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The functions of a capital city: Williamsburg and its "Public Times," 1699-1765

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THE FUNCTIONS OF A CAPITAL CITY:
WILLIAMSBURG AND ITS "PUBLIC TIME," 1699-1765

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Mary S. Hoffschwelle
1980
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Until recently, the history of the colonial South has not included an urban component. Taking urban theory and history of other regions and periods and in particular the work of a new group of historians of the Chesapeake as a foundation, this study attempts a closer look at Williamsburg, Virginia's capital city from 1699 to 1780.

Williamsburg was not just a small town serving the needs of a small section of the Tidewater, but a capital. The functions of a capital are the main concern of this study: what they were, how they affected the city's development, and, to some extent, how they affected the colony. The Public Times, the meetings of the General Court and concomitant activities in the business and social spheres, are given close scrutiny as the times when the functions of the capital were exhibited most fully.

By delineating the many activities of Public Times, governmental, business, social, and cultural functions are identified and then analyzed to understand how Williamsburg operated as a capital city and the people for whom it functioned. Williamsburg is seen as the creation of an elite class, to be used by them as a temporary home for their exercise of colony-wide power and influence in its role as capital, both in harmony with Great Britain and, later, against it.
THE FUNCTIONS OF A CAPITAL CITY:

WILLIAMSBURG AND ITS "PUBLICK TIMES," 1699-1765
Much of the older historiography of colonial Virginia has concentrated on the rural qualities of plantation life, with cities and towns coming into the picture only as the setting of organized resistance to Britain in the prelude to the Revolution. Histories of Williamsburg follow the same pattern. Although the city served as the colonial capital from 1699 to 1780, historians have neglected its place in the development of the Virginia colony except insofar as it has related to the political struggles of the 1760s and 1770s. The existence of a distinctive urban settlement throughout the century is barely acknowledged. Thus, one of the most noted historians of colonial Williamsburg can write: "The essence of eighteenth-century Virginia was its rural quality," and "the real and most attractive attributes of Williamsburg were--and still are--those of a rural community."¹

In recent years, some historians have reevaluated the problem of urbanization—or the lack of it—in the colonial South. Interest now centers on the Chesapeake, one of the most populous and yet least urbanized areas of the colonies. The existence of urban centers and their roles are recognized and explored. Thus, a new perspective has opened from which Williamsburg can be seen as a capital city, a center for Virginia's economy, society, and culture. The interrelationships
between centralization and dispersal, town and country, and perhaps even the parent culture and that developing indigenously, can be seen most clearly in the colonial capital. A further focus on these issues may be provided by concentration upon those periods when, as shall be seen, Williamsburg most fully exhibited its urban character, the "Public Times" occurring twice a year during the meetings of the General Court.

The background of this study is broad indeed, encompassing both urban studies (including the interdisciplinary variants of the "new" urban history) and colonial American history. The field of urban studies is dominated by research in the sociology, economics, and history of nineteenth-century industrial civilization, with notable contributions from geography. Some basic ideas, theories, and interpretations that have come out of studies of both the nineteenth- and (more rarely) the eighteenth-century city will be reviewed here for their suggestions as to how the colonial capital should be approached.

The first problem is, of course, to define the term "city." Implicit in any definition is the idea of urbanization, the process by which a city is created or the growth of whatever characteristics one has selected as one's criteria for urbanity. Demographers define the city as a point of population concentration and measure the relative size and density of these points. Economists see the city as a center for the distribution of wealth, typically emphasizing its concentration of specialized economic activity, division of labor, technology, and economic growth. Sociologists look at cities as centers for the
creation and dissemination of broad cultural values, characterized by heterogeneity, secondary or impersonal human interactions, increased mobility and stratification. These definitions acquire greater usefulness when associated with the functions that a city performs. In Walter Christaller's complex theory, there are certain functions which can be performed only in a central (i.e., urban) place. These functions place cities and towns on a hierarchy of "centrality" according to the size of the hinterland they serve. He concentrates on the economic functions of a city, which tend toward the rendering of services rather than the production of goods.

But the provision of services for a rural area, while assuring a necessary economic base for the city's survival, does not answer the question of for whom the city functions. Power over the economic activities of a city is allied with power over society and politics, suggests Gideon Sjoberg in his study of the preindustrial city. He defines the city as a distinctive, nonagricultural pattern of concentrated population ordered within a given space and performing centralized functions for a broader region or hinterland. Power working through social structure determined preindustrial urban development, he contends, and ensured that the city benefited its ruling elite. Economic considerations were part of the larger dimensions of power. This emphasis on power in several spheres is of particular interest as Sjoberg relates it to the capital city. The capital of the preindustrial world provided the setting for
governmental and judicial activities on the highest level; from it radiated the laws of society. As the center of influence, it was the natural habitat of those who wished to or did control their society.

Another writer, O. H. K. Spate, notes the combination of political and cultural power in the capital city. Interestingly, he identifies the period of a country's greatest cultural advance with the political stabilization and growth of independence of its new society. The capital, he suggests, "is often the link through which the state in process of formation receives the vital external influences that impregnate its internal potentialities." At the same time, the capital provides a focus for the integration of the components of a new state, often in response to a dangerous frontier or an external menace to the common culture, perhaps finally seizing the initiative and becoming the center of an expanding empire of its own.

The example of the capital city is a more concentrated version of the cultural roles performed by any city. Robert Redfield and Milton Singer suggest that it is the varying combinations of cultural functions within a particular city that are significant. They divide cities historically between those in existence before the Industrial Revolution and those operating after it. While modern cities seem dominated by economic function and tend to be composed of a population with diverse cultural origins, older urban places were more usually political-religious or political-intellectual centers. These pre-modern cities played an "orthogenetic" role, integrating and uniformly interpreting an established culture, coordinating the activities of
town and country into a "universalization of cultural consciousness." In contrast, modern cities have a heterogenetic function, creating a new cultural consensus among various groups in the face of an unstable future.

Ferdinand Braudel turns to the material evidence of city life during the ancien regime, which he also finds epitomized in capital cities. They were "the accelerators of all historical time," dependent upon the countryside and yet controlling it through their monopoly of wealth and luxury. The growth of such large, all-powerful capitals awaited the development of the centralized state, for it was only in conjunction with political power and the money it mobilized that the capitals were able to provide their elite with an extravagant standard of living. Such cities were the final expressions of an old structure, with little hint of a new one, exemplifying "deep-seated disequilibrium, asymmetrical growth, and irrational and unproductive investment on a nation-wide scale."

These theories are summarized best by Lewis Mumford's view of the city as a "container and transmitter of culture." His definition, taken together with Sjoberg's, provides the best understanding of the nature of a city like Williamsburg. It is the "assemblage, storage, interchange, transmission, and further development of material products and symbolic culture goods," which widens "the scope of human association through the continued interaction of functions and activities in time as well as space."

Mumford directly concerns himself with the interface between
social order and material culture. The buildings of a city are physical representations of its institutions and values. With Sylvia Thrupp and John Reps, he sees the capital as the most obvious example of this architectural symbolism, but he extends this to a function of cultural centralization, which incorporates provincial customs and habits into a new national image by providing the image of a royal court as the guide for the entire society.¹⁵

This is a useful approach to take towards Williamsburg, which was but a small outgrowth of rural society in the era before the full impact of the Industrial Revolution. Since Williamsburg was not a city of large physical proportions or population, the key to its importance as a particular type of urban place, a capital, must lie in its functions. A normative and functional approach should show it to be the product of and means for the diffusion of collective values, or at least those which the ruling class wished to promulgate, operating through a series of economic and, more importantly, political and social structures to influence an entire society.

Those mechanisms operated in a context quite unlike that in England and Europe and indeed there was a great difference between the little city of Williamsburg and other cities in colonial America. Older works on colonial cities have stressed the development of municipal government and communal social action in response to the problems of urban life.¹⁶ New work by Gary Nash challenges this simple approach, presenting a picture of uneven economic growth, class conflict, and developing political consciousness among the laboring classes of Boston,
New York, and Philadelphia.  

Other historians have looked back to the commitment of colonists and those who sent them to America to urban values and urban settlement. Carville Earle suggests that the establishment of an English colony was synonymous with the creation of an urban place. The English heritage stressed the necessity of towns to perform legal, institutional, and commercial functions. It also saw towns to be literal as well as symbolic expressions of the social structure which kept people ordered and therefore civilized, protecting them from a natural tendency to degenerate when isolated in the wilderness. This had been put into practice already in Ireland, where the British government increased its control by settling colonists in towns at the sites of military garrisons.

The primary economic function intended for the colonial American city was commerce, what Eric Lampard calls the "carrier" role. Trade in foodstuffs and raw materials complemented imports of English manufactures and the products of local craftsmen. In its role as distribution and processing center, the city revealed the dependence of the colonial economy on Europe, the source for its "population, capital, customers, and much of its enterprise." Yet the British located their cities in the American colonies without especial regard for their economic health; independent commerce and industry were secondary, if crucial, developments. This is of particular importance to Virginia, for John Rainbolt contends that belief in the social and cultural importance of cities and in the power
of a government to determine society and economy led British politi-
cians and the Virginia government to conclude that they could legislate
towns into existence. Despite the good intentions of those who
settled Virginia, towns did not spring up automatically from the many
legislative acts of the seventeenth century that he and Edward Riley
describe.

Students of colonial Virginia have attributed the lack of towns
in this colony to four major causes. First, some have contended that
the availability of cheap land encouraged plantation agriculture and a
willingness to use the soil until it was exhausted, since new land
could be acquired with ease. Others suggested that the slave-holding
plantation system itself, which may have retarded the growth of trade
centers in the colony by dealing directly with British agents and
having goods shipped to the plantation on Virginia's many rivers.
Then, the tobacco inspection system, instead of fostering trade centers,
limited the development of towns in the backcountry by assuming their
distribution functions. Lastly, historians have pointed to a contra-
dictory commitment to rural values on the part of Virginians who
ostensibly supported the creation of towns. Even while the legislature
passed town acts, its members were acquiring large rural estates and
building impressive houses in which to live the lives of country
gentlemen.

New perspectives on economic functions are available already.
Joseph Ernst and Roy Merrens evaluate the urban structure of the
colonial South by function rather than size, claiming that the question
of numbers is a false issue. The striking fact, they contend, is that urban economic functions—the exchange, collection, storage, and distribution of commodities and manufactures—were carried on in the smallest of centers; urban functions were thus independent of urban location. According to their analysis, a single Scottish store constituted an urban place since it performed the same function for its region as a town. The same was true of inns and ordinaries, warehouses and inspection sites, courthouses, fairs, even traveling merchants. However, this analysis runs the risk of losing sight of the city altogether, for a concentrated population and centralized location give these functions their urban status.

This is part of Hermann Wellenreuther’s critique of Ernst and Merrens’ argument. While suggesting that value remains in the traditional explanations for the lack of urbanization in colonial Virginia, he also believes that to confine the study of urban development to a few admittedly important economic functions leaves out a multitude of other factors. This broadened approach is not taken up by Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman in their lengthy economic study, in which they contend that the South underwent an important urban experience in the eighteenth century. They disregard geographic or economic determinism in favor of the change from tobacco to grain production as the catalyst for urban growth. Hence, "elaborate urban systems emerged when expansionary markets fostered increased staple flows and where the commodities [grain] were sufficiently bulky, weighty, and perishable to require forward linkages in the transport, manufacturing, and
service sectors.29

What these studies continue to indicate is that colonial Virginia, like the rest of the southern colonies, was a decentralized, rural, and agricultural society. The economic functions of the city had to be dispersed through the countryside without a central location or await a change in the staple crop and economic organization to find an opportunity for centralized development. Yet it will be argued here that a genuinely urban life did go on in the colonial capital of Virginia. These economic studies have underscored a crucial point of the theoretical discussion of the nature and functions of the city and the history of town settlement in Virginia outlined above: that in this context, economic life was a companion of other urban functions. Williamsburg did not need to resemble the huge, dense agglomerations of people and industry evolving elsewhere in this period to be an urban center. Instead, it performed its roles as a capital and a city within a small physical setting better adapted to the needs and circumstances of its own existence and that of its hinterland. And without an overwhelming economic presence, Williamsburg still took a central place in the colony by virtue of its functions as a political center and cultural transmitter for the colony's ruling elite.

In Virginia, then, larger social and political mechanisms, supported by a cultural commitment to the value of a city on the part of influential colonists, led to the creation of a town that would function as a center for society without a large economic or population base. The functions intended for the capital dealt with that super-
structure which united the disparate rural plantations and tiny mercantile and commercial elements—the polity and culture of the colony. The administration of the colony was at the heart of Williamsburg's life. Of equal importance with its rudimentary centralized political role was its role as a cultural center. The town looked back to England for conceptions of its character, for it was a conscious effort to create an environment where the traditions of the English ruling class could be conspicuously maintained and extended. This tradition included intellectual life, social organization and activities, and the material evidence of environment and possessions as well as the exercise of political power. The impact of the capital city on the countryside was not limited to its civic jurisdiction; the people and objects there had a great influence in the rural hinterland.

Williamsburg is thus a particularly interesting subject for study because of the emphasis of its functions on power and culture and the way in which it performed these functions without an independent, extended economic base or a large physical size and correspondingly large population. As such, this city provides a unique opportunity to study the broadly-defined cultural functions of a city in action. Williamsburg also should provide useful suggestion about the transmission of English culture and the generation of distinctively colonial culture.

From this perspective, the "Public Times" occurring at the General Court sessions are especially important. The functions of the capital city in Virginia operated most fully when those people who
controlled the colony's culture and society were there. Most of these people lived out in the countryside and so Williamsburg led a dual existence as a quiet country town for the greater part of the year and then a thriving capital for two short seasons each spring and fall. The creation of this singular capital, the ideas behind it, and the functions it performed will be discussed in the following pages.
CHAPTER II
THE URBAN IMPULSE IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA
AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

To evaluate the functions of the city of Williamsburg, it is necessary to understand the circumstances in and for which it was created. This chapter will explore the establishment and growth of Williamsburg as a capital through the statements of those who created and came to the city, its physical attributes, and the institutions which the government centered in it.

During the early years of Virginia's life, the urban impulse was strong in theory but inconsistent and often unsuccessful in its practical results. Educated colonists arriving on its shores carried with them a tradition of urban thought stretching back to ancient history which saw in the city, and particularly in the capital, an historical representation of social order through which and from which emanated the regulation of the entire society. An implicit identification of town and order, of city and civilization, underlay the continued attempts to organize the colony into a series of urban settlements. As the seventeenth century progressed, some colonists increasingly felt the need for towns as organs of social control to avoid the repetition of the disorders which had culminated in 1676 in Bacon's Rebellion.
British policy identified towns with ports and mercantilist control over commerce and shipping. But tobacco was the sole desired commodity; the economic diversification and independence which true urban centers, both coastal and inland, would generate were severely curtailed. The emphasis laid on tobacco monoculture, by both the British and Virginia authorities, subordinated urban development to the streamlining of trade, and abbreviated and undermined the policy of requiring towns to be settled in each county throughout the colony.³

By the end of the first century of Virginia's existence, the realities of life in the colony, together with the contradictory quality of British policy, had rendered most attempts at urban development failures. Some complained bitterly of the effects of these defeats:

> if we enquire for well built Towns, for convenient Ports and Markets, for Plenty of Ships and Seamen, for well improved Trades and Manufactures, for well educated Children, for an industrious and thriving People, or for an happy Government in Church and State, and in short, for all the other Advantages of human Improvements, it [Virginia] is certainly, for all these Things, one of the poorest, miserablest and worst Countries in all America, that is inhabited by Christians.⁴

The association between towns and the orderly development of a contented and prosperous colony is clearly seen in such an indictment of conditions in Virginia. Another commentator felt that to continue in such a manner would be perverse: Francis Makemie, in his Plain and Friendly Perswasive to the Inhabitants of Virginia and Maryland for Promoting Towns and Cohabitation of 1705, pointed to the tendency of animals, fish, and heathens to live in groups and remarked that "all
these concur to upbraid our Folly, and ruining singularity in our manner of living and scattered habitations.\(^5\)

Makemie and his fellow writers Hartwell, Blair, and Chilton, whose 1697 account *The Present State of Virginia, and the College* was published in 1727, blamed Virginia's backward rural existence on policymakers who did not consistently enforce their demands for urban settlement upon the unwilling or ignorant population. In 1722, Hugh Jones laid the charge squarely on the shoulders of the colonists. Inclined neither by habit nor interest to living in towns, Virginians made of every plantation a little market, scattered their stores and warehouses at convenient points in the countryside, and ignored the towns laid out in each county.\(^6\)

This "unfortunate Method" of settlement may have prevented self-sufficiency and the profitable exploitation of a variety of crops in favor of the exclusive cultivation of tobacco, but it seemed to suit the colonists themselves and gave Robert Beverley some consolation in the knowledge that Virginians "are happy in the enjoyment of a Ever-lasting Peace, which their Poverty and want of Towns secure to them."\(^7\)

Even as late as the mid-eighteenth century the essentially rural character of Virginia was still a subject for comment, though few now believed it could be changed simply by legislation. In his 1759 travels Andrew Burnaby noted that, according to an act of the Assembly, Virginia should have had forty-four towns, yet no more than half of the legislated towns had more than five houses, and even those were little better than insignificant villages. He concluded that such a
pattern would characterize the colony for many years to come: "when the colony shall come to be more thickly seated, and land grow dear, people will be obliged to follow trades and manufactures, which will necessarily make towns and large cities; but this seems remote, and not likely to happen for some centuries."²

To the leaders of the colony, the advantages of urban life that Virginia forfeited by its dispersed settlements were all too apparent to allow the need for a significant central place to continue past the beginning of the eighteenth century. They wanted a forum of public life, political and social, in which they could participate according to the tradition of the civic responsibility of the ruling class. Their commitment to urbanism was somewhat ambivalent in that they sought the basis of social stability in the control of land and labor in the countryside and maintained it by living there. At the same time, they saw the city as a concentrated symbol of social order, expressed in rational harmonies of architectural design, which provided the setting for their transient ceremonies. London set the standard of refined living, but these Virginians hoped to avoid the corruption and social disorder which that urban center had engendered in a new city where the dispossessed who might offer a threat to the established order were contained by slavery.³ Thus, the need for a center of trade or revenue collection was not paramount, though it was certainly there: the quality of life itself suffered from the lack of advance in religion, education, and "human Improvement." The colony took action in 1699 to counter these problems when it created the capital of
Williamsburg.

This may have been a particularly propitious time for such an action. In the years between Bacon's Rebellion and the beginning of the eighteenth century, a new class of Virginians had come to political maturity. Composed of a second generation of landed planters, this native-born elite entered the colonial government blessed not only with a secure financial status, but with a new confidence in the colony and its (white) inhabitants. The substitution of black slaves for white indentured servants and of bitter racism for class conflict had elevated the status of lower-class whites. Riding a wave of prosperity in the tobacco market, white planters of all degrees were able to forge a common identity now that large planters did not need to exploit the small for economic gain and in fact courted the small planter for political support.

The planters' confidence in the colony had led them to establish the College of William and Mary in Middle Plantation in 1693. It also allowed them to envisage a capital city which could unify the scattered population of the colony. If the planter elite looked to classical sources and a long English philosophical tradition of urbanism, lesser planters also understood the value of a central place within the context of their own largely oral culture. As one student of colonial Virginia's popular culture has written:

the existence of community in these circumstances [dispersion] special importance necessarily attached to the places and occasions where the inhabitants came together for common purposes; on these occasions their scattered society would become visibly present to them. A people's sense of what is
dramatic profoundly shapes its experiences of life. 12

The first direct evidence of a strong impetus to build a new capital and build it in Middle Plantation came in the speeches of two students of the College of William and Mary of May 1, 1699. All of the qualities and necessities perceived to be essential to any city, and in particular a capital, were attributed to the puny settlement. The second of five student orators discoursed at length upon the merits of a Virginia education and emphasized the need for good colonial educational institutions to prevent the degeneracy sure to set in if colonists were not educated or were sent to England to study. 13 The third student took up the theme of the beneficial influence of the College and the education it provided and suggested that if a Virginia education was to be improved, it would require a market and the convenience of good company and conversation. He moved for the creation of a town, filled by the members of the government which sat there, to provide such amenities.

This speaker summed up the variety of reasons for which Middle Plantation should be considered as a site for a new capital. The colony was under an obligation to build a new state house after the burning of the fourth one in Jamestown in 1698. It ought to be built in the healthful location of Middle Plantation, on high and dry ground, with a plentiful supply of fresh water and natural valleys "to drain away all the filth and nastiness of a city." Its convenient location, with access by land and water, lay astride the road which ran to the west and yet was safe from attack. Nearby creeks would afford
sufficient milling for a town; clay, lime, and wood were readily available for building purposes. Already enough buildings stood to help supply and maintain a market and begin a town: "a Church, and ordinary, several stores, two Mills, a smith's shop, a Grammar School, and above all the Colledge." His conclusion added a competitive note intended to stir his hearers once and for all to show their urban spirit:

There is one thing perhaps worthy of our consideration, that is, that by this method we have an opportunity not only of making a Town, but such a Town as may equal if not outdo Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Annapolis, and consequently such a Town as may retrieve the reputation of our Country, which has suffered by nothing so much as by neglecting a seat of trade, wealth and Learning, and running altogether into dispersed Country plantations.

Such words could not have failed to excite the listeners, which included Governor Nicholson, the Council, members of the House of Burgesses, and others. The governor had received his instructions from England to rebuild the state house. On May 18, 1699, the government moved quickly: Governor Nicholson sent a message to the House of Burgesses suggesting that the capital be moved to Middle Plantation. Given Nicholson's importance to the establishment of the new city, his words bear quotation here:

You having desired me to continue my Favour in Generall to this his Majesties Colony and Dominion of Virginia but particularly to the Colledge is another very great Obligation upon me for my Useing all Lawfull Ways and Meanes for the Promoteing and Supporting the Good of them, and therefore I do now cordially recommend to you the Placeing of yo'r publick Building (w'h God willing you are designed to have) somewhere at Middle Plantation nigh his Majesties Royall Colledg of William and Mary which I think will tend to Gods Glory, his Majesties Service, and
the Welfare and Prosperity of your Country in general and of the College in particular.\textsuperscript{16}

A Committee of the Whole in the House considered these matters and acceded to the governor's request. The Council seconded the suggestion the following day. A bill soon passed to raise the money necessary for the building of a state house, but the House of Burgesses decided that there were too many public debts to allow for building of a house for the governor as well, which instructions from England also required.\textsuperscript{17}

The decision to leave Jamestown and create a new capital in Middle Plantation by and for the planter elite to demonstrate its new hold on the colony does not seem to have required much debate.\textsuperscript{18} The speed with which the government acted in locating a new capital and the intensity of the language used to describe it convey the determination of the Virginia authorities to have an urban center of their own. The words of the speeches above express the intentions and aspirations of these people to have an improved cultural life in their colony, which they believed could be obtained only through the establishment of a city. They hoped to be able to extend the power of a capital over a colony of rural settlements to give them the same stature that Philadelphis or Boston gave their colonies. The physical realities of Williamsburg's development prevent any comparison between it and those other colonial capitals, but Virginians did not confuse the physical results of their urban legislation with the satisfaction of those social and political needs which they felt most strongly. The course of Williamsburg's growth closely reflects these values and intentions,
highlighting their connection with the desires of the colony's ruling class.

When Hartwell, Blair, and Chilton declared that it would take a strong governor like Francis Nicholson to force the settlement of towns, they did not know how future events would corroborate their statement. Nicholson was not only powerful enough to undertake the creation of a new capital but talented enough to design it was well. He intended the little city to present a variety of open vistas, public buildings, and commercial and residential districts to the impressed viewer. The rational unity which underlay the design came directly out of the Renaissance and Baroque principles then current. These ideas, first developed in ancient Greece and Rome, in the seventeenth century became the core of a civic aesthetic which emphasized a formalized and rationalized harmony based on mathematical relationships of proportion.

Nicholson engineered the architecture and plan of his new capital city to mirror the refined and cultivated ceremonies for which they would provide the setting. He and those responsible for establishing Williamsburg attempted to embody the style of the Virginia gentry and their social order in their buildings. The General Assembly passed acts in 1699 and 1705 which regulated the building of the capital and its state house in great detail; in the future the legislature would devote much time and many bills to the building of a residence for the governor and other public structure, as well as their repairs. These acts also gave precise instructions regarding the
organization of the town, its division into lots, and the regulation of buildings: the town was to grow under close control.

The preamble to the 1699 act summarized the reasons for the relocation of the capital and the functions it was expected to perform in much the same manner as the student orator had done:

Whereas the state-house where the general assemblies and general courts for this his majesty's colony and dominion of Virginia, were kept and held, hath been unhappily burnt down; and it being of absolute necessity that another building be erected, with all the expedition possible, for the convenient sitting and holding of the general assemblies and courts, at a healthy, proper and commodious place, suitable for the reception of a considerable number and concourse of people, that of necessity must resort to the place where the general assemblies will be convened, and where the council and supreme court of justice for his majesty's colony and dominion will be held and kept:

And forasmuch as the place commonly called and known by the name of the Middle Plantation, hath been found by constant experience, to be healthy, and agreeable to the constitutions of the inhabitants of this his majesty's colony and dominion, having the natural advantages of a serene and temperate, dry and champaign land, and plentifully stored with wholesome springs, and the conveniency of two navigable and pleasant creeks . . . .

And forasmuch as the general assemblies, and general courts, of this his majesty's colony and dominion, cannot possibly be held and kept at the said capitol, unless a good town be built and settled adjacent to the said capitol, suitable for the accomodation and entertainment of a considerable number of persons, that of necessity must resort thither: . . . in all probability, it will prove highly advantageous and beneficial to his majesty's royal college of William and Mary to have the conveniencies of a town near the same . . . .

The classical bent of the town's creators is evident in their designation of the state house as the "capitol," the first time this term had been used in the colonies, and possibly the only time it was used here before the Revolution. The building itself was not fully
completed until 1705, so the General Assembly and General Court held their sessions at the College from December of 1700 until April of 1704. The Executive Journals of the Council of the colony give evidence of the need felt by officials to maintain the respectable and grand appearance of their new central public building: on September 5, 1705, the Council ordered the removal of a pillory and stocks set up in the courtyard of the Capitol and of boards bearing inscriptions placed on the east and west fronts of the building, as they were "improper" and "in a very unfit place." Not all were impressed by Nicholson's "stately Fabrick" of a Capitol, for "some Persons, who were not endowed with any publick Principle, were against this Expence, the Impositions with which they were loaded in England and Virginia, keeping them always low." Robert Beverley took a dim view of Nicholson's "fond Imagination, of being the Founder of a new City," which led him to remove the government from the plentiful accommodations of Jamestown to the empty spaces of Middle Plantation.

But this "fond Imagination" was not limited to Francis Nicholson; many other Virginians shared it and felt that it was a crucial point in the life of their colony to have such a city. Though those who voted to found a new capital did not, for the most part, intend to live there themselves, they believed it to be so important that they passed detailed legislation about its plan and the type of buildings to be erected, both public and private. Obviously they intended to create a town of some permanence which would possess an architecture appropriate to their power and ideas of beauty, even if on a small scale. And as
long as the ruling class was not resident in the capital, Williamsburg was bound to remain limited in its growth, becoming fully a city and a capital only during restricted periods.

The building of a town and public buildings commodious enough for even these transient people and activities was left to later governors. Governor Edward Nott convinced the Burgesses to fulfill his instruction to build a suitable residence for the royal governor in 1706. This house was finished by Alexander Spotswood, who also completed the adornment of the Capitol. He oversaw the completion of the rebuilding of the College after a fire in 1705, the renovation of Bruton Parish Church, and was responsible for the building of the Magazine, the Gaol, the first Williamsburg courthouse of James City County, and perhaps the Brafferton.26

The needs of government and commitment to the civic aesthetic made possible the growth of a city in a colony which previously had been unable to establish a town.27 The presence of major colonial officials gave the town some permanence: not only the governor lived in Williamsburg, but as of 1701 it was "thought very requisite & Necessary" that the Attorney General and the Clerk of the Council maintain residences in the city also, to enable them to attend the Council or the governor at any time.28 The governmental functions of the new capital attracted to it a sizable number of visitors, which required an expansion of its public buildings. In November of 1710, the vestry of Bruton Parish Church asked the General Assembly to contribute toward the erection of a new church, since "'tis very
Apparent the Parishioners are very much straightened & often outed of their places and seats, by dispensing with & allowing room for the frequent resort of strangers, & more particularly at the meetings of the General Assemblies: Courts: Councells: & other public Occasions.²⁹ The General Assembly ordered a prison to be built in 1711 to contain those persons committed thereto by the General Court or awaiting trial before that body, the sheriff of York County being required to attend the Court and act as prison keeper.³⁰ In 1713, Governor Spotswood requested that a market house be built, creek landings improved, and public springs opened, which "would not only redound to the credit of the Country, when Strangers resort hither, but would likewise be for the benefite of all those whose business calls them to the Assemblys & General Courts."³¹ Despite repeated requests for a market house, one was not built until 1757 and then it stood only until 1764 on a site southeast of the Magazine.

Though the volume of administrative business conducted there was large and economic activity grew, the size of the city itself was not overly impressive to outsiders. In 1702, the traveler Francis Louis Michel admired the new capital, though Williamsburg was still a place where a city was "intended."³² By 1720, a memorandum to Governor Spotswood described the houses and Capitol as in "Indifferent Repair" and predicted that Williamsburg had seen its best days.³³ Another traveler found Williamsburg in 1732 with nearly one hundred houses, of which twenty and the church he noted as being good, but the rest merely ordinary. A theatre built in 1716 (the first in colonial America) was
now gone, he said, "having little to do." Still another contemporary described Williamsburg as "a most wretched contriv'd Affair for the Capitol of a Country," really no better than a country village. Andrew Burnaby counted two hundred dwellings and not more than one thousand inhabitants in 1759, which left the city "far from being a place of any consequence."

Visitors from Europe, accustomed to much larger and denser cities, could hardly help seeing Williamsburg as anything more than a village in its physical dimensions. Lord Adam Gordon, in his account of travels in the colonies in 1760, reported the Virginia capital to be something like a "good Country Town in England," with many good houses. Yet he at least was able to see beyond the small quantity of buildings to the activities which they contained; that Williamsburg gave its true appearance as a capital city when the public affairs required the presence of those "topping people" who normally resided on their rural plantations.

In truth, it was the functions and roles which the city performed and which its public buildings and plan embodied that created a capital out of the "country village." This small area provided what has been called "an urban environment hitherto unknown in the colony": a series of closely-spaced facades of house and shops in a regular grid arrangement broken by impressive public structures and enlivened with open grassy spaces, the vistas along its streets culminating in major buildings. At a time when many members of the colony never experienced anything but a rural life, it was an unusual sight to those who passed
through its streets.

The Virginia planters found vehicles for the expression of their urbanity as much in institutions and political activity as in buildings. A new capital had been created to perform certain functions, among them the administration and judicial regulation of the entire colony. The city of Williamsburg was of course the setting for meetings of the General Assembly, composed of the governor, his council, and the House of Burgesses. Each county sent two men to serve in the House, choosing them by the only elections in the colony. The Council and Burgesses generally comprised a register of the membership of Virginia's aristocracy, selected from a relatively small circle of powerful and socially prominent families. There was no set time for meetings of the Assembly, which was convened when the governor's decision and the press of business so required. A survey of the dates of the meetings of the House of Burgesses shows that slightly over half of their sittings convened shortly after the close of the General Court. It was natural and convenient to call the Assembly for such dates since the Council, which often met separately, was already in town for the Court. In addition, members of the House may have been present in the city already for business and pleasure during the Publick Times.

The General Court had been associated with a broader range of activities since the early years of Williamsburg's existence. The capital's judicial functions were more pervasive than any other in establishing it as the center of the colony. Hugh Jones listed the variety of high courts which sat in the Capitol:
in this is the Secretary's office with all the courts of justice and law, held in the same form, and near the same manner, as in England, except the ecclesiastical courts. Here the governor and twelve counsellors sit as judges, at the General Courts in April and October, whither trials and causes are removed from courts, held at the court-houses monthly in every court . . . . Here also are held the Oyer and Terminator Courts, one in summer, and the other in winter . . . . Here are also held courts martial . . . . for the trial of pyrates, likewise courts of admiralty . . . .

Given the importance of the General Court to the colony as an institution and as the focal point around which the capital's urban life formed, the nature of its work should be explained.  

Until the creation of the June and December courts of Oyer and Terminator in 1710, the General Courts were the only times of gaol delivery, and it was to house the Court's prisoners that the colony erected the Gaol. Before 1745, each session began on the fifteenth day of the month and lasted up to eighteen days; after that year, sessions began on the tenth and went on for as long as twenty-four days. The first five days of each meeting were devoted to chancery cases and appeals from county courts and other inferior courts. The remainder of the court's time was devoted to suits in the king's name--all criminal cases involving life and limb--and all other matters.

An act regarding the General Court of 1753 restated the jurisdiction of this body as follows:

That the said general court shall take cognizance of, and are hereby declared to have power and jurisdiction to hear and determine, all causes, matters, and things whatsoever, relating to, or concerning any person, or persons, ecclesiastical or civil, or to any person or things, of what nature soever the thing shall be, whether brought before them by original process, appeal from any inferior court, or by any other ways or means whatsoever.
The original jurisdiction of the court covered cases involving more than £10 or 2000 pounds of tobacco, and all felonies except those committed by slaves. Appeals from county courts being relatively easy and inexpensive to pursue, the ensuing cluttered docket necessitated a law in 1761 barring lawyers from practicing simultaneously in the county and the General Courts.

The members of this bench were the Governor and the twelve members of the governor's Council, though the quorum was set at five. A total of £1200 was set aside each year to pay the salaries of the judges, which was divided between them according to their record of attendance at the Council and the Court. The governor himself possessed a single vote as a judge; he presided over the Court, delivered the charge to the jury, and passed sentence.

Williamsburg's peculiar location, straddling the dividing line between York and James City Counties, required some special regulations. The sheriff of York County attended the Court, together with his under-sheriffs, since the capitol stood on that county's territory. By 1705, the General Court had to enlarge the powers of the sheriff attending the Court in order to empower him to deliver summons in every part of the city and within a half-mile radius of its limits to prevent the easy evasion of duty as a grand juror, juror, witness, or defendant. The court impanelled a jury of twenty-four bystanders each Monday. The jury members first met on "Criminal Day," when the Court turned to felony cases, which until 1745 was the fourth day of the session, but after that date was the sixth. Witnesses were provided
with some renumeration for their efforts to be present to testify: the Court allowed them one and one-half pounds of tobacco for each mile traveled and sixty pounds for each day spent in court.

Other courts met in Williamsburg--the courts of Oyer and Terminer each June and December after 1710, the monthly courts of James City County, which moved its seat to Williamsburg in 1715, the hustings courts of the city after its incorporation in 1722. The activity surrounding these sessions, the elections for burgesses and a mayor, the meetings of the vestry of Bruton Parish, lent a slight urban flavor to the town. The presence of the governor and his mayor officials gave an elegant tone to the society of the capital which a country town could never have achieved. The irregular rhythm of the General Assembly sessions offered the townspeople and any visitors an opportunity to see the elite of their society at work in the colony's government.

But only during the sessions of the General Court did the dependable routine involve the entire concatenation of social and cultural activities for which the capital had been created as much as to rule the colony. The court, as the highest bench in Virginia, attracted people to the town--lawyers, suitors, politicians, planters, merchants. The Virginia Gazette broadcast the decisions of the Court to the countryside by publishing its notices and reports of the criminals and their sentences. Government officials took advantage of the presence of people and money to demand settlement of the colony's accounts during the General Courts, a practice which many ordinary
citizens followed for their own affairs. A broad variety of trades, taverns, and stores grew to support the needs of visiting people of wealth and the lesser folk they attracted. Dinners, balls, theatrical performances, state ceremonies, and official business allowed people to meet and enjoy an expanding social life and supply of material goods.

The people in the city who, by their position, intermittent presence, and actions made Williamsburg a capital used it to enact their expectations of urban functions. They passed laws to regulate society, upheld those laws in court, engaged in some centralized economic activity, and participated in an intensified social life. They presented to the rest of the colony's people an urban symbol of the organization and control of their society.

The precise delineation of the growth of Public Times and the attraction of activities to those periods will follow, but fundamental to the discussion thus far is the creation of a specific and quite unusual type of capital. Williamsburg stood as one of the last preindustrial cities of the colonies modeled on the tradition that Sjoberg, Braudel, and Mumford have described. The need for a central location for the organization of political power in the colony blended with ideas of the city as a symbol of order, a place with an inherent, stable hierarchy and broad cultural unity from which these things would emanate.

The ruling elite was the key factor in the growth of the capital. This was the class that voted to create the capital; some of
its members designed the city and its architecture; it ruled the institutions of the colony which gave Williamsburg its purpose. Political power was thus central to the town's existence, but its most important use was not in the consolidation and extension of the dominance of a feudal aristocracy, but in the expression of a stable authority and unity which the Virginia aristocracy wished to celebrate and exercise. The legislature and the courts provided the elite with an ample forum.

The goals of the capital were not limited to political dominance but extended to the display of a cultural unity and continuity as English Virginians. The layout of the town physically and conceptually demonstrated an affinity to English ideas of urbanity as the bulwark of civilized life and embodiment of the fundamental principles of society. The close connections between England and Virginia in ideas, customs, and material life were to be seen on the isolated plantations of the rich, but found a more appropriate setting and extensive display in the capital.

Enmeshed with this is a function which other writers have ascribed to capital cities, the provision of a link with vital external cultural influences. These are integrated and used to create a culture which is then disseminated through the city's hinterland. The English culture brought into, copied, transformed, and sent out from Williamsburg put it as a colonial capital in a position analogous to older country towns in England. The social and cultural life of such towns in England as of 1700 was an adjunct of country gentry society,
set by London standards. Public ceremony in these towns demonstrated the formal unity of the urban polity and gave its visitors an exhibition of communal pride and continuity with the countryside. These towns and the spectacle of London were the models for Williamsburg's cultural role.

Virginians of the leading planter group attempted to make this kind of urban center with a significant difference: there was no fully resident ruling class in their capital. The root of political and social dominance in this colony lay in vast land holdings and a decentralized tobacco economy. With an elite that lived on scattered plantations, often far from the capital, the functions for which the city was intended awaited a time when those people would be drawn into it. The General Courts served the function of attracting influential people and other activities to the capital. Public Times gave Williamsburg its urban status in the eyes of the colonists who came to the capital, for only then did the roles performed by the city outweigh the limited development of its size and population. And so we turn to a close examination of Williamsburg's Public Times and their import for the colonial capital.
CHAPTER III
THE CAPITAL ACQUIRES A LIFE OF ITS OWN: PUBLIC TIMES

The formal social life of the Virginia elite quickly fastened on the Public Times: by 1705 Robert Beverley could attest to the large numbers of people attracted to the General Court sessions for social reasons. He observed that the Court selected its juries from the best gentlemen of all parts of the colony present in Williamsburg, "for if they should be summon'd by Writ of Venire, from any particular county, that county cannot afford so many qualify'd persons as are here to be found, because of the great resort of Gentlemen, from all parts of the colony to these Courts as well to see Fashions, as to dispatch their Business."¹

As the eighteenth century wore on, the General Court meetings became a regularized event of great import for the town and its services to the colony. Within the first twenty years of Williamsburg's life, the effect of its role as a capital on the physical capacities of the town led to the first round of a continuing discussion about buildings, offices, and organization. The strain on the city's resources of the periodic surges in population required a market and the rebuilding of Bruton Parish Church.² These two matters bring to attention a theme which recurs throughout the period: the people
that descended upon the town often caused it inconvenience and required special accommodations. While this may have been troublesome to the permanent inhabitants of the town, the presence of large numbers of people was a natural consequence of the role of the capital, though in Virginia they came and left in recurrent waves.

The results of this fluctuating increase in population were new buildings, new ways to occupy the crowds, an increase in the amounts of foodstuffs, liquors, and other provisions on hand, and a cyclical pattern of life. This in turn added to the experience of the person in Williamsburg, who as town dweller or in particular as visitor, saw a crowded, public form or architecture and a concentrated variety of goods and services unparalleled in the colony, which expanded the influence of the town's functions on the city and reflected it back out into the rural hinterland. The cyclical pattern of expansion and contraction in population and activity demonstrated the peculiar relationship of the capital to the countryside, in which the power and influence of the central government depended on the land and labor controlled by the class that contributed its members.

Another facet of the growth of the capital was the impact on other branches of administration of the location of a centralized government in a successful town. The officials of the colony gravitated toward the capital, willingly or not. Governor Nicholson requested that both the Auditor and Receiver-General be required to keep offices in the new Capitol, "where all the Chief Records of the Country are (God willing) to be kept," and that they and the President
of the Council be forced to live in the capital. He also complained of the difficulty of getting a quorum for the Council meetings in these early years, "nay even in the General Court time," and proposed new members who lived within an easy ride of Williamsburg. The county courts took advantage of a central urban place by disregarding an order to them to sell quitrents or land in their jurisdictions, preferring that the Auditor sell them himself for the entire colony at the October General Court.

During this early period, the Council considered for the first time the question of the incorporation of Williamsburg, indicating a growing recognition of the qualitative difference between this town and the other small villages in the Virginian countryside and also of the increasing internal administrative burden felt by the capital. A petition from the freeholders and inhabitants of the town prayed for the "encouragement" a charter of incorporation would give to the place. In typical fashion, the Council agreed to the intention of the petition, but did not commit itself to any immediate action.

The diaries of William Byrd II from 1709-1712 offer good descriptions of life in Williamsburg during early Publick Times. Several days of preparation preceded each departure from Westover for the capital. Byrd arrived in Williamsburg at the beginning of April and October for Council meetings, occasionally sat in Council after the Court, and once met with the governors of the College on March 31, consolidating administrative business around a central meeting. Besides conducting the business of the court, which could resolve
itself into the council for a few hours if necessary, Byrd used his time in town to settle his private business affairs. 11

Quickly settling into a routine of work and social life, Byrd spent his days in hearing cases at the Capitol, eating dinner at one of his favorite taverns, and ending the night in a few simple pleasures. Card playing was a frequent pastime at the private homes and taverns he visited, with gambling to add spice to the game. Dancing was almost a nightly activity among Byrd's circle during the April Court of 1709. He and his friends may have had "much to do to get a bottle of French wine" one evening, but others felt the effects of late nights at the tavern during these busy times: "several of our young men were before Mr. Bland this morning for a riot committed last night at Su Allen's [a reprobate tavernkeeper] and A-t-k-s-n's." 12 The first horse race recorded in Williamsburg took place on October 17, 1710, at which Byrd lost thirty-five shillings. 13

When joined by his wife, evenings spent at the coffeehouse playing cards gave way to visits in the homes of family and friends; Byrd enjoyed another quiet period in April, 1711, when there were no criminals. 14 Byrd's position in the social elite of the colony included him in the activities of that elite when in town. Such activities might include an evening with the governor when official business concluded:

About 10 o'clock I went to the capitol and sat all day in court without once going away and by night we made an end. Then I waited on the governor home to dinner where we found Mrs. Churchill and several other ladies and my wife among them. The table was so full that the Doctor and Mr. Graeme
and I had a little table to ourselves and were more merry than
the rest of the company. I ate roast beef for supper. In the
meantime the Doctor secured two fiddlers and candles were sent
to the capitol and then the company followed and we had a ball
and danced, till about 12 o'clock at night . . . .15

This informal social round found a more formal counterpart in
ceremonies which were consciously planned to express the colony's
cultural identity with its motherland. In 1701, the Swiss traveler
Francis Louis Michel watched a long, moving, and highly structured
ceremony mourning the death of William III and acclaiming the accession
of Queen Anne. 16 The opportunity to make another such public display
of loyalty to Great Britain, utilizing the crowds and the propensity
to pleasure-seeking already seen in Public Times, came to Governor
Spotswood in his proclamation of George I in October, 1714. He
officially proclaimed the new king first in the General Court, then in
Market Square, and lastly at the College. The festivities concluded
with an entertainment provided by the governor for all the gentlemen in
town, where "Hi^ Maj't's health was drank with the firing of Guns and
all Suitable demonstrations of Joy."17

William Byrd can take us on to the 1720s. By this time he had
fallen from favor with the governor and had lost and then regained his
seat on the Council. But not only had Byrd's political career under­
gone some changes, but so had the nature of the Public Times through
which he exercised his political power. The dinner parties at taverns
or the homes of friends continued, along with a great deal of card­
playing; a conciliatory dinner given by Spotswood for his recalcitrant
Council included the standard firing of guns, illumination of the town,
concert, and drinking of healths with "great joy" which marked occasions of importance in the capital. Yet during this decade, a new group of people and activities began to add greater depth and a more public, institutionalized side to the Williamsburg social setting. The town acquired a bowling green and, more importantly, its first theatre. This latter project began under William Dering, a dancing master and talented painter of portraits, and his associates, Charles and Mary Stagg. The governor gave his own assemblies as usual, as also did Mr. Commissary Blair while acting governor; but Mary Stagg opened this type of social function to a broader range of people by organizing public assemblies and balls at the Capitol.

Hugh Jones, formerly a professor at the College of William and Mary, left Virginia in 1721 and in 1724 published an account of his pleasant recollections of the colony. He commented on the fine quality of society in the capital and the material luxury which accompanied it:

At the Capitol, at publick times, may be seen a great number of handsom, well-dressed, compleat gentlemen. And at the Governor's House upon birth nights, and at balls and assemblies, I have seen as fine an appearance, as good diversion, and as splendid entertainments in Governor Spotswood's time as I have seen anywhere else . . . .

Williamsburg . . . is well stocked with rich stores, of all sorts of goods, and well furnished with the best provisions and liquors.

Here dwell several very good families, and more reside here in their own houses at publick times.

They live in the same neat manner, dress after the same modes, and behave themselves exactly as the gentry in London; most families of any note having a coach, chariot, berlin, or chaise.

The number of artificers is here daily augmented; as are the convenient ordinaries or inns for accommodation of strangers.
Jones documents the growth of a prosperous and elegant life style which dramatizes the importance of the temporary presence of the Virginia aristocracy to the character of the town. He also records the attempt to appear as English, and as Londonized, as possible, a vital part of the capital's function to transmit the cultural values of its society in behavior and material goods.

By the time that Jones had written his book, he had heard that Williamsburg had taken on a new urban dimension. In May, 1722 the freeholders and inhabitants of the town renewed their petition for incorporation, this time to the House of Burgesses. Governor Spotswood received a petition from the House within a week which argued eloquently for the cause of the town, noting the growth and comfort of the capital and the need for a more streamlined administration of its affairs. Soon the capital became a self-governing, incorporated city.

Its charter gave the city a mayor, recorder, six aldermen, and twelve common councillors to govern itself with and a member of the House of Burgesses in the customary manner of English corporations. Williamsburg could have two markets weekly and two fairs yearly "for the Sale and Vending all, and all Manner of Cattle, Victuals, Provisions, Goods, Wares, and Merchandize, whatsoever." The city also received its monthly Hustings Court at this time, which at first had only civil jurisdiction in the city but in 1723 was given criminal jurisdiction and raised to the level of county courts.

Incorporation may be taken as a mark of maturity, as an indication
that Virginians recognized the complexity attained by this town and its development from a mere setting for the Capitol into an independent community. The goal of Francis Nicholson and his contemporaries to create a permanent urban settlement had been realized. The capital city still depended on the broader commercial and political functions it performed for its lifeblood of population and economic activity. But as a whole, it contained the authority, impressiveness, display, crowds, material goods, and social heterogeneity which identified it as decidedly English, decidedly Virginian, and decidedly urban.

In some instances, the city still encountered conflict between the needs of town dwellers and the requirements of those transient elites who governed through it. The close-set lots of the town plan, which Nicholson intended to represent the ordered life and government of the capital, prevented the existence of a common. The city government complained of this in a 1736 petition to the House of Burgesses, feeling that it restricted population growth: the lack was "a great Hardship upon the poorer Sort of Inhabitants, having occasioned many to remove out of the said city, and hindering others from coming to settle there." They argued that this was actually contrary to the purpose of a capital since the prosperity and improvement thus lost to the city could benefit the entire colony. The city officials asked for an appropriation of adjacent lands and an enlargement of the jurisdiction of the Hustings. Ignoring this interpretation of the capital's need and influence, the Burgesses approved only the latter proposal, leaving the "poorer Inhabitants" to find land on their own.
The impact of being a capital on the institutional framework centered in Williamsburg was not limited to its internal administration. Throughout the entire period under consideration, the York County court suspended its April and October sessions almost every year, presumably because its sheriff and his subordinates attended the General Court. In 1732, the Council ordered the Receiver-General of the colony to keep his office in Williamsburg for the sale of land rights (and awarded him ten pounds per annum for doing so), "whereby that Branch of the Revenue hath been greatly increas'd." Treasurer Richard Randolph found the General Courts a convenient time to dispatch his "necessary business." He advertised in the Virginia Gazette several weeks prior to the sessions that he wanted to meet the tobacco inspectors in Williamsburg "in order to settle their Accounts, and receive and the Ballances that shall appear to be due."

Public affairs attracted private business to Williamsburg, bringing more people and activity to the capital and thus reinforcing its functions for the colony. The political administration of Virginia and the workings of its judiciary naturally involved financial transactions such as the settlement of public accounts and payment of debts and fees from legal cases. While involved in such public business, men like William Byrd took the opportunity to settle personal accounts and pay debts. Robert "King" Carter led a similar round during Court sessions: in 1722 and 1723, while sitting as a judge, he noted paying debts for Carter and Elizabeth Burwell and also to Charles Stagg for the governor. In 1727, Carter had to write a letter to Governor
William Gooch to excuse his absence from the Court because of an illness, assuring him that he would come to the city soon, as "my own affairs to be at town are so very pressing that nothing less than an insuperable incapacity will delay my attendance in paying my duty to your honor and to ye court." After King Carter's death in 1732, his sons conducted much of the family's legal and financial business at the General Courts. Others conducted their business with the help of the Virginia Gazette, whose circulation would ensure, they hoped, that clients throughout the colony would know to be prepared for Public Times. During the later years of the 1730s when the Gazette had just begun its publication and if its advertisements are a good guide, the pace of business picked up noticeably during the General Court sessions. These were popular times, together with the meetings of the Court of Oyer and Terminer in June and December, to settle accounts since many creditors and debtors were in town and prosecutions could begin immediately in debt cases. Advertisements warned the debtors of the estate of a man recently deceased that they would be sued unless they paid by the fifteenth of April and October. Any sort of meeting between people could be arranged. A typical announcement read: "This is to give Notice, That the Subscriber will attend at Mrs. Packe's, in Williamsburg, the Week before next October General Court, to meet all Persons who have Business with him." And Mr. Osheal of Nansemond County gave notice that he would attend at a Williamsburg lodging from the 13th of April until the end of the General Court "to receive the
commands of such Gentlemen who have or shall think fit to employ him."\textsuperscript{33}

Shopkeepers and tradesmen began to take advantage of the amount of money circulating in the hands of the rich and their hangers-on as Public Times' legal, public, and private business went on. Advertisements appeared in force, the mounting store inventories they recorded reflecting an expansion not only in the availability of affordable luxury items but an expanding market in which to sell them. These things included the cakes, candies, sweetmeats, and jellies Mrs. Stagg sold fresh every Tuesday and Friday to those who needed fine refreshments but lacked the domestic staff to provide them in town.\textsuperscript{34} Surprisingly, slave auctions were not held often in Williamsburg during Public Times but seem to have occurred with greater frequency at local county court days. Still, in April of 1737, a ship from Angola carrying 490 slaves arrived in Yorktown, its human cargo to be sold by Thomas Nelson at this propitious time.\textsuperscript{35} The crowds in town for the Court needed accommodation and Williamsburg tavernkeepers in turn relied upon Public Times to generate enough business to help them survive the ensuing lean periods. Tavern owners competed for the attention of travelers to town:

\begin{quote}
Mrs. Sullivane, of Williamsburg, having left off Publick Business, and retir'd to the Country, the Subscriber has taken the same House, and now comes on Publick Business, where Gentlemen may depend upon kind Treatment, and good Accomodations for themselves, and extraordinary Pasturage and Stabling for their Horses, from their very humble servant,

John Taylor.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}
Other notices in the *Virginia Gazette* record the plethora of business activity expected to result from a session of the General Court. This could influence life in the countryside, as when the executors of William Strother had to change the date of their estate sale in King George County to October 5th, 1738, "the 25th being found inconvenient, by Reason of its happening in the Time of the General Court."³⁷ It could also affect the material life of rural dwellers, who were encouraged well in advance of their visits to town for Public Times to return home with the wares of Williamsburg coachmakers, metalworkers, tailors, breechesmakers, and hatters.³⁸ The popular fund-raising technique of a lottery distributed valuable items, such as jewels and plate.³⁹

Much of the economic activity which took place during Public Times was a direct outgrowth of the political and social importance of these periods to the capital. When the Court was in session and a sizable portion of the Virginia elite, as well as some others lower on the social scale, were present, Williamsburg lost its country town atmosphere and became a city and a capital. The economic affairs of the colony, public and private, were a concomitant to other functions the capital performed at this time; Williamsburg provided the institutional and temporal focus for their concentration into an urban pattern. From a modern viewpoint, the level of this activity is the indicator of the level of the city's urbanity, but from the viewpoint of colonial Virginians, its cultural meanings could outweigh the actual economic dominance Williamsburg exercised.
Social activities could have a strong business flavor; certainly enterprising people like Mary Stagg and Barbara Degraffenriedt turned a handsome profit from their public balls and assemblies. But more important than the price of the ticket was the opportunity to imitate the dances held by the governor. Throughout the General Courts of 1737, 1738, and 1739, these women held numerous balls or assemblies, Mrs. Degraffenriedt opening her own home to the public while Mrs. Stagg had the Capitol itself at her disposal. The latter provided in addition "several Grotesque Dances, never yet perform'd in Virginia" and a raffle. It is not known how many people danced at these balls or who they were; one can assume only that they were well-attended and popular enough to justify the number of them held and the public method chosen for advertisement. The extent of their audience was limited, however, to those who could afford the admission fee. That the price of a ticket could be expensive is attested to by George Washington's notes in his accounts for November 1759, when he paid thirty-five shillings for a ball at the Capitol, twenty shillings for two tickets (presumably for that same ball), and twenty shillings for another ticket to a ball.

Social and cultural implications backed the advertisements of Williamsburg shopkeepers and tradesmen. They offered material evidence of the capital's role as a funnel for the spread of an English provincial culture in the imported goods they listed, the number and concentrated location of shops in which these goods could be found, and in their own interpretation of high-style English tastes. By 1732, Peter
Scott operated a cabinetmaking shop on the Duke of Gloucester Street. He produced pieces for sale to people all over the colony in a style and manner closely related to early eighteenth-century British urban practice. The quality of his work and its unique inclusion of sculptural details more usually associated with English work indicate the ability of the capital to attract a craft and provide a means of centralizing its market when it served the need for an expression of the refined, English lifestyle to which the colony's elite aspired.41

In other areas, the cultural life of the colony came to a new level of maturity. An interest in rhetoric and oratory led Governor Gooch to appeal to a relative in England for help in his speeches to the grand jury: "'Tis not so much matter of Form as you imagine, nor is it the Circuits that I go, but the general courts, held twice in the year, where all the country are present, but Gentm. & Ladies, and I give the charge to the Grand Jury so that I wish for some help," he wrote in 1729. His address to the jury in October of the following year became the first known Virginia imprint.42 The Williamsburg theatre offered its English plays until October, 1736, when Elizabeth Hollaway told her daughter that she should not mind missing this court session in town since there would be no plays performed.43 Richard Beale Davis, in his study of the colonial South's intellectual life, describes the formation of a circle of professional men in the 1730s and early 1740s who centered their discussions of drama and poetry on their communal presence in Williamsburg for Publick Times.44

The formal behavior of people in the capital, an important part
of the life of its elite, attracted the attention of two visitors from Europe. William Hugh Grove commented that the Virginians he saw in Williamsburg "Affected London Dress and ways" and Edward Kember stopped complaining long enough to note that "the Courts of Justice are held ... with a Dignity and Decorum, that would become them even in Europe." The attempt to recreate an English way of life continued in the ritual of holidays associated with the Crown. "Elegant entertainments," balls, and the "handsome appearance" of the guests merely concluded a long series of ceremonies. First the governor ordered the guns to be fired thrice and the colors to be displayed from the Capitol. Then the townspeople illuminated the city or at least lit up "most of the Gentlemens and Other Houses of Note." "Demonstrations of loyalty," "all the Distinguishing Marks of Loyalty we are capable of Shewing," "great Decency and Respect," and "great Demonstrations of Joy, suitable to the Occasion," characterized these events. The repeated stock phrases themselves express the formalized and traditional quality of the birth-nights, repeated reminders of allegiance to and identity with Great Britain.

As the mid-century approached, this closeness to England continued to be manifested in outward appearances and the capital continued to develop its characteristic Anglo-Virginian style of life. "Their Clothes are brought from England for Persons of Distinction, and are as much in the Mode as Art and Cost can make them," said an English account of the Virginia colonists. It portrayed the colony at about the time of William Byrd's last writings, which give further details of social life.
Late in the October court of 1740, Byrd invited several friends to dinner at Henry Wetherburn's tavern, after which "we had a race which I went not to but won 20 shillings. At night ventured to the ball [for George II's birthday] at the capitol where I stayed till 10 and ate three jellies . . . . The President entertained well." 48 The literary circle of which Byrd was an important part continued to gather in town after his death in 1744 and often published their verses and prose in the Virginia Gazette.

Back in England, continued interest in the little capital of Virginia can be seen in a proposal to establish a bishopric for the colonies at the College of William and Mary. 50 This would have given the capital an ecclesiastical jurisdiction far greater than any other of its powers, though of course, it was never put into action. Ironically, this thought of extending the range of Williamsburg's influence came at the same time as a significant challenge to the city's urban achievement.

On January 30, 1747, the Capitol burned, its demise unleashing a strong movement to build a new capital city elsewhere in the colony. As early as 1738, the members of the House of Burgesses had discussed moving the capital to either Bermuda Hundred on the James River or West Point on the York River to bring it closer to the center of population and make it more accessible to travelers. 51 This brought a hurried protest from the city corporation and the House abandoned the project. But in 1747, the Burgesses expressed their intention to move the capital in clear, uncompromising terms and Governor Gooch gave them
his initial support.

The debate over the removal of the capital reveals a conflict within the colony over the control of the capital's functions and, to some degree, over the value of a city. The reasons advanced for the change in location away from Williamsburg listed the disrepair of the Governor's House, the city's unhealthy trade, and its inconvenient site in relation to the expanding western population. Most pressing and most popularly held of the complaints was the last one, at least according to proponents of the change in the legislature. They claimed that two thirds of the common planters would contribute willingly to the expense of a new town. This point was strong enough to encourage the House to pass a bill for settling the capital on the land of William Gray and New-Year Smith on the Pamunkey River, allocating twelve thousand pounds for building a capitol, governor's residence, church, prison, and magazine from the revenues of a tax on tobacco and wheeled carriages. Some sort of recompense was to be given to the inhabitants of Williamsburg, "who are like to be Sufferers by the Removal of the Seat of Government." The corporation of the city petitioned against the move, to no avail.

In their desire to relocate the capital, the members of the House echoed some of the arguments and beliefs which had motivated the creation of Williamsburg, but with an important difference. The idealism which had believed that a city could be legislated into existence was present here again in the assumption that functions performed by Williamsburg were easily transferable to another location.
speeches, addresses, and petitions to the Commissioners for Trade and
Plantations expressed these sentiments in terms reminiscent of those
used by the College students in 1699; but when Gooch praised these
arguments for their zeal for the welfare of the Burgesses' constituents,
he touched on the key difference between 1699 and 1747. The members of
the House, in trying to move the capital to bring it closer to the people
of the colony, were contesting the role of this particular city as the
capital of the life and power of the Virginia aristocracy. Though them­
selves members of that aristocracy at lower levels, they challenged the
right of the upper levels of the elite to maintain a city which expressed
their values for their own convenience at the expense of those for whom
it was beyond reach in physical distance and social status. The concern
for the trade, or lack thereof, of Williamsburg suggests that the
Burgesses also wishes to establish a new capital with a sounder, more
independent economic base.

The debate quickly came down to a battle between the House and
the Council. As the more conservative, select portion of the Virginia
hierarchy, the Council opposed the move and defeated it. Reluctantly,
Gooch made a show of agreeing with their veto:

The sentiments were directed by a generous Motive, the Love of
their Country; and I wish I could say those of the Council who
opposed it, were influenced by any public Principle. Neverthe­
less at the End of the Session, I rather blamed the Burgesses
than the Council, knowing it to be the best Method to stifle
the flame of contention. 35

When the Assembly reconvened in October, 1748, Gooch argued
against the move again, citing the need for appropriate official
buildings:

that we are not only deprived of commodious Apartments for your Reception, but destitute of a Court for the Administration of justice; which, as our Sovereign's Presence is always to be presumed in the Exercise of his Authority, require Decency in their Structure and Forms, as well as Rectitude in the Managers of their Proceedings. 56

He had been forced to conclude that Williamsburg, which had been relatively free from the smallpox epidemic of 1747/48, was the best location for the capital 56 Stability, continuity, and respect for established authority weighed heavily in Gooch's argument, as well as the need for an appropriate architectural manifestation of these qualities. Stubbornly persisting in its challenge, the House at first kept to its own proposal for removal and offered £9000 in damages to the citizens of Williamsburg. 57 But the bill lost on a second reading and the "Bill for Rebuilding the Capitol in the City of Williamsburg" passed by a margin of only two votes. 58

Yet another unsuccessful attempt to move the capital, this time to Newcastle on the York River, followed in 1749. The Burgesses were unmerciful in their condemnation of Williamsburg, which was not only inconvenient in location, but had bad air and water and bad and expensive provisions. They reiterated their complaint of the inconvenience and lack of trade in the capital, where "all the Necessaries of Life [were] so hard to get, the Tradesmen and Artificers [were] discouraged from settling there." As final proof of Williamsburg's "baneful influence," they concluded that it constituted a moral danger to the colony:
And lastly. Because the Morals of the Youth of this Colony educated at the College are greatly depraved by the Evil Examples they see from the Numbers that flock to this Place at the public Meetings, the Impressions that are receiv'd at those Times being too strong for all the Care of the Masters to overcome. And we are persuaded that while the Seat of Government is continued, the Evil will increase, and our Prospect from the Corruption of the Morals of the rising Generation is a very melancholy consideration.⁵⁹

In their hyperbole, the Burgesses here attacked the heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism generally associated with urban life and regated the hopes of the 1699 student who asked for a capital city to support the educational benefits of the College. Though it is difficult to evaluate the source of this protest, which was motivated by some definite political aims, it does record a genuine disillusionment with the social and cultural standards of the capital and by inference those of the people for whom it presently operated.

Few records survive to indicate the reaction of the citizens of Williamsburg to these attacks on their city. The wills of two inhabitants provide some idea of the negative effects which they believed a removal of the capital would have had on their estates. James Shields cut the amount of his daughters' legacies in half should the seat of government be changed within ten years of his writing.⁶⁰ John Crawley bequeathed his land adjoining the city to his sons and their male heirs forever but, if the capital moved, he gave permission for them to sell what he evidently believed would become less valuable property.⁶¹

No doubt all were relieved by Governor Robert Dinwiddie's promise to the city of his support for its rights and privileges, as well as its continuance and enlargement, on his arrival in 1751. This
was meant, probably, as part of a policy to discourage the persistent movement for relocation. Perhaps Dinwiddie had agreed to the plans of those whom John Blair believed would be content not to move the capital if the circuit courts were held in "proper places." That summer Blair had also heard that "Mr. R. Carter intends to live and build in Wmsburgh and to persuade all the gentm he can to do so too" -- a movement was afoot to reinforce Williamsburg's status by a member of its highest circles.

An attempt to move the capital again in 1752 brought another outcry. Edwin Conway of Lancaster county wrote a spirited defense of Williamsburg which he published in the Virginia Gazette. He noted that, as a Burgess for twenty-four sessions of the Assembly, he had never found Williamsburg an inconvenient or unhealthy place. One the contrary, easy access by river for trade and the availability of good food and drink made it a pleasant location "when my Occasions required me to attend, which have been in more than forty years." He argued that in redressing the grievances of the western inhabitants, the government would only give the eastern inhabitants as great a grievance and completely ruin the people of Williamsburg. Enough of Conway's colleagues in the Assembly agreed to defeat the bill.

The cycles of activity associated with Public Times continued through this period of crisis and the mid-century without much alteration. The Virginia Gazette recorded the appeals of lawyers for clients, of creditors for their money, of tradesmen for customers and prompt settlement of accounts; all hinged their claims on the opportunity
to do business during the meetings of the General Court more than any other time. The diaries and accounts of contemporaries give evidence that these calls for people to come to town were heeded. The Reverend Robert Rose of Essex County joined merchants John Mercer of Stafford County and Francis Jerdone and William Lightfoot of Yorktown in journeys to Williamsburg in April and October to transact their business.

By the mid-eighteenth century, Williamsburg had become a crucial decision-making center for mercantile interests in the colony. Merchants gathered in town during Public Times to collect debts, buy and sell bills of exchange, order goods for their rural stores, and attend auctions. The use of Williamsburg courts for debt suits, the settlement of accounts, and extension of credit during General Court sessions put the city at the center of the colony's credit system. Merchants also met with planters to make bids and offers for tobacco crops, which helped to clarify the supply and demand situation and establish the price of that staple.

These informal meetings settled the exchange rate for sterling, usually at the "Exchange" behind the Capitol, and became a market for trade in bills of exchange, which put Williamsburg in the inter-colonial money market. At the conclusion of each session, the General Court set the exchange at the highest rate that had been given during its meeting. The informal meetings of merchants became an institution in 1769 and the rules drawn up in that year probably reflect earlier practice. Four meetings each year at the sessions of the General Court and the Court of Oyer and Terminer lasted three days each, during which
time those attending were to settle the rate of exchange and pay all debts. Williamsburg quotations for tobacco and sterling ruled trans-
actions throughout the colony, making it "the one central market in Virginia." 67

Thus, personal business on a small scale, such as that conducted by Reverend Robert Rose, larger commercial operations by merchants local and distant, and colony-wide networks of merchants and planters found the General Court congenial. The seasonal influx of people into the capital created a wide market and the easy access to the local court helped these men. What is fundamental to this economic activity, however, is not Williamsburg's natural tendency to assume such an urban status, providing a central market for the colony, but its dependence on its role as capital to allow it to acquire such economic importance. Had not the Capitol stood there and the General Courts met to settle the financial as well as legal issues of the colony, while the admin-
istration of the colony settled its public account and handled land claims, the chains of public and private business would not have come to fasten upon Williamsburg as they did.

While this activity revolved around the General Court as a means for its organization and centralization, the transactions which took place derived much of their value not only from the activity itself but from their material expression of a certain way of life which the Public Times embodied. Part of this way of life can be seen in the kinds of things bought and sold in the capital and the crafts it supported: the city catered to the upper levels of Virginia society.
The movable items sold at the many auctions at these times were, by and large, luxury goods for which there was a market only when a number of wealthy people were present: skilled slaves, silver, coach-horses, carriages, collections of books. The quality of these items was matched in literary value by William Stith's *History of Virginia*, for which the author in Varina and Mr. Parks in Williamsburg required subscriptions by the last day of the April General Court of 1745. Also relying upon a literate and professional audience during Public Times was John Mercer, who advertised for 600 subscriptions to his abridgement of the new laws of the colony by the end of the April Court of 1752. By this time, artists William Dering and Charles Bridges were at work painting portraits; more an artisan, John Keeff came from London to paint landscapes, heraldic designs, and houses "in the best and Exactest Manner." Furniture produced in Williamsburg by the Anthony Hay shop (in operation under Hay from 1751 to 1767) stood at the forefront of Virginia cabinetmaking. It included not only fine, well-constructed pieces for use in the homes of Hay's scattered patrons, but some outstanding ceremonial chairs, an indication in physical proportions of the formal public life characteristic of this society. Again, English influences loomed large in Williamsburg furniture, leading to the conclusion that this shop "stood in the vanguard of British colonial furniture production." The two decades around the mid-century also witnessed a consolidation of the social and cultural life of the city, as well as of the
economic and material culture. Again, the way of life to which the city aspired belonged to at most the middle, and particularly the upper, classes of people who came to Williamsburg, as evidenced by the activities specially offered during Public Times. William Dering kept up a series of public entertainments during the General Courts of 1745 and 1746 so that ladies and gentlemen could have attended an assembly at the Capitol almost every other night. He also seems to have engineered such occasions for the government, for the Council ordered the Receiver-General to pay him for an entertainment that probably took place in April of 1747. After the reaffirmation of the capital's position, Mrs. Anne Shields took over the tradition of public balls, which she held at the court house in April, 1751. A ball for the "scholars" of Richard Coventon was held there in October of the same year. And during the next year, Alexander Finnie held weekly balls in the Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern during the General Assembly and April Court.

The inhabitants of Williamsburg revived the art of drama in these years by taking up a subscription in August of 1751 to build a new playhouse in town for the accommodation of the Murray-Kean Company, then in New York. That fall the Virginia Gazette proclaimed the opening of the theatre with a performance of Richard III accompanied by "a Grand Tragic Dance, compos'd by Monsieur Denoter, call'd the Royal Captive, after the Turkish Manner, as perform'd at His Majesty's Opera House, in the Haymarket." The Constant Couple opened the April, 1752, season, displeasing Landon Carter, who said that he was "surfeited with
stupidity and nonsense delivered from the mouths of Walking Statues." Though without a royal governor through most of 1751, President Lewis Burwell's impressive public displays of loyalty and authority competed with the theatre. John Blair wrote that Burwell celebrated the King's birthday (in late October) in an extraordinary manner, supplementing the usual elegant entertainment for ladies and gentlemen with the distribution of fifty pistoles among the poor.

A ripple of excitement must have passed through the ranks of Virginia society when they learned that the famous Microcosm had arrived in Norfolk and would be shown in Williamsburg during the October Court of 1755. This wonder was so widely known that "a Description would be needless, any more than it is the Microcosm, the most instructive as well as Entertaining Piece now extant, and ought to be seen by all Degrees of People, &c." who had at least five shillings to spare for the ticket. The only event which could have rivalled this was a public entertainment by the governor. Perhaps under the edifying influence of the spectacle of the Microcosm, the people illuminated the town for the King’s birth-night that fall Court, for which occasion there was the usual "ball and a very elegant entertainment at the Palace, where was present a very brilliant Appearance of Ladies and Gentlemen; all the Loyal Healths were drank, and the Evening concluded with all Demonstrations of Loyalty."

The remaining years of the period under review here were little different, except in the developing friction with Great Britain. Each April and October, the colony settled its accounts, as did many private
citizens; others advertised their wares, hired apprentices, lost slaves. Horse racing was popular as a public sport and social event for the elite. George Washington recorded a racing debt in Williamsburg on May 4, 1759; Robert Wormeley Carter paid for his father's subscriptions to the "Wmsbg Purses" for October, 1763, and April, 1764.

Once again, in 1761, the House of Burgesses threatened to move the seat of government to a more convenient location. Governor Fauquier wanted to comply, believing that the actual location was unimportant to British policy; the Board of Trade reprimanded him for this assumption but did give him authority to assent to a move if it tended to the well-being of the colony. But in the final vote the bill for removal lost by a narrow margin of one vote, 35 yeas to 36 noes. It is evident that the idea that the capital should be convenient for all members of the colony had not disappeared. The hold Williamsburg exercised over the colony clearly was uncertain and dependent on the desires of those who controlled the General Assembly. For again, in 1764, petitions from Caroline, Essex, and King and Queen counties requested that the capital be moved nearer to them, though no bill resulted.

By this time the city was far from new and had suffered at the hands and feet of its many visitors as well as expanding beyond its original limits. Yet Burnaby reported:

upon the whole, it is an agreeable residence; there are ten or twelve gentlemen's families constantly residing in it, besides merchants and tradesmen: and at the times of the assemblies,
and general courts, it is crowded with the gentry of the
country: on those occasions there are balls and other amuse-
ments; but as soon as the business is finished, they return to
their plantations; and the town is in a manner deserted.

A French traveler to Virginia in the spring of 1765 thought that from a
distance Williamsburg looked like a large town, but that in fact it was
far from being so. The capital was "very Irregular," with only one
street which made a good appearance. Unfortunately he had arrived at
the peak of Public Times and only with some difficulty had been able
to find lodgings at Mrs. Vobe's tavern, "where all the best people
resorted." The best people were gamblers all, which made Williamsburg
a most disagreeable place to this writer. He found the city full of
people and activity:

a great number of people from all parts of the province and
also adjoining provinces, for this is the time for carrying
on business and settling matters with correspondents. I
suppose there might be 5 or 6000 people here during the
courts . . . . In the Daytime people hurrying back and forwards
from the Capitoll to the taverns, and night, Carousing and
Drinking in one Chamber and box and Dice in another, which
continues till morning commonly.

The same traveler witnessed much of the furor over the passage
of the Stamp Act. He heard Patrick Henry's famous "Caesar-Brutus"
speech, with its mixture of threats and loyalty to the King. That Henry
was not alone in his condemnation of British action is shown by the
Frenchmen comments on the King's birth-night celebrations given by
Governor Fauquier: "I went there in Expectation of seeing a great Deal
of company, but was Disappointed for there was not above a Dozen of
people." The rift with British authority was expressed in such
concrete and at the same time symbolic terms by refusing to participate in the traditional ritual of unity and loyalty with Great Britain.

These rituals found new meaning at the next General Court in October. Unluckily for British officials, Colonel Mercer arrived with the stamps at this time when, as Fauquier ruefully observed, the town was full of people. The Public Times crowd mobbed Mercer; it included gentlemen of property and English, Scottish, and native Virginian merchants. When Mercer acceded to their demands for his resignation, they treated him to the same cheers, entertainments, illumination, music, and balls usually reserved for the celebration of events such as the King's birth-night. These social rituals had been mobilized for a different set of political, and perhaps even cultural, goals.
CHAPTER IV

URBAN LIFE IN A COLONIAL CAPITAL:
AN INTERPRETATION

The multitude of individual activities reviewed in the preceding pages was based on one fact: the location of the seat of government, of power and authority, in Williamsburg. It was very much a capital in the sense described by Gideon Sjoberg, where "power operating through the social structure" took on visible form in the administration of the colony by its aristocratic elite. Other tangible evidence of the capital city's dependence on its official functions and functionaries can be found in the types of goods and services it offered: the rise and fall of its tavernkeepers, the presence of artists and outstanding cabinetmakers, a newspaper for the colony, and a broad range of luxury trades--silversmiths, wigmakers, coachmakers, milleners, tailors. Concentrated in the shops of these artisans and retailers, then distributed to the homes of their customers, items sold and made in Williamsburg offered an expression of comfort, London fashion, and Virginia finery.

Students of the material culture of cities such as Mumford, Braudel, Fries, and Thrupp, have found such display an integral part of the capital, associated with the dominance of an elite there over the city's hinterland. And certainly the objects and services described
in Williamsburg catered to a group with money or credit to spend and prestige or status to exhibit. The very plan of the city, as for so many other capitals then and now, exemplified the order, restraint, and emphasis on grand public institutions of a hierarchical society.

At the heart of all this is the need felt by a ruling class to establish a place from which authority in politics, economy, society, and culture can be exercised over a given area or hinterland. This abstracted definition of a capital evolved in a particular way in Virginia, given the distinctive politics, economy, society, and culture of the people of this colony, resulting in a unique reality for the capital. Most studies of cities and capitals emphasize the dominance of the urban place over its hinterland. The relationship between town and country in colonial Virginia was more reciprocal in nature. Dispersal, isolation, and agriculture dominated the scene here. Britain and those who ruled colonial affairs from London were far away. The powerful native Anglo-Americans who wanted a central government for the colony controlled by themselves owed their status to their place and power in the hinterland, their possession of land and slaves there. Williamsburg was an extension of this structure of rural society and dependent on it for the influence it was able to exercise back over the countryside.

With this observation as a foundation, it is possible to summarize other qualities which made Williamsburg a distinctive capital from the evidence reviewed in the second and third chapters. An immediate effect of Virginia's rural character was the absence of a
permanent settlement of the colony's elite in the capital. Some Virginian aristocrats resided in the city but the majority chose only to visit there from their estates in the country. This limited Williamsburg's growth and kept it dependent, unlike other colonial capitals which established expanding economic bases of their own.

This also set a peculiar pace of life in the city. Much of the time, Williamsburg operated on its own internal rhythm, set by the activities of its inhabitants and their relationships with the immediate locality. But when the legislature was in session or, more important (and consecutively), the General Court sat at the Capitol, the influx of ruling planters, merchants, and others seeking to do business or join the social whirl expanded the city and brought its status as capital into sharper focus. The evidence presented in this essay suggested the development of this concentration of power, administration, and activity with the General Court at its center and the importance of these in understanding the functions of the capital and its relationship to the colony.

The functions described in the preceding pages included official government and administration of the colony from a centralized source (the Governor, Council, Burgesses, and General Court), the representation of the power of this government and governing class in visible state of architecture, material goods, and formal ceremony, and some degree of centralization in economic activity through the courts, the gathering of merchants, planters, and factors, and the trade in sterling. Like other colonial cities, Williamsburg experienced
the same uneven economic trends of the eighteenth century. But unlike them, it continued to be characterized by deferential relations between classes rather than the developing class consciousness and conflict Nash pointed to for Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.

The social structure of Williamsburg deserves a longer glance to see how it reflected the organization of the colony and produced some urban variations on that theme. At the apex stood the governor, the King's political representative and symbol of unity with Great Britain. The governor lived in the capital as a matter of course, to be and be close to the center of power. Next in line, the great planters came and went, lending their own influence to the city and using it as a means of display. Balls and formal celebrations such as those for the King's birthday offered both governor and large planters the opportunity to make their status public and proclaim their unity in ruling the colony as part of the British empire.

The city government may have provided some link between the influential planters and other representatives of their interests fully resident in the city and the next level of shopkeepers, tradesmen, and tavernkeepers. Lawyers, merchants, and physicians, bearing names associated with the upper levels of Virginia society, dominated but also mingled with a few tradesmen.

Those who fell in place next do not seem to have questioned this arrangement; at least no records survive of their protest except during the dispute over removing the capital. However, they, like those people of lesser sorts who came to Williamsburg on business from
the country, probably were aware of the different form their social structure took on in the city. Here everything, people, goods, and buildings, were more concentrated. The Palace and Capitol stood as ostentatious symbols of their rulers' might. Here more people and activity brought different classes into greater contact, whether through business or more often just in jostling them together in the street. More strangers could be seen.

This urban concentration of classes and people included and greatly affected the slaves who formed a large part of the city's population. Williamsburg slaves tending houses and gardens or working as craftsmen worked in closer proximity to their white masters than many of their rural counterparts, as Tate concluded, and may have been more highly skilled as a whole. Crowded Public Times allowed some of them to slip away to freedom.

The social structure of Williamsburg was tied into and very much a product of its functions. Both were in keeping with the character of colonial Virginia and reinforced its way of life. Both found Public Times a convenient vehicle for expression. This essay has used the Public Times as a means to get at the particular qualities that distinguished Williamsburg as an urban place and capital. The two cannot be separated, given the city's dependence on its colony-wide functions to assure its development beyond a small country village. Can Public Times also be used to find a thread leading from the capital's inception to the beginning of revolution, from the parent culture to an independent, indigenous offspring?
The capital began its life as an extension of British power and center for the aspirations of the new native elite of Virginia. Their Williamsburg represented a partial commitment to urban values long cherished in their English heritage but also the need for a capital which would allow them to retain immediate ties with their rural power sources. This resulted in the Public Times, during which the power structure of the colony physically condensed itself and activities. Throughout the period of this study, Public Times demonstrated the unity of the colony under its elite and the elite with British authority. However, this very closeness, the conscious attempt to follow London standards, gave the Virginia elite not only a certain degree of cultural sophistication, but cultural independence as well.

The many changes in politics and economy which encouraged the drive for separation from Britain have been detailed in the historical literature and still provide endless sources for debate. But the continuing round of General Court sessions and the growing activities surrounding them provide evidence of the consolidation of a viable society in Virginia which, though dominated by the hinterland as much as the capital or any other city or town, did not require British intervention to survive. The change in the content of those formal celebrations in Williamsburg from loyal toasts on the King's birthday to resolutions of independence is evidence of the ability of Virginia's native rulers to mobilize their Anglo-American traditions, which have been seen here through the focus of Public Times, in an altered direction. Their deferential internal social structure symbolized in
the capital city could be led to independence.
NOTES

Chapter I


8 Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City*, 67, 70.


11. Ibid., 60, 66. Redfield and Singer describe colonial Philadelphia as an orthogenetic city, but see below, p. 6, for Nash's quite different view.

12. Ibid., 64.


Joseph Ernst and Roy Merrens, "Camden's turrets pierce the skyes!" "The Urban Process in the Southern Colonies during the Eighteenth Century," WMQ, 3d Ser., XXX (1973), 550-552.

Ibid., 555 and passim.

Ibid., 573.


Chapter II


Francis Makemie, "A Plain and Friendly Persuasive to the Inhabitants of Virginia and Maryland, for Promoting Towns and Cohabitation," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, IV (1897), 258-259.


Edmund Morgan has offered the best account of the evolution of this class and its control over Virginia in *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975).


"Speeches of Students of the College of William and Mary, Delivered May 1, 1699," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd series, X (1930), 325-329.

Ibid., 329-332.

Ibid., 333

H. R. McIlwaine and John P. Kennedy, eds., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia 1695-1702* (Richmond, 1913), 166-167.

Ibid., 168, 174-5, 177-8, 196, 198.
The settlement at Middle Plantation began as a buffer zone between Indians and colonists. Bruton Parish was established there in 1674; Bacon quartered his followers there in 1676. In 1677, the first attempt to move the capital to this location came in a petition from the citizens of York County to the King's Commissioners. John Reps, *Tidewater Towns: City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland* (Williamsburg, 1972), 141.


R. Tidewater Towns, 175.

Fries, *The Urban Idea in Colonial America*, 113.

McIlwaine, ed., *Executive Journals*, II, 136. The Council raised the salaries to attract qualified men to these positions in town.


Memorandum to Governor Spotswood, c. 1720, Nicholson Papers, MS, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (microfilm).

William Hugh Grove, "Diary," MS, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

[Edward Kimber], "Observations on Several Voyages and Travels in American in the year 1736," William and Mary Quarterly, 1st series, XV (1907), 223.


Reps, Tidewater Towns, 185.


The General Courts were the descendants of quarter courts held each March, September, and November during the early years of the colony. The March court moved to April in 1666; the September and November courts merged into an October session in 1684, the former being too early before tobacco comes in demand and ships arrivall into this country. And November court held in the depth of winter, and soe immediately following the other, as the suitors can scarce returne home before they are exposed, to the danger and charge of returning againe . . . .

The early association of the tobacco trade and the meetings of the high court is interesting and significant for later years. Hening, Statutes, II, 58-69, 227-8; III, 9-10.

Quoted in Hugh Rankin, Criminal Trial Proceedings in the General Court of Virginia (Williamsburg, 1965), 1.

Hening, Statutes, III, 303.

Suggested in the writings of Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, O. H. K. Spate, and Lewis Mumford discussed in Chapter 1.
Chapter III


2 H. R. McIlwaine, ed., Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia (Richmond, 1925-1966), III, 251; John Reps, Tidewater Towns: City Planning in Colonial Virginia and Maryland (Williamsburg, 1972), 177; Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712 (Richmond, 1941), 359; Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), April 22, 1757.

3 The number of taverns in Williamsburg grew from 1 in 1699 to 8 in 1702 to 15 during the Revolutionary period. Taverns in the capital were exempt from the regulations on credit during Public Times. The city's hustings court did not have authority over taverns until 1742. See Patricia A. Gibbs, "Taverns in Tidewater Virginia, 1700-1774" (M. A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1968).

4 Francis Nicholson to the Commissioners for Plantations, July 1, 1699, C. O. 5/1359, 341-342, Public Records Office (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg). The Receiver-General at least, did not move to the capital until ordered there by the Council in 1732.


9 See Wright and Tinling, eds., The Secret Diary, passim., each April and October.

10 Ibid., 90, 241, 508-9.

11 Ibid., 23.

12 Ibid., 517.
13. Ibid., 244. See Timothy Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, XXXIV (1977), 239-257, for a discussion of the horse race as a vehicle for the expression of values and hierarchy.


15. Ibid., 431.


17. Alexander Spotswood to the Board of Trade, Oct. 25, 1714, quoted in Jane Carson, Colonial Virginians at Play (Williamsburg, 1965), 203.


20. H. R. McIlwaine and John P. Kennedy, eds., Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1712-1726 (Richmond, 1912), 341.

21. Ibid., 348.

22. See Robert M. Barrow, "Williamsburg and Norfolk: Municipal Government and Justice in Colonial Virginia" (M. A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1960). Leola O. Walker's "Officials in the City Government of Colonial Williamsburg," VMHB, 75 (1967), 35-51, lists sixty-three names of city officials, of which there were twenty-three lawyers, ten merchants, seven doctors, six tradesmen, two members of the governor's Council, and one royal governor (45). These figures and the number of prominent names appearing on the list indicate that government of the city reflected the governing class of the colony.


26. Va. Gaz., March 11, 1736/7; March 18, 1736/7; May 20, 1737; Sept. 16, 1737; Sept. 23, 1737; Sept. 8, 1738; Sept. 15, 1738; Sept. 22, 1738.
27. Wright and Tinling, eds., The London Diary, 399, 525-6, 464, 467, 521-2, 403.


32. Ibid., June 17, 1737; May 20, 1737.

33. Ibid., Apr. 6, 1738; Mar. 24, 1738, July 14, 1738.

34. Ibid., Sept. 22, 1738.

35. Ibid., Apr. 8, 1737. See Thad Tate, The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg (Williamsburg, 1965).


37. Ibid., June 23, 1738; Apr. 6, 1739; Oct. 26, 1739; Aug. 4, 1739.

38. Ibid., Apr. 13, 1739; Oct. 6, 1738; May 4, 1739; Sept. 21, 1739.

39. Ibid., July 29, 1737.

40. Ibid., Feb. 28, 1736/7; Apr. 22, 1737; Sept. 16, 1737; Oct. 14, 1737; Mar. 24, 1738; Mar. 31, 1738; Oct. 13, 1738; Apr. 20, 1739.

Horse-racing and acrobats were available for public entertainment as well. See ibid., July 1, 1737; Apr. 21, 1738.

41. Wallace B. Gusler, Furniture of Williamsburg and Eastern Virginia, 1720-1790 (Richmond, 1979), 54-55. Gusler comments, "While such a tradesman might not have had sufficient skill or business ability to achieve prominence in a large city, his success in Williamsburg would have been understandable had he arrived around 1720 with a sound knowledge of current fashion. Such an introduction, when styles in America often embodied turn-of-the-century features, could have met with extreme success. In Virginia, where the leaders of society were continually seeking the latest but not always conveniently available
English styles, it is easy to hypothesize why Scott was so popular" (55).


44 Ibid., 1472.


46 Va. Gaz., Nov. 5, 1736; Nov. 4, 1737; Nov. 3, 1738; Nov. 2, 1739.


51 JHB 1727-1740, 339, 342.

52 William Gooch to the Board of Trade, June 10, 1747, C. O. 5/1326, 232.

53 JHB 1742-1749, 242-245; Gooch to the Board of Trade, June 10, 1747, C. O. 5/1326, 230-232.

William Gooch to the Board of Trade, June 10, 1747, C. O. 5/1326, 232.

JHB, 1742-1749, 256.

Ibid., 283-284.

William Waller Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia (Philadelphia, 1823), VI, 197-198. The act included a proviso that the seat of government not be permanently located at Williamsburg. See also William Gooch to the Board of Trade, May 10, 1750, C. O. 5/1327.


Will of John Crawley, Apr. 12, 1748, recorded June 20, 1748, Ibid., 107.

Va. Gaz., Nov. 28, 1751; John Blair, "Diary," WMQ, 1st Ser., VIII (1899), 6, 8.

JHB, 1752-1758, 58-59; McIlwaine, ed., Legislative Journals, II, 1078; see Joseph Ball to Joseph Chinn, Mar. 10, 1748 and to Benjamin Waller, July 8, 1749, Jones Family Papers, MS, Library of Congress (Colonial Williamsburg microfilm); Va. Gaz., Apr. 12, 1752.


James H. Soltow, The Economic Role of Williamsburg (Williamsburg, 1965), 143, 156.

"List of Judgements for Sterling Money Obtained in the General Court of Virginia, 1757-1763," WMHB, XI (1904), 348-349.

Soltow, Economic Role, 17-18, 10-11.

Va. Gaz., Apr. 3, 1746; Mar. 28, 1745; Mar. 18, 1745; Oct. 24, 1745; Apr. 25, 1751; Oct. 6, 1752; Mar. 21, 1755.

Ibid., Feb. 20, 1752.

Ibid., Mar. 21, 1744/5.
Ibid., Apr. 18, 1751.

Gusler, Furniture of Williamsburg, 110, 106. Williamsburg-trained cabinetmakers may have spread the techniques and tastes they learned in the capital to other areas, such as Fredericksburg, but the extent of such influence is not yet known (170).


Ibid., Oct. 24, 1751.

Ibid., Feb. 27, 1752.

Ibid., Aug. 29, 1751, closed with "N. B. The House to be completed by October Court."

Ibid., Sept. 26, 1751.

Ibid., Apr. 17, 1752; Jack P. Greene, ed., The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778 (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), I, 103.

Blair, "Diary," WMO, 1st Ser., VIII (1899), 14.


Ibid., Oct. 3, 1755.

Ibid., Nov. 14, 1755.


Francis Fauquier to the Board of Trade, May 12, 1761, C. O. 5/1330, 63-66; Board of Trade to Francis Fauquier, Sept. 10, 1761, C. O. 5/1368, 92-93.
87 JHB, 1758-1761, 251.
88 JHB, 1758-1761, 250.
89 See Hening, ed., Statutes at Large, VII, 469-470.
92 Ibid., 746.
93 Francis Fauquier to [the Board of Trade], Nov. 3, 1765, C. O. 5/1331, 54-59; Fauquier to the Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, Dec. 13, 1765, Stowe Manuscripts, No. 265, British Museum (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg), 189.
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