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When Peter the Great decided to build a new capital city, he ultimately selected a site near the Neva River. He called his new town St. Petersburg. This map, created for *Gentlemen's Magazine* and published, in London, during 1749, depicts the plan the Russian Tsar had for his new city and its fortifications.

The swampy terrain along the River Neva (*Peka Heba*) wasn't really suitable for building a town but, in 1703, Peter the Great - the Russian Tsar still renowned for leading his country into the modern age - believed its strategic location was perfect.

Having spent time in The Netherlands, where he learned the art of shipbuilding in seafaring towns like Rotterdam, Peter wanted a city - like Amsterdam - of canals and shipbuilders. The problem was ... he didn't have available land with which to create a Russian Amsterdam.

How does one tell a ruler with absolute power that his choice of land, which is subject to flooding, isn't a sensible place for development? At the time ... one didn't do such a thing ... so site preparation commenced. Back then, no bridges spanned the Neva.

The first house in the new town was for Peter himself. It was a small wooden cabin, along the Neva, which still exists inside a protective pavilion. Peter lived there - in a total living space of about 60 square meters - while he supervised building his new fortress and the town itself.

For a time, St. Petersburg was just a small place, built up around the Peter and Paul Fortress. By 1712, however, it was large enough to become Russia's new capital city.

Several years after Peter the Great died (in 1725), Elizabeth - his daughter - became empress and commissioned the Smolny Convent and the Winter Palace. During the twenty years of her reign, the city flourished and its population reached about 150,000.

During this time, Peter the Great's summer palace - called Peterhof - was remodeled by Bartolomeo Rastrelli. The home, and its stunning fountains, remain one of St. Petersburg's biggest attractions.

Catherine the Great was the first to move into the Winter Palace, built along the Neva. The royal art collection, which Catherine started, eventually grew so significantly that it became the Hermitage Museum - now maintained in the Winter Palace.

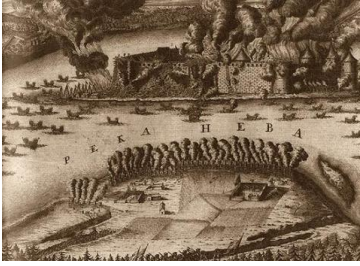
Let's take a closer look at life in the city which features so prominently in Dostoevsky's writing.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ST.-PETERSBURG-BEGINNINGS-Dostoevsky)

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River Neva

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Building St. Petersburg

Image online, courtesy Cal Poly College of Liberal Arts.

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Peter the Great Learns Shipbuilding

Image, by an unknown artist, of Peter the Great learning the art of shipbuilding in The Netherlands. Online, via a Dutch-language website.

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Amsterdam, a City of Canals

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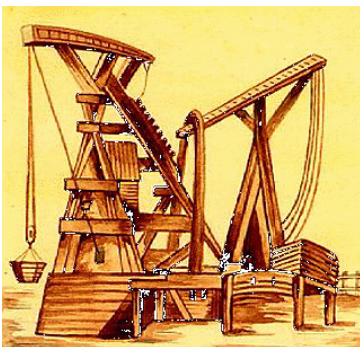
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Canals of Amsterdam in 1538

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Sketch of Shipbuilding in Amsterdam

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Peter the Great in The Netherlands

French-language trading card, of *Pierre le Grand* ("Peter the Great"), online courtesy French-language website.

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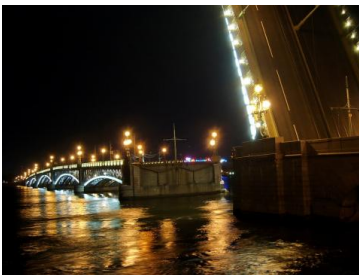
Site Preparation for St. Petersburg

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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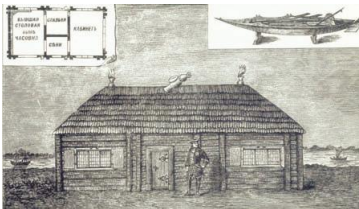


Trinity Bridge Over the Neva River

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First House Built in St. Petersburg

Image online, courtesy [The Russian Museum](http://www.russianmuseum.com) website.

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Cabin Built for Peter the Great

Image online, courtesy [The Russian Museum](http://www.russianmuseum.com).

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Pavilion Housing Peter the Great's Cabin

Image online, courtesy the [saint-petersburg.com](http://www.saint-petersburg.com) website.

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Boat for Peter the Great

Image online, courtesy The Russian Museum website.

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Bartolomeo Rastrelli

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Drawing of the Neva River

Image depicted above, from the Illustrated History of St. Petersburg: Page 8. Online, courtesy the [petersburgcity.com](http://www.petersburgcity.com) website.

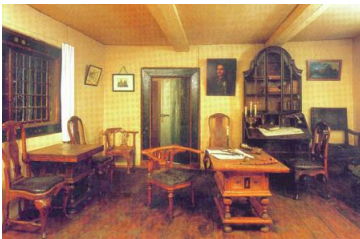
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Life in St. Petersburg

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Living Space Inside the Cabin of Peter the Great

Image online, courtesy The Russian Museum.

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Dining Room - Cabin of Peter the Great

Image online, courtesy The Russian Museum.

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Portrait of Elizabeth - Daughter of Peter the Great

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Portrait of Peter the Great

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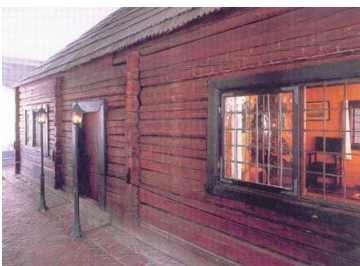
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Summer Palace

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Wooden Cabin for Peter the Great

Image online, courtesy The Russian Museum Website.

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Peter the Great Plans a New City - St. Petersburg

Gentlemen's Magazine, Map created for Gentleman's Magazine and published, in London, during 1749.

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Peter the Great Envisions St. Petersburg

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Peter the Great and the West

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Peter the Great and St. Petersburg

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Peter the Great - Absolute Power

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