

THE THREE CAPITALS OF VIRGINIA

The first capital of Virginia was Jamestown. In 1698 a fire destroyed much of Jamestown. After the fire the burgesses began meeting at the recently established College of William and Mary, at Middle Plantation. In 1699 they decided to move the capital rather than rebuild at Jamestown. Other reasons for moving the capital were that the land at Jamestown was swampy and Middle Plantation was about 7 miles further inland, so the government officials thought it would be safer if the colony were attacked by way of the sea or by gunfire from ships.

Soon the name of the settlement was changed to Williamsburg, to honor William, the English king. Williamsburg was the capital from 1699-1780. Richmond became the capital in 1780. Although the population was only about seven hundred people, Richmond was becoming an important village. Its location on the James River made it an ideal place for trading with settlers going into the wilderness beyond. The second Virginia Convention was held in Richmond so that Lord Dunmore and his followers, who were in Williamsburg, could not interrupt the meeting. In 1779, soon after Patrick Henry was elected the first governor, the government decided to move the capital to Richmond. Richmond was a more central location in the growing colony, and it was believed the village would be easier to defend from invasion by British troops.

When Virginia joined the Confederacy in 1861, Richmond became the capital of the Confederate states. After the Civil War ended, and Virginia was readmitted to the Union as a state, Richmond was still the state capital. Richmond remains the capital today.