

# Alexander Spotswood Biography

## Alexander Spotswood

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# Contents

[Alexander Spotswood Biography.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Biography.....3](#)

# Biography

Alexander Spotswood (1676-1740), a British soldier, became lieutenant governor of the Virginia colony in America.

Alexander Spotswood was born in Tangier, Morocco, where his father was an army physician at an English military base. The family had been prominent in Scottish public life and strongly committed to the Stuarts during the Puritan Revolution. Young Spotswood entered the army in 1693, serving an initial term as ensign in Flanders. During the War of the Spanish Succession he was appointed lieutenant quartermaster general, later rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Wounded in the Battle of Blenheim, he was a prisoner of war until the Duke of Marlborough negotiated his release. On June 23, 1710, he assumed the office of lieutenant governor of Virginia.

The appointment of a British officer to serve in the Colonies was in keeping with the pattern of royal appointments in the mid-18th century. Furthermore, at a time when the colonial assemblies were taking a dominant role, a governor with military experience seemed well inclined to reassert the power of the mother country.

Spotswood impressed Virginians with his ability during 12 years as lieutenant governor. From the first he tried to develop effective means of limiting land grants to actual settlers (not speculators); successfully explored the West; wanted to control tobacco production; offered protection against pirates; reformed the systems of finance, local courts, and the militia; and sought unsuccessfully to impose his will on the Anglican Church in Virginia. Spotswood's emphasis on the power of his office, however, combined with his lack of tact in dealing with members of the council, provoked bitter quarrels and demands for his removal. He was relieved of office in 1722. Ironically, at the end, he understood that the need for harmony with the assembly would mean substantial concessions to colonial autonomy.

As a civilian, Spotswood cast his lot with Virginia. He became a Virginia gentleman, retiring to his estates at Germanna, where he produced iron and looked after the 85,027 acres he had acquired in Spotsylvania County. Returning to England in 1724, he married Anne Butler Brayne, with whom he had four children. He was appointed deputy postmaster general for the American colonies in 1730. He received the position of major general at the onset of the war with Spain in 1739. He died in Annapolis, Md., on June 7, 1740, while preparing to take part in the conflict.