

## Virginia's Indian Neighbors in 1712

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Colonel Alexander Spotswood (1676-1740) arrived in Virginia in June of 1710, the Deputy, or Lieutenant, to George Hamilton, Earl of Orkney, the British government's official, but never resident, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Colony of Virginia. Spotswood (1) was very much a governor in every sense of the word, and developed into very much of an American, the type of American that broke with parent England in The Revolutionary War. After his governorship was cancelled in 1722 he spent the rest of his days in Virginia until his death in 1740; and in Virginia his children established or married into powerful families that played important roles of leadership in the late colonial and early continental periods of the State's history.

When Spotswood took over the affairs of the Colony its people were in a relatively tranquil social and political frame of mind both internally and externally, but both domestic and foreign economies were anything but prosperous. Spotswood did much to set in motion the wheels of agrarian production plus the beginnings of a manufacturing economy, at the same time regulating taxes and government supervision, to the end that for the first time in her hectic history Virginia began to build the sterling character that was developed into the flower of England's colonial possessions by the early 1770's. Also, Spotswood was a splendid military leader and a real Indian fighter; but there were few Indians to fight in Virginia.

Among the many subjects under discussion in his lengthy letter, dated from Virginia, July 26, 1712, to the Council of Trade, London, Spotswood wrote the following interesting paragraphs about the Colony's Indian neighbors:

"Concerning the Strength of our Neighbors, I suppose to be meant of the Neighboring Indians (for there are no other foreign Nations near this Colony), in answer to which there are nine Nations of Indians Tributary to this Government, Vizt: The Pamunkys, Chickahominys, Nansemunds, Nottoways, Maherins, Sapons, Stukanocks, Oconechees and Totteros, whose number of men, women and children do not exceed 700 in all, and of these there may be reckoned 250 fighting men. These are all in an Entire Subjection to this Government and live quietly on our Frontiers trafficking with Inhabitants their Skins and Furs for Clothing, Powder, Shot and other European manufactures. The next Nation of Indians with whom we have had frequent correspondence and who are most like to annoy us is the Tuscarurs, said to be about 2,000 fighting men. They live within the bounds of Carolina, and before the late Massacre, committed there by some of them and others, had a constant Trade with our Inhabitants for the like Commoditys as our Indians, but since that time I have prohibited all Commerce with them till they give satisfaction for the murders committed in Carolina. Besides these We have no other Nations that frequent our frontiers, and those with whom our Traders have ye Chiefest Traffique for Skins live

some 4 or 500 miles to the So. West of us and their names scarce known to any but the Traders." (2)

Spotswood's Indian problems were not, of course, either so simple or so rosy as his letter may have suggested to the Council of Trade, in London; but the fact remains that of the great Powhatan confederacy of Algonquian tribes in Virginia when the Jamestown colonists arrived, only a few poor tribal remnants remained in 1712. Of the Iroquoian Tuscarora whom his letter says "are most like to annoy us," within the year this letter was written, the Tuscarora, together with kindred Iroquoian tribes, the Meherrin and Nottoway and the Siouan Tutelo and Saponi tribes, were gathered together at Fort Christian, Virginia, and in the same year (1712) were started on their slow journey northward through the Susquehanna Valley until they finally reached the Iroquoian Five Nations tribes in New York State, by whom they were adopted. (3) This relieved the Virginians of the onerous proximity of their Carolina Indian neighbors and four of their nine immediate and tributary Virginia neighbors.

Spotswood still was faced with the task of protecting his western frontiers from the Five Nations Iroquois, particularly the Seneca, during their continual raids against the Siouan Catawba in South Carolina. He finally solved this problem by establishing compact communities of friendly Indians powerful enough to resist the Iroquois. This culminated in his treaty with the Iroquois by the terms of which they were to stay north of the Potomac river and west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. As for "ye Cattabaw and several other Southern Nations of Indians" two children from each Indian town, sons of their great men, should be delivered as hostages to Virginia, and educated at the Indians' expense at Fort Christian, Virginia. (4) During the frightful Yamasee war in 1715, in which this Muskogean tribe lead an organized combination of most of the tribes below Charleston to the Florida border against the English, he successfully protected Virginia against the unrest this war created among the Indians closer to his frontiers.

The Governor foresaw serious difficulties with the Spaniards in Florida, and to settle them with vigor and dispatch advocated to the British government the seizure of Florida. Likewise he raised a powerful voice on behalf of English interest west of the Alleghanies, and to this end suggested to London the establishment of a chain of forts from the eastern Great Lakes to the Mississippi river as a bulwark against the French. Spotswood splendidly typified the spirit of the English colonists. They were empire builders. The Indians had little chance against them. At the first opportunity the Red Men were disposed of. True, William Penn did his part in a rather polite manner, but the English from Maine to Georgia came to build an English civilization, and the Indians were to have no part in it. The same thing happened when the post Revolutionary Americans crossed the mountains into the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. The French, on the other hand, were willing to temporize and compromise with the Indians. They were ready and willing to live with them, and to share the Indian formula of culture so long as the fur trade and its enormous profits lasted. The Spaniards were

nothing more nor less than plunderers and murders. The English were empire builders, the French adventurers, the Spanish destroyers. The fate of the American Indian was a hard fate.

#### Literature Cited

1. The official letters of Alexander Spotswood, Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1710-1722. In the collections of the Virginia Historical Society, new series, Vols. 1 and 2 (Richmond, 1882 and 1885).
2. *Ibid*, Vol. 1, p. 167.
3. Weer, Paul, 1937. Preliminary notes on the Iroquoian family, Indiana Historical Society, Prehistory Research Series, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Indianapolis) pp. 8-9.
4. Official Letters, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 147.