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The 'Enchanted Castle' Archeological Site Home of Virginia's Lt. Governor Alexander Spotswood

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In 1710, Virginia had been without a royal governing official in residence for several years, the appointed governor residing in England refusing to come to the colony and no one could be found to serve in his place as Lieutenant Governor.

Alexander Spotswood, just retiring from a military career, and felt deserving of more payment than the government had allotted, was approved by Queen Anne, to serve in the capacity of Lt. Governor of the Colony, the position offering him not only an income, but the chance to gain property. Spotswood's family, once landed gentry of Scotland, had lost their properties when his Grandfather was beheaded over some political and/or religious differences, and Spotswood and a cousin were determined to regain their position as land owners.

Charged by Queen Anne with examining the patents granted to colonial residents for conformance with the requirements to hold the patent (usually meaning they agreed to provide homes for so many persons for so many acres), Spotswood was to withdraw the patents in case the conditions were not met and reassign them to someone who would conform. He took his charge seriously and made a number of enemies by assigning the patents to himself. He did this indirectly by assigning the patents to friends for a short time who then reassigned them to Spotswood. The gaining of ten's of thousands of acres provided one reason for Spotswood's encouragement of westward expansion of the population as the lands he took were those at the then western edge of Essex County (which extended to, if not beyond, the mountains.)

Having made an agreement with a man named de Grafenreid of North Carolina to develop an iron industry, Spotswood sought royal permission to do so, but was turned down, it being the wish of England to export iron products to the colony. De Grafenreid (and Spotswood) then sought permission to develop silver mining, and permission was granted. After arranging for a group of German miners to come to the colonies, de Grafenreid then ran out of money, but charged their passage to Spotswood. When the Germans arrived in 1714, Spotswood accepted (or insisted upon) their indentures for several years to pay off their passage.

Needing a place to seat the Germans, Spotswood, who had been trying to establish a protective fort at the western-most edge of the county, but finding few citizens willing to move there, placed the Germans there at the site now called Germanna—named for the Germans and for Queen Anne. (Spotswood had a penchant for applying Queen Anne's name to everything he could—the fort used for christianizing the Indians became Fort Christiana; the rapid-flowing river the Rapid Anne, etc.)

There, these Germans who had landed at Hob's Hole (now Tappahannock) built a five-sided fort with a five-sided blockhouse. John Fontaine visited the site in 1715 and recorded the details of the nine houses with pig pens and the church services being held in the block house.

The Germans were put to searching for iron ore, but told if anyone asked, to say they were mining silver—which is what they did tell Fontaine. Fontaine recorded he examined the ore most of the day and thought it would come to nothing!

In 1716 Governor Spotswood and a group of men explored the wilderness between Germanna and to and over the mountains. The horses had to be shod for this trip and the farrier was probably inexperienced, but the horses lost their shoes regularly. Each time this happened, a 'drink-break' was called. (There are some thoughts about 'why?' the shoes were lost so often!) So many 'drink-breaks' were taken that it became a joke and upon return from the trip, the Governor presented those who had made the trip with a miniature golden horseshoe and dubbed the members the 'Knights of the Golden Horseshoe'. None of the little shoes are in verified existence today.

After the first miners worked off their indentures, they wanted to buy land, but Spotswood would not sell any of his holdings. The Germans moved to what is now Fauquier County and started German Town on Licking Run near present day Catlett. Thus the early populating of Fauquier was the result of these Essex settlers.

Needing more workers, Spotswood brought in another group of Germans, this time of the Lutheran persuasion. When their indentures were worked off, they moved to

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present day Madison County to start the population there. Later groups moved over the mountains into the Shenandoah Valley.

By 1720 so many settlers had moved into the area they wanted a new county seat—they did not want to travel all the way to Tappahannock to record their deeds, marriages, births, deaths, or pay their taxes. Spotswood got the governing officials to agree to the new county which was named in his honor—only through the anagram 'sylvania' for wood. Thus, in 1721 Spotsylvania County was separated from Essex.

Having started his own home at Germanna (in 1719 he already had his wine and clothes there for a servant girl was taken to court for wearing his clothes and drinking his wine—these records found in the Essex County Court Records!), Spotswood offered to allow the new county the use of a room in his house as a courtroom. Once this was accepted, it was then the responsibility of the county to develop the road to the courthouse! (and to Spotswood's new home).

By 1722, Spotswood's 'enemies' saw his removal as Lt. Governor and he was requested to return to England to explain some of his 'doings'. In the midst of building a new house at Germanna and establishing his iron industry, he postponed this trip for two years.

What was this new house like? There exist no paintings, no descriptions, no blue prints. We have only the word of William Byrd of Westover in 1732 who called it an 'Enchanted Castle'.

Spotswood was known to possess great architectural talents. When he arrived at Williamsburg in 1710 the Governor's Palace was not completed. Not liking the design, he modified it, saw it completed, and was the first Governor to occupy it. He was instrumental in the planning and construction of the Powder Magazine and some of the original buildings of the College of William and Mary. He was involved in the design of Bruton Parish Church. All of these buildings are considered masterpieces of architectural beauty. We assume he would have not settled for less in his own home.

Records indicate the house was burned about 1750, ten years after Spotswood's death, eight years after his widow remarried and moved to Salubria in present Culpeper County. Tradition only has placed the site of Spotswood's 'Enchanted Castle' or Germanna at the site opposite Germanna Community College. An exploratory dig in 1977 indicated that there was indeed a building ruins, buried about three feet under the soil surface, at that site—and dishware recovered indicated the occupation by a person of note. This evidence placed the site on the Register of Historic Places. The owner of the site had no plans for it, so no further excavation plans were made, there being many other registered places that were endangered by shopping center and sub-division construction. Suddenly, in 1984, the 250-acre site was sold to a man whose intention was to develop a 55-home-site subdivision. The buried ruins of Spotswood's 'Enchanted Castle' was being threatened. A plea by the local historical societies resulted in permission to conduct a salvage archeological dig, providing it was done immediately. The dig was started the next day and has resulted in the discovery of a large house site measuring about 88 or more feet long and 36 or so feet wide; constructed of brick and stone, much of the latter fancy cut for doors and windows. The house had a slate roof (evidenced by lots of roofing slate in the rubble, many pieces with the nails still in place.) This is intriguing, for there were no slate quarries open in Virginia at this time, most slate being imported from Wales.

The 'basement' area has been found to be covered with brick 'pavers' 7 inches square, 2 inches thick and one beautifully constructed stone fire place has been excavated with evidence of three more attached to the same chimney. A beautiful iron fire or chimney back has been found in complete condition. It is about 2 1/2 feet high, 22 inches wide, 1 inch thick and weighs about 80 pounds. It has a perfect image of Queen Anne in the center.

Evidence of life styles have been found in the form of clay pipes, wine bottles, and dishware fragments.

A number of dependencies have been partially excavated, the entire complex covering over 60 acres.

Historic Gordonsville, Inc., convinced the tests of the area indicated an important historical site to be preserved, undertook to purchase from the sub-division developer the sixty plus acres to preserve the Germanna Complex—and has, through donations and help from the Virginia Legislature, succeeded.

Now, it is necessary to acquire the services of an archeologist to direct the activities over the next five years to completely expose and interpret the home site of the 1720-1740 time period.

You are all issued an invitation to visit the site at any time to see what has been found and what is to be done.

Getting back to the history!

Spotswood did go back to England, was examined, was found to be guilty of no wrong-doing. While there, he met and married Butler Brayne and by her had two children (he was already in his 40's, she just 20). When the time came to return (1730), an old-maid sister (possibly not too good looking and Spotswood maybe felt she would fare better in the wilderness where 'anything looked good') came back to Germanna with them. There, in 1732 when William Byrd visited, Miss Thecky (as Dorothea was called), showed him around over the grounds, down the terraced walkways to the fountain spring with the white marble basin. Near by was a covered bench which Miss Thecky pointed to and remarked 'There is where I spend hours bewailing my virginity!' (Byrd was such a detailed diary-keeper that if he had thoughts about the statement, he would have recorded them—and he didn't). Miss Thecky did, later, marry Elliot Bengier of Spotsylvania. (The fountain spring is still there—and visible if you visit!, but the bench is not. When a local history class was asked to 'restore it' as a class project, they remarked 'not needed today!'. We'll have to wait for the new morality.

Two more children were born to the Spotswood's, and visitors reported the Ex-Governor spoiled them rotten. Visitors also reported the Ex-Governor bored them with his accounts of being injured by a 4-pound cannon ball which he had recovered and kept. As excavations proceed at the site, one wonders 'who will find the cannon ball?'

Successful in his iron business, successful in western expansion of population, as well as a number of other accomplishments, it was a sad day when Spotswood died in 1740.

We, at Germanna, would like to know a great deal more about him. There is lots to be unearthed, both from the ground and from the records—some of it right here in Essex County. His descendants are many—some are noted and known, Helen Keller and Robert E. Lee are among them. Any help you can provide in assisting the excavation, locating records, identifying family members would be greatly appreciated.

Contact either Robert A. Hodge, Germanna Community College, Locust Grove, Virginia 22508 or

William H. B. Thomas, Project Director, P. O. Box 687, Locust Grove, Virginia 22508.

Thousands Attend Corner Stone Laying*

Tappahannock's "Big Day" has come and gone. It is a memory and a very happy memory at that, for it marked a red letter day, a new era, a dawn of a new prosperity. The laying of the corner stone for the Rappahannock River bridge, the longest south of New York, is not merely an incident. It is an epoch, for hope has changed to glad fruition in a long desired project.

We see the Rappahannock Valley waking up, springing into life, we see a closer communion, a united fellowship among a people whose interests are common; we see the removal of a barrier that has existed since barbarous men stealthily tread on moccasins and stalked the deer of the forests.

Some of the distinguished visitors who were on the program were late in arriving, and it was about 12 o'clock when the great throng was called to order by Mayor H. C. DeShields, of Tappahannock, and an invocation was offered by Rev. H. S. Osburn, rector of this parish. After a few remarks from the mayor, he introduced Judge Alvin T. Embrey, of Fredericksburg, president of the Rappahannock Valley, Inc., who presided throughout the meeting, and introduced the various speakers, among whom were Senator Thos. J. Downing, "father" of the bridge; State Highway Commissioner, H. G. Shirley; Thos. Oslin, speaker of the House of Delegates; Mayor Bright, of Richmond; Luke C. Bradley, president of the Virginia Electric and Power Company; J. Scott Parrish, president of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce; Jas. W. Gorthrup, secretary of the Virginia Highway Improvement Corporation, and Col. Jno. R. Saunders, Attorney General of Virginia. With the exception of Col. Downing, who was the orator of the occasion, the speakers were limited to only about five minutes each. The audience was remarkably attentive, although there was an overflow and the large gymnasium of St. Margaret's School was sufficient to seat or even hold only a very small portion of those present, the attendance numbering five thousand at the most conservative estimate.

When Senator Downing was escorted to the rostrum pandemonium broke loose. Every person in the building arose, and he was cheered to the echo. The Senator was at his best and fully maintained his reputation. He kept the crowd either spellbound by his oratory, or convulsed with laughter. He said that he had brought his visitors to Mt. Pisgah that they might view the "land of pure delight," that the Northern Neck was God's country, rich, fertile, alluring—the greatest place in the world in which to live.

Highway Commissioner Shirley gave an exceedingly practical talk with reference to the construction of the bridge. He said that the span would be 5,440 feet long, and enough lumber would be used in the construction of it to build a village. He spoke of the surprising depth of the river which necessitated the splicing of piling, and the necessity of creosoting the piling for permanency. He said that the floor of the bridge would be of concrete and that the same speed as maintained on the highway could be used in driving over it with but one minute's delay at the draw. That the draw can be operated within a minute is possible through the Virginia Electric and Power Company who will have signal lights to show when the draw is open and when it is closed. The bridge is to be built in sections so that with little inconvenience repairs may be made when necessary, and in course of time it is practically certain that the entire bridge will be of steel and concrete. Mr. Shirley said that the construction of the bridge would permit two fifteen-ton trucks to cross

abreast and then leave a large margin of safety.

He gave the people positive assurance that the 13th of next February would see the completion of the bridge, and that work on the approaches from each side would begin at once. On the Northern side the approach will be three miles long, much of which is marsh and that because of the sinking of the road bed a smooth surface road would not be constructed for a year or two, but that it would be built and maintained in the best of order.

The corner stone was laid with due ceremonies by the Grand Lodge of Masons of Virginia and was most impressive. Within the stone was placed a copy of the Rappahannock Times of January 15th containing The "Skipper's" Soliloquy; a copy of the current number of February 12th, and a copy of the Northern Neck News of the same date; a 1925 Acca Shrine card, signed by the Allport Construction Co.; a Buffalo nickle; a ten centime French Republic coin; a 1902 25 cent piece; a Stone Mountain half dollar, and several other articles.

In recording the events of the day too much stress cannot be laid upon Fredericksburg's part in it. Judge Embrey was the leading spirit—he put his ability, his energy, his enthusiasm into it; the Elk's Band enlivened the day with splendid music, and the business men of Fredericksburg were generous to a fault in their donations of the substantial and refreshments with which the visitors' appetites were satisfied.

Through the courtesy of the Virginia Electric and Power Co., which has substantial holdings in Tappahannock, their handsome motor busses were placed at the disposal of the Legislature and the solons were enabled to attend in a body while huge sight-seeing busses and hundreds of beautiful private cars were supplemental in accommodating the Richmond contingency.

It was a source of much regret that ex-Governor Trinkle who suggested the plan of financing the bridge under the Robertson Act, and Governor Byrd were prevented from attending the ceremonies because of serious illness in their families.

The bridge which links the Northern Neck and Southside has officially been named the "Thomas J. Downing" bridge.

It was a glorious day for Tappahannock and this great section of the country. The fates were with us. A kind Providence seemed to smile upon the works of men, for the wintry blasts and bite of the preceding days had been followed by the balmy breath of springtime—a day that made life joyous and hope buoyant.

In the feeding of this great number of persons gathered on the river shore there is no lack of reverence when we say that we are reminded of that wonderful picture drawn by St. John in his description of the feeding of the five thousand by the master. There was no grass and the people did not sit down in companies, but many had come from a long distance and were weary. We cannot say that all were fed; it is impossible to say, but few went away hungry, for in addition to the two hundred bushels of oysters, there were hundreds of bushels of sandwiches, there were "tanks" of steaming coffee, while hotels and private homes were thrown open to the guests. And we believe that the same blessing attended the crowd gathered there in this great Christian community as was given to those with whom Christ walked and talked in His pilgrimage on the shores of Galilee.

*This was taken from the Rappahannock Times for February 13, 1926.

**The Essex County Historical Society Members
Enjoy Visiting Germanna Excavations of
Governor Spotswood's Enchanted Castle on
October 20, 1986**

Instead of having our regular fall meeting about 30 members traveled to Germanna in Orange County, which in Governor Spotswood's time was Essex County, and had a delightful picnic on the grounds of Director William Thomas's home, overlooking the site of the Castle and the Rapidan River. It was a gorgeous fall day, a little windy in the beginning. Mr. Thomas gave an interesting talk informing us exactly how the site was discovered and how the Historic Gordonsville Society set about saving it from becoming a part of a housing development just opposite Germanna Community College on Route 3.

It was exciting to see the foundations of the castle which have been uncovered, the lovely tiles which formed part of the ground floor, the type of chimney and brick construction, and other artifacts which have been discovered to date.

Everyone thought this an exciting tour and has expressed their hope that we might plan something of this kind again. Our thanks go particularly to Mr. Thomas for his

kind invitation and for making the picnic facilities and his home available for our comfort and enjoyment.

We did not have a business meeting and since we had planned this trip for our July meeting, cancelled because of extremely hot weather, there are no minutes for July and October, 1986 meetings.

Anne T. Wright, Secretary

Officers of the Society

President Hill B. Wellford
Vice President Carroll Garnett
Treasurer Ludwell Smither
Secretary Anne T. Wright

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Charles W. H. Warner, *Chairman*
Mrs. William A. Wright, Mrs. J.M. Evans

Meetings are held quarterly in the Essex Court House, or in an historic home or church of the County. Dues are \$5.00 per year. For copies of publications send \$2.00 to Mrs. J. M. Evans, Box 8, Tappahannock, Virginia 22560.
