

# THE VIRGINIA DYNASTIES



The Emergence of "King" Carter and the Golden Age

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on the four great rivers emptying into Chesapeake Bay. From the Potomac, near the site of the present city of Washington, south to the James at the present site of Richmond, the fall line would measure on a straight course one hundred miles. The Rappahannock flowed midway between these two rivers, the York between the Rappahannock and the James; and the longest land distance from the bay to the head of tidewater was less than a hundred miles. Criss-crossed by smaller rivers and creeks, and by bays and inlets near the coast, this was a semimaritime wilderness in which about forty thousand settlers lived on clearings so isolated that a European visitor said Virginia looked uninhabited.

By 1675 the Indians in this tidewater area had spent their powers for making war, largely in the great massacres of 1622 and 1644. Most of them existed as "tributary" tribes—under the protection of the English. Like tribes west of the fall line, the tidewater Indians lived in settled communities, with their own villages and forts and fortified towns. Their wigwams were built of wood; though crude affairs, they were actually houses, not tents. The Indians made use of window space, which could be covered by mats; they had louvres as smoke exits for their central fires; and the larger houses were partitioned by mats. The house of a "werewance"—either a chief or an emperor, ruler over chiefs—was a large affair with winding interior passages. The Indian temples, where the important dead were prepared for burial, could be more than 150 feet long, and contained hand-carved and hand-painted images of idols.

As with white nations, the tribes varied in their stages of civilization and power for war. The Doegs, who were not among the great tribes, had been having their troubles with the Susquehannocks. The Susquehannocks, of fierce reputation, were a very warlike people. Although they were not a large tribe numerically, the Susquehannock warriors were powerfully built and skillful fighters. Under a working agreement with the Maryland colony, the Susquehannocks had for some years acted as a buffer against approaches of the Senecas from the north. It was the custom of Indians in the middle states to roam up and down across the backcountry trading among themselves, and frequently a tribe killed a few white families in passing. By 1674, Maryland had so expanded that the colony, no longer needing the Susquehannocks, made a separate peace with the Senecas. The abandoned Susquehannocks, heavily outnumbered by the Senecas, retreated to the northern banks of the Potomac. There, sullen and restless, they began to disturb the Doegs.



Evidently in reaction the Doegs had turned their hostilities to the whites — although the churchgoers at Hen's simple home did not give any thought to such causes. Confirming their worst apprehensions, a war party had been bold enough to swoop out of the forest into a public clearing and murder a settler without provocation, even while his distant neighbors were approaching the church. In a group response, the men decided to go after the Indians right then.

The county militia was quickly mustered around its lieutenant colonel, John Washington. These county units were the only forces for maintaining law and order, including protection against Indian uprisings and attacks from England's enemies. When Colonel Washington's militia marched out of the clearing, the force was joined by frontier people carrying muskets, their powderhorns hung over their shoulders.

Following the Doegs, Colonel Washington ignored the treaty which forbade armed bodies to enter another colony's territory, and led the aroused settlers across the Potomac into Maryland. The Doegs had by then retired to the neighborhood of the Susquehannocks. In anticipation of the later aphorism "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," the Virginia force opened fire on Susquehannock and Doeg indiscriminately.

When the fighting grew general, the Maryland authorities, overlooking the violation of their border, hurried off militia to join the Virginians. Against that combined force, the Susquehannocks fell back to the west. It is not clear whether the Doegs gradually slipped away or stayed with the Susquehannocks during the flight. The pursuers referred to "Susquehannocks" when the Indians made a stand in a rude fort.

The earthen walls of the fort were enclosed by a ditch, outside of which trees were stuck in the ground and wattled together, leaving six-inch spaces as firing holes. While it would have been worthless against artillery, the fort was effective against the short-range fowling pieces of the militia. The white men laid an informal siege. When food ran low in the fort, the Susquehannocks sent out six chiefs to parley under a flag of truce. But in some kind of misunderstanding, the Indians were shot.

The Virginians blamed the Marylanders, and the Marylanders blamed the Virginians, especially Colonel John Washington. Militia Colonel Washington was the son of an English clergyman who had experienced difficulties with the Cromwellian Puritans, and at the age of about twenty-six, John had come to Virginia in 1657 as partner in a



small trading ship. His first marriage to Anne Pope gave him a good start in the Colony through his father-in-law, and Washington had the education, vigor and shrewdness to advance his fortunes rapidly in the Northern Neck — the land between the Potomac and the Rappahannock rivers. Acquiring land and buildings, growing and shipping tobacco, by 1666 he was a justice of the county court, member of the vestry, representative in the House of Burgesses and lieutenant colonel of the militia. There was no color about this prudent, businesslike entrepreneur. But when he went after the Indians, he left at home a sixteen-year-old son, Lawrence, who was to be the grandfather of George Washington.

It was never established who was guilty of killing the Susquehannock chiefs. With this act of the white man's treachery, the Indians stole out of their fort at night and dispersed into small parties. The two militia forces began to lose their ardor as each day's tracking through the tangled green woods took them farther from their homes. Growing apprehensive about their families, with hostile savages on the loose, the men abandoned the pursuit and returned to their homes.

When winter settled on the countryside, making the isolation of the settlers' clearings complete, the Susquehannocks began ravaging the frontier. Bands swooped down on lonely dwellings and murdered the families. The settlers began to petition the royal governor for protection.

Most of these settlers were not such successful plantation operators as Colonel Washington or Thomas Mathew, who employed an overseer to direct other workers. Having come without education or money, the men hacked clearings out of the primeval forests on fifty-acre tracts and threw up crude one-and-a-half-room houses, the half-room upstairs for the children to come. They petitioned through their successful neighbors, representing them in the Burgesses, for the right to form armed bodies to take the war to the Indians.

Governor Sir William Berkeley, for an amalgam of complicated reasons, wished to avoid a war between the white men and the red men. By March of the following year, 1676, Berkeley admitted that at least thirty-six murders had been authenticated. Finally aroused, he ordered an expeditionary force to form. The Susquehannocks had their own ways of getting news and immediately made a peace offer. Since this was what the governor wanted, he called off the expedition and returned to planning more of the forts which had proved to be no help at all to the frontier settlers. By spring, only eleven of seventy-odd holdings along the north-central border were still occupied, and



the settlers throughout the region began to ignore the prominent citizens who represented them at Jamestown. They began to talk of marching against the Indians without the governor's authority.

At this stage the repercussions from Hen's murder had aroused the settlers into a potential mob without a leader. When they found a leader in young Nathaniel Bacon, a patrician idler newly arrived from England, the mob swelled into a force composed of a cross section of colonists from all over Virginia and, with no one planning it, brought on the first revolution on the American continent. It was a curious rebellion, in which the leaders were transplanted English aristocrats. And that fight to the death on a colonial frontier had a curious result: from it grew, with other factors, a new ruling class in the New World — a native-born Virginia aristocracy.

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No facet of American history has been the subject of more myths and countermyths than the *native* Virginia aristocracy. The colonial ruling class which developed in Virginia first became an aristocracy in the formal meaning of the word: "government . . . by a relatively privileged class or order . . . any form of government in which the ruling power is vested in a minority consisting, presumably, of those best qualified to rule." Extending from these, the definitions include "the ruling body of such a government."

In common usage the word "aristocrat" carries the implication of noble heritage, of a patrician way of life — of attitudes and manners, of values and privileges, even of physical appearance. An essential element for the aristocrat in the broader social sense is the leisure and the means by which tastes and sensibilities can be cultivated, and sometimes are. In this general definition the aristocrat is the product of time. Succeeding generations habituate themselves to the privileges secured by wealth, the influence based upon wealth, and the prestige produced by privilege and influence.

All aristocracies began with wealth and its concomitant powers, and the warrior knights who founded the early aristocratic families in England were pretty crude articles. They were the robber barons who formed an alliance in 1215 (Magna Carta) to assure their role of authority in government. There was nothing continuous about the original families of that aristocracy. The generic aristocracy was almost wiped out by the Wars of the Roses, and recruitment from among the commoners was constant and necessary for the nobility