Bacon’s Rebellion

Bacon’s Rebellion occurred over a period of months in 1676 in Tidewater Virginia. It was brought on by a growing shortage of available land and the colony's complicated relations with both friendly and hostile tribes of Native Americans. Historians generally characterize the rebellion as one that pitted the colony's wealthy planters against its growing numbers of poor, landless men who had served out their term as indentured servants and were eager to begin their independent lives. There was simply nowhere for landless men to establish residency except farther west, in territory inhabited by Indians. Virginia had experienced two deadly Indian uprisings in 1622 and 1644, as well as another in 1675. William Berkeley (1606–77), the colonial governor, hewed to a policy that honored alliances with friendly tribes, which in turn acted as buffers and allies against the hostile tribes.

Nathaniel Bacon (1647–76), the disgruntled but wealthy son of English gentry, arrived in Virginia in 1674. He was a cousin by marriage to Governor Berkeley, who honored him with a seat on his Council, the colonial equivalent of the Senate. After Indians killed a laborer on his plantation in 1676, Bacon took on the mantle of Indian fighter, leading a band of men—who made no distinction between friendly and hostile tribes—in a series of deadly attacks. Bacon then led his men to the capital, where Berkeley and the colonial Assembly were in session, and demanded a commission to clear Indians from the remote, outlying areas of the colony. When Berkeley refused, Bacon’s men extorted the commission by threatening to kill him and the members of the Assembly.

On July 30, 1676, Bacon issued his "Declaration of the People," a manifesto justifying his usurpation of authority to protect the rights of Englishmen against Native Americans. Bacon and his band pillaged and ransacked tidewater plantations, gathering slaves and indentured servants to join them, and leveled the capital of Jamestown, burning it to the ground. Bacon died of dysentery in October, and order was restored in Virginia when a thousand troops arrived from England.

In the wake of Bacon's Rebellion, the planter elite continued to dominate Virginia's colonial politics, but that group recognized the threat posed by the freemen, indentured servants, and small farmers. As a result, the colony pursued an expansionist military policy to clear the frontier of Native Americans, and it expanded the franchise among white freemen.

Bacon’s Rebellion accelerated the codification of chattel slavery in Virginia. Although the number of indentured servants coming from England began to wane as a result of the Industrial Revolution there, the specter of a roving, landless class of freemen led colonial authorities to view slavery more favorably, believing that it ensured a more stable free society.

http://caho-test.cc.columbia.edu/sim/15005.html
The Salem Witch Trials

Brief Account

The Salem witchcraft events began in late February 1692 and lasted through April, 1693. All told, at least twenty-five people died: nineteen were executed by hanging, one was tortured to death, and at least five died in jail due to harsh conditions. Over one hundred people were accused of witchcraft, most were jailed, and many deprived of property and legal rights. Accused persons lived in the town of Salem and Salem Village (now Danvers) and in two dozen other towns in eastern Massachusetts Bay Colony. Nearly fifty people confessed to witchcraft, most to save themselves from immediate trial. Hundreds of other people -- neighbors, relatives, jurors, ministers, and magistrates -- were caught up in the legal proceedings of the trials. In October 1692, Governor William Phips ended the special witchcraft court in Salem. Accusations soon abated and eventually stopped. In January, the new Superior Court of Judicature began to try the remaining cases and eventually cleared the jails. After Salem trials, no one was convicted of witchcraft in New England. During the Salem trials, more people were accused and executed than in all the previous witchcraft trials in New England.

Further Explanation

The first witchcraft accusations occurred in Salem Village, then a parish of the town of Salem, at the end of February 1692. The accusations began with two young girls who lived in the home of the Rev. Samuel Parris. Prior conflicts within the village had caused the departure of three ministers in the past sixteen years. Almost immediately after Rev. Parris's arrival in 1689, conflicts arose among villagers concerned about the benefits Parris was to receive, including ownership of the parsonage. In 1692 a new Village committee opposed to Parris was elected. Parris's salary was not paid for months, and he began to run out of money and firewood. In January, 1692, Parris's 9 year-old daughter Betty Parris and her 12 year-old cousin Abigail Williams began to behave erratically and exhibit extreme physical contortions. Their actions were similar to that of the Goodwin children in Boston who had fallen into fits and accused a servant woman named Glover of bewitching them. Glover was later convicted and hanged as a witch. The Goodwin case and the children's "afflicted" behavior were described in detail in a widely read book, Memorable Providences, written by Rev. Cotton Mather, a prominent Boston minister, and published in 1689.

In Salem Village the Rev. Parris and other local ministers were unable to remedy the girls' behavior through prayer. Doctor William Griggs, a village physician, was consulted, and he pronounced the girls to be suffering from the "Evil Hand." Several young friends of Betty Parris and Abigail Williams, also exhibited similar behavior. They were all children of influential families in the Village and supporters of Rev. Parris: Ann Putnam, Jr., daughter of Sgt. Thomas Putnam, Elizabeth Hubbard, grand niece of William Griggs, Mercy Lewis, a servant in the home of Thomas Putnam, and Mary Walcott, daughter of Capt. Jonathan Walcott. Subsequently, the girls began to name people in the Village. The first to be accused were easy targets of social prejudice: Sarah Good, a homeless mother and beggar, Tituba, the Indian slave of the Rev. Parris; and Sarah Osburn, a woman whose marriage and inheritance dispute attracted disfavor. Tituba, the first to be examined by the magistrates, admitted that she had been beaten by Rev. Parris and told to confess. She confessed volubly and in great detail to an alliance with the Devil, and she named Osburn and Good as witches. Sarah Good also accused Sarah Osburn before the magistrates. Tituba's confession and Good's confirmation Osburn's involvement convinced the ministers and magistrates of a local conspiracy with the Devil. Bolder accusations followed. Emboldened, the girls accused Martha Cory and Rebecca Nurse, both respected members of the church. At the end of March, people in nearby Ipswich accused Rachel Clinton, an abandoned wife, who had previously been accused of witchcraft. All were jailed on charges of witchcraft and shackled with iron fetters.

The newly appointed governor Sir William Phips returned from England in the middle of May. He arrived with a new royal charter and was empowered to govern. With dozens of accused witches filling the jails and with more accusations threatening to overwhelm the local courts, Governor Phips established a special court of Oyer and Termerer ("to hear and determine") to try the backlog of cases. In June, the first to be executed was Bridget Bishop, an outspoken woman who had been accused of witchcraft twelve years earlier. The
accusations continued and began to spread outside Salem Village, filling the jails in Salem, Boston, Cambridge, and Ipswich. Accusations also began to spread up the social ladder to people of high social status, such as Salem's richest merchant, Philip English, and the famed sea Captain John Alden. The most active accusers lived in Salem Village, and this community suffered the most from executions, while the people of Andover sustained the largest number of accusations.

The court of Oyer and Terminer was headed by Lieutenant Governor William Stoughton, appointed by Governor Phips. Stoughton supported the validity of spectral evidence used by the girls and young women in their accusations. A "specter" was the image of a person visible only to the witchcraft victim whom the specter was said to have attacked in some way. The use of spectral evidence was common in New England witchcraft trials, but never played a decisive role. The Rev. Cotton Mather, writing on behalf of several Boston ministers, advised caution in relying on such evidence but at the same time urged the court to undertake "the speedy and vigorous prosecution" of anyone guilty of witchcraft. In the Salem, spectral evidence was used to initiate legal complaints, alleging harmful pinching or choking, in order to bring people into court on charges of witchcraft, with the presumption of guilt. As the documents reveal, the magistrates were successful in obtaining dozens of confessions of witchcraft, which meant testifying to having made a covenant with the Devil. The records show that 47 people confessed to witchcraft, and many did so when it was apparent that confession would put off a trial. This was an unprecedented exception to the law pertaining to capital offenses. Much persuasion and some torture were used to make people confess to a covenant with the Devil. All those who confessed were saved, whereas those who maintained their innocence were executed. This, again, was unprecedented legal procedure. When some confessors recanted their false confessions, for reasons of conscience, serious doubts about the confessions of others were raised, and the legal process called into question.

In early October, the Rev Increase Mather, minister of North Church and President of Harvard College, together with other ministers in Boston, such as the Rev. Samuel Willard, prevailed upon Governor Phips to stop the proceedings of the special court in Salem and to disallow the use of spectral evidence. Public opinion was also changing, as indicated in a famous letter by Thomas Brattle. Without the admission of spectral evidence and without the court room performances of the "afflicted" girls, convictions of witchcraft soon came to an end. In January, Phips appointed the Superior Court of Judicature to try the backlog of cases and begin clearing the jails. In a letter of explanation sent to England, Eventually, Phips wrote a letter of explanation to the Crown saying that he stopped the trials because "I saw many innocent persons might otherwise perish. Phips cited his absence from Boston while fighting Indians and the zealouslyness of Stoughton for allowing the Salem trials get out of hand.

**Aftermath**

Despite strong opposition, Samuel Parris clung to his position as the pastor of Salem Village, admitting too late that "I may have been mistaken." He was forced to leave the Village in 1696. In 1697 a Day of Repentance was declared in Boston. On that day Samuel Sewall, a prominent magistrate on the court of Oyer and Terminer, rose from his seat in South Church to confess the "blame and shame" of the witch trials in a statement read by Rev. Samuel Willard. Twelve jurors who also served on that court confessed to "the guilt of innocent blood." Years later, in 1706 Ann Putnam, Jr, one of the most active accusers, stood in her pew before the Salem Village church while the Rev. Joseph Green read her confession of "delusion" by the devil.

In 1711, the courts of Massachusetts Bay began to make monetary restitution to the families of those who were jailed. The names of some of those condemned and executed were cleared; and the process of clearing names of the condemned from the court records continues today.

http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/