Williamsburg and Urbanization in Antebellum Virginia: "A Place--a Process--a Parade of Change that Continues Forward"

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WILLIAMSBURG AND URBANIZATION IN ANTEBELLUM VIRGINIA: 
“A PLACE...A PROCESS—A PARADE OF CHANGE THAT CONTINUES FORWARD”

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Elisabeth Frederick Butler
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Elisabeth Frederick Butler

Approved by the Committee, April 2005

James P. Whittenburg, Chair

Professor Carol Sheriff

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I also thank Professor Carol Sheriff, who helped me place the development of antebellum Williamsburg into a larger context; and Professor Kris Lane, who served as my third committee member at short notice. I am grateful for their generous help and guidance.
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ABSTRACT

Williamsburg had been for almost a century the wealthy and influential capital of colonial Virginia, but the removal of the state capital to Richmond during the latter part of the Revolutionary War brought a period of decline to Williamsburg.

Far from disappearing, however, Williamsburg rallied and during the first half of the nineteenth century manifested a remarkable transformation. A group of up-and-coming men, natives of the town as well as newcomers, united by their desire for personal wealth and local economic improvement, actively pursued strategies for exploiting the agricultural and land resources of the area. Such strategies included development of internal improvements—railroads, canals, and steamboats—to link Williamsburg with the rest of the region, nearby cities like Norfolk and Petersburg, and more distant markets.

Making use of its important intellectual resource, the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg also positioned itself as an educational center featuring a cadre of preparatory schools and academies, attractive to an expanding southern urban professional base that wanted good educations for its children. Further, Williamsburg responded to the state’s need for public institutions for treating the mentally ill by renovating, modernizing, and expanding its old Asylum to accommodate and draw in a greater number of patients. Until the Civil War put an end to its expansion, Williamsburg during the antebellum period increased its population, gained a measure of prosperity and influence, and played a significant part in the economy of Virginia within the “urban corridor” which developed in eastern Virginia.

In the past, historians had believed that the South in the nineteenth century was almost entirely rural and played no significant urban role in antebellum America. However, in recent decades some historians have begun to test this view by taking a closer look at specific nineteenth century southern urban areas. That is the context for this study of Williamsburg between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.
WILLIAMSBURG AND URBANIZATION IN ANTEBELLUM VIRGINIA:
“A PLACE...A PROCESS—A PARADE OF CHANGE THAT CONTINUES FORWARD”
INTRODUCTION

In the late 1780s, the Reverend Jedidiah Morse, a Congregationalist minister from Massachusetts, trudged through Virginia recording his impressions of its people and places for his *American Universal Geography* (1793), perhaps the first American travelogue. Encountering Williamsburg, once the rich and powerful capital of the largest of the British American colonies, Morse observed that

> everything in Williamsburgh appears dull, forsaken and melancholy-no trade-no amusements but the infamous one of gaming-no industry, and very little appearance of religion. The unprosperous state of the college, but principally the removal of the seat of government, have contributed much to the decline of the city.¹

Noting that the town’s surviving two hundred houses were “going fast to decay,” Morse criticized the design of public buildings like Bruton Parish Church, the Public Hospital, the Governor’s Palace, the College of Williams and Mary, and even the statue of Lord Botetourt, a once-popular Royal Governor, which stood desultorily in front of the former Capitol.

One Williamsburg citizen strongly objected to Morse’s caustic judgement. He was St. George Tucker, respected Judge of the General court, Professor of Law at the College, former Revolutionary War officer, and leading luminary of the town for the past ten years. The son of a prominent and wealthy Bermudian merchant, Tucker had twice married into the Virginia gentry. Employing his formidable debating skills, Tucker responded to Morse with a pamphlet entitled *A Letter to the Rev. Jedediah Morse*, printed...
in Richmond in 1795.

Tucker systematically attacked Morse's description of the town. He first drew attention to Morse's plagiarism of Jefferson's architectural criticisms of the College, maintaining that such an intelligent man as the honored reverend could surely find his own words. Referring to Morse's hints of mediocrity and degeneration, Tucker protested that the town could boast a Bishop of the Episcopal Church, three distinguished ministers, a judge of the United States Supreme Court, and a Chancellor of Virginia among its residents ("Figure to yourself...this groupe employed at the infamous amusement of gaming!")\(^2\) To Morse's suggestion that there was no religion in Williamsburg, Tucker sarcastically retorted, "Did he expect to see a procession like the triumphal entry of St. Rosolia At Palermo; or the elevation of the host at Rome, or the celebration of an Auto de Fe at Madrid!"\(^3\) Tucker also challenged Morse's view that the town was uniformly poor, saying it possessed a good market, a large number of skilled mechanics, and a generous outpouring of hospitality. Tucker conceded that Williamsburg had a shabby appearance and few prospects, but these things derived from the "ravages of war, the devastation of fire, the lapse of time, and the decease of population, and the increase of poverty" and not from lack of ambition in the people.\(^4\)

Tucker presumably had the support of many townspeople, for a letter from Judge John Tyler to Tucker indicated widespread dislike of Morse.\(^5\) They probably found Morse's contemptuous, superior attitude an attack on their honor. Tucker expressed as much when he prefaced his pamphlet with a quote from Shakespeare: "But he that filches from me my good name/Robes me of that which not enriches him." Since Williamsburg had helped to nurture the colony (not state) and the ideals of democracy and freedom, it
was not surprising that some felt offended. As Tucker declared, “The [inhabitants] will be content that the place of their residence be represented as dull, forsaken, melancholy...[and] acquiesce in the loss of trade and industry...” but it should not be considered “contemptible” for “Williamsburg [to] arrogate to herself the rank and honors of a metropolitan city “despite being a mere village.”

Morse was moved later to recant some of his controversial observations, but Tucker’s defense actually revealed deep anxieties within Williamsburg. Its dwindling number of residents worried desperately about its survival--there were a large number of new western Virginia counties waiting to seize power from the eastern ones--and believed that its best days were gone. These fears also reflected larger concerns about the future of the state as a whole which was now trying to find its place in a young and growing nation. Morse’s depiction of Virginians (especially easterners) as provincial, unintellectual, dissolute, and oligarchical, seemed to reflect the prevailing attitudes of the time.7

In 1785, the visiting Noah Webster declared that the houses “are decaying, and so is the City,” though he believed Williamsburg was the “most beautiful city in Virginia.”8 Eleven years later, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt also reflected on the straggling town that had once been the great city he knew during the Revolutionary War.9 Thomas Green, who visited Williamsburg in 1827, observed that “too many pages might be consumed immortalizing on the fortunes and ambitions of man, which, however great and prosperous, in one age, are like this ancient city, overlooked and almost forgotten.”10 Described variously over time as “the city which time had forgotten” or “left behind,” Williamsburg was said to have enjoyed periods of “philosophical serenity” where nothing important occurred, with the unfortunate exception of the Civil War.11 Another writer
concluded that Williamsburg, once it was no longer Virginia's capital, had “sunk to a mere village, living with much pride of ancestry, but without much hope for posterity.” Local writer Walter Karp also wrote, “for 140 years after the government’s removal, Williamsburg could scarcely be said to have a history at all.” When Reverend W.A. R. Goodwin, rector of Bruton Parish, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., decided to restore Williamsburg in the late 1920s, it was to its glorious and instructive colonial past, not to its other eras, that they looked.

But more recent town histories have recognized that Williamsburg was not only “a place, but... also a process--a parade of change that continues forward....” and books like Parke Rouse’s *Cows on the Campus* and Caroline Kettenburg Dubbs’ *Defend This Old Town*, reveal interesting and lively elements of Civil War Bourbon Williamsburg. Furthermore, a more complete picture emerges if one places Williamsburg in the context of more modern views on urbanization within the South.

Historians have often discounted the importance of cities and urbanization in the South, a place where, as David Smiley famously put it, “planter, plantation, staple crop, and the Negro” dwelled in a languid, rural setting. But over the past thirty years, historians like James Oakes and Edward Ayers have illuminated different aspects of the Southern experience, discovering a rather more heterogeneous society in tune with general American economic, social, and political trends than originally thought. Many studies have been written detailing the diverse number of Southern regions and people, from mountain “plain folk” to the wealthy, capitalist planters of Natchez. In the same spirit, some historians have looked to cities and towns as a Southern region-in-itself where questions about the degree of Southern integration or exceptualism in the American
experience can be debated. That urbanization has been called an exclusively Northern phenomenon made the presence of Southern urbanization an even more appealing subject.

One of the most outstanding urban South historians is David Goldfield. In his thirty-year career, he has tried to overhaul the traditional view that a city, and the urbanizing process, is purely industrial and fundamentally apart from the county. He contends that the South's urban experience was different because it drew from its agricultural base and was reflective of its hinterland, or a series of interlocking regions. Cities and towns were primarily processing centers for cotton in the lower South and wheat and tobacco in the upper part. They were not large in size and held an enslaved workforce. Yet, southern cities had the manners and interests characteristic of all cities, such as desire for economic development, urban boosterism, fighting for competitive advantage over rivals, and the creation of services and institutions for a professional and commercial population. This qualitative aspect, also called the degree of "urbanity," should be weighed equally with the quantitative when defining an urban center. Goldfield applied this approach to Southern urbanization in all eras.

This new, serious interest in Southern cities is not necessarily an effort to equalize urban development in the South with that in the North. As Peter Calcine and John Majewski have shown, the South possessed fewer industrial centers and weaker communications systems, a fact which contributed to its defeat in the Civil War. While this is conceded by urban South historians, the idea of urbanization deriving from and shaped by regional affiliation has started to change perceptions of the nation's urban experience. William Cronon's innovative environmental approach to the study of Chicago in *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* is one example. The gaps between
Northern and Southern urban development are undoubted, but that should not minimize the South’s urban experience or contributions.

Goldfield believed that Virginia was a microcosm of Southern urbanization. Indeed, Virginia, which Ayers called the “New England of the South,” is sometimes considered more advanced than the rest of the South. In reality, Virginia was not the most urbanized Southern state (most of its cities and towns were small and slave holding was more widespread), but there was a wide variety of urban centers, from Marion (100 people) to Richmond (16,060 people), that existed in four diverse regions analogous to those in the larger South. More significantly, there is also a way to apply “urbanity” to Virginia’s towns and cities. Goldfield found that they were no more “mutations of the larger southern environment” than “Connecticut’s cities were atypical of the northern environment.”

Thomas Armstrong used the same regional thesis in his comparative study of three antebellum Virginia cities (Fredericksburg, Staunton, and Lynchburg) that developed and dominated their respective hinterlands. To understand this process, Armstrong needed to reject the “artificial” population figure of 2,500 used to define a city because it was inappropriate for sparsely populated Virginia. Such an “arbitrary figure eliminates many population concentrations that might have all the appearances of an urban area” or performed some sort of urban function. In this way, the smallest town could feature external (expansion in a region or projection of an urban image) and/or internal (responding to communal needs) growth and have influence beyond its size. Consequently, “any town attempting to urbanize, to grow, or to express a community purpose becomes worthy of study.”
In this context, Williamsburg is a suitable subject for study as an example of urbanization in Virginia. Goldfield observed that “conceivably, southern cities could have been isolated way stations amid a vast sea of farms and plantations,” which could well be said about the odd village in the rural backwater of eastern Virginia. Williamsburg provides a small town perspective on an urbanizing process seemingly dominated in Virginia by large (10,000 or more) and wealthy trading cities and a test case for the relevancy of “urbanity” to the study of Virginia (and Southern) urbanization. Perhaps it may shed light on the larger controversy over the nature of Southern distinctiveness.

Although Goldfield and others disdained city monographs as antiquarian or too narrowly focused (the real goal is ascertaining the complex functions of the urban network), many fine Southern city and town studies have successfully contributed to the study of southern society. Besides, as historian James Bonner believed, “scholarly work on local history is ...a fertile and unworked field” and can hold as much value as any macrocosmic study.

Goldfield, and another urban Southern historian, Blaine Brownell, advocated the use of city directories, census records, and city government documents as the best sources available to study the urban South. For Williamsburg, many of these records have not survived or were not created until after the Civil War (for example, the first city directory did not appear until the 1890s). However, there are research reports written over the years by Colonial Williamsburg Foundation historians, census records, and land tax and personal tax lists, from which a profile of the town can be reconstructed. Moreover, there are collections of Williamsburg families’ papers which contain material not found elsewhere. The Robert Anderson Papers and the Southall Papers are particularly useful for their inclusion of papers related to the commercial, legal, and political functions of the
town. The *Virginia Gazette*, resurrected in 1853, has also provided much valuable information on the town's social and economic life which had been lost over the years. Local and oral histories, with their anecdotes about people and events, have supplemented these primary sources. Since these resources are quite extensive, a survey, determined by the needs of this thesis, was made of the largest manuscript collections rather than a complete study.

The first two chapters of this thesis cover the economic and institutional life of antebellum Williamsburg. These chapters will discuss the town's connections with the other urban centers and its efforts to entrench itself in its rural and urban environment. The third chapter will shift to the political and social side of Williamsburg for this period, including an examination of the large slave and free black population that contributed much to this small town. The town's urban situation affected its attitude toward Virginia's campaign to develop economically and its stance on local and national issues. It also helped determine which urban image Williamsburg would project--university town, tourist mecca, or Tidewater marketplace; or perhaps all.

The most interesting aspect of St. George Tucker's 1795 pamphlet response to the criticisms of Jedidiah Morse is the urban pride it displays in an ancient, plantation-dominated part of Virginia. Williamsburg would forever be called a "metropolis" or "city" by its residents. This civic pride continued throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, when Williamsburg, far from disappearing, was transformed into a county seat and market place. Although the town maintained the same size physically, it slowly gained more inhabitants and a measure of prosperity and influence. It played its part in the antebellum economy of Virginia and, as a small town, comprised part of an "urban
corridor” which developed in eastern Virginia. The fact that such a small town could survive in a predominantly agricultural state indicated the broad and encompassing nature of Virginia, and American, urbanization.
Notes for Introduction


3. Ibid., 192

4. Ibid., 188


9. Carson, *We Were There*, 87


16. Eric Foner discusses this change (and opposite viewpoints) in *The New American*


18. Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis, The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 2. Ayers pointed out, “...from the Southern point of view [Virginia] could seem the face of the future.” Its economy was more diversified and more urban than that of the lower South.

19. David Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism: Virginia, 1847-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1977), xxix


21. Armstrong, Urban Vision, 14

22. Goldfield, Urban Growth, xxix

23. Brownell and Goldfield, City in Southern History, 18

CHAPTER I

"THE SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE"

When young Edward Lively succeeded to the editorship of the Virginia Gazette in September 1858, he wrote in his prospectus that he wanted to encourage the farmers, merchants, and professional men in Williamsburg, since "these are the inestimable requisites in any society or community." He was right, for the once-renowned urban newspaper, which had lain dormant for many years, had been revived by increasing commercial and agricultural activity in Williamsburg and its region. Like most antebellum towns in Virginia, Williamsburg benefitted from Virginia's interest in finding greater prosperity and economic independence. Far from shunning development, its leaders embraced progress to sustain their town.

The years immediately following the Revolution had not been promising for the Tidewater. Tobacco, which had long sustained the area, had depleted the sandy soil of nutrients, making it unproductive. Visitors who toured the area often described the landscape as thin and barren. As tobacco growing migrated to the healthier Piedmont and Southside counties between the James River and the North Carolina border, Tidewater population decreased. In James City County, total population fell from 4,094 in 1810 to 3,161 in 1820, and in York County, from 5,187 to 4,384 in the same period. Many of Tidewater’s citizens were small farmers and planters who left for the more fertile western region of Virginia. By 1850, there were 90,000 more people in the western part of the
state than in the eastern, which had now gained a reputation for indolence and sluggishness.¹

The Tidewater’s economic troubles led to the breakup of large plantations and to the dissipation of the gentry’s power. New laws which abolished primogeniture, entail, and the established church also contributed to this situation. Much of the Ambler land on Jamestown Island and Powhatan was sold off to a succession of owners, with some of the Amblers themselves leaving for Richmond.² The vast Ludwell estate, including the Green Spring, Rich Neck, and Chippokes plantations, and parts of Williamsburg, was sold off bit by bit to make up for falling revenue. Its proprietor, Lucy Ludwell Paradise, who had lived most of her life in London, symbolized the waning influence and frenzied extravagance of the Virginia gentry as her increasing eccentricity led to eventual confinement in Williamsburg’s Public Hospital in 1812 and to her rather squalid death two years later. Her impoverished descendants then squabbled over what was left of the inheritance.³ The fertile land which had once produced so much wealth now seemed empty and heartless. St. George Tucker concluded (in the words of historian Phil Hamilton) that the “land itself...was now a dismal, dead-end investment” which could no longer support the gentry’s lifestyle.⁴

The Tidewater’s situation paralleled Virginia’s decline during the early nineteenth century. Virginia began as the largest and most populous state with three-quarters of a million whites, but was eventually overtaken by Pennsylvania and Ohio, with a corresponding decline in congressional representation from twenty-two seats to thirteen by 1850.⁵ The panic of 1819 proved devastating for Virginians, who as James Madison observed, suffered “the remarkable down fall in prices of two of our great staples,
breadstuffs and tobacco” that brought “privations at every man’s door.” Agricultural prices remained unstable and industrial output was nearly non-existent, while the rest of the country enjoyed growth. Many Virginians lamented the loss of status and economic prosperity and became anxious about increasing competition from other states.

One of the most insidious effects of Virginia’s decline was the out-migration of its people. The lack of economic promise drove many young men and families to the West or to the lower South. By 1850, 388,000 former citizens were living in other states; Virginians like Sam Houston and Henry Clay found their fame elsewhere. The same applied to slaves, about fifty thousand of whom had moved with their masters from the Chesapeake to Mississippi and Alabama between 1810 and 1820. The Tidewater’s own “brain drain” was small in comparison, but it rankled nonetheless.

Williamsburg felt these changes keenly. One woman complained in 1814 that there were so many unmarried women in town because there were not enough young men. This was not only due to the war with England (1812-14), but also because, as another woman remarked, “all the young men are going west.” Susan Bowdoin, writing to her nephew Joseph Prentis, feared that all her friends would move away and wondered whether she should move to the Blue Ridge. “Indeed,” she said, “it seems the poor old town seems going down fast I think.” Prentis himself thought about “quitting this poor part of the country, and seeking out some place” more promising than Williamsburg. A common refrain among residents was that Williamsburg was dull and empty. One man even likened the place to a prison.

Visitors offered similar views. Williamsburg was a lonely Tidewater town which time was quickly passing by. Elizabeth Kennon called it “a poor old decrepit
dowager...where everything is like herself in a decayed situation,” which served as a lesson in worldly vanities and the ephemeral nature of human greatness.\(^{13}\) An anonymous author said the town “is just as lifeless as the very Goddess of Dullness could wish...As it is, it is but the shadow of itself, and even that seems passing away.”\(^{14}\) A student at William and Mary could “never walk the streets without experiencing the most gloomy sensations” while looking at the crumbling houses and the general desolation.\(^{15}\)

There was general agreement that Williamsburg was the picture of decadence and decline. The town was no longer a gathering place for wealthy planters; Samuel Galt sadly remarked that “the little Society we once enjoyed is now done away.”\(^{16}\) Few great assemblies were held, although social life did not completely cease. Lucy Ludwell Paradise, despite her mental affliction, gave brilliant balls, while other parties were quite crowded.\(^{17}\) But in student William Barry’s opinion, “there is a certain looseness of manners and conversation” and thought the people, especially the women, too “licentious” in their conduct. The students were notorious for unruly behavior and were considered “dissipated”; parents were afraid to send their children to the college “lest their morals should be perverted.”\(^{18}\) There were serious student riots in 1802 and 1808 and frequent cases of dueling. The students were particularly passionate about the French Revolution (and everything else French), which may have encouraged rebellious behavior.\(^{19}\) Indeed, the people of Williamsburg gained a reputation for recalcitrance. In 1807 Ellen Randolph wrote to her grandfather Thomas Jefferson that “the embargo has thrown the dissipated inhabitants of Williamsburg in great confusion; [they] cannot give up tea and coffee and...wine.”\(^{20}\) These sentiments remained prevalent until the 1820s.

If Williamsburg was a dying town in a hopeless backwater at this point, the state
was determined to reverse Virginia’s decline. This was especially true in urban Virginia, which grew faster than the general population as the antebellum years progressed.\textsuperscript{21} Because wheat had replaced tobacco, there was an increased need for processing and marketing centers to serve as “back-stops” on wide-reaching transportation networks to the North, West, and South. Indeed, Virginia was the largest wheat-producing state east of the Appalachians.\textsuperscript{22} It was part of a particular region, the upper South, that was geared to the production and selling of wheat (and to a smaller extent corn and potatoes), in comparison to the richer, cotton-growing lower South. By 1850 there were close to a hundred towns in Virginia, together containing about ten percent of the population.\textsuperscript{23} These towns were small (holding a few hundred to a few thousand people) and dotted the four regions of Virginia—the Tidewater, Piedmont, the Valley, and the Transalleghany—but in an unequal way, since some towns were better established than others. They also served different purposes. Some places, like Danville or Farmville, facilitated the tobacco trade, while Lynchburg, further west, benefitted from back country settlement. As a result, Virginia became “a sprawling, populous, diversified, even dynamic region-in-itself.”\textsuperscript{24}

Most of these places were peripheral to Williamsburg, but the three surrounding cities of Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk were significant to its story. These cities had colonial beginnings, but they continued to flourish in Virginia’s new economic climate. Richmond’s location at the head of the meandering James River made it the emporium of the Virginia frontier. Its position as the state capital also ensured that it would become an economic powerhouse. Tobacco was the most important crop. The city was inspecting tens of thousands of hogsheads and had fifty-two tobacco firms and a large Tobacco
Exchange to regulate prices. Richmond manufactured more tobacco than any other city by 1860. Wheat was also prominent, with 100,000 to 250,000 barrels of flour pouring into the city between 1819 and 1848. Along with processing agricultural products, Richmond also participated in large-scale industrial enterprises such as iron works. Its population grew from 5,700 people in 1800 to 38,000 people in 1860. Petersburg, south of Richmond, was an exchange point for farmers carving out the frontier, but it was also touched by the burgeoning tobacco and wheat trade in the 1830s and 1840s. Petersburg also held some cotton and textile mills and had 18,300 people by 1860. Norfolk, the only city in the Tidewater, had a more difficult time finding a role after losing its position as prime eastern port to Boston and New York City. Norfolk continued to act as an exporting center for North Carolina and Tidewater products, but its geographically advantageous position seemed to offer better things to a state increasingly obsessed with finding a direct route to Europe. These cities would later influence Williamsburg’s economic and social life.

Virginia cities’ economies revolved around Baltimore and the North. Baltimore was the upper South’s primary wheat exporter and one of the country’s largest commercial and industrial centers—the envy of so many ambitious Virginia townspeople, whose produce inevitably fed into the metropolis. Baltimore had 80,620 people in 1830, but thirty years later the population had risen to 212,418. Baltimore was also a funnel to Northern markets controlled by the leviathan New York City. New York City, which had over 500,000 people by 1850, was the main exporter of the South’s cotton and tobacco, and the main importer of the manufactured goods the South needed. Southern merchants were dependent on New York for their credit systems and marketing to Europe, a fact
which was much resented.

The South's reliance on the North is commonly seen as hindering the South's urban development, but it did serve to integrate Southern rural and urban life. In his article "Urban-Rural Relations in Old Virginia," David Goldfield wrote how rural and urban people sought to encourage each other in an attempt to improve the state's economy and competitive edge. Far from seeing agriculture as curtailing urban growth, he considered it the inspiration for and bedrock of urbanization. In turn, towns and cities encouraged greater agricultural production and efficiency as a way to increase profits. As the Richmond Enquirer remarked, "Agriculture is commerce, and commerce is agriculture." This cooperation also helped stimulate connections between eastern and western Virginia towns, like mountainous Staunton's endeavor to establish a trade route to the James River and vice versa. It is no wonder, then, that Virginia became intensely interested in internal improvements. In this, and in the need for rural-urban cooperation, Williamsburg was not negligent.

But at the beginning of the nineteenth century, people believed that Williamsburg could not survive because it was not favorably positioned for either external or internal trade. St. George Tucker wrote, "there never was much trade in Williamsburg." But this view was not accurate. Williamsburg was one of just a few large towns in the Tidewater and this fact allowed it to serve as an important way station for local markets for a century. Historian James Soltow explained how its colonial merchants acted as informal clearinghouses for the colony's financial transactions and as regulators of export commodity prices, in association with Norfolk. Tobacco and wheat (Williamsburg was "the great Mart for Wheat") were prominent goods. A German traveler in the 1780s
wrote in his journal that “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,” but he believed this had ceased with the change of capital.31 Nevertheless, Tucker wrote that the town’s market still furnished good meat, poultry, vegetables, and fruits. Tucker’s cousin also observed that farmers, who “had been in the habit of resorting to the market of Williamsburg” when it was the capital, still continued to do so.32

Furthermore, an element of Williamsburg’s colonial leadership also survived. In the last years of the eighteenth century, the town was controlled by “fifteen or twenty families” that included “judges of the federal or state courts, professors of the college, lawyers, physicians, and two or three gentleman of fortune.”33 These professions reflected the importance of the College, the Public Hospital, and the courts. Many of these well-born families eventually left for other places, but some remained, while new men trickled into Williamsburg.34 David Goldfield called this group the “city builders.” In his book *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, he found that Virginia’s cities possessed a special group of men who “articulated the needs of [their] city and directed implementation of programs designed to promote wealth and progress.”35 He formulated several criteria, like property-ownership, marriage status, age, and number and quality of business interests, to define this group. These men were more likely to own property, establish stable families, be older than the rest of the townspeople, and perform varied town responsibilities. Goldfield cited professionals, merchants, and manufacturers as those most likely to be city builders.
City Builders

Although Williamsburg was a small town, examples of the “city builder” can be discerned (see Figure 1). Those qualifying were farmers, merchants, and professionals, who together made up 6% of whites in 1860. Most of these men came from the Tidewater region and were not of ancient lineage. When “M” from the Richmond Dispatch visited Williamsburg in the 1850s, he observed that a new generation had replaced the old. Just a few months before, old Professor Griffin had remarked “There are names...not at all familiar to me.” The rapid loss of population and the break-up of large estates left an opening for ambitious county men to find economic opportunity. St. George Tucker’s cousin, George Tucker, wrote sadly about the replacement of the gentry with the middle-class in his 1824 novel The Valley of Shenandoah. In an area still experiencing landed poverty, an urban area like Williamsburg seemed ideal for new entrepreneurs.

The best example of a Williamsburg “city builder” was Robert Anderson (1781-1859). Anderson was the son of a well-to-do Williamsburg blacksmith, James Anderson (d. 1798), who owned land in Richmond and western Virginia, which Robert inherited. During the War of 1812 Anderson served with the 68th regiment in Norfolk and Hampton and afterwards was Alderman and Mayor of Williamsburg several times. He was primarily a merchant, but he held diverse interests, a characteristic of a town leader. He was farmer, estate trustee, and real estate agent. He owned large plantations in York, Warwick, James City County, rented out houses and storehouses in Williamsburg and Richmond, and participated in various business endeavors, such as acting as agent for the Mutual Assurance Society (a fire insurance company) and Aetna Life Insurance. He was also a
**FIGURE 1**

WILLIAMSBURG’S “CITY BUILDERS”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Personal and Real Estate</th>
<th>% Property Owners</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Farmers²</td>
<td>$862,597</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ave: $45,399</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Merchants³</td>
<td>$357,779</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ave: $19,876</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lawyers⁴</td>
<td>$297,100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ave: $37,137</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Doctors⁵</td>
<td>$187,403</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ave: $23,425</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>$25,245</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ave: $1,328</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Compiled from *Census of the City of Williamsburg*, June 18 to July 16, 1860, microfilm, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library

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1 7 (out of 12) farmers, 3 (out of 18) merchants, 2 (out of 8) lawyers, and at least 3 (out of 9) doctors came from pre-1783 Williamsburg families.


4 Samuel Bowden, Talbot Sweeney, Sidney Smith, P. M. Thompson, William Peachy, Robert McCandlish, Robert Armistead, J. B. Cosnahan.

political and social leader in the town. He was, as one anonymous citizen wrote, “one of the most enterprising men in Eastern Virginia, and one disposed to encouraged enterprise in others.”

Anderson also promoted personal connections. In 1814, he made a brilliant marriage to Helen Macauley Southall, heiress of Yorktown merchant Alexander Macauley (and Elizabeth Jerdone, a Williamsburg native), and widow of Peyton Southall, a lawyer and son of James Southall, owner of the Raleigh Tavern. From her, Anderson gained possession of the wealthy Southall estate in Yorktown and in the Tidewater and became paid trustee of the Macauley and other lucrative family estates. Anderson also acquired four stepchildren, (Peyton) Alexander Southall, a naval officer and later businessman; Helen Matilda Southall; Elianna Maria Southall (who married Sam Bright, a new Williamsburg farmer); and George Washington Southall (1810-1851), a prosperous lawyer and Williamsburg property-holder who was educated under Nathaniel Beverly Tucker (son of St. George) in Winchester. In addition, Anderson’s brother-in-law was Dr. Patrick Macauley, president of American Life Insurance and Trust Company in Baltimore, where family members visited often. Such ties were typical of the “city builders.”

**City Builders: Farmers**

Though farmers are not usually considered to be part of the urban environment, agriculture was vital to Williamsburg. In the early nineteenth century, Virginians discovered ways to reverse soil exhaustion and erosion by experimenting with various minerals and techniques. The most famous and successful agricultural reformer was Edmund Ruffin of nearby Charles City County. His signature contribution was using marl to restore barren fields, which practice he popularized in *Essay on Calcareous Minerals*
(1832) and in his farm journals. The result, by the 1850s and 1860s, was to make agriculture more commercial and profitable in the Tidewater and Northern Neck and its products therefore attractive to outside markets. When William Barton Rogers, at one time a William and Mary professor, visited his former home, he reported on the cheery farmers and delighted that “all along the road [to Williamsburg were] proofs of prosperous and improved agriculture.” Farmer Goodrich Durfey, from an old Williamsburg family, claimed his 2,000-acre farm on Jamestown Island produced over 30 bushels of wheat to the acre. Large farms that included such amenities as barns, stables, “Negro houses,” and fine dwelling houses, appeared frequently in local real estate advertisements. Individuals submitting these advertisements often accompanied them with requests that they be printed also in New York, Richmond, and Baltimore newspapers, because these places formed “the market for all the country on the York and its tributaries.” Success in agriculture later spurred Williamsburg’s leaders to seek further economic opportunities.

The area’s agricultural resources were plentiful. Tobacco had been largely abandoned in favor of wheat, corn, livestock, and market garden crops. The Tidewater raised forty percent of the state’s pigs and one-third of the cattle. There were also products from the rivers and creeks, namely “a variety of the best fish; rock, perch, sturgeon, sheepshead, boneto, with the best oysters of the state...; crabs, soft and hard.” Additionally, lumber from the “vast” forests that had slowly reclaimed the peninsula became important. This commodity was especially important to America’s Northern and Western towns.

The dominance of wheat and timber encouraged Williamsburg farmers to attach mills to their farms. In the 1810s, for example, Robert Anderson mentioned how the good
timber on his lands along the Chickahominy River could be shipped to Norfolk, Richmond, or elsewhere if laborers and a steam saw could be found. With better agricultural prospects, the 1850s saw an upsurge in the number of mills. Farms like Warhill in James City County were sometimes advertised as having saw mills. Mills were especially attractive to Williamsburg’s prominent citizens. Farmer-businessman Henley Jones owned the “College Mill” which ground corn and flour. The Magic Corn and Cob Mill of Williamsburg (eventually administered by Norfolk agents) was known for its superiority to Richmond, Norfolk, and Petersburg mills. Goodrich Durfey and John Coke established an especially large grist and saw mill complex at Newport Mills (located at Jockey’s Neck and originally owned by Benjamin Bucktrout, a Williamsburg resident) in 1856. The Virginia Gazette claimed it rivaled those at Richmond and Patapsco. Durfey also had an interest in another steam saw mill at College Landing. His partner, James Custis, took over and then joined with Andrew Lytle, an outside manufacturer, who later took over from him. The College Landing mill grew to include a Lath Mill, a Shingle Machine, and a Tarping Lathe. Newspaper editor Ed Lively proudly said that “the steam whistle of Lytle & Co. saw mill is heard distinctly in the heart of the city— it smacks of energy and enterprise.” Not to be outdone, Robert Anderson managed his own saw mill, steam mill, and brickyard complex on the York River in the mid-1850s as well as large tracts of timber, like his estate of 450 acres in Warwick, for development. An advertisement said the mill’s land was 1,000 to 2,000 acres and included large parts of Yorktown, which, in its dilapidated state, had become economically subordinate to Williamsburg. But Anderson had to furnish his mills with saws, engines, and boilers from Baltimore. Machinery used to power Williamsburg’s mill mostly originated from other cities, an
example of the town’s dependence on larger markets.

**City Builders: Merchants**

Like Anderson and Durfey, Williamsburg’s merchants based their business on processing and selling agricultural products. One merchant, Jacob Sheldon, who came from the Tidewater, moved to Williamsburg as a merchant around 1818 and married a townswoman, Harriet Dixon. In the 1830s, he formed a company with Thomas Peachy, a Williamsburg resident of old family who had been in business for himself. This was an early case of “old” and “new” men working together. They sold castor oil from an “oil factory,” constructed in 1832, along with commercial tanning and brick yards. A gazetteer who recorded a manufactory and three tanyards near Williamsburg in 1835 may have referred to this business.\(^50\) Sheldon and Peachy contracted with several small farmers to grow beans for the “factory.” The firm then sold the castor oil to a New York agent, R. Maitlands, who had contacts with people in Boston and Philadelphia. In a series of letters, Maitlands documented the difficulties shipping the oil, but he otherwise praised its quality and it was often sold out. The medicinal value of castor oil was, in urbanized areas, highly important. That the firm was successful is indicated by its records, which show Williamsburg families like the Wallers, Andersons, and Greenhows, to have been customers. There were also account holders, like a Mr. Knowland and a Mr. Dobbin of Norfolk, who came from other places, a sign of the firm’s relatively large reach.\(^51\)

For each year from 1818 to 1844 an average of twenty individuals held merchant licenses in Williamsburg. In 1860, eighteen individuals claimed this profession.\(^52\) These merchants bought and sold local produce and finished goods acquired from the North to townspeople and to large and small farmers who came to Williamsburg to buy supplies.
As proprietors of urban-country stores, merchants often furnished a wide range of services and goods. A visiting professor found hams, French brandy, black silk stockings, shell oysters, glisters, and chewing tobacco in one store, which also served as a post office, apothecary, and grocery. Sometimes merchants were in business for themselves or they formed partnerships. For example, in 1831, Richard Coke, member of an old Williamsburg family, formed a partnership with a new resident named Wilson Willcocks. They rented a storehouse and counting house from Robert Anderson for $100 a year and commenced business. Just two years later Willcocks and Coke ended their company, with a number of outstanding bills left behind. This was not uncommon. Forming partnerships was a way of enhancing business or gaining a foothold in the town. Dissolving them and moving on showed flexibility. Despite the financially precarious situation of country stores, the steady number of merchants revealed some economic stability, and underscored the importance of Williamsburg as a provider of services to the community.

Partnerships could be quite varied. The adaptable Jacob Sheldon also had a firm with Roscoe Cole, another well-to-do merchant from an old Williamsburg family. The Sheldon-Cole Company imported merchandise like textiles, glassware, cloth, and various kinds of equipment from the North. Its ads in the local newspaper, Pheonix Gazette, also mentioned tea, fruit, molasses, sugar, whiskey, and cheese. It had dealings with sixteen New York firms, six Philadelphia firms, and five Baltimore firms, with several Bills of Landing indicating that College Landing creek, the nearest navigable outlet to Williamsburg, was frequently used as a port (as it had been in the eighteenth century). Sometimes Sheldon and Cole had contacts with other merchants, such as one who asked
the price for cotton in Virginia and the best cities to send it. Sheldon and Cole remained together until Cole left Williamsburg in the 1830s; Sheldon stayed in business with several different people until the 1850s.

A wealthier merchant was William W. Vest, who moved to Williamsburg from Louisa County in the 1830s. He started as a clerk in Roscoe Cole’s store but later partnered with Jesse Cole, another old Williamsburg resident. Vest’s career was also furthered by his marriage to a daughter of the old, moneyed Waller family of Williamsburg. When Cole died around 1853, Vest started a firm with Richard Hansford, a descendent of a Williamsburg tailor. One of their surviving records—a large, handsomely bound ledger—is testament to good business, documenting the thousands of dollars they acquired from selling general goods from the North and from lucrative contracts with the College of William and Mary and the Public Hospital, the town’s main institutions. In 1860, Vest was worth $124,350 and he owned the Palmer House, one of the largest houses in Williamsburg, which he later extended, refurbished, and renamed after himself. Years later, Martha Vandegrift recalled the popular view that Vest owned half the town, while merchant Richard Cole, son of his former partner, owned the other.

Some of these merchant firms were prosperous enough to afford agents. Sheldon and Cole had Walter de Lacy in Norfolk, who traveled to Petersburg and Richmond to find freight for their business in the 1830s. De Lacy also owned $450 in Williamsburg real estate. Isaac Smith, a Williamsburg merchant, acted as agent for Charles Lively, a town grocer and owner of a shipping vessel. One of the most successful agents was John Barlow, a new Williamsburg resident since the 1830s, who corresponded with George Southall about out-of-state cotton and wheat mills in which he invested. It was
not uncommon for people in Williamsburg to have financial interests in other places. Barlow married a Deneufville and rose to become an affluent dry goods merchant in Williamsburg and an active member of the community.

It was not unusual for Williamsburg merchants also to become farmers. To own land, and have a stake in its prosperity, was the goal of any well-to-do, upwardly mobile man. The continuing break-up of large estates helped them to become landowners. Peter Desvergers, who came to Williamsburg in 1798 to open a dry goods store, briefly owned in the 1810s the 375-acre Powhatan farm, originally part of the Ambler estate. Richard Cole, whose father was Jesse Cole, William Vest’s partner, bought 602 acres in Rich Neck in 1848. Jacob Sheldon purchased a large farm from the Fitzhugh estate, of which he was an administrator. Land was also valuable for speculation. Goodrich Durfey, the mill owner, was described as a professional land speculator who developed property in Jamestown and other places. This probably gave him the wealth to purchase Burwell Bassett’s large colonial-era house on Duke of Gloucester Street. Mill owner Henley Jones was once called “a man of large experience, with just conceptions of business, in all its ramifications” in his role as estate administrator and land speculator. Roscoe Cole outdid them all by becoming a flamboyant land speculator selling tens of thousands of acres in Mississippi and Florida from New York City and sending his children on grand tours through Europe. Although he left “dear old Williamsburg,” he continued to own property and pay taxes there.

Attracted by availability of land for speculation, improving agriculture, and better transportation, new residents started to arrive in the 1840s and 1850s, although Williamsburg had been seeing some Northerners since the 1820s. One young New Yorker
named Walter Webb came to Williamsburg around 1820 and became a partner with Roscoe Cole. He acquired some property (he paid $200 rent for one of Robert Anderson’s lots) and, in a bid to enter Williamsburg society, scandalously married Betsy Peachy when he was 22 and she 33.\(^7\) He later served as mayor. A New York firm called R & H Haight owned property in the town in the 1830s.\(^7\) Another New York company bought a farm from William Waller to develop for timber export.\(^7\) The 3,000-acre Green Spring plantation was acquired by the Ward brothers from New Jersey.\(^7\) Some mills in Warwick and York were established by Northern companies, and the York River Steam Saw Mill, owned by Snow, Hammond, & Co., had Northern investors.\(^7\) Moreover, Alexander Lytle, the College Landing mill owner, was a New Yorker, and his business ventures attracted Northern mill managers and workers.\(^7\) These Northerners were generally welcomed for their enterprising spirit and services to the community. When the John Brown crisis occurred in 1859, the local newspaper editor hastened to assure local “Northern friends” of the region’s continuing respect and appreciation.\(^7\)

**City Builders: Lawyers**

Another group important to Williamsburg was lawyers. In the early nineteenth century, the state consolidated James City County’s various courts in Williamsburg, which still maintained a county jail. William Wirt and John Wickham, of Richmond, were just two of the famous lawyers who had practiced in Williamsburg. People from different counties and towns came to Williamsburg on legal business. For example, George Gaithers of Baltimore lodged a claim against resident J. W. Keeling (originally from Norfolk), and J.D. Towner, of Petersburg, sued clerk James Cabaniss (who later died in penury). But if surviving suits, deeds, and indentures in the papers of Robert Anderson
and George Southall are any indication, the people of Williamsburg contributed greatly to the courts’ work. Williamsburgers were a litigious bunch; Robert Anderson had at least five suits in progress during one month in both Williamsburg and Richmond. Businesses had to be formed or dissolved, bonds paid out, landownerships fought over, debtors forced to pay bills. Merchants also needed representatives. George Southall acted as lawyer for Sheldon and Maupin, and William Peachy helped Anderson. Southall was considered especially prominent in this area, for the New York Merchants Credit Association sought him as correspondent for its Tidewater syndicate in 1844.

Because of their high status and lucrative business, Williamsburg lawyers and judges enjoyed great wealth and connections. For example, when Judge Prentis died in 1809, he left an estate worth $3,742.40. Samuel Griffin estimated that one lawyer earned $7,000 a year through his law practice. Some of this wealth derived from landownership, as important to lawyers as to merchants. George Southall owned an extensive timber tract in Warwick County, among other properties, while Robert McCandlish owned over 1,500 acres in the surrounding counties. Another source of wealth was family connections. As with Robert Anderson, marrying “up” was prevalent. Judge James Semple, professor of law from 1820 to 1834, married Anne Contesse Tyler, President John Tyler’s sister. The Tylers were one of the few aristocratic families still involved in Williamsburg. Semple’s daughters later married a Waller, a rector of Bruton Parish, and a Semple kinsman who later settled in Williamsburg. Another Waller daughter married new resident J. B. Cosnahan, who acquired a house next door to the family’s holdings. Sidney Smith from Yorktown married Virginia Bucktrout, whose property-rich mother later married merchant James Joyner.
One of the most well-known Williamsburg lawyers was Lemuel Bowden, who came from a relatively poor farming James City County family. His brother Henry was primarily a farmer, but also at times an auctioneer and building contractor. Bowden rose quickly and became very wealthy, owning several properties in Williamsburg and building a handsome brick house on Main Street. Dr. Samuel Griffin wrote, “Lemuel is decidedly at the head of the bar & is making a fortune...[He] is certainly a man embracing the first order of talents.” Bowden was the quintessential self-made urban lawyer, a leader on a par with Robert Anderson. The reactionary Robert Saunders may have been thinking of someone like him when he wrote that the “Bar was not what it was...new men now push their way through.”

As “city builders,” the merchants, farmers, and lawyers dominated Williamsburg’s government. It consisted of the Common Hall, a collection of twelve men, an alderman, and a mayor. They controlled the appointments to positions like constable and overseer of the poor. Unfortunately, because its records were lost in the Civil War, the exact composition and actions of the Common Hall cannot be reconstructed, but surviving copies of poll lists in Robert Anderson’s papers indicated that the size of one’s personal following determined a man’s electoral success. Everyone knew everyone one else, so elections were quite personal. But it was not just in government that these men met and furthered their interests.

Internal Improvements

Because they wanted to grow rich and find new markets, Williamsburg’s farmers, merchants, and lawyers joined in informal alliances to support internal improvements. They were not alone. In 1816, Virginia created a Fund for Internal Improvement and a
Board of Public Works to encourage private companies to build crucial turnpikes, bridges, and canals. Wanting to become economically independent and not wishing to lag behind the rest of the country, Virginians, especially urban residents, were obsessed with building internal improvements. The people of the Tidewater were no different, because the region was in dire need of improvement. A French visitor in 1794 noticed roads were either non-existent or “mere tracks” with bridges made from tree trunks. The situation was not much better twenty years later. Eastern Virginians increasingly supported Internal Improvements Bills, such as the one in 1824 which State Representative Scervant Jones, a Williamsburg lawyer and representative, worried over because not enough money would be spent on his constituents. A few years later, George Southall reported that Judge Coalter attended a state discussion of internal improvements. Another Williamsburg man described enviously a Baltimore friend’s talk about how much money that city was laying out for canals, roads, and railroads. Moreover, advertisements for internal improvement company stocks filled local newspapers. Improving access and transportation became a leading preoccupation for Williamsburg’s leaders. Framed by the cities of Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk, the town was in the most productive commercial region of Virginia.

**Internal Improvements: Canals**

Canals were an early and popular mode of transportation. The innovative Erie Canal, completed in 1825, inspired Virginia to create its equal. The result, the James River and Kanawha Canal, was taken over and improved by the Board of Public Works in the 1820s and 1830s. This helped bring produce from the interior of the state to Richmond or Lynchburg, the latter becoming the western terminus of the canal in 1840.
Lynchburg’s economy improved as a result, as the city became an important part of the tobacco trade (15,000 to 18,000 hogsheads annually), and actually made canals and turnpikes central to its economic strategy. Another important waterway was the Dismal Swamp Canal, which Norfolk designed to lift its depressed economy. Opened in the early nineteenth century, this canal connected with the Dismal Swamp, a large swathe of North Carolina which contained timber, tar, and other agricultural products and which had been unevenly developed over the last hundred years. After a shaky start, the canal took off, bringing in about one million staves and six or seven million juniper shingles a year by 1826, and taking in large vessels containing lumber, naval stores, cotton, tobacco, flour, and corn. Tobacco trade from Lynchburg to Norfolk was cut in half. The Dismal Swamp Canal inspired interest in clearing smaller rivers in the region to increase the canal’s capacity, which soon gained the attention of the U.S. Navy. As Lynchburg and Norfolk learned, canals could shape a town’s economy.

Not surprisingly, Williamsburg’s leaders also became interested in canal building. There were many streams around the town which could be harnessed to encourage trade from nearby mills (many of which were owned or invested in by Williamsburg citizens). This was actually an old idea. As far back as the 1770s, there were plans to establish a canal linking College Creek and Queen’s Creek through Williamsburg. This project was connected with Norfolk’s attempt to create navigable waterways in the area, and was an interesting case of cooperation between cities. Unfortunately, it did not happen. Later, in response to the Board of Works, the private Virginia Canal Company drew up plans in 1818 for a Williamsburg canal which would have passed through the Tazewell family’s farm and the town. However, nothing came of these plans. Thereafter, for a time,
Williamsburg’s citizens were content to give financial support to other cities’ canals. Robert Saunders, Sr., who died in 1838, owned 10 shares of the “James River Company” worth $2000. He had also thought about buying 1/4 share in the Dismal Swamp Company worth $750-$2000 or $5000 in canal shares. He often asked his friend Joseph Prentis if it was true that Dismal timber was inexhaustible or whether opening the Roanoke River would improve Dismal Canal revenues.91 Robert Anderson discussed the problems of the James River Canal during one of his frequent trips to Richmond in 1833.92 In the 1850s, Anderson tried to revive the Williamsburg canal. This may have borne fruit in the form of the College Creek and Capital Landing Canal Company, which advertised a meeting of stockholders in Williamsburg in 1858.93 However, it appears that nothing further developed since there were no further notices in the newspaper. Apparently, Williamsburg was not central enough to warrant its own major canal.

**Internal Improvements: Steamboats**

Steamboats became another of the town’s interests. The first steamboat in the area, the *Washington*, arrived in Norfolk from the upper Chesapeake in 1815, and soon many others followed. These steamboats came from New York and Baltimore, which quickly took advantage of Virginia’s excellent waterways to trade directly with the Tidewater. The people of Williamsburg welcomed steamers as transporters of desirable manufactured goods. Samuel Garland, a student at the College in 1824, wrote that everyone awaited “a cargo of goods for this place; as all novelties excite interest” from Richmond. Instead, there was a “rich cargo of ladies,” who were immediately “escorted into Town by some of the students.”94 As the group of women showed, traveling, either for pleasure or business, was another activity for steamboats. They provided much
smoother rides than bumpy roads and were open to all. Margaret Page, wife of Governor John Page, wrote about a friend’s agreeable trip on a steamboat from Norfolk to Richmond in 1819, and one of Southall’s clients used a steamboat to reach Williamsburg in the 1830s. In the 1850s, Tidewater steamboats grew as large and elaborate as those which plied the Mississippi River. One boat, the *Louisiana*, which steamed between Norfolk and Baltimore, had seventy-one staterooms and could accommodate five hundred people. With increasing numbers of steamboats, it was not surprising that the 1860 census records seven watermen and one steamboat fireman living in Williamsburg.

Some Williamsburg men saw steamboats as a likely investment opportunity. Robert Anderson made himself part owner of the boats belonging to the Baltimore Steam Packet Company and the New Virginia Steamboat Line, which were partners. The fittings, supplies, and engines were provided by Baltimore firms like Haskins & Libby and the Eagle Foundry, and the ships traveled to and from Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg, Baltimore, and New York. Anderson, along with two other Williamsburg men, owned a 1/32 share in the *Alice* worth $1000. Another ship, the *Curtis Peck* (which made $4,315.17 in 1844-5) was still being advertised into the 1850s. Anderson was also a Director for a steamboat company (probably the James City Steamboat Company) and often went to Richmond to find more stock subscribers. Another Williamsburg man, Captain Gabriel Williamson (a cousin of the Gaits), served as captain of the steamer *Fulton* in Norfolk in the 1850s. Like canals, steamboats brought people and towns together and helped Williamsburg take advantage of a valuable and convenient connection with its markets.
Internal Improvements: Wharves

In order to attract steamers to the rivers, wharves were built. Goodrich Durfey and William Edloe, Williamsburg’s sometime postmaster, asked and received permission to relocate the James River ferry landing from the mainland to Jamestown Island, where steamboats could more conveniently dock. There was also a toll bridge on the Back River to help ferry traffic. Despite John Hill Smith’s objections (his wife, a descendent of the Amblers, owned the property), the wharf was built in 1833. Past ownership rights had given way to commerce. Durfey was rewarded, for the wharf and ferry produced $600 a year, a sizeable sum. A decade later, Durfey deeded Jamestown to his mill partner, John Coke (also a former tavern keeper), who had kept his own wharf on the James River and at Kingsmill. In 1839, Robert Anderson received permission to construct his own wharf into the York River from his lands around Yorktown. He wanted to transport freight and people, but surviving accounts showed that more people than goods (mostly several thousand shingles) used the wharf, which survived into the 1850s. It generated $10-12 a month. In the 1850s, William Blassingham, a Williamsburg coachmaker, jointly owned Grove Wharf on the James River with a Mr. Ellison. Sometimes wharves were for a merchant’s own vessel. Williamsburg’s Rob Griffin had his own schooner which sailed from the town to Richmond, Norfolk, and Baltimore to carry people and freight.

Steamers and wharves were important not only because they opened up markets; they also enabled sightseers to travel to Williamsburg and the Tidewater. Virginians had a passion for their history, and the Tidewater, where the first colonists struggled to build a new country, was the heart and soul of Old Virginia. It was also the place where the glorious Revolutionary War was fought and won, a fact underscored by the triumphal visit
of the Marquis de Lafayette to Williamsburg and Yorktown in 1824. This history included Virginia’s renowned hospitality, a survival of the old and gracious aristocratic living. George Tucker portrayed Williamsburg in his book as a town graced with friendly people who welcomed and impressed visitors with their taste and easy manners. The *Virginia Gazette* celebrated the belief that Williamsburg was “a synonym with luxury, ease, and old fashioned hospitality.” If agriculture and internal improvements gave Williamsburg some degree of prosperity, nostalgia for the past provided Williamsburg’s charm and allure.

As a result, Williamsburg’s society acquired a certain mystique. People enjoyed the “aristocratic” character of the town. Edward Claiborne, who wrote “A Letter of Advice to the Young Ladies of Williamsburg” in 1809, breathlessly recounted “the justly famed hospitality of the inhabitants [which] gave me easy access to every family of distinction” and the beautiful, sweet belles who possessed such standing in Southern society.104 The surrounding decay made the town even more fascinating. “There are many beautiful residences,” Thomas Green observed in 1827, “rendered more conspicuous by the dilapidation around them.”105 Caroline Hemassel said “we have never seen the beauties of Williamsburg...but I hope...to be able to [tell you] the many curiosities...of this Old City.”106 Williamsburg obliged these tourists by putting on brilliant 4th of July orations and byorganizing periodic celebrations of Jamestown’s founding. The townspeople themselves enjoyed excursions to Jamestown and other historic sites. The *Richmond Post* summed up the view: “if [Williamsburg] is no longer the capital, it is at least a capital [for] hospitality, intelligence, and refinement.”107

People needed easy access to Williamsburg and other places for historical study, pleasure trips, or for business. Often, the men who owned wharves provided some form
of transportation for their patrons. John Coke provided a Four Horse Coach to his wharf from Williamsburg to Jamestown, Richmond, and Norfolk. William Blassingham and Ellison purchased a $300 omnibus, an expensive investment, for their line from Williamsburg to Grove Wharf. In 1858, E. A. Christian, relative of a nearby farmer, opened a livery stable, providing a kind of cab service. Because Williamsburg lay on the main peninsula highway, now known as Richmond Road, it was fairly easy to reach. In the 1850s, this road was called Stage Road, which reflected the importance of that form of transportation to Williamsburg.

Like most towns, Williamsburg was eager to offer hospitality services to its visitors. Many townspeople took in boarders, but Williamsburg also had taverns, the last of which still existed at the Old Raleigh Tavern in the 1850s. Rob Blassingham (Williams's brother) headed the Raleigh in the 1850s. He established a hack service there and advertised it as a good place for Norfolk and Richmond visitors to stay. By this time, however, the more fashionable and urbane “hotel” had replaced the tavern, and Williamsburg, always eager to show its modernity along with its antiquity, built its own hotels. In Yorktown, Robert Anderson ran the Washington Hotel, where lodgers could feast on the York’s fish and oysters. He emphasized its convenience to his wharf and steamers. Yorktown’s hotel was directly associated with Williamsburg’s City Hotel, first maintained by Ben Hansford and then by John Hope. Hope owned horses and vehicles that went to various steamboat landings and wharves on the York and James Rivers. John Charles, son of a shoemaker, remembered that the Hotel was a well-known and well-patronized establishment which hosted parties and the “High Rollers” of the town. The Virginia Gazette called John Hope a “valuable man both socially and publicly” who
“fill[ed] a vacuum...creating to the full satisfaction of the citizens of town and country, a desideratum which has long been hoped for.” The people of Williamsburg continued to patronize this hotel for many years.

Internal Improvements: Railroads

Dwarfing canals, steamboats, and coaches were railroads. Like other Americans, Virginians quickly adopted this revolutionary invention. To them, railroads “assumed the status of a demigod” and were treated “with a respect that approached reverence.” They offered efficient access to outside markets to a transportation-mad public. Between 1830 and 1846, Virginia’s General Assembly chartered eight steam railroads, but starting in the 1840s and 1850s, state funding greatly increased, lavishing money on railroads by funding fifteen road projects costing a total of $2,300,000 to $2,600,000. Cities were especially important to railroads because they were vital stopovers for travelers and produce. Indeed, David Goldfield believed that railroad construction was a turning-point for urban consciousness in the South. Railroads were commonly thought to “make or break” a city and its region, so it was not surprising that urban dwellers, and their rural relations, clamored for railroad construction. Typically, local funding combined with state support. For the proposed 1858 Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire Railroad, Alexandria subscribed $450,000, Winchester pledged $30,000, and each affected county contributed $100,000. The state made up the rest. As part of the process of railroad building, people organized conventions, usually well-attended by wealthy and interested professionals who needed railroads to further their business. Eventually, almost every urban area wanted its own railroad, and by 1858 Virginia’s track had increased to 1,321 miles from 270 miles a decade before, ranking Virginia third in railroad construction.
behind New York and Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{114}

Eastern Virginia was the first to build major railroads. Since it possessed the wealthy commercial cities of Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk, the region was uniquely situated to encourage and benefit from the railroads. Like canals and steamboats, railroads were an excellent (if not better) way of transporting tobacco and various kinds of produce to the North. Petersburg was the first to build a major railroad. In 1830 a charter was granted for the Petersburg Railroad Company to build a railway from the city to Weldon, North Carolina, which would compete with Norfolk's attempts to build canals in the Roanoke Valley. Norfolk retaliated in 1832 with a railroad from Portsmouth to Weldon, which became, as one correspondent of George Southall's remarked, all the rage. The road was completed in 1837, but an economic panic and a fierce rate-war with Petersburg over tobacco freight caused it eventually to close. Meanwhile, Richmond developed ties with Baltimore and Petersburg. Its large Virginia Central Railroad opened up the west to the James River region.\textsuperscript{115} These cities also started smaller lines to other towns or to important waterways. Spirited competition and enterprise marked railroad building.

With these as incentives, Tidewater people began to want their own railroad as a means to increase property values and attract investors, farmers, and perhaps a few ex-Virginians. It would cheaply bring oysters, fish, and wheat, all in high demand, to market. It would complement and boost steamer traffic since railroads often harmonized with ports and wharves to facilitate such traffic. More importantly, it would increase the market garden trade. Market garden crops had been around since the early nineteenth century. Robert Anderson cultivated apple, peach, pear, cherry, apricot, quince, and nectarine
trees, which he bought from a Long Island firm in the 1830s. In the 1850s, production of market garden crops increased 400 percent with many fruit trees coming from Baltimore and Richmond. James City County experienced an increase in the market garden trade of 58 percent from 1850 to 1860 and an increase in orchard farms from zero to 821 in the same period. Many farms with large groves of fruit trees were sold by Robert Anderson, Henley Jones, and Goodrich Durfey in the “garden spots” of James City County and the York River. The profitability of market gardening was directly associated with the urban market and the railroad, which could easily and safely transport these delicate products. The market garden trade and the railroad in turn stimulated wheat production and urban growth.

In this, it seemed natural for Williamsburg, one of the few towns in the area, to start the process of developing a railroad. Sometime in late 1831 or early 1832, Robert Anderson and a collection of his friends proposed a railroad between Richmond and Yorktown to create a direct line between the Tidewater and Virginia’s metropolis. The idea was inspired by Petersburg’s new railroad, which was then capturing the area’s imagination. Although Yorktown was to be the terminus, Williamsburg spearheaded the campaign. A committee of citizens, such as the (normally conservative) Robert Saunders, Jr and Roscoe Cole, was assembled. They met throughout the year drawing up plans to obtain a state charter, funding, and a survey. There were several calls for public meetings of interested individuals in Williamsburg. In June 1832, the survey costs were estimated at $500-$1000 and it was eventually completed by a hired engineer. The General Assembly granted Anderson’s company permission to construct the Richmond-Yorktown Railroad at a cost of $360,000 and a proposed length of 60 miles. But nothing happened because,
as Anderson later wrote, railroads were too new and sufficient funds were not provided.\cite{footnote119}

Had this railroad been realized, it would have been one of the first in Virginia.

The spurt of railroad building in the 1850s gave new life to the Richmond-Yorktown project and the dream of bringing the Tidewater into Virginia's system of internal improvements. A new company, formed in 1852 by the indefatigable Robert Anderson, was a larger and more serious affair with the promise of $500,000 from the state (3/5th of the total) and the rest, over $200,000, from private subscription. Supporters were county leaders like A. C. Garrett, Fred Powers, and William Wynne, and Williamsburg leaders like Peyton Southall (Anderson's stepson), Robert Saunders, Burwell Bassett, Thomas Peachy, William Edloe, Robert Cole, and Lemuel Bowden. Railroad backers emphasized its usefulness to such places as Baltimore and encouraged influential cities to provide funds. The response was overwhelming. People in Richmond, New York, Baltimore, Williamsburg, Gloucester, and New Kent County gave a total of $30,000. Several conventions, some with over 1,600 men attending, were held around the region to appoint committees and directors and raise money. John Barlow, teacher William Morrisett, and Lemuel Bowden chaired the meeting in Williamsburg. In January 1854, the company successfully raised stock and a Charter was granted.\cite{footnote120}

Although Williamsburg was not directly affected by the Richmond-Yorktown Railroad, the town participated in its construction. The railroad was completed in 1861 (part of it opened in 1859) and fulfilled its backers' ambitions. Because Richmond had formed ties with Baltimore, the railroad provided direct route to that city. The railroad spawned terminals at White House and wharves on the Pamunkey River. The struggling town of West Point, which became a staging area for freight-laden steamboats because of
the railroad, was the biggest beneficiary and confirmed the transforming power of the
"iron horse." Williamsburg celebrated the opening of the railroad, appropriately, by
receiving its first flour shipment from a New Kent plantation in 1859. Twenty-five
Williamsburg men, mostly merchants and professionals, had attended the Railroad
Convention in 1853. The town had invested between $12,000 and $13,000 in the scheme,
a respectable sum for a people who were reputed not to have $300 among them. In the
mid-1850s, there was an effort to build a railroad from Yorktown to Williamsburg to
connect with the Central Railroad (and enhance waterway transportation), but no railroad
passed through the town until 1881. The Richmond-Yorktown Railroad was successful
because it fulfilled regional, rather than one town's, objectives, but one town--
Williamsburg--must be credited with the railroad’s inception.

Railroads gave a industrial gloss to the Tidewater and a sense of economic
progress. Of the proposed Lynchburg and Tennessee and Petersburg to Norfolk railroads,
Williamsburg’s “Viator” approvingly remarked, “I rejoice to find all this region a warm
desire on the part of the most enterprising and intelligent citizens” to form connections
with Norfolk and build more railroads. “It is very evident we want many things,” the
*Virginia Gazette* later opined. “We want a regular line of communication between
Williamsburg and the York River. We want some kind of manufactory...” The latter
something of a priority for the town as railroads often spawned manufacturing centers.
There was a correlation between the increase of flour, timber, and steam engine mills and
the establishment of railroads in the 1850s, and in 1860, investment in James City County
manufacturing was $75,425, up from $6,500 twenty years before. There were other
concerns called “manufactories” like the Sash, Blind, and Door manufactory in
Williamsburg which used the region’s abundant timber to build and renovate urban and rural dwellings. There were also castor oil “factories” (like Sheldon-Peachy’s concern) that dotted the area. In reality, these “manufactories” were generally small concerns, but Robert Anderson, never one to stay out any enterprise, envisioned a larger commercial and manufacturing business, inevitably connected to the Williamsburg-Yorktown railroad, with himself as chief stockbroker. In truth, railroads in the Tidewater in this era were primarily designed to enhance agricultural trade and not necessarily to encourage intensive manufacturing, which did not become important to any appreciable degree in the Tidewater. It was more important to build unimpeded lines with larger manufacturing cities to move products.

The Virginia Gazette

The economic activities of the previous decades culminated in one of the most vital urban trappings: a newspaper. Antebellum newspapers were indispensable urban “boosters” which advocated enterprise and growth. Their establishment often signaled a town’s maturing prosperity. When Williamsburg and the Tidewater experienced greater affluence and amity with neighboring cities in the 1840s and 1850s, they needed some sort of publicity organ. Williamsburg had had a newspaper, the *Virginia Gazette*, which had died in the 1780s. The people missed their newspaper (one briefly ran in the 1820s), but it was not until 1853 that the *Gazette* was successfully revived. Its first editor, Thomas Martin, a Powhatan farmer, believed the time was right to show “the ancient metropolis of the Old Dominion” to the world and highlight its “enlightened [that is enhanced by railroad and other innovations] system of agriculture.” The newspaper was later entitled *Williamsburg Weekly Gazette* to emphasize its location and emphasis. Not surprisingly,
people like Robert Anderson enthusiastically supported the paper. Because the *Gazette*

itself had roots in an earlier era, the new *Gazette* harked back to Williamsburg’s past; but

as a promoter of progress, it also represented the town’s adoption of the modern.

The *Gazette* had many purposes, but it was as “a Business Paper” that it excelled. Its *raison d’etre* was advertising. It targeted advertisers from Williamsburg’s customer cities of Richmond, Norfolk, and Baltimore, and to underscore this direction, was subtitled the “Richmond, Norfolk, and Williamsburg Advertizer.” The editors made the *Gazette* a weekly billboard of the best goods and services from eastern Virginia, with Williamsburg providing a more modest contribution in the form of agricultural estate, mill, and merchant business advertisements. It assured outsiders that the people of Williamsburg and the Tidewater encouraged industry and sought the finest Southern wares. The editor saw the newspaper as representing the values and interests of Williamsburg and the region and a loyal supporter of urban enterprise. Merchants and tradesmen who did not advertise there risked commercial obscurity or failure. The three or four pages of advertisements from Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, and Boston testified to its success and power as an urban-country journal. The newspaper demonstrated that Williamsburg could see itself as a market worthy of outside consideration rather than merely as a small part of another city’s economic landscape.

Williamsburg’s commercial life was quite active. The *Gazette* estimated that there were between twenty and fifty-five businesses in Williamsburg, which included merchant stores as well as blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters, grocers, and coachmakers. These were the commercial descendants of the dressmakers, milliners, jewelers, and silversmiths who populated the colonial capital. Later prosperity preserved the town’s trades, but they
were now geared to the economic strategies of the region as well as the needs of the town. For instance, there were more men employed as carpenters and woodsmen because timber was so important in the local market. These tradesmen's interests were not necessarily different from those of the "city builders," but they were not as wealthy or as well-established in the town. Some originated from distant places. John Kidd, who opened a Merchant Tailor store in 1859, originally did business in Baltimore and Philadelphia and was advertised as having both country and town experience. W. Wright, a saddler, had practiced in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and different parts of Virginia.

Competition could also be surprisingly fierce, especially if the businessman aimed for a larger customer base (usually by advertising in the *Gazette*), and often resulted in interesting alliances. Tailors T. Capps and J. Wilkins formed a partnership precisely to better compete with others in the town. J. W. Thomas, a storekeeper, created a firm with Petersburg dress and fancy goods merchant, G. P. Wilcox. With new advertisements constantly appearing and including enticing lines as "Bargains, Bargains, Bargains!" Williamsburg's business life seemed lively and ever changing. A proud *Virginia Gazette* proclaimed "let every businessman in Williamsburg... [realize] that his individual efforts are required to give energy, activity, and prosperity to the whole."\

As potential customers for Williamsburg's services and finished products, which merchants obtained from the North, local farmers were part of this lively picture. Victoria Lee, a resident, remembered that country people walked into town to talk prices, learn the latest gossip, and see a court case or two and buy goods. The *Gazette* helped the farmers and merchants by documenting the "News of the Markets," that were tallies of prices for chickens, corn, pork, and cattle for Williamsburg and associated cities. Cattle
were brought to the town, slaughtered and dressed in the adjoining fields, and then transported to market. One directory for New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore markets in 1859 read: corn 76¢; wheat: "the market is excited"; pork: at prime $10.75; lard 10¢; whiskey 25¢. The wheat market was not neglected. Prices were periodically printed for New York, Richmond, and Baltimore so that farmers and merchants would know when to buy or sell.

By 1860, economic growth had pushed Williamsburg's population from 1,200 in the 1790s to about 1,500 (excluding students and hospital patients). This was a respectable number for an agricultural town which possessed some influence in its immediate region. Williamsburg had managed to maintain itself as a way station in the antebellum economy. Large steamboats, carrying chattering passengers and highly-prized finished goods, plied the James and York rivers; the whistles of nearby steam engines could be distinctly heard; bags of wheat and cartons of garden fruits transported by clanking railroads could be found in the town's markets; and there were one or two Yankee accents among the elegant, Southern drawls. Williamsburg had often been called "a quiet and sleepy place," but this was plainly not true.

So it seemed that rumors of Williamsburg's demise and the degeneration of Tidewater society were greatly exaggerated. As William Shade colorfully put it, despite "its consumptive poets, various romantics, and general naysayers of doom, the patient recovered." Far from being passive, Williamsburg's leaders took an active interest in reviving their town and region. They rationalized the town's economic life by trying to found canals, stage lines, and steamboats. They imagined and disseminated ideas about
industrial developments such as manufacturing and railroads, even if the results were small and scattered. To do these things, the various leaders--such as the farmers, merchants, and professionals--had to pool their resources, whether agricultural or town-based, to succeed. Their interests had to meld. It was this interconnectedness which helped Williamsburg stay afloat and relevant in a changing world.
Notes for Chapter I


5. Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 3


7. Dabney, *Virginia*, 275


9. Rouse, *Cows*, 34


11. Joseph Prentis to Judge John Prentis, April 7, 1805, Webb-Prentis Papers


15. William T. Barry to brother, February 6, 1804, in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., Vol 13 (1904), 113
16. Samuel Galt to Alexander Galt, May 20, 1793, Galt Papers

17. Elizabeth Prentis to Joseph Prentis, June 28, 1807, Webb-Prentis Papers; William Galt to Alexander Galt, May 19, 1793, Galt Papers; Elizabeth Prentis to Joseph Prentis, March 9, 1808, Webb-Prentis Papers

18. William T. Barry to brother, January 30, 1804, William and Mary Quarterly

19. Rouse, Cows, 29


21. Shade, Democratizing, 37

22. Goldfield, Urban Growth, 190

23. Shade, Democratizing, 38

24. Ibid., 18

25. Goldfield, Urban Growth, 191


27. David Goldfield, Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 71

28. Armstrong, Urban Vision, 163

29. Tucker, A Letter, 196


33. Tucker, Valley, 49

34. Among those were: George Wythe, Edmund Randolph, Philip Norborne Nicholas, Dr. James McClurg; some Galt's, Tazewells, and Bowdens went to Norfolk; Prentis family
to Suffolk; some Henleys, Pelhams, Blairs, and Charltons to Richmond

35. Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 29

36. *Virginia Gazette*, March 13, 1856; May 16, 1856

37. *Virginia Gazette*, May 31, 1855


39. Carson, *We Were There*, 116

40. McCartney, *James City County*, 284. It was “one of the best stock farms in Eastern Virginia, with ample pasturage for 300 head of cattle,” and easy access to water

41. *Virginia Gazette*, October 6, 1853

42. Shade, *Democratizing*, 34

43. Tucker, *Valley*, 49


45. *Virginia Gazette*, November 22, 1855; June 10, 1857; January 29, 1857

46. McCartney, *James City County*, 288

47. *Virginia Gazette*, January 15, 1857; December 27, 1855; January 29, 1857; October 14, 1857; August 10, 1859.


49. George Page & Co, to Robert Anderson, March 23, 1855, Business Papers, Robert Anderson Papers; Robert Anderson to Edward Brady, September 7, 1856; Bill for Sam Borum, dealer of agricultural implements in Norfolk, 1857; Bill for William Roberts, Jr., & Co, dealers in stoves and metals in Norfolk, February 6, 1856

50. Carson, *We Were There*, 106

51. R. Maitlands to Sheldon & Peachy, February 23, 1833; Joseph Brown to Sheldon & Peachy, March 16, 1833; R. Maitlands to Sheldon & Peachy, March 22, 1833; R. Maitlands to Sheldon & Peachy, April 6, 1833; Contracts with individual farmers; all in
Sheldon-Peachy Papers, Jacob Sheldon Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary


53. Carson, *We Were There*, 102

54. Indenture, September 6, 1831, between Robert Anderson and Richard Coke and Wilson Willcocks, Estate Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

55. Simon Stubbs to George Southall, July 19, 1833, and George Southall to Wilson Willcocks, December, 1833, Southall Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

56. *Phoenix Gazette*, or *Williamsburg Intelligencer*, April 1825

57. Sheldon-Cole Papers, Jacob Sheldon Papers

58. Roscoe Cole to Jacob Sheldon, January 10, 1829, Southall Papers


60. David Edward Cronin, “The Vest Mansion: Its Historical and Romantic Associations as Confederate and Union Headquarters (1862-1865) in the American Civil War,” 1908, 3-4, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation


62. Walter de Lacy to George Southall, September 2, 1831, Southall Papers

63. Memorandum on Property Values for Mutual Assurance Society, 1809, Robert Anderson Papers.

64. *Virginia Gazette*, March 18, 1856

65. McCartney, *James City County*, 257

66. Will of Robert Cole, Cole Papers
67. Purchased in 1824-5 from Mary Fitzhugh

68. *Virginia Gazette*, February 12, 1857

69. Memorandum of Agreement between Roscoe Cole, E. Lathrop, and Robert Collins, July 21, 1836; Elizabeth Cole to Roscoe Cole, September 24, 1835, Western Lands, Southall Papers

70. Indenture, May 9, 1826, Estate Papers, Robert Anderson Papers, Robert Saunders to Joseph Prentis, March 1, 1822, Webb-Prentis Papers.

71. Granger Birch, New York, to George Southall, August 19, 1837, Southall Papers

72. *Virginia Gazette*, January 12, 1854

73. McCartney, *James City County*, 287

74. *Virginia Gazette*, January 12, 1854; February 9, 1854

75. When Robert Anderson tried to sell his saw and grist mill, he received a number of responses, many from the North. For example, John Bailey, of New York, wrote on October 26, 1857, that he sought the mill for a client in Toronto. John Bailey had earlier written on the 10th that he wanted to become Anderson’s land agent since he knew many northern clients interested in the land. Anderson refused his services. R.B. Simpson, an unemployed mill worker in Baltimore, asked to work for the mill on November 23, 1857. Silas Davenport, of Sharon, Massachusetts, wanted to buy the mill for a group who wanted to live in Yorktown. Business Papers, Robert Anderson Papers.

76. *Virginia Gazette*, November 23, 1859

77. Philip Moody, of Williamsburg, laid a bill against Sheldon and Maupin and George Southall at the Superior court of Chancery in April 1835. It was about James Cabaniss, clerk, and the selling of a negro man, Sheldon Papers

78. Circular of 1844, sent to George W. Southall, Southall Papers

79. Sam S. Griffin to James Griffin, April 24, 1860, transcript, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

80. Charles Botts to George W. Southall, March 28, 1838, Southall Papers, Robert McCandlish Papers


82. Rouse, *Cows*, 58
83. Robert Saunders to Joseph Prentis, November 18, 1818, Webb-Prentis Papers

84. McCartney, *James City County*, 251

85. Scervant Jones Report to his constituents, March 4, 1824, Political Papers, Robert Anderson

86. George Southall to Peyton Southall, 1828, Southall Papers


89. Thomas Parramore, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 158


91. Will of Robert Saunders, Sr., 1838, Page-Saunders Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary; Robert Saunders to Joseph Prentis, May 17, 1811; March 1, 1819; July 9, 1832; Webb-Prentis Papers

92. Robert Anderson to George Southall, June 5, 1833, Southall Papers

93. *Virginia Gazette*, December 8, 1853; April 7, 1858


95. Margaret Page to Mrs. Lowther, April 16, 1819, Page-Saunders Papers

96. *Virginia Gazette*, July 1, 1857

97. There are individual folders belonging to each steamboat, with inventories and bills in Steamboat Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

98. Robert Anderson to George Southall, May 8, 1833, Southall Papers

99. *Virginia Gazette*, August 10, 1859

100. McCartney, *James City County*, 271 and 284
101. Ibid., 285; Virginia Gazette, August 24, 1853

102. Tolls on RA’s ferry landing at York, 1856, Business Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

103. Virginia Gazette, May 5, 1858; June 19, 1856; April 20, 1859

104. “A Letter of Advice to the Young Ladies of Williamsburg, September 18, 1809,” by E. Claiborne, Galt Papers

105. July 1827, Thomas Green Diary, 1827-1829

106. Caroline Hemassell to John Richard, March 1810, Hemassel Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

107. Virginia Gazette, June 21, 1855

108. Ibid., August 24, 1853; July 21, 1858; May 19, 1858

109. Ibid., May 5, 1858; December 13, 1855; April 13, 1859

110. John Charles, “Recollections of Williamsburg as It Appeared at the Beginning of the Civil War,” transcript, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1928, 32

111. Virginia Gazette, May 18, 1859

112. Goldfield, Urban Growth, 10; Goldfield, Regions, 72

113. Goldfield, Urban Growth, 11

114. Goldfield, Regions, 75-5, 195


116. Bill for Prince & Sons, of Long Island, October 19, 1835, Business Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

117. Goldfield, Regions, 84-5

118. Virginia Gazette, February 12, 1857; December 7, 1857

119. Robert Anderson to Robert Shields, February 24, 1832; Robert Saunders to Robert Anderson, March 1, 1832; Robert Anderson to Railroad-Yorktown Commissioners, June 18, 1832; Posted announcement for Railroad-Yorktown meeting in Williamsburg, June
1832; “To the Senate and House of Representatives of Virginia in General Assembly Convened, December 1852,” Robert Anderson Papers

120. “To the Senate and House of Representatives of Virginia in General Assembly Convened, December 1852, “Robert Anderson Papers; *Virginia Gazette*, September 15, 1853; November 3, 1853; December 8, 1853; January 26, 1854; February 9, 1854. The railroad meeting in Williamsburg was attended by twenty-five Williamsburg citizens, including Scervant Jones, Thomas Peachy, Robert McCandlish, Robert Walker, Dr. John Galt, Robert Saunders, James Joyner, and Dr. Edward Camm


122. *Virginia Gazette*, August 24, 1859

123. *Ibid.*, November 3, 1853; Rouse, *Cows*, 46

124. *Ibid.*, December 1, 1853

125. *Ibid.*, October 6, 1853; June 21, 1855

126. *Ibid.*, February 2, 1854; February 19, 1857; November 22, 1855; December 1, 1853

127. *Ibid.*, October 11, 1855; August 24, 1853


129. *Ibid.*, April 6, 1859; April 13, 1859; September 15, 1853; May 25, 1859; July 1, 1857

130. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1858


132. *Virginia Gazette*, October 6, 1853

133. Charles, “Recollections of Williamsburg,” 50

134. *Virginia Gazette*, August 10, 1859

135. Shade, *Democratization*, 44
CHAPTER II

"THE LAZIES AND THE CRAZIES"

In one of its promotional articles, the *Virginia Gazette* proclaimed, "The history of the College and the history of our city are so firmly incorporated, the one into the other, by age, location and other circumstances, that no one can be a true friend of the one without regarding the other with affection." It was speaking of the venerable College of William and Mary, established in 1693 as the second college in English America and one of colonial Williamsburg's great institutions. Equally worthy of celebration was the Public Hospital, built eighty years later. Both institutions were the only survivors from Williamsburg's glory days, and despite their parlous condition, they remained important symbols of former urban greatness for Williamsburg.

The College

After flourishing during most of the eighteenth century, William and Mary was forced to confront the loss of royal revenues and status when America became independent and the Virginia capital moved to Richmond. As the Revolutionary War loomed, the college was already suffering and was described as being "in a very declining state." Precarious finances, a troublesome town, and loss of standing made matters worse. Professorships remained unfilled and quarrels erupted over money. Joseph Cabell, an alumnus and friend of college president James Madison and of Thomas Jefferson, sadly observed that there were "five able professors...who are [more] miserably compensated
for the services they render, than any five men in America.” The college ran deficits through the 1800s. More damaging, the college became associated with the town’s decline and “decadence,” as student William Barry earlier described. The college involuntarily became embroiled in political battles between Federalist and Republican students. When President Madison (who, because of these problems, had tried to leave the college several times) died in 1812, people expected the institution to die with him—at least in Williamsburg. Suggestions arose in 1824 about moving the college to Richmond, where it would presumably improve. Although President John Augustine Smith campaigned vigorously for such a move, the House of Delegates (with help from Jefferson, who did not want to create a rival to his new university in Charlottesville) rejected the idea, and the town had to decide what to do with its struggling college.

Williamsburg was fortunate that the college remained there, for as the nineteenth century progressed, education became a greater concern within the state. Internal improvements and the changing market economy, which emphasized competition and entrepreneurial skills, necessitated (to some) a classless, efficient and technical-based educational system. As future Governor Henry Wise (from Accomac) proclaimed, “the ends of our republic are Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and they depend on Popular Education...The people universally must be trained alike in Schools of one common education.” Other Virginia thinkers, like Charles Fenton Mercer and Thomas Jefferson, envisioned public school systems. However, many public school proposals never materialized because of funding disagreements. In 1810, the General Assembly managed to pass a Literary Fund, which was designed to support some sort of public school system, and a successful free school system was later established in Norfolk. The Tidewater
showed an interest in free education and contained more common schools than any other part of the state, partly because it did not wish to be thought backward. Additionally, as David Goldfield wrote, “cities were the natural repositories of education” because of a larger population and a higher proportion of professionals.

Virginians were particularly interested in higher education because they believed that at this level the most important skills were taught. Some colleges were built in remote areas, away from the corrupt and distracting world. One such institution was the Presbyterian college of Hampden-Sydney, established in 1776. The construction of city- and town-based college began with such institutions as Washington College (1798) and the Virginia Military Institute (1839), both located in the western town of Lexington, and Jefferson’s public-supported University of Virginia in Charlottesville. New prosperity and the fashionableness of education made a college a beneficial addition to urban life in the 1840s and 1850s. In an effort to bring “prestige and urbanity” to the town, Lynchburg used its public school funds to start its own college in 1855, and Richmond established teacher and women’s colleges. The growing number of these colleges put enormous competitive pressure on already established schools, and drove many to suffer persistent financial difficulties or to close. Of thirty-two Virginia colleges founded in the antebellum era, only ten still existed by the start of the Civil War.

These competitive and educational pressures affected William and Mary. Many years before, Thomas Jefferson had enacted reforms by introducing new faculty and departments (Modern Languages, Constitutional Law, and Medicine). He also founded a Law School, with his former tutor George Wythe appointed as first Law Professor (he resigned in 1789 and moved to Richmond). For a while, the college survived quite well.
In his 1795 pamphlet, St. George Tucker insisted “the college is so far from being in a declining state, that the number of students is now considerably greater than before the revolution.” The restored Grammar school was popular in Williamsburg, and the six professorships (Moral and Natural Philosophy, Mathematics, Law, Modern Languages, and two Humanities) were worth $400 a year, when the college’s annual income had fallen to $3,500.

After surviving a period of decline, the school tried to improve its standing by instituting more reforms. After 1820 many Virginia colleges began to include mathematics and science courses in response to the state’s pressing need for engineers and architects. With Williamsburg involved in many economic activities designed to encourage prosperity in the town and region, there was much incentive for William and Mary to change. In 1836, Professor John Millington, a distinguished British doctor with engineering training, started the Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, and Civil Engineering department. In the 1850s, William and Mary’s popular president, Benjamin Ewell, who had been a civil engineer and mathematics professor at Hampden-Sydney and Washington College, inaugurated a small revival of professional training in engineering and medicine, and established some standards for modern language instruction. The object was to make the college “useful” and therefore attractive to prospective students.

These changes brought some success and some professors became famous within their disciplines. John Augustine Smith became well known in science. Professor of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy William Barton Rogers, an alumnus, was a popular lecturer in manufacturing, geology (he headed a state geological survey), and the construction of bridges, roads, and steam engines during the 1820s and 1830s. He was
eventually lured to the University of Virginia, and later founded and presided over the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Another prominent teacher, Thomas Roderick Dew, served as president of William and Mary from 1836 to 1847. Dew was known for his controversial views on slavery, but, like Rogers, also published eminent lectures on business and manufacturing and was a great proponent of state-supported railroads, canals, and roads. During several General Assembly debates in the early 1830s, Governor John Floyd and Joseph C. Cabell, president of the James River Canal Company, urged Dew and Rogers to write in support of internal improvements. Historian Ludwell Johnson claimed Dew “had little success in winning over his section to the cause,” but there is evidence to suggest that his views complemented those in Williamsburg. People could be just as enterprising there, and a new, practical curriculum could be beneficial to the townspeople. Joseph Glover Baldwin had been impressed by several William and Mary men who started business enterprises in Alabama and Mississippi.

But the college’s financial reality cut short any comprehensive modernization scheme. Buying scientific equipment from the North (little could be found in the South) proved expensive and time-consuming, and with competition for the state’s scarce resources, William and Mary could not sustain the effort. The Chemistry department was threatened with dissolution, and a joint professorship in Natural Philosophy and Mathematics was proposed to save $600. Millington’s department failed, and a request for a medical school was never fulfilled. The college resorted to petitioning for Literary Fund support, but economic troubles, political infighting, and state reluctance to help most private schools prevented any relief. As a result, professors were often lured to other institutions (the loss of Rogers was particularly hard) and some positions were difficult to
In the end, keeping the old, classical curriculum proved more manageable and cheap. There was interest in reform and keeping abreast of new developments, but the town also recognized the antiquity of the college. In her study of Benjamin Ewell, Anne Chapman observed with surprise that “the [crumbling] institution...mysteriously seduced many of its professors and most of its students with an almost indefinable magnetism made up of antiquity, tradition, pride in past glories, and a sense of mission.”

It was a historical monument and it melded well with the town’s self-interested cultivation of its past. It gave Williamsburg a certain cachet among other towns and colleges. The Richmond Enquirer made this connection early, when it observed that Williamsburg was “at the feet of a justly celebrated university, and the residence of many families of the first distinction in our country.”

A nostalgic Professor Rogers remembered fondly that the college was “the spot where [my father and I] first caught the inspiration of science.”

William and Mary with its classical tradition gave Williamsburg special significance. “The reason why every school-boy in the United States is acquainted somewhat with our city, is because William & Mary College is located here,” the Virginia Gazette said. It was known for the famous men who had studied there. These judges and lawyers, politicians and thinkers, economists and philosophers, had shaped Virginia’s government and society and even the town itself. Their achievements, and those of the professors, added to Williamsburg’s image as a learned, literary society. As the Richmond Enquirer observed, there was “found in the bosom of a society distinguished for intelligence and refinement, and embracing both the useful and ornamental branches of their improvement [a quality not found elsewhere].” The Virginia Gazette echoed this
view, saying "the reputation of our community for intelligence and refinement abroad is justly due [to the college]." This created conflicts between tradition and reform, for both were equally appealing and equally useful to a self-proclaimed cultured and modern society. The college was often the victim of disputes between so-called conservative and liberal factions, and the contradictions between new and old may have been the cause.

These contradictions were especially powerful because the relationship between town and college was close and intense. The town's leaders usually sat on the Board of Visitors, often for many years. Possessing education and wealth, they were the natural controllers of the town's institutions. The professors themselves lived among the townspeople and were some of the most prominent men in town. Their lectures offered news and "intellectual pieces" for local newspapers. Robert Saunders, Jr., was a native of Williamsburg and descendent of one its oldest families. Not only was he Professor of Mathematics and temporary president of the college, but he also served as city councilman, state senator, mayor, and president of the Board of Directors of the Eastern Lunatic Asylum. Judge Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, son of St. George Tucker, was Professor of Law for many years, and his daughter Cynthia married another William and Mary professor, Henry Augustine Washington. Inevitably, problems arose. In 1847-8, a particularly nasty struggle occurred between two claimants to the college presidency, Robert Saunders (not well liked and seen as representing old thinking) and Archibald Peachy, a young Williamsburg native practicing law in Georgetown in Washington, D.C. (seen as an upstart). The conflict involved the town, which took sides, and was not resolved until one man backed down.

Understandably, townspeople often expressed their anxieties about the college.
One area of concern was student attendance, since it measured the college’s success. In 1828, Helen Southall Anderson wrote to her son that one hundred students were coming for the next term, which was due to the popularity of President Empie, who presided over one of the better times in the college’s history. Barely five years later, George Southall was reporting that there were fifteen students. Then, in 1837, there were ninety-eight students, as Joseph Prentis learned. In the early 1840s, student population reached 140, the highest ever, as Dew told his brother: “Our college is going quite smoothly...we shall have quite a respectable graduation in the [department].” But levels dropped thereafter. A disappointed Elizabeth Galt wrote to a friend that the college expected two hundred students, but only forty arrived. Financial problems and occasional internecine fights were the culprits. Yet, notices touting the college’s situation (“flourishing condition” was a favorite phrase) and historical origins appeared periodically in the always enthusiastic Virginia Gazette, along with statements denying rumors that the town was unhealthy for children.

Schools and Academies

Williamsburg was not just a college town; it was a “metropolis of education.” During the first half of the nineteenth century, a large number of private schools and academies came to Williamsburg, almost like pilgrims to a shrine. Some were preparatory schools for the college and others were separate entities. The prestige of these schools became almost equal to the college’s.

Virginians’ love of intellectual improvement was party responsible for this growth in the number of schools, but the development of towns in the Upper South was also influential. Urban centers, with their high population concentration, middle-class, and
service-based economies, created the need for good formal education, which often meant private education. As a result, there were many male and female academies associated with Virginia towns. For a variety of reasons, female education was an especial beneficiary of private education. Well-to-do southerners “understood the importance of women as the arbiters of culture” and believed they should be educated accordingly.26 This was important in towns and cities, where there were more opportunities for benevolent work, one of middle-class women’s main responsibilities. One Williamsburg student’s mother was anxious that her daughter become familiar in all branches of learning, because “you will be subject to many inconveniences...particularly when you get to be an old maid, as was your resolution.”27 As the nineteenth century progressed, female schools became more sophisticated and rigorous. Williamsburg, with a ready supply of teachers, was well-placed to serve this need for proper education.

Williamsburg’s earliest private academies evolved from the college. One of the first was the Grammar School at William and Mary, abolished by Jefferson in 1779 but revived a few years later because residents wanted preparatory instruction for their sons. Professor Bracken opened this school, which taught mathematics, languages, and writing, but he was not a success. Walker Maury took over in 1783 and taught traditional and non-traditional subjects like bookkeeping. Testifying to the popularity of academies, his school boasted more students than the college.28 Two more William and Mary professors, George Blackburn and Achille Plunkett, went beyond teaching boys to opening an ambitious female academy, one of the first in Williamsburg. It taught girls writing, geography, history, math, science, and the arts. Blackburn was a great proponent of preparatory education, especially for his college students, who often came to William and
Mary unprepared in mathematics and other complex subjects. His experience in the academy led him to communicate his ideas for the college to Joseph Prentis, a Visitor.29 It was a case of mutual support between academy and college, and it was not unknown for professors to provide references for teachers and principals in Williamsburg and elsewhere. Sometimes professors started their own schools or became school principals, and teachers, like William Morrisett of the Male and Military Academy in Williamsburg, sometimes became professors.

For the most part, teachers were unaffiliated with larger institutions. Some of the finest were Williamsburg natives. Leroy Anderson, brother of Robert Anderson, operated a female academy with his widowed sister. His background is unknown, other than that he worked in Norfolk, and perhaps Baltimore, in the 1790s.30 For whatever reason, he decided to become a teacher and opened his school in 1804. In his advertisements, Anderson referred to the popular view that “the society of Williamsburg has ever been considered peculiarly favorable to youthful improvement” and assured them that he understood what a proper girl’s education should include. Like Blackburn, he taught history, geography, and arithmetic, along with more traditional lessons in dancing and drawing.31 One father thought Anderson’s school was the best female academy in the state.32 Since Anderson had at least two competitors in Williamsburg, and several others in Richmond and Norfolk, this was a great compliment. His students included daughters of friends like Robert Saunders and Joseph Prentis (in Suffolk), and his tuition rates of around $100 per term reflected the well-to-do urban class of people he served. He later opened similar schools in Richmond and Lynchburg, but returned to Williamsburg in the 1830s.33
His genuine devotion to education made him popular. This dedication can be seen in his other concerns. Sometime in the 1830s, his family acquired a Richmond property called Navy Hill from James Southgate, his father-in-law. The Andersons already owned property in the city, but they planned to set aside Navy Hill for development as an educational complex for urban and rural orphans who would learn Latin and French, among other subjects. Though this admirable plan never reached fruition, it demonstrated the extent to which a Williamsburg family went to support what it saw as its educational mission.

Anderson was followed by many other private instructors in Williamsburg. Teachers traveled from town to town, opening and closing schools, in order to serve one population after another. As Suzanne Lebsock wrote, “teaching was a business.” Like merchants, teachers were entrepreneurs selling a product, often advertising in local newspapers. In the 1850s, the *Virginia Gazette*, ever the faithful town booster, happily supported these schools. Some were traditional. A Professor Coleman from the Virginia Military Institute opened a private preparatory school for William and Mary. A Mrs. V. F. T. Southall, from Washington, D.C., opened another school in 1856. A Rev. Blain opened a “Boys Mathematical and Classical School.” Others were dancing or music schools, reflecting the more ornamental aspects of Williamsburg’s culture. In the early 1800s, there was a “scientific” dancing master, M. P. L. Duport (supposedly recommended by several dukes, lords, and three hundred Parisian students), who was attached to Anderson’s school (he later left for Richmond). In 1855, a Mr. Deusberry, of Richmond, opened a dancing school with his wife; soon after, he was joined by L. Warroch. By 1859, there were six operating schools, the oldest of which was only ten
years old. The diversity of offerings and teachers backgrounds indicated high demand for education and increasing ties with other towns and cities.

To encourage efficiency and increase profit, Williamsburg sought to organize its scattered schools in the same manner as its internal improvements projects. In nearby Petersburg, Lebsock described how town leaders helped to consolidate their control by founding and running educational institutions which tended to drive out smaller schools. In some ways, this was an indication of the trend to develop urban control over resources. In the same fashion, Williamsburg started the Female Academy, Male Academy, and Military Academy in the 1850s. These possessed ambitious curriculums (ancient languages, geography, mathematics) and fine lecturers, and ably conveyed the town’s intellectual image to the world. They were considered the most prestigious of Williamsburg’s private schools.

Not surprisingly, the schools were inspired and funded by Williamsburg’s top citizens. In true business fashion, the Female Academy was supported by a Joint Stock Company, finally approved by the legislature in 1849, and one of only a few in town. Its trustees were Robert McCandlish, Robert Waller, Goodrich Durfey, William Vest, James Joyner, Robert Cole, and Dr. John Galt, all of whom were elected from a list of dozen or more candidates.39 The academy’s goal was to give a thorough education, along Anderson’s lines, to young women. Almost the same men controlled its counterpart, the Male Academy (1850), with the addition of Samuel Bright, Judge Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, George Southall, and W. R. C. Douglas (later a Washington, D.C., civil servant). It was supposed to "prepare [the] pupils to enter with credit, William & Mary, or any other Literary Institution in the country, or for commercial pursuits, as their friends may
The Military Academy (c.1851) may have also had the same men on its board. It was an interesting institution which linked the town’s ties to military establishments in Hampton, Norfolk, and Washington, D.C., with its attempt to provide more practical instruction to young men.

Their trustees were responsible for all aspects of the schools and, with so much invested in them, these individuals handled the schools with great care. In a town filled with old buildings (and a populace loath to replace them), the Female Academy was deemed important enough to receive its own structure, funded by town subscription. It was situated where the last remnants of the Capitol burned in 1832—a symbolic transition from the old Williamsburg to the new. Surviving images and accounts show that it was a lovely and substantial brick building, with two stories, a basement, a double front porch, and a metal roof. It was enclosed by an ornamental fence and “attractive gates” that framed plump trees, shrubs, and flowers. The building was an excellent advertisement for the school and kept the more than sixty students discreetly separated from the town. A new building was also designed for the Male Academy, but nothing much is known about it, except that it was brick, sixty-two by forty-four feet, and “located in one of the most central and healthy situations in the city.” In earlier days, the best schools had to rent out premises, but these new buildings gave the academies standing and style.

The teachers at the academies were suitably talented and cosmopolitan. When the Female Academy trustees advertised headmaster and teacher positions in national newspapers (local newspapers would have been too limited for this special school), nineteen people applied. They were American, English, Irish, and Scots, and came from New Jersey, Fredericksburg, New York, New Orleans, Lynchburg, Philadelphia,
Richmond, Norfolk, and different parts of Virginia. The successful applicant for headmaster, Hubert Lefebvre, was a Frenchman who had taught in the North but had moved to Richmond, where he was teaching. Was he attracted by the little town’s educational reputation? The first head of the Male Academy, Richard Ford, was “a mighty educated English gentleman,” who garnered the recommendations of the British ambassador to America and Daniel Webster, the Secretary of State. He was replaced in 1854 by Christopher Pryor, who had previously taught in Hampton and Greensborough, Alabama, and had lately set up his own Male and Female Seminary in Williamsburg. His successors, John Noel, had academy connections in Richmond, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Delaware, and William Woodson was educated at the University of Virginia. The first head of the Military School was a graduate of VMI; one of his successors was William Peyton, a graduate of William and Mary and Randolph-Macon College, who later ran a High School “in the South.” The fact that faculty changed frequently revealed the peripatetic nature of teachers. The quality of their backgrounds also showed how highly placed Williamsburg was in the state’s (and perhaps the Upper South’s) educational life.

With male stockholders and an all-male college, men tended to dominate Williamsburg’s educational life, but women also played a strong role in furthering the town’s educational mission. This made sense, as there were so many schools for girls. One of the earliest recorded female teachers in the nineteenth century was a Mrs. Sutcliffe, who had a school (ca.1811) for daughters of the elite. Another teacher was Mrs. Anna Byrd, who, although she owned property in Williamsburg throughout the first half of the century, taught school in Lynchburg. She was a female education pioneer who opened the first women’s school in Richmond. Local women were also important. Philapa
Barziza, a descendent of Lucy Ludwell Paradise, opened a school in the 1850s which taught girls “the rudiments of the French and Latin languages, and all the higher branches of English, together with music on the Piano.” The newspaper claimed she was “entirely qualified to teach what she professes.” For women in urban, patriarchal societies, teaching was often the only public employment available to them. Teaching was the logical extension of middle-class women’s advancing education and many turned it into a vocation. Barziza was one with such a vocation, and Maria Clopton, wife of Judge Clopton, was another. Clopton went further than most women by actually becoming headmistress of the Raleigh Institute, an offshoot of the Female Academy managed by the same Joint Stock Company. The Virginia Gazette noted that Clopton’s school “has secured an enviable popularity” in the town.

The students who attended the college and the academies primarily came from Williamsburg and the Tidewater. Over half of the three academies’ students in 1851-53 came from Williamsburg; names such as Barlow, Coke, Custis, McCandlish, Vest, Tucker, Bright, Armistead, Maupin, Slater, Camm, Clowes, Peachy appear in the attendance rolls. This underscored the fact that the academies were first created to serve community members, especially those of means who wanted to secure a good and affordable education for their children. As the Gazette pointedly remarked, “a citizen of Williamsburg, or the neighboring county, can now educate his son [at the college] at a cost not exceeding $75 per annum.” Like most middle-class parents, they wanted to perpetuate their affluence and pass on the love of intellectual and moral improvement for the benefit of their families and town. The Gazette proudly noted that some of Williamsburg’s merchants, farmers, and mechanics went to William and Mary, and hence
were now “skilled in their respective employments” and fully able to participate in business.\textsuperscript{53}

But there was also a strong desire to attract students from other places. Teachers, like James Sandsford in the 1820s, advertised in local and national papers.\textsuperscript{54} The establishment of the three academies was also advertised in national papers. The \textit{Gazette} itself had connections to various Virginia and Northern cities, so presumably its glowing descriptions of Williamsburg’s society and schools were well received outside the town. Most of these students were of the same social class as the Williamsburg students, and some came from cities and towns. For example, in the early nineteenth century, John Clarke, Superintendent of the Virginia Manufactory of Arms in Richmond, sent his daughters to Williamsburg, while Sally Watts, daughter of a Lynchburg lawyer, studied under Anderson. There were also students from other Southern states, though some of them may have been children of ex-Virginians. William Redwood, a Mobile lawyer and cousin of George Southall, indicated that his son Leroy wanted to return to “his native state” to complete his education.\textsuperscript{55} Like teachers, students from other places enabled Williamsburg to project an urbane image and maintain a place in the educational field.

With so many schools and students (it was reckoned that the Male and Female Academies together had about two hundred students), there could have been great rivalry among them. However, there was little of the rancor which periodically plagued the college, and the academies and smaller schools flourished side by side. Both college and schools generated large amounts of money for the town; “the farmer finds a ready market, and receives cash for his produce, the mechanic directly or indirectly is benefitted, and the professional citizen reaps a proportionate share of the benefits,” not to mention merchants
who supplied the schools and impecunious citizens who opened their homes as lodging places to students as well as visitors. The availability of so many schools also helped sell real estate. Advertisements, like Roscoe Lipscombe’s for Carr’s Hill, a 500-acre farm outside Williamsburg, emphasized either the land’s closeness to the town’s schools or its suitability as a school. This practical view of schooling did translate into a larger desire to be “friendly to the cause of education.” Far from shunning other colleges, the Gazette printed advertisements for commercial colleges in Baltimore, Richmond, Pittsburgh, and different parts of Virginia, partly, of course, for the benefit of Williamsburg’s “ambitious” merchants, farmers, and mechanics. People gave money to other institutions, like Robert McCandlish’s $50 donation to Randolph-Macon. With the wonderful benefits of education, it was no wonder that students were “a source of continual pleasure and satisfaction to the citizens of the Ancient Metropolis.”

Surprisingly, there seemed to be little room for public schools in Williamsburg. As far as is known, there was no free school system within its boundaries, although some James City County free school teachers, like Martha James and James Woolfolk, resided there. There is an intriguing reference to a “free school lot” next to Joseph Repiton’s house in an indenture, but nothing more is known about it. The truth was that private schools were more lucrative and attracted the kind of people likely to be in tune with the town’s character. Business, and self-interest, were not far behind good intentions. Some leading citizens (Robert Anderson and Henley Taylor) did become educational leaders as School Commissioners for nearby counties and as patrons of various teachers’ schools. Slaves and free blacks were excluded from formal schooling.

The town’s esteem for its schools and college (despite the latter’s many problems)
was displayed in February 1859 when the college burned down. President Ewell had just repaired the colonial building at a cost of $6,500, even though the college was experiencing another bout of financial difficulties. The college, town, and former professors like William Barton Rogers rallied to rebuild the college. It was crucial to rebuild the building—a symbol of Williamsburg—quickly, and this was accomplished in October of that year. The foundations were retained but “a more convenient interior [was] planned.” The resulting building had the Italianate appearance, with two front towers, fashionable in the mid-nineteenth century. This architectural design offered a fresh, modern look for the college. The architects and masons were primarily from Richmond. The official opening was also suitably urban-oriented, with Baltimore and Richmond leaders attending and many financial supporters coming from cities like New York (there was a total of forty-nine New Yorkers who contributed to the rebuilding fund, most citing its prime selling point—preserving history—as their reason). William and Mary became a proud example of Williamsburg’s urban ties and its historical importance to the nation.

The quick rebuilding of the college after a potential deathblow was a testament to its ability to survive. Referring to the precarious condition of many educational institutions, the Virginia Gazette proudly announced:

> Colleges are frequently founded, live a few sessions and expire, either for want of patronage, or a lack of proper professional guidance, or control. William & Mary, if it ever had these difficulties to contend with, has nobly survived, and time has left the impress of permanancy [sic] deeply engraven on its classic walls, and it occupies now, as it ever did the highest position capable of being filled by a Collegiate institution.

The college, and the schools which it inspired and attracted, gave a singular and most desirable gift to Williamsburg—an air of being cultured and cosmopolitan. It was the
dream of Southern cities and towns to be known as “a cultural center, a repository of capital and expertise, and ultimately of ‘civilization.’”

The Eastern Asylum

The old Public Hospital was experiencing problems similar to those of the college during the early nineteenth century. The Revolutionary War and the removal of the Virginia capital to Richmond caused extreme financial difficulties which lasted several decades and even temporarily closed the hospital. The main building, built along Georgian lines, was described as a “poor specimen of taste.” Despite the founders’ laudable goals for the hospital, it ended up offering minimal custodial care to a decreasing number of patients. In 1796, the visiting Duc de Rochefoucauld-Liancourt reported that there were only fifteen patients when there could have been thirty. Because of Williamsburg’s suspected unhealthiness, transportation problems, and lack of advertising, few people sent their sick relatives to the Hospital.

The main institutional difference between the college and the Hospital was that the Hospital became a public-supported. In the late 1780s, the General Assembly passed several bills authorizing public funds, the election of the Board of Directors, and the selection of officials by the government (later the Governor) to give better administrative regulation to the Hospital. A treasurer was also assigned to analyze its financial situation. Much later, the Assembly mandated an annual accounting of patients and their expenses, with visits by officials to enforce the rules. The advent of public control also coincided with the Galt family’s taking over medical management of the Hospital. Dr. John Minson Galt was one of the first attending physicians (Dr. Sequeyra died in 1795 and Dr. Philip Barraud, like other Williamsburg residents, moved to Norfolk), but he tended to practice
conventional techniques on patients rather than experiment with new ideas. He was succeeded by his son Dr. Alexander Galt in 1808.

Having a “madhouse” in town is commonly seen as distasteful, and the one in Williamsburg was, indeed, crumbling and grim looking. Shrieks and moans of inmates could sometimes be heard at night, and students and townspeople found the inmates a source of squalid amusement. The Hospital and its sagging, empty cells seemed a fitting symbol for this reputedly poor and decadent town, ridiculed as “five hundred lazy living off five hundred crazy.”

But an institution like a lunatic hospital could play an important part in a city’s life. For example, when the small western Virginia town of Staunton failed to extend its commercial, manufacturing, and transportation base, it turned to public institutions to attract visitors and new residents; it was already a well-known resort and convention area. Like Williamsburg, it first looked to private academies and schools. Then, in 1825, Staunton became the home of the public Western State Lunatic Asylum, which quickly grew despite “niggardly appropriations” from the state. The head doctor, Dr. Francis Stribling, attracted a large number of visitors through his innovative treatments. Visitors and the ever increasing patient population pumped money into the town’s economy, creating many jobs. By 1860, eleven percent of the town was connected with the Asylum in some way. The Asylum’s success caused Staunton to recruit the privately run Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Institute (a public one was later established in 1839), which added to the town’s prosperity and reputation as a leader in scientific and humane research. The fact that Staunton had to fight other towns for the Asylum and Institute showed that, however dubious their reputation, their presence was beneficial to the local economy.
Building well-regulated asylums and hospitals was part of a larger nineteenth century reform movement that derived from the need of politically powerful urban and suburban middle-classes to control the problems resulting from overcrowding and poverty. Although these institutions tended to be located away from cities, the values they taught—for example, punctuality and obedience—were appropriate for decent, urban, middle-class living. Some Southern cities felt the need to provide these kinds of institutions to their own growing populations, although they did not have the pressing problems of poverty and congestion that plagued larger cities like New York and Boston. In some cases, as with Staunton, the economic incentive came into play.

Such ideas affected the development of Williamsburg’s Eastern Asylum, as it was later called. Closely studying the success of the Western Asylum, Williamsburg recognized that the Asylum could provide a needed service for local and state citizens as well as make money for the town. Developing an Asylum could combine altruistic impulses with practical ones, and complement the moral and personal improvement themes already displayed in the town’s educational endeavors. As a result, the way the Asylum operated was changed, especially with regard to the medical treatment offered there. Dr. Stribling in Staunton successfully enlisted his hospital in the “moral management” movement, and the Eastern Asylum sought to do the same thing. Efforts at reform had begun in the 1820s, but did not fully develop until the young Dr. John Minson Galt II took over the superintendency after the death of his father in 1840. Young Galt had studied at William and Mary and the Medical College of the University of Pennsylvania (there were few good medical colleges in Virginia). He had received no psychiatric training, but he was intelligent and had an inquiring mind. After much reading and travel, Galt formulated
a more sympathetic approach to the insane, one that was geared less towards harsh
punishment and more towards compassionate care.

He devised a number of different approaches to make his patients’ lives and
treatment more comfortable and effective. He started an occupational and recreational
therapy program, which surpassed what was available at other institutions of the time.
Patients could work in the carpenter, shoemaker, and leather goods shops or relax in
rooms for reading, card-playing, and other pastimes. Galt also used music as a form of
therapy. Galt most famously encouraged patients to interact with the townspeople so that
they could become better acclimated socially. Far from shunning this interaction, the town
initially responded enthusiastically. Patients sold their work in the town’s fairs and charity
bazaars, and used the money to buy books, musical instruments, and other items.
Townspeople would reciprocate with money, property, and other gifts to the Asylum.;
they would also invite patients to their homes, take them on trips, and put on
entertainments for them. As Professor McLean wrote, the Asylum became part of a
remarkably strong community volunteerism effort that attracted such luminaries as
Dorothea Dix, who accompanied the Williamsburg ladies “in a swirl of charity and
crinoline.” The Asylum also became part of an experiment in community-based mental
health care. Galt, who wanted to separate out the harmless patients from the most
chronically ill and dangerous, allowed some patients to walk freely about the town. The
townspeople, who enjoyed their sense of being an enlightened people, welcomed this
approach until several bad incidents ended the practice in the 1850s. However, their
welcoming attitude to the patients had done enormous credit to the town.

To accommodate new treatments and patients, the Asylum quickly grew in size.
Various structures, which included a kitchen, smoke house, dining hall, and servants lodgings, were built around the original building in the 1820s and 1830s. A Convalescent House was added to segregate recovering patients from sick ones. After Galt became superintendent, there was a rapid increase in building. The Main Building, built in the 1770s, was given an updated Greek Revival appearance, with portico, cupola, and third floor. It also acquired a series of wings for employees and patients, who were now classified into high- and low-paying groups and had to be housed separately. Walls were built to surround the complex and separate “curables” from “incurables.” In the 1850s, the Asylum began to make use of its grounds as part of the therapy program. It purchased several more acres for gardens designed in the English manner, with shaded walks, water fountains, and clusters of trees where games and activities could be held.7 The gardens, as the newspaper reported, “are indicative of the taste and persevering energy” of the stewards Robert Taylor and James Bowry.74 The gardens and the new gleaming white buildings offered splendor and a vision of tranquility for patients and townspeople.

There were a large number of buildings partly for practical reasons. The Asylum had to house around three hundred people, the projected number of patients that it believed would be admitted. The numbers actually ranged from 150 to 280, but this amount was a great improvement since the beginning of the century. Most patients came from eastern Virginia, but some came from northern and western Virginia. Since Staunton’s hospital was more select, Williamsburg was often forced to accept its rejects. The Gazette, which reported in March 1857 that eleven out of a new batch of fifteen patients came from the West, remarked that the Asylum would need to make more room for poor applicants from further away.75 Staunton also refused black patients, but Galt
continued the tradition of allowing them into the Asylum. Slaves and free blacks were formally admitted in 1846, and although they never made up a large part of the patient population, they were given their own building, the Gothic Tower, an impressive Tudor-Gothic pile behind the Main Building. In the opinion of the newspaper, it was one of the great sites of Williamsburg. The reasons behind allowing blacks was both financial and altruistic. Because slaveowners paid for the upkeep of their slaves, black patients brought in as much money as white ones. Galt was also a compassionate man who believed that blacks could suffer equally from mental disease and that they deserved as much medical consideration as white patients. It does not appear that the town objected to the presence of black patients.

Some historians have compared the Asylum at its height to a hotel resort. Resorts and spas were extremely fashionable in this period, and many Williamsburg families repaired to them during the summer months to escape the diseases endemic to the area. Dr. Barraud, during a trip in the west Virginia mountains, wrote that “we...gossiped and frolicked with the whole round of the good folks in the district–visited Winchester, drank some limestone water and qualified [it as] twice as much good wine.”76 Elizabeth Galt remarked in an August letter in the 1850s that there was only a handful of people left in Williamsburg, the rest having left for the cool air and lively society of the Springs.77 Ambitious entrepreneurs were setting up countless resorts to attract pleasure-seekers. By the 1850s, visiting the Springs was an act of class affirmation and solidarity for the planter elite and emerging urban upper-classes. Since so many in Williamsburg counted themselves part of this group, and since the Springs resorts boasted high financial returns, it was understandable for Williamsburgers to emphasize the resort-like aspects of the
Asylum.

The Main Building, with its white columns, Greek architecture, and two extending wings was looked very like a spa resort, a comparison which the town inhabitants were happy to encourage. This was conveyed by an 1846 lithograph by Thomas Millington, who painted other idyllic, “small town” scenes of Williamsburg. It showed the full facade of the Main Building, with strategically placed trees, children, and animals in the foreground. Strolling through the grounds are fashionably-dressed couples, a rather improbable picture. Galt used this image on brochures to prospective families of in- and out-of-state patients, only changing certain elements to suit his audience. He seemed to suggest that this was what patients would expect at the Asylum: not a lowly hospital, but a place of dignified retirement and rest, where their phobias and depressions would be cured (or eased) just as easily as their rheumatism and gout might be treated at Sulphur or White Springs. The fact that there were nine or ten physicians in Williamsburg, all of good background, was partly an outgrowth of the Asylum’s existence.

Creating a resort image for the Asylum was a bid to attract some elements of an emerging leisure and tourism industry, and this image extended to the interior of the Asylum. The importance of occupational and recreational therapy was reflected in the many sitting rooms, halls, and dining rooms within the buildings. The luxury of the surroundings was astounding. The Gazette editor, who toured the establishment, remarked “so comfortably fixed were the sleeping rooms, so fastidiously adorned were the parlors and saloons with pictures, mirrors, piano-fortes, furniture, carpeting, center tables&c. that we almost felt we were treading the saloon of some floating palace, or walking again the halls of the luxuriously furnished St. Nicholas of New York.”78 The
rooms were lit by gas fixtures, and furnaces supplied the heating—innovations not found elsewhere in Williamsburg. The *Gazette* concluded that “this asylum can now boast of as great and decided improvements, advantages, &c as any institution of a similar kind in the country.” The gasworks, set up by Northern agents, provided a modern, progressive touch to the place and may have inspired homeowners to acquire gas lighting themselves. Both Williamsburg citizens and patients could take advantage of the Asylum’s services and gardens, making it into a regular recreational center for the town. There was nothing else as fancy as the Asylum in Williamsburg.

Not surprisingly, the Asylum played an role in Williamsburg’s economy. It employed about one hundred people, including forty-five slaves. The positions ranged from President of the Board of Directors to the most menial. Personnel expenses were great, as were the costs for food, clothing, furniture, and fuel, much of which was imported from the North. In 1833 alone, expenses were $10,081.49. Added to that amount was the $16,400 paid for the first enlargement of the Asylum in 1840 and the costs associated with subsequent building. Since most of these charges were supported through public funds (one citizen estimated them at $120,000 a year), anyone who could tap into this “spring” could become quite wealthy.79

The Directors were quite powerful; they decided admissions, hired workers, and approved expenditures, which meant they controlled how the Asylum was provisioned. The Directors came from Williamsburg and were predominantly of the professional and commercial classes, the same people who dominated the economy, schools, and government—such men as the Coles, Saunders, McCandlishes, Southalls, Andersons, Sheldons, and smaller merchants like Parkes Slater, James Custis, and Dr. Edward Camm.
These men had the means and will to take advantage of the Asylum. Appointments to staff positions became naked acts of patronage; directors used Asylum funds as though they were their own personal bank accounts; and local merchants sold their wares to the Asylum at exorbitant prices. In fact, part of William Vest’s fortune was founded during his time as the Asylum’s treasurer, and there were others who benefitted greatly.80

Some townspeople were appalled at this behavior. Dr. Galt, who refused pay raises and remained untouched by graft (although his family had dominated many Asylum positions), disliked it. He was joined by lawyer Lemuel Bowden, the Gazette, and other residents who wanted to end the corrupt cabal and open the Asylum to outside competition and men of other political persuasions. “It is,” said S. Pendleton, “a prodigious advantage to have the control of a home market where one can dispose of all his surplus products at a handsome profit.” He mentioned that one board member (Richard Bucktrout) sold coffins to the Asylum at $50 each, an amount few Williamsburg citizens could afford. On another occasion the board took on a New York agent at 5% interest when they could have found cheaper rates elsewhere.81 Bowden fought for greater governmental scrutiny, and became President of the Board as the result of laws passed to rein in the directors’ excesses.

The corruption bothered townspeople for several reasons. It was contrary to the good economic principles that were gradually becoming internalized in the business-minded town. As Pendleton wrote, “a market unaffected by the fluctuation of prices, or the relation of supply to demand” would burden patients and townspeople with high prices and shoddy products.82 It was unacceptable in a modern town. Anything less than full openness and fairness jeopardized the Asylum’s reforms of the past years and the town’s
attempt to gain a reputation as a progressive center of culture and hospitality. Dr. Galt had brought renown to Williamsburg and any impropriety associated with the Asylum recalled the sordidness and laxity that had characterized its early years. Those who criticized the directors, of course, had much to gain from their fall (Bowden, for example, did well out of his new position), but there was a genuine belief that the Asylum was more than a hospital; it should be well-regulated and pleasing to patients and citizens alike.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Williamsburg was left with two major relics of its the colonial past: the College of William and Mary and the Asylum. Far from allowing these to degenerate into lifeless symbols, through the next decades the town developed and improved them as a means to gain prestige, prosperity, and increased population. The college, and the many academies and schools it attracted, transformed the town into a “metropolis of education.” The Asylum became, through its innovative medical treatments and up-to-date physical appearance, a resort-like complex that drew visitors to the town and became a symbol of the town’s modernity. By making the most of these two institutions, Williamsburg showed its ability to respond to outside trends and influences while providing useful services to its region and associated urban areas.
Notes for Chapter II

1. *Virginia Gazette*, February 23, 1854

2. Carson, *We Were There*, 27


4. Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 166

5. Dabney, *Virginia*, 249


9. Carson, *We Were There*, 88

10. Godson, Johnson, et. al., *William and Mary*, 249


12. William Browne to Joseph Prentis, October 3, 1828; William Browne to Joseph Prentis, October 5, 1828; Robert Saunders to Joseph Prentis, October 12, 1830; Webb-Prentis Papers

13. Chapman, *Benjamin Ewell*, 91


15. Carson, *We Were There*, 116

16. *Virginia Gazette*, February 23, 1854

17. *Richmond Enquirer*, April 30, 1805, Williamsburg Papers

18. *Virginia Gazette*, February 23, 1854

20. Helen Southall Anderson to Peyton Southall, July 24, 1828, Southall Papers

21. George Southall to Wilson Willcocks, December 1833, Southall Papers

22. Robert Saunders to Joseph Prentis, January 13, 1837, Webb-Prentis Papers

23. Thomas Roderick Dew to Benjamin Dew, May 10, 1841, Dew Family Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

24. Elizabeth Galt to Mrs. M, c. 1850, Elizabeth Galt Papers (undated), Galt Papers


27. Betsy Watts to Sarah C. Watts, April 4, 1807, Sarah C. Watts Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

28. Godson, Ludwell, et. al., *William and Mary*, 173


30. Leroy Anderson to Alexander Galt, November 11, 1792, Galt Papers

31. *Virginia Argus*, December 29, 1804, Williamsburg Papers

32. John Clarke to William Wirt, April 26, 1805, John Clarke Letterbook, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia

33. Jane C. Charlton to Sarah C. Watts, July 14, 1808; Jane C. Charlton to Sarah C. Watts, December 4, 1808, Sarah Watts Papers. In the first letter, Anderson told Charlton “that money awaited him at the Mountains, and glory at the Metropolis.” She replied, “He will be a great loss to this place, I fear we shall never get such a teacher again.”


36. *Virginia Gazette*, October 27, 1853; July 24, 1856; August 3, 1859
37. Leroy Anderson to Joseph Prentis, April 9, 1822, Webb-Prentis Papers

38. *Virginia Gazette*, September 13, 1855; December 13, 1855

39. *Ibid.*, October 28, 1853; Election of Trustees, February 27, 1844, Southall Papers

40. *The Williamsburg Male Academy Prospectus with Catalogue of the Pupils, &c. For the Scholastic Year 1850-51* (Richmond: Isaac Lyon, 1850), Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

41. Many Williamsburg male citizens were in the militia, but there were those who served in the national military. Dr. Robert Miller was a surgeon on the *U.S.S. Essex* during the War of 1812 who was presumably killed in action, since his prize money from captured British ships went to his mother (Robert Anderson to James Robinson, c. 1812-1814, Correspondence, Robert Anderson Papers). Peyton Southall, Robert Anderson’s stepson, was in the U.S. Navy and received a purser’s berth in 1832-1833 (Robert Anderson to Peyton Southall, March 18, 1831, and Helen S. Anderson to Peyton Southall, July 24, 1828, Southall Papers). Resident John Henderson and at least one other were recorded as naval officers in the 1860 census.

42. *National Intelligencer*, July 24, 1849, Williamsburg Papers

43. Charles, “Recollections of Williamsburg,” 52-3

44. *Virginia Gazette*, September 8, 1853; October 13, 1853

45. Applications for Positions in Female Academy (1849), Southall Papers

46. Elizabeth Galt to Mrs. M, c. 1850, Elizabeth Galt Papers (undated), Galt Papers, *Male Academy Prospectus*

47. *The Southern Churchman*, August 27, 1858, Williamsburg Papers

48. *Virginia Gazette*, November 23, 1859. Peyton died, still in his twenties, in 1859. His obituary was one of the longest in the newspaper, a sign that he and his profession were held in high esteem in Williamsburg

49. Thomas Griffin to Carter Berkeley, June 29, 1811; Thomas Griffin to Carter Berkeley, May 18, 1811, Williamsburg Papers

50. Margaret Page to Mrs. Lowther, March 18 [year unknown], Page-Saunders Papers

51. *Virginia Gazette*, September 15, 1853

52. *Ibid.*, February 14, 1856
53. *Virginia Gazette*, February 23, 1854; November 3, 1854

54. *Phoenix Ploughboy*, 1828

55. William Redwood to George Southall, September 28, 1847, William Redwood Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

56. *Virginia Gazette*, February 23, 1854; August 10, 1859; John Clarke wrote to Leroy Anderson that a Mrs. Donaberry, a milliner from Philadelphia, wanted to move her business to Williamsburg because of Anderson’s school (July 8, 1805, John Clarke Letterbook)

57. *Virginia Gazette*, August 10, 1859

58. This phrase was used by Sally Lindsay (who became a Williamsburg teacher) to Alexander Galt when she asked to rent his house for a school (July 17, 1832, Galt Papers).

59. Robert McCandlish Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

60. *Virginia Gazette*, May 10, 1855

61. Indenture, November 23, 1829, Estate Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

62. Carson, *We Were There*, 116

63. *Virginia Gazette*, October 12, 1859; November 30, 1859

64. *Ibid.*, February 23, 1854

65. Brownell and Goldfield, *The City in Southern History*, 9

66. Carson, *We Were There*, 98

67. *Ibid.*, 90


69. Rouse, *Cows*, 36, 37

70. Armstrong, *Urban Vision*, 179-180

72. Maccubbin, *Williamsburg*, 85

73. Siske, *Eastern State Hospital*, 37-8, 49-50

74. *Virginia Gazette*, June 8, 1859

75. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1857

76. Dr. Barraud to St. George Tucker (?), September 6, 1797, transcript, Barraud Family Papers, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

77. Elizabeth Galt to Marianne G., n.d., Undated Manuscripts, Galt Papers

78. *Virginia Gazette*, October 19, 1859

79. Siske, *Eastern State Hospital*, 38: *Virginia Gazette*, April 7, 1858

80. Siske, *Eastern State Hospital*, Appendix A (A List of members of the Board of Directors, 1773-1862)

81. *Virginia Gazette*, April 7, 1858. In another article, Pendleton (under the pseudonym "Junius"), criticized the view that the Asylum’s goods should not be bought beyond the Mason-Dixon Line--"what humbug" (*Virginia Gazette*, April 14, 1858)

CHAPTER III

"WILLIAMSBURG WAKING UP"?

In early 1855, the Norfolk Argus wrote that its rival, the Herald of Norfolk, "has always shown a disposition to uphold a false policy, which if not restrained would make Norfolk what Williamsburg now is." Offended by this insult to his town, the editor of Williamsburg's Virginia Gazette quickly countered: "it don't show a pretty disposition to be snapping at your neighbors that way...Williamsburg is dead is it?"1 He then went on to refute this view of Williamsburg. Long after St. George Tucker finished his pamphlet in 1795, the town was still defending its existence. Yet Williamsburg had survived, and, moreover, had prospered. It could now turn to making improvements within its own boundaries.

By 1860, Williamsburg's physical size was essentially unchanged from what it had been in 1782. The former Duke of Gloucester Street ran through the center of town, with a smaller grid of streets, now shorn of their original aristocratic names, framing it. Huge dark mulberry trees covered Main Street, nearly blocking out the sunlight, and handsome oak trees surrounded the grassy college campus. The structures, survivals of the colonial era, were a collection of houses, offices, little shops, student lodgings, and outbuildings closely tucked into corners and squares. Some were in bad shape, but others were quite elegant and well-kept. They often had gardens, which were some of the most remarkable sights of Williamsburg. Other than those at the Asylum, orchards and fruit trees, which
reflected the growing importance of the market garden trade, flourished throughout the
town, while there were a number of “beautiful” house gardens full of “damask roses, white
roses, primroses, cowslips and violets”—nothing “new-fashioned.” It was a charming,
even prosperous picture, that gave the impression of a suburban, “quiet little village.”

But economic and institutional growth of the past few decades had brought some
changes. The strengthening role of Williamsburg as a service and market center brought
an increase in population. An 1822 Virginia almanac stated the town’s population at over
1,400, an increase since the 1790s. A census thought to have been taken in the mid-1850s
showed some decline, to 1,335 (excluding students and Asylum patients), but the number
suddenly zoomed to over 1,500 (again excluding students and Asylum patients) just a few
years later. This growth was in the number of whites, and later free blacks, while the size
of the slave population stagnated. In 1855, the *Virginia Gazette* had lamented that there
were too few mechanics and tradesmen, but later newspaper directories revealed large
numbers of carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, tailors, shoemakers, and common
laborers. Some of these individuals came from outside Virginia, other parts of Virginia
(especially the Tidewater), or were foreigners. In 1860, close to fifty-eight percent of free
residents were not natives of Williamsburg.

As cities slowly developed their economic resources and improved their
transportation links, they started to experience a surge in population and, as a result, the
need for public services. With so many new business and so many people living together,
a demand for laws concerning public cleanliness, street lighting, fire service, and police
service followed. As David Goldfield wrote in *The City in Southern History*: “As
southern cities grew from frontier outposts and dusty market towns, the limitations of the
small group of elites that defined community interests became apparent, even to the leaders themselves. Basic urban services such as fire, police, water, lighting, and disease prevention were necessary if a city were to carry on with the business of growth and prosperity...the pressure of competition made the provision of such services prerequisites for modern urban life."

Reforms such as standing committees and boards of health were adopted by various Virginia cities like Alexandria and Wheeling. Norfolk, existing in one of the most unhealthful areas in Virginia, was particularly sensitive to public health. Richmond established a water system and a fire service in the 1850s, Alexandria citizens founded a private night watch service to combat a rise in crime, and Lynchburg organized a Gas Light Company. Cities also thought about their aesthetic qualities. Richmond’s Hollywood Cemetery was one of the most beautiful in the country, and it provided enjoyment to strollers. People in Norfolk called for park development. These efforts were typically part-private, part-public. This desire for civic improvement was national. Northern cities tried to find the best ways to manage the consequences of industrialization such as immigration and pollution.

Newspapers, as the major medium for advertising, information, and city boosterism, supported and defended internal reform. Their editors were often active community leaders who believed that the press had an important role in the shaping of its city. They were progressive voices urging changes upon their citizens, and urban Southerner editors participated just as strongly as Northerners. The Norfolk Southern Argus stated that “the mighty influence of this silent teacher [the press], pouring its lessons every day into the minds of men, it is impossible to estimate.” This view was
shared by the *Richmond Whig* and the *Richmond Enquirer*, the two most powerful newspapers in Richmond and models for many others in Virginia. They were joined by a number of urban leaders like J.D.B. De Bow, who urged Southerners to urbanize and break free of “Northern domination.”

Influenced by these ideas, and always anxious to improve, some Williamsburg town leaders were eager to adopt internal reforms. Their appeal was as much economic as aesthetic. A town desirous of economic development and located in one of the most potentially bountiful and populous spots in the state, as Williamsburg believed itself to be, needed internal improvement. Robert Anderson envisioned great things for the area in a 1855 letter about his new mill business to a Baltimore agent. It “will be placed on a conspicuous position at the [York] river shore where thousands will look at and witness its operations” as they slowly steamed down the water. He hoped that

state elections will come and the “theorists” that had been in charge will give way to “practical men,” when our lines of internal improvement will be opened to the Ohio river and the west. York River will then become the outlet of much produce to the Ocean. When the Pacific railroad shall also be made, the great travel of men and merchandise, to and from Europe, California, and China, will pass on this river, and by this town.6

“The West” was the catchword in Williamsburg. If, as many people believed, economic opportunities would abound there, the establishment of ties with the West was therefore crucial for any economic success. But it was a race against time and other more enterprising cities and states. As the *Virginia Gazette* reminded its readers, “...many of the other states of the Union, not so favorably situated as Old Virginia, have been bending all their energies and expanding their treasures to secure the trade of the west and fertile country.”7 The newspaper frequently printed investment opportunities in the West (especially in Chicago) to underscore this belief. Williamsburg had to better itself by
acquiring the amenities of a city.

The prime mover for reform was, of course, the newspaper. As the town's foremost advertiser and economic "booster," this role came naturally to the *Virginia Gazette*, especially to its new editor, J. Hervey Ewing. The first trained newspaper editor in Williamsburg, Ewing had been apprenticed for three years under an "urbane and accomplished" newspaper editor in Muncy, Pennsylvania. The fact that Ewing may have had Northern origins was significant. He was an aggressive and ambitious newspaper proprietor whom the *Daily Express* of Petersburg called "one of our most reliable and interesting interior exchanges."

That Williamsburg could attract such a man showed its growing sophistication; and since no family in Williamsburg was without the *Gazette* (or so he claimed), Ewing hoped for a receptive audience.

There was much to improve. Williamsburg's services and sanitation arrangements were poor or non-existent. There were no sidewalks, just strips of pounded dirt, and water was provided by inefficient wells and ditches along the streets. Simple brick culverts drained the water and sewage away (there was little plumbing in town). The streets were often pockmarked with mud holes and filled with grazing animals. Cows, pigs, horses, mules and goats, all necessary for local markets and transportation, ran freely in the fields and streets. William and Mary Professor De La Pena "thought [he] was transported to Noah's Ark,...so prodigious was the quantity of animals I met with." Rural life, with its sprawling acres and dirty farmhands, never seemed far away.

In this, Williamsburg was typical of most Virginia towns and cities. David Goldfield described how "a walk through urban Virginia would leave a visitor covered with dust...and impressed at how the rural countryside seemed to melt into the urban
setting...[he] would be likely to find himself alone except for annoying swarms of flies and mosquitos..."10 Petersburg, Williamsburg’s growing neighbor, still had “a few narrow, muddy streets” with grazing animals, and was considered an unhealthy place for many decades.11 Even larger cities like Richmond had a whiff of the country.

Embarrassed by the old town’s shoddiness, the newspaper and other interested parties wanted to banish as much of the muck as possible. Their actions took the form of prodding the Common Hall to act. The most aggravating problem was the condition of the streets. Ordinances to keep the streets clean had existed since 1832, but editor Ewing’s constant complaints about the unkempt streets made it plain that they went unenforced. He wondered where the Street Commissioners were, for the odors of the hog pens, neglected privies, dead animals, and trash pits were “repulsive.” The stench was especially unpleasant during the summer, when many people were forced to flee the pungent miasma. Ewing complained that the Commissioners, the town’s virtual “health officers,”—a term then coming into use—should be more attentive. Mud was an even worse problem. Pedestrians sank into water holes and women soiled their dresses and shoes. A concerned Professor Snead, with the support of an anonymous councilman, sought to pave Main Street end to end. Snead raised $700, but this was not enough. Out of frustration, Ewing joked that women should welcome the introduction of the crinoline, for it would keep their skirts off the road. Ewing broadened his complaints to include the condition of the town’s interconnecting roads (especially the dangerous ravines along the creeks that desperately needed lighting and paving) and lack of new road construction.12

These desperate complaints reflected Ewing’s concern for commerce, which required the smooth movement of goods into and out of town. Better designed and
conditioned streets could clear spaces and encourage people to build inside the town. Historic buildings were fine, and brought attention to the town, but new building signaled enterprise and growth. According to one resident, there were large amounts of wasteland used only for grazing that surrounded Williamsburg. Although Ewing found the tinkling cow bells in the pastures charming, he believed that the town should sell its common lands to those who could build residential and office areas. He often calculated how many dwellings could lie on the large properties sold by Robert Saunders and Lemuel Bowden. Even selling and buying of a house was a potential opportunity for development.

**Land and Building**

The lack of new construction, related to the lack of useable land, was a real problem. Land prices had been increasing since the 1830s because of agricultural improvement and the railroad. This was welcomed by most Virginians. In the Tidewater, land in Warwick County was already selling at $10 an acre, and George Southall had to fight off buyers for the departing Wilson Willcocks’ estate. By the 1850s, land prices at increased by fifty percent around the lower James and York Rivers ($100 an acre was one quoted figure), and much of this was starting to affect Williamsburg. The farms which encircled Williamsburg increased in value. Judge Christian was selling land at College Landing for $2,700, with the purchaser then selling it for twice as much. Lemuel Bowden sold property for $1000, when it had been worth $300 just a few years before. Ewing knew of a 2-story house on a back street worth an astounding $2,200 and “negro” kitchens were renting for $30 a year, which was about the same price as one of Robert Anderson’s small houses. All hotels and taverns were full. People complained about scarce housing and high rents. As a result, structures started to appear along Capitol
Landing and Mill (now Jamestown) Road, beyond town boundaries. It seemed that the old town could not accommodate the new workers and tradespeople who were arriving in the 1850s. Ewing hinted darkly that this housing shortage might turn away prospective merchants and residents, so he constantly urged people to build more.16

The building shortage caused a small flurry in speculative building. Dr. Samuel Griffin, a Williamsburg stalwart, built a much-praised “warehouse” for stores and residences. It soon attracted a Richmond merchant and a dentist. Colonel Armistead, another prominent townsman, also built a brick office building. John Dix built “a new stuccoed building” near the College that was a “large, well constructed, and comfortable residence.” It consisted of three stories and twenty-two rooms and was primarily for boarding college students. Merchant and later Reverend James Joyner built a row of storehouses along Mill Road, hoping to fill them with new enterprises. These individuals often had the extra money to build. Many private houses were also built. Although these were not acknowledged in official records, there were places described in the newspaper as “lately erected,” “new,” or “improved.”17 People also tacked on Greek columns or additions onto their old houses to expand and modernize them.

Buying up property was a way of gaining possession over an area, and urban speculation, like land speculation, had since colonial times figured in individual economic strategies in Williamsburg. Those families owning property in other cities could also benefit immensely. Robert Anderson had storehouses in Richmond which he periodically rented out. Robert Saunders invested in land in Norfolk and Richmond, for they “must increase [sic].” He was especially enamored of Norfolk’s markets and good police force.18 Saunders bought property from a Baltimore man in Norfolk for female relations.
The Galts had relatives in Norfolk and Petersburg, and the Prentis family had a cousin, George Bowdoin, who was a commission merchant in Baltimore. These cities could provide models for good property investments and buildings.

In Williamsburg, a wealthy man could acquire any number of existing stores and storehouses. The departure of so many residents in the early nineteenth century left much vacant property. For example, the defunct Prentis Store was sold to the Warburtons, a Tidewater family. Dr. Alexander Galt purchased a house and lot once owned by the Nelson family, now of Hanover, Lynchburg, and Kentucky. Rob Saunders, William Browne, and a Mr. Pryor divided up the remaining lands of the burned Governor's Palace. Robert Anderson was particularly acquisitive. He bought houses from the Turners (now of Petersburg) and from a man whose grandparents once lived in Williamsburg. He, in turn, rented these properties as tenements to merchants and tradesmen, such as merchant John Keeling, of Norfolk, and mechanics Tom Bowery and John Wrenn. Anderson did the same in Yorktown, which practically became his fiefdom. An 1850 assessment of Anderson’s tenements and stores on Woodpecker Lane in Williamsburg put their worth at $1,875. In sum, only a minority of Williamsburg structures remained with the same family or individual for a long time; the majority were divided and/or rented and sold to a series of different owners, many of whom were in trade.

As Lawrence Larsen wrote, “almost every [city] claimed to have had a “Great Fire,” and Williamsburg was no exception. Periodic fires ravaged the town, depriving it of houses and some of the most important historic sites in the area. Yet, there was no fire engine. Ewing urged the town to acquire one, not just because it was useful but also
because it was forward-looking to have fire protection. Both Richmond and Petersburg had fire engines and companies, and since these cities served as models for all good Virginia towns, it was natural for Williamsburg to follow. The problem lay with fire insurance. Thanks to the careful endeavors of Robert Anderson, agent for two insurance companies, most houses had policies. But people discovered that it was often more lucrative to let a building burn down and collect insurance, which is what the owners of the Raleigh Tavern did in 1859.

There was a desire, however, for genuine improvement. Some contributors to the newspaper were warm to a corporation tax increase, if it were used to promote services and building. Lemuel Bowden, the wealthy, self-made lawyer, wanted to build a new residence to show his commitment to Williamsburg. His jack-of-all-trades brother, Henry, and masons from Richmond and Gloucester constructed a handsome, Baltimore brick home on Main Street, where it could easily be seen and admired. The choice of brick was significant, because it was more permanent. The heavy wrought iron fence around it was made at Tredegar Ironworks in Richmond, one of the largest industrial enterprises in the South. Ewing, who turned this project into a big news story, hoped it would inspire homeowners to improve the city.

Public Buildings

Ewing soon turned his attention from private building to more public efforts. One endeavor was a new courthouse that would comfortably house various courts, a clerk’s office, and a library. The courts constituted a large part in Williamsburg’s life and prosperity, drawing suits and spectators throughout the region, so it made sense to build a more modern building. Ewing applauded the venture, for he felt that a new courthouse
would reflect the town’s local power. Though lack of funds left it unfinished, the resulting building was still compared to a miniature state house. It was in a proper Greek style with two stories and an expansive porch. It stood out from the surrounding small wooden structures, especially the old crumbling powder magazine, a survivor of the colonial past. Now empty, the magazine was converted into a butcher and barbershop at the same time that the new courthouse was built. Part of it was also turned into a market house for the town’s trade and new market clerk. Williamsburg did not have enough money to build a real market house, but it still believed that it some outward sign of economic prosperity.

By urging creation of new services and better investments in land and building, Ewing was trying to instill a sense of civic pride and encourage communal thinking and planning. Although the results seemed mixed, returning ex-Williamsburg citizens noticed changes. Looking at the new courthouse, houses, and the commercial prosperity they represented, Professor Griffin, now of Madison College in Mississippi, wrote “Williamsburg must be greatly changed and I believe improved since I last saw it six years ago.” Many observers, including Ewing, believed Williamsburg held great potential. It had a great newspaper, there were new people in town, and there was growing interest in business. Ewing responded to Griffin, “We can say...that in six years from this time, [he] will scarce know the place.” As long as economic success was sustained and urbanization slowly advanced in Virginia, Williamsburg would continue to engage with the future.

Ewing placed great confidence in the presence of the Asylum and College and Williamsburg’s reputation as a literary, refined, and cosmopolitan town to fulfill this promise. In particular, the stately appearance of the Asylum revealed the town’s aesthetic
sensibility. The population was “an intellectual and educated one,” with Williamsburg “becoming sufficiently populous and progressive” to contain proper, public societies, preferably those that would improve and uplift.31 A proper town not only organized itself internally but also provided attractive social opportunities. Providing such social opportunities was taking part in progress and Ewing did not want Williamsburg to be left behind.

**Social Activities**

Williamsburg had always been an intensely social town. The old upper class had long given assemblies and balls for their family, friends, and political allies. They had also made pleasure excursions to nearby historic sites and places. For the new and old well-to-do in the nineteenth century, this party-giving and visiting continued. The militia, the Masonic Society, and the Jockey Club, which reflected the town’s love of horses and racing, were beloved social staples. Their membership included the town’s leading male citizens, who were, by their status and responsibilities, uniquely clubby.32

But an air of aristocratic exclusivity still clung to these groups, and editor Ewing had more modern and populist ideas in mind for the town’s social and intellectual life. The age emphasized personal improvement and civic participation. Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg, and other cities with which Williamsburg was associated, founded theaters, clubs, libraries, and large charitable organizations. Ewing believed that the serious and professional population of Williamsburg deserved similar amenities. He called for a town library— for “intellectual improvement”— and a bookstore.33 He regretted that there were none, a fact underscored by the many Richmond book advertisements in the newspaper. He felt that this lack was shameful because there were so many rich gentlemen and
educated merchants with their own private collections. They could make donations, and Petersburg, Richmond, and other Virginia booksellers could come to Williamsburg and sell their stationery and supplies, thereby injecting money into the town and encouraging similar efforts elsewhere.

Williamsburg also needed lyceums and lecture halls. "How dull it is in old Williamsburg" is a common exclamation of the pleasure seekers and the lovers of social intercourse" the newspaper wrote in 1857. There were several purposes for these amenities, not just the fact that they substituted for a theater, which was too expensive to maintain. They provided forums for the many college and town societies and visitor groups which sprouted up during the 1840s and 1850s. There was a YMCA, Youth's Missionary Society, and Youths Singing Association (who always sang "creditably"). Visiting musicians, like Signor Fabi and Madame O'Connor, lecturers, like Miss E. White, Shakespearian reader, and Oliver Baldwin, editor of the Richmond Dispatch, who talked about women's rights and other issues of the day, needed a place to speak to Williamsburg audiences. Lecturing professors needed to be accommodated. Fashionable photographers from Richmond also needed a place to take pictures and exhibit their products. Ewing hoped that, by providing suitable spaces for these educational entertainments, Williamsburg would discourage the ubiquitous low class rural minstrel shows and other acts which he thought degraded town life.

The Virginia Gazette tried to enhance this improving atmosphere by opening a Reading Room next to the office, where back issues and the "most important Commercial and Literary papers" would be available, as well as various college brochures from around the country. In turn, the Gazette gave copies of its issues to Boston, New York, Norfolk,
and Richmond newsrooms, and had its own agents in Norfolk, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The Norfolk agent was Simon Stubbs, a friend of George Southall’s. The Reading Room furthered the existing literary connections of Williamsburg citizens. William Overton, editor of the Washington Sentinel in Washington, D.C., married Rebecca McCandlish, Robert’s daughter. Shields & Ashburn, who published the American Beacon and Norfolk & Portsmouth Advertiser in Norfolk and printed bills and indentures for Williamsburg, were kin to the Southalls and Andersons.

Among the most powerful organizations in the South, churches were integral to fostering and supporting these social and cultural activities. With the disestablishment of Virginia’s Anglican Church in the 1780s, many different Protestant churches progressed. The old Bruton Parish became Episcopalian, the religion to which many townspeople still adhered, and was financed privately through donations and bank shares. In the nineteenth century, a number of religious revivals occurred which encouraged greater self-discipline and moral and intellectual gravity. This movement gave rise to an increase in denominations. A white Baptist congregation of seventy-five was organized in 1828. Under its first minister, lawyer Scervant Jones, “a man of exalted piety and recognized ability,” the group increased to 431. Next to the Baptists were the Methodists, Presbyterians, and a smaller group belonging to the Christian Church. Writing in 2000, local historian Rev. John Turner thought this church growth remarkable “for the size of the town.” Some eighteenth century visitors had thought Williamsburg almost godless, but by the 1830s, Ella Southall was reporting that there was a new spirit of religious inquiry that was draining society of its gaiety. A series of revivals was affecting Southern society, even old-fashioned Williamsburg. The actions of Susan Bowdoin, who
left $510 to the Bible Society and $500 to the Episcopalian Education Society in her will, became typical. By the 1850s the *Virginia Gazette's* constant trumpeting of Williamsburg's strong morality implied that this was already an established fact.

The growth of established religion was significant because it paralleled and encouraged serious interest in both economic and town improvement. By the 1830s, there were two benevolent societies, no doubt related to the churches, which a gazetteer had placed alongside the four merchant mills and manufactory as some of the town's great advancements. The Baptist Church ended up opening the only known Williamsburg library (other than students' miscellaneous collections at the college) which contained religious and "entertaining works." Rev. Young also formed a Library Association. Other organizations like the before-mentioned YMCA and other youth's groups probably originated from the churches. The Baptist Church also possessed lecture rooms, for visiting religious leaders and for college literary society celebrations. There were also rooms for the Williamsburg chapter of the Mount Vernon Association, one of the earliest preservation efforts in America and an appropriate endeavor for the history-conscious town.

Church members wished to possess the best and most modern structures in which to worship. In 1842, the Methodists demolished the Elkanah Dean house and erected a brick, Gothic-style church in its place. Like the new College building and Asylum's Gothic Tower, Gothic was a favorite choice in architecture. Not to be outdone, the Baptists, who had held meetings in the cramped, crumbling magazine, started to raise funds for a new church on Main Street in the middle of Williamsburg. The Baptists, "in our poverty," raised four or five thousand dollars, with help from other Williamsburg
denominations and possibly from outside sources. The church was designed in the Greek style, with handsome, white columns, and a huge flight of welcoming steps. Shaded by large trees, it was called it a “splendid house of worship.” The Baptist Church was dedicated in 1857 by the magnificently named Rev. Tiberian Gracchus Jones of Norfolk. Well-patronized fairs and grand suppers managed by the town’s women financed the building. The Presbyterians quickly created a subscription list for their own church, but the Civil War interrupted their plans. Ewing eagerly applauded these efforts in the \textit{Gazette}. 

By building churches for themselves, Williamsburg citizens were expressing their civic-mindedness. The \textit{Gazette} wrote “it is a rare thing here to find an individual who is not accustomed to attend some church.” As the only strong social presence in the town, the churches deserved suitable public accommodations and a lavishment of funds. They provided a mission for people and formed an umbrella under which voluntary societies could flourish. They also gave influence to well-to-do Williamsburg women like Mrs. Clopton (the schoolmistress), Mrs. Barziza, Mrs. Yerby (wife of the court/market clerk), Mrs. Barlow, Mrs. Deneufville (wife of another merchant), and Mrs. Lindsay who directed the churches’ activities and fund-raising appeals. Since Ewing and outside visitors praised the new church buildings as the great ornaments of Williamsburg, their modern facades and spirit reflected their importance in fashioning urban life in Williamsburg.

The churches undoubtedly had an influence in attracting the temperance cause to Williamsburg. One of the most renowned social reform movements of the antebellum era, it affected the entire country, and according to historian Ellen Eslinger, those who joined the movement in the South, as in the North, “belonged to the urban middle classes of
professionals, merchants, skilled tradesmen, and entrepreneurs. Williamsburg was no exception. Ewing expressed interest in temperance and always welcomed temperance speakers who came to Williamsburg. Professor Lucian Minor, a respected William and Mary teacher, was a well-known temperance advocate, a fact which dominated his obituary in the *Gazette* and the *Petersburg Express*. Lexington, another small college town and county seat, was also heavily involved in the temperance cause. Like Lexington, Williamsburg possessed a chapter of the Sons of Temperance, which boasted 15,000 members in Virginia alone. A surviving Williamsburg booklet from 1848, which belonged to lawyer/farmer Rob Armistead, indicated an elaborate system of philanthropy designed to preserve sobriety and fellow-feeling with members. How many Williamsburg people joined the organization is not known, but it is easy to discover why some did. People hoped that the “cumulative effects of temperance would foster a society conductive to good business—efficient, reliable, and moral” and would thus encourage the growth of “organized social and civil institutions,” which some felt Williamsburg needed.

**Slaves and Free Blacks**

Eslinger wrote that temperance was popular in the South partly because it helped to control the slaves. It is not certain whether this view applied to Williamsburg, but there was a desire to keep on eye on this large and worrisome population. Blacks, after all, made up the majority of Williamsburg’s and its surrounding counties’ population. In this regard, the churches had a large impact. A separate Baptist Church for slaves, held in a carriage house provided by the pious merchant Jesse Cole near the Asylum, had been operating for many years. But people complained that the services were so enthusiastic that the poor place appeared ready to collapse. There was also a noted lack of white
supervision. The main Baptist Church, ever mindful of the slaves' spiritual welfare, raised funds to build a proper brick one for them, which Ewing praised as a show of good feeling. The resulting structure, dedicated in 1856, was simple architecturally but hardly cheap. It seemed to house comfortably most of its five hundred or so members.

What did slavery look like in Williamsburg at this time? In his seminal *Slavery in the Cities*, Richard Wade posited that slavery in Southern cities was different from that found in the country, the former experiencing a decline. Although subsequent studies have qualified this view, the fact remains that there was a difference. This difference was the case in smaller towns, which Wade largely ignored in his study. Larry Seip, in his study of Alexandria, Louisiana, found that slavery, although popular, had characteristics of both the country and city. There was a large working free black population, a large hired slave market, but little decline in slave numbers. Alexandria was much like Williamsburg. By 1860, it had 1,600 inhabitants, with some stores, hotels, bars, three churches, a new courthouse, and a "sash and blind factory." Its public services were as undeveloped. Like Williamsburg, it "existed to fulfill the demands of the countryside," but it was, unlike Williamsburg, a booming riverside frontier town. It was one of those places to which many Tidewater people had moved.

The occupation of Williamsburg's slaves conformed well to Wade's and Alexandria's model. As Wade wrote, "the bulk of urban slaves were domestics, living in the master's house and doing the household chores." Most of Williamsburg's slaves were listed as house servants or semi-skilled houseworkers in the 1860 census. Indeed, people in Williamsburg referred to slaves as "servants," which could reflect the genteel nature of their occupation. Their duties are suggested by those of slave Eliza Baker, who did
housework, washed clothing, weeded the garden, sawed wood, milked the cow, and looked after the children of her masters. Field slaves usually lived in outlying plantations. Robert Waller and Robert Saunders, the wealthiest and largest slaveowners in Williamsburg, owned weavers who lived at Queens Creek and other places. As the county seat, Williamsburg traded and auctioned slaves just as it traded cows and horses for the local market. Richard Hansford, Vest's partner, was described as a "nigger trader," who sold carpenters for $400 and cooks and seamstresses for between $175 and $200. These good prices demonstrated the value placed on their skills.

Not everyone in Williamsburg owned slaves. Like other towns and cities, large slave-holding was confined to a small group, while the majority owned few or no slaves. A closely-packed town or city seemed to rule out large-scale slave-holding. In Williamsburg, the number of large slaveholders decreased over time. In the early 1780s, before the town's status changed, 14% owned eleven or more slaves, 19% owned between six and ten slaves, 50%, the largest number, owned between one and five slaves, and 16% owned no slaves (out of 134 taxpayers). By 1850, with 171 recorded taxpayers, the numbers changed. Thirty-four percent owned no slaves and 54% (essentially the same number as in the 1780s) owned one to five slaves, while only 7% owned six to ten slaves and 2% percent owned more than eleven. Since 1830, those owning six or more slaves declined, while those owning fewer than six to no slaves increased. Other places had higher numbers of non-slaveholders (more than fifty percent of people in Petersburg did not own slaves), but Williamsburg seemed to have a large number of whites too poor to become ratepayers, so the number of non-slaveholders may have been larger than recorded.
This did not mean that these Williamsburg citizens were bereft of labor when they needed it. Although she and her mother were owned by Col. Bassett, Eliza Baker was hired out to Mr. Bucktrout and then to Mr. Whiting, who was a simple sign painter. Baker emphasized that only “quality” people owned slaves; “plain folks,” like Whiting, hired them. Both Wade and Seip speculated about the importance of slave hiring in Southern towns and cities, but it was a difficult practice to pin down because of the lack of official records. Its prime importance was economic. It provided ready cash for the slave owner and workers for labor-strapped industries, and in the view of David Goldfield, played an important role in urban prosperity. In the early 1800s, Robert Anderson hired out several slaves to different people, including Job Mills, a boot and shoemaker formerly of Williamsburg, John Tabb of Petersburg, and L. H. Girardin of Richmond.57 The only “industries” in Williamsburg were the mills and castor oil factories, but they needed workers too. Robert Miller hired out his slave Charles Tabb to a Williamsburg mill. One of Parke Jones’ slaves was hired by Mr. Cowles for his mill, while there were advertisements for black and white laborers for a nearby timber mill. Anderson’s steamboat company certainly hired slaves as firemen and chambermaids, while others provided manual labor for the Asylum. Some Williamsburg citizens, like William Lindsey, advertised their slaves for hiring.58 Hiring out slaves gave even the poorest white individuals access to this labor resource.

Whether hired out slaves experienced greater independence is not known, but their free counterparts probably did. Free blacks held a nebulous position in Southern society. As masterless beings, they were eyed with suspicion. But their relative freedom allowed them to move more widely, and many gravitated towards towns and cities because of the
opportunities available there. This was the case in Alexandria, Louisiana, which saw a 500 percent increase in its free black population before the Civil War. In Williamsburg, there was also an increase in number, from eighty-five free blacks in 1822 to 121 in 1860. In contrast, the slave population declined slightly. There were 784 slaves listed in 1822, but in 1860 that number was 743. In James City County, the slave population steadily increased, along with the free black population.

There were more free women than free men. The reason for this was that domestic service played a larger role in the town. In fact, washerwoman was the top occupation listed in the 1860 census. At least three free black women, probably washerwomen in their youth, accumulated estates worth more than $1000. There was only one male, a blacksmith, who possessed similar worth. Free black women were more likely to head a household and own property. If they were fortunate in a master and mistress, they could obtain a large amount of property. Mary Stith bequeathed her shop to her three slaves, Nelly Bolling, Patsy Rowsey, and Beverley Rowsey, in 1815. The high number of free women was also the case in Alexandria, Louisiana, and in larger Southern cities.

There was also a good number of working free black men in Williamsburg as well. Seventeen rated as taxpayers in 1850. They tended to be fishermen, oystermen, boatmen, shoemakers, blacksmiths, and even servants, but few had estates equal to their female counterparts. It also seemed that some were employed by the town. Wade wrote that in Southern cities "municipal works depended heavily on slave labor. Gangs of Negroes graded, paved, and cleaned streets, built bridges, collected garbage, dug canals and sewers, and generally provided the muscle for city projects." Blacks provided cheap
labor for cash-strapped councils and it was a way for them to earn a little money. Newspaper reports in Williamsburg indicated that free blacks gathered dung, hauled trash, dug ditches and wells, and did other jobs. This could be dangerous work. In 1855, free black Lexi Brown drowned in a well he was digging for the county.63

Slaves and free blacks made homes wherever they could. As Wade observed, “scattered around the city, in sheds, basements, attics, small houses, and single rooms, bondsmen improvised shelter.”64 The same was true in Williamsburg. Those blacks fortunate enough to own houses lived beside or between white families, like the Debris frame house which was close to the modernized Bright property and its “spacious” green lawn. Others lived behind stores, in yards, and in kitchens.65 Professor John Millington described how “some negroes” lived in the outbuildings of his house (formerly the Wythe House) and cultivated the gardens.66 There was also a suggestion in the 1860 census that some free blacks and poor white laborers lived under the same roof. This interaction extended to public spaces. Townspeople used the turrets of the Asylum’s Gothic Tower, the slave patient quarters, to enjoy a panoramic view of the town. Although slaves and whites had their own churches, there was still a sizeable black (probably free) membership of the main Baptist congregation, and whites often used the African Baptist Church as a meeting place and extra lecture hall. However, there was segregated seating.

Williamsburg was a closely-packed town with not much new building and so whites and blacks were bound to live in close proximity.

In spite of prejudice against them, some free blacks were able to carve out an independent existence in Williamsburg. John Dipper, who was freed in 1816, had some standing in Williamsburg, for he was a licensed preacher, did unspecified work for the
town, was a taxpayer in the 1820s, and owned some property. He even occasionally owned slaves, a not uncommon practice in urban places because it prevented the selling of relatives and provided an opportunity for emancipation. In Petersburg, a third of freed slaves after 1806 was emancipated by free blacks. Dipper had a friendly correspondence with well-to-do white men (one letter was about African colonization, with which he was somehow associated), and Lemuel Bowden acted as his lawyer when he was sued in the 1830s. But by that time, he was living in New Jersey because the harsh post-Nat Turner rebellion laws forbade free blacks from residing in Virginia. But the continuing presence of free blacks in Williamsburg after 1831 revealed that the laws were not enforced. Some free blacks were too entrenched in the town to leave. Zizi [Parsons] appears in both the Williamsburg Land Tax and Personal Tax lists as the owner of one or two slaves and horses during the 1820s and 1830s. She owned the Richard Crump House until 1847, when she gave or sold it to another free black woman, Margaret Parsons, possibly a relative. Zizi was remarkable for her longevity, for it was said that she died at age 111, a witness to the Revolution, and she was a member of the Roman Catholic Church. There was also the amiable Rocktilda Rollinson, a washerwoman, who lived on Henry Street surrounded by gardens and fruit trees, from which she presumably sold fruit and vegetables to make extra money. The Debris family, whose worth was equal to that of any white tradesman, and who made up part of a small black elite, lived in the town for several generations. Although a small county town, Williamsburg seemed to offer the modest opportunities that any urban free black could enjoy.

Little is known about what Williamsburg slaves thought about their lives. Eliza Baker, who stayed in Williamsburg as a paid servant to the Vest family after the Civil War,
had fond memories of some citizens. She could, however, express bitterness about the ceaseless hard work and the lack of education for slaves. Virginia enacted a number of tough laws against slaves and their movement, especially in the 1850s. Williamsburg slaves could not go too far and had a curfew of 9 PM on all days except Sunday, when they could move freely. Baker claimed that the “quality” coldly used their slaves as saleable assets to keep up appearances, that is go to the Springs, buy a carriage, or keep a daughter at the Academy. Certainly, some slaves fled to the North when war broke out (“Dandy” Jim Weaver, a coachman/footman and one of those black “characters” beloved of whites at the time, settled in Boston), but others remained and guarded their masters’ property because they knew no other life.70 John Dipper seemed to long for Williamsburg while in exile in New Jersey, but there was little he could do to get back.

The attitude of slaveowners towards their slaves could vary. Eliza Baker emphasized that there were good and bad masters. Some had extremely negative views of blacks, especially free ones. The otherwise progressive Ewing, on a visit to Petersburg, remarked “we believe Williamsburg is not far behind [Petersburg], for [negroes] are large in number, and as impudent as they can possibly be.” He thought there were far too many of them for the town’s good. Others had a more paternalist view. The townspeople’s intention in building a church for slaves was not only to control them but to also to ensure that they were spiritually healthy. Reverend William Lindsay, originally from Richmond, was Pastor of the African Church, and on one day baptized forty-four blacks in College Creek. The approving Gazette pointed out that while Southern masters were generous in giving their slaves church time, new holiday apparel, and “everything necessary to make them comfortable and happy,” Northern blacks had no one to look after them.71 Dr. Galt
II, who was forward-thinking on the treatment of slaves, nevertheless believed that they were less prone to mental disease because they did not have the stresses of independent living. This "fatherly" feeling derived from the fact that most slaves in Williamsburg were servants who, because of the nature of their positions, were intimately tied to their master and his family. Sometimes these close bonds were expressed openly. When Aunt Rachel, the Prentis family's old nurse, died in 1837, Rob Saunders, who knew her well, wrote: "thus had departed as benevolent a heart--and as pure and upright character as can be found in any walk of life...we feel her loss very sensibly." She had lived as an urban slave, moving around Norfolk, Richmond, and Williamsburg.

But there was also within the town a great fear of slaves and free blacks. Williamsburg's whites and blacks lived closely together, and whites were keenly aware that they themselves were outnumbered. Although the number of whites and slaves was practically equal by 1860 (the result of an increase in whites), there was the large number of free blacks with whom to contend. The need to control the slaves to prevent rebellion was expressed in several ways. Townspeople discouraged slave gatherings outside of church. William Bowden's slave Billy, William Galt's slave Sam, Jesse Cole's slave James, James Hay's slave Billy, and Philip Barziza's slave Robin were arrested by the constable and charged with unlawful assembly in 1820. By the 1850s, Williamsburg had two policemen (another innovation) whose duties, other than preventing crime, involved tracking down escaped slaves and whipping slaves and free blacks for transgressing laws. The newspaper printed stories of slave rebellions (or rumored ones) in Virginia and other states. The supposed rebellion of Christmas 1856 elsewhere in the South was widely discussed, as was the John Brown episode in 1859. The Gazette claimed and condemned
the fact that Williamsburg slaves were aware of the events in western Virginia and freely expressed their opinions. The paper urged vigilance and the removal of "vagrants." These stories were accompanied by news items about criminal slaves and free blacks, whose deeds sent shudders through the white population. But as Tynes Cowan pointed out, Williamsburg whites were also wedded to the idea that slaves were happy in the system, so that rumored slave rebellions were sometimes treated by the newspaper as figments of hysterical women's imaginations—although precautions taken by the community indicated otherwise.74 Williamsburg's slaves were decidedly quiet and untroubled. For his part, William R. Galt, a Norfolk cousin of the Galt family, did not believe that slaves loved their masters. Galt had learned this from bitter experience. His father lost his castor oil factory in a fire started by his own hired slave workers during Nat Turner's revolt in 1831 and never recovered the business. Galt, who became a schoolteacher, moved to western Virginia, where he became decidedly skeptical of slavery. Surely some in Williamsburg took the same position, but, like the cashier of the local bank with whom Galt discussed his ideas, were reluctant to broadcast it.75

At least publicly, abolition was not a popular cause. Despite his progressive leanings, Ewing never expressed support for it. Indeed, slaves and free blacks were nothing but nuisances whose impudence, like the "negro" on a horse who accidentally knocked down a lady in Main Street, was infamous. He was particularly bothered by the role of free blacks in Williamsburg society. Because free blacks, "with whom our city unfortunately abounds," were the only people who performed public services, Ewing feared that they would become "[our] lords and masters."76 Sloughing these duties onto blacks was an expression of laziness and of the town's lackadaisical attitude to
improvement. The town’s civic authorities should be responsible for community health and welfare, but the presence of blacks and their willingness to do others’ work for them hindered the development of government services. In Ewing’s view, free blacks (and perhaps even some slaves) had no place in a town eager to modernize and attract new people. When the magazine no longer served as a makeshift church, Ewing advocated its case as a barbershop, although Williamsburg already had a popular barber, a mulatto named Leroy Randolph, who was the only free black mentioned in the newspaper’s directory. It was possible that Ewing wanted Randolph out. However, most of the town seemed to tolerate free blacks (Zizi, one of the most interesting and docile free blacks, received a good obituary).

Ewing also had a continuing battle against whom he dubbed the “old foggies,” the elites of the town. These were the villains of reform. They preferred “darkness” and the obscurity of a rural hamlet, while Ewing wished to bring community feeling, prosperity, and a youthful spirit to Williamsburg. His modern vision for Williamsburg made him enemies, some in town government, who removed their patronage from his newspaper, and if Ewing is to be believed, made threats against him. Ewing, like any good curmudgeon, loved to regale Gazette readers with stories of his fights with the Common Hall and backward-looking citizens.

His battles took on the language of class. Ewing fingered the “old foggies” as the “nabobs” of Williamsburg—the old planter elite (otherwise not named). He wrote that “the rich [have] been a curse, rather than a blessing, for, by their extreme selfishness and avarice, they have effectually blocked up the avenues of enterprise, and have played the petty...tyrant over the industrial community.” He resented the “social distinctions” that
formed "a marked and peculiar feature of [our] ancient hamlet."\textsuperscript{78} Years later, Martha Vandegrift also observed that "lines in Williamsburg were closely drawn then."\textsuperscript{79} Such class differences were typical of many cities and towns, and they reflected the comparative complexity of Williamsburg society at this time. It must be good to be a "city father," Ewing mused, with gaping boys and negroes following behind, but they drained vitality from the town because they were out for themselves. They did not care if the roads were not mended or if the taxes were unjustifiably high. Another problem with Williamsburg was that there were too many office seekers for the jobs available at the Asylum, College, and Common Hall. Ewing sarcastically wrote of the detectable "office-leer" in the eyes of downtown men, who would do anything to be a "toad-master" to the influential. It seemed that country people looked to the town for opportunity, in the same way that so many people flocked to larger cities looking for better jobs and wages. Ewing saw them as leeches draining the town's honest lifeblood. Ewing enjoyed exposing the excesses of the Asylum board and other corruptions. In this, Williamsburg was almost a miniature Tammany Hall, with its suspect contracts, nepotism, bribes, and eagle-eyed muckrakers eager to reveal all. At least that was the picture Ewing wished to paint.

Ewing preferred tradesmen and mechanics. They represented the dedication to good business which he celebrated constantly in his newspaper. "Every boy, " Ewing announced, "should be taught some manual occupation...law, physic, and pulling teach are all the go" but this was not enough to sustain society. "Mechanics who are working men...are...the pride and glory of any community." He could only look at the "public works" projects like the churches, College, and Asylum, or the little York River mill town of Biglersville, with its mill workers, stores, residences, and its owner Mr. Bigler (from New
York), or the improved settlement at Burnt Ordinary with “neat white houses,” for
evidence of the mechanics’ spirit. Yet, they were not always approved by the “nabobs.”
“Independence” wrote to the Gazette that it was common for wealthy types to ruin men of
moderate means “by stripping them of their property and secondly driving them from the
place.” He believed that “four-fifths” of Williamsburg agreed with him, but were too
cowed to speak out.80

Politics

Ewing’s struggle with the “foggies” also acquired a political edge. In this, he was
following a pattern of divisive politics that affected Williamsburg throughout the
antebellum period. In the 1790s, George Tucker remembered that “the parties were nearly
balanced in numbers and talents” and that the people, mindful of their past, enjoyed
politicking and arguing over issues.81 National, state, and local elections were great events
in the town. One story about a tie between two gentlemen running for the Virginia
Assembly that was only broken by the sudden introduction of an elderly voter (who voted
against the incumbent) was fairly typical of the suspense engendered by elections.82 Yet
Tucker laughed at it. While it was true that people held different beliefs, politics was
“seldom...treated as a serious business.” Politics “only served to give a little zest and
variety to conversation.”

This was too shallow an image. Historians have come to appreciate the diversity
of Southern antebellum politics and its implications for the existence and strength of
Southern urban identity. Not all of the South’s politics revolved around sectionalism or
state rights. In truth, the South possessed a “vigorous” two-party system (the monolithic
South came after the Civil War) which fought over economic and social development.
This tendency was stronger in cities and towns, which were the seats of economic prosperity and professional influence.

The Whigs saw themselves as the party of growth and progress, and since the 1830s, Williamsburg was predominantly Whig. It is not hard to see why. The previous chapters have shown that the town had an interest in commercial and cultural development consistent with that party’s views. The people who furthered these aims also were party members. Charles Sellers, Jr. found that the Whigs were supported “mainly by the commercial groups of the cities and towns, with their allied lawyers and editors.”

Sellers saw the urban middle classes as the key to Whig power in the South, rather than the planters, who were originally thought to be the main drivers behind it. The urban region where Williamsburg was located—Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk—provided unbroken Whig majorities from 1834 to 1840. There was already a remarkable sympathy and similarity of purpose between Williamsburg and its surrounding cities. Robert Anderson and George Southall exemplified the core beliefs of Williamsburg Whigs. Anderson was an intensely political man who continually ran for local and state positions and organized political events. Southall, a wealthy lawyer, also ran for office in the 1840s. Anderson, like many other Whigs, was previously a Federalist who wrote pamphlets about the importance of national unity. He favored a national financial policy (he felt that Williamsburg was too isolated from financial centers to develop), internal improvements (he had spearheaded efforts to establish steamboats and a railroad), and a more liberal approach to relations between eastern and western Virginia (he was only one of four Williamsburg citizens to vote for the 1828 Constitution, which gave more political representation to the west). Like many Southern Whigs, his actions were influenced by
Andrew Jackson, whose promotion of “mobocracy” offended the urban professional elite. Several anti-Jackson meetings were held in Williamsburg and the town sent delegates to state anti-Jackson organizations. Those who attended ranged from the Semples, Lightfoots, and Durfeys, to newcomers or middle class men like Walter Webb and Henry Edloe. Anderson and Southall disliked Jackson too because they resented his tendencies to aggravate sectionalism (his fight with South Carolina over the tariff), but their feelings were qualified by their own criticisms of nullification (they supported the tariff to protect domestic manufactures), so Anderson supported him on that issue. Nullification was actually a heated topic in Williamsburg, probably because of its economic consequences, and there was little agreement about its legality. Anderson also had a more practical reason for his stance: he had a stepson in the navy who wanted a promotion, so he and his family had to act friendly toward Jackson.

Williamsburg’s was a political culture which celebrated participation and economic improvement. C.R. Bruff and Joseph Repiton, friends of Anderson’s, started the Phoenix Gazette and the Phoenix Ploughboy newspapers, which, despite their ostensible independence, favored Whig views. The Ploughboy’s 157 subscribers came from Richmond, Norfolk, and the Tidewater area and were of “liberal views.” Bruff emphasized the role of newspapers in representing such men. Williamsburg’s Whigs were quite social, establishing various organizations, especially Clay Clubs, which also sprang up in other cities. Henry Clay, whose signature policies were the American System and the call for national unity, caught the imagination of many Williamsburg voters. Benjamin Dew, brother of the College president, saw Clay “as the coming political savior of his country. Let the friends of peace and order, of law and the Constitution, rally &
valiantly fight under [his banner]." There was a majority of 16 (66-50) for Clay in Williamsburg in the 1844 General Election.

However, the Democrats were not completely eclipsed. An anonymous writer in an April 1828 pamphlet lamented Williamsburg’s rejection of Andrew Jackson despite the support of some College faculty, three medical graduate students, six lawyers, one ex-Mayor, one regimental officer, two Staff and one ex-Staff Field Officers, two Commonwealth's Attorneys, Asylum officers, one “Foreign ex-Justice,” two Delegates, and one “Grand Judge.” Whigs could draw support from the same kind of people, and in some cases, there was little in the way of class and economic status to distinguish between the two parties. Although Democrats disagreed with Whigs on slavery, sectionalism, and the powers of the national government, many advocated internal improvements, which belied their provincial image. Thomas Roderick Dew, a notorious Democrat who alienated Whig citizens with his outspoken pro-slavery views, also wrote in support of state-sponsored roads, bridges, and railroads. The enterprising Lemuel Bowden, Thomas Martin (the first Gazette editor), and Dr. John Minson Galt II were also Democrats. In truth, as historian William Shade wrote, neither the Whigs nor the Democrats held the advantage on progress and development. Whether the battle was over who favored change at the College or who wanted greater accountability in the Asylum’s government, reform dominated the debate.

While the Whigs slowly declined in number in the 1850s, economic and social development remained central to the town’s politics. When changes to allow wider political participation were proposed to the Virginia Constitution in 1850, Williamsburg’s voters voted in favor. Even the conservative Robert Saunders, who ran as the town’s
delegate to the convention, supported a more liberal suffrage. Williamsburg, though well-versed in the past, still wanted to be part of Virginia’s modern political life.

But for some, the conventional political system did not go far enough. Ewing, whose calls for internal improvement were already well known, sought a different political framework for his particular brand of reform. A former Democrat, he was disillusioned with the status quo and with the old (planter) elite that still possessed influence in the town. He yearned for the urban, progressive Whigs, but they were now split into Southern and Northern factions because of slavery and so were no longer a national party. He shared a distaste for sectionalism and for the political infighting that continually afflicted Williamsburg. He claimed that it hurt the business, efficiency, and prosperity of the town and its institutions. With the struggling state of Williamsburg’s physical appearance and services (in a candid article, Ewing wrote that the town had “dilapidated houses, muddy sidewalks, a crumbling whipping post, an uncompleted courthouse, a powder house”), disunity was lethal. 

Ewing and his allies turned to the American Party, a new political alliance that swept many Virginia towns and cities (including neighboring states) in the 1850s. It was a replacement for the dying Whig party and the Southern equivalent of the Know-Nothings, an anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant party. Norfolk, Whig since the 1830s, had an especially strong group who won control of the city government in 1854 and retained control of several offices in subsequent years. They resented foreigners and the competition for jobs they created among the Norfolk workforce. Norfolk had for years sought economic prosperity, economic independence, and an effective city government, and the American Party appeared to offer that opportunity. Although the American
Party won no national races, it did gain urban and local seats.

It seemed odd that the American Party would gain support in Williamsburg. The town had no sizeable foreign or Catholic population. Although there was some unfavorable mention of immigrants in pamphlets, Williamsburg was quite welcoming of immigrants, with Ewing and his predecessor condemning bigotry and praising the enterprising spirit of foreigners. The editors could well have been thinking of the Hofheimmer brothers, three German Jews who sold furniture and other goods and were sufficiently assimilated to join the Masonic Society; or Jonas Heller, another Jew, who worked as an agent for a Northern Jewish luxury goods merchant.94 Just a few years before, Know-Nothingsm was anathema. What attracted Ewing and his friends to the American Party was its pro-Union sympathies, support for economic development in the South, and middle-class values. The National American of Richmond commented that “the great middling-classes—the woof and warp of this country—are moving. They are convinced the nation wants a ‘safe man’ and they see none more so than Mr. [Millard] Fillmore [the party’s presidential nominee in 1856].” Ewing enjoyed criticizing Williamsburg’s “aristocrats” and even urged the working men of Williamsburg and nearby counties to vote against one because he would leave them “with only 10 cents day labor.”95 To Ewing, the American Party was for the socially and economically mobile. That the rise of the American Party coincided with the rise of city government in nearby towns and cities made the Party doubly attractive.

The American Party drew the middle-class and working men in Williamsburg. A list of party attendees and convention delegates included disaffected Whigs, Democrats, and newcomers: Goodrich Durfey, Robert Cole, Lemuel Bowden (and his family), Talbot
Sweeney, Rob Saunders, Thomas Deneufville, Dr. Ed Camm, William Yerby, Alexander Lytle (the New Yorker mill owner), the Clowes, the Barhams, Alexander Coke, S. J. Pendleton, James Joyner, humble Tom Whiting (Eliza's temporary master), and many others high and low. It was, in its own way, a democratic movement. Some of these men already had close ties with Williamsburg's economic life and the newspaper, but seemed somehow dissatisfied. They wanted some form of government reform. They were moderate states righters who did not care for demagoguery on either side, although their ire was mostly directed against abolitionists. Talbot Sweeney denounced "Fremontism and Northern humanitarianism" and believed that they, not Southerners, threatened the Union. That the American Party became identified with "Southern Commercial Independence" made outside agitation even more unbearable. It is easy to put this reaction solely down to defensiveness over slavery, but there had always been a strain in Williamsburg politics that emphasized national unity and the common good, largely because it ensured uninterrupted business and trade, growth and development.

In the end, the American Party went down to defeat in the presidential election of 1856 and never possessed the same power again in Williamsburg. As a third party, it did not have a chance nationally. In August 1858, Ewing left for Norfolk. Norfolk readers made up a large percentage of the Gazette's readership (Williamsburg's Common Hall was the butt of many jokes) and Ewing apparently felt he would be more comfortable there. He merged his newspaper with the Norfolk Commercial Examiner. His apprentice, Charles Lively, a native of Williamsburg, opened his own Virginia Gazette soon after because he believed that Williamsburg deserved a strong voice. Lively continued to document cases of outstanding enterprise and called for improvement when he felt
encouragement was needed. One of his chief causes was a Williamsburg Agricultural Society, where the town could show off its best produce and homespun.

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By the middle of the nineteenth century, a growing number of Williamsburg residents wanted their town to rise above the perceived backward agrarian world around them. They wanted to make their town more sophisticated and progressive. To accomplish these objectives they felt that before any such social and cultural refinement could take place, the town infrastructure had to be revitalized by removing dilapidated and unsightly structures, and at the same time, by constructing new buildings to replace them. Although Williamsburg already had strong social interrelationships among its older families, “reformers” such as Virginia Gazette editor Ewing and others wanted to transform their town’s social relationships to include self-help and civic improvement organizations. As a result of these efforts, such amenities as libraries, lyceums, and temperance clubs became part of the town’s landscape. Moreover, the establishment of a variety of stable and disparate religious denominations began to take hold and flourish and provide the town with an intellectual and cosmopolitan flavor. As in many growing towns of antebellum Virginia, Williamsburg also became home to a vigorous multi-political party establishment which reflected the town’s sophistication and national interest. All of these changes made Williamsburg an excellent example of an advancing antebellum urban center amidst an agricultural hinterland.
Notes for Chapter III

1. *Virginia Gazette*, February 1, 1855


3. Almanac of 1822 in the Tucker-Coleman Papers; *Virginia Gazette*, July 1, 1857; U.S. Census, United States Population Schedule for the Eighth Census, 1860, James City County, Virginia

4. Brownell and Goldfield, *City in Southern History*, 67

5. Goldfield, *Regions*, 202

6. Robert Anderson to George Page, March 30, 1855, Business Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

7. *Virginia Gazette*, September 15, 1853

8. Ibid., June 2, 1858; September 6, 1855

9. Carson, *We Were There*, 102

10. Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 16

11. Lebsock, *Free Women*, 3-4

12. *Virginia Gazette*, September 27, 1855; September 20, 1855; February 21, 1856; May 16, 1856


14. *Virginia Gazette*, August 7, 1856

15. George Southall to D.B. Wakeman, New Jersey, May 5, 1837, Southall Papers

16. *Virginia Gazette*, January 12, 1854; December 13, 1855; February 7, 1856; May 16, 1856

17. Ibid., June 7, 1855; July 17, 1856; August 5, 1857; August 12, 1857

18. Robert Saunders to Joseph Prentis, November 18, 1818, and August 21, 1818, Webb-Prentis Papers

19. Robert Saunders to Joseph Prentis, August 9, 1824; Receipt of Edwin Lee, agent of
Francis Thornton of Baltimore, August 13, 1824; George Bowdoin to Joseph Prentis, December 4, 1844, Webb-Prentis Papers

20. William Prentis to Judge Joseph Prentis, April 18, 1804, Webb-Prentis Papers

21. Indenture, February 1, 1823, Galt Papers


23. Indenture, April 26, 1841, Estate Papers, Robert Anderson Papers

24. John Keeling to Robert Anderson, November 11, 1834; Indenture with Tom Bowery, December 13, 1836; Indenture with John Wrenn, November 5, 1845; Robert Anderson Papers

25. Assessment, September 24, 1850, Estate Papers, Robert Anderson Papers


29. *Ibid.*, February 1, 1855; July 1, 1857


31. *Ibid.*, April 27, 1854; November 3, 1853

32. David Goldfield wrote that “voluntary associations were important to the process of urbanization.” Richmond’s Board of Trade “defined urban needs, lobbied for urban interests before local and state lawmakers, and served as a clearing house for information by establishing reading rooms and libraries.” Williamsburg’s smaller and more informal groups did similar things (Brownell and Goldfield, *City in Southern History*, 61)

33. *Virginia Gazette*, November 3, 1853

34. *Ibid.*, January 8, 1857; April 27, 1854

35. Philip Dougherty to Robert Anderson, April 19, 1839, Robert Anderson Papers; *Virginia Gazette*, May 17, 1855; March 12, 1857; April 16, 1857; January 22, 1856

36. *Virginia Gazette*, March 9, 1859; May 4, 1859; April 1, 1855; January 20, 1856

37. Charles, “Recollections of Williamsburg,” 23
38. Maccubin, *Williamsburg*, 112

39. Ella Southall to George Southall, February 8, 1832, Southall Papers

40. Will of Susan Bowdoin, 1835, Prentis Papers

41. Carson, *We Were There*, 106

42. *Virginia Gazette*, April 13, 1854, October 26, 1859

43. *Ibid.*, August 24, 1853

44. Charles, “Recollections of Williamsburg,” 33

45. John Leyburn to Juliana Dorsey, August 3, 1857; Subscription List, 1860 (to build and organize a Presbyterian Church in Williamsburg), Dorsey-Coupland Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary


47. *Virginia Gazette*, July 21, 1858; Professor Minor’s support for temperance reflected his modernity. On a visit to New England, Minor wrote, “those Northern states have very far the start of us Virginians in almost all the constituents of civilization...They...possess better organized social and civil institutions.” (Dabney, *Virginia*, 277)

48. *Constitution and By-Laws of Williamsburg Division*, (no. 91) *Sons of Temperance* (Richmond: H.K. Ellyson, Printer, 1848)

49. Eslinger, “Antebellum Liquor Reform,” 165


51. *Virginia Gazette*, February 1, 1855


55. “A List of Taxable Articles in the City of Williamsburg, 1783,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., Vol. 23 (1914), 133-142; Personal Property Tax for 1850, Personal Property Tax Records, 1783-1861. Copy in John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

56. Lebsock, *Free Women*, 153

57. Robert Anderson to Joseph Prentis, February 22, 1814; Robert Anderson to Joseph Prentis, March 22, 1811, Webb-Prentis Papers

58. *Virginia Gazette*, February 2, 1854; September 28, 1859; June 26, 1856


60. Mary A. Stephenson, *Mary Stith Shop* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1948), 3-4


62. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 44

63. *Virginia Gazette*, May 17, 1855

64. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 67


66. John Millington to Kate Millington, July 20, 1859, Millington Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

67. Lebsock, *Free Women*, 96

68. John Andrews to John Dipper, May 8, 1833; Robert Saunders to John Dipper, March 27, 1835; Lemuel Bowden to John Dipper, August 14, 1835; John Dipper Papers, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia

69. Richard Crump House; *Virginia Gazette*, November 30, 1859

71. *Virginia Gazette*, October 4, 1855; July 15, 1857


73. Constable notice, December 26, 1820, Robert Anderson Papers


75. “Reminiscences” (1888), William R. Galt Papers, Galt Papers

76. *Virginia Gazette*, May 19, 1858; September 20, 1855

77. *Ibid.*, December 11, 1856; July 1, 1857

78. *Ibid.*, June 3, 1857; July 1, 1857

79. Vandegrift, “Williamsburg in 1844-45,” 2

80. *Virginia Gazette*, September 18, 1856; April 21, 1858; June 29, 1859; June 10, 1857; Carson, *We Were There*, 116

81. Tucker, *Valley*, 51

82. *Phoenix Gazette, or the Williamsburg Intelligencer*, March 1825


84. For example, Richard Coke to Voters of Accomack, April 21, 1832, Political Papers, Robert Anderson Papers, announced that Robert Anderson was running for the Virginia Senate as a “National Republican” (formerly a Federalist Republican) who was in favor of “domestic industry” and Henry Clay

85. Convention Poll, April 25, 1828, Political Papers, Robert Anderson Papers. The three other men voting “yes” were John Hutchings, Archer Brooks, and Walker Hubbard, all mechanics.

86. Leonard Henley to Robert Anderson, January 20, 1828, Political Papers, Robert Anderson Papers, sent copies of the proceedings of the Citizens of James City County opposed to the election of Andrew Jackson. This correspondence group had contacts in Williamsburg, Richmond, and Norfolk (records of meetings on December 15, 1827, and January 16 and October 13, 1828); Anderson served as a delegate to an anti-Jackson meeting in Richmond (Robert Anderson to Thomas Coleman, January 13, 1828); Williamsburg also held a barbecue for B.B. Randolph, who famously “tweaked” Andrew Jackson’s nose on July 20, 1833. Those attending included W.W. Vest, Jesse Cole,
George McCandlish, William Moody, and Richard Coke.

87. The most moving pamphlet which Anderson wrote was on March 18, 1833, in which he "repudiated" both Nullification, Secession...the Union is a sheet anchor of our Happiness"; he supported the tariff despite opposition, and the National Bank, and denied the right of states to secede or to nullify laws. Because Jackson and Van Buren were staunch in their opposition to South Carolina, he had to support their administrations, and while he admired Senator Calhoun, "I lament, however, sincerely lament, his present infatuation."

88. The nullification controversy upset one Jamestown jubilee. Some people complained that the celebratory supper at the Raleigh Tavern was really a nullification rally. A supporter of the Jackson administration who offered the toast was received poorly, which Thomas Peachy, the dinner's president, ascribed to drunken "incivility," not politics (David James Kiracofe, "The Jamestown Jubilees: "State Patriotism" and Virginia Identity in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 110, no. 1 (2002), 64-5


91. Political Pamphlet, "Most Deplorable Catastrophe!" April 1828, Political Papers, Robert Anderson Papers. Williamsburg actually did vote for Jackson, 36-26, while Richmond and Elizabeth City voted for John Quincy Adams (*Phoenix Ploughboy*, April 1828), but Bruff excused the Williamsburg vote on the basis that seven Adams men were unavailable and others refused to vote (C. S. Bruff to Robert Anderson, November 2, 1828, Joseph Repiton Papers, Robert Anderson Papers)

92. *Virginia Gazette*, March 31, 1828

93. Parramore, *Norfolk*, 180-1

94. Maccubin, *Williamsburg*, 115

95. *Virginia Gazette*, June 26, 1856

96. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1856
CONCLUSION

The Civil War left Williamsburg in a wretched condition. The town had been the scene of a major battle and had endured three years of Union occupation. The post-war period witnessed terrible economic times in a broken community. Formerly successful professionals and farmers were now either dead or had little to leave to their heirs; businesses had dried up; and capital and labor were impossible to find to renew fortunes lost during the war. Those left tried to revitalize the college and the other schools that had flourished in Williamsburg during antebellum times, but most of these efforts failed; the college was even closed for nearly twelve years. Williamsburg slipped back into obscurity and economic stagnation—a situation which, sadly and inaccurately, defined its place in history until the Rockefeller-funded restoration revived the city’s fortunes in the 1930s.

In contrast, following the Revolutionary War, Williamsburg saw a remarkable transformation despite the removal of the capital and disruption from military actions. Town natives as well as individuals who moved into the town saw the possibilities opened by the economic developments of the nineteenth century. A group of up-and-coming men, members neither of the old gentry nor of the poor classes, were united by their desire for personal wealth and economic improvement for the area, and so determined strategies for exploiting the agricultural and land resources of the town and country. These strategies included making internal improvements—railroads, canals, and steamboats—to link the
town to its region, surrounding cities like Norfolk and Petersburg, and more distant markets. The leaders’ efforts were rewarded with an influx of city, town, and country mechanics and laborers who offered needed support services and the potential for further growth in Williamsburg’s population and influence.

Williamsburg also made use of its institutional and intellectual resources. An expanding urban professional base in the South wanted good schools for its children, and Williamsburg was well able to fill this need through the College of William and Mary and the schools and academies that abounded in the town. Virginia also needed public institutions for treating the mentally ill, and Williamsburg met this need by renovating, modernizing, and expanding its old Asylum to accommodate a large patient population. Like other cities and towns which became known for specific functions, Williamsburg used its position as education center and as center for the treatment of the mentally ill as a vehicle for creating and maintaining connections with the larger world.

As some citizens realized, Williamsburg’s economic and institutional endeavors would come to nothing if they were not advertised or made to contribute to the town’s aggrandizement. The town revived the Virginia Gazette, which became both a booster and a mirror of progress for Williamsburg. There was also a sense that without infrastructure reforms and development of new social amenities that strengthened ties among residents, Williamsburg could not reach its potential. This ambition for greater things for the town was reflected in the political preferences of many town leaders, who favored Parties that supported national and regional economic development.

If a place can be called a “city” because it organizes its resources, provides economic and social opportunities to its inhabitants, and offers a chance for its people to
reach beyond narrow confines to a larger world, then antebellum Williamsburg was a city. As the nineteenth century progressed, Williamsburg went beyond merely providing a residence for wealthy farmers to become a place that supported interconnecting legal, business, and communication services, as well as fairly sophisticated social and political activities and organizations. Williamsburg was dependent in certain ways on its larger surrounding cities, but it also contributed greatly to its immediate region.

Can lessons about the nature of Southern distinctiveness be drawn from antebellum Williamsburg? In one sense, no, for in their small corner of Virginia, the townspeople expressed economic aspirations that were no different from those of other Americans. They started businesses, joined and dissolved social and professional organizations, sought personal and professional opportunities locally and in the outside world, and argued with each other over what political policies were most likely to ensure prosperity.

On the other hand, in Virginia, urbanization was on a much smaller scale than in the North, the boundaries between town and country were blurred, the work force included an enslaved population, and there was no significant competition between the native-born and foreigners for jobs. Because towns in Virginia were geographically dispersed, they both worked together and competed with each other. Williamsburg, for example, while seeing itself as part of a region made up of Richmond, Norfolk, and Petersburg, at the same time had a tendency to feel independent of the other cities and in competition with them for population and resources. Though the new model for urbanization allows historians to come to a better understanding of the South, it cannot overcome the real differences—which were made painfully obvious by the Civil War—that
existed between the South and the North.
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