

# The Rappahannock River Settlements

## Orange County History

In 1634, just one hundred years before the formation of Orange, "the country was divided into eight shires which are to be governed as the shires in England. And lieutenants to be appointed the same as in England, and in a more especial manner to take care of the war against Indians. Sheriffs shall be elected as in England, to have the same powers as there; and sergeants and bailiffs, where need requires." (1 Hen., 224.)

Of these original shires one was named Charles River; so called after the river as named by the colonists in honor of King Charles. The Indian name of the whole river had been Pamaunkee (spelled Pomunkey by Hening) which means, according to Campbell the historian, "where we took a sweat."

It is not known when these political divisions ceased to be called shires and became known as counties, but in 1642-3 the name of the shire Charles River, then called County, was changed to York, and the river below the confluence of the Mattaponi was called York River. The boundaries of these counties were not defined towards the frontiers, and it is assumed that, like Spotsylvania, they extended as far "as might be convenient."

The genesis here becomes somewhat confused. Lancaster County is first mentioned by Hening in 1652, when it had two representatives at a session of the House of Burgesses.

It is included because subsequent formations relate back to it and seem to constitute it a link in the line.

New Kent was formed from York in 1654.

Old Rappahannock from Lancaster in 1656, ceasing to be a county name in 1692, when two counties, Richmond and Essex, were formed from it.

And thus Orange, as will be seen later, furnishes the paradox of being alike the daughter and the mother of a Rappahannock County.

King and Queen was formed from New Kent in 1691 .

Essex from old Rappahannock in 1692.

King William from King and Queen in 1701.

Spotsylvania from Essex, King William, and King and Queen in 1720; and

Orange from Spotsylvania in 1734.

This is believed to be the genealogy of Orange, direct and collateral. To complete its geography, its dismemberment and line of descent is here added.

Augusta and Frederick, embracing all the territory of Orange lying north and west of the top of the Blue Ridge, were formed in 1738,

Culpeper, embracing Madison and Rappahannock, was formed from Orange in 1748.

Madison was formed from Culpeper in 1792, and named for James Madison.

Rappahannock was formed from Culpeper in 1833.

Greene, named in honor of Gen. Nathaniel Greene, was formed from Orange in 1838, the last dismemberment.

While it might be interesting, it would be beyond the scope of this book to attempt even an outline history of the many counties named in this genesis. Spotsylvania, as the immediate territory from which Orange was formed, must be briefly considered.

In 1720, the seat of government being at Williamsburg, the following Act "for erecting the counties of Spotsylvania and Brunswick" was passed by the "General Assembly, " for so the law-making power was called even at that early date:

"Preamble, That the frontiers towards the high mountains are exposed to danger from the Indians, and the late settlements of the French to the westward of the said mountains.

Enacted, Spotsylvania County bounds upon Snow Creek up to the Mill, thence by a southwest line to the river North Anna, thence up the said river as

far as convenient, and thence by a line to be run over the high mountains to the river on the northwest side thereof, so as to include the northern passage through the said mountains, thence down the said river until it comes against the head of Rappahannock, thence by a line to the head of Rappahannock river, and down that river to the mouth of Snow Creek; which tract of land from the first of May, 1721, shall become a county, by the name of Spotsylvania County." (4 Hening, 77.)

The County was named for Lieutenant-Governor Spotswood, then acting governor of the Colony.

Without the help of boundaries subsequently established and maintained to this time, it would be difficult to define the lines laid down in the statute. Interpreted by these it may be safely affirmed that on the east and south the County was bounded as now; "Snow Creek, " the line with Caroline County, empties into the Rappahannock ten or fifteen miles below Fredericksburg : the North Anna is the southern boundary up to the Orange line: "up the North Anna as far as convenient" is obscure but unimportant, and may be interpreted as meaning all the way to its source. The ultimate source of this river is a spring on the Johnson place, near the top of the Southwest mountains, and but a few feet from the turnpike leading from Gordonsville to Harrisonburg. Taking this spring, which is not far from the Albemarle line, as the starting point for the "line over the high mountains to the river on the northwest side thereof so as to include the northern passage through the said mountains, " we have approximately the present lines of Orange and Greene counties with Albemarle to the top of the Blue Ridge. This about forces the conclusion that the "northern passage " means Swift Run Gap, through which this same 'pike crosses the Blue Ridge. At the time the County was formed the only passage across the mountains had been made by Governor Spotswood in 1716, known as the "Expedition of the Knights of the Horseshoe." The "river on the northwest side" of the mountain is our Shenandoah, then called "Sherrando" and "Shenando", and by Spotswood "the Euphrates;" down this river until it comes "against the head of Rappahannock : " this would bring us about Front Royal, the county seat of Warren; thence by a line to the head of Rappahannock River, say about the corner of Fauquier, Warren, and Rappahannock, and then down to the beginning, following the line of the

sources of the Rappahannock, and the Rappahannock itself to Snow Creek. These boundaries can be easily traced on any modern map of Virginia.

By the same Act fifteen hundred pounds was appropriated, to be paid to the Governor, of which five hundred for a church, courthouse, prison, pillory and stocks where the governor shall appoint them in Spotsylvania, he to employ workmen, provide material, etc.: one thousand pounds, of which one-half to Spotsylvania, to be distributed in arms and ammunition among such persons as shall hereafter go to seat the said County; that is, to each Christian titheable one fire lock musket, one socket, bayonet fitted thereto, one cartouch box, eight pounds bullet, two pounds powder, until the whole one thousand pounds be laid out, the account to be laid before the General Assembly. The arms appropriated to the defence of the County, and both the real and personal estate of the persons taking them made liable to their forthcoming in good order; and to be stamped with the name of the County, and liable to seizure of any militia officer if found without the bounds. Inhabitants made free of public levies for ten years, and the whole County made one parish by the name of St. George. Because foreign Protestants may not understand English readily, they and their titheables made free for ten years if any such shall entertain a minister of their own. This last clause was for the benefit of the Germans settled at Germanna.

While Orange was yet a part of Spotsylvania, and, indeed, before Spotsylvania itself was formed, thousands and thousands of acres of land to the westward, even as far as to the Mississippi, had been granted to individuals by the Crown, acting mainly through the Governors of the Colony; and titles to much land in Orange of today are traced back to Spotsylvania, King and Queen, and the land office at Richmond. The Madison Grant, " for example, was made while the grantee was still a resident of King and Queen.

ORANGE COUNTY was formed from Spotsylvania in 1734, and was named not from the "color of its soil" as erroneously stated by Howe and others, for there is no soil of orange color in the County; but for William, . Prince of Orange one of England's most worthy kings: Next to "good Queen Anne" he appears to have been the best beloved by the colonists of all their kings; King

William, King and Queen, Williamsburg, and William and Mary College were all named in his honor, two of them in honor of him and his Queen.

In colonial times it was not uncommon for parishes to be formed before the counties which afterwards contained them were established. Such was the case with Orange, and the boundaries of the County can only be stated in connection with those of the parish of St. Mark. The Act defining St. Mark is as follows:

Enacted, Whereas many inconveniences attend the parishioners of St. George parish, in the county of Spotsylvania, by reason of the great length thereof, that from January 1 1730, the said parish be divided into two distinct parishes: From the mouth of the Rapidan to the mouth of Wilderness Run; thence up the said Run to the bridge; and thence southwest to Pamunkey River: the part below the said bounds to be known as St. George Parish, and all that other part which lies above the said bounds be known as St. Mark.

The freeholders were required to meet at Germanna on that day and there " elect and choose twelve of the most able and discreet persons of their parish to be vestrymen. " When Orange was established, just four years later, the dividing line between these parishes was made the boundary line between Orange and Spotsylvania, so it becomes necessary to determine what that line was. It is manifest that Orange never touched the Pamunkey River as we now know that river, and the conclusion is unavoidable that we must understand some point on the North Anna, which probably, at that time, was called the Pamunkey, because it was the main branch of that stream; which point is the present corner of Spotsylvania with Orange on the North Anna.

The Act establishing the County was passed at the August session, 1734. (4 Hen., 450.) Leaving out unnecessary words it reads:

An Act for dividing Spotsylvania County.

Whereas divers inconveniences attend the upper inhabitants of Spotsylvania County, by reason of their great distance from the Courthouse and other places usually appointed for public meetings: Be it therefore enacted, by the Lieutenant-governor. Council and Burgesses, of this present General Assembly, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same; That from

and immediately after the first day of January now next ensuing, the said County of Spotsylvania be divided by the dividing line between the parish of St. George and the parish of St. Mark; and that that part of the said county which is now the parish of St. George remain and be called and known by the name of Spotsylvania County; and all that territory of land adjoining to and above the said line, bounded southerly by the line of Hanover County, northerly by the grant of the Lord Fairfax, and westerly by the utmost limits of Virginia, be thenceforth erected into one distinct county, to be called and known by the name of the county of Orange.

A Court for the County was directed to be constantly held by the justices thereof on the third Tuesday in every month.

For the encouragement of the inhabitants already settled and which shall speedily settle on the westward of the Sherrendo River, it was further enacted that they should be free and exempt from the payment of public, county and parish levies for three years next following, and that all who might settle there in the next three years should be so exempt for the remainder of that time.

The terms of the statute need explanation in this, "southerly by the line of Hanover." Louisa was then part of Hanover. "The grant of the Lord Fairfax" on the north. As then understood, Lord Fairfax's southern limit was the Rappahannock River, as it is known to-day. There was much and long continued contention and litigation about this line, however, between Fairfax and the colonial authorities, but it was finally settled that the Fairfax grant embraced all the land lying between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers up to the head springs of each river, and that the head spring of the Rappahannock was the source of what is now known as Conway or Middle River, which source is near the corner of Greene and Madison counties, near the crest of the Blue Ridge. As this contention was not settled till long afterwards, the northerly boundary of Orange continued to be the present Rappahannock River until Culpeper was cut off in 1748, and it remains the boundary of Culpeper to this day.

A map showing a " survey according to order in the years 1736 and 1737 of the Northern Neck of Virginia, being the lands belonging to Lord Fairfax, " is published in the report of the commissioners appointed to settle the

boundaries between Maryland and Virginia in 1873. On it South River is called "Thornton, " the Rapidan above the mouth of South River, is called "Staunton's River," and below the mouth is put down as " Rappahannock River, South Branch, called Rapidan, " and the Rappahannock above the mouth of the Rapidan is called "Cannon", and, higher up, "Hedgeman's River."