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Landlords, Tenants, and Rental Property in Williamsburg and Yorktown, Virginia, 1730-1780

Emma Lou Powers

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LANDLORDS, TENANTS, AND RENTAL PROPERTY
IN WILLIAMSBURG AND YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA, 1730-1780

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the American Studies Program
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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

by
Emma L. Powers
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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Approved, December 1990

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This study examines landlords and tenants in two Chesapeake towns during the late colonial period. At that time, Williamsburg and Yorktown were capitalist towns caught at a preindustrial stage of development. Both towns were settled largely by tenants. Landlords, although diverse, generally reflected the general population. Most owned real estate in addition to their urban tenements, indicating their continuing attachment to agriculture and a reluctance to make investments in urban property only.

Tenants differed: they were highly mobile, usually new to the area, and likely to change or combine occupations to eke out an existence. Williamsburg tenants worked at a large number of different occupations, all of them requiring the capital city as the only feasible place to sell their luxury goods and specialized services. Yorktown tenants, on the other hand, were either merchants or people still closely attached to the countryside. When these tenants bought real estate, they almost always chose urban property. Tenants, especially in Williamsburg, were a distinctly urban breed.

Town tenements, except store buildings, were conventional domestic designs put to commercial use. Few were strictly residential properties, since home and place of work remained identical. Rental properties were flexible, multiple-use buildings that could be adapted to the varying needs of a series of tenants. The distribution of buildings by function showed two trends. First, only the eastern half of the main street was functionally specialized as the premier business address; secondly, gentry residences tended to cluster at the northern and southern bounds of Williamsburg.

The study concludes that these two early urban centers were characterized by social fluidity, undifferentiated neighborhoods, and nonspecific building types.

EMMA LOU POWERS

AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM

COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY
LANDLORDS, TENANTS, AND RENTAL PROPERTY

IN WILLIAMSBURG AND YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA, 1730-1780
INTRODUCTION

In the past few years we Americans have become exceedingly interested in the social history of our immigrant ancestors. Two new special-interest museums prove the point. Ellis Island, where thousands of immigrants first set foot on American soil, has been lavishly restored and refurbished. In September 1990 it opened as a museum dedicated to those brave enough—or desperate enough—to cross the ocean for a new and possibly better life in the United States. The West Side Tenement Museum is even more unusual. When it opens in 1991, it will interpret the material lives of immigrants to New York, mostly ethnics and mainly those who reached Manhattan during the late nineteenth century. Until recently the homes and lives of people such as these were not the stuff of museum exhibits. But current studies in material culture find their subjects further down the social ladder so that now they consider newcomers, ethnics, and the poor.

Eventually the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation may exhibit a tenement from an even earlier period. To do so, a building on an appropriate site must be restored or reconstructed. Masses of background information will be necessary to interpret it thoroughly. The study presented here begins that search by investigating individual landlords and tenants in the eighteenth-century capital
city. It also examines those who owned or occupied tenements in Yorktown. Further, this report collects information about what buildings the rental properties contained, their design, what functions each fulfilled, and where they stood in town. More importantly, this study discusses tenants' means of support, how long they remained in town, and changes during the fifty-year period, and how tenant families lived and worked in their rented accommodations.

This thesis considers, then, the entire rental market for urban properties, both residential and commercial, in Williamsburg and Yorktown between 1730 and 1780. One-room shops, bachelors' lodgings, stores, multiple-use lots, town houses of the gentry, and every manner of tenement in between are discussed here. Landlords and tenants, both individually and collectively, are described and analyzed. Wherever possible, their successes and failures are noted and their motivations spelled out. Williamsburg's rental property and the people involved in it are drawn in more detail than Yorktown's, mostly because references to renting in the capital city are more numerous, but also because the Williamsburg material may eventually be put to use in interpreting a tenement in Williamsburg's Historic Area.

Studies of early American cities have produced various estimates of the proportion of tenants in the total population. According to Elizabeth Blackmar, as many as a third of all taxpayers in New York City owned no urban real estate in the period 1701 to 1730. She implies, therefore, that this third of the population were renters.
Whether they became more or less numerous in later years she does not say.¹ Sam Bass Warner, Jr. calculates that 81 percent of Philadelphia families were tenants in 1774. Even in the affluent Middle Ward their numbers, he believes, approach three quarters.² Billy G. Smith's study of the working class in Philadelphia reckons that 86 percent of cordwainers and tailors and 96 percent of laborers and mariners rented in 1767.³

Both Williamsburg and Yorktown were tenant towns as well, although precisely what proportion of the population rented is subject to debate. Julie Richter, in studying lot ownership in colonial Williamsburg and Yorktown, finds that nearly half of the residents of the capital did not own town property in 1750 and presumably rented.⁴ Richter used extensive background research compiled by the staff of the York County Project at the Department of


³Billy G. Smith, The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 104n. Because Smith concentrates on the working class, the low numbers of homeowners are not surprising.

⁴Caroline Julia Richter, "In Pursuit of Urban Property: Lotholders in Colonial Yorktown and Williamsburg," (M.A. thesis, College of William and Mary, 1989), Table 11, p. 60. Richter's table is set up by decades, but the background data for it was gathered on a year-by-year basis. Julie kindly allowed me to use her raw notes in order to produce truly comparable figures. I have used her data for 1750 only, since newspaper references from the 1770s have not yet been included in the York County Project files, leaving the list of residents in the later period as yet incomplete.
Historical Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. That project surveyed all deeds for town property recorded by the York County court, culled every mention of residents from court records, and collected references to lot owners and town residents from local newspapers, parish records, and selected collections of family papers. Richter tabulated the maximum resident population for each decade of the eighteenth century and then checked the land ownership history of each individual. Her figure results from comparing known property owners with those mentioned as town residents and assumed to be heads of households.

Richter's estimate squares with results from comparing the earliest census (1782) with the land tax roll for 1783. Of the 189 heads of households who paid taxes in 1783, 50.1 percent owned no town lot and so may have been tenants. Like Blackmar's figure for Manhattan, this is a minimum figure, since it omits the poorest householders who may have paid rents but no taxes.

This study discovered concrete evidence of renting for only 18.5 percent of Williamsburg's households in 1750, far fewer than the 49.6 percent of householders that Richter identified as non-owners and

"Lorena S. Walsh, "A Comparison of the Social Structures of Williamsburg and Annapolis in 1783," p. 3 in Bergstrom et al., "Urbanization in the Tidewater South, Part II: The Growth and Development of Williamsburg and Yorktown," final report to the National Endowment for the Humanities, Project Number RO-20869-85. A computerized, alphabetical list of names comparing the two sources was prepared by Michael L. Nicholls, who kindly allowed me to use his data.

The 1782 lists are used because they are the earliest surviving ones. Certainly, it is possible that Williamsburg changed dramatically during the Revolutionary War and when the capital moved to Richmond in 1780."
50.1 percent from the 1780s tax lists. Part of the difference between the figures may result from missing deeds for lots on the James City County side of town. About 40 percent of Williamsburg’s population lived in James City County. Corrected for these underrepresented townspeople, my estimate for the portion of townspeople who were tenants reaches 26.6 percent, approaching Blackmar’s figure for early New York.

Possibly, some of the people who Richter assumed were independent heads of households lived as dependents in others’ homes. The remaining difference, no doubt, stems from townspeople’s easygoing attitude about rental arrangements. The law did not require such agreements to be recorded by the courts. Few were. Usually both landlords and tenants seem to have considered "gentlemen's agreements" sufficient guarantees and controls. All these factors help account for the lower number of tenants netted by this study than by other analyses.

In studying the rental accommodations available in the two towns, I have drawn on a wide variety of sources. None gives the complete picture. For Philadelphia, New York, and some other eighteenth-century American cities, tax lists and city directories provide very nearly complete data on residents and whether they owned or rented property. Information for these two Virginia towns is much less comprehensive.

While in some respects Williamsburg must surely be the most

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*Interview with Kevin P. Kelly, historian for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg Virginia, November 1990.*
intensely studied of eighteenth-century towns, having been subjected to over sixty years of analysis by architects, archaeologists, curators, and historians, there are serious limitations to the local records. The town straddled the dividing line between York and James City counties, and the records of the latter were destroyed during the Civil War. The Williamsburg Hustings Court records were lost at that time too. Likewise, records for the General Court, Virginia's highest court and the fourth court with jurisdiction in the capital city, are also missing. Yorktown lay completely within York County, so the county court records are more inclusive than for the capital city, but, unfortunately, fewer newspaper notices and private papers deal with Yorktown rental properties.

The sources used for this thesis are the York County court records supplemented with information from local newspapers, as well as family papers, account books, and a multitude of miscellaneous sources that supply additional data on individual landlords, tenants, or properties in the towns. (See the Appendix for a more detailed description of how the various sources were used.) Given the limitations of the data, rental histories for very few urban sites in either town can be written comprehensively. For example, in the 283 recorded instances of Williamsburg rentals between 1730 and 1780, 23 percent of tenants and 7.9 percent of landlords remain anonymous. In other cases it has been impossible to find any description, no matter how sketchy, of the property. Sometimes the information is as scanty as an owner's notice in the newspaper that his house in town is available for rent. While some advertisements at least enumerate the
major structures on the site and indicate when they will become
available, others are much more cryptic. By examining the
individual's land ownership history, it has usually been possible to
learn more about a particular rental property. Alas, careful study
of many other landlords, especially those who owned lots on the south
(James City County) side of town, has not brought to light additional
data.

In addition to concrete evidence of 283 rentals in Williamsburg
and 54 in Yorktown between 1730 and 1780, there is data for another
93 rentals during the periods 1700-1730 and 1780-1806, but they are
not included in this study. The bulky report "Rental Property in
Williamsburg and Yorktown, 1700-1806" is a chronological compilation
of all materials gathered in the course of research. The record of
each "rental event" contains 25 fields of information--name, age,
occupation, property ownership, and so on for both tenant and
landlord, as well as location of the property, opening and closing
dates for the rental, sources of information, key words chosen for
computer cross-referencing, and an arbitrarily assigned
identification number. The introduction to that report explains the
content of all fields in detail.

Background information about many of the townspeople came from
the detailed master prosopographical file and "link sheets" compiled
by the staff of the York County Project, Department of Historical
Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Their work has been

7The report is available at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Library.
invaluable to the completion of this study. Without their long years of hard work, this project would have been a herculean, if not impossible, task.
CHAPTER I

"TO LET OR LEASE": LANDLORDS

The experiences of one English immigrant illustrate the range of rental housing available in Williamsburg and Yorktown at the middle of the eighteenth century. Garrulous and rancorous, Daniel Fisher kept a journal detailing his trials as a tenant in both towns between 1750 and 1754. In the 1720s a youthful Fisher had lived in Yorktown where he was a deputy clerk of the York County court. A restless soul who always saw greener grass elsewhere, Fisher returned to his native England about 1727. But his homeland was still not satisfactory. Living there again had shown him that English ways were detrimental to character, and he especially feared the effect on his children. England seemed to him "a Land abounding in luxurious Temptations." The more frugal and innocent colony across the Atlantic, Fisher believed, offered a moral refuge—and better business opportunities as well, since "Trade in general was less

"Daniel Fisher's diary appeared in Louise Pecquet du Bellet, Some Prominent Virginia Families (Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell Company, Inc., 1907), 2: 752-812. Portions of it were printed as "Narrative of George [sic] Fisher, Commencing with a Voyage from London, May, 1750, for Yorktown in Virginia and Ending in August, 1755, on his return from Philadelphia to Williamsburg," William and Mary Quarterly, 1st ser., 17(1909): 100-39, 147-76. The location of the original manuscript is not mentioned in either of these printed sources, and its present location, if it survives, is not known.
intricate (not requiring so much Art or Skill) in Virginia."

And so, in May 1750 Daniel Fisher and his family boarded the Berry in London and set sail for Virginia. With plans to go into retailing, he brought along several chests of tea—an item, he had heard, that could be sold profitably in the Chesapeake. Fully equipped for the trip and full of high hopes, Fisher embarked upon a course that would ultimately bring about the collapse of his marriage, the loss of his trade, and his bitter departure from Virginia. A veteran of two crossings of the Atlantic, Fisher never found himself a home. His restlessness and yearnings drove him from England to Yorktown twice. The second time he fled the port town because Williamsburg seemed more promising, and he eventually tried Philadelphia as well. As tavern keeper and merchant, landlord and tenant, Fisher quickly learned that greed and deceit were not confined to the eastern side of the Atlantic. In a capitalist town like Williamsburg, the drive for profit and advantage ran through landlord-tenant relations.

Fisher had high connections in England who wrote him several letters of recommendation, including one from former Virginia governor William Gooch; another written by a merchant named Hunt to "the two Mr. Nelsons," leading citizens of Yorktown, whose father Fisher had known thirty years before; and a third to Nathaniel Walthoe, clerk of the Council and Williamsburg resident. Fisher also knew several people still living in Yorktown.

The Berry departed on 15 May. Despite short rations, misunderstandings among passengers, and smallpox on board, she safely
reached the York River on 12 August after nearly three months at sea. For about five weeks the Fishers stayed in Yorktown at a house provided by customs officer Richard Ambler. Ambler remembered Fisher from the 1720s and did him the service of providing temporary shelter gratis, "tho' he could not conveniently spare it." Fisher knew himself to be fortunate in this acquaintance, for "the favour was the greater as there was none other [house] to be had." Apparently Ambler neither asked for nor received rent, although the supply of housing was extremely short in Yorktown and presumably he could have named his price.

After quarreling with several of the Nelsons' dependents and learning that Hunt's letter on his behalf came from one now out of their favor, Fisher realized he "should have no willing aid or advice from the Mr. Nelsons" and decided to try Williamsburg. His introduction to Nathaniel Walthoe went more smoothly, "and by his kind aid [Fisher] took a house there." Fisher's earliest advertisement gives the location as near Colonel Custis's, probably on Francis Street, which Fisher described as "lying much out of the way for any kind of business." Neither price nor owner of this tenement is specifically given in the journal. At any rate, he and his family did not stay there long.

"In less than a year after we came to Williamsburg, a large

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"Virginia Gazette" 24 January 1751. This advertisement says the house was previously occupied by a Mrs. Dixon, whom I believe to be Obedience Dixon, widow of Thomas. She is listed in the Francis Street area on the 1747/8 smallpox list and seems to have had at least one boarder at that time; [John de Sequeyra, supposed author] "A true State of the small Pox Febr. 22d 1747/8," Virginia Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Box 1 (1606-1772), Library of Congress.
house near the Capitol became vacant and known by the name of the English Coffee House,\textsuperscript{10} . . . we were advised to take this, tho' the rent was larger." Again Walthoe gave a hand in the negotiations and was present when Fisher and the landlord, tavern keeper Henry Wetherburn, came to terms about the rental:

I to take a Lease of the House for Three years, certain at the Rent of Forty pounds a year, for which Mr. Walthoe to become bound; He [Wetherburn] to put and keep the House in good repair, and in case it answered my purpose, and suited my farther inclination, I to have the liberty (upon the same terms) of taking a further Lease either of Three, Six or Seven years more, just at my option.

As partial compensation for this considerable rent, Wetherburn also promised "the use of a Billiard Table, the best he said in the Country." That pledge notwithstanding, he sold it to William Byrd a couple of days later. The lease was not yet executed, but on 29 September 1751, the Fishers moved in anyway. After the billiard table incident, Fisher was understandably wary of his landlord, but Walthoe convinced him to let it go without open disagreement. Then came the signing of the official paperwork, an experience that Fisher recorded in detail and with obvious outrage.

I had been a month in the House when Mr. Wetherburn came with the Leases to be executed. He brought with him Mr. Walthoe as my security. One Mr. Swan who drew the Lease, and one Mr. Thomas Carter [both] to be the Witnesses. The Lease at my request was read; whereupon I took notice that the article concerning Repairs, and that also for granting me a further Lease, was omitted. Mr. Wetherburn very readily acknowledged our agreement, and declared the omissions were not made by his direction. Mr. Swan took the fault entirely upon himself, said it was owing to inapprehension or forgetfulness; observed however, that what related to repairs was quite superfluous and

\textsuperscript{10}The building Fisher referred to here is presently known as Shields Tavern.
unnecessary, as the Laws and Customs of the Country if not otherwise particularly stipulated, always obliged Landlords to keep Houses in proper Repair; Appealing to Mr. Walthoe for the truth of what he asserted: who said he believed what Mr. Swan had affirmed might be true. As to the further grant of a Lease, he said Mr. Wetherburn's worth and honor were so well known, that no body who had any themselves would scruple taking his word for anything of much greater consequence; and hoped I would not give the trouble of drawing fresh Leases, and the Company that of another meeting upon so unnecessary an occasion. But I still persisted in not subscribing without the last mentioned alteration at least; Mr. Swan expressed great amazement in this exclamation, What! do you distrust or do you doubt of Mr. Wetherburn's honor? adding that no person, right himself, could ever entertain any such jealousy or suspicion. And Mr. Walthoe . . . saying, I dare say Mr. Fisher you may rely safely on Mr. Wetherburn's word; and he desired all persons to bear witness. Mr. Wetherburn now making a formal and solemn declaration of both the conditions to which I signed directly without any further hesitation.

Satisfied with this contract and believing himself fully protected by it, Fisher first ran a tavern but soon gave that up to sell tea, coffee, wines, and other imported goods from his Duke of Gloucester Street house and store that was so advantageously located near the Capitol. He also decided that his family did not need all the space in the house. Since subletting was not prohibited by the terms of the lease, Fisher divided the house and had "let it out into several distinct Tenements" by Christmas. These rooms brought in a

11Fisher announced the opening of his tavern in the 3 October 1751 newspaper. Not quite five months later he complained that "Several Difficulties and Impediments in the Business I so lately undertook, subjecting me to the Necessity of giving it over"; in the same notice he advertised "divers Rooms or Apartments to let." Barely a month afterward he first advertised liquors and other imported goods for sale. Virginia Gazette, 3 October 1751, 20 February 1752, and 12 March 1752. In the interim he had advertised himself as available for employment; ibid., 11 and 25 April 1751.

12Ibid., 20 February 1752.
total of £46 a year, £6 more than his obligation to Wetherburn, while Fisher still had the "better and larger part" of the house for his own use.

But happiness never lasted long with Fisher. He felt he was interfered with because his "flourishing situation unhappily attracted the envy and rancour" of his landlord and others. Colonel Philip Lee precipitated the first incident. Fisher wrote that Lee tried to force him out of his leased property in exchange for a house the latter had rented but no longer liked. Lee's surly behavior and presumptuous manner alienated Fisher, and Lee's statement that the owner would never make repairs or grant a further lease sent the tenant to Wetherburn in a flurry. Wetherburn concurred that he had promised Fisher the option of a further lease but "denied his being under any engagement to repair the House" and swore he would not do so while the Englishman occupied it.

Fisher hied himself, a copy of his contract in hand, to local attorney Benjamin Waller, whose clerk happened to be Thomas Carter, one of the witnesses to the lease. Carter "either would or could remember nothing"—a lapse of memory brought on, Fisher believed, because Carter owed Wetherburn money. Likewise the other witness seemed conveniently to have forgotten the spoken parts of the agreement. Waller's professional opinion was that at least two witnesses must testify to verbal agreements for them to be binding. Steadfast Walthoe well remembered and declared himself willing to swear to it in court, but just this one witness was one too few for Fisher's purposes. Despite the "Laws and Custom of the Country," the
tenant himself ended up repairing the tenement.

After confrontations with two more Williamsburg residents, both of whom were rival merchants, Fisher saw his favor waning. Then came a devastating fire at a neighbor's that Fisher claimed destroyed much of his property. On 24 April 1754 a fire started in the back room of a store adjoining Mr. Walthoe's. This property was rented to a Mr. Osborne. That merchant had gone to England to bring back his family, leaving the store in care of Armstrong, his brother-in-law. According to Fisher, Armstrong's negligence caused the blaze. He had left "a fire too carelessly in the said room, while he staid longer than he intended at a Public House, [so that] the first floor catched and then the window curtains." After the alarm was given, a crowd of blacks and whites gathered to watch. They well recognized the immense danger of fire in a town where most buildings were wooden and all roofs were shingled with wood.

Then someone "gave the word that there was a large quantity of Gun Powder in the store, which struck a general terror for a considerable time." Due to a strong gale even the recently rebuilt Capitol seemed destined to burn. Gunpowder there was indeed; when one barrel exploded, Mr. Walthoe's store caught fire, bringing the blaze within four feet of the English Coffee House. The mayor (who had already had one run-in with Fisher) commanded "great numbers of lazy negroes" to level Fisher's house "for the Public good" to protect the rest of town. Our outsider declared they broke into his house and looted and ransacked his possessions, taking silver, several fancy swords, and every kind of store and household item;
more importantly, much of the house was pulled down by the mob. It was impossible, Fisher moaned, "to compute the damages I sustained in this unparalleled depredation on my goods and every commodity I dealt in as well as Liquors." To Fisher's mind this final catastrophe ruined his chances of making a go of it in Williamsburg. Adding insult to injury, his wife "separated bed and board" from him in June 1754. It was time to leave. There seemed no other option, so "I turned my mind toward my former plan of going to Philadelphia."

Fisher's Williamsburg career covered the extremes—from flourishing retailer to a tenant without shelter. Very probably he was too harsh towards certain individuals, and the journal seems to have been written with an outsider's intent of justifying himself and his failures. But concerning housing it is probably an accurate portrayal of options available in mid-eighteenth-century Williamsburg.

As a family, the Fishers were in search of cheaper and more private accommodations than local taverns could offer. Lodgings too were probably unnecessarily expensive for people, especially a family, who expected to stay for longer than a few weeks. Not meeting with another offer of a rent-free house like Ambler's in Yorktown, Daniel Fisher took what he could find—a small tenement well away from Williamsburg's business area and let at a moderate

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charge. But when the opportunity arose Fisher left that tenement and moved into the English Coffee House on Duke of Gloucester Street. Not only was this house spacious and recommended by his only true friend in town, it was located near the Capitol in the prime commercial district.

Fisher's experience with Henry Wetherburn as landlord explains several aspects of leasing in the eighteenth century. Despite the legal contract and verbal agreement before witnesses, in the end the lessee wielded very little influence. While it may indeed have been local custom for landlords always to be responsible for repairing leased property, Wetherburn—at least according to Fisher—avoided doing so. Perhaps Fisher was right about the tavern keeper's holding sway over two of the witnesses; on the other hand, maybe Wetherburn had good reasons. Fisher may have been an undesirable tenant who damaged the property or made extraordinary demands of his landlord. (Given Fisher's character as displayed in his journal, the latter seems particularly likely.) At any rate, Wetherburn raised no objection to Fisher's subletting, even though it brought in more than the amount he was paying.

Henry Wetherburn was a successful businessman in at least two realms—as tavern keeper and landlord. With his property holdings, business and personal connections, and years in town, Wetherburn was both more rooted and more prominent in the community than the come-lately Fisher. The behavior of the witnesses to Fisher's lease is an example of the way influence or patronage made itself felt: the better connected party's side was upheld. As an outsider, Fisher was
tacitly excluded from the "circle of honor," those participating in the oath-swearing rite.\textsuperscript{14} By manipulating those present at the lease-signing procedure, Wetherburn kept out of the written lease what he did not intend to perform and reneged on his oral agreement to make repairs and grant Fisher additional years at the same rate. In this instance, the local landlord was better served than the immigrant tenant. But ultimately most of the responsibility lay with Fisher. He was naïve to think any court would side with him on the two points of his verbal agreement with Wetherburn. Courts were extremely reluctant to enforce parol agreements. He had at least two other options: he could have declined to live in Wetherburn's house at all, or he could have refused to sign the contract until the two additional clauses were added.

The day-to-day control Wetherburn exercised over his tenant is not described in the journal. Had it been a high degree of control, one that restricted Fisher's behavior and aspirations, he would probably have complained about it at length in his writings. And Wetherburn apparently had no objection to Fisher's subletting. Certainly Fisher's tenant or tenants were more closely supervised than Fisher by Wetherburn. Simply because Fisher lived on the premises, he must have been a more intrusive landlord. Perhaps those who took rooms from him did not mind his direct involvement in their lives, or maybe they stayed there only briefly. The record is silent on reactions to Daniel Fisher as landlord.

\textsuperscript{14}Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor. Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 57.
Several other salient points emerge from Fisher's journal. First of all, Fisher seriously expected royal treatment in both tidewater Virginia towns. Given his connections in England—most notably a former governor of the colony—this seems a reasonable expectation. From deputy clerk of the York County court to merchant and landlord in his own right, Fisher is an example of a tenant's mobility in colonial Virginia. He knew that Virginia, like England, was a world where people deferred to their betters. But he soon learned that the Virginia social system worked quite independently of the English model: the word of a man back in England, no matter how prestigious, carried little weight with colonial gentry. Virginia's wealthy merchant-planters did not bend to the wishes of England's ruling class in matters of this kind. Sir William Gooch's letter of recommendation on Fisher's behalf did him little good—even in the province Gooch formerly governed with much popularity and success. Fisher's squabbles with the Nelsons' dependents prejudiced locals against him so strongly that not even the recommendation of a high ranking Englishman could put him in a favorable light; the good wishes of the Nelsons would have been more helpful. Fisher expected colonial society to be deferential in exactly the same ways as English society, but those expectations were rudely dashed.

Secondly, the journal indicates how close together stood buildings used for a variety of purposes—store, counting house, private residence, and rooms or "apartments" lined up cheek by jowl along the major commercial artery of the colonial capital. They were not separated by function into neighborhoods but clustered together
regardless of use.\textsuperscript{15}

Finally, buildings were undifferentiated spaces, that is, likely to serve one function under one occupant and quite a different one under the next. Fisher rented what had been used previously as a coffee house (which term usually connotes a particularly genteel version of a public house).\textsuperscript{16} Once he moved in, he used the structure as his residence as well as, first, a tavern, then a store, and eventually a lodging house.

These then are major themes of town life in eighteenth-century Virginia: social fluidity, undifferentiated neighborhoods, and nonspecific building types. All three themes will be elaborated upon in succeeding chapters.

Daniel Fisher's journal is unusual for several reasons, not the least of which is that it gives voice to a tenant. It was an age-old story and yet one as current as today's court docket: tenants complaining about landlords, and, inevitably, landlords about tenants. Fisher was bitter over Wetherburn's failure to keep the place in decent repair, and he was furious at efforts to oust him from the premises. But no matter how strong his emotions, in the end Fisher proved powerless. Wetherburn manipulated the law and used economic power to have his way.

Landlords, of course, saw matters differently. They lamented


the way tenants let property go to ruin and about never paying on time. As far as landlords were concerned, of course, rents were always too paltry to be worth much effort. For instance, in 1771 Philip Ludwell Lee wrote his brother William in London that their Williamsburg house called the Blue Bell was "in bad repair always rented to bad tenants always nasty and few rents paid." Philip Reynolds, owner of a Yorktown tenement, considered his tenant negligent and the whole ordeal of renting an unprofitable nuisance. "I have been used so ill by my late Tenant," he wrote, "that it has almost determined me not to rent it again for the Rent in this Country is by no means adequate to the value of the Buildings." William Lee agreed that rents were low. He expected the annual rent of a property to be 10 percent of its value, but his Williamsburg houses brought in only 8 percent. At a time when the customary interest was 5 percent, an annual rent of 8 to 10 percent of the value seems very high, but Lee was not satisfied with that return. He wanted to get out of the landlord business.

It appears that the Houses in Wmsburg when tenanted do not let for 8 pr. ct. of the value to which they were appraised, wch. is 2 pr. ct. pr. an. less than what is common for houses; I shd. think it wd. be best way [sic] to dispose of them all, & as I suppose the appraisers only fixed that value on them, wch. they wd. be willing to give, I shall be very willing therefore to take for them all, the appraised price . . . . [I wish] to sell all the houses in Williamsburgh, not under the appraised price nor wd. I have


one house sold without the whole.\footnote{William Lee to Robert Carter Nicholas, 23 April 1772, Lee Family Papers, Mss1, L51, f. 85.}

In 1770 Philip Ludwell's three Williamsburg tenements were appraised at £300 for "Warringtons, or the Mansion House"; £750 for the "Brick House"; and £250 for the "Blew Bell."\footnote{Ibid., f. 203.} Unfortunately, the rents they earned are not available, so it is impossible to learn what percentage of their value they rented at.

Miscellaneous sources provide a few other examples of rent as a fraction of value. The 1740 settlement of Robert Ballard's estate listed both annual rents and the values of his four pieces of Yorktown property. Two of them—the two most valuable lots by far—rented for nearly 10 percent of their value, just what William Lee strove to earn on his holdings. The cheapest of Ballard's three improved properties was worth £90 and rented at a low 6.7 percent of its value, while an unimproved lot worth £30 rented for only £1, a mere 3.3 percent of its value.\footnote{York County Wills and Inventories 19: 36. All court records are from York County, Virginia, unless otherwise stated.}

An English traveler wrote that in 1732 Yorktown was very expensive for tenants. "In York, house rent is Extravagantly dear. The Swan [Tavern] paid £60 per annum . . . . Other houses [are] in proportion dearer than London."\footnote{William Hugh Grove, "Virginia in 1732: The Travel Journal of William Hugh Grove," ed. Gregory A. Stiverson and Patrick H. Butler, III. Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 85(1977): 23.} No reason for this discrepancy is obvious: maybe the traveler's information was completely wrong, or...
perhaps rental housing in Yorktown was then in particularly short supply (as it was eighteen years later when Daniel Fisher noted that only Mr. Ambler's house was available when he and his family arrived there).

Far from all references used in this study state a rental price. Just over a third of Yorktown rentals give a yearly charge for rent, while two other properties were leased for a lump sum rather than an annual fee. An even smaller proportion, only 17.3 percent, of Williamsburg properties rented for a known amount, while four other Williamsburg leases and sublets were granted for a lump sum rather than yearly rent.

The average rent in Williamsburg rose only slightly from 1730 to 1779, and medians also remained remarkably constant. Table 1 compares averages, medians, and ranges of rents in the two towns for each decade between 1730 and 1780. The boom decade of the 1750s is duly reflected in higher rents in both towns, especially Yorktown. The port grew vigorously during the 1740s and 1750s, which made housing especially hard to come by and, therefore, expensive. Yorktown ceased developing after the 1750s, so lower rents were charged in the last two decades. Williamsburg rents, on the other hand, dropped back only slightly in the 1760s and rose again in the 1770s. Despite stiff competition from an growing population, rents in the capital did not become exorbitant. In the 1770s the craftsmen, merchants, and shop keepers in the two Virginia towns paid rents quite similar to their 1730s counterparts. Rents stayed the same, while rental accommodations became smaller. Lots were
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1730s</strong></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>£8.10..0</td>
<td>£8.10..0</td>
<td>£7 - £10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>£5.13..2</td>
<td>£5..0..0</td>
<td>£4 - £6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1740s</strong></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>£10.15..0</td>
<td>£10..0..0</td>
<td>£7 - £16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>£12.18..0</td>
<td>£13..0..0</td>
<td>£2.12..6 - £32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1750s</strong></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>£16.15..0</td>
<td>£14.10..0</td>
<td>£2.05..0 - £40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>£22..2..6</td>
<td>£31..0..0</td>
<td>£10 - £78..9..8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1760s</strong></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>£15..0..0</td>
<td>£10..0..0</td>
<td>£1.15..0 - £45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>£8..5..0</td>
<td>£8..5..0</td>
<td>£1.10..0 - £15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1770s</strong></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>£20.15..5</td>
<td>£14.10..0</td>
<td>£5 - £70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1

RENTS (IN POUNDS, SHILLINGS, AND PENCE)
FOR WILLIAMSBURG AND YORKTOWN
BY DECADES
subdivided, and two, three, or even more business establishments (along with residents of the several proprietors and their families) shared a half-acre lot or, in some cases, one building. Virginia townspeople at the end of the colonial era were paying almost the same amounts as the urban pioneers earlier in the century, but at the later period those amounts afforded them smaller spaces.

A few properties were granted rent-free, but the lessors' motivations are not always apparent. The clearest case was the lifetime lease James Tarpley gave to Rebecca Byrd. Tarpley had purchased the house and land adjoining John Blair's garden the same day he granted her the lease. Byrd is elsewhere described as unmarried and the mother of two sons. The natural supposition arises that they were Tarpley's children and that this free lifetime lease was his method of providing for his illegitimate family.23 Another case involves the 1752 will of merchant Mark Cosby who left the jeweler and silversmith Blovet Pasteur a shop on the property Cosby owned with Gabriel Maupin. That Pasteur and Maupin were both French is obvious from their names. There may have been family connections between them as well. Pasteur was Cosby's brother-in-law. What is not so readily understood is why the will granted Blovet Pasteur the shop only as long as he remained there, but, if he left, he lost control of the property.24 A more mysterious rent-free provision


24Wills and Inventories 20: 270. Perhaps this arrangement was made to accommodate Pasteur while alive and using the property as his shop but not to disadvantage Cosby's heirs in the long run on behalf of a non-resident.
appeared in the 1739 will of planter and land speculator Samuel Wilkinson. He left the barber-wigmaker Andrew Anderson the use of his Williamsburg house, where Anderson and his wife were already living, for two years at no charge.\(^\text{25}\)

No family or occupational connection between Anderson and Wilkinson is apparent.\(^\text{26}\)

This study uses the term *tenement* in its eighteenth-century sense. At that time a tenement was any property occupied by a tenant; there was no connotation of slum conditions as would come about in nineteenth-century cities. The terms *rent* and *lease* are also used here as they were intended in the eighteenth century and not as synonyms. *Let* and *rent*, on the other hand, were synonymous.\(^\text{27}\)

Leases were recorded legal contracts of mutual obligations between landlord and tenant. Only twenty-eight leases on town property have been discovered for the period covered in this study. (See Tables 2 and 3.) Typically, leases covered extended periods such as three-, seven-, and twenty-one-year terms. But they were also granted for varying lengths of time or only from one year to the next. Missing court records for the James City County side of Williamsburg, the

\[^{25}\text{Wills and Inventories 18: 494.}\]

\[^{26}\text{Only one instance of free rent in Yorktown appeared in the materials compiled for this study, and as it dates from 1719 it is not considered here; see Deeds, Orders, Wills (15): 474-475.}\]

\[^{27}\text{This distinction is clearly drawn in, for example, Reginald Orton's rental advertisement which begins "To be LET by the Year, or Leas'd for a Term." Virginia Gazette, 17 April 1752. This study does not concern itself with the documents called lease and release. They were conveying of sale, not leases. Henry Campbell Black, Black's Law Dictionary, 4th ed. (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1951), p. 1036.}\]
TABLE 2

RECORDED LEASES FOR YORKTOWN PROPERTIES
AND LENGTH OF RENTAL PERIODS
BY DECADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECADE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>LENGTH OF LEASE</th>
<th>AS % OF ALL RENTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 YR 10 YR 14 YR 21 YR UNKNOWN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730s</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770s</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE 3**

RECORDED LEASES FOR WILLIAMSBURG PROPERTIES
AND LENGTH OF RENTAL PERIODS
BY DECADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECADE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>LENGTH OF LEASE IN YEARS</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>AS % OF ALL RENTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7 15 21 25 LIFE UNKNOWN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730s</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760s</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>1 1 3*</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 1 1 1 1 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2 1 1 1 2 3 2 1 1 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All three sublets in the 1750s and one in the 1760s concern the same property. It had been leased out for 21 years in 1749.*
Williamsburg Hustings Court, and the colony's General Court, make it impossible to know the total number of leases recorded for urban property during the period.

As today, rental arrangements did not have to be officially recorded. Presumably many were simply oral contracts. Others may have been written, though not necessarily by a lawyer, but were never taken to the court for official recognition. Colonial Virginia law is silent on the subject of leases and other rental arrangements.\(^2\) Either party could initiate the legal process of recording a lease by paying the clerk's fee. Otherwise they could agree not to record it at all.

In general, a lease could benefit either party. A lease could prove advantageous to the landlord by specifying the amount of rent due him, when it was to be paid, and whether tenants must repair or improve the property. A lease, especially a long-term one, served the tenant by giving him security of tenure for a certain rental period and by stipulating conditions such as the landlord's obligation to keep the property in extraordinarily good repair. By common law landlords were required to perform only the most rudimentary maintenance, the English courts even holding that the

\(^2\) Virginia's only colonial statutes concerning renting and the relations between landlord and tenant deal with distrain for back rent. This is the landlord's right to seize a tenant's goods to the value of the rent due him. See William Waller Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619, 13 vols. (Richmond: Franklin Press, 1809-1823; reprint ed., Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia for the Jamestown Foundation of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1969), 4: 288-91, 483-86; 6: 9-13; 8: 332-34.
"tenant takes the premises for better and for worse." In the eighteenth century the legal rights of tenants were few and very difficult to uphold. Over and over again, courts showed that caveat emptor was the only sensible policy.

Perhaps those leases that were recorded by the courts involved especially cautious individuals or unusual obligations. John Custis, for example, stipulated that his tenants must "continually . . . keep the Chimney clean swept for fear of fire." He also wanted to collect rent quarterly instead of once a year. Several Williamsburg leases required one of the parties to make improvements to the property. For example, George Washington promised to paint his house before the new tenant moved in. Others required the lessee to construct new buildings or make extensive repairs to existing ones, in which case their rent payments were substantially reduced. Recorded leases,


Although the case Weinberg cites dates from the nineteenth century, legal historian David Thomas Konig of Washington University assures me that the law had not changed in this regard for many years previously. Interviews with David Thomas Konig, Richmond, Virginia, October 1990 and St. Louis, Missouri, November 1990.

30Weinberg, "Landlord and Tenant," pp. 32, 44.

31John Custis to John Wheatley, 24 May 1746, manuscript lease in private collection; transcript, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.


most of which deal with commercial properties, are also striking
eamples of the capitalist organization of the market. The law was
voked to enforce specific behaviors upon landlord and tenant. As
isher learned, neither party could count on informal procedures or
ersonal ties to ensure appropriate action. By drawing up formal
leases, both sides agreed that the ultimate guarantor of their
tract was the power of the state.

Unlike some other colonial towns and cities, notably Manhattan,
ong-term leases for ground were rare in Williamsburg and Yorktown.
here is just one lease for ground in Williamsburg, and in that case
he lessee had clear title to his shop, which he eventually sold to a
an who continued renting the ground where it stood.\textsuperscript{34} A store in
orktown was leased out for ten years, but in the lease the ground it
ood on was specifically excluded.\textsuperscript{35}

The number of leases for Yorktown property is quite small, and
o increase during the century is apparent. The length of leasing
periods for Yorktown properties varied widely, from five to twenty-
one years, and two were of unknown length. (See Table 2.)

Most Yorktown leases were executed for stores or in one instance
perhis on a combination store and warehouse. Two taverns were
ed, accounting for a third of Yorktown leases. In one case the
ased property was apparently used as a combination residence and
dctor's office, and in the other instance the function of the leased
erty is not known. These uses are only as expected, since

\textsuperscript{34} Blackmar, \textit{Manhattan for Rent}, p. 15; Deeds 6: 26-27.

\textsuperscript{35} Deeds and Bonds 5: 600-2; Judgments and Orders 2: 401.
stores, warehouses, and taverns were essential adjuncts to a port town. As suggested above, the number of leases for buildings of this type indicates greater legal jurisdiction applied to commercial relationships.

For Williamsburg there is more information about leased property. Twenty-two leases appeared in records between 1730 and 1779. (See Table 3.) Generally, they increased over the course of the century, but the length of leasing periods for Williamsburg properties are hardly more consistent than in Yorktown.

Nearly half (41.7 percent) of the leased properties were used as stores, although some of them served simultaneously as lodgings and most also included the residence of the storekeeper and his or her family. The second most likely way of using a leased property in Williamsburg was as a craft shop. Seven artisans from five different trades leased property in town; three of them were wigmakers and/or barbers. Among the other artisans who leased property were a cabinetmaker, a carpenter, a tailor, and a blacksmith. As in Yorktown, most Williamsburg leases concern business property, indicating a heavier reliance on the legal system when commercial sites were rented.

Only a few (13.6 percent) of the Williamsburg leases may have been for properties used as private residences; that is, it does not seem likely that these sites were simultaneously used for craft or commercial activities. In one case the tenant was "spinster" Rebecca Byrd, mentioned earlier, for whom no occupation is known. Another lessee owned his place of business, so that his lease was very
probably for a residence. And in the last instance the doctor who was leasing part of a house worked at the brand-new Public Hospital and probably had no time to see patients at his home. For about a tenth of the leases the use to which the property was put is unknown. Just as often what initially appear in court records as leases were afterwards described as mortgages or arrangements to settle a debt. One lease may well have been the means for the lessee to purchase the property, especially since she paid a sizable lump sum in lieu of yearly rent.

Daniel Fisher's stint as a merchant makes him representative of town landlords. Nearly a fifth (17.5 percent) of Williamsburg's landlords were merchants; almost as many (15.8 percent) were planters, and another 7.9 percent of Williamsburg landlords combined those two occupations. As shown in Table 4, these occupations among landlords are very similar to the percentages of merchants and planters in Williamsburg's general population, although planters are slightly underrepresented in the ranks of landlords.

Planters and merchants were also the groups most likely to own more than one rental property. These two occupational categories are only to be expected in good numbers among landlords, for both planters and merchants had the greatest potential incomes, and the most successful ones were quite rich. Among the overall population of Williamsburg these same two occupations, planter and merchant, were the most numerous.

The same pattern holds true for Yorktown's landlords in that merchants and planters are the two most numerous job categories,
### Table 4

**Selected Occupations of the General Population of Williamsburg by Decades**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Planters</th>
<th>Tavern Keepers</th>
<th>Merchants</th>
<th>Doctors &amp; Apothecaries</th>
<th>Ministers</th>
<th>Lawyers</th>
<th>Tailors</th>
<th>Carpenters</th>
<th>Total Number With Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1730 - 39</td>
<td>49 29.2</td>
<td>20 11.9</td>
<td>20 11.9</td>
<td>8 4.8</td>
<td>8 4.8</td>
<td>8 4.8</td>
<td>12 7.1</td>
<td>5 3.0</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740 - 49</td>
<td>64 27.0</td>
<td>20 8.4</td>
<td>39 16.5</td>
<td>11 4.6</td>
<td>10 4.2</td>
<td>14 5.9</td>
<td>12 5.0</td>
<td>6 2.5</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750 - 59</td>
<td>95 19.8</td>
<td>24 5.0</td>
<td>61 12.7</td>
<td>22 4.6</td>
<td>16 3.3</td>
<td>13 2.7</td>
<td>10 2.1</td>
<td>17 3.5</td>
<td>479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760 - 69</td>
<td>95 17.4</td>
<td>27 4.9</td>
<td>73 13.4</td>
<td>21 3.8</td>
<td>13 2.4</td>
<td>14 2.6</td>
<td>9 1.6</td>
<td>19 3.5</td>
<td>546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770 - 79</td>
<td>88 13.7</td>
<td>26 4.1</td>
<td>82 12.8</td>
<td>28 4.4</td>
<td>14 2.2</td>
<td>18 2.8</td>
<td>14 2.2</td>
<td>15 2.3</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Planters</th>
<th>Tavern Keepers</th>
<th>Merchants</th>
<th>Doctors &amp; Apothecaries</th>
<th>Ministers</th>
<th>Tailors</th>
<th>Carpenters</th>
<th>Total Number With Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1730 - 39</td>
<td>40 40.0</td>
<td>11 11.0</td>
<td>17 17.0</td>
<td>2 2.0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>7 7.0</td>
<td>3 3.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740 - 49</td>
<td>42 34.1</td>
<td>13 10.6</td>
<td>28 22.8</td>
<td>6 4.9</td>
<td>1 0.8</td>
<td>4 3.3</td>
<td>4 3.3</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750 - 59</td>
<td>45 30.0</td>
<td>11 7.3</td>
<td>30 20.0</td>
<td>5 3.3</td>
<td>1 0.7</td>
<td>7 4.7</td>
<td>13 8.7</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760 - 69</td>
<td>39 35.5</td>
<td>8 7.3</td>
<td>31 28.2</td>
<td>3 2.7</td>
<td>1 0.9</td>
<td>6 5.5</td>
<td>3 2.8</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770 - 79</td>
<td>35 29.2</td>
<td>8 6.7</td>
<td>29 24.2</td>
<td>9 7.5</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>3 2.5</td>
<td>4 3.3</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
although in Yorktown there is a slightly higher percentage of planter-landlords (18.8 percent) than merchant-landlords (12.5 percent), but another 12.5 percent combined the two occupations. The larger margin of planters in Yorktown is also reflected in its general population, not just in its landlords. The port, it seems, had a stronger rural base than Williamsburg, at least in its first decades, although the percentage of planters in Yorktown declined slightly over the course of the century. (See Table 5 for selected occupations of Yorktown residents.)

Lodging house keepers, printers, and physician/apothecaries each made up nearly a tenth (7.0 percent) of all Williamsburg's landlords. While keepers of lodging houses might rent property, they were by definition landlords in that they took in lodgers (and indeed that is the only way in which Daniel Fisher was a landlord). A few tavern keepers, lawyers, and an array of craftsmen were also represented among the town's landlords. A greater variety of crafts is represented by Williamsburg landlords than by landlords in Yorktown.

Landlords who were merchants usually rented their property to tavern keepers and other merchants. The latter sounds like an especially risky practice because of sheltering one's competition in the same trade, but apparently Yorktown merchants profited by it. Other merchant-landlords took as their tenants a variety of craftsmen such as blacksmiths and printers, but no one trade is represented heavily. Planter-landlords most frequently rented to tavern keepers and to professional men like physicians, lawyers, clergymen, and professors. A few planter-landlords had merchants as tenants, as
well as a variety of craftsmen from barber and butcher to printer and cabinetmaker.

At least half of the Williamsburg landlords owned more than one piece of property. Obviously, this figure is an absolute minimum because it was not possible to check the records for every county, town, and colony for their other holdings. Of those landlords who owned additional property, over half (59.2 percent) had both rural land and other urban property (whether in Williamsburg, Yorktown, or another Virginia town) while they rented out a Williamsburg lot. Nearly another fourth (23.5 percent) owned another piece of urban property but no acreage in the country. Very few of them had only rural land or acquired other properties, either rural or urban, after their Williamsburg tenements were rented. Essentially, then, Williamsburg landlords were more confident of making a profit in towns than in the countryside, and as a group these were people who owned multiple properties. They put their surplus capital in real estate and favored town lots.

Landladies were a rarity in eighteenth-century Williamsburg. Women account for less than a tenth of those who owned and rented out properties in the capital city, and most local landladies were widows—over half of them. Neither the small number of female tenement owners nor the preponderance of widows is at all surprising given the colonial legal system. By law, a married woman was feme covert. Subordinate to her husband in the eyes of the law, she could

\footnote{Marital status for most of the remaining women is unknown; none was identified as "spinster." Very probably some of those whose marital status is unknown were also widows.}
not hold property or enter into contracts. Widows and women who did not marry were guaranteed many of the same legal rights as men; they could buy, own, and sell property and enter into contracts such as leases. Despite these preferences in the eyes of the law, a single woman faced the dreary choice between living as a dependent in a home not her own or else setting out on her own in a world where tradition and custom were against her from the start. Legal hazards of becoming a wife notwithstanding, rates of marriage were quite high in the colonial Chesapeake, so, in fact, most Virginia women married at some point in their lives.

Among Williamsburg landladies, nearly three quarters (70.1 percent) worked for their living at some time in their lives. As widows, they were responsible for themselves and for their children, if any; and fortunate indeed was the widow who inherited a large enough estate to maintain herself and her family. Yet some (29.4 percent) are not known to have engaged in any occupation. By and large those town women who had occupations were involved in providing

37Marylynn Salmon, "The Property Rights of Women in Early America: A Comparative Study," Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1980, p. 86; Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), pp. 41, 46. There were a few mitigating, although hardly adequate, protections for the married woman. For example, before the sale of property, courts required that a married woman be interviewed privately to assure that she truly assented to her husband's wish to sell. A widow was also protected by the custom of dower rights in her husband's estate; a third of his total estate was designated for the widow's lifetime use, regardless of the number of children and the final disposition of the property by his will.

food and shelter for an overwhelmingly male clientele. These were the women who operated taverns, took in a lodger now and again, ran larger commercial lodging houses, or cooked meals for paying boarders. Lodging and boarding houses were the more respectable and private alternatives to public inns, ordinaries, and taverns. By providing more and better services to discriminating customers, lodging house keepers and those who "kept table" had more earning potential than all but the best located and most fully capitalized tavern operators. Milliners dealt in fashionable clothing and accessories and were often involved in commissioned sewing as well. Sewing for wages was a very common way for largely untrained women to make their living. Some probably did so in the hope of accumulating enough capital to open a millinery shop. While shopkeeping was an option for any woman with the money to buy herself some stock, running a profitable shop or store required her to enter a new world of credit, accounting, and large-scale purchasing. Williamsburg's outstanding midwife, Catherine Blaikley, excelled at delivering babies and other medical attentions, skills every woman needed in some degree. All these jobs may be viewed as extensions of housekeeping and other requisite female skills, a small and tentative first step outside the domestic sphere. Work of these kinds was typical for colonial women.

The most common occupation of Williamsburg landladies was

40Ibid. pp. 141-43.
41Ibid., p. 138.
lodging house keeper; almost a third (29.5 percent) of them either ran commercial lodging houses or took in the occasional lodger. Two others had boarders but not lodgers; that is, they provided meals for businessmen who had engaged rooms elsewhere.

Women became landladies for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they hardly deserved the name: in seven of nineteen rentals, Williamsburg landladies merely supplied services, in the form of a little shelter and board. They were not owners who joined the ranks of landlords through possession and control of property. Other rental involved the management of property bequeathed by husbands or fathers. Five Williamsburg landladies ran lodgings or lodging houses, and two other women provided board only. These last seven were actually landladies only because of the services they provided. Two rentals dealt with town lots left in a woman's estate. Other transactions included one sublet, a lease to pay off a debt (so that this lease seems to have worked as a mortgage), and a widow's renting out property in order to cover debts owed by her deceased husband's estate. The printer Alexander Purdie collected rent for the lot tavern keeper James Southall occupied, the lot having been brought into the marriage by his wife Peachy. Widow Sarah Waters was credited with a third of the income from a store rental received before her dower was allotted. The three remaining rentals were to unknown tenants.

Some local landladies offered meals but not overnight accommodations. In 1754, as a young soldier, George Washington noted
a charge of £1.7.6 "by board at Mrs. [Rebecca] Coulthards." Mary Davis, wife of merchant Richard Davis who rented William Carter's brick house on Duke of Gloucester Street, advertised lodgings, but she differentiated between them and keeping table for "10 to 12 Burgesses, during the sessions of Assembly." One woman tenant apparently had an arrangement to provide meals for her landlord and his family; in 1779 the estate settlement of Richard Hunt Singleton, administered by his widow Mary, included a charge of £70 for "House rent" and a credit for £25.18.09 "By Board William Carter and Family," thus reducing her rent by over 35 percent. Clementina Rind was simultaneously tenant and landlady. Widowed in 1773, Rind remained at the Ludwell-Paradise House that she rented from the estate of Philip Ludwell. There she continued printing her dead husband's edition of the *Virginia Gazette* and took in at least one lodger. Mary Singleton ran a boarding house in the 1770s at William Carter's brick store, and in 1775 wigmaker James Nichols sublet the corner room from her; therefore, like Rind she was tenant and landlady at the same time.

In a few instances, women's estates were rented out. Widows Joanna Archer and Mary Goodson both died owning considerable town

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45*Virginia Gazette*, ed. Rind, 16 June 1774; *ibid.*, ed. Purdie and Dixon, 16 June 1774 supplement.

46*ibid.*, ed. Purdie, 27 October 1775.
property. Archer, who died in 1732, had kept a store that five years afterward became William Hooper's place of business. Her house and lots were not offered for sale until 1745, at which time Dr. Kenneth McKenzie was occupying the property.47

Landladies in Williamsburg fell into two separate classes--those who owned extra property and rented it out and those women who made some income through renting rooms and cooking meals. Barely half of Williamsburg's landladies controlled property strictly through possession, not just through their services.

More typically landlords were male, local, and landed. Short biographies of Fisher's landlord and two others will help fill in details and supply several possible variations.48 Henry Wetherburn, tavern keeper and landlord, was a local success story. His origins are uncertain; like Fisher, he probably came from England, but from which county is not known. He first appeared in local records in June 1731 with his marriage to Mary Bowcock, widow of Williamsburg tavern keeper Henry Bowcock. Apparently she taught him the business, for in August of that year he received a license to keep tavern at the Raleigh (across the street from Bowcock's), where they stayed until 1743. The Wetherburns seem to have made good profits in their business, for they soon became property owners.

In 1738 Wetherburn acquired his first land when he bought lots 20 and 21, now called Wetherburn's Tavern, and within five years

47 Ibid., 17 May 1737 and 16 May 1745.

48 These biographical notes are taken from the data base files prepared for this thesis and are not individually footnoted here.
moved his tavern there. In 1743 he bought lot 57, presently known as the John Crump House; and six years later he bought three quarters of the lot adjoining it to the west. In 1750 he made his last known purchase when he acquired eight lots at nearby Capitol Landing. How he used all these properties is not clear. Perhaps he rented them out the whole time he owned them, but besides Fisher only one tenant is known, John Doncastle who rented the John Crump House between 1753 and 1756.

Mary Wetherburn died in July 1751. Only ten days later the easily consoled widower took another wife, and she too was bred to the tavern keeper's trade. Ann Marot Shields was a Williamsburg native, the daughter of Jean Marot, another tavern keeper, from whom she inherited some Williamsburg houses and lots. Widowed by her first husband James Ingles in 1733, she was married to James Shields by 1739 when their son James was baptized. For many years she and Shields ran a tavern on lot 25. The elder James Shields died in 1750, and shortly thereafter she and Henry Wetherburn joined forces. With his marriage to Ann Shields, Wetherburn took over the management of her property as well as that part of the estate left for her eleven-year-old son James until he came of age in 1760. In this way Wetherburn became the landlord of what Daniel Fisher called the English Coffee House on the south side of Duke of Gloucester Street and near the Capitol. Toward the end of his life Wetherburn began selling off his property. In late 1759 Wetherburn sold part of lot 20 and in July of the next year sold his portion of lot 56. Henry Wetherburn, a Williamsburg success story through a profitable tavern
business and his choice of wives, died in late 1760.

Another notable local landlord was surgeon-apothecary William Carter. Williamsburg born and bred, he was involved in a dozen rentals between 1766 and 1780 (plus two more later in the century). It was not that he owned more property than Wetherburn and the others, but that one of his properties was subdivided and frequently rented to more than one tenant. Lot 19, presently known as Brick House Tavern, but then usually called "Dr. Carter's Brick House," was partitioned off into several shops, and there was rapid turnover among the storekeepers, tavern keepers, and various craftsmen who took space there. Two of these tenants arranged for sublets—one took in lodgers while another let a corner room for a wigmaker's shop. Carter also owned a multi-lot residence on Palace Green (Elkanah Deane House) and the brick duplex on the north side of Duke of Gloucester Street (John Carter's Store and the Unicorn's Horn). For three years, 1771 to 1774, Dr. Carter lived in Gloucester County but returned to Williamsburg thereafter and entered a partnership with his brother James who was also an apothecary. After serving in the Continental Hospital during the Revolution, William Carter established a practice in Richmond. He maintained the Williamsburg shop, but it was probably run by an assistant. Old and deaf, Dr. William Carter "formerly of Williamsburg, but for many years an inhabitant of this city" died in Richmond in June 1799.

John Blair was a landlord of quite a different ilk. A wealthy merchant, burgess, councillor, and member of an exceedingly well connected Scottish émigré family, Blair was one of Williamsburg's
few true rentiers. His foray into the business world was greatly eased by legacies left him by his father Dr. Archibald Blair and his uncle the Reverend James Blair, founder of the College of William and Mary and commissary to the Bishop of London. With that auspicious start, Blair added even more to his wealth with substantial profits from his commercial partnership with William Prentis and Wilson Cary. He owned at least sixteen lots, including his multiple-lot residence with its notable garden. His tenants included several merchants, a tavern keeper, and philanthropic school for black children run by the Associates of Dr. Bray. At his death in 1771 at an advanced age, five tenements were advertised for sale.

Because of his great wealth and extensive property holdings in town Blair was atypical of Williamsburg landlords; he came from the wealthiest class of Virginians. Carter and Wetherburn, as the moderately successful men of business diversifying their investments by buying town lots, were more representative. Carter was landlord to a large number of tenants, but that was due more to the "shopping mall" nature of one of his buildings than to his owning many lots. Wetherburn's control over town lots by right of his two well-heeled wives and by profits from his tavern meant he could buy rental properties to produce still more income. The marginal figure among these individual landlords was Daniel Fisher. Simultaneously tenant and landlord because of subletting, he was neither a native nor well-connected among town residents. His stay there was brief, and his commitment to a single occupation weak. Fisher more closely resembles Williamsburg tenants (who are described in detail in
Chapter II) than his fellow landlords. Landlords were a class apart, distinguished by local origins or at least strong local connections, a high level of land ownership, and their commitment to the success of Virginia towns.

What were the properties that these landlords rented out? How did the Fishers live and work in the house they rented from Wetherburn? Certainly it was spacious. The "English Coffee House," as Fisher called it, is best described in the room-by-room inventory of James Shields's estate taken in January 1750/1, only nine months before Fisher moved in. It names eight rooms plus a closet, cellar, and upstairs. Significantly, "upstairs" appears three times in the inventory, indicating three separate sections to the upper story of the structure (and possibly three staircases to that floor). The names of the rooms, their contents, and the order in which they were listed indicate that its form was essentially two hall-passage-parlor units joined by an exterior chimney. It may be that four of the rooms were additions to the simple two-unit plan. One was the small, unheated room at the eastern end of the building. Probably it is the one called the "lower room" in the inventory. At the back of the house a long, narrow shed addition joined the two sections. The three rooms making up that addition were probably the bar room, garden room, and shed off the kitchen.

Formerly used as tavern by James Shields, this building served a variety of functions during Fisher's tenancy. First and only briefly Fisher also ran a tavern there, in addition to which he and his

49Wills and Inventories 20: 195.
family lived on the premises. Without major alterations it became a store as well as continuing as their residence. As store keepers rather than tavern keepers, this family of four had much more room than before when the same space had to accommodate customers eating, drinking, and sleeping. The Fishers owned no slaves, and the journal never mentioned hiring slaves. Consequently, this small family of only four occupied a house with eight rooms on the first floor, probably nearly that many above stairs, and a full cellar. Certainly they lacked neither space nor privacy.

Fisher probably used only one room as his store, most likely the eastern addition, with its own street entrance. An unheated area, this room was quite separate from the domestic space. If he needed more storage space for retail items, Fisher could use all or part of the full cellar.

Soon after closing down the operation of his tavern and by December 1751, Fisher began renting rooms. He described them as "several distinct Tenements" in the journal and as "divers Rooms or Apartments" in his newspaper advertisement. Just how many were available or how many lodgers he expected to put up he never said, but he wrote that he and his family kept "the better and larger part" of the house for their own use. Architectural historians do not doubt that the eastern unit was the "better and larger" section of the house. It seems likely, then, that the lodging rooms were on both floors of the western section of the house well away from both the easternmost room (the store) and the larger, hall-passage-parlor unit (the Fishers' residence). How the rooms in the addition along
the back of the house were used is not certain; perhaps Fisher was willing to rent them if he had enough interested lodgers but, if not, the family would continue to occupy those spaces as well.50

Hall-passage-parlor houses of one and a half stories (usually with detached kitchens) were the typical form of most early Virginia buildings.51 Williamsburg inventories sometimes give room names and the relationship of one room to another, showing that the hall-passage-parlor plan was typical in the town as well as the countryside.52 James Shields's inventory stands as another example. William Hugh Grove described both the single- and double-pile version of this plan. "They have a broad Stayrcase with a passage thro the house in the middle which is the Summer hall and Draws the air, and 2 Rooms on Each hand. Some indeed have only one room on a Side and the Windows opposite each other."53

The hall-passage-parlor plan could be enlarged in various ways: by adding a room or rooms onto one end; by putting a lean-to addition on the back; or by building a wing or wings at a right angle to the axis of the main house, creating an L- or U-shaped plan. Examples of each of these survive in Williamsburg. In general the houses in

50I am grateful to Mark R. Wenger, architectural historian at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, who gave me much useful assistance in this section.


52For examples, Deeds, Orders, Wills 7: 211; Wills and Inventories 17: 416, 587-88 quoted in Whiffen, Houses, p. 68.

53Grove, "Virginia in 1732," p. 28.
Williamsburg resembled contemporary construction in English villages, although the colonial buildings were on a larger scale, with higher ceilings and more sophisticated architectural details.54

The wide frontages and overall spaciousness of Williamsburg lots encouraged builders to orient houses with their long sides to the street, exactly as Shields Tavern stretches its maximum length along Duke of Gloucester Street. This arrangement was essentially rural; it had not been used in English towns since the sixteenth century. English towns and cities were made up of rows of buildings whose narrow ends faced the street, like London terrace houses. Some Williamsburg buildings were arranged this way too.55 Normally, in this plan, the front room on the ground floor was a shop.56 In Williamsburg this orientation was used for a wider range of structures--stores and shops as well as private residences.57

Urban tenements had no distinctive design. Rental properties in the towns were built to utterly conventional house plans, but these residential designs were put to a variety of commercial uses. Properties could be readily adapted to different purposes, just as Fisher's tenement was in turn tavern, store, and lodging house.

55Whiffen, Houses, p. 71.
57Whiffen, Houses, p. 71.
Occupants made do with whatever was available for rent, and the structures themselves were flexible enough to suit any number of purposes.

It is impossible to know just how families other than the Fishers lived in these houses, but some estimates of privacy and comfort are possible. The typical Williamsburg house was built on the hall-passage-parlor plan, making a total of six rooms in a story-and-a-half structure. While sizes of Williamsburg households at mid-century varied widely (from 54 to only 1) the average was 8.8 persons. Analysis of Williamsburg estate inventories has shown that during the 1750s the majority of Williamsburg decedents owned five or fewer slaves. So then approximately four members of the white family lived in a six-room house. Even if one room served as a shop and another for storage or work space, this seems adequate housing for such small families. Like the Fishers, they were no strangers to comfort and privacy, although modern convenience levels had not yet been approached. If the household were headed by a couple who shared a chamber, that still left one or two upstairs rooms as sleeping space for the other two or three members of the

58 Cathleene B. Hellier and Kevin Kelly, "A Population Profile of Williamsburg in 1748," an occasional paper from the Research Division, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1987, p. 2 and Table 1. This average coincides nicely with travelers’ impressions that the town contained about a hundred houses with a total population of nine hundred people.

59 Kevin Kelly, 27 February 1979 memorandum on demographics and slave holdings in Williamsburg, Research Query File, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library. This figure agrees with other estimates, notably the half-white, half-black city population figures stated in the Virginia Almanack for the Year of Our Lord 1776 (Williamsburg, Virginia [1775]).
family. In other houses, of course, more space may have been given over to craft production or storage of goods than allowed for here. And naturally some Williamsburg families were larger and some residences much smaller.

The size of the house Fisher rented was typical only of buildings along the main thoroughfare, Duke of Gloucester Street. Elsewhere smaller structures prevailed. This differential began with the initial plans for the capital city. The legislation creating Williamsburg and emendations six years later were very specific about the kinds of buildings the city should contain. The intent of these laws was to enhance the appearance of the town as well as to encourage its growth. Along Duke of Gloucester Street the law required sizable, well-built houses on every lot or two, all structures to be of uniform height and equidistant to the thoroughfare with good fences surrounding each individual's property. Within two years a purchaser of a lot along Duke of Gloucester Street had to build and finish on each lot a dwelling house at least twenty by thirty feet. If one purchaser took two lots along the main street, he had to build a house fifty by twenty on any one of the lots within two years; alternatively, the purchaser of two lots could put up one brick or framed house forty by twenty feet, if the house had "two Stacks of Brick Chimney's & Cellers under the whole." If the buyer of two lots along Duke of Gloucester Street also took one or more lots away from the main street, he could preserve his title to all of them by constructing "in ordinary framed Work as much Dwelling Housing as will make five Hundred square Feet superficially"
Measure . . . for every Lott or half Acre taken up," or "in Brick Work or framed Work with Brick Cellars under the whole and Brick Chimney's as much Dwelling Housing as will make four Hundred square Feet superficial Measure" for each lot. Failure to build within the stated time or to the designated dimensions resulted in reversion of the property to the trustees. Building requirements for lots on the other streets were determined later by the directors appointed in the act. These requirements showed concern for the formal or baroque style of the Williamsburg town plan. The difference from main street to lesser areas also shows a knowledge of building codes for London after the great fire of 1666. The strictness of these building codes may also have been a reaction to earlier rough-and-ready building practices in rural Virginia.

By 1730 Williamsburg had received its official charter and was fairly evenly developed with virtually all the lots taken up by private owners. The capital attracted residents from rural York

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County and elsewhere in the colony, as well as a great many from Great Britain and a few Huguenots from France and Switzerland.\textsuperscript{64}

When William Hugh Grove first saw Williamsburg in 1732, he was favorably impressed.

\begin{quote}
Wmsbergh is the Metropolis [capital city]. It has about 100 houses, tho by the Manner of building their offices seperately its shews to be 300. It is a full Mile Long & 1 Mile Broad. The House of Assembly, Called the Capitol, is an Elegant and Comodious building at the East end of the Town. The governor's [Palace], about the middle of the North side [of town], is also a Very Elegant Structure with a Cupula.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

In the 1740s Williamsburg faced two crises. First of all and more immediately, the Capitol burned in January 1746/7, an accident seized upon by burgesses from the inland counties as an opportunity to move the capital farther west to a site more convenient to their constituents. Barely two months later the Assembly considered a bill for moving the capital to a new town. Happily for Williamsburg, the Council rejected that bill. But the question of a new capital was far from settled, for the House of Burgesses at first defeated a bill for rebuilding the Capitol on its charred remains. The legislature did not make a quick decision; in fact, they did not even meet for eighteen months because of a virulent smallpox epidemic that swept through Williamsburg in early 1747/8, killing 15 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{66} Finally in December 1748 the bill for "Re-building the


\textsuperscript{65}Grove, "Virginia in 1732," p. 24.

\textsuperscript{66}[de Sequeyra], "A true State of the small Pox."
Capitol, in the City of Williamsburg" passed—but only by a hair's breadth—in both houses and was approved by the governor.67

That crisis past, Williamsburg faced another, a crisis of space. The city's population had increased greatly during the 1730s and 1740s, reaching a total of about nine hundred blacks and whites who lived in a hundred households. Housing was in great demand, and only half (46.9 percent) of heads of households are known to have owned their homes.68 Benjamin Waller was the first of three local land owners to develop tracts adjoining Williamsburg's boundaries; these subdivisions were annexed to the city in the following decade. Thereafter physical development in the capital was concentrated in the suburbs.69

The period of Williamsburg's greatest population growth still lay ahead. Between 1750 and 1775 the number of townspeople doubled, from about 900 who lived in 100 households in 1750 up to 1,880 in 1775. In a contemporary publication this population figure was broken down by race and gender: 52 percent black (469 black males and 517 black females) and 48 percent white (505 white males and 389 white females).70

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68Richter, "In Pursuit of Urban Property," Table 11, p. 60.


Formal in plan, purposefully created as the ceremonial setting for the homegrown gentry's public service, Williamsburg attracted both investors and residents from elsewhere in the colony. With all the original town lots sold to private owners by 1730 and suburban developments annexed to the city shortly thereafter, the capital was in the hands of a fairly small group of property-owning businessmen. They were by no means a rentier class, but their Williamsburg properties produced income that, if not spectacular, was certainly steady. Landlords felt plagued by negligent tenants, but they were virtually guaranteed a reliable stream of rents as welcome supplements to their profits from mercantile, agricultural, and other business endeavors. The tie binding landlord and tenant was simple: money brought them together; theirs was a contractual relationship in a world of capitalist property. Landlords in eighteenth-century Williamsburg, like landlords in every place and in every age, wanted income from their real estate investments. Tenants needed housing, and only money could get that for them. In the eighteenth-century Chesapeake connections between landlords and tenants were already modern, based entirely on money. Daniel Fisher, like many another tenant, found that out to his chagrin.
CHAPTER II

"ALWAYS NASTY AND FEW RENTS PAID": TENANTS

Mr. Peter Scott's old house in this City, which he had rented and lived in for 43 years, was burnt down last Sunday Night, by accident.

This brief notice in the Williamsburg newspaper for 26 January 1776 tells of the destruction of the Custis house on Duke of Gloucester Street across from Bruton Parish Churchyard. Locals blamed the soldiers billeted there for starting the fire. Cabinetmaker Peter Scott, who died only a few weeks before the incident, had rented the house most of his life. Despite the coincidence of fires in both their histories, Scott's tenancy in the capital city differed dramatically from Daniel Fisher's experiences.

Scott first appeared in Williamsburg in February 1735/6, when he was probably already renting the Custis property. Early on he gained townspeople's respect, for he served on the Williamsburg Common Council, the municipal government, for more than forty years.\(^{71}\)

\(^{71}\)Virginia Gazette, ed. Purdie, 26 January 1776 and supplement to the 5 January 1776, issue; ibid., ed. Dixon 27 January 1776; Edmund Randolph to George Washington, 26 January 1776, Emmet Collection #1135, New York Public Library; Custis Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; Virginia Gazette, ed. Dixon, 2 December 1775; Mary A. Stephenson, Peter Scott House History (Block 13, colonial lot 354), July 1952, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Despite Scott's long residence in Williamsburg, his commitment to the town was, at least for a time, weaker than the town's commitment to him. In 1755 he announced his intention "to leave for Great Britain" and liquidate his assets. Besides woodworking tools and materials and two slaves "bred to the Business of Cabinet-maker," Scott hoped to sell his two lots "on the Back Street, near Colonel Custis's in Williamsburg." On one lot stood a six-room house with cellar, the usual dependencies, and a well. It too would go on the block. But Scott did not leave—or at least not for long; his name shows up in records for mid-1756 and afterward.

The 1755 advertisement is our only evidence that Scott owned property. From this description it is clear that Scott's lots were located on Francis Street, one of the two "Back" streets, near John Custis's block bounded by Francis, Nassau, Ireland, and King streets. Because this part of Williamsburg lay in James City County, the early records of which have not survived, no deeds in his Library. Accounts for Scott's rent appear in the Custis manuscripts only between 1757 and 1771, but other evidence cited here definitely proves that he occupied the property much longer.

72Virginia Gazette, 12 September 1755. The same advertisement reappeared in the next two issues of the newspaper; see ibid., 19 and 26 September 1755. In 1773 a Peter Scott announced his intention "to leave the Colony soon," but as this notice carried a Fredericksburg dateline, it may concern an entirely different man; see ibid., ed. Purdie and Dixon, 28 October 1773.


74Mary A. Stephenson, "Custis Square House History, Block 4, colonial lots 1-8," 1958, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library. This block is familiarly known as the "Six Chimneys Lot."
name survive. How the cabinetmaker used the property he owned is not documented, but this thesis suggests one possibility.

Peter Scott's trade required enough interior space for himself and his two slaves to work; he also needed storage space and perhaps a sales area for showing customers finished work. Archaeological excavation uncovered early eighteenth-century brick foundations of a house measuring 32 feet 7 inches along Duke of Gloucester Street and 20 feet 9 inches wide. Beneath it all lay a full cellar. With its cellar and probable garret space, this was a sizeable structure, one potentially roomy enough for both home and shop. Duke of Gloucester Street, the closer to the Capitol the better, was the preferred business address in the capital city. A craftsman, especially one in charge of his own retailing, would naturally desire that location.

References to the Custis property on Duke of Gloucester Street specifically state that Peter Scott "lived" there and do not mention the location of his shop. Since there is no indication that Peter Scott had a wife or children, perhaps he kept simple bachelor quarters. In that case the upper floor of the Custis house would have been more than sufficient for his needs. The two woodworking slaves are the only known members of Scott's household. They may have had very minimal accommodations in a part of the upstairs or cellar, off to the side of the work area, or even in the one "outhouse" mentioned in the description of the fire. (See pp. 70-72 for a discussion of housing for slaves in eighteenth-century)

—Ivor Noel Hume, archaeological report on the Peter Scott Site (lot 354, Block 13), November 1958, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.
Obviously Peter Scott had the capital to invest in a couple of improved lots on a back street, but perhaps he did not have sufficient means to buy prime commercial property, where his shop-cum-residence would continue to draw customers. Alternatively, his actions may have been the results of a conscious decision; maybe he chose to remain in Custis's house because the rent was low, allowing him to reinvest in his business rather than using it to buy the highest-priced real estate. A receipt from the Custis papers indicates that during the 1750s Scott owed only £10 a year in rent, and part of that sum he paid with furniture he made. This seems a very reasonable rent in terms of a successful craftsman's probable income, especially since he paid partially in his own product. The ten pounds Scott owed Custis was well below the 1750s median rent of £14.10.00 and the average of £16.15.00. It is also possible that Custis had granted him a long-term lease, ensuring the continuation of a low annual rental charge.

If the Custis property met his space requirements for both living and working, then Scott could rent out the property he owned. It was probably rented at less than £40 a year (maybe even more than he himself paid in rent), and it very likely resembled the first Williamsburg house Daniel Fisher lived in. Not many tenants owned property in town while they rented, but a fifth of those who rented

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7"Manuscript receipt signed by Peter Scott and Daniel Parke Custis with dates 12 June 1754, 3 August 1754, 5 August 1755, and June 1756, Department of Collections, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, accession number 1988-405.
in the 1760s, for example, bought urban property later on. (See pp. 74-77 for more specific information about the property tenants owned.) Scott rented for a lifetime, although he certainly commanded enough capital to buy Williamsburg property. When he became a landowner, he did not move from the Custis house. Scott was hardly a typical tenant—he stayed longest of all known renters, and a very few owned town lots during their tenancy—but in his economic diversification, he nicely represents Williamsburg tenants.

What motivated a person to rent a house, shop, or store in Williamsburg? Specific answers were as numerous as individual tenants. These people, however, shared characteristics such as origin, occupation, the length of time they remained in the town, and the likelihood of their owning property at some time in their careers.

Tenants' origins are often difficult to discern. Instead of place of birth, this study uses the amount of time a tenant had spent in the York County area before he began renting. This was determined by the appearance of names in court records or local newspapers.77 Between 1730 and 1780 more and more tenants made their first appearance in the area when they began renting in Williamsburg. (See Table 6.) Over time tenants became less and less like their landlords. Renting relationships, then, were not connections between familiairs. Tenants did not know local ways or how to play their roles; in other words, they were outsiders like Daniel Fisher.

77Local and creole for the purposes of this count includes tenants who came from York, James City, and Warwick counties. Naturally, anonymous tenants had to be omitted from these calculations.
### TABLE 6

**WILLIAMSBURG TENANTS' TIME IN YORK COUNTY BEFORE RENTING BY DECADES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECADE</th>
<th>No. When Names Known</th>
<th>0 (1st-appearance)</th>
<th>1-5 years</th>
<th>6-10 years</th>
<th>11-20 years</th>
<th>21+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730s</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740s</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750s</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760s</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770s</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: York County Project mast biographical file, CWF.
The earliest tenants were divided into two groups, new arrivals and creoles. The most numerous category (30.0 percent) were those who made their first appearance in local records with the rental in question. At the opposite end of the spectrum, almost as many renters (25.0 percent) had been in the vicinity for twenty years or more. Undoubtedly, many of these were natives, indicating locals' rosy view of opportunities in the town. But after the first flush of urbanization, not nearly so many town tenants showed a York County origin. By 1740 under 10 percent had a strong local basis or had been in the area longer than twenty years.

Of tenants who began renting in the 1740s, the largest group (40.0 percent) had spent one to five years in the vicinity. Those intrigued by Williamsburg as the venue for their work may have moved near, but not actually inside the limits of the town. Others were still more cautious, coming to town as lodgers or other kinds of dependents. They risked establishing their own households only when they were assured of earning a good living there. After a trial period of one to five years, they then threw their lot in with the town and rented places for their businesses and families.

With the rapidly increasing population of Williamsburg between 1730 and 1780, competition for housing in the capital grew keen. This is reflected in the steady numbers of would-be tenants who lived nearby for six to twenty years before they found accommodations in the town. From 20.0 to 44.6 percent of the tenants had that much local experience, presumably waiting to make the move into the capital until they felt assured of a modicum of success there. The
commercial area of town was small and fairly restricted. Some aspirants waited years for a desirable tenement to become available.

The length of time tenants had been in the vicinity coincides perfectly with what is known about Williamsburgers in general. From the beginning, Williamsburg was settled by relative newcomers. Almost half of them first appeared in York County records the very year they occupied a Williamsburg lot. The rest had been four or five years in the area before moving to Williamsburg. Only a few (11 percent) varied from this pattern. But while Yorktowners generally had grown up nearby or had very strong local connections, renters of lots in the port town had not been reared in neighboring counties. They lacked strong local connections and would not stay there long anyway. Yorktown appeared socially stable, but from the tenants' perspective it was anything but that. Yorktown tenants were propertyless strangers, Daniel Fishers, briefly passing through on route to another short-term home. For most of the eighteenth century both towns continued to attract significant numbers of immigrants, most of whom probably came from urban places in Britain, France, and Switzerland.

Almost everyone who rented in Williamsburg depended upon the town as the market for goods and services he or she had to offer. Few of them were William Byrds, the rich and famous who hired a pied

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79Ibid., p. 24.
à terre in the capital during the social season. Williamsburg tenants worked for their living. Their occupations ranged widely—from merchant and minister to butcher and bricklayer. Tenants worked at more than forty different occupations, but only merchants and tavern keepers showed up in significant numbers. (These occupations are discussed at length below.) For the most part Williamsburg tenants were highly specialized workmen and marketers, such as printers and bookbinders, upholsterers, auctioneers, a surveyor—cartographer, mantua maker, cutler, hatter, watchmaker, instructors in dance and deportment, and many more. These were no simple backwoods blacksmiths and coopers. The goods and services they offered were not needed in the countryside; they show an inclination towards the sophistication of town life. "As a center that attracted the social elite from throughout the colony, Williamsburg provided luxury craftsmen an ideal location to tap into a provincial market."^{1}

Tavern keepers made up about a fifth of all Williamsburg tenants in the 1730s and 1740s (21.7 and 19.0 percent, respectively), but only a tenth (10.7 percent) in the 1750s. Their numbers rose slightly in the 1760s (to 15.7 percent) but dropped again in the 1770s (to 11.3 percent). During the 1760s and 1770s several men engaged in the unlikely combination of wigmaking and tavern keeping. Adding them to the individuals who stuck with tavern keeping exclusively, the percentages rise to 25.5 percent for the 1760s and 15.0 percent in the 1770s. No clear trend over time is apparent,

^{1}Kelly, "Urbanization," pp. 18, 27.
although the low in the 1750s probably relates to the temporary uncertainty of the government's remaining in Williamsburg and the availability of new suburban lots. Among the general population of the town, tavern keeping became a less important occupation with each decade, but this was not consistently so among tenants. (See Table 4.) The number of tavern keepers in a decade does not necessarily mean that Williamsburg supported that many taverns simultaneously since some, like Daniel Fisher's, operated only briefly, after which the tenant attempted another means of making a living. Other taverns, like Wetherburn's, were run by the property owners themselves.

The merchants among Williamsburg tenants grew in absolute numbers but not in proportion to the total number of tenants. In the 1730s only one merchant rented, and he represented a mere 4.3 percent of all tenants that decade. In the next two decades their proportion went up sharply to a quarter. During the 1760s the number of merchants in proportion to all local tenants dropped slightly to about a fifth (21.6 percent), and in the 1770s plummeted to only 12.5 percent. Compared to the general population of Williamsburg, merchant-tenants are over-represented in every decade but the 1770s when the percentage of merchant-tenants approached very closely the percentage of merchants in the town. Although many landlords were merchants, a considerable number of tenants earned their living that

James City County's ordinary licenses do not survive, of course. It is possible, though unlikely, that in some years taverns were much more numerous on the James City side of town than in the York County part of Williamsburg.
way too. Undoubtedly, Williamsburg offered strong attraction for merchants, because it was the most important Virginia town and the periodic gathering place for so many of the colony's citizens.

Fluidity in occupations characterized urban tenants. Frequently they combined or changed how they made their living. Like Daniel Fisher who initially ran a tavern, then both kept store and took in lodgers, tenants tried first one thing and then another. The wigmaking-tavern keepers mentioned above are another example. To supplement their incomes, a good number of Williamsburg renters, especially women, took in the occasional lodger, ran larger-scale lodging houses, or prepared meals for paying boarders. These means of bringing in an extra few shillings required little or nothing in start-up costs and only the usual domestic skills. But the additional income was important to their household budgets. The primary occupations of those who fed and/or housed strangers varied greatly—from teaching music and tailoring gentlemen's suits, to building houses and printing newspapers.

Williamsburg tenants lived on the edge economically. Town renters, with a few affluent exceptions, eked out an existence by putting their hands to any kind of work that might possibly bring a return. Much more than landlords, tenants lived hand to mouth.

Occupations for only three quarters of Yorktown tenants have been identified; for the other quarter occupations remain mysteries. In contrast, the work of only a small handful (6.9 percent) of Williamsburg tenants are lacking. Yorktown had fewer tavern keepers who rented property and a much higher proportion of merchant-
tenants. Records of only two tavern keepers among Yorktown tenants between 1730 and 1779 survive, therefore tavern keepers made up less than a tenth (7.1 percent) of Yorktown tenants. The port needed and supported more taverns than this, but there they were not rented to keepers as in Williamsburg. Obviously then owners of Yorktown taverns were themselves the proprietors or chose to hire tavern keepers rather than lease or rent out tavern sites. Interestingly, five Yorktown taverns were rented between 1703 and 1722, quite early in the port's history. There are two possible explanations for the many fewer rented taverns later on: either taverns after 1730 were run by their owners or the evidence is especially poor. (The latter is always a distinct possibility when dealing with early Virginia records.)

Merchants, on the other hand, were quite numerous in the port town. Nine merchants rented Yorktown stores during the period under consideration in this study, and they account for nearly a third (32.1 percent) of all Yorktown rentals. Three of the nine rented in Yorktown beginning in the 1740s, and five others kept stores there during the 1750s. None is known to have rented during the next decade, and only one Yorktown merchant-tenant has come to light for the 1770s. Clearly, after 1750 Yorktown became a backwater. Although there were proportionately more merchants among tenants in Yorktown than in Williamsburg, no decrease through the course of the half-century is apparent in the port as in the capital. With so few merchant-tenants in Yorktown, it seems risky to posit elaborate theories about reasons for temporal changes.
Quite a large fraction of Yorktown tenants were doctors, surgeons, and apothecaries—nearly a fifth (17.9 percent). Why the port needed so many medical professionals is not certain, although it is conceivable that crews of incoming ships required extensive medical attention. Other Yorktown tenants worked at planting, teaching, barbering, instructing dancers, and clerking in the Naval Office. Yorktown tenants displayed a much narrower range of occupations than renters in Williamsburg. While Williamsburg was economically diverse, the port town offered fewer, but highly specific services.83

Women tenants in both Virginia towns are especially interesting. Although they accounted for only a small part of either town’s known renters, they were very much alike. Only nineteen women tenants in Williamsburg are known for the whole period between 1730 and 1780, and they made up less than 10 percent of all tenants in the town and of all rentals. (Poor women tenants are also the most likely not to appear in the records.) Almost half of the female renters in the town (47.4 percent) were widows, about a third (31.6 percent) were apparently unmarried at the time of the rental, and marital status for the remaining few is impossible to determine. Women faced many legal and customary restrictions; as both landladies and tenants women were at a severe disadvantage in early Virginia. (The major drawbacks relating to property ownership and rental contracts for women are discussed in Chapter 1.)

Most women renters were either tavern keepers or milliners.

83 Ibid., p. 24.
Practitioners of each of these occupations accounted for a fourth (26.3 percent) of all women tenants. Other occupations included a dancing mistress, a seamstress, a teacher who kept store part-time, a lodging house keeper, and a printer's widow who continued the newspaper and took in a lodger. The last two (previously described in the landlady section of Chapter I) were simultaneously landladies and tenants. Like landladies' occupations, most of these were extensions of normal housekeeping or other typical female skills. Only Clementina Rind, the printer, was engaged in an "unfeminine" trade.

A fifth (21.1 percent) of the women tenants owned land at some point in their careers. Three bought only urban lots, while one had both town and country property. They had made their money as milliners and tavern keepers, and two of them were widows. (The third held property only in the sense that she and her husband purchased it after they married.)

The low numbers of women tenants in both Williamsburg and Yorktown are not other than expected. If they were married, women were precluded from owning property and entering contracts such as leases. While some urban businesswomen prospered, they did so despite convention. Like the rest of Virginia, the two towns were very much a man's world.

Another group of town residents, fully half the population during this entire period, was even more restricted than white women. Slaves had few, if any, options and exercised no authority over where they lived, the kind of roofs over their heads, how long they stayed
in the town, and the work they performed each day. Accommodations for the black half of the population have been omitted from nearly all discussions of local architecture. Very little information specifically about slave housing in towns is available, so one must fall back on the evidence for Virginia as a whole.

Kitchens in Virginia were made separate buildings, not just to enhance the smell and temperature of the main houses as Robert Beverley claimed, but to separate the white family from their black workers. Kitchens, stables, and other work buildings "provided secondary spaces [for slaves] that ranged from private domestic quarters to an open corner where a person could fall asleep." Lofts, basements, and garrets of main houses were other make-do spaces allocated to slaves.  

In one of the very few references to slave housing in Williamsburg, Thomas Craig mentioned the "large and strong smokehouse" at Market Square Tavern when he advertised the property for sale in 1770. This smokehouse was a multiple-use building, for Craig went on to say, "at one end of it a place for people to sleep in." The "people" Craig had in mind here are assumed to be slaves. A portion of a work building was hardly private and certainly not domestic space in any real sense. It was a place "where one might

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Most town residents owned small numbers of slaves, so slave "quarters" as on plantations were rarely necessary in towns. Among the possible exceptions was Peyton Randolph, whose property on Nicholson Street may have included a "servants' quarter" for his numerous slaves.
collapse at the end of the work day, not a private domain in which cooking, eating, talking, and other social activities could take place.\textsuperscript{85}

At least two transients made sure that their slaves were housed apart during their visits to Williamsburg. John Fontaine, a King William County merchant and planter, spent three months of 1715 there. He arranged for lodgings for himself and "hired a shop and a house for my people." Neither landlords nor locations of these accommodations are known.\textsuperscript{86} In 1770 Thomas Jefferson took "rooms" at Mr. Adams's (probably the house of Richard Adams in the Johnson subdivision). His slave Jupiter seems to have stayed with a family named Smith, but where they lived is not known.\textsuperscript{87} The population of Williamsburg was equally split between the two races, but slaves were allowed nowhere near half the housing.

Once free tenants, male and female, settled in Williamsburg, how long did they stay? As a group they were highly mobile. While only very rough estimates of the length of time tenants remained on the same Williamsburg property are possible, it appears that tenants seldom stayed put more than five years. Peter Scott was the anomaly, for only he rented the same tenement for a lifetime. For the 1730s


\textsuperscript{87}Thomas Jefferson Papers, series 4, memorandum books, 1767-1770, Library of Congress. I am grateful to Kevin Kelly for bringing this information to my attention.
through the 1750s most tenants stayed a year or less, but during the next two decades there was more persistence. During the 1730s over half (56.5 percent) of the tenants stayed in Williamsburg for a year or less, while for the other half of the tenants there is very little information and no patterns emerge. Those who remained in their tenements longer than a year did so for two, three, or four years, but Peter Scott's all-time high persistence of 43 years also began in this decade. In the 1740s just over half (52.4 percent) stayed a year or less on the same rental property, and in the 1750s exactly half remained a year or less.

With the 1760s tenants began to stay longer. A third (37.3 percent) rented for a year or less, while a fifth (21.6 percent) stayed two years. A third (31.4 percent) kept their tenements for three to ten years, while a tenth (9.8 percent) stayed between eleven and fifteen years.

These figures may be variously interpreted. On the one hand, Williamsburg tenements may have become much more appealing by the 1760s, probably because by then Williamsburg's position as the capital had been reaffirmed and its population was growing rapidly; alternatively, people may have been forced to stay in the same old rented houses because their chances to buy diminished over the period or because they could neither buy nor rent other, better properties.

During the 1770s almost three quarters of tenants remained for a year or less, a very high proportion by comparison with the previous decades. Another fourth (26.3 percent) persisted for two to five years, while the remaining few stayed from six to eighteen years.
Turmoil during the Revolutionary War and the quick return of Loyalists to Britain may account for much of the turn-over in tenants during this decade.

Yorktown tenants were even less attached to that town than Williamsburg's renters were to the capital. More than two thirds of renters (68.5 percent) stayed in Yorktown a year or less; but nearly a fifth (18.5 percent) rented in the port for two to five years. Only a very few (3.7 percent) occupied Yorktown tenements for six to ten years, while a tenth (9.3 percent) stayed between eleven and twenty-two years.

Dunmore, Virginia's last royal governor, understood at least one aspect of his subjects--their mobility. "Americans," he wrote, "will remove as their avidity and restlessness invite them. They acquire no attachment to Place: But wandering about seems engrafted to their nature." So accurate is this picture that he might have been describing Williamsburg and Yorktown's tenants in particular.

Would that there were better information about whether and why tenants bought rather than continuing to rent. Did every one of them aspire to own property? Could only exceptionally successful business people like Peter Scott buy an establishment in town? Or, given sufficient capital, would any tenant jump at the chance to buy a plantation, give up his or her trade, and turn farmer? Probably we

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will never know specifically, since local tenants' aspirations and motives are not mentioned in the surviving documentation. But what land some tenants acquired is known. First of all, though, an explanation is in order. In every decade but the 1730s over half of the identified Williamsburg tenants are not known to have owned any real property at any point in their careers. This figure represents an absolute maximum since, of course, it is not possible for any one person to make an exhaustive search of the records of every city, county, colony, and country. Undoubtedly, some of these tenants migrated elsewhere and at least a fraction of them bought property somewhere at some time in their lives.

The first of two trends in tenants' landholding is a decrease in the proportion of tenants who owned rural land while they were renting in Williamsburg. In the 1730s, 13.0 percent owned acreage in the countryside while they paid for tenements in town. The percentage decreased steadily until it reached a low of only 2.0 percent in the 1760s, after which it went up slightly in the 1770s (but only to 6.3 percent). This tendency indicates tenants' divorce from agriculture and increasing reliance on an urban life-style, their commitment to making their living in town only. Over time fewer tenants made a tentative move from the country to rent a shop or store in Williamsburg expecting that venue to supplement their farm incomes. As the century progressed, urban tenants became more and more distinct from their country cousins.

Another related trend was town tenants' propensity for purchasing some urban property—not necessarily in the capital, but
in any town--after they had rented in Williamsburg. Only a very few (4.3 percent) Williamsburg tenants during the 1730s are known to have bought urban property later on, but that proportion grew with every decade: from 9.5 percent in the 1740s to 10.7 percent in the 1750s, reaching its high point in the 1760s when almost a fifth (17.6 percent) of Williamsburg tenants acquired urban property after they had rented in Williamsburg. The percentage drops slightly in the 1770s, but only to 12.5 percent, which was still higher than the 1750s level. Perhaps this decrease in the 1770s was due to wartime disruptions and a loss of confidence in town life once their city of choice was no longer the capital. These figures, like the ones concerning town tenants who simultaneously owned farms, show that increasingly Williamsburg's renters were an urban breed, a people whose chosen way of life was town-based, and whose occupations were viable only in a metropolitan community. Their goods and services appealed to a clientele that only a good-sized town, not a mere country crossroads, brought together.

In Yorktown for over half (51.7 percent) of the tenants no information about land ownership was been discovered. This figure agrees with Williamsburg's and for Yorktown too represents the maximum number without land for their entire careers. Former tenants in Yorktown, like their Williamsburg counterparts, were most likely to purchase urban property after having rented; although only 13.8 percent did so, this was the most numerous category of property owners. But almost that many (10.3 percent) owned both urban and rural land during their tenancy in Yorktown. Williamsburg renters
during the 1730s and 1740s had done likewise but did no longer as of the 1750s. This Yorktown phenomenon was due primarily to the number of affluent merchants who opened stores at the York River port while maintaining both plantations and commercial concerns elsewhere.

While it was not unlikely that one who had rented in Williamsburg or Yorktown would go on to own property elsewhere, especially in another urban environment, only two town tenants are known to have bought the very same property they had previously rented. Landlords had no incentive to sell off their rental properties. If tenements were good moneymakers, owners wanted to maintain that income, not sell them. In both cases where renters purchased their tenements, the landlords' deaths put the properties on the market. In the newspaper announcement that John Blair's five tenements were for sale, merchant John Holt was mentioned as the occupant of one. At the auction in early 1772, it was he who bid highest (£91) and became owner of lot 239 near the church. Likewise, when Nathaniel Walthoe's estate was settled in 1774, Christiana Campbell purchased the tavern she had rented for more than three years.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{83}For Holt's purchase of Blair's property see \textit{Virginia Gazette}, ed. Rind, 21 November 1771; ibid., ed. Purdie and Dixon, 7 November 1771; and Deeds 8: 207-8. Campbell's purchase of Walthoe's lots is documented in \textit{Virginia Gazette}, ed. Purdie and Dixon, 3 October 1771 and 20 May 1773. See also Deeds 8: 384-86.

Another Williamsburg businesswoman may have become the purchaser of the property she had rented, but the circumstances are not complicated. In 1770 milliner Jane Hunter paid £100 for a four-year lease to part of lot 52. Because of this large payment, this lease may have been a mortgage or some other way for Hunter to purchase the property from Gilmer. By the fall of 1771 she was married to wigmaker Edward Charlton. In November 1774, when her lease ought to have expired, Jane Hunter Charlton's sister, Margaret Hunter, another
The uses of Williamsburg rental properties necessarily correlated with tenants' occupations. Townspeople with residences entirely separate from their places of business were few and far between. Typically, buildings were chosen for their usefulness in business, while the family—along with servants, slaves, and apprentices, if any—lived and worked in such space as remained.

Assuredly, only a few Williamsburg tenants maintained separate and distinct domestic and work properties. In the 1770s James Southall, proprietor of the Raleigh Tavern, rented a house on Nicholson Street from printer Alexander Purdie. William Hunter, also a printer, owned his shop but simultaneously held a lease on another town property, presumably residential. Rebecca Bird and her two sons lived in a simple little house provided for them by James Tarpley. These few constitute the majority of cases where rental properties (other than lodgings) were used strictly as living

milliner, was occupying what seems to be the lot 52 property formerly leased to Jane. Margaret Hunter kept this property until her death in 1787, at which time her brother-in-law as administrator of her estate offered it for sale. Deeds 8: 67-69, 461-64; Williamsburg-James City County Land Tax, 1783-1788; Virginia Gazette and Williamsburg Advertiser, 18 October 1787. In the 1780s at least one more former tenant bought the property he had previously rented; see Deeds 6: 173-74.

May 1773, Southall Receipt Book, Brock Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library.

Wills and Inventories 21: 79-82.

Judgments and Orders 3: 111; Deeds 6: 232; Bruton Parish Register (Births).
Seldom were rental properties touted as special-use buildings because few of them had been designed for specific purposes. Nearly always advertisements emphasized size and location over design. But the distinction between purely residential and strictly business neighborhoods was made clear. A landlord would boast of "a very commodious house" to be let and would then extol either the commercial potential of its location or its private, garden-like surroundings "in one of the most agreeable parts of the town" for a genteel home. If the property stood on Duke of Gloucester Street, the landlord normally drew attention to its usefulness in retailing and called it "well calculated for any public business." For example, the owner of a lot immediately west of the Capitol claimed it was "the most convenient Spot in this city for Trade."94

These two uses, commercial and residential, were the only functional divisions in the eighteenth-century town's rental property. A study of Williamsburg property owners before 1750 found three kinds of neighborhoods. Duke of Gloucester Street, especially between the Capitol and Market Square, was the premier business location. As the century progressed, the gentry tended to cosset themselves in estates in the west end of town away from the main street. By mid-century the gentry had entirely deserted Nicholson

93Because several tenants' names and occupations are unknown, it has not been possible to figure the percentage of tenements that were purely residential.

94Virginia Gazette, 8 August 1755; ibid., ed. Dixon, 29 April 1775; ibid., 23 January 1745/6.
Street; along it then stood the homes and work shops of "middling" artisan families.  

(For the layout of the town, see Figure 1, an adaptation of the so-called "College Map" dating from about 1800.)

Few upper-class residences ever came into tenants' hands, so this thesis cannot pretend to report fully on that type of property. Neither can it adequately address the character of the Nicholson Street neighborhood, for only four tenants in that location have been found. For its southern parallel, Francis Street, only eight rental properties have been located. By and large, rented business properties, which also included their proprietors' living quarters, lined Duke of Gloucester Street, and nearly all of them were east of Market Square.

The uses to which properties were actually put show their high degree of versatility. Dr. Carter's Brick House was tenanted by a wide variety of tradespeople, from tavern keepers and merchants to milliners and wigmakers. John Custis's elaborate residence with the town's most famous garden, a gentry home by any standard, was rented to a variety of tenants between 1760 and 1780. The diverse ways they used that property showed how adaptable it could be. Tenants at Custis Square (south of Francis Street and in the west end of town) included a tailor, then a lawyer who took in lodgers, followed by

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36Custis Square is a rare exception to this rule. Its occupants in the second half of the eighteenth century are discussed below.

37The dearth of information for Francis Street is as expected, because it lay in James City County for which colonial records no longer exist.
Figure 1
Map of Williamsburg in about 1800
William Byrd III when in town for Assembly sessions, then a clergyman fresh from England. Afterwards upholsterer-paperhanger-gilder-auctioneer Joseph Kidd used the property for his myriad endeavors, and finally (albeit briefly) Peter Hardy made coaches there. In the hands of an enterprising craftsman, even a gentry estate off the beaten track could be useful for trade.

Stores and taverns were the two notable exceptions, for these structures seem to have been purpose-built. They tended to be taken up by other merchants or tavern keepers and constantly employed in the same old ways. Rental advertisements made clear the customary uses of both stores and taverns. In 1776, for example, John Holt advertised "A STORE to be LET for the ensuing year." Similarly, George Gilmer, Jr. advertised his "Brick Store, late Harmer and King's [merchants], in Williamsburg, to be let." This property had been left him by his father whose will described it only by use. From 1765 until 1778 six merchants in succession rented Waters Storehouse on Duke of Gloucester Street near the intersection of Botetourt Street. Other examples abound. Proving the rule, "

"Virginia Gazette, ed. Pinkney, 6 January 1776, and 3 February 1776.

"Ibid., 24 October 1755; Wills and Inventories 20: 423.

Mary A. Stephenson, "Waters Storehouse House History, Block 18, building 3A," 1959, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library. This may be the same property Holt advertised early in 1776 specifically as a store available for rent; Virginia Gazette, ed. Pinkney, 6 January 1776 and 3 February 1776.

Among the most elucidating and interesting examples are the following: James Geddy advertised the "Store" adjoining his shop (Virginia Gazette, ed. Purdie and Dixon, 18 July 1771). Henry Hacker's will, probated 20 December 1742, gave to wife Mary the use
one store was used another way. A 1736 advertisement offered to rent or sell the "house in which the Bristol Store was lately kept." It was described only as a "house" and said to be a large one, built on two lots with a garden, coach house, stable, and other domestic dependencies. Perhaps the house's use as a store in the first place had been the anomaly, since its description makes it sound more like an upper-class residence than a commercial site.

In both America and Britain stores usually took a particular architectural form. Typically stores were comprised of two rooms, the show room just off the street and a smaller counting room behind for privacy and security. To take advantage of expensive commercial real estate, stores were nearly always built with their narrower gable ends facing the street. Frequently the retail area was unheated and had few windows, while the counting room had two or more windows and a fireplace so that the bookkeeper could see his ledgers and not suffer the cold. Cellars and lofts were used for storage. To accommodate heavy and bulky items both had direct access from the street--a bulkhead at ground level with a few stairs going down into the cellar and a stout door into the attic with a brace and winch above it for lifting casks and crates. While not all Williamsburg buildings with their gable ends turned towards the street were

of all his property in town and at Capitol Landing "except the store and warehouse in Williamsburg" (Wills and Inventories 19: 142). In 1772 Richard Davis wanted to sublet the complex of buildings he had leased from Dr. William Carter at £60 annually; among the structures was a "Wooden Store" that alone rented for £15 (Virginia Gazette, ed. Purdie and Dixon, 17 December 1772).

102 Virginia Gazette, 10 September 1736.
stores, most local stores were so constructed.\textsuperscript{103}

Tavern keepers tended to rent sites that had previously been operated as taverns. Indubitably, it showed good business sense for them to take up places already known as taverns; repeat customers must have found that reassuring and convenient. Probably these sites were particularly well located to attract and to serve customers in the first place. While taverns had no particularly distinctive architectural form, they had to be spacious buildings and contain a large number of bedrooms. Taverns took the same form as large residences, although by the second half of the eighteenth century enormous public rooms had become \textit{de rigueur} for major taverns in urban areas. One after another, tavern keepers tended to occupy the same sites. The James Anderson House, for example, was the site of Christiana Campbell's tavern for about ten years. When she relocated and Anderson bought the property, another tavern keeper, William Rawlinson Drinkard, rented it and opened for business right away.\textsuperscript{104} Daniel Fisher, of course, kept a tavern in what had been the English Coffee House. The Raleigh was certainly the best known tavern in town and probably the most famous in the colony. It drew a series of enterprising keepers during the course of the century and remained in operation until well into the nineteenth century.

Surprisingly, one property was used as a cabinet maker's shop by

\textsuperscript{103}Whiffen, \textit{Houses}, p. 71. While it was not a rental property, the original building called Prentis Store on Duke of Gloucester Street is a classic example of eighteenth-century store architecture.

three different practitioners of that trade. First Anthony Hay, the owner, had his shop on Nicholson Street from about 1756 until 1766. Ailing from facial cancer (probably caused by mahogany dust, a constant hazard in his occupation), Hay gave up making furniture and became the proprietor at the Raleigh Tavern. Benjamin Bucktrout rented Hay's shop for the next three years (1767-1770), after which another cabinet maker, Edmund Dickinson, rented from Hay's estate until 1776. Was the building itself specifically suited to woodworking? It is difficult to imagine what made it so. More likely under the circumstances, Hay included tools and a supply of furniture woods, thus making it a particularly attractive rental deal for other cabinet makers.

Williamsburg tenants chose rental properties with an eye mainly to business. Wherever they hung their hats was their shop—and their home. They made do with conventional domestic buildings. Other than stores and, to a lesser extent, taverns, local rental properties were undifferentiated spaces. Function had not yet dictated form, nor form function. Because of expense, lack of rental options, and since discrete and private living quarters were not considered essential, few Williamsburg tenants maintained separate homes and work places. This last is, of course, characteristic of preindustrial towns. Residents of the capital city looked first for location, greatly preferred the east end of main street; design, size, and amenities appeared farther down the list of considerations.

105Virginia Gazette, 8 January 1767; and ibid., ed. Purdie, 15 November 1776.
Only merchants could hope to rent buildings designed specifically for their purposes.

Williamsburg tenements were all very much alike, as befits the resting spots of a remarkably cohesive tenantry. The first chapter here began examining landlords through Daniel Fisher's journal. In the end, it concluded that he scarcely resembled his fellow landlords. A newcomer who passed through, never living long in any one house, Fisher had much more in common with tenants, which, of course, he was. Peter Scott's experiences began the chapter on tenants, but over all he seems out of place with those who rented in Williamsburg. His settled life and prosperity align him with urban landlords; indeed, a fixture in his rented house for a generation, Scott was as identified with the property as if he owned it himself.
CHAPTER III

"CONVENIENT TO ANY PUBLIC BUSINESS":
CONCLUSION

Social and spatial fluidity characterized eighteenth-century Williamsburg and Yorktown. The population changed constantly. Not even uses of buildings were static and fixed by custom. Occupants came and went, leaving the flexible, multiple-purpose structures available for the next round of eager tenants. Most buildings in the urban landscape resembled the simple three-part farmhouses that Virginians had been putting up and living in for a hundred years or more. Local builders' total repertoire consisted of only two specialized architectural forms, house and store.

Just as there were only two kinds of buildings, Williamsburg was separated into only two functional neighborhoods. "Downtown," the prime commercial district, stretched along both sides of Duke of Gloucester Street from Market Square to the Capitol. The only other specialized part of town was not a single zone at all, but a broad, diffuse border of gentry residences scattered around the town's northern and southern bounds. Elsewhere in town, existing structures served as home and work place to tenants and others whose miscellaneous and ever-shifting occupations were the only
determinants of how buildings were used. No part of town or kind of building was restricted to any social class.

This can hardly have been what the town's creators envisioned. Differentials in the original building codes indicate that the town planners had in mind a hierarchy of streets and parts of town. Duke of Gloucester was to be impressively lined with uniform, closely built structures, while the two streets paralleling it and all the cross streets would be more informal and open.

The original baroque plan of Williamsburg was meant, in the words of historian Sylvia Doughty Fries, to emphasize a "celebrative civic aesthetic." Through the formal, rational design of the capital city, the Virginia gentry intended not only to build a functioning political and cultural center but also to embody their ambitions as a home-grown elite. In this vision, the city was to be at once a work of art and the projection of planters' aspirations to social and political dominance. But such dreams were not to be. Despite their intentions, the capital actually became a temporary resting spot for an urban tenantry totally without agricultural backgrounds and political aspirations. The livelihoods of these folk were viable only in a town setting.

Like the inhabitants of eighteenth-century Philadelphia, Virginia townspeople were motivated by what Sam Bass Warner, Jr.,

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105 Fries, The Urban Idea, pp. xvi-xvii, 129.

106 Ibid., p. xvii.
They strove for personal gain rather than public welfare. Residents of colonial Williamsburg and Yorktown, like their counterparts in Philadelphia, did not identify themselves with others of their class. Each, quite separately and according to his or her individual efforts and luck, anticipated scaling the social and economic ladders as soon as his or her work paid off. If that success did not come within a few years, all were ready and willing to start all over again in another town, another city, another colony.

In scale and ordering Philadelphia differed from America's mere towns. But its neighboring community of Germantown closely resembled Virginia's urban centers in the eighteenth century. Germantown, Pennsylvania, was a congregation of specialty workers, but the town itself was no more specialized in material form than Williamsburg and Yorktown. There was little differentiated use of town lots in Germantown until late in the eighteenth century, by which time both Williamsburg and Yorktown had passed their prime. With their modest size and the ambitious population, these "urban villages" lacked the explosive metropolitan development observed in Philadelphia, London, and New York. They shared instead "a tempo and pace of change" more representative of American towns in general.

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109 Ibid., p. 95.
A recent study of landlords and tenants in Manhattan shows how differently New York City developed. Elizabeth Blackmar's examination of rental property deals mainly with the class relationships, specifically, the rentier class's manipulation of the land market and the reorganization of labor in the nineteenth century. Manhattan island, in Blackmar's survey, harbored not just the two extremes, the propertied and the propertyless. Three categories of people inhabited the place. First came the elite merchants who owned vast acreage in the countryside and along the shore; next there were the independent traders, craftsmen, and laborers who owned a single town lot each; and, finally, those excluded from owning property by law, custom, and personal finances. Residents of colonial Williamsburg and Yorktown came from all three of those categories, although this thesis indicates more movement from one status to the next than in Blackmar's Manhattan.

The drastic changes in the labor market she describes in nineteenth-century New York were completely foreign to eighteenth-century Chesapeake towns. Williamsburg and Yorktown were indeed capitalist towns but in an assuredly preindustrial time. There "found labor" took a far back seat to bound and slave labor. Apprentices, slaves, boarders, and lodgers lived as dependents in most southern households. All residents--young and old, black and white, free, temporarily bound, and permanently enslaved--shared shelter, although with obvious inequities. Where masters moved,

110Blackmar, Manhattan for Rent, pp. 44-71.
dependents were obliged to follow. Where masters ordered them to work, eat, and sleep, they must; they had no alternative.

In the eighteenth-century Chesapeake no working class was forming, therefore no rentier class took it upon themselves to buy, build, and rent out housing suitable for the working class in isolated neighborhoods. In the South men and women who had the money made diverse investments--farm land and slaves as well as town property--and did not count on urban tenements as their sole income. Landlords and landladies in southern towns did not feel certain that rent receipts would support them. By and large, their tenants stayed put only a year or two before moving on to try their luck in the next place. The Virginia towns consisted of integrated neighborhoods where workers of every sort spent their days elbow to elbow. Houses in Williamsburg and Yorktown were largely undifferentiated spaces and scarcely distinguishable from their neighbors'.

Williamsburg thrived only while it was the political center of the Old Dominion. It was largely artificial as a town, dreamed up by self-conscious legislators as a cultural center and periodic gathering place. Like two other legislative creations, Edenton, North Carolina, and St. Mary's City, Maryland, the colonial capital could not sustain itself by trade and shipping. Unlike the bustling ports at Boston and Philadelphia that were also colonial capitals, Williamsburg's growth was limited and temporary. It dwindled in both size and importance as soon as the new state government moved away.

As governor of the new Commonwealth of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson succeeded in relocating the capital to Richmond in the
spring of 1780. Soon thereafter Williamsburg went into decline.\textsuperscript{111}

Within only three years its condition was described as ruinous and as being nearly bereft of inhabitants.

Williamsburg is now a poor place compared with its former splendor. With the removal of the government, merchants, advocates, and other considerable residents took their departure as well, and the town has lost half its population. The trade of this place was never great, its distance from navigable waters not being favorable to more active affairs which thus became established in smaller towns . . . . The merchants of the country round about were accustomed formerly to assemble here every year, to advise about commercial affairs and matters in the furtherance of trade. This also has come to an end. Thus, like so many older ones in Europe, do cities in this new world lament for the uncertain fate of a past glory.\textsuperscript{112}

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\textsuperscript{111} Yorktown, as has been explained earlier, peaked in 1750 and declined steadily afterward.

APPENDIX

Sources on renting in colonial Virginia towns are fragmentary at best. This appendix describes the uses of the many kinds of records consulted for this study. Recorded leases are the ideal sources, but (as shown in Tables 2 and 3) not many exist for eighteenth-century Williamsburg and Yorktown. A few additional manuscript leases, owned privately or by libraries, give complete information on their respective transactions even though they are personal copies rather than officially recorded versions of the documents.

Other York County Court records that provide information are deeds, wills, orders, inventories, estate settlements, and guardian accounts. Of course, none of these is directly concerned with rental arrangements, but by oblique reference some in each category add data. For example, deeds occasionally mention adjoining lots and name the owner (landlord) and occupant (tenant). Likewise, in wills bequeathed property might be described as adjoining a tenement or "Mr. Smith's house in the occupation of Mrs. Jones." Other wills instruct executors to rent out town property to pay debts or until the infant heir reaches adulthood. One estate appraisement included the value for the time remaining on the decedent's lease on a town property. A variant of the estate appraisement is the room-by-room
James Shields's inventory suggested how Daniel Fisher and his family lived in the house Wetherburn rented to them. Estate settlements often mention rent paid out or received by the estate. If the settlement concerns the estate of a prosperous town dweller who owned rental properties and if it covers several years, such a document can be very informative about the landlord's side of the rental market. The settlement of one Williamsburg resident's estate even listed his widow's share of income from renting a store before the estate was divided and her dower was assigned her by the court. Guardian accounts sometimes list the amount and recipients of rent paid for the orphan's house or board or else show rent earned by the child's properties.

These last few sources resemble private papers in the kind of information they yield. Ledgers, accounts, and letters occasionally indicate rent paid or charged and when it became due or was paid. Sometimes the tenant's name is mentioned, but there is almost never a description of the property, which must then be identified from other sources such as deeds, wills, and other letters.

Because it is common knowledge that Thomas Jones, Daniel Parke Custis, George Washington, the Lees, Reynolds, and Ludwells controlled property in Williamsburg and Yorktown, I spent a good amount of time reading their papers. Account books and letters sometimes supply data about renting (although one might question the profitability of reading thousands of frames of microfilm for the rare nugget of information about a mere handful of tenements). On tips from other researchers, I delved into other collections, such as
the Benjamin Weldon account book. It contains a good deal of information about tenants and tenements because Weldon served as agent for several Williamsburg estates. Letter books, memoranda, business papers, diaries, ledgers, and other kinds of documents for local residents or lot holders added occasional stray facts.

The *Virginia Gazette*, published in Williamsburg from 1736 until 1780 (although many issues do not survive), includes dozens of advertisements each week. Many of these offered lodgings, stores, and houses for rent. Others deal with the rental market only indirectly; that is, in his advertisement a craftsman or merchant may identify his location as the property by the owner's name, as the previous location of some other business person, or as adjoining a well known landmark. Occasionally, tenements themselves were offered for sale, and in one instance the occupant was named. The manuscript daybooks kept by editors of the newspapers also contain scattered pieces of information, such as the charge for advertising a lease.

Sixty years of historical research at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has generated a wealth of reports and files. Especially useful for this study were the histories of each lot in the Historic Area. While these "house histories" are far from perfect, they are helpful starting points for studying individual properties, landlords, and tenants.

More important still were the "link sheets" and master biographical file created by the staff of the York County Project. Their work of "record-stripping" all the court materials has allowed me to find, all in one place, every reference to known residents of
the towns and the county. The Project staff's final report to the National Endowment for the Humanities has been an invaluable resource because it describes the towns and townspeople in general terms, against which I have compared and contrasted landlords and tenants.
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