Hugh Jones: Lord Baltimore’s Mathematician

It is likely that the shortness of Hugh Jones’s first residence (four years only) in Virginia was due to the fact that he supported his friend, Governor Alexander Spotswood, against that official’s mortal enemy, the Reverend James Blair – the president of the College of William and Mary, Commissary of the Bishop of London, and Councilor. Blair proved himself to be a greater political “figure” than the Governor. He wanted to damage Jones’s name, so he appointed him to a notoriously unruly parish. All the while he assured the Bishop of London in his answer to a letter recommending that Jones supervise the parish. Commissary Blair wrote his supervisor a letter a year after Jones took the parish position, stating, “Mr. Hugh Jones has upon a foolish dispute with the Vestry, about the placing of the pulpit, suddenly left this Countrey and gone to Maryland.”

Hugh Jones’s first six-year stay in Maryland was not profitable, and he was sued a few times. He also became a member of the vestry to acquire money that was owed him. In his stay in Maryland he made a few acquaintances. One was with Governor Benedict Leonard Calvert, who made a promise to Jones that the first available parish in Maryland would be his.

In 1731 Jones was given a profitable parish, North Sassafras Parish (commonly know, as St. Stephen’s), located close to the border of Pennsylvanian and Delaware. As the rector of St. Stephen’s, Jones became the Chief Mathematician for Lord Baltimore in a land dispute between Maryland and Pennsylvania. The dispute was over the placement of the line, but the groups failed to agree on the center of the circle which was to form the boundary north and west of New Castle. The group called in mathematicians to settle the location of the boundary, and Jones was one of the mathematicians that were chosen. The dispute continued for many years.

Hugh Jones continued with his life, and in July of 1760 accepted a transfer to Augustine parish but he died two months later. In the same year of his death, Lord Baltimore and the Penn family signed a final agreement on their boundary dispute. Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon were employed two years later to place the line that bears their names.


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February 12, 2004