

Bacon's Castle



Nathaniel Bacon, a wealthy planter from Suffolk, England and kinsman of

the famous Sir Francis Bacon, was by marriage related to Governor Berkeley, the colonial governor.

Bacon arrived in Virginia during 1674. He was financed by his father and acquired two estates along the James River. The main plantation was located some 40 miles above Jamestown and was described as an average size manor house, with an old and new hall, inner room over the hall and outer room. The chamber of Mrs. Bacon was included, as well as a kitchen, dairy and storeroom. The second plantation was located in the vicinity of Richmond, Virginia.

Because his wife was a cousin of the governor and owing to his influential social and family background, Bacon was soon appointed to the governor's council where he readily endorsed a policy to remove all Indians from the region. The plan was to expand the territory. But, most of all, put an end to the Indian attacks along the frontier settlements. Berkeley was opposed. He feared a general Indian war such as the massacre of 1622/3 when the Indians set out to kill all white men on the continent. Also, Berkeley was concerned for trade with Native Americans, and desired to avoid the costs of a major conflict,. Hence, he took no action. But as settlers continuously suffered the atrocities of the raids and murders near the settlements, Bacon became impatient.

Therefore, in 1676 he organized an expedition against the Indians. From the start the governor branded Bacon a rebel, but was soon forced by public pressure to give Bacon a commission. Later, Berkeley changed his mind and once again declared Bacon as a rebel and took the drastic action of sending several military expeditions against Bacon and his 60 odd rebels. This unfortunate action resulted in the burning of Jamestown! Bacon then managed to seize control of the government for a time and called an assembly to repeal low tobacco price scales and high taxes.

However, during the height of his power in late 1676, Bacon died of fever,

and the rebellion collapsed.

Actually, Nathaniel Bacon dared to reform a bad situation in the colony arising out of a privileged English aristocracy when he addressed the colonial grievances of the times. The unpopular Governor Berkeley was recalled to England and another sent to replace him. Bacon was the first rebel reformer in the colony and has been described as a forerunner of the American Revolution.

Source: Records of York County, vol. 1690-1694. The Bacon genealogy is traced and available to members of Virginia Pioneers.