

## **The Quit-Rent System in the American Colonies**

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“One of the most distinctive features of the English Land-tenure in the sixteenth and seventeen centuries was the quit-rent.”

The quit rent was a survival of feudalism. Varied feudal dues were converted into fixed quit rents and by the beginning of the sixteenth century had become common.

The imposition of the quit rent in the American Colonies emphasized their relation to the mother country as fiefs of the Crown. The feudal notion of land tenure, that the soil belonged to the Crown, who either collected the feudal dues, chiefly in the form of quit rents, or else transferred this right to the proprietors, was carried to the New World. This feudal notion may be traced in all the early charter.

In Virginia attempts to establish an effective system of collection involved a long struggle for control begin the governor and the office-holding class. In the earliest days of the colony the treasurer or his deputy collected the rents; later the sheriffs assumed this duty. Many abuses attended such a scheme of collection by officers, themselves usually landowners, who sided with the tenants rather than the Crown.

In the Royal Colonies the revenue from the quit rents was theoretically under the control of the Crown as overlord. Since the rents were frequently employed for local purposes, the assemblies tended to assert authority over them, but the policy of the home authorities was to allow expenditures from the quit rents only with royal permission. The value of such a source of income, in rendering the royal government independent of local control, is obvious.

The quit rents were also employed in Virginia to supplement the 2 shillings duty for the ordinary purpose of government. This aid, however, was granted only for the salaries of officers directly dependent upon the crown

Occasionally grants were made to aid local interests, including an appropriation in 1692 of 1,982 pounds, 14 shilling to found the college of William and Mary.