

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910787518703321
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Titolo	The way of improvement leads home [[electronic resource]] : Philip Vickers Fithian and the rural Enlightenment in early America / / John Fea
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Philadelphia [Pa.], : University of Pennsylvania Press, c2008
ISBN	0-8122-0639-8
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (278 p.)
Collana	Early American Studies
Disciplina	973.3/7 B
Soggetti	American diaries - History and criticism Diarists - Virginia Enlightenment - United States Plantation life - Virginia - History - 18th century Presbyterians - New Jersey Tutors and tutoring - Virginia United States History Revolution, 1775-1783 Chaplains United States Intellectual life 18th century Virginia Social life and customs To 1775
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. [219]-255) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- Introduction -- Chapter 1. A Cohansey Home -- Chapter 2. A Presbyterian Conversion -- Chapter 3. Ambition -- Chapter 4. Rural Enlightenment -- Chapter 5. A Virginia Sojourn -- Chapter 6. Revolution -- Chapter 7. The Call Of God -- Chapter 8. Duty -- Appendix. A Note On The Fithian Diaries -- Notes -- Index -- Acknowledgments
Sommario/riassunto	The Way of Improvement Leads Home traces the short but fascinating life of Philip Vickers Fithian, one of the most prolific diarists in early America. Born to Presbyterian grain-growers in rural New Jersey, he was never quite satisfied with the agricultural life he seemed destined to inherit. Fithian longed for something more-to improve himself in a revolutionary world that was making upward mobility possible. While

Fithian is best known for the diary that he wrote in 1773-74 while working as a tutor at Nomini Hall, the Virginia plantation of Robert Carter, this first full biography moves beyond his experience in the Old Dominion to examine his inner life, his experience in the early American backcountry, his love affair with Elizabeth Beatty, and his role as a Revolutionary War chaplain. From the villages of New Jersey, Fithian was able to participate indirectly in the eighteenth-century republic of letters-a transatlantic intellectual community sustained through sociability, print, and the pursuit of mutual improvement. The republic of letters was above all else a rational republic, with little tolerance for those unable to rid themselves of parochial passions. Participation required a commitment to self-improvement that demanded a belief in the Enlightenment values of human potential and social progress. Although Fithian was deeply committed to these values, he constantly struggled to reconcile his quest for a cosmopolitan life with his love of home. As John Fea argues, it was the people, the religious culture, and the very landscape of his "native sod" that continued to hold Fithian's affections and enabled him to live a life worthy of a man of letters.
