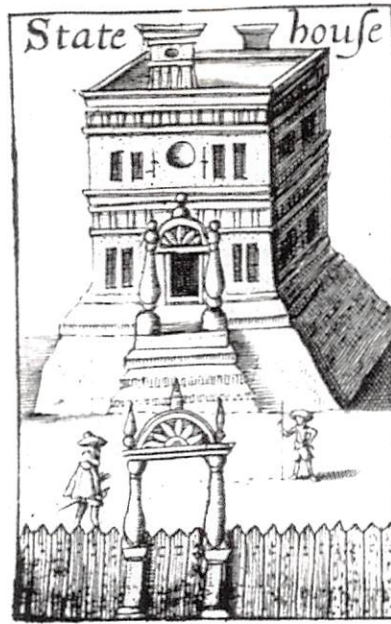


WITCH HUNTS

Innocent women were often accused of being witches in the 17th century. Bermuda was no different from Europe, and many witch trials were held here. Anyone accused of **sorcery** sometimes was guilty of nothing more than having a mole or birthmark. These were thought to be sinister signs at a time when people believed in demons and evil spirits. If found guilty, “witches” were tortured, imprisoned or hanged.


← **STATE HOUSE**

Bermuda's oldest stone building is the State House in the Town of St. George. Built in 1622, it was a courthouse and headquarters for the General Assembly. Later, it became a storage depot for gunpowder. The State House also had a darker role to play: as the venue for nearly two-dozen witch trials held in the colony's first 40 years.

ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

It was a **volatile** period of religious upheaval in Europe. The rise of Protestants (Puritans) in England caused a power struggle with the Roman Catholics, who were supported by the monarchy. Civil war broke out (1642–51) and enemies of the Crown defeated King Charles I and cut off his head.

He was replaced by Parliamentarian Oliver Cromwell, who established a period of rule known as the “Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland.” It lasted just five years before the monarchy was restored. In Bermuda, where Royalist support was strong, a group tried to **banish** the island's Puritans. Some Puritans fled to the Bahamas.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In 1619, Captain Nathaniel Butler became Bermuda's new Governor. He organized the construction of bridges between Bermuda's main islands—at Somerset, Flatts and between St. George's and Coney Islands. He also brought in laws to protect turtles and cedar, which was fast vanishing. He created a grand jury system and rebuilt St. Peter's Church in stone. Butler also established the first General Assembly. This laid the foundations for Bermuda's **democratic** parliament. The first gathering of the Assembly took place in St. Peter's Church on August 1, 1620.

CHANGE OF DESTINY

After more than 70 years of very strict government, Bermuda's colonists were ready to take charge of their destiny. In 1684, the Bermuda Company was dissolved, and the island became a colony of the Crown. Trade restrictions were lifted. Bermudians gave up their unsuccessful efforts at agriculture. Instead, they began to seek their fortunes at sea. A **maritime** era was about to begin. It would forever shape who we are and how we live.

3

The First Settlers



In the summer of 1612, a group of 60 men, women and children spent 11 weeks sailing to Bermuda aboard a ship named the *Plough*. They arrived on July 11 at St. George's and set up camp at what is now Smith's Island in the harbour. A carpenter named Richard Moore was their first Governor. The London investors in charge of the Virginia Company told Moore to send them back proof of Bermuda's riches—silk, tobacco, pearls or whale oil. But Moore found none of these treasures in Bermuda.

The **settlers** soon moved across the bay to the larger main island, now called St. George's. They were English farmers who knew nothing about life on a **subtropical** island, so everything had to be learned by experimenting. They had to discover which crops would grow well in the new soil and climate, and how to build homes with unusual materials like palmetto leaves and cedar wood. They cleared the land, planted corn and tobacco, went fishing and hunted hogs and turtles. The **fledgling** community was first called "Virginiola," as it lay off the coast of

4 The Company Island

The London investors who controlled Bermuda decided they needed a tough new leader to manage the island. They chose Virginia planter Daniel Tucker, who became Bermuda's governor in 1616. He had his work cut out for him. When Tucker arrived in Bermuda, he found a disorganised community plagued by crime, laziness and rats.

No one seemed to be in charge and there was no industry and few crops. Drastic changes were needed to make the colony **self-sufficient**.

Tucker carried a commission from the king. This gave him authority to set down new rules which the settlers had to obey. These included: "Gunpowder shall be carefully stored and not wasted," and "All nets and



↑ *Bermuda Company seal*

lines shall be carefully dried before being stored." Tucker also brought a surgeon to take care of the settlers' health. He made fresh water available to everyone and distributed rat poison to kill disease-carrying vermin. Tucker ordered widespread planting, and handed out cuttings and seedlings from London: "vines" (grapes), aniseed, fennel, marjoram, basil, onions, sugarcane and mulberry trees.

SEEDS OF GOVERNMENT

The Bermuda Company laid down a plan for the island's first government. It decreed that Governor Tucker and the colony's two religious ministers should choose 40 men. These, in turn, would elect a man from each of the eight tribes (or parishes) to act as bailiffs. The bailiffs sat with the Governor and two ministers on a General Council that dealt with important matters, such as crime and punishment.

TUCKER'S TOWN

Governor Tucker named Tucker's Town when he tried to move the capital of St. George across Castle Harbour. But few colonists went to live there. The **peninsula** was used only by guards posted to the Castle Island forts.