

**THE FIRST
COMMANDER OF
KENT ISLAND**

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The First Commander of Kent Island by Sebastian F. Streeter

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SEBASTIAN F. STREETER

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BY

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SEBASTIAN F. STREETER,

LATE RECORDING SECRETARY OF THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY;

Baltimore, September, 1868.

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THIS Historical Tract concerning GEORGE EVELIN, First
Commander of Kent Island, in the Chesapeake Bay, is
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IN the month of December, 1636, appeared on Kent Island, a person, whose arrival occasioned no little stir among the members of Claiborne's settlement and who was destined to exercise an important influence over the fortunes of those with whom he thus became associated.

The new-comer, to whom I allude, was **GEORGE EVELIN**, the eldest son, if I am rightly informed, of Robert Evelin, of Godstone, in England. His uncle, Capt. William Young, had been or was then engaged in a trading enterprise in the Delaware, (then generally known as the Charles river,) and had built a fort, or trading house, at Eriwo-meek, on the north side of the river, for the purpose of organizing a traffic with the natives of that region. He was accompanied by his nephew, Robert Evelin, a brother of George, and probably by a sufficient company to protect him from the assaults of the surrounding tribes; but his undertaking was not prosperous, and after a fair trial, was relinquished.

Whether George Evelin was associated with his uncle and brother in this enterprise, we do not know;—all that we can assert is, that either as a casual visitor, or, more probably, as an agent of Clobery & Company, Claiborne's partners in England, he made his appearance on Kent, and attached himself to the settlement on Kent Point.

The Kent Islanders, notwithstanding their collisions with the Marylanders, about eighteen months before, in which the lives of some of their best members were lost, and their vessels and goods taken from them, had, through the energy and influence of Capt. Claiborne, been kept together, and to some extent furnished with proper supplies for sustenance, trade, and self-protection; and had, in the face of Governor Calvert and the people of St. Mary's, continued their traffic with the natives, in the Bay and its tributaries, and even in the Potomac river itself. Not an article, however, during that whole period, was received from the partners in England, nor did they give the slightest intimation that they were aware of the existence of the settlement, or felt the least interest in the progress or results of the enterprise, which Claiborne had, thus far, so manfully sustained. Ship after ship arrived in Virginia, by each one of which he was confident he should receive advices and supplies from his partners, a confidence cherished only to be disappointed;

and after fruitless delay, he was obliged, with renewed sacrifices and at greatly increased expense, to obtain those articles, which were absolutely necessary for the comfort and preservation of the settlers and the successful prosecution of their trade. It is quite probable that this neglect on the part of Clobery & Company, entailing a great increase of expenditure upon Claiborne, together with the opposition and competition of the Marylanders, so far consumed the profits, that Claiborne could make little or no returns; and that they, doubting whether any thing could ever be realized from the concern, were discouraged from making further efforts to aid or sustain it.

Things were in this condition, when George Evelin appeared on the Island. The minds of the people were still excited by jealousy of Lord Baltimore's settlement, and the question of the comparative strength of Claiborne's commission backed by letters of the King, and Lord Baltimore's patent, was often under discussion. Evelin, from the first, took the view of the subject naturally popular on the Island. He took pains positively to deny the right of jurisdiction of the Marylanders over the plantation on Kent, and their claim to exclusive trade in the Bay, and asserted that the commission given to Claiborne, and his Majesty's subsequent letter of confirmation against the claim of Lord Baltimore and his

agents, were of sufficient strength to withstand the Maryland patent. Not content with this, he even resorted to disparaging references to Leonard Calvert, and his family. "Who was his grandfather," asked he, "but a grazier?" "What was his father?" "What was Leonard Calvert himself, at school, but a dunce and a blockhead; and now, has it come to this, that such a fellow should be governor of a province, and assume such lordly airs?" By such zealous and apparently sincere declarations, and by a shrewd and time-serving policy, Evelin soon won the confidence of the people, and probably of Claiborne himself, and was regarded as one of the bitterest opponents of Governor Calvert and his measures, and one of the most strenuous supporters of Claiborne and Clobery's claims to the possession of Kent Island and to unrestricted trade.

But the hypocrite and traitor was soon to shew himself in his true colors. In the month of February, 1637, arrived in Virginia from England, the ship Sara and Elizabeth, on board of which was a supply of servants and goods destined for Kent Island, and shipped by Clobery & Company, of London. These were taken up to the Island in a pinnace belonging to one John Goodfellow, of Virginia; but, instead of being consigned to Claiborne, as he and all expected, both goods and servants were claimed by Evelin as a special consignment to