 1808; CA CO 3867 60 “The Memorial of Michiel van Breda to His Excellency Du Pré Earl of Caledon,” January 22nd, 1808; CA CO 3892 77 “The Memorial of Michiel van Breda to His Excellency Sir J.F. Cradock,” April 27th, 1813; CA CO 3901 125 “The Memorial of Michiel van Breda to His Excellency Lieutenant General Lord Charles Henry Somerset” June 7th, 1815; CA CO 3903 14 “The Memorial of Michiel van Breda to His Excellency Lieutenant General Lord Charles Henry Somerset” October 29th, 1814.
331 A morgen is a Dutch unit of land measuring approximately .85 hectares.
or selling his wool during this time. By 1817, Reitz had fallen into ill health and decided to form a partnership with his neighbor and brother-in-law, Michiel van Breda.332

Van Breda’s control of the partnership led to profound changes in the management of the sheep and produced a wealth of documents that shed light on the farm’s daily operation, even though he was informally educated and wrote with difficulty. In fact, van Breda was a frequent contributor to Cape newspapers and prolific writer on the subject of Merino sheep. His personal journal, known as the *Groot Boek*, chronicled the business of the Zoetendalsvlei farm for nearly thirty years, from 1817 until 1844.333

Van Breda’s *Boek* begins with a short treatise on methods of sheep raising in Spain. As van Breda had never visited that country, he obviously copied these notes from some other source. That a Dutch-language publication on Merino sheep in Spain could be found in Cape Town by 1817 is a testament to the networks that spread knowledge of the breed throughout the Atlantic world and beyond. The second preface to van Breda’s *Boek* is a set of rules for managing the Zoetendalsvlei farm. Van Breda wrote these “Twenty-seven Articles of Instruction” (addressed to his overseer, Johannes Swart) in February of 1817. The first article clearly demonstrates van Breda’s priorities. It reads: “Since Spanish sheep are the sole source of revenue to this farm, they must receive first and best consideration.” The other rules address a range of practical concerns, such as when and how to shear the sheep or what to do in case the sheep became afflicted with diseases or parasites.

333 Burrows, *Overberg Outspan*, 98. Photocopies of pages from the *Groot Boek* are held in the Western Cape Archives Repository under CA VC 276 “The Diary of Michiel van Breda.”
guidelines also address horses and other aspects of the farm's operation, but the Merino sheep are clearly the center of attention.334

The majority of the Boek contains bills of sale, yearly profits and losses, prices of sheep and wool, and other business records. It also contains annual stock lists that show the number of rams, ewes, wethers, and lambs. These stock lists sometimes indicate the shepherds who were responsible for the various flocks on the farm. Their names (Bachgus, Carolus, Platje, Caatje, etc.) suggest that these shepherds were slaves.335 In the first years under van Breda’s management, the number of sheep at the farm barely increased at all. The 1817 total of 1727 sheep had reached only 1744 by 1820, having dipped to nearly 1500 in intervening years. This was likely a result of active culling as van Breda’s shepherds sought to purify the flocks of undesirable sheep. These were, after all, not pure-bred Merinos but Merino-Cape crosses. With each generation, however, the wool became finer and increasingly similar to the Spanish pure-bred. From 1820 onward, the number of sheep at the farm skyrocketed. While still numbering less than 2000 in 1821, by 1826 there were nearly 4000 sheep on the farm. By the end of the decade there were more than 5500.336

334 CA VC 276 “The Diary of Michiel van Breda.”
335 CA VC 276 “The Diary of Michiel van Breda.”
336 CA VC 276 “The Diary of Michiel van Breda.”
Figure 14: Michiel van Breda's 27 Rules for Managing the Farm. Cape Archives
Figure 15: A sample stock list from Michiel van Breda's *Groot Boek*. Cape Archives.
Reitz and van Breda were far from the only farmers raising Merino sheep at the Cape. Their operation was uniquely important to the future of Merino raising, however, for several reasons. First, Reitz and van Breda pursued Merino wool as a serious business venture. While the van Reenens and other gentry farmers kept the breed intact, they never made Merino sheep their primary focus. Their energy was devoted toward established products like meat, wine, and beer. In the words of one historian, the van Reenens were “agricultural dillettanti rather than serious wool farmers.” Another wrote that the earliest Cape wool farmers saw their Merinos as little more than “werft pets,” valuable for their novelty but little else. Zoetendalsvlei, far from the beaten track and carefully managed, was certainly not a showplace. By 1820, Reitz and van Breda’s operation produced a full one fifth of the Colony’s wool and, by 1829, accounted for nearly 40% of all wool exported from the Cape Colony.337

Second, the partners (especially van Breda) advertised their activities widely through newspapers in an attempt to cement their status as the premier breeders in the colony. In doing so, they brought awareness to Merino wool as a possible venture for Cape farmers. In an advertisement of January 21, 1824, van Breda offered “5,000 lbs of excellent Spanish Wool, the washing and management of which has been particularly attended to.”

In 1828, van Breda wrote to the South African Commercial Advertiser to boast of his increased wool production. He attributed this increase to “improvement in the

bloodstock” and the fact that his farm remained “almost the only one in the Colony run on a regular system.”

Third, Reitz and van Breda produced a large volume of certified breeding stock. This pool of stock was necessary to supply small farmers who wished to start their own flocks. The shepherds at Zoetendalsvlei monitored and managed their Merino sheep to a degree not seen on other farms. Through systematic breeding, they rapidly increased the percentage of Merino blood in the flock and thereby increased fleece weights. The farm’s success, self-promotion, and strict system of management certified the value of their stock in the eyes potential buyers. Even as the center of wool production shifted to the colony’s eastern regions in later decades, the Overberg region, and Zoetendalsvlei in particular, remained the center of Merino breeding at the Cape.

The Government Farms

Though most Merino sheep in the Cape Colony were held by private individuals, the Colony’s public flocks were also noteworthy. Like the VOC before them, the British government operated a system of experimental farms from 1806 until the middle of the 1820’s. Some served principally to supply colonial troops with provisions, while others were meant to improve agricultural methods or to advance stock breeding. Groote Post Farm, near present day Darling, was home to the Colony’s Merino flock. The first Merino sheep landed by Colonel Gordon were kept here, conveniently close to the van Reenen family farms. While the Groote Post Farm was designed to promote agricultural

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339 Peter Wickins, “State and Private Enterprise,” 53; Burrows, Overberg Outspan, 87.
improvement, it rarely lived up to its purpose. Activities at the farm had surprisingly little impact on the development of the wool industry, although Merinos were bred and raised there continuously from the 1790’s until 1826. The farm’s shortcomings can be largely attributed to the series of unfit supervisors.

The first superintendent of the Groote Post farm under the British, James Onslow Williams, did not leave much of a record during his employment but his activities there can be deduced from later correspondence. Williams was granted a farm of his own in 1811 after citing his work “stocking the [Groote Post] farm with Spanish Sheep and the best Breeding Cattle.” Williams later applied for a reduction of his rent, citing, “the improvement of stock, or the pledge to improving the Agricultural Pursuits, which your Excellency has so wisely promulgated to the Public to be the great source of Wealth and happiness in a community.” Williams claimed that “his Cattle are inferior to none and that his Spanish Sheep will presently become as fine as any in the Colony.” Despite his claims, Williams was unable to support his family through farming and instead held a succession of middling government posts for the rest of his life.

Williams was succeeded by Richard van Blerk, a notoriously harsh man who generated complaints from his neighbors as well as workers at the farm. In 1811, Jacob van Reenen (the son of Sebastiaan Valentyn van Reenen) protested van Blerk’s treatment of Khoisan workers at the Groote Post Farm by petitioning the government. Though free

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340 CA CO 3883 250 “The Memorial of Francis Dashwood Esquire and James Onslow Williams Esquire to His Excellency Du Pré Earl of Caledon,” June 4th, 1811; CA CO 3883 251 “The Memorial of Francis Dashwood Esquire and James Onslow Williams Esquire to His Excellency Du Pré Earl of Caledon,” received July 6, 1811.

subjects, Blerk prohibited these workers from engaging in other employment and threatened them with prison if they resisted. In 1812, a prisoner named Johan Christiaan Davids, sent to Groote Post as a reading tutor, complained of constant abuse by van Blerk. Van Blerk complained of a low salary and resigned in 1813, accepting a government land grant given in recognition of his services.  

The farm’s next superintendent, Thomas Crowcher, arrived in the Cape as part of William Duckitt’s party in 1800. Crowcher seemed rather uninterested in the position itself, rarely communicating with his government agent, Mr. Klerk, after 1815. Klerk suspected that Crowcher had been ordering wine and brandy for personal use on the Farm’s account, a suspicion shared by the farm assistant John Gowan. In this dreadful procession of farm managers, Gowan seems to have been the one most attuned to the Merino flocks and other needs of the farm. He sent regular updates to Klerk about the flocks, purebred horses, and cattle at the farm. He made sure that the Merinos were shorn and attended to their distribution through the colony. Despite his diligence, governmental neglect for the institution continued to show. On October 18, 1816 Gowan wrote to Klerk that “The Cape Hamels is all killed and we must kill Spanish Sheep unless we gett sum more, which we cannott gett until you sen a lert.” It is remarkable that the farm would resort to slaughtering valuable Merinos for meat, which was so widely available in

342 Van Blerk’s behavior irked the young van Reenen, who was owed payment in labor from some of these workers, see CA CO 3882 140 “The Memorial of Jacob van Reenen to His Excellency Du Pré Earl of Caledon,” April 15th, 1811. See also CA CO 3890 624 “The Memorial of Johan Christian Davids to His Excellency Lieut. General John Francis Cradock,” June 17th, 1812; CA CO 3892 59 “Memorial of Richard van Blerk,” 1813.
343 CA Groote Post Farm (GPF) Box 1, Volume 1 “Klerk to Crowcher,” 7–18–1817 and CA GPF 1-1 “Gowan to Klerk,” 5-2-1817.
the Cape. Such a conclusion is perhaps the most egregious example of mismanagement of the farm.344

Sir Charles Henry Somerset instituted major changes at the farm after he became Governor of the Cape Colony in 1814. Since the time of the VOC, government farms had been managed by an agricultural commission comprised of established Dutch farmers. In 1815, Somerset suddenly disbanded the commission and took personal control of the Government farms. The decision was unpopular with many in the colony who believed Somerset used the farms for his own gain. Critics alleged that the Camps Bay farm became a picnic ground for Somerset and his guests, while Groote Post became host to Somerset’s hunting expeditions. Despite his corrupt management of the farms, Somerset took a keen interest in Merino breeding. He imported Merino sheep directly from England on several occasions, including 35 “real Spanish” sheep (10 rams and 25 ewes) in 1814 and 60 sheep (10 rams and 50 ewes) of the “pure Merino breed” in 1818. Somerset ordered his last shipment of four Merinos in 1824 for “the purpose of keeping up the breed.” Somerset concentrated on importing foreign stock because he feared the Cape Merinos were degenerating due to interbreeding with Cape sheep.345 Somerset obtained his Merinos from the British Royal Flock at Kew Gardens, which had been started by Sir Joseph Banks and George III in 1785. They were descended from the small, hardy Negretti flock and well suited to the arid climate and short, sparse grass of the Cape. Somerset grazed his imported Merinos at

344 CA GPF 1-1 “Gowan to Klerk,” 10-14-1816; CA GPF 1-1 “Gowan to Klerk,” 10-18-1816; CA GPF 1-1 “Gowan to Klerk,” 12-22-1816; and CA GPF 1-1 “Gowan to Klerk,” 5-2-1817.
Groote Post and, eventually, some were sold to private wool growers at the Cape. Michiel van Breda and Jan Frederik Reitz purchased six of these sheep (three rams and three ewes) for 300 rixdollars in 1817.\footnote{McKee, \textit{South African Sheep and Wool}, 4; Reitz, \textit{Cape Agriculture}, 17.}

But as Sandra Swart has detailed, Somerset was most interested in another quadruped, the horse. During his tenure as Governor, Somerset managed to establish a near monopoly on the importation of Thoroughbred racing horses. Between March 1814 and August 1824, Somerset imported and sold 23 Thoroughbreds while all other private individuals sold just 36 during the same period. Somerset used the government farms to pasture his thoroughbreds and then ordered the government farms to purchase his private stock.\footnote{Swart, \textit{Riding High}, Chapter 3. Also see \textit{Accusations Preferred Against Lord Charles Somerset by Sir Rufane Donkin in his Published Letter to Earl Bathurst, Dated Park-Street, Grosvenor-Square, April 6, 1827; With Lord Charles Somerset’s Explanations} (London: Shackell and Baylis, 1827), 21 and 76.} He eventually came under scrutiny for his (literal) horse trading practices and was dragged before the Commission of Inquiry. His fiercest opponent, Charles D’Escury, the Inspector of Lands and Woods, argued for the closure of the Government Farms, which had accomplished little more than the “mal-application of 25,308 Acres of Land, wastefully occupied by that establishment, through mismanagement of the same.” He argued that Merino sheep were already sufficiently distributed throughout the Colony, and with the growth of merchant houses at the Cape, individual farmers and breeders were now free to import the stock of their choosing. D’Escury’s criticisms were ultimately dismissed by the Commissioners of Inquiry, who believed his attacks were politically motivated. Governor Somerset’s reputation was sullied, however, and he was soon recalled. Without the autocratic presence of Somerset, the Government Farms were
disbanded in 1827. The Agricultural Commission themselves had recommended this action in 1815, shortly before the commission was dissolved on Somerset’s orders.348

Ironically, the government farms were perhaps most effective at advancing the dissemination of Merino sheep through their own disbandment, as the last years of the Groote Post Farm saw dramatic a sell-off of the prized Merino flock. From 1817 onward, Somerset claimed to annually offer Merino sheep from Groote Post for sale to willing buyers, though it is unclear how many sheep were sold, to whom, and through what means. In 1825, 40 Merino Rams were sent from Groote Post to Albany to be sold. Somerset intended to establish an annual shipment of seventy Merino rams to the east, but this plan was cut short by his recall to England.349 As preparations were made to break-up the Groote Post Farm, an inventory was taken of the stock remaining there. The farm included breeding stock of 42 thoroughbred Merino rams, 54 thoroughbred Merino ewes, and 416 three parts bred ewes. In addition, the most recent lambing season had brought 20 thoroughbred Rams and 72 thoroughbred Merino ewes. When forwarding this inventory to the Colonial Home Office, Major-General Bourke highlighted the value of these stock. He wrote to Earl Bathurst, “I shall avail myself of any opportunity that may offer for getting some of the Stock and particularly Sheep sent into the Interior for the improvement of the Breed.” Though still one of the larger flocks in the Colony, the Groote

Post flock was by this point a far cry from the days before Somerset’s rule, when it numbered over 2,000.  

Somerset fought against the closure of the Groote Post farm until the bitter end, long after it became clear that its days (and his) were numbered. In November of 1826, Somerset wrote to Robert Hay, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, to protest the closure. Somerset argued that even if “a rent be obtained of 10 times or even 20 times the value of the land... the breaking up of the establishment would be a fatal blow to the future prosperity and agricultural interests of the Colony.” Somerset recognized that much of the vast Cape colony was only suitable for grazing and he placed a great value on “improved breeds,” which he believed could only “be procured from Europe.”

The failure of the Groote Post Farm reflected the continuation of failed policies that had plagued earlier attempts to introduce Merino sheep during the transitional governments. Like van Ryneveld, Janssens, and Caledon before him, Somerset did not find value in the native fat-tailed Cape sheep. Wool farming, like the farming of wheat or other crops, was considered a respectable agricultural interest. Boer pastoralism, based on transhumance and the use of African breeds, was considered wasteful and unscientific. Most importantly, Somerset did not trust the colonists to make the correct decisions regarding agricultural improvement, nor did he seek their input. Somerset’s autocratic administration of the government farms aligned with other aspects of his governorship, such as restricting the press. In the line of colonial administrations, however, Somerset’s

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rule was not exceptional. Rather, his rule typified colonial approaches to governance at the Cape, which were elitist and often aloof from the concerns of the colonists. Early British governors of the Cape, like the VOC before them, considered the Cape a "strategic way-station to the east," rather than a constituency in itself.352

Private and public efforts to expand Merino wool at the Cape failed to alter a colonial economy that had changed little since the time of the VOC. The rural economy of the Cape continued to depend on semi-subsistence pastoral grazing regimes and commercial activity was mostly limited to Cape Town and the arable lands surrounding it. Wine, produced by slaves on large plantations, still accounted for 60% of the Colony's exports, while wool exports barely registered. The total number of Merino sheep in the colony remained under 20,000 into the mid-1820's.353

Despite this stasis, many historians view the 1820's as a seminal period when the Cape economy began to shed the monopolistic model inherited from the VOC. According to Saul Dubow, this period marked the "transformation from an agrarian-based Dutch colonial slave society to an extensive and expanding English colony in which commerce and internal trade were assuming increasing importance." Some, like Robert Ross and Timothy Keegan, have partly attributed this change to the legalization of trade with neighboring Xhosa people. Others, like Jeff Peires, have pointed to the rise of an industrial economy in Britain and changes in the Cape government. These changes were exemplified by the Commission of Inquiry, a body designed to introduce effective government and free

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352 Dubow, Commonwealth of Knowledge, 20.
enterprise to the Cape. In addition to educational reforms intended to 'Anglicize' the Colony, the Commission eliminated many of the long-established monopoly contracts granted to butchers, brewers, and wine makers. This action, described as "a veritable St. Bartholomew's day Massacre" by Jeff Peires, devastated the Cape gentry. While these changes in government policy have not gone unnoticed, most historians have emphasized the role of the 1820 settlers in this economic transformation.354

**British Invasion: The 1820 Settlers**

The 1820 Albany settlement scheme was one of many emigrations supported by the British Government. Families who were struggling in Britain believed they could enjoy greater prosperity in the Cape Colony and colonial officials believed the new settlers would improve the local economy. Contemporaries cited the small settler population as the Cape's major economic weakness and welcomed a larger market and labor pool. Furthermore, by placing settlers near the Colony's frontier, the colonial government hoped to stabilize the region, which was plagued by constant warfare between colonial and African forces.355 The 1820 settlement scheme was novel in that it was both voluntary and highly competitive. The 4,000 settlers chosen by the Colonial Office were selected from over 90,000 applicants. The demand suggests, as James Belich argues, that emigration following the Napoleonic Wars had shed the "pejorative connotation" of earlier schemes based on indentured labor, penal servitude, and other forms of forced

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The settlers that arrived in the Albany region were united by their Methodist beliefs and their aspirations toward a respectable, middle class lifestyle, but they were hardly a homogeneous group. In fact, they were drawn from different social classes, including the landed gentry, artisans and professionals, and laboring classes. They entered the settlement scheme through a tiered system of proprietary, joint-stock, and parish parties. Parish parties were drawn from the working poor, while proprietary parties were led by landholders. This system served to reproduce the home island’s class divisions in the Colony, as Alan Lester has demonstrated. \(^{357}\)

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\(^{356}\) Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 147; Lester, *Imperial Networks*, 49.

The 1820 settlers were expected to settle in agricultural communities, where they would provide a bulwark against Xhosa expansion and raiding. Unfortunately, the 1820 settlers failed in their initial attempts to farm the eastern Cape region for two reasons. First, they did not adapt to the environment by adopting proven local techniques, as the Boers had done. The British settlers continued English farming practices, although they had little value at the Cape. Second, the British settlers were an aspirant group who were largely unsatisfied with the rural subsistence lifestyle expected of them at the Cape. The British settlers quickly discovered that intensive agriculture was difficult, if not impossible, in much of the dry eastern Cape region. By the end of the first year, settlers were writing to complain that grain crops were failing and were perhaps unsuited to the land.³⁵⁸ By 1823, it was apparent that the settlement had failed agriculturally. A report from a settler, David Francis, written in June of that year clearly lists the problems faced by Albany farmers. Francis, who was nearly bankrupt, explained that English style agriculture on small plots was impossible in the region. There was little water and even grazers were forced to keep separate summer and winter farms. Too many mechanics, artisans, and former soldiers had been sent to the Colony, all lacking in agricultural experience. And furthermore, the nearest port at Algoa Bay was more than one hundred miles away. Francis asked, “What would a farmer in England think of carting a load this distance to a market for forty rixdollar or four pounds sterling?”³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ “Letter from Colonel Strutt to Robert Wilmore Esq., Cumberland Place, 7 June 1823,” in RCC Vol. 16, 53-60.
The Boers had adapted to these conditions by adopting local practices like kraaling, trekking, and grass-burning. They also accepted a pastoral economy that brought them only limited access to cash and goods. The sale of cattle, tallow, soap, candles, and other animal products linked the Boers to European markets, but only marginally. Though many Boers were rich in land and livestock, they were cash poor. The 1820 settlers did not easily adapt to this type of subsistence. Many were accustomed to commercial trades or, at least, to farming produce for market. Boer pastoralism was unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and seemingly unprofitable. Most of the 1820 settlers, therefore, did not consider transhumance a respectable way of life. After suffering agricultural failures, the 1820 settler George Pigot lamented that he had “no other prospects than following the Dutch Boors’ system... for I am fully convinced by experience we can never grow grain to any extent”³⁶⁰ In the faltering agricultural settlements, women, by necessity, worked as agricultural laborers alongside men. This became a source of embarrassment for those who believed that respectable women should not work in the field. In addition, relations between the British settlers and neighboring Xhosa were difficult and marked by stock theft on both sides. The resulting instability caused settlers to feel exposed, insecure, and besieged in their rural locations. The combination of failure and disorder led many British settlers to abandon their rural positions for Grahamstown or other towns. They quickly embraced commercial trades that might provide them with the standard of living they expected. While some settlers may have truly wanted to live out a pastoral existence at the

Cape, it seems that many never intended to abandon commercial life. In the words of Jeff Peires, these settlers were “unwilling, rather than unable to make a living off the land.”

Unlike the Cape gentry, the 1820 settlers lacked access to arable land or to capital in the form of enslaved people. They were not tied to existing crops, such as wine grapes, and they were not sympathetic to the Cape liberal tradition. Unlike the Boers, the 1820 settlers did not respect or adopt African livestock breeds or the tested livestock management regime of transhumant pastoralism. Nor were the 1820 settlers content to enter the Boer pastoral economy based on the barter of animal meat and fat. These characteristics positioned the 1820 settlers to pursue Merino wool. In fact, some of the Albany settlers had arrived at the Cape with Merino sheep already on their mind.

Miles Bowker, leader of a proprietary party, wrote of his intention to start a Merino flock at the Cape while still in England. In his letters to Henry Goulburn, the Under-Secretary of State for War and Colonial Affairs, Bowker boasted that he had perfected the “assorting and scouring of wool... in the Spanish manner.” Like van Breda and Reitz, Bowker used his agricultural experience to impress government officials. He presented Goulburn with a barrage of questions on the prospects of raising wheat, corn, and potatoes at the Cape. He asked about the presence of navigable rivers, the availability of cattle and horses, and the prospects of fertilizing and tilling the soil. But Bowker was particularly interested in sheep-raising at the Cape. Bowker asked “What kind of sheep are used as fittest, and if part of the Country is not calculated for large sheep, and other parts hilly and fit for highland or merinos, and if merinos are to be had, and considered fittest,

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and the price; and if this kind of wool was well managed in the Saxon or Spanish way it would not answer a good purpose for a Home Market.363

Bowker’s questions suggest he was ignorant of the Cape climate and local methods of sheep-raising. The "large sheep" he referred to were English long-wool breeds that had been developed for both wool and meat. While Bowker was open to raising either long-wool or Merino sheep, the native fat-tailed Cape sheep was entirely alien to him. Bowker was keen, however, in understanding that Merino wool could be profitable as an export to England. It is interesting that he never suggested manufacturing wool within the Cape Colony itself. This lack of interest distinguished Bowker and other South African Merino enthusiasts from their American counterparts, who were often drawn from, or drawn into, the world of powered industry.

In many ways, Bowker was an archetypal leader of the proprietary parties. As a member of the gentry who was no longer able to support his family in England, he hoped to replicate his former lifestyle in South Africa. The first Albany settlers to seriously pursue Merino wool farming were all proprietary leaders of this gentry class. George Pigot, Miles Bowker, Richard Daniell, Charles Griffiths, Thomas Phillips, Daniel Campbell, and Thomas White were all proprietary leaders who later became large wool growers. Most of these men became interested in Merino sheep after they had failed in their first attempts to make a living at the Cape. Those who remained in the east applied for larger and larger

363 "Miles Bowker to Henry Goulburn Wilton July 15th, 1819," in RCC Vol. 12, 253; “Letter from Miles Bowker to Henry Goulburn London, July 24th, 1819,” in RCC Vol. 12, 266. Bowker was certainly not the only settler to highlight agricultural experience when applying to the Colonial Office. George Pigot wrote that his knowledge of “different systems of agriculture in various climates” prepared him to lead a proprietary party at the Cape, see “Letter from Captain George Pigot to Earl Bathurst Newbury, August ist 1819,” in RCC Vol.12, 277.
grants of land, as they pivoted toward stock raising and abandoned cultivation.\textsuperscript{364} These settlers, likely exposed to agricultural societies in England, were well versed in the language of agricultural improvement. They favored public programs to support agriculture and cared little for indigenous economies that did not produce cash. The settler David Francis argued that the government should reserve the Albany district for grazing and provide colonists with European breeds of sheep and cattle. He specifically asked for Merino sheep and even suggested that rams of all other breeds should be culled. Francis’ comment shows an impressive, if common, disregard for the Cape sheep and the Boer economy that it supported.\textsuperscript{365}

Like Merino enthusiasts in the United States, the Albany settlers were effective self-promoters who framed their Merino sheep operations as progressive and enlightened. Through organs like the Grahamstown Journal, settlers cast themselves as a civilizing force in a primeval and barbaric land. By the 1830’s, they had constructed histories of their recent past to support their triumphant legacy. Depictions of the Cape as a fertile and peaceful oasis, as promised by boosters like William Burchell, were replaced with images of desolation. At the same time, the misery and failure experienced by many of the first settlers was erased from early histories. These revisions supported the narrative of a

\textsuperscript{364} For example, Charles Griffiths and Thomas White jointly led an ill-fated party to settle near the River Zonderend in 1820. Within six months, the settlement was in ruin, and the settlers were forced to return to Cape Town. See CA CO 3918 306 “The Memorial of Charles Griffith, Valentine Griffith, and Thomas White to His Excellency Sir Rufane Donkin,” July 3rd 1820. For land grant extensions to Pigot, Bowker, Daniell, Campbell, Phillips and others, see “Letter from Harry Rivers, Esqre to the Commissioners of Enquiry, Graham’s Town 12\textsuperscript{th} February 1824,” in RCC Vol. 17, 77-78 and “Letter from Harry Rivers, Esqre, to the Commissioners of Inquiry, Graham’s Town 18\textsuperscript{th} February 1824,” in RCC Vol. 17, 83.

\textsuperscript{365} Francis also recommended that only European bulls should be kept, so as “to improve the cattle,” see “Letter from Colonel Strutt to Robert Wilmore Esq., Cumberland Place, 7 June 1823,” in RCC Vol. 16, 53-60.
virtuous and industrious people rising from the desert. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the Albany settlers and their descendants claimed responsibility for introducing Merino sheep and ignored the efforts of Dutch colonists before them. This claim has proved remarkably resilient in South African historiography.³⁶⁶

**Grass Roots: Agricultural Societies in the Cape Interior**

In the years following 1820, agricultural societies were established throughout the colony’s eastern and interior regions. Although it is tempting to attribute this development to the arrival of the 1820 settlers, many agricultural societies were established in Dutch-dominated districts like Swellendam, Graaff-Reinet, and Uitenhage. More likely, the rise of local agricultural societies reflected the decline of the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Commission that was disbanded by Governor Somerset. The first of these local societies, “The Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and the Breeding of Cattle, in the Interior of the Cape of Good Hope,” was established in Graaff-Reinet on March 1, 1824. As the society’s “principal object” was to “encourage the breeding of sheep producing fleecy wool,” Governor Somerset, gifted twelve certified Merino rams to start a breeding flock. These were referred to as “Vaderland Rams,” which suggests that Dutch-speaking farmers dominated the society.³⁶⁷ The “Uitenhage Agricultural and Horticultural Society,” founded in 1827, pledged to support “the breeding of Cattle and Sheep and the growth of Corn.” However, the adoption of Merino wool was clearly their principal

concern. In their founding statement, members of the society pledged to spread Merino sheep throughout the eastern districts, which were, regretfully, dominated by native fat-tailed sheep. The society predicted success by claiming that the Cape “bears a great resemblance to those parts of Spain where the extensive flocks of Sheep are pastured.” It is unclear on what basis the author drew this conclusion, but it is true that the districts of Uitenhage, Somerset, and Graaff-Reinet eventually proved amenable to Merino flocks.368

Growing interest in Merino sheep led to uneven growth in wool production. In the more metropolitan districts near Cape Town, both English and Dutch settlers dabbled in Merino sheep. James Gosling of Hottentots Holland had a large enough flock to offer “300 Merino Ewes, the whole of them in excellent condition, and in lamb by Rams of the very best breed” at a public sale in May of 1823. Gosling was a personal friend of Governor Somerset and an accomplished breeder. His other trophies included ”Bastard European Bulls,” ”Vaderlands Cows,” and ”a thorough-bred Colt, rising 5 years old, got by Bobtail, out of the celebrated English Mare Anna.” 369 When Hendrik van Niekerk liquidated all of his livestock in January of 1825, he offered 1500 Cape sheep, 200 goats, and 500 Merino sheep ”of the best breed.” While Niekerk’s holding were less impressive than Goslings, he could still claim ”100 trained oxen,” ”100 excellent milch cows,” and ” some young Stallions by Cricketer.”370 Advertisements placed in the South African Commercial Advertiser during November 1826 included large Merino flocks offered for public sale in the Groenekloof and near Swellendam.371

368 “Memorial of the Uitenhage Agricultural and Horticultural Society,” in RCC Vol. 28, 363-368.
In the more rural regions of the interior, where most grazing land was located, Merino sheep continued to lag behind the Cape sheep. Few interior farmers had the capital to purchase Merino breeding stock or to hire the shearers needed to process Merino wool. Even fewer understood how to manage, breed, and shear Merino sheep. As late as 1825, there was not a single pair of sheep shears in the whole Graaff-Reinet district, nor a skilled shearer to be hired.372 Civitas and Veritas, anonymous contributors to the South African Commercial Advertiser, blamed the local agricultural societies for their failure to spread the breed.373 An editorial of May 20, 1829 in the same paper blamed Cape farmers who were unwilling to pay for pure-bred Merino stock.374

Furthermore, some rural farmers retained their affection for the native Cape sheep, much to the chagrin of those in favor of Merinos. In 1825, an Uitenhage farmer wrote to the Commercial Advertiser calling for the creation of an agricultural society to educate local farmers who were ignorant of improvements in farming techniques. Although some had begun to discuss Merino sheep, the farmer sensed "a lurking feeling of attachment for big-tailed sheep, on the part of the Boors, for which it is difficult to account." The farmer alleged that "the rust" (a wheat disease) "does not occasion one tenth of the loss that is caused by the predilection to these unseemly animals, with their preposterous appendages." Not only were the Cape sheep ugly, in this author's opinion, they required good pasturage and nearly as much care as the Merino. The author concluded with the assertion that the Boers' unreasonable affection for the Cape sheep resulted in the loss of

1,000,000 pounds of potential wool export each year.\textsuperscript{375} An article in the \textit{Commercial Advertiser} in January 1826 alleged that many farmers had made strides in the "improvement of their sheep" but had since "reverted to the genuine 'broad tail.'"\textsuperscript{376}

Cape farmers who were frustrated by the slow progress of Merino wool looked to the Australian colony of New South Wales, where Merino sheep dominated range lands. Ironically, the Australian Merino industry had only begun in 1795 when British naval officers imported sheep from Robert Jacob Gordon's flock. By 1820, however, New South Wales contained over 300,000 Merino sheep and exported Merino wool in large quantities. Contributors to Cape newspapers noted the success of Australian wool with a mixture of jealousy and admiration. A writer to the \textit{South African Commercial Advertiser} on October 25, 1828 attributed the success of Australian wool to the agricultural societies of the Colony, which met monthly. The writer lamented that in the absence of such societies, the cultivation of specialty crops that thrive in the Cape, such as Merino wool, "has hitherto been neglected."\textsuperscript{377} These writers' anger may have been misdirected, as it is more likely that structural and environmental factors enabled Australian success. Peter Wickins argued that Australian wool was advantaged by relative political stability, the absence of competing export goods, and the vast amount of pasture land available in interior Australia. While Cape farmers may not have apprised these advantages, they were acutely aware of being outpaced by their Australian counterparts.\textsuperscript{378}

\textsuperscript{377} "Letter to the Editor," \textit{South African Commercial Advertiser}, October 25, 1828, 2.
Sea Lanes: Connecting the Cape Interior to the World Economy

The greatest impediment to wool production at the Cape was the difficult nature of transportation within the colony. As the only viable market for Cape wool was in London, all wool needed to be transshipped through Cape Town, the colony’s only port of entry. For wool farmers in interior districts, this represented a serious impediment. The colony’s roads and bridges were in poor condition and it could take weeks for farmers to make the journey. Boer pastoralists had the advantage of driving their flocks and herds to Cape Town on the hoof, where they were then slaughtered. But wool farmers were faced with the prospect of carrying bulky fleece in carts over difficult passages. The cost and difficulty of transportation alone would have made wool farming impractical for many farmers. The improvement of intra-colonial shipping was, therefore, critical to the development of Merino wool.379

The first internal shipping routes were established by a small group of Cape Town merchants following the second British invasion of the Cape. These routes reflected increased trading in the southern Atlantic and Indian oceans resulting from the Napoleonic Wars. During and after these wars, large British garrisons were stationed at several ports near the Cape, namely St. Helena and the Mascarene Islands. Cape Town merchants, accustomed to trade with military posts, were active in provisioning these troops. Among the first was John Ebden, who partnered with a London merchant named George Watts. In 1810, Ebden and Watts purchased the brig, Fancy, and began trading

379 George Pigot, one of the first of the 1820 settlers to pursue wool, called for a direct shipping route between England and the small port at the mouth of the Kowie River. Pigot argued that “if one ship in the year would visit us, it would be a stimulus for exertion.” See “Letter from Captain George Pigot to Earl Bathurst” Newbury, August 1, 1819, in RCC Vol. 12, 277. See also Wickins, “South Africa and Australia,” 39-41; Muller, “The State and the Development of the Cape,” 71.
along the southern Cape coast. The ship’s first voyage carried it to Plettenberg Bay and then onward to Isle Bourbon (Reunion). Another merchant, Hamilton Ross, entered the coastal trade with purchase of the brig, Maria in 1811. Within the year, Ross had gained license to trade with St. Helena and Isle de France (Mauritius) as well. In time, both Ebden and Ross would become heavily involved in the Merino sheep and wool trades.380

Prior to 1820, it was rare for European ships to visit any harbors between Cape Town and Delagoa Bay. The few ships that ventured to Mossel Bay and Plettenberg Bay did so at the high risk of landing in dangerous conditions for the meager rewards. The first viable port along the southern coasts, Port Beaufort, was established at the mouth of Breede River in the Overberg. Although Governor George Yonge and DG van Reenen had recommended opening a port at this location as early as 1800, nothing was done until Benjamin Moodie, a recent immigrant from Scotland, opened a trading post in 1817. In 1822, another recent immigrant, Joseph Barry, opened a second post at the port. By 1823, Barry owned his own brig, the Locust, and held a stake in two other coasting vessels. He opened a second store in Swellendam and by 1825 he had completely overtaken Moodie. Barry quickly expanded his business by offering to pay Overberg farmers in cash for their products, absorbing their risk on the Cape Town Market.381


The arrival of a secure cash market for produce encouraged farmers to invest in export goods, including wool. Without the burden of high transportation costs, small farmers in the region could now safely consider experimenting with Merino sheep. It is unsurprising that Merino wool production in the Overberg exploded following the establishment of Barry’s trading network. In 1829, there were 7,577 Merinos in the Overberg, approximately 5,000 of which were held by Michiel van Breda and Jan Frederik Reitz. By 1833, there were more than 30,000. Over 20,000 of these sheep were held by small producers outside of the Breda-Reitz partnership, a spectacular ten-fold increase over a four-year period.\(^{382}\)

Further to the east, the development of Port Elizabeth at Algoa Bay had an even greater impact on the growth of Merino wool in the Colony. The first European trading post in the area was established by Thomas Ferreira in the late eighteenth century, but a more stable trading environment was not created until the arrival Frederik Korsten in 1812. Korsten was a Dutchmen by birth who first arrived at the Cape in 1795 as part of a failed expedition to reestablish Dutch control. Over the next eighteen years, he led a rather unsettled life, traveling between the Cape, England, Holland, and the United States. Korsten was a merchant who sometimes engaged in dubious practices, such as the transshipment of "prize goods" captured from the East India Company while England and Holland were at war.\(^{383}\)


Korsten’s first venture in Algoa Bay was a salting factory at “Papenkuils Fontein,” later known as “Cradock Place.” The presence of easily accessible salt pans and cattle grazing lands made this an ideal location for producing salted meat. The British garrisons at St. Helena and Mauritius required large amounts of meat and, at its height, Korsten’s factory slaughtered and salted 40 oxen per day. Cradock Place also served as an informal market where interior farmers bought and sold goods for the coastal trade with Cape Town. Korsten operated a cooperage, a windmill, and a tannery at the site. The development of Cradock Place allowed for the establishment of nearby Port Elizabeth as the second major port in the Cape Colony. With the opening of a customs house in 1826, goods could be exported to foreign countries directly from Algoa Bay.\(^{384}\)

Like Merino pioneer Jan Frederik Reitz, Frederik Korsten attempted to enter the whaling industry, but was unable to compete with newly arrived American whaling crews. In the mid-1820's Korsten established a sealing station on Bird Island between the mouths of the Sundays and Bushmans Rivers. The sealing venture failed, in part due to poachers who ravaged Bird Island and the other nearby Chowan Islands. Korsten petitioned the government for more restrictions on seal hunting, just as Reitz had a decade earlier. He lambasted those who hunted with firearms out of season, disrupting the seals’ breeding patterns and threatening the population’s sustainability. Korsten briefly retired after the failure of his sealing venture, but he returned to Algoa Bay in 1831 to launch a new venture, Merino sheep farming. Following the example of settlers who had begun exporting wool

\(^{384}\) Muller, ”The State and the Development of the Cape,” 72; Inggs, ”Liverpool of the Cape,” 80-81.
from Algoa Bay, Korsten soon built a flock of 4,000 Merino sheep on Cradock Place and
two other nearby estates, Gomery and Bushy Park. 385

Korsten and Reitz shared remarkably similar paths to Merino raising at the Cape.
Though Dutchmen, they were decidedly separate from the Boers of the interior. They
traveled widely and showed a greater interest in the global merchant economy than the
pastoral and rural economy of the Boer. They weathered the uncertain first decades of the
century through trial and error, testing new economies like sealing and cautiously trading
in contraband. Both were amenable to the British administration and Korsten even seems
to have been something of an Anglophile. The names of his farms, "Cradock Place,"
"Gomery," and "Bushy Park," are notably English and were said to be constructed in an
English Style. 386

Saul Dubow has described Dutch colonists like Reitz and Korsten as “Anglomen,”
who embraced both the English commercial world and the metropolitan liberalism
surrounding it. In the face of growing British hegemony in South Africa they "were
disposed to accommodate themselves to the new colonial order and the economic
opportunities it offered." Hermann Giliomee also identified a segment of the Dutch-
speaking elite who became "increasingly attracted to the idea of liberal progress, with its
emphasis on the non-racial franchise, representative democracy, separation between
church and state, secular education, and the value of scientific inquiry." 387 As part of their

385 Chase, Old Times and Odd Corners, 3-5; CA CO 3926 13 "The Memorial of Frederick Korsten to
Hhis Excellency the Right Honourable General Sir Charles Henry Somerset," January 12, 1824; CA
CO 3928 347 "The Memorial of Frederick Korsten to His Excellency General the Right Honourable
386 Chase, Old Times and Odd Corners, 4.
387 Dubow, Commonwealth of Knowledge, 45-46; Hermann Giliomee, The Afrikaners: Biography of a
People (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 128, 198.
progressive identity, both Reitz and Korsten were versed in the language of conservation and improvement. When their sealing ventures failed, for example, both men were quick to blame the unchecked avarice of competitors who did not understand the need for conservation. In doing so, Reitz and Korsten positioned themselves as responsible and knowledgeable stewards of the environment. Though these ventures were short-lived, they foreshadowed the arguments that would later be made in support of Merino sheep.\(^{388}\)

Although the absolute number of Merino sheep in the Cape Colony remained small in 1830, several developments since 1810 had paved the way for the growth of wool raising. The professionalization of Merino breeding, exemplified by the firm Reitz, Breda, and Joubert, proved that wool farming could be practical and profitable at the Cape. Professional wool breeders also increased the availability of stock for new wool growers. Though many Cape farmers were still reluctant to invest in Merino sheep, interest in the breed slowly increased. Both British and Dutch-speaking settlers formed agricultural societies and partnerships dedicated to promoting Merino sheep. Finally, the improvement of shipping and commercial trading in rural areas of the Cape Colony allowed farmers to pursue to more reliably raise wool and send it to market.

But between 1830 and 1840, more dramatic developments within the Colony led to an explosion of Merino wool growing, especially in eastern regions. The abolition of slavery hurt the established wine industry in western regions and shifted Cape gentry investment toward wool in the east. Colonial invasions of Xhosa territory, along with the

\(^{388}\) CA CO 3926 13 "The Memorial of Frederick Korsten to His Excellency the Right Honourable General Sir Charles Henry Somerset," January 12, 1824; CA CO 3928 347 "The Memorial of Frederick Korsten to His Excellency General the Right Honourable Lord Charles Henry Somerset," July 7th, 1825.
exodus of some Boer colonists, gave wool growers in the eastern districts access to more grazing land. And finally, an influx of migrant labor from other parts of South Africa reduced costs for wool producers. Because of these developments, the number of eastern Cape farmers raising Merino sheep climbed dramatically, while flock sizes increased as well. New Merino raisers capitalized on improvements in colonial shipping to access global trade networks and reach customers in distant Britain.

The First Wool Boom: 1830-1840

The first sign of the coming wool boom was an increase in the importation of foreign breeding stock. Though the number of Merino sheep in the colony was growing rapidly by 1830, most of these were actually Merino-Cape sheep crosses, which produce a less fine and voluminous (hence less valuable) fleece. Pure-bred Merino breeding stock were difficult to find, especially in the eastern districts of the colony. The demand for pure-bred stock led to the formation of societies dedicated to importing Merino sheep. The first of these, the "Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society," was founded in 1831. Its members included Michiel van Breda, the Colony’s largest Merino breeder, and Hamilton Ross, a leader in the coastal trade. This was soon followed by others, such as the "Society for the Encouragement of the Breeding of Merino Sheep and the Production of Wool for Export," "The Association for the Improvement of Cape Wool," and the "Eastern Cape Joint Stock Sheep Farm Association."389

389 An Illustrated World History of the Sheep and Wool Industry, 108; Keegan, Colonial South Africa, 72, 116; George, "John Bardwell Ebden," 49. Some of these association went by alternate names and many had overlapping membership. For example, Hamilton Ross was a member of at least three of these societies.
Hamilton Ross began importing large numbers of Merino sheep, using the ships *Leda*, *Tiger*, and *Sir Charles McCarthy*. In 1832, another merchant, George Robb, took over the *Leda* and began to import Merino sheep from the Australian Colony of New South Wales. Shortly thereafter, John Ebden, who had pioneered the trade between the Cape and New South Wales, also began to import Australian sheep. Ebden and Ross had been trading with New South Wales since 1817, around the same time that trade with the Mascarene Islands became more common. These merchants generally exported Cape wines, which could be sold at protected rates in the British colonies across the Indian Ocean. Merchants returning from Mauritius carried cargoes of sugar and cotton, but New South Wales offered no such valuable export. By 1820, New South Wales was beginning to export wool in quantity, but Cape merchants had little interest in carrying bulky wool that would need to be transshipped on its way to England. Australian Merino breeding stock, on the other hand, presented a high value good with a ready market in the Cape Colony.

Merino importation peaked in early 1835. In January alone, three large shipments of Merino sheep landed in the Colony. The merchants Venning and Robertson imported thirty-six "Saxon sheep" from Germany, which was still a world leader in Merino wool at this time. The other two shipments carried sheep from New South Wales. The high level of speculation led to what the merchant and amateur historian, Benjamin Moodie, referred to as a "mania." Large importations led to a glut in the supply of breeding stock and a subsequent drop in prices. John Ebden found it impossible to sell many of his rams imported in 1835, some of which remained unsold until at least 1837. This phenomenon is

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390 CA CO 3973 133 "The Memorial of George Robb to His Excellency General Sir Benjamin D'Urban," June 9th, 1834.
reminiscent of the much earlier Merino Mania that struck the United States in 1810 and 1811, though it is important to remember that the prices and quantities of Merino sheep imported into the Cape Colony in 1835 were significantly lower.\textsuperscript{392}

The introduction of foreign breeding stock, though important to the development of wool raising at the Cape, occurred alongside several more dramatic changes at the Cape. First, the British government initiated a gradual emancipation of all slaves in its overseas colonies in 1834. Emancipation caused the Cape gentry to doubt the future success of wine and wheat plantations that depended on bound labor. More importantly, slaveholders suddenly found themselves flush with cash from the compensation paid to them by the British government. Unable to invest in slaves, many former slaveholders turned their attention to the emerging wool industry in the Colony’s eastern regions. They used compensation money to purchase the land, stock, and labor needed to begin wool-growing operations. Compensation money was also injected into various sectors of the metropolitan economy like banking, insurance, and shipping. This would also prove beneficial to colonial wool exporters.\textsuperscript{393} John Ebden, who imported Merino sheep and exported wool, also assisted former slaveholders by processing compensation claims on their behalf. In early 1835, Ebden offered to take claims of compensation money as payment for Merino stock that he had imported from Australia. Ebden later used the money from these compensation claims to fund development of a steamship line.\textsuperscript{394}

\textsuperscript{393} Keegan, Colonial South Africa, 116, 162-164; Ross, “Rise of the Cape Gentry,” 204-207.
\textsuperscript{394} George, "John Ebden," 50.
Despite the low number of slaves on the frontier, interior farmers reacted strongly against emancipation. They were generally distrustful of the colonial government and they lacked any sympathies to liberal humanitarianism that the Cape Gentry may have had. Their distance from Cape Town made it difficult for them to claim and receive compensation money, multiplying their frustration. Following emancipation, a greater number of Boer pastoralists began migrating out of the Cape Colony toward regions farther to the east and north. This migration has, over time, become known as the Great Trek, a seminal moment in Afrikaner history and mythology.395

The causes, consequences, and intentions of the Great Trek have been subject to many debates. Many Boers felt disenfranchised by Anglicization measures or simply disconnected from the political process. Others believed they had been cheated during the colonial conversion from rixdollars to pounds. Some likely trekked in response to drought and land scarcity, as Boers before them had done for generations.396 It is clear, however, that the departure of Dutch-speaking farmers from interior districts like Graaff-Reinet, Beaufort, and Somerset led to an influx of new landowners. Many of these new landholders intended to raise Merino sheep. In the decades following emancipation and the Great Trek, interior flocks were completely converted from the fat-tailed Cape sheep

to the Merino breed. Whereas Merino sheep comprised a minuscule percentage of sheep in Graaff-Reinet before 1834, they comprised 96% of that region's flock by 1865.397

Colonial expansion through warfare also played a significant role in growing the wool industry in the mid 1830's. Between 1779 and 1879, the Cape Colony waged nine frontier wars against Xhosa people, through which colonial forces gradually pushed the colony's border eastward. As a result, whites gained access to more and more grazing land that had previously been controlled by Xhosa grazers. Both Boers and Xhosa in the region were pastoralists, who moved their herds frequently on account of seasonal weather patterns. This created conditions under which stock theft and trespassing became difficult to prevent or police. The Boer 'commandos,' informal mounted militia units, were formed to protect colonial stock and to raid Xhosa territory. Until the end of the Dutch colonial period, small-scale violent conflicts between Boers and Xhosa were common, usually a result of disputes over cattle. But a relative balance of power between the Boers and the Xhosa held the Colonial border at roughly the Sundays River. This period of fairly equal, if often violent, relations between Europeans and Africans has been famously coined the 'open frontier' by Hermann Giliomee. The frontier remained open so long as "the colonial government failed to establish itself as an undisputed authority." In the decades prior to 1820, however, the eastern Cape frontier gradually closed, as Europeans exerted firmer territorial and cultural control over parts of the region. This resulted in greater racial division and oppression of Africans by Europeans.398

While historians have debated the accuracy of Giliomee’s model, the transition it describes relates directly to the expansion of Merino sheep farming in the eastern Cape. When the 1820 settlers arrived in South Africa, the Albany region was still somewhat contested. British farmers experienced stock theft, which limited their ability make a living and prompted many settlers to abandon their rural locations and seek shelter in towns. The experience also hardened settler opinion against their Xhosa neighbors and prompted calls for military action against them. With renewed warfare in the 1830’s, the balance of power along the eastern frontier shifted dramatically. The sixth frontier war, also known as the War of Hintsa, was fought over the course of 1834 and 1835. Despite an initially successful Xhosa offensive, the war ended in a decisive Colonial victory. The negotiations that ended the War of Hintsa established a ‘Neutral Zone’ between the Fish and Keiskamma rivers. This zone was supposed to be off limits to both parties, but the British government and British settlers clearly intended to occupy it. Prominent Merino sheep farmers in the colony began eyeing land in the Neutral Zone almost immediately after the war’s conclusion. Miles Bowker had applied for land in this region even before it became Colonial territory. Following the war, he abandoned his own farm to join his sons in the Neutral Zone, where the grass was said to be better suited to Merino sheep.

Following the war, Merino wool production grew most significantly, not along the frontier, but in the districts of the Cape Karoo or Midlands. Places like Cradock, Graaff-Reinet, and Somerset East, which had once been considered frontier, were firmly in the

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399 Lester, Imperial Networks, 55.
400 CA CO 3941 120 "Miles Bowker to His Excellency Governor Honourable Galbraith Lowrie Cole," May 26th, 1829; CA CO 3976 110 "Miles Bowker to His Excellency Sir Benjamin D’Urban," October 6th 1835; CA CO 3989 56 "The Memorial of Miles Bowker," April 12th, 1836.
colonial sphere following the War of Hintsa. Prior to 1834, these districts were unstable, disconnected from coastal trade, and mostly populated by Boer pastoralists. After 1835, British settlers like the Southey and Rubidge families moved into these regions, bringing Merino sheep with them. Many of these new British settlers were able to purchase land cheaply from trekking Boers. Additionally, better communication between these regions and the newly developed port at Port Elizabeth made wool production more feasible for interior farmers. Port Elizabeth merchants expanded their interior networks to aid wool farmers in a variety of ways. Merchant houses, such as Mosenthal and Company, offered wool washing services and sold pedigree rams in addition to extending credit. In 1836, Port Elizabeth exported just over 100,000 lbs of wool. By 1844, more than 1,000,000 lbs of wool were exported annually, much more than was exported through Cape Town. 401

Another major change in the Cape wool industry was the involvement of black migrant labor. Prior to 1834, the major wool growing operations in the western Cape were conducted by slave laborers. Following emancipation, western wool farmers continued to employ former slaves, referred to as 'coloured' people. 402 In the eastern and interior regions of the colony, where farms and flocks were much larger, farmers complained constantly of labor shortages. Though many interior farmers (both Boer and Briton) were slaveholders, they generally owned fewer slaves than the Cape gentry. Their livelihood was derived from pastoralism, which was less labor intensive than wine or wheat farming.

They inhabited a more contested region where colonial control was incomplete and labor

was more difficult to subjugate. And they were cash poor, relying on promissory notes from Cape butchers in the absence of any other banking or lending institutions. As a result, frontier farms were worked by a combination of free, enslaved, and Khoi people, under varying levels of coercion.\textsuperscript{403}

A new source of labor emerged in 1835, when colonial allies known as Mfengu migrated en masse into the Colony. While their origins have been fiercely debated, Mfengu occupied a subordinate status under Xhosa chiefs by the 1830’s. Following the War of Hintsa, more than 20,000 Mfengu entered the Cape Colony where the British government allotted them agricultural lands in the Neutral Zone and other regions near the frontier. European settlers and missionaries praised Mfengu farmers as sophisticated agriculturalists who practiced sedentary agriculture rather than transhumant pastoralism. And as they were located near frontier regions, Mfengu militias formed an important part of the Colony’s defenses. Colonial administrators like Governor Benjamin D’Urban welcomed the arrival of Mfengu settlers, who bolstered the region’s defenses against Xhosa incursions. D’Urban also hoped that Mfengu farmers would alleviate the Colony’s labor shortage by working on colonial farms.\textsuperscript{404}

In fact, Mfengu were quick to abandon their rural locations for more lucrative wage work in towns, especially Port Elizabeth. In the absence of harbor facilities, all imports and exports from Port Elizabeth were unloaded or loaded directly on the beach using small surf boats, creating a high demand for longshoremen. During the 1830’s and


'40s, Mfengu emerged as surf-porter specialists, carrying large loads (often wool) on their heads to the surf boats waiting in chest deep water. Visitors to Port Elizabeth were also ferried ashore by Mfengu. William Munro, Surgeon General of the 91st Highlanders Regiment, recorded his surprise upon landing when “we (ladies and gentlemen) were lifted out, and carried in the arms of naked Kafirs through the breakers to land.” Mfengu employed at the Port Elizabeth harbor gained access to high wages and bargaining power rarely enjoyed by people of color in the Cape Colony. During times of warfare, when Mfengu were called to the front and labor was scarce, their bargaining power was further increased. On two occasions, in 1846 and 1854, Mfengu beach workers in Port Elizabeth went on strike for higher wages. These two demonstrations, the first African strikes in the Colony, were a powerful symbol of Mfengu leverage.405

Mfengu laborers and artisans traveled to towns and villages throughout the east, and within a few years they had even formed a community in far away Cape Town. They gradually migrated into the Colony’s interior, finding work in areas like Graaff-Reinet and Cradock, where labor shortages were chronic prior to the 1830’s. In these booming interior regions, Mfengu men forged a reputation as shepherds, shearers, wool-washers, and porters. Despite the relatively high status of Mfengu workers in the Colony, they were always subject to race-based restrictions. The traveler, Robert Wilmot, reported that Mfengu workers faced discrimination from white farmers, "who give them miserable wages, never pay in money and make them answerable for losses of every kind. No wonder

labour is scarce!” Mfengu traveling through the Colony were required to carry passes or face penalties. And, despite promises from the Colony, prime grazing lands were reserved for white farmers. The Mfegnu were allotted land in crowded and overgrazed areas like the Kat River, and later forced to move beyond the Colony’s borders entirely.406

In the 1850’s, Mfengu were joined by large numbers of Xhosa workers, who had been displaced by aggressive colonial expansion. The especially brutal Eighth Frontier War (1850-53) caused the loss of 16,000 Xhosa lives and concluded with the expulsion of thousands more from tribal lands. These losses were compounded by an epidemic of the cattle disease ‘Lungsickness,’ which decimated Xhosa herds. Unable to control the spread of the disease, many desperate Xhosa embraced the ‘Cattle-Killing’ movement, a millenarian movement that promised salvation for those who slaughtered their livestock. The disastrous combination of warfare, disease, and fanaticism led to widespread famine and the collapse of Xhosa chiefdoms. Starving Xhosa people fled to the Cape Colony where they were given food in exchange for laboring on public works.407

By 1860, Mfengu and Xhosa workers had become a seasonal fixture on colonial wool farms. But in response to the influx of black to the colony the Cape government hardened its commitment to racial discrimination. Blacks in interior towns were barred from living within city limits and reduced to inhabiting segregated ‘locations’ outside of the town center. Without land or freedom of movement, blacks in the Cape Colony

became forced into labor migrancy. The hardships weathered by blacks who labored in the Merino wool industry would be reproduced on a larger scale during the South African mining boom later in the century. The locations inhabited by Mfengu and other black wool workers foreshadowed the segregated townships that later developed in mining districts and urban centers throughout South Africa.  

408 Charles Bunbury, a visitor to the Cape, wrote of the Mfengu, “There are a great many of them settled in the neighborhood of Graham’s Town; and here, as at Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, they are found very useful in performing various menial and laborious offices, such as washing, and carrying firewood.” See Charles Bunbury, *Journal of a Residence at the Cape of Good Hope; with excursions into the interior, and notes on the natural history, and the native tribes* (London: John Murray, 1848), 171. See also Dubow, *Land, Labor, and Merchant Capital*, 34-36.
Conclusion

Between 1810 and 1830, Merino sheep raising in South Africa was guided by Dutch-speaking gentry farmers as well as the British colonial government. As in the United States, agricultural societies emerged as institutions of Improvement, which included the promotion of the Merino breed. But the colonial government’s efforts to disseminate Merino sheep can be contrasted with the United States, where Merino boosterism was strictly within the purview of private citizens and societies. Despite government efforts, most Cape farmers responded to the Merino breed with indifference or resistance. They only pursued wool farming in earnest after improvements in intra-colonial trade granted them access to global markets.

Three developments of the mid-1830’s - the abolition of slavery, the colonial conquest of grazing lands, and the influx of black laborers into the Colony - precipitated the first Cape wool boom. By 1850, the Cape Colony exported more than 5,000,000 lbs. Of Merino wool. This accounted for a full 60% of the Colony’s exports, dwarfing the formerly dominant wine industry. By 1855, Cape farmers kept 5,000,000 Merino sheep and exported more than 12,000,000 lbs. Of wool. By the end of the decade, wool exports from Port Elizabeth alone had topped 15,000,000 lbs. This spectacular boom could not have happened without incremental, decades-long developments in sheep-breeding and merchant trade. The Merino flocks of the Cape gentry, expertly managed by enslaved men and women, allowed for the later expansion of Merino wool throughout the Colony. The arrival of British settlers in 1820 and the success of Merino wool in the British colony of New South Wales contributed to the creation of a settler culture obsessed with

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409 Keegan, Colonial South Africa, 116
agricultural improvement. And the development of inter- and intra-colonial shipping connected previously isolated regions of the Cape to global markets and allowed farmers to profit from the export of an industrial commodity.

These long term and short term developments allowed for the creation of an enduring wool industry in South Africa, based on Merino sheep. Though the wool boom (South Africa’s first commodity boom) busted in the 1860’s, the discovery of diamonds (in 1866) and gold (in 1886) created a feverish export economy in the Cape Colony. The mineral revolution would have much greater and more lasting consequences for the region than the wool boom. Even so, the wool boom presaged many features of the South African mineral economy. Prior to the discovery of precious minerals, the growth of the Merino wool industry transformed the Cape Colony. The development of merchant and financial institutions, the creation of an expansionist settler culture, and the colonial conquest of African lands and people, were all tied to Merino wool. Between 1810 and 1850 the Cape Colony was transformed from a neglected outpost to a thriving constituent of the British Empire. It is impossible to understand this transformation without considering the role of Merino sheep.
CHAPTER FIVE: INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: MERINO SHEEP IN THE UNITED STATES, 1810-1840

In 1810, a Philadelphia publisher printed an anonymous pamphlet titled *Antidote to the Merino-Mania now Progressing through the United States; or, the Value of the Merino Breed*. At the time, pure-bred Spanish Merino rams sold for one thousand dollars or more, while pure Merino cloth sold for as much as sixteen dollars per yard. As the pamphlet’s title suggests, however, the excitement over Merino Sheep in the United States was boiling over into irrational speculation. The arrival of large shipments of Merino Sheep from war-torn Spain had attracted wealthy merchants and investors and caused the price of Merino stock to skyrocket. Many of these buyers had little or no experience in agriculture.

*Antidote to the Merino Mania* contains little more than summaries and reproductions of essays by English agriculturalists, many from Dr. Caleb Parry. In their brief introductory notes, however, the authors critically assessed the progress of the American Merino project. While some success had been gained, the authors asserted that “a few pieces of broad cloth” would bring little benefit to the country. True success would only be achieved when American manufacturers could produce wool cloth “of the first quality, and of our own make, at a price considerably lower than that which the English commands.” The authors deemed it “absurd to expect, that patriotism will induce our citizens to give more for any thing than it is actually worth... especially as none are hereby
benefitted but speculators and monopolists.” The authors added a trenchant, personal critique of those who coveted the sheep "from a false pride of wishing to equal his far more affluent neighbor." By paying such exorbitant prices, these speculators harmed their families and deterred more knowledgeable, if less wealthy, buyers. The result, they argued, was the decline of American wool, so that most consumers were left only with "an inferior texture.”

The authors of this pamphlet were clearly not convinced by the self-congratulatory odes of Merino sheep enthusiasts like David Humphreys or Robert Livingston. But personal attacks aside, Antidote to Merino Mania presaged significant changes to come in the American Merino wool industry. After nearly a decade as an obscure novelty, the arrival of William Jarvis’ Spanish Merino sheep in 1810 vaulted the breed into the public consciousness. The outbreak of war in 1812 elevated the price of wool and, in the absence of competition from British mills, American mills flourished. As the authors of Antidote to Merino Mania predicted, the Merino sheep bubble soon burst and by 1815, the price of sheep and wool had come crashing back to earth. This rapid boom and bust, the “Merino Mania,” signaled the beginning of a new era in the history of Merino sheep in the United States.

Between 1810 and 1840, a transformed Merino wool and wool manufacturing economy emerged, primarily in the northeastern states. The eventual success of woolen factories increased demand for Merino wool and led to an explosion in the population of Merino sheep in the United States. The growth of these factories also contributed to a

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410 Antidote to Merino Mania now Progressing through the United States (Philadelphia: J&Y Humphreys, 1810), iii-iv.
reordering of society in both rural and urban areas of the northeastern states. And the culture and management in the Merino sheep industry itself changed significantly as a new generation of breeders supplanted the founding fathers of wool. Merino raising ceased to be a pursuit of the country gentleman and became more professionalized. Farmers of modest means commonly grazed Merino or mixed-breed wool sheep in small herds to supplement other income from farming and wages. Diverse labor arrangements also emerged to support the complex economy of processing Merino wool into cloth. Unlike South Africa, the spread of Merino sheep in the United States supported the formation of dynamic local economies.

Textile Manufacturing in the United States

Textile production in the northeastern United States dates to the earliest days of European colonization. Beginning in the 1640’s, Yorkshire immigrants established large operations to full and weave wool near Rowland, Massachusetts. Almost simultaneously, Scotch-Irish families near Londonderry, New Hampshire began producing linen garments made from flax. These early examples of centralized production were quite rare, however, and accounted for a small share of American textiles. Until the end of the eighteenth century, nearly all of America’s domestic textiles were produced in homes. In northern states, homespun cloth was made using flax and wool, often combined to make the fabric known as “linsey-woolsey.”

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Producing wool cloth at home was a complex and time-consuming process. First, the sheep had to be shorn of their wool, a physically demanding job that was generally performed by men. The wool was then skirted, a process that involved removing pieces of dirt, feces, and vegetable matter that had become lodged in the wool. Skirted wool was then sorted by length and quality and washed to remove the oily lanolin. Skirting, sorting, and washing were most often performed by women and children. These processes were performed by hand and continued to be into the twentieth century.\footnote{Ouellette, \textit{US Textile Production}, 26-28; Rasmussen, “Waging War with Wool,” 17.}

Once washed and sorted, wool was carded to lay the individual fibers in a uniform direction. In the eighteenth century, this was done using a hand card, a simple wooden board studded with nails in a regular pattern. Raw wool was placed between two hand cards, which were then pulled in opposite directions. The wool fibers were drawn between the nails of the two cards and laid parallel to each other. The parallel fibers were gathered into bunches and spun into a continuous yarn using hand spindles and, later, foot-pedal-powered spinning wheels. Wool carding, a simple if slow process, was mostly performed by children while spinning was often performed by adult women. Finished yarn was then woven into cloth using hand looms. Weaving was performed by highly skilled men and women who mastered a variety of patterns to create different types of cloth. The final stages of production involved fulling and dyeing the finished cloth.\footnote{Ibid.}

While various stages of wool production commonly occurred in homes, eighteenth-century American woolens should not be categorized as a homemade product. It is conceivable that some self-sufficient farm families raised and sheared sheep, then
carded, spun, and wove their own wool – but this was not typical. American wool production was a professional endeavor that was complex, efficient, and dynamic, even prior to the advent of powered industry. As seen in Laurel Ulrich’s *Age of Homespun*, "because cloth-making involved so many steps, the work could be subdivided again and again." Cloth was not produced in a single workshop, but "in hundreds of homes linked by the entrepreneurial energies of clothiers." Divisions of labor were clear as specialists emerged along every step of the wool production process. Some farm laborers became skilled shearers, traveling from farm to farm during the shearing season. Some men and women specialized as spinners, weavers, fullers, or dyers, processing wool in exchange for cash or goods. These trades, especially weaving, relied skills passed down through generations.

The earliest American woolen mills developed from artisanal family enterprises. George Loxton’s study of the Davis family mill in North Kingstown, Rhode Island shows how one family of wool workers expanded into a regional commercial power. Joshua Davis was already an established weaver when he opened a fulling mill on the Frenchtown Brook in 1720. The mill used a series of water-powered hammers to pound wool in a caustic solution, thereby softening its texture. Customers could bring woven cloth to the mill to be fulled and returned to them for a fee. Fulling was a relatively simple process and, consequently, the first to be mechanized. During the late eighteenth century, the Davis mill incorporated a carding machine as well. Wool fed into the carding machine was raked

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416 The Gardiner Family of Rhode Island, for example, recorded intricate weaving patterns that were passed down through the generations. The Gardiner Family Papers (GF) are held at the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS).
by a series of studded drums until the fibers lay parallel to each other. These machines eliminated the laborious process of hand carding and, by 1810, there were more than 700 carding mills in New England.417

As its capabilities increased, the Davis family mill expanded to produce cloth using a 'putting-out system.' Under this production regime, machine processes completed at the mill were married to hand processes completed by skilled contract workers in their own homes. First, raw wool purchased by the Davis family was carded and oiled at the factory. Then, home spinners peddled small, foot-powered spinning wheels to turn the carded wool into yarn. Spinners returned the yarn to the mill to be scoured and dyed. After dyeing, the yarn was sent out again to contracted cottage weavers. Finally, the woven cloth returned to the mill for the third and final time to be fulled and finished. It was then ready for sale. The mill services were also offered to customers a la carte. Customers could bring raw wool to the mill to be carded, oiled, and returned to them. They could also bring woven cloth to the mill to be fulled and finished.418

The emergence of powered woolen factories has been somewhat overshadowed by the larger and more revolutionary cotton factories, which began appearing in New England at almost the same time. Cotton, in either raw or finished form, had been relatively rare in eighteenth-century New England. The first powered cotton mill in the United States was opened by Samuel Slater, an English immigrant who built and operated advanced machinery for spinning cotton fibers into yarn. In 1790, Slater partnered with a

418 Loxton, Davisville, 79-81.
wealthy merchant, Moses Brown, to construct a mill on the Blackstone River in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Following the success of Brown and Slater’s mill, cotton mills sprung up along the Blackstone and other New England rivers between 1790-1810. Cotton manufacturing was most visibly changed by the opening of the impressive Waltham and Lowell Mills in 1814. Unlike the small factories that preceded them, these Massachusetts mills were highly capitalized and technologically advanced. In addition to spinning machines, the mills also contained power looms that mechanized weaving. This level of vertical integration had only been achieved in the largest British factories. Raw cotton brought to the mills left the factory as finished cotton cloth.

Historians of the United States have been attracted to early cotton mills, especially those at Waltham and Lowell, as harbingers of change resulting from industrialization. The scope of investment and production at these two mills was unprecedented in America. Furthermore, the experience of factory workers at Waltham and Lowell was entirely unlike that of earlier textile workers. Most of the mill workers were young, unmarried women from rural areas, who resided at the mill site in company boarding houses. They were employed full-time on short-term contracts and were paid in cash for their labor. Though women and girls had been employed for decades through the putting-out system, their employment in factories away from home was a departure from established norms. By 1840, Lowell had grown into a crowded company town of 40,000 people, where all life revolved around factory production.

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419 Rivard, New Order of Things, 8-10.
421 Ibid., 47.
Contemporary Americans were disconcerted by the emergence of Waltham and Lowell. Many feared that industrialization would bring the dangerous working conditions, poverty, and crime that were associated with Britain. Others fretted about the moral repercussions of allowing young women to work and live outside of the home. Most American textile mills, however, did not follow the fully integrated model of Waltham and Lowell. This was especially true of woolen mills, where "technical innovations had remained extremely modest." Spinning wool using large machinery was impractical until the invention of the Goulding condenser in 1826. This device, invented by the American James Goulding, united carding and spinning into a near-continuous mechanical process. Even after this development, woolen mills rarely employed powered looms, which were
expensive and complicated to operate. Most wool manufacturers continued to rely on the labor of home spinners and skilled hand weavers until mid-century. As late as 1830, two-thirds of all woolen goods in New England were produced through the putting-out system.422

E.I. du Pont’s woolen venture was one of the few to attempt fully integrated wool textile production. When Eleutherian Mills opened its doors in 1811 it produced, from start to finish, dyed superfine Merino broadcloth. On New Year’s Day of 1812, President Madison received guests at the White House wearing a suit made of du Pont broadcloth that had been produced only one week prior. These high-profile displays did not, however, guarantee financial success. The mill never made money and shuttered its doors in 1815 after accumulating more than $37,000 in debt. Though it eventually reopened, the mill never again produced fine Merino cloth.423

More typically, woolen mills tended to be small and family-owned. Some only operated in the late spring, when sheep were sheared and water power was abundant. Woolen mills were forced to be flexible and very few specialized in producing fine Merino goods. Instead, woolen mills produced a variety of less expensive cloths, including flannel, kersey, cassimere, and, especially, satinet. These materials were cheap to produce and did not require fine Merino wool. Satinet, a material made of interwoven cotton and wool, proved extremely popular and largely replaced linsey-woolsey. By the 1830s, half of the woolen cloth produced in America was satinet. The large variety of cloth demanded by

consumers proved to be an advantage to smaller mills that offered "close attention to
detail, as well as the capacity to make sudden changes in production."\footnote{Rivard, \textit{New Order of Things}, 83-88.}

Although most early nineteenth century mills processed both Merino wool and
coarse wool, they always made a distinction between the two materials. The Litchfield
Manufacturing company, for example, used fine Merino wool to produce broadcloth and
coarse wool to produce satinet. The factory overseer further separated wool into classes
based on fineness and, in some instances, per the percentage of Merino blood. While
course 'listing wool' could be purchased for as little as sixty dollars per bale, Merino wool
could cost as much as $300 per bale. Although Merino wool was clearly considered
premium, it is important to remember that most American woolen goods were not
dependent on the superfine wool.\footnote{Connecticut Historical Society (CHS) Oliver Wolcott Jr Papers (OW) Box 52, Folder 2; CHS
Oliver Wolcott Account Books, 1781-1831 (WAB) Vol. 5; "Gaius Lyman to William Jarvis,
Wethersfield, June 19, 1811" in VHS William Jarvis Papers (WJ) Box 63; Folder 21}

Small woolen mills were similarly flexible in the type of labor they employed. Some
mills employed full-time workers while others operated intermittently and relied on
casual day laborers. Most contracted at least some piece work to skilled independent
workers. Often, mills survived on a combination of wage and contract labor. At the Clarke
and Cundall carding mill in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, workers were paid roughly six
cents per yard of wool carded. At Allyn Burr's Hartford, Connecticut mill, wool carders
were paid a flat fee of one dollar per day. Weavers, however, were contracted at the rate of
twenty cents per yard of cloth produced.\footnote{CHS Allyn Burr Account Book (AB); Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) Clarke and Cundall
Account Book (CC) Vol. 7.}
Although they lacked the size and influence of Waltham or Lowell, woolen mills still played an important role in the small towns of New England. Mill owners often ran associated businesses, such as boarding houses and general stores, which catered to workers and nearby residents. The owner of the Litchfield Manufacturing Company, Oliver Wolcott, also ran a store that sold meat, fish, wood, and other goods in addition to cloth. Mill owners with stores often compensated their workers in goods or store credit. Thomas Sessions, who ran the Providence Manufacturing Company from 1811 to 1817, offered workers cash or goods, according to the length of cloth they had woven. Customers at Johnathon Hopkins’ Greenwich, Rhode Island store paid their accounts in a variety of ways, including boarding mill workers, performing labor, cash or barter. Workers at Granville Olney’s carding mill in Smithfield, Rhode Island held running accounts at Olney’s store, where their daily wage could be redeemed for staples like, rum, rice, and Indian corn. Many of the male workers lodged at Olney’s boarding house, for which expenses were deducted from their pay.427

The woolen mills that emerged in New England between 1810 and 1840 transformed the region in many ways. They allowed for great increases in wool production and eliminated low skill, time consuming processes like carding. Many workers at carding and fulling mills engaged in regular wage labor for the first time in their lives. In small towns, mills became the center of economic life, often providing employment, commerce, and lodging in a single location. For consumers, the growth of mills increased access to

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427 CHS WAB Vol. 5; RIHS Thomas Sessions Papers (TS) Box 1, Folder 20; RIHS Johnathon Hopkins (JH) Volume 3, see pages 14, 21, 28, 34. RIHS Granville Olney Records (GO) Folder 1 and 2; See also RIHS James Utter Arnold Papers (JA) Box 2, Folder 8, Arnold owned two stores in Rhode Island in addition to a mill and dying factory.
woolen goods that were (at least partly) produced by machine. In time, this eroded the national veneration of homespun cloth as "the mass-produced suit emerged as the badge of a uniquely virtuous American polity." \(^{428}\)

At the same time, the dynamic and highly variable process of creating woolen textiles contradicts the image of textile mechanization as a monolithic and crushing process. Families that had produced wool for generations opened woolen mills with relatively small amounts of capital. Spinners and weavers continued to work independently from their homes, often earning high wages. The arrival of powered factories, at least in this period, signaled an acceleration of the existing pre-industrial wool economy, rather than a violent reordering of society. \(^{429}\)

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\(^{428}\) By the middle of the nineteenth century, the ready-made factory suit had become a symbol of American egalitarianism. See Michael Zakim, “Sartorial Ideologies: From Homespun to Ready-Made,” 1554.

Merino Breeders: The Next Generation

As Merino sheep became commonplace and woolen manufacturing became viable, the culture of Merino sheep breeding in the United States changed dramatically. Prior to 1810, interest in, even knowledge of, Merino sheep was limited to a small group of wealthy and educated aristocrats. They discussed their interest in terms of patriotism, enlightenment, and a desire to advance the common good. Their enthusiasm, however, did not attract general interest in the breed and the impact of Merino sheep during this period.
time was limited. Only the arrival of nearly 20,000 Merino sheep from Spain in the years 1810-1811 established the breed as a known quantity in America. After a brief period of wild speculation known as the 'Merino Mania,' the sudden abundance of Merino sheep caused their price to plummet. Furthermore, when the war of 1812 ended, many American woolen mills crumbled under the weight of cheap British imports.430

Nevertheless, many Americans managed to profit from dealing in Merino sheep and wool. The generation of Merino enthusiasts that arose after the war of 1812, however, was quite different than the one that preceded it. The dramatic language of Robert Livingston, David Humphreys, and E.I. du Pont, who glorified their efforts to introduce the Merino breed, became less common. And while Merino breeding remained a lucrative venture, it no longer attracted the attention of the wealthiest Americans. Those who bred Merino sheep after the war of 1812 did so as an economic opportunity rather than a public, patriotic gesture. Merino sheep breeding became professionalized and directed by breeders possessing a greater understanding of animal husbandry and the wool trade.

Just as the first generation of American Merino breeders was united by common interests and advantages, a new generation of Merino breeders shared several important traits. Like their South African counterparts, this generation of American Merino enthusiasts was attracted to speculative and experimental industries. William Jarvis, America's largest Merino importer, tried to raise silk worms and, in his later years, took an interest in breeding Short-horned Dutch, Teeswater, and Holderness cattle. Significantly, these breeds were related to the Friesland cattle pioneered by the van Reenen family in

430 Rasmussen, "Waging War with Wool," 35.
South Africa. As these breeds were celebrated in European agricultural treatises, it is likely that Jarvis and the van Reenens learned about the animals from similar sources.431

American gentry increasingly tied notions of Improvement to territorial expansion, and pursued it by "building canals, constructing steam locomotives, clearing forests, hollowing out coal, and creating industrial factories."432 Many Americans interested in Merino sheep also invested in western states that were considered undeveloped or even frontier. Abel Jones, a Merino raiser from Boston, purchased land in Maine and Indiana in hopes of finding coal. Christopher Rhodes of Rhode Island also hoped to strike coal and invested in land throughout Virginia, Ohio, and Wisconsin. David Humphreys, one of the founding fathers of wool, also moved his Merino business into Ohio and Kentucky after 1810. A similar process unfolded in South Africa, where metropolitan gentry near Cape Town invested heavily in land near the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony after 1830. Merino pioneers like Michiel van Breda actively marketed their sheep to farmers in these remote areas.433

The culture of American Merino breeders during this period is illuminated by the extensive records of the Whitman family, successful Merino breeders from West Hartford, Connecticut. Between 1810 and 1840, members of the Whitman family entered the Merino wool business and quickly became leading breeders and wool producers. Their records,

432 Stoykovich, "The Culture of Improvement," 38.
especially those of Samuel Whitman Jr., illustrate the family’s rise in the Merino industry and their subsequent expansion into land speculation, wool brokerage, and manufacturing.

The Whitman family had been engaged in animal breeding prior arrival of Merino sheep. Samuel Whitman Sr. led a company of cavalry during the Revolution and became a renowned horse breeder following the war. Like English breeders of the day, Whitman named his horses and aggressively promoted them to farmers who wished to improve their stock. He solicited experts to affirm the value of his breeding stock and obtained numerous certificates of their authenticity. Samuel Sr. rarely sold his horses and instead rented them to farmers with mares to be bred, a practice known as ‘covering.’ Samuel Sr.’s stud books record hundreds of such coverings dating back to 1775. When Whitman did sell a horse outright, it was often with the condition that he should receive half of the profit on any future sale of the animal. Whitman mares sold under this agreement could bring a price of $150 or more.\(^{434}\)

Samuel Whitman Sr., was killed by a kick from a horse in 1810, just as interest in Merino sheep was starting to build. It was Samuel’s wife, Abigail, and his son, Samuel Jr. who steered the family business into Merino sheep. As early as 1814, the Whitmans were sending “fine wool” to be carded and oiled at local mills. Although they also experimented with cattle, The Whitman family ultimately chose to specialize in Merino wool and began to expand their flock by purchasing Merino breeding stock.\(^{435}\) In September of 1817,

\(^{434}\) CHS Whitman Family Papers, 1745-1814 Box 3: “Horse Stud Books” and “Horse Certificates and Agreements”

\(^{435}\) Premium awards for heifers and steers suggest that the Whitmans took their cattle venture seriously, even after their success with Merinos, see CHS WF 1745-1814 Box 3: “Horse Certificates and Agreements;” CHS Whitman Family Papers 1776-1915 (WF) Box 4: “Premiums and Awards.”
Samuel Whitman bought ten “full blood Merino bucks” from the Hartford silversmiths, Ward and Bartholomew, for the incredibly low price of three dollars and fifty cents apiece. He also bought seven “full blood Merino lambs” from the pair for just over three dollars apiece. In October of 1820, He purchased a further twenty “full blood Merino ewes.” Within a few years, the Whitmans had graduated to the expensive market of certified Merino breeding stock. Samuel Whitman made several large purchases of Merino stock through the Boston merchant company, Coolidge, Poor, and Head. On July 14, 1825, he paid $200 for a single ram and $100 for a single ewe. The following May, Whitman purchased three rams from the same company for an average of $60 per head. Such large purchases helped to establish the family as well-known and reputable breeders.\textsuperscript{436}

The Whitman family continued their business, and began looking for foreign sources to improve their breeding stock. Although the originally Spanish Merino flocks had been dispersed during the Peninsular War, some European flocks retained a high level of prestige. Saxony, a small German state, emerged as the world’s largest Merino wool producer and, by the 1820s, its Merinos were highly prized. American merchants began to import Saxony sheep, leading to a brief Saxony craze, which was reminiscent of, if much smaller than, the ‘Merino Mania.’ For example, in July of 1824, Coolidge, Porter, and Head held an auction in Brookline, Massachusetts for Saxony sheep carried by the ship \textit{Velocity} from Bremen. A catalog for the sale listed detailed information on each of the forty-six

\textsuperscript{436} CHS WF Box 3, "Sheep – Receipts and Memoranda 1814-1829"
rams, twenty-five ewes, and four lambs to be sold, including their label number, earmarks, and date of birth.\footnote{CHS WF Box 3, "Sheep – Receipts and Memoranda 1814-1829." For an account of Saxony Merino importation see Jarvis and Grove in C. Benton and S.F. Barry, \textit{A statistical view of the number of sheep in the several towns and counties in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio: a partial account of the number of sheep in Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, and Kentucky in 1836. And an account of the principal woollen manufactories in said states}, (Cambridge: Folsom, Wells, and Thurston, 1837), 130-139.}

In April of 1826, Samuel Whitman purchased a Saxon sheep from the ship \textit{Marcus}, also from Bremen. The one-year-old ram came with a certificate stating, “This Ram is from the Naundorf Flock, one of the most esteemed in Saxony.” As with the earlier 'Merino Mania,' however, intense speculation was followed by a dramatic fall in prices. Imported Saxon Merinos quickly began to sell for as low as fifteen dollars per head. These prices were too low to justify further importation. Nevertheless, up to 1500 Merino sheep were imported from Saxony between 1823 and 1826. Saxony Sheep were also exported to South Africa after interest in fine wool grew during the early 1830’s. In January of 1835, the merchants Venning and Robertson employed two ships to land thirty-six “fine Saxon sheep” at Cape Town. Saxon sheep did not, however, generate as much interest in South Africa in the 1830s as they did in the United States a decade earlier.\footnote{Ibid., For importation of Saxon sheep into the Cape Colony, see CO 3983 88.}

In addition to purchasing expensive, certified, or exotic stock, Merino breeders sought to bolster their reputations by participating in agricultural competitions. Local agricultural societies bestowed awards on breeders who were judged to have the best stock in a variety of categories. Samuel Whitman held a dominant grip on premiums and awards given by his local group, the Hartford Society. In October of 1820, the Hartford Society awarded Whitman the prize for both “Best Merino Buck” and “Best Merino Ewes.”
Each honor carried a reward of six dollars and a set of Lisbon tea spoons. Whitman dominated these awards for more than two decades. In almost every year between 1820 and 1841, Whitman accumulated multiple awards in categories such as “Best Saxony Buck,” “Best three Saxony or Merino Ewes,” and “Best piece of woolen cloth.” Whitman also won awards for his prize cattle, some of which were also imported from Europe.\footnote{CHS WF Box 3, "Sheep – Premiums and Awards"}
Samuel Whitman’s reputation as a breeder earned him a steady supply of customers. Whitman’s account book shows that he sold many sheep from 1830 onward, often in large quantities. Whitman sold animals of varying value and his business was not restricted to pure-bred Merino sheep. Instead, he appealed to a variety of markets by selling “full-blood,” “half-blood,” and “seven-eighths blood” sheep. Individual pure-bred rams usually sold for fifty dollars or more, but in August of 1834 Whitman sold a flock of 153 sheep for just under $500, a mere $3.25 per head. Although an increasing number of American sheep contained at least some Merino parentage, the market for part-bred or undifferentiated ‘common sheep’ remained strong. Many American wool manufacturers produced flannel, cassimere, kersey, satinet, or "negro plain" cloth for southern plantations, none of which required fine Merino wool. It was, therefore, common for even
renowned Merino breeders to retain common sheep. Oliver Wolcott, owner of the Litchfield Mill in Connecticut, also kept a flock of full blood Merinos and “half and common blood” sheep. Like Whitman, this allowed Wolcott to diversify his wool-product and livestock offerings.440441

Like other large flock owners of the time, Samuel Whitman sometimes leased sheep to farmers who were unable or unwilling to purchase their own sheep. These agreements allowed flock owners to profit from their Merino sheep without having to maintain them. They also provided an opportunity for poor farmers to earn money through wool sales or possibly to start their own flocks. In December of 1820, Whitman entered a two-year lease agreement with one Joseph Hawley. Under the terms of the lease, Whitman provided Hawley with six Merino sheep, which he was to pasture and care for until the agreement expired. After shearing the sheep, Hawley was permitted to keep three pounds of wool per head, giving the rest to Whitman as payment. As Merino sheep generally produced at least five pounds of wool, this provided Whitman with a healthy profit. In addition, Hawley was to give Whitman one third of the weaned lambs at the end of the two-year period, keeping the rest to sell or to start his own flock.442

Jedediah Harris of Stafford, Vermont employed a similar system and his surviving contracts detail the terms of the arrangement. Between 1823 and 1831, Harris entered yearly sheep lease agreements with one John Cheney. Each contract specified that Cheney would collect ninety-three sheep from Harris’ barn on November 15 and keep them for one year with “plenty hay, salt and other feed.” In addition, Cheney was to “wash, shear and

440 CHS OW Box 52, Folder 1 and 2; CHS WAB, 25, 79-80.
441 CHS WF Box 3, “Sheep – Receipts and Memoranda 1814-1829, ‘Memoranda Book’”
442 CHS WF Box 3, “Sheep – Receipts and Memoranda 1814-1829”
deliver the wool at said Harris’ house in good season.” Cheney was also responsible for earmarking the lambs and for castrating the males before returning them to the flock on the following November 15. In return for his work, Cheney was given use of farmland owned by Harris. In other cases, Harris let out sheep on credit and accepted wool as payment at his general store.443

As Merino wool was an important industrial raw material, it is unsurprising that many Merino breeders were drawn into manufacturing. By the 1830’s, Samuel Whitman was selling large quantities of wool to local factories. On August 31, 1832, Whitman sold the Denny Manufacturing Company six-hundred and twenty-one pounds of wool at sixty-two and a half cents per pound for a total of three-hundred and eighty-eight dollars. The next July, Whitman sold six-hundred and six pounds of wool to the same company for eighty cents a pound, netting nearly five-hundred dollars.444 Building on his experience as a wool producer, Whitman began to function as a wool broker for local factory owners. In the year 1832, Whitman made more than one hundred wool purchases, including from members of his family. These purchases ranged from as small as ten pounds or as large as four-hundred pounds. Whitman paid some fine wool growers the same high rate that he received for his own wool (sixty cents or above) while coarse, unwashed wool was bought for as low as thirty cents per pound. By 1834, Whitman was selling more than two-thousand dollars’ worth of wool to his largest customers.445

Whitman sold much of his wool to the Rock Manufacturing Company in Vernon, Connecticut, who also employed him as a broker. He purchased two shares of the

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444 CHS WF Box 3, “Sheep – Receipts and Memoranda 1814-1829, ’Memoranda Book’”
445 CHS WF Box 3, “Sheep – Receipts and Memoranda, 1830-1850.”
company, valued at five-hundred dollars each, in 1832 and an additional two shares in 1834. As his role at Rock Manufacturing increased, Whitman brokered larger purchases of wool, usually in shipments of over five-hundred pounds. Whitman also increased his involvement with the New England Manufacturing Company of Hartford. In 1839 alone, he sold the company over seven-hundred dollars’ worth of his own wool and brokered their purchase of more than eleven-hundred dollars’ worth of wool from other farmers.\textsuperscript{446}

Despite his decades of work with Merino sheep, the language of wool employed by early importers like E.I. du Pont, Robert Livingston, or David Humphreys is absent from Samuel Whitman’s correspondence. By comparison, Whitman’s prose on sheep is curt and businesslike. While seemingly knowledgeable about sheep and wool, Whitman did not seek out or discuss treatises on wool. As Merino sheep became more common and available in the United States, the culture of Merino sheep breeding became less predicated on elite status and education. Take, for example, Thomas Hazard, a Rhode Island Merino breeder and factory owner known affectionately as "Shepherd Tom." In his memoirs, "The Jonny-Cake Letters," Hazard adopted a folksy and self-deprecating tone and teased the arrogance of the "college-bred farmer." He concluded one anecdote with the pronouncement that, "however well-adapted a collegiate education was then – and now – conducted to the professions of law, medicine, and divinity, it was worse than useless when applied to agriculture." Such tones were a direct satire of the gentleman farmers who first introduced Merino sheep to the United States.\textsuperscript{447}

\textsuperscript{446} CHS WF Box 3, "Sheep – Receipts and Memoranda 1830-1850."
\textsuperscript{447} Thomas Hazard, \textit{The Jonny-Cake Letters}, (Providence, Sidney Rider, 1880), 89.
The American Samuel Whitman exhibited many similarities to Michiel van Breda, the first wool baron of South Africa. Indeed, these contemporaries were of a similar background. Both were wealthy landholders, but without the economic or political connections of aristocrats like E.I. du Pont and Robert Livingston. Unlike the first generation of Merino breeders in the United States and South Africa, Whitman and van Breda actually relied on the sale of sheep and wool for their livelihood. Whitman’s memorandum book and van Breda’s groot boek reflect a similar bare meticulousness and commercial focus. Neither man’s writing conjures David Humphreys’ sense of triumph or E.I. du Pont’s glowing descriptions of his favorite ram.
There were, however, important differences between American and South African Merino breeders during this time. American breeders, for example, were less strict in their commitment to the Merino breed. Because the American market demanded coarse wool, even major breeders like Samuel Whitman kept common sheep as well as Merinos.\textsuperscript{448} South African breeders, in contrast, sought to purge non-Merino sheep breeds from their flocks and from the landscape. They regarded the Cape sheep, their analogue to the

\textsuperscript{448} See CHS Samuel Whitman Account Book, 1828-1851 (SWA). Entries show sales of Merino, Saxon, cross-bred, and unidentified common sheep. See also CHS WAB, 79-80.
"common" sheep, as useless and worthy of extinction. And while American Merino breeders, concentrated in northern states, employed mostly free laborers, South African breeders relied on slave labor and, later, coerced African labor. Because of these conditions, the rhetoric of South African wool raisers was pregnant with racial insinuations about breeding and heredity. American Merino breeders did not make the same analogies and, in fact, many were vocal opponents to slavery. In the southern states, where slavery flourished and became a central tenet of white society, Merino sheep were wholly neglected. As the nineteenth century progressed, Southerners became more rigid in their support of a cotton economy based on plantation slavery and in their opposition to industrialization and wage labor.449

Important differences also arose from the simple fact that the Merino wool industry progressed much faster in the United States than in South Africa. By the time Samuel Whitman began experimenting with Merino sheep in 1814, many Americans were familiar with the breed. Because so many Merino sheep had been imported during the Merino Mania, breeding stock was easy to procure. Many Americans, even small farmers, had the resources to purchase Merino sheep and markets for wool were readily available. Because a domestic wool economy based on long-wool sheep already existed in the United States, a large supply of skilled shepherds and shearers was available to support the Merino wool industry. Furthermore, American Merino raisers benefited from robust domestic manufacturing. In time, many became involved in manufacturing themselves. South African Merino breeders did not enjoy any of these advantages. Without ready markets or the infrastructure to process wool, most sheep raisers in the Cape Colony

449 Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South in Georgia and South Carolina, 1760-1815," 200.
showed little interest in wool of any kind. While American Merino wool production grew steadily from 1810 onward, it was relatively stagnant in South Africa until after 1830.

**A New System of Life**

The introduction of Merino sheep impacted not only wealthy industrialists and breeders, but small landowners, wage laborers, and artisans as well. Prior to 1810, many Americans had already become involved in raising long-wool sheep breeds. The arrival of Merino sheep expanded this existing economy and further diversified economic activity in rural and small town America. In some rural areas, Merino sheep breeding dominated land use. Along many New England waterways, the appearance of textile mills producing Merino cloth altered patterns of life and labor in many small towns. In between these extremes, many American farmers and laborers participated in the production of Merino wool and textiles to earn a part of their living. Small farmers added Merino sheep to their stable of domestic farm animals. Farm laborers worked as shepherds and shearers. Spinners and weavers thrived as part of the putting out system that supplemented powered woolen mills. Together, these men and women constructed a complex and heterogeneous wool economy. This American system, which produced and processed Merino wool within a small geographical area (often within the same town, parish, or county), was much different than the export-oriented system of wool production that emerged in South Africa.\(^{450}\)

The first Merino sheep in the United States attracted the interest of wealthy individuals, partly due to their exorbitant price. As Merino sheep became more common

and affordable, however, they came within reach of many American farmers. Between 1810 and 1840, the population of Merino sheep in the United States exploded, with much of this growth occurring on relatively small farms. In areas like Addison County, Vermont, which became famous for Merino breeding, it was possible to find flocks of 2,000 sheep. Most farmers, however, kept much smaller flocks. And while some large breeders still obsessed over the purity of their Merino sheep, most farmers insisted on a more fluid, less rigid distinction between fine wool and coarse wool sheep.451

Although pure-bred or highly bred Merino and Saxony sheep could still draw a high price at auction, cross-bred sheep with some Merino parentage could be bought quite cheaply from 1815 onward. For small farmers who could not afford pure-bred sheep, cross-bred could be a wise investment. When the Boston shopkeeper Jedediah Harris looked to start a new life as a farmer near Stafford, Vermont, he had little trouble in stocking his fifty-acre farm. While two cows cost Harris fifty-two dollars, he purchased twenty-five Merino sheep (almost certainly cross-breeds) for less than two dollars apiece. Gurdon Hibbard, a farmer in Brookfield, Vermont, bought a seven-eighths Merino buck for only five dollars in November of 1825. His farm diary shows that he bought and sold cross-bred and common sheep for around two dollars. Despite highly variable prices, cross-bred Merino sheep could generally be bought in the northeastern United States for a couple of dollars throughout the period 1815-1840. These low prices are exceptional when contrasted with the Merino Mania of the early 1810’s. Small farmers who raised these

451 In Addison County alone, there were more than 160,000 Merino sheep by 1837. See Benton and Barry, A Statistical View of the Number of Sheep, 27 and "Addison County’s Last Flock of Merino Sheep," Rutland Herald, Nov. 30, 1949, accessed at Vermont Historical Society.
cross-bred sheep rarely documented their pedigree and, by the 1820’s, cross-bred Merinos had largely attained the generic status of ‘common’ sheep in much of New England.\textsuperscript{452}

Farmers and rural laborers participated in the Merino wool trade in many ways. For most, the sheep and wool industry constituted only a portion of their employment. The journal of Lovel Kelton, a middling farmer from Calais, Vermont provides one example of the role sheep played in the dynamic American rural economy. Kelton’s journal records the predictable cycles of farm life, including the management of his flock of sheep. Near the end of each May, Kelton would wash his sheep to remove accumulated sand and debris from the fleece. After the fleeces were dry, Kelton would shear his sheep. In addition to selling wool, he also raised corn and butchered sheep for meat. Kelton supplemented his farm income by cutting wood, framing buildings, raising barns, picking apples and hoeing fields. He occasionally worked in a nearby sawmill and, in the winter time, he hunted foxes and panthers for bounties. As his flock of sheep grew, Kelton began to lease his sheep to other farmers.\textsuperscript{453}

Many small flock owners in New England shared Kelton’s varied and irregular employment schedule. Ira Bissell of Hebron, Connecticut was another such farmer who sheared his own small flock of sheep and sold the wool locally. In addition, Bissell charged a fee to pasture and to shear his neighbors’ sheep. This income supplemented what Bissell earned from selling cheese, butter, and cider or from working as a day laborer. Amos Geer, another Connecticut farmer, also supplemented the wool sales of his medium sized flock by shearing sheep. In the wintertime, Geer focused on making the shoes and corn brooms

\textsuperscript{452} VHS JH; VHS Gurdon Hibbard Farm Diary and Account Book (GH), November 1825-May 1826; VHS Ephraim Briggs Account Book (EB), Folder 14, "Cattle and Sheep Books."
\textsuperscript{453} VHS Lovel Kelton Journal (LK).
that he sold. Alexander Phelps of Simsbury, Connecticut did not own any sheep of his own, but he earned extra income from leasing and shearing sheep. Between May and June of 1825, Phelps was paid one dollar and fifteen cents for pasturing, shearing, and earmarking six sheep owned by one Abigail Case. During the same year, Phelps received a little more than a dollar from one Lamar Phelps for washing, shearing, and pasturing a small flock of sheep. This work complemented Alexander Phelps’ income from ploughing, woodcutting, planting, and cider-making.454

Shepherds and shearers in the early United States appear to have been overwhelmingly male. The workforce that processed woolen cloth, however, was much more diverse. By 1820, relatively simple tasks of carding wool and fulling cloth had been mechanized. Even small home producers generally paid to have their wool carded by water powered machines rather than carding themselves by hand. The records of the Smithfield Manufacturing Company, a Rhode Island carding mill that operated between 1817 and 1835, show the daily operations of such a mill. Individuals carried wool, often in amounts less than five pounds, to be oiled and carded at a standard rate, usually about eight cents a pound. The Smithfield labor account books show that workers were paid daily wages, either working full, half, or quarter day shifts. Though little is known about the workers at the mill, records show that both men and women were employed in equal numbers. Like other small Rhode Island woolen mills, the Smithfield mill employed

454 CHS Ira Bissell Account Book (IB), June 7, 1827; CHS Amos Geer Account Book (AG), June 2, 1828; CHS Alexander Phelps Account Book (AP), May-August 1825.
members of the same family concurrently, such as four women from the Saunderson family, Caroline, Ann, Almyra, and Content.455

Some carding mills produced finished cloth, but many lacked the complex machinery needed to spin and weave yarn. Instead, this work was contracted out to skilled spinners and weavers who then returned the wool to the mill to be finished and sold. An account of weavers contracted by the Providence Manufacturing Company from February to October 1811 shows that female and male weavers were employed in near equal numbers and paid by the number of yards of woven cloth produced. Payments ranged from eight to twelve cents per yard and women often earned a higher rate than men. A similar system was used at Allyn Burr’s Hartford woolen factory, although Burr seems to have only employed male workers. Burr’s employees at the factory were responsible for carding and dying wool and could expect to earn about one dollar per day. Weaving, however, was contracted to (mostly male) individuals, who were paid roughly twenty cents per yard for their work.456

The division between unskilled wage work, like carding and fulling, and skilled contract work, like spinning and weaving, was not absolute. Some workers, like Beriah Hartshorn and Elam May, filled both roles simultaneously. Hartshorn and May were employed at the Clark and Gray wool carding factory in Windham, Connecticut in 1815. Both men received monthly wages for carding wool at the mill, with Hartshorn earning between fourteen and twenty dollars per month and May earning twenty-six. In addition, both men were paid for spinning, weaving, and other forms of piece work. For example,

455 RIHS GO, Folders 3 and 6.
456 RIHS TS, Folder 20; CHS AB Account Book.
between April and October of 1815, Hartshorn earned just over eighty-four dollars in monthly wages carding wool. He supplemented this income with a further fifteen dollars earned by spinning and weaving. May must have been a more skilled worker, as he earned a similar wage, eighty-four dollars, in only three months of work. Furthermore, as a contract worker May earned nearly one-hundred and forty extra dollars over the same period. May was paid for weaving a variety of cloth styles, for spinning wool, roping, and scouring wool. May was also subcontracting his work, to use an anachronism, by employing other weavers.  

Some wool workers like Elam May were clearly specialists. This was especially true of weavers, many of whom descended from a long line of professionals. The Gardiner Family of Rhode Island, weavers since the first half of the eighteenth century, passed down beautiful depictions of weaving patterns that resemble musical notation or tablature. These drawings depict parallel lines of yarn and use numbers and symbols to indicate where and when the yarn should be crossed. The drawings were annotated with short hints on completing the pattern. Asa Hungerford, a weaver in East Haddam, Connecticut, used similar patterns for kersey and satinet. Dyers and print makers were likely to be specialists as well. Samuel Dunster, a skilled calico maker, found employment throughout New England. The sample books that he created throughout his career show a wide variety of highly detailed designs.

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457 CHS Clark and Gray Account Book (CG).
458 RIHS Gardiner Family Papers (GF) Box 2, Folder 1; CHS Asa Hungerford Papers (AH); RIHS Samuel Dunster Collection (SD), Box 1.
Figure 23: Gardiner Family weaving patterns. Rhode Island Historical Society.

Figure 24: Calico print by Samuel Dunster. Rhode Island Historical Society.
Other spinners and weavers, however, were only casual participants in the wool economy. David Lake of Tiverton, Rhode Island was one of these intermittent wool workers. Lake was a skilled carpenter who performed different agricultural and artisanal odd jobs for his neighbors. Lake charged about one dollar a day for mowing, planting, or mending tools, such as yokes and ploughs. Lake also worked for Paul Cuffe, the African-American ship captain, repairing masts and performing general ship carpentry. From 1809, however, Lake also entered the textile business. Lake was paid to weave woolen broadcloth and flannels and to spin “toe yarn,” presumably from flax fibers. In 1815, Lake married his carpentry and textile skills to build a loom, for which he was paid eleven dollars.459

Many hands were needed to make woolen cloth from the backs of Merino sheep. Shepherds, shearers, and wool washers in rural areas harvested raw wool. Workers in water-powered carding mills treated the wool before sending it out to contract spinners and weavers. This complex but efficient putting-out system survived until the mid-century before being altered by improvements in factory technology. It would be misleading to equate this system with the more familiar image of the cotton mills at Waltham and Lowell. The bold vision of those mills included tenement housing, company stores, mill girls, and a violent upending of village life. The growth of the woolen textile industry, however, was a much more gradual process. Complex networks of work and trade characterized the New England wool economy before the arrival of Merino sheep or the advent of industrialization. Farmers who had raised long-wool sheep now raised cross-bred Merino sheep. Women, men, and children who had long processed wool at home

459 RIHS David Lake Family Papers (DL), Folder 1, "Ledger."
now carried it to carding and fulling mills before spinning and weaving. Across the United Stated, especially in New England, people who had always relied on sheep and wool for a portion of their income continued to do so.

**Conclusion**

By 1840, there were roughly 13 million sheep in the United States, 10 million of which were located in the northeastern states. Most of these sheep were pure-bred or cross-bred Merinos. American wool manufacturers operated more than 1500 sets of machinery, producing broadcloths, cassimeres, satinetts, flannels, kerseys, and carpets. Wool manufacturing was concentrated in the northeast as well, with more than 500 sets of machinery in Massachusetts alone. In addition to producing roughly 40 million pounds of wool domestically, American manufacturers imported 12 million pounds of wool annually (mostly coarse wool) to satisfy demand. Almost no American wool was exported to foreign countries.⁴⁶⁰ These figures alone form a sharp contrast with the Cape Colony of South Africa, which lacked a single factory for producing wool and exported nearly all its annual Merino wool clip. Although both countries managed dramatic growth in Merino sheep population and wool output, their respective systems of wool production and sheep-raising cultures were very different. Of all major wool producers, outside of Europe, only the United States sought and gained the capacity to manufacture wool cloth.

The impressive growth of American wool raising and manufacturing was facilitated by the presence of an established commercial wool economy prior to 1810. Americans, accustomed to wool, were undaunted by experimenting with Merino sheep and the breed

slipped into rural life rather seamlessly. To many Merino owners and workers, they
became almost unremarkable. Although they quickly became the most popular and prized
breed in the United States, they did not cause the decline of other coarse or 'common'
long-wool breeds. As Merino sheep became more available and less expensive, they
attracted many types of farmers, not only aristocratic gentry. Many small farmers, new to
the breed, raised Merino sheep to supplement their income. American breeders became
indistinguishable from 'practical farmers,' profit-minded and responsive to a dynamic
market that demanded many grades of wool.

Although they may not have been cultural elites like their predecessors, American
Merino farmers established a thriving industry only imagined by the founding fathers of
wool. The new wool industry benefitted a diverse cast of workers, including free wage
laborers, independent artisans, and business owners in both rural and urban areas.
Together, these workers fulfilled the dreams of economic independence that had
motivated the first American Merino enthusiasts. By the mid-nineteenth century,
domestic manufacturers supplied nearly all the wool garments on the American market,
freeing the young country from dependence of Great Britain. In the process, the domestic
wool economy ignited industrial processes and a new way of life for many American
workers.
CONCLUSION

On August 12th, 1844 John Mitford Bowker addressed a group of South African farmers gathered at the home of one Gert Else. Recalling his early days in the colony, Bowker spoke of a time "when our plains were covered with tens of thousands of springboks," a type of antelope that had nearly disappeared by the mid-1840s, decimated by hunters and fenced off prime grazing lands by ranchers. While Bowker cherished the few remaining springbok and lamented that "so much innocence, beauty, elegance, and agility, must need be swept from the earth," he saw this destruction as a necessary evil. For in place of the springbok, "tens of thousands of merino sheep, whose fleeces find employment to tens of thousands of industrious men," now roamed the countryside. Bowker asked his audience rhetorically, "are they not better than the springbok?"464

Bowker's tone abruptly changed as he began to express his feelings toward black South Africans. Like other white frontier colonists, who had been warring for decades with Xhosa and other Africans, Bowker was consumed by a fear of black people. Professing with certainty that "rapine and murder are in all [black men's] thoughts," Bowker only claimed to "hate [them] accordingly." Specifically, Bowker reserved a special contempt for black

people because he believed them "to be the great bar to all improvements amongst us," the white South Africans.\textsuperscript{462}

Bowker then deployed his now infamous analogy, stating: "I begin to think that [blacks] too, as well as the springbok, must give place." For he could not tolerate the idea of "a few thousands of ruthless, worthless savages" wastefully occupying "a land that would support millions of civilized men happily." Just as a tide of Merino sheep had overwhelmed the wild springbok, a wave of 'civilized' white settlement threatened to erase black populations from the landscape. All of this in the name of improvement.\textsuperscript{463}

The blunt racism and the sheer intensity of Bowker's analogy is shocking to the reader. Clearly, Merino sheep were not just a source of fine wool. They symbolized the advancement of civilization, the remaking of the earth, and the extermination of inferior breeds, both human and animal. The history of Merino sheep in South Africa and the United States is littered with episodes of similar fervor. A lyrical American diplomat dreams of bringing Merino sheep to his home country and compares himself to Jason of the Argonauts. After nearly a decade, he arrives with the Merinos and is celebrated by his peers.\textsuperscript{464} A Governor of the Cape Colony orders all other sheep breeds to be castrated, and thus brought to extinction.\textsuperscript{465} A Merino merchant describes his cargo as "the Sheep of Ararat," the germ of new hope and prosperity. In each of these examples Merino wool was

\textsuperscript{463} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{464} Humphreys, "Poem on Industry," 103.
\textsuperscript{465} In October 1805, Governor Janssens orders his \textit{Landdrosts} "to encourage by every means, the exchange of the native Cape Sheep for those that give wool," which included orders for mass castration, see CA CO 3876 145 "Memorial of the Field Cornets in the Cold and Warm Bokkeveld and of the Divisions on and behind the Hex River in the District of Tulbaugh to His Excellency, Du Pré Earl of Caledon," received February 19th, 1810. This course of action was also recommended by W.S. van Ryneveld, see Van Ryneveld, \textit{Concise Remarks}, 137.
more than a commodity; these sheep carried with them major social and cultural implications.\footnote{BL PDM Folder, I "Letter to Captain Ward from Charles Hall."}

A powerful notion of improvement lay at the heart of Merino enthusiasm. In South Africa, improvement meant elevation from poverty and escape from charges of "incorrigible degeneracy." By abandoning the native Cape sheep and the native practice of migratory pastoralism, white South Africans hoped to dispel the idea that they "lived as animals on the veld with the animals." At the same time, they hoped to distinguish themselves from black South Africans, with whom they shared many agricultural practices. For white farmers in the Cape Colony, a commercial economy based on a European sheep breed represented a full-throated rejection of African influence.\footnote{Dubow, \textit{Commonwealth of Knowledge}, 6; Ross, "Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape," 62.}

Improvement in the United States involved scientific and technological advancement, as well as the growth of commerce. The first American Merino enthusiasts also invested in other novel business ventures, such as mining, canal construction, steam power, and complex manufacturing. Raising Merino sheep allowed the gentry class to demonstrate knowledge of the latest trends in agriculture while flaunting their entrepreneurial spirit. But American improvement also involved assertions of national prestige and a challenge to British power. As E.I. du Pont explained, "the greatest harm that can be done to the English is to destroy their trade; the only way to accomplish that in this country is to establish manufactures that will rival theirs." Interest in Merino wool was never limited to agricultural gains, but rather "the technological advance of an
industrial future.” American Merino enthusiasts always emphasized the belief that raising fine wool was an object of national interest.468

The "Improvers" who first coveted Merino sheep in South Africa and the United States shared important characteristics. They were wealthy, cosmopolitan, and considered themselves elites. By joining agricultural societies, maintaining rural estates, and publishing literature on sheep, they cast themselves as "wealthy and patriotick landholders," the natural leaders of society.469 Within these small circles, information about Merino sheep travelled quickly. The Language of Wool allowed them to separate their livestock from 'common' sheep and, in the process, distinguish themselves from 'common' people.

Intense enthusiasm for the breed was not shared by middle and lower class farmers in South Africa and the United States. The pastoral Boers of the Cape Colony rejected the Merino breed and resented government efforts to force it upon them. Their loyalties lay with the familiar Cape sheep and established practices borrowed from African herders. American farmers were, most often, simply uninterested in the expensive and unfamiliar sheep. For these reasons, the first attempts to propagate Merino sheep in South Africa and the United States were largely ineffectual, and Merino sheep breeding remained the domain of self-proclaimed specialists.

After a period of relative similarity, the Merino industry in these two countries diverged greatly, starting around 1810. South African Merino flocks grew slowly but steadily until 1830, when dramatic shifts within the Cape Colony intensified sheep raising

468 "E.I. du Pont to Du Pont de Nemours, Brandywine, Eleutherian Mills, October 1 1808,” in Life of Eleuthere Du Pont Correspondence 1807-1811, 98-103; Stoykovich, "Culture of Improvement," 33.
469 Thornton, Cultivating Gentlemen, 74 and 92-93.
and wool production. Wool became the Colony’s leading export and brought prosperity to formerly impoverished regions of the Cape. The growth of wool also pulled large numbers of black workers into the colonial wage economy for the first time. Despite these changes, textile producing enterprises never materialized in South Africa.470

In the United States, fallout from the Napoleonic Wars led to the "Merino Mania," a sudden and unprecedented boom in Merino sheep importation in 1810. In the northeastern states, Merino sheep became ingrained in rural communities as a common source of supplemental income, even among farmers with small landholdings and little capital. Water-powered textile factories augmented existing networks of textile production but did not entirely replace them – at least initially. As a result, a dynamic wool economy sprang up to employ a diverse group of men and women in a variety of skilled and unskilled positions.471

Much of the divergence in the South African and American Merino industries can be explained by geography and demographics. The Cape Colony’s wide open plains and dry climate proved excellent for raising sheep, but lack of rainfall curtailed food production and population growth. Even in 1840, the Colony’s population hovered around 150,000, or less than two persons per square mile. In the same year, the population of the northeastern United States was approaching seven million, or 37 per square mile. Although wool brought prosperity to towns of the interior Cape Colony, such as Graaff-

471 This economy ranged from the large, centralized, and ideologically inspired mills at Waltham and Lowell to the upstart capitalists of Rhode Island, who "possessed no inherent sense of restrictions on their economic and social goals and tastes." See Dalzell, Enterprising Elite, 26-27 and Blewett, Constant Turmoil, 19.
Reinet, these regions were small and undeveloped compared to more numerous American cities and county seats.472

Nor were the respective economies of these two countries even remotely similar. The Cape wool boom brought rural investment to South Africa, but a lack of commercial institutions made the boom unsustainable and rather short-lived. The Cape Colony, therefore, struggled to support the development of merchant capital at a time when the northeastern United States was being transformed by steam powered factories, railroads, and rapid urbanization. Alongside these changes, an "encroaching web of market transactions" commercialized even the most rural and agricultural sectors of the American economy.473

But divergence in the Merino wool industry in South Africa and the United States also reflected conscious choices made by those most interested and invested in the Merino breed. Most importantly, Merino breeders in South Africa and the United States fundamentally different reactions to the rise of British imperial and industrial power. To borrow from P.J. Marshall's thesis in Making and Unmaking of Empires, these reactions "depended to a large extent on the responses of elites."474

Elites in the Cape Colony, including the Dutch-speaking 'Cape gentry,' welcomed the Colony's incorporation into the British Empire. The arrival of British dominion provided the Colony much needed stability and security. By leveraging British military

474 Marshall, Making and Unmaking of Empires, 2
strength toward violent conquest and dispossession, white colonists managed to gain control of black South Africans’ land and labor. Although the Colony remained dependent on Great Britain both economically and militarily, inclusion in the globally-oriented British empire offered the cosmopolitan gentry numerous commercial opportunities as well as cultural cachet. Thus, Merino raisers in the Cape Colony succeeded in distancing themselves from pernicious stereotypes that undermined their status and standing.

The United States, in contrast, was born out of discomfort with subordination to British interests. Following independence, "the leviathan of imperial control” continued to haunt the young nation. American interest in Merino sheep was rooted in competition with Britain and always tied to industrialization. The dramatic growth of Merino wool, along with advances in manufacturing and tariff protection, allowed the United States to become self-sufficient in most types of wool cloth by 1840. Thus, American Merino enthusiasts achieved their goals of developing domestic industry and gaining economic independence from Great Britain.

**Futures**

This dissertation concludes in the year 1840, after South Africa and the United States established the foundational elements of the Merino wool industry. But the history of Merino wool in these places after 1840 is rich, providing many possibilities for future projects. After 1840, the wool industry in South Africa continued to grow rapidly. By 1865, there were 8,000,000 Merino sheep in Cape Colony and, by 1890, the population had risen

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above 10,000,000.\textsuperscript{476} The increase was most dramatic in eastern districts like Graaff-Reinet, Cradock, and Somerset East, located behind the white settlement frontier. Cape sheep outnumbered Merino sheep in these regions into the late 1840's, but by 1865 Merinos constituted 96\% of eastern flocks. The 6,000,000 Merino sheep in the eastern Cape Colony dwarfed the 2,000,000 in western districts nearer to Cape Town, where Merino pioneers like the van Reenen family and Michiel van Breda had started the industry. Although eclipsed, regions like the Overberg (home to van Breda’s farms, Zoetendalsvlei and Rhenosterfontein) remained important sources of Merino breeding stock.\textsuperscript{477}

The aggressive expansion of wool farming was devastating to the fat-tailed Cape sheep. The indigenous breed survived, even thrived, in some especially arid regions, but in much of the Colony it was systematically extirpated.\textsuperscript{478} Wild animals suffered grave consequences as well. Indigenous grazing species, like the springbok, faced destructive habitat losses as sheep farmers divided grasslands with fencing. Predator species like the wild dog and jackal were hunted, trapped, and poisoned by farmers to minimize stock losses.\textsuperscript{479}

The growing industry required vast amounts of labor, as well as land, to survive. Large Merino farmers needed shepherds and shearsers to manage sheep, maintain fences, and pursue predators. Wool growers, nearly all of whom were white, supported actions that guaranteed the availability of cheap labor. By fencing open ranges, often under dubious authority, Merino raisers “reified and obscured [their] claim to control over the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{476} Beinart, \textit{Rise of Conservation in South Africa}, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{477} Inggs, “Liverpool of the Cape,” 91; Wilson, “Rural Revolution,” 8; and Burrows, \textit{Overberg Outspan}, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{478} Tamarkin, \textit{Volk and Flock}, 69; Inggs, “Liverpool of the Cape,” 91.
\item \textsuperscript{479} Beinart, “Night of the Jackal,” 182-185; Van Sittert, "Bringing in the Wild," 282.
\end{itemize}
land.” Legislation like the Glen Grey Act (1894) stripped black farmers of their communal landholdings and forced many to work for low wages on white farms.480

In the United States, Merino sheep moved westward behind the white settlement frontier. As in the eastern Cape Colony, newly conquered regions in the American West witnessed the greatest increases in wool production. In 1840, there were perhaps only 500,000 sheep of any type west of the Mississippi River. But the western sheep population trebled over the next decade and by 1890, there were more than 27,000,000 sheep in the western United States, most of them Merinos. This dramatic transformation did not occur without conflict. Rapid growth in both the sheep and cattle industries led to brutal range wars between cattle ranchers, usually Anglo-Americans, and sheep herders, often Hispanic or Native Americans.481

While Merino wool flourished in the American west, it floundered in the northeastern states where the industry was founded. The sheep population of this region steadily declined from a peak of 11,000,000 in 1840 to a mere 4,000,000 in 1890. Compounding the general decline in sheep farming, northeastern Merino raisers found they could no longer compete against wool farmers in western states with access to larger flocks and pastures. Pivoting toward meat production for the expanding urban market, they abandoned the Merino in favor of English sheep breeds that produced more and better mutton. The Merino, once ubiquitous throughout the northeast, became a rarity

once again. A notable exception was in the state of Vermont, where, as in the Overberg region of the Cape, Merino breeders continued to produce renowned breeding stock for farmers in other regions.482

**Final Questions**

The somewhat parallel trajectories of the Merino sheep industry in South Africa and the United States after 1840 offer tantalizing opportunities for inquiry and comparison. For example, as the Merino sheep frontier expanded to the east and west, respectively, the wool industry moved into regions where whites were a minority. More research is needed to determine how, exactly, the breed was received by African and Native American peoples, who possessed their own cultures of sheep raising. To what degree did black South Africans embrace or reject the Merino breed on their own lands? How did Hispanic and Native Americans incorporate Merino sheep into existing systems based on Churro sheep? These questions promise illuminating answers that may interest historians of many persuasions.

There are also opportunities for a more directly transnational study of Merino sheep in these two countries. Beginning in the 1860’s, Vermont Merino breeders began looking outside of the United States for potential clients. Thanks to an aggressive marketing campaign, "Vermont Merino" sheep were exported to South Africa, as well as other wool-producing countries like Australia and Argentina. In Australia, the "Vermont Invasion" was criticized for degrading the locally developed breeds like the Peppin

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Merino. Other transnational livestock, such as the Boer goat (which was developed in South Africa but is now common in the United States) may provide avenues for further research.483

Regarding the period of study, 1775-1840, this dissertation raises several questions that have not yet been adequately answered. For example, why were South African wool breeders and wool merchants so wholly uninterested in processing wool into textiles? Even after other sectors of the South African economy, such as mining, became industrialized, wool merchants continued to focus only on exporting raw wool. To this day, most South African wool is sold unwashed or "in the grease" due to a lack of processing facilities.484

A second (and likely related) question involves the significance of black laborers in the Merino wool industry. To what degree did the treatment of blacks in the South African wool industry foreshadow or influence the racially oppressive labor systems that later developed in South African gold and diamond mines? In both cases, black workers were often people dispossessed of their landholdings by white settlers and forced to become

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483 Addison County, Vermont became an international known breeding hotspot and, "by the post-Civil War period, [Addison Merinos] were being shipped as far as Australia, South America, and South Africa. Times were good and breeders sold their sheep for fabulous prices of $5000 or $6000." See "Addison County's Last Flock of Merino Sheep," Rutland Herald, November 30, 1949 retrieved from the Vermont Historical Society and Belanus, They Lit their Cigars, 33-35. See also H.B. Austin, The Merino: Past, Present and Probable (Sydney: Grahame, 1943) 50-54.
484 Less than one fourth of the Merino wool sold in SA is processed prior to sale. See Cape Wools, "Wools Processed in South Africa, March 2017," which can be accessed at http://www.capewools.co.za/documentlibrary.
http://www.capewools.co.za/assets/statisticalreviewofwoolsoldinsouthafrica201415.pdf
landless migrants. Barred from residing in white rural towns, they were confined to nearby townships.\footnote{Dubow, \textit{Land, Labour, and Merchant Capital}, 34-36, 41.}

South Africa and the United States were each plagued by systems of racial oppression and inequality during the nineteenth century. But only in South Africa did the Merino wool industry advance the interests of oppression and inequality. The South African Merino industry grew out of a slave society in the Cape Colony and was, in many cases, funded by the profits of slavery.\footnote{Ross, "Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape," 68-70.} The industry expanded into new pastures through brutal race-based conflict and conquest. The American Merino industry, in contrast, developed in a time and place of budding abolitionism. Although the gentry of the northeastern states often benefited from slavery in the American South, they were immediately removed from it. In time, Merino wool raising supported the rise of a factory system that was seen by some as the antithesis to slavery. These significant disagreements between two white settler populations motivated by a similar 'Language of Wool' deserve further investigation.\footnote{Rivard, \textit{A New Order of Things}, 22; Dalzell, \textit{Enterprising Elite}, 174.}

South Africans and Americans embraced Merino sheep in response to global conditions, specifically the growth of a global British Empire. In both regions, Merinos played a symbolic and practical role in the making and unmaking of empire. The question of race may be critical to understanding why elites in South Africa and the United States adopted different positions in the face of encroaching British imperialism and industrialization. It is possible that white South Africans embraced British rule primarily to preserve the racial order. And yet, the United States rejected British rule despite
forming a racially exclusive society. What role, then, did race play in these two nations' engagement with imperialism, industrialization, and cosmopolitan culture?

These questions lie beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the complex cultural and racial associations applied to Merino sheep in South Africa and the United States speak to their importance. Merino breeders agonized over the purity of their animals' blood and painstakingly documented their heritage. Merino sheep were considered superior to other breeds for their innate characteristics, a belief that Merino raisers internalized as proof of their own high stature. Although the Merino industry in South Africa and the United States diverged significantly, the central impulse of Merino enthusiasm was quite similar. Praise for Merino sheep suggested a rejection of the status quo and a great leap forward toward a modern future.
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Figure 2: "Cañada Real Soriana Occidental (Cañada de la Vera de la Sierra) en Prádena de la Sierra (Segovia)" by Luis Fernández García. Used under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.1 Spain license. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cannada-real-vera-de-la-sierra.jpg

Figure 3: "Table of the Animal Kingdom (Regnum Animale) from Carolus Linnaeus's first edition (1735) of Systema Naturae." Public domain. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Linnaeus_Regnum_Animale_(1735).png

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BIOGRAPHY

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