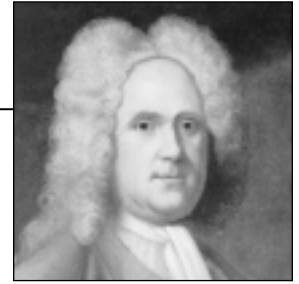


## Alexander Spotswood

### Farsighted Colonial Governor



*Virginia governor Alexander Spotswood was one of the first officials to see the potential of the Backcountry. He encouraged the settlement of Virginia's frontier.*

Alexander Spotswood (1676–1740) was born in Tangier, Morocco. His father had served there as a military surgeon. Spotswood wanted to follow his family's tradition of military service, so he joined Britain's army at the age of 17. Several years later, his bravery during the War of the Spanish Succession won the attention of the Duke of Marlborough. Spotswood was rewarded with the governorship of Virginia.

In addition to governing the colony, the 34-year-old Spotswood also became responsible for leading its church, commanding its army, and seeing that justice was served in its courts. He also had to manage Virginia's dealings with the other colonies and oversee relations with Native Americans.

Not long after he was made governor, Spotswood ran into difficulties with Virginia's law-making body, the Council. The Virginians who served on the Council had grown used to making their own laws. They resented the Crown's new representative. After Spotswood had served as governor for several years, he complained about the Council's prejudice against him.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

These are the men that look upon all persons not born in the Country as forreigners, and think that no other qualification is necessary for an employment, nor ought to be considered in the disposal thereof, but that of being born in the Country.

ALEXANDER SPOTSWOOD, letter to Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations

Spotswood was Virginia's governor from 1710 to 1722. During that time, he worked to increase and regulate trade with Native Americans. He oversaw the construction of forts to protect

Virginia's frontier. He also led an expedition into Virginia's Shenandoah Valley that helped to open up the West for colonial settlement.

**A Practical Indian Policy** Governor Spotswood believed in the importance of trade with Native Americans. He also felt responsible for keeping order. In 1711, a group of Tuscarora Indians attacked a settlement in nearby North Carolina. Spotswood promptly sent troops to prevent Native Americans from Virginia from joining the warring Tuscaroras.

The governor then called a meeting near the Carolina border. He invited Tuscaroras who had not participated in the deadly attack to send delegates to sign a peace treaty with the colonists. There would be no more trade, Spotswood warned, until they signed the treaty. In order to convince more delegates to sign, Spotswood promised to send two Native American children from each town to college.

Three years later, Spotswood proposed the Indian Act of 1714. This act established the Virginia Indian Company to oversee relations with Native Americans. The Company, which chose Spotswood to be its governor, also built a schoolhouse to educate Native American children.

The Indian Act of 1714 required all trade with Native Americans to take place at a market called Christanna. Safe trade with the Native Americans required strong security measures. Under Spotswood's guidance, the Virginia Indian Company built a large fort at Christanna. The fort had five sides, each measuring about 100 yards in length. Five cannons stood ready to defend Christanna against attackers.

**Looking West** Governor Spotswood’s interest in trade led him to look westward toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. He hoped to find a good site for a fort that would defend a mountain pass and launch trade with the Native Americans who lived further west.

The governor himself decided to lead a mountain expedition in the summer of 1716. Sixty-three men went along. Among them was John Fontaine, who kept a diary during the journey. In addition to turning the eyes of Virginians toward the West, the trip itself proved to be quite an adventure.

Fontaine described how the adventurers braved dense thickets, muddy streams, and rattlesnakes. In spite of these challenges, the explorers soon reached the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains. They then descended on the western side and camped on the Shenandoah River. There the men fired their guns and made toasts to celebrate their success.

#### **A VOICE FROM THE PAST**

We had a good dinner, and after it we got the men together, and loaded their arms, and we drank the King’s health in champagne, and fired a volley—the Princess’s health in Burgundy, and fired a volley, and all the rest of the Royal Family in claret, and a volley.

JOHN FONTAINE, quoted in *Colonial Virginia*

On the west bank of the Shenandoah, Spotswood buried a bottle. In the bottle, he placed a document “on which he writ that he took possession of this place in the name and for King George the First of England.” When the adventurers returned, the governor gave each of his men a golden horseshoe to commemorate their expedition and the opening of the West for English settlement.

**A Virginia Gentleman** In 1724, two years after Spotswood left the governorship, he traveled to England. He took the trip to secure his title to a vast piece of land in the new Virginia county of Spotsylvania. In England, Spotswood married Anne Butler Brayne. But the former governor now considered himself a Virginian.

In 1730, he brought his family back to his large Virginia home. In addition to running a profitable ironworks in Virginia, Spotswood resumed his public career. He served as deputy postmaster general of the colonies from 1730 until his death in 1740.

#### **Review Questions**

1. How did Spotswood serve Virginia and the American colonies?
2. How did Spotswood feel about the Virginia Council when he was governor?
3. What were some characteristics of Spotswood’s policy toward Native Americans?

#### **Critical Thinking**

4. **Drawing Conclusions** Alexander Spotswood experienced a change in loyalties from his early days in Virginia to his later years. Explain this change.
5. **Recognizing Effects** Why did Spotswood’s expedition across the Blue Ridge Mountains become a milestone in Virginia’s history?
6. **Making Inferences** How did Spotswood’s early experiences as governor indicate a beginning conflict between the colonies and England?