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The early causes of the Virginia-Maryland boundary controversy, 1627-1668.

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EARLY CAUSES

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THE

VIRGINIA - MARYLAND

BOUNDARY

CONTROVERSIES.

(1627~1668)

PREFACE

Maryland were due mainly to the haphazard way in which the King of England granted the land in the New World, but the lack of geographical knowledge, on the part of the commissioners of the colonies, and later of the states, aided much in furthering these disputes, which covered a period of about two hundred and fifty years (1632-1894), and were only ended by a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States.

This paper is not a history of these boundary controversies, but only that part of the subject which led to the first open dispute. It is generally understood that the actual disputes began in 1668. There is, however, a slight error in this, as the Virginia Colony began their complaints as soon as they heard of the charter to Lord Baltimore.

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The Virginia Company received at various times during its existance three charters.

The first charter, dated 1606, to the London Company, states that the company

"*****shall and may begin their first plantation and habitation, at any place upon the said coast of Virginia and America, where they shall think fit and convenient, between the said four-andthirty and one-and-forty degrees of the said latutude; and they shall have all the lands, woods, ***** from the first seat of their plantation and habitation by the space of fifty miles of English statute measure, all along the said coast of Virginia and America, towards the west and south-west, as the coast lieth, with all the islands within one hundred miles directly over against the said sea coast; and also all the lands **** towards the east and north-east. or towards the north, as the coast lieth, together with all the islands within one hundred miles directly over against the said sea coast, also all the lands ***** from the said fifty miles every way on the sea coast, directly into the mainland by the space of one hundred like English miles; **** and that none other of our subjects shall be permitted, or suffered. to plant or inhabit behind, or in the back side of them, without **** consent of the Council." This grant does not extend between the thirtyfourth and forty-first degrees of northerly latitude,
as is generally understood today, but is for land
to a distance of fifty miles on each side of a
settlement made between these parallels. By this
the company only had jurisdiction over a section
one hundred miles on the coast, and, as is stated
in the charter, one hundred miles inland (see Map I)

In 1609 the London Company received another charter changing its name to the Virginia Company, and granting it

" **** all those lands **** situate, lying, and being, in that part of America called Virginia, from the point of land called Cape or Point Comfort, all along the sea coast, to the northward two hundred miles. and from the said point of Cape Comfort, all along the sea coast, to the southward two hundred miles, and all that space and circuit of land, lying from the sea coast of the precinct aforesaid, up into the land, throughout from sea to sea, west and northwest; also all the islands, lying within one hundred miles along the coast of both seas, of the precinct aforesaid*****." 1

This charter grants all land on the Atlantic Coast from about the middle of the state of New Jersey to the southern part of the coast of North Carolina, and extends from "sea to sea, west and northwest." From this it can be seen that about forty of the present states of the United States

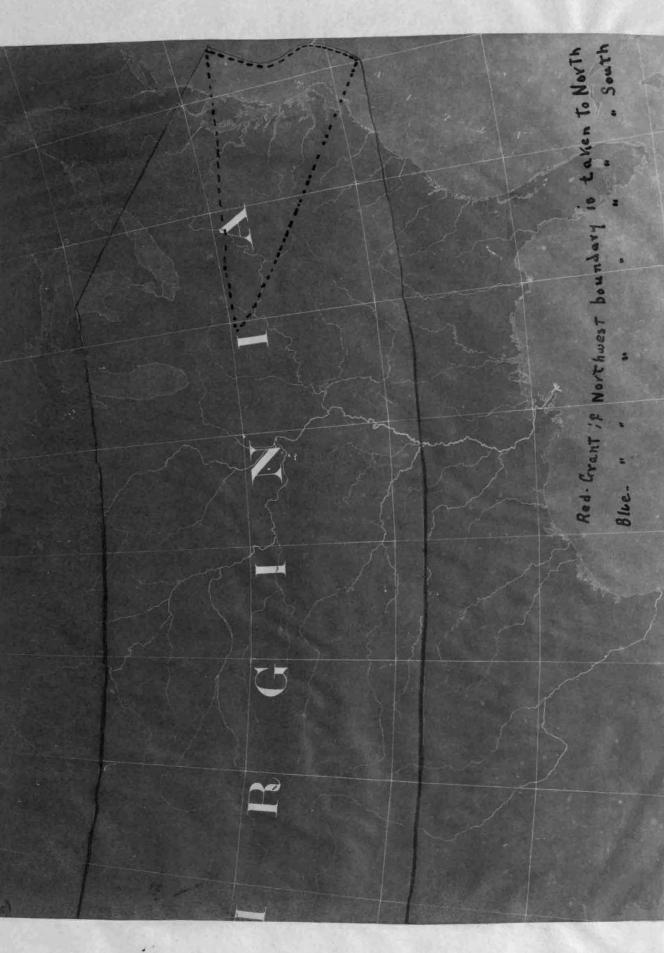


were originally in the boundaries of Virginia, that is, if the western boundary is taken to the south and the northwestern to the north. (See Map II)

If however, the western boundary is taken to the north and the northwestern to the south, the territory covered was very little, if any, more than the present state of Virginia. Against the first interpretation it is argued that De Soto had explored the Mississippi valley, and Cortez, de Vaca, and Coronado had entered into the southwestern part of the continent several decades before the date of this grant, and therefore the distance to the western sea was known; but it will be remembered that the English court did not recognise these Spanish explorations, and, also, that it instructed the first settlers of Virginia to go up the river (the James) in search of an outlet to the South Sea.5 By this it is evident that the English thought the South Sea was not far from the Atlantic coast.

The third charter, issued in 1612, adds to that of 1609

"**** all and singular those islands whatsoever, situate and being in any part of the ocean seas bordering upon the coast of our said first colony in Virginia, and being within three hundred leagues of any of the parts heretofore granted **** and being within or between the one and fortieth and thirtieth degrees of northerly latitude."



MAPII

Besides reaffirming the grant of 1609 this brings under the government of Virginia the Bermudas. Little or no mention is made of these islands in Virginia history, as they were only under her jurisdiction for two years. In 1614 they were transfered to a few members of the Virginia Company under a new charter, known as that of the Somers Island Company. 7

This charter of 1612 was cancelled by James I in 1624. The King stated in a letter to the colony that he did not cancel the grant of land, but only dissolved the company. His reasons for the disbandment, he explained, were that there were two parties working against each other in the colony, and that the time in the Assemblies was spent in wrangling and arguments between these two factions, and not, as it should have been, in planning for the advancement of the colony and its interests.

In 1629 the colony was visited by Lord Baltimore, whose settlement in the north had failed
because of the cold climate. After a short stay
in Virginia, he returned to England. Soon after his
arrival he petitioned the King for a grant of land
to the south of the Virginia grant. The Virginians,
fearing this move, hadesent Wiliam Claiborne to
England about the same time to plead against any

such grant. Claiborne's pleas were successful for a few years, but, in 1632, Baltimore was granted a section of the country to the north of the Potomac River. His grant gave him

"*****all that part of the peninsular, or Chersonese, lying in the parts of America, between the ocean on the east, and the bay of Chesapeake on the west. and divided from the residue thereof by a right line drawn from the promontory or head-land, called Watkin's Point, situate in the aforesaid bay, near the river of Wighco. on the west, unto the main ocean on the east; and between that bound on the south, unto that part of the bay of Delaware on the north. which lyeth under the fortieth degree of northerly latitude from the equinoctial where New England terminates; and all the tract of land between the metes underwritten; that is to say, passing from the said bay, called Delaware bay, in a right line, by the degree aforesaid, unto the true meridian of the first fountain of the river of Potownack. thence verging towards the south unto the further bank of the said river, and following the west and south unto a certain place called Cinquack, situate near the mouth of the said river, where it disembouges into the aforesaid bay of Chesapeake, and from thence by the shortest line unto the aforesaid promontory or place called Watkin's Point, so that the whole tract of land divided by the line aforesaid, drawn between the main ocean and Watkin's Point unto the promontory called Cape Charles, and all the appendages thereto, do remain entirely excepted forever to us, our heirs and successors. *** 9

The present state of Maryland extends, on the

west, to the Fairfax Stone, which is considered at the head of the Potomac. At this point the Potomac forms the boundary line between West Virginia and Maryland. The northern boundary of Maryland is about 39° 45' north latitude, which is approximately the line mentioned in the original grant. From this it can be seen that the present state of Maryland covers almost the same territory as the original grant.

William Claiborne, gentleman, trader and at various times prominent in the government of Virginia, in 1627 saw the possibilities of a trading station among the Indians un the upper Chesapeake. He applied to Sir John Harvey for a charter, and received permission to trade with the Dutch in the surrounding settlements, or any other English settlements "which may tend to an intermutual benefit, wherein we may be useful to one another." A few years later he applied to the crown for a similar license, and received one under the seal of Scotland, to trade principally in Nova Scotia, which at that time was directly under the crown of Scotland. After receiving this license, he formed a connection with a trading company of English merchants to trade on the American continent.

He returned to Virginia with a shipload of trading articles, and, after discharging that part of the cargo which had been assigned to the Jamestown colony, he proceeded to Kent Island, where he states he and his followers

"Entered upon the Isle of Kent, unplanted by any man, but possessed of the natives of that country, with about one hundred white men, and there contracted with the natives and bought their right, to hold of the crown of England, to him and his company and their heirs, and by

force and virtue thereof William Claiborne and his Company stood seized of the said Island." '3

In 1629 a petition was sent to the King by the Governor, Roger Smith, William Claiborne and others telling of Lord Baltimore's visit and asking confirmation of their rights and protection for their religion within the bounds of the Virginia grant.

The next year Claiborne was sent to England to act as the Colony's representative against Lord Baltimore's petition for a grant in the south. Claiborne's protests were successful for a few years, but in 1632
Baltimore received a grant to a large area to the north of the Potomac River. Burke, in his <u>History of Virginia</u>, gives the attitude of the Virginians to this grant. He states

"The property conveyed was however supposed by the colony to
be within the limits of their
grant; and it became a subject
of deepest concern that the soil on
which they trod, and which they
had earned by their labors and
sufferings, was everyday eaten
from beneath their feet, by the
dishonest and capricious bounty
of a monarch, who contributed
nothing to its improvement or
discovery." "

The colonists complained to the King, stating that the section granted was a part of the original grant of Virginia, and, also, that Claiborne had settled there before the date of Baltimore's charter.

Baltimore, in answer, stated that the Virginia company had been dissolved in 1624, and that, therefore,

It is true that the King had annulled the charter of the Virginia Company in 1624, but, if his statements in letters to the Colony can be taken as giving his real reasons for this step, he only widhed to break up the company, while the bounds of land were to remain the same as when he had first granted them.

stated that he could find no grounds on which Claiborne could base his claim to the land. There was no record of a grant to Claiborne or any of his company. Claiborne acknowledged that the only claim he had to the land was that he had bought it grom the Indians. At the time Claiborne settled the island the usual method of acquiring land was to take it by force, but he did as only a few of the settlers had done, that is, paid for what he received. The trading charter he received from England covered the territory under the rule of Scotland, but did not extend to those lands under the English crown, therefore, the charter did not give him the right to hold Kent Island.

In 1632, the year in which Lord Baltimore's charter was issued, Kent Island was a recognised part of the Virginia Colony, as it was represented in the Assembly by one Captain Nicholas Martain.

The members of the Maryland colony arrived in

February, 1634. Leonard Calvert, the leader of the expedition, had been instructed by his brother, upon his arrival in Virginia, to arrange an interview with Claiborne. If Claiborne refused to agree with Lord Baltimore's plans, he was not to be bothered for a year. However, Calvert failed to follow the latter part of these instructions.

In an interview with Claiborne Calvert informed him that he was to consider himself a part of the Maryland colony and that he was to pay taxes accordingly. Calvert also stated that he would be glad to give any assistance he could in building up the Kent Island settlement.

At the March meeting of the Virginia Council Claiborne requested instructions as to how he should regard Lord Baltimore's grant and these orders of Leonard Calvert. The Council answered

"that they wondered why there should be any such question made, That they knew no reason why they should render up the rights of that place of the Isle of Kent, more than any other formerly given to this colony by his majesty's pattent; and that the right of my Lord's grant being yet undetermined in England, we are bound in duty and by our oathseto maintain the rights and privileges of this colony." '

Backed by these instructions Claiborne refused to stop his trade in the Chesapeake, or to consider himself a part of the Maryland colony Regardless of the ideas of the Virginia colonists on the subject, in July, 1633, the Star Chamber,
to whom the claims of Virginia and Claiborne had been
referred, decided to "leave Lord Baltimore to his charter
and the other parties to the course of law".

Burke, in his <u>History of Virginia</u>, however, gives a different view of the Virginians attitude to the subject. He states

"But Virginia, aware that little was to be expecyed from a contest of this nature, dropped all farther opposition to her younger sister. And with a liberality and sound policy, which reflect equal honor on the heart and understanding, immediately proposed a league of commerce and amity, which should advance the prosperity and confirm the security of each." 20

Lord Baltimore, finding that his settlement in the north could not succeed, in October, 1629 visited Virginia while on his way back to England. It was known that he had planned to ask for a grant in the south, near that of Virginia, and that his real idea in visiting the colony was to look over the ground for a favorable location. This visit caused great fear among the Virginians, and the next year they sent Claiborne to England in the colony's interests.

While in Virginia Lord Baltimore and his followers were requested to take the oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance. He refused to take the oaths as prescribed by law, but agreed to take ones which he wrote and substituted for them. As the Virginia officials did not feel that they had the power to allow this substitution of an oath for that prescribed by the King, the oaths were not administered.

The records of the Virginia Colony show very little of Lord Baltimore's visit, except that the Council ordered "Thomas Tindall to be pilloried for two hours for giving my Lord Baltimore the lie and threatening to knock him down." This one mention, though short, seems to illustrate the feeling of many

of the colonists.

Lord Baltimore stayed in Virginia only a short time, after which he returned to England. his wife and children with the Virginia colony, however, feeling that he could depend on the hospitality of the higher class in Virginia. This act showed more than ever that he intended to return as soon as possible. Soon after his arrival in England he approached the King concerning a grant of land to the south of the Virginia settlement. Claiborne, pleading against any such grant was successful for a few years, but in 1632 Lord Baltimore received a grant to lands to the north of the Virginia grant. It is said that Baltimore drew up this grant with his own hand from what he had seen while in Virginia. Some historians even go so far as to state that he made a trip up the Cheaspeake with this grant in mind at the time. This is evidently fiction as he, at first, requested a grant to the south of Virginia. In Baltimore's charter it is stated that it is to "uninhabited lands" to the north of the Virginia Colony. All the land to the north of the Virginia settlement was uninhabited at the time of Baltimore's visit in 1629, but between that time and the date of his charter Claiborne had settled Kent Island, which fact Baltimore either did not know or else overlooked in the wording of the charter. The Virginians took the case to the King and them to the Star Chamber. The Star Chamber issued the decision which has been mentioned. (see page 10)

Leonard Calvert, the brother of Cecil, to whom the grant had been made, arrived in Virginia with his settlers in February, 1634. He remained in Jamestown a few days to get supplies for his colony. The Maryland settlers found that the Virginians were much displeased with the idea of their colony. Governor Harvey, in a letter to the King, stated that several of the Virginians said they had rather knock their cattle in the head than sell them to the Marylanders.

A short time after the Maryland colonists had arrived at their point of settlement, Saint Mary's they had agreed to call it, charges were made by Captain Henry Fleet that Claiborne had been inciting the Indians against the Maryland settlement by telling them that the Marylanders were Spaniards and not English. Calvert complained to the Governor of Virginia. who put Claiborne under bond not to leave Jamestown until the charges were investigated. Both colonies appointed commissioners, who met at Patuxent in June, 1634; ton examine the Indian chief as to the truth of the charges. The Chief of the Patuxents denied all knowledge of the statements referred to by the commissioners, and added that he did not see why the Maryland commissioners should notice what Captain Fleet had said. The Virginia representatives, in explaining this phrase to the Marylanders stated that it was evident that the Maryland

people did not know Captain Fleet as well as the Virginians did. The commission, after this testimony, freed Claiborne of all charges made against him. Fleet later denied what he had said. His attitude can be clearly understood when it is recalled that he was one of Claiborne's rivals in the fur trade, and that he had cast his lot with the colony at Saint Mary's.

These charges of Fleet's in some manner reached Lord Baltimore, and in September, 1634 he ordered Leonard Calvert to capture Chaiborne and hold him a prisoner at Saint Mary's until further instructions.

He was also ordered to take possession of the plantation at Kent Island. Lord Baltimore seems to have overlooked the fact that he had instructed Calvert to take no steps against Chaiborne for a year, even if he refused to obey the laws of the Maryland colony.

At the beginning of the dispute between the two colonies Governor Harvey had taken the side of the more radical Virginians, but after a short time he began to lean to the Maryland colony, evidently seeing the power Lord Baltimore had at court, and thru this also seeing the ultimate outcome of any dispute.

The result of this change of views on the part of "arvey was that he was driven from office and sent to England the next year. Just before this happening Harvey was sent a letter by the King thanking him for his kindness and assistance to the Maryland colonists, this being done at the request of Lord Daltimore. 28

Claiborne's partners in London, soon after hearing of Lord Baltimore's letter to his brother concerning Claiborne, petitioned the king for the protection of their plantation on Kent Island. This brought forth a letter to the Virginia Council, in which the King stated that Lord Baltimore's interference with Kent Island was

"contrary to justice and to the true intention of our grant to the said Lord; we do therefore hereby declare our express pleasure to be that the said planters be in no sort interrupted in their trade or plantation by him or any other in his right, ****** and we prohibit as well the Lord Baltimore, as all pretenders under him or otherwise to plantations in those parts to do they any violence, or to disturb or hinder them in their honest proceedings and trade there." 29

The King also wrote Calvert, instructing him not to interfere with Claiborne or his settlement.

On the grounds of the above Claiborne continued his trade in the Cheaspeake. In the early part of April, 1635 a boat belonging to Caliborne and under the command of Thomas Smith was siezed in the Patuxent River by Captain Fleet and the charge of trading without a license from Maryland. Smith showed the King's commission and several letters confirming it, but Fleet said that all were false, and on this ground ignored them. The boat and its cargo were confiscated.

Claiborne immediately took steps to arm all of his trading vessels. In the later part of April a boat belonging to Claiborne, under the command of Lieutenant Warren, met with two of the boats from Saint Mary's. A battle resulted in which the Maryland boats lost one man, while Warren and two of his followers were killed, and the boat forced to surrender. Boats from the two settlements met again on the 10th of May, with another battle and more bloodshed as a result. In this encounter Claiborne's men were successful, as they were able to continue their trade on Kent Island for two years longer.

For this period matters between the inhabitants of Kent Island and Saint Mary's seem at a standstill, but in 1637 the island was surrendered to the Mary-land officials thru the treachery of George Evelin. From the beginning of the dispute concerning the jurisdiction of Kent Island Clobery and Company (the English firm which backed Claiborne in his trading enterprise) had ignored him. In December, 1636 they sent George Evelin to Kent Island to look after their interests.

evelin gained the confidence of the inhabitants of the island by pretending to be an ardent supporter of Claiborne's claim. He even went so far as to use abusive language against the Calverts. .

In February, 1637 Clobery and Company sent a ship-load of goods to Kent Island, consigned to Evelin instead of to Caliborne. This ship also carried a letter to Claiborne requesting him to turn all property over to Evelin, and to come to England to adjust his accounts. He was directed to require a bond of Evelin for the safe keeping of the goods on the island. This Evelin refused, and Caliborne, under protest, set sail for England, leaving him in charge of the island.

Claiborne's ship had hardly weighed anchor when Evelin began negotiations with the Calverts for the capture of Kent Island. He tried to persuade the inhabitants to renounce their allegiance to Caliborne

and to Virginia, and join the Maryland colony, but with no avail. Calvert, at first did not want to use force in gaining the island, but after persuasion from Evelin, he allowed the latter to lead a force of forty men against it one night in December, 1637. 30 The fort was captured and the inhabitants made to submit to the government of Maryland. Evelin, for his part in the capture, was made "Lord of the Manor of Evelinton," near Saint Mary!s.

In March, 1638 the Maryland Assembly passed a bill of attainder against William Caliborne, declaring him guilty of murder and piracy, and stated that he should forfeit to the Lord Proprietary all lands and property on Kent Island held in his name. Thru the power of this act all property of Caliborne's on the island was confiscated. Lord Baltimore vetoed all of the acts of this Assembly; therefore the confiscation of Caliborne's property was really robbery, as there was no power tothe act after the veto.

The Lords Commissioners of Plantations, to whom, as a last resort, the petitions of Caliborne and Lord Baltimore had been referred, declared, on April 4, 1638, that in their opinion the right and title to Kent Island belonged to Lord Paltimore. The pleas of Virginia in the matter were ignored entirely. The King, in a letter to Baltimore, under date of July 24, 1638 instructed him to allow Kent island to stay as it was.

Claiborne, after the decision of the Lords Comm-

issioners, tried to recover his property from the Maryland government, but without success. In 1644, while England was trouble with civil war, he renewed his claims before the English government, but without waiting for action on his claim he proceeded to Kent sland and took possession of it. 33 The inhabitants of the island received him gladly, but, strange to say, very little of this happening is mentioned in historys of either Virginia or Maryland.

About the same time Richard Ingle gained possession of Saint Mary's. He and Caliborne held control of Maryland for two years. During this time they sent many of the prominent people of Maryland back to England in chains. In the latter part of 1646 Ingle and Claiborne were driven out of the colony by the forces of Calvert, with the assistance of a small force from Governor Berkley. The force had little trouble in capturing Saint Mary's, but Kent Island offered more resistance. It fell to the invading force only after martial law had been declared and all communications cut off from the outside world.

The island remained under the government of Maryland until March 12, 1652, when the articles of surrender between the Commissioners of Parliament and the Assembly of Virginia were signed. Among the important articles was the following:

"Virginia shall have and enjoy the ancient bounds and limits granted by the charters of the former Kings, and that we shall seek a new charter from Parliament to that purpose against any that have intrenched upon the rights thereof."35

By this it was hoped that Kent Island would soon be under the government of Virginia.

Caliborne seems to have dropped out of the Kent Island affairs for a few years. The only mention of his name with that of Kent Island after 1646 appears in a treaty with the Indians, dated April 5, 1652, which mentions "the isle of Kent and Palmers Island, which belong to Captain Caliborne." 36

Matters remained at a standstill until, 1668 when the Calvert-Scarborough line, the settlement of the first real dispute, was run by the orders of the Assemblies of both colonies.

Thus thru a period of thirty six years the English government and the governments of both colonies were annoyed by petitions and arguments over the proper interpretation of the charters of Virginia and Maryland.

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