

Nathaniel Bacon: The Patriot Rebel



Pirates

During the reign of Charles I of England, Robert Beverley of Beverley sold his possessions in that town and immigrated to Virginia his considerable fortune.

He purchased extensive tracts of land in Middlesex County where he established his home. The family seat was in Yorkshire, and before leaving England, the Beverley name was conferred to the order of the Royal Oak.

In Virginia, Robert would be a loyalist, true to the royal government. Therefore, he was elected clerk of the very respected House of Burgesses, which office he held until 1676, the time of Bacon's Rebellion, which he helped suppress and found favor of the Governor Sir William Berkeley.

However, in 1682 the malcontents arose once again, almost to the pitch of rebellion, and this time included Beverley. There had been two sessions in the Assembly engaged in angry and fruitless disputes between Lord Culpepper, Governor Berkeley and the House of Burgesses which resulted

in the malcontents of the counties of Gloucester, New Kent and Middlesex riotlessly cut up tobacco plants in the beds, especially the sweet-scented which was produced no where else.

Lord Culpepper and Governor Berkeley suppressed this destruction by sending out patrols of horse. The ringleaders were arrested and some of the hanged on charges of treason. The Riot Act was passed, making plant-cutting high treason.

The vengeance of the government fell heavily upon Major Robert Beverley, clerk of the House of Burgesses, as a principal instigator. Also, he refused to deliver up copies of the legislative journal to the governor without permission of the Assembly. In May of 1682, he was committed a prisoner to the ship, the Duke of York lying in the Rappahannock river. Ralph Wormeley, Matthew Kemp and Christopher Wormeley were directed to seize the records in the possession of Beverley and to break open doors if necessary.

Afterwards, Beverley was transferred to the ship Concord and set under guard. He apparently escaped because he was later found at his home in Middlesex County from which he was transported over to the county of Northampton on the Eastern Shore. Some months later his attorney, William Fitzhugh, applied for a writ of habeas corpus, which was refused.

A short time later he was arrested again and remanded to Northampton. During 1683, new charges were brought against him. First, That he had broken open letters addressed to the Office of the Secretary. Second. That he had made up the journal and inserted his Majesty's letter therein, notwithstanding it had been first presented at the time of the prorogation. 3rd. That in 1682 he had refused to deliver copies of the journal to the governor and council, saying "he might not do it without leave of his masters.

In May of 1684, Bacon was found guilty of high misdemeanors, however,

judgment was respited and the prisoner asked for pardon on his bended knees. Thus, he was released upon giving security for his good behavior in the penalty of 2,000 pounds. He thereupon sued for pardon to the governor to whom he had served loyally. He had not, however, lost the esteem of his countrymen because they re-elected him as clerk of the Assembly in 1685.

Hence, this body strongly resisted the power of the governor. When King James II came to power, indignant of its democratical proceedings, ordered the dissolution of the Assembly, attributing the blame to Robert Beverley, the clerk, declaring that he should be prosecuted and future appointments of the office of clerk should be done by the governor. During the spring of 1687, Robert Beverley died, the persecuted victim of an oppressive government.

A distinguished loyalist who invested his fortune in the new Colony, he was the persecuted victim of an oppressive government. Indeed, a patriot Martyr.

Source: The History of Virginia by Robert Beverley.