

Volume 20

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America's Revolution (32) – Patrick Henry and the Parson's Cause – II

Lead: In the 1700s the United States broke from England. No colony in history had done that before. This series examines America's Revolution.

Intro: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts

Content: Having secured the support of the English Privy Council in striking down a Virginia statute that sought to relieve debtors facing ruin because of a spike in tobacco prices caused by drought, several Anglican clergymen set Virginian teeth on edge

by suing to have their salaries paid at the full market rate, drought and inflation be damned. Their efforts were turned aside in two cases, but that of the most Rev. Mr. James Maury of Louisa County received favorable judgment from the court who then referred the case to a jury for a determination of the damages.

Local lights hired Patrick Henry to argue the county's case before the jury. He knew very little law at the time but he could certainly make a speech. He first attacked the clergy for their disloyalty to the Commonwealth by not obeying the law and then complaining to London. Henry then went after the King accusing him of tyranny because his government

disallowed a lawful Virginia Act, thus forfeiting the obedience of his subjects. The cries of treason in the courtroom were ignored by the presiding judge, Colonel John Henry, the lawyer's father, who had as little compassion for troublesome clergymen as he did for tyrannical monarchs. He then let his son proceed to rhetorical heights few had ever heard. The jury responded to his vicious attacks by awarding the pitiful Rev. Maury the enormous total of a single penny. Henry's reputation was made.

At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.

Resources

Beeman, Richard. *Patrick Henry: A Biography*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1974.

Isaac, Rhys. “Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia in the Era of the Great Awakening and the Parson’s Cause,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 30 (1973): 3-36.

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