

William Claiborne (1600-c.1677)

William Claiborne, a member of the Virginia council, established a trading post on Kent Island just before King Charles I granted the colony of Maryland to Lord Baltimore. Kent Island was the first English settlement in Maryland. But he is known today for the fact caused a lot of trouble for Virginia's neighbor, Maryland.

Claiborne was born in Kent, England, in 1600 and came to the colonies in 1621. He was educated and from a family with good social connections. At first he was a successful tobacco farmer, but he soon became interested in the Chesapeake fur trade. He developed good relations with the Susquehannock Indians, who provided him with beaver furs that could be sold for a profit in England. Claiborne established a profitable trading base on Kent Island, not knowing that King Charles I of England would soon grant this same land to Lord Baltimore.

When Leonard Calvert, the Governor of Maryland, arrived in America to claim the colony's territory, Claiborne refused to leave or to allow his land to become part of Maryland. Claiborne's supporters fought briefly with Calvert's forces but could not defeat them. Claiborne went to England to argue his case before the king, and while he was gone, Maryland gained control of Kent Island.

Soon afterwards, the king agreed that the island belonged to Maryland. However, the battle for Kent Island did not end there. Several times during the seventeenth century, conflict arose between Protestants and Catholics in Maryland.

In 1645, the Protestant Richard Ingle led a rebellion, attacking the Catholic settlers of Maryland. Claiborne, also a Protestant, joined forces with Ingle to regain control of Kent Island, forcing Governor Calvert to flee to Virginia. However, Calvert returned the following year with paid soldiers from Virginia and defeated Ingle's troops. Maryland was back under control of the Calverts, but not for long.

In 1651 William Claiborne was appointed to a commission that was to go to Virginia and Maryland to make sure the colonies were loyal to the new English government. Claiborne and his partner, Richard Bennett, overthrew Maryland's government and took control of the colony for several years.

Kent Island again belonged to Claiborne for a short while until Oliver Cromwell, the leader of England, returned the colony (including Kent Island) to the Calvert family. Claiborne hoped and fought to get Kent Island back for forty years, right up until his death.

His last attempt was peaceful but still unsuccessful. In 1677 he sent a petition to King Charles II asking for return of the island, but he died without recovering what he truly believed was his land.

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