VIRGINIA’S INDUSTRIES, including agriculture, commercial fishing, shipping, and coal mining, have relied on wood and metal crafts since early settlement days. Coopers, basket makers, wheelwrights, carpenters, furniture makers, machinists, and iron founders all helped shape the commonwealth.

When the English arrived in 1607, Virginia tribes were making tools and utensils from natural materials, such as wood and stone. A blacksmith and several carpenters were among the first Jamestown settlers. Many enslaved Africans became master metalsmiths and woodworkers. Some of their descendants still practice these crafts.

In England, centuries of deforestation led to a shortage of large timber for shipbuilding and construction; Virginia’s abundant timber helped supply the shipyards. Today, England has strict woodland-management and conservation programs.

The first blast furnace in America was constructed just south of the site of present day Richmond, Virginia, in 1619. In 1833, the Tredegar Iron Works opened in Richmond and served an important role in munitions making during the Civil War. Railroads linked industrial centers and kept Virginia ironworkers and craftspeople in business. Even now, the large shipbuilding facilities of Hampton Roads use tons of steel.

◆ According to the Virginia Department of Forestry, there are 15 million acres of timberland in the commonwealth.

◆ In early days, blacksmiths made nails by hand. Jefferson’s estate, Monticello, included a nail factory.

◆ In Kent, England, craftspeople use live willow plants to craft “living furniture.”

◆ Colonial Williamsburg has a larger craft program than any other historic site in the United States. Twenty eighteenth-century shops and fifty-four craftspeople—masters, journeymen, and apprentices—bring Virginia’s traditions alive.

◆ After cedar blight hit Bermuda in the late 1940s, Virginia supplied the island nation with cedar.