

The Capital Cities of Early Virginia

1. As the colony of Virginia grew, the needs of its people changed. The original capital located at Jamestown was plagued by problems. The drinking water was contaminated by the salt water of the surrounding river and bay. This in addition to mosquito born diseases, dirty living conditions, and frequent devastating fires caused the leaders of the colony to look for a healthier location for the capital city.

2. When the government buildings at Jamestown burned in 1699, The House of Burgesses chose the College of William and Mary as their new meeting place. Once there, they decided that the village near the college would make a fine new capital. They named it **Williamsburg** after their king, William. Williamsburg was located on much higher, dryer ground than Jamestown. Because of this, its water supply was fresh and disease-carrying mosquitoes were not as abundant. The houses of Williamsburg were also safer. Instead of the small, flammable huts of Jamestown, the citizens lived in larger homes constructed of wood and brick.

3. By the early 1700s, the population of Virginia was moving westward and the Piedmont region was becoming home to more and more settlers. As the population moved west, so did the capital. The city of **Richmond** was chosen as the site of the new capital. Richmond was a more central location than Williamsburg and its inland location and distance from the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay gave it added protection from possible attacks by the English navy. Its location on the **James River** also made it a major center of trade and commerce.

4. A number of geographical factors influenced the relocation of the capital of the colony of Virginia. Some of these included: the elevation of the land, the water supply, nearby bodies of water, and the distance inland. It is clear that the geography of Virginia influenced its early history.