

1734 Formation of Orange County

One of the Largest Ever Formed in the US

“On January 21, 1734, by the Old Style calendar, certain freeholders (landowners) of St. Mark’s Parish met to form a new Virginia county. The commission of William Gooch, the Lieutenant Governor of the colony, was read, appointing the Gentleman Justices (judges) for the county’s court. All but a few of the named appointees were present, and they swore to the several required oaths before attending to the housekeeping matters associated with starting up a new county. The words which begin line 1, page 1 of Orange County Order Book I, are *Orange County, be it Remembered*....“¹

The land which became Orange County had previously been part of St. Mark’s Parish, an Episcopal Church parish which originated from the Church of England.² The land in early Virginia had been organized into parishes before counties were formed and before the concept of separation of church and state was embedded in the US Constitution (1787). Church parishes were the first type of “government” in the colony and tracked births, marriages, and deaths. The parishes were powerful, i.e., they elected representatives to the General Assembly and taxed through the church’s system of tithes. Before county governments were formed, parishes were the central organizing body for governance in the developing British colony.³

Orange County had been formed through an Act of Establishment by the House of Burgesses. The act also set the county’s boundary lines and in doing so created one of the largest counties ever formed. The western boundary was declared to be “westernly, by the utmost limits of Virginia”⁴ which was understood to be all the way to the Mississippi River and as far north as the Great Lakes. It included the present-day counties: Orange, Greene, Culpeper, Madison and Rappahannock east of the Blue Ridge; all of the Great Valley from the Potomac to the Cumberland Gap; and the states of West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan.⁵ In the 1580s Queen Elizabeth I (the Virgin Queen) and Sir Walter Raleigh had named ALL of British North America to be “Virginia”⁶.

Further, Virginia’s Act of Establishment declared that the newly formed county “was to be called and known by the name of the County of Orange”⁷ after Prince William of the House of Orange-Nassau in the Netherlands and his wife Anne who was the daughter of King George II of England.⁸ The two were married in March 1734 and the act of naming Orange County after

¹ Frank Walker, *Remembering, A History of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 19.

² *Ibid.*

³ As counties developed, St. Mark’s Parish eventually became part of Culpeper County and Orange County became part of St. Thomas’s parish.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵ Thomas, W.B., *Orange County Be It Remembered*, Bicentennial Series, No. 1 (January 1975), 2-3.

⁶ Walker, 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸ *Ibid.* This was not the William and Mary of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 who established the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg.

them was a sign of good will from the new British county in America to the new monarchs, and by extension to the Netherlands and England.

In 1720 when she was eleven, Princess Anne contracted smallpox and her face became pox-marked and scarred.⁹ Further, she was obese and short. Likewise, her groom suffered from a spinal deformity which affected his appearance, but Anne was reputed to have said that she would marry him even “if he were a baboon”.¹⁰ She apparently did not want to be a spinster at the court of her father or brother since she did not get along with them. Nor did she want to marry just any commoner as she believed the only match suitable for her was with a monarch or an heir to the throne.¹¹

Prince William IV (1711-1751) ruled from his birth until his death from a stroke in 1751. His wife Anne (1709-1759), Princess Royal and Princess of Orange, became Regent upon William's death in 1751 until her son became of age to ascend the throne. She died eight years later in 1759. The couple had three children: Princess Carolina, Princess Anna and young William, Prince V of Orange who succeeded his father to the throne after his mother's Regency.

William IV, Prince of Orange



Portrait attributed to Johann Valentin Tischbein¹²

⁹ John Van der Kiste, *George II and Queen Caroline*, Stroud, (Gloucestershire, England: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Author unknown. “William IV, Prince of Orange”. *Wikipedia*, Google, Accessed April 15, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_IV,_Prince_of_Orange



Anne, Princess Royal and Princess of Orange

Portrait published by Rebecca Starr Brown¹³

¹³ Brown, Rebecca Starr. "The Georgian Princess Royal: Anne, Princess of Orange". *RSB-Rebecca Starr Brown, From Normandy to Windsor, Putting the British Monarchy in Context*, Google, Accessed April 15, 2021, <https://rebeccastarrbrown.com/2018/09/09/the-georgian-princess-royal-anne-princess-of-orange/>

The following map, designed by Randall Beard, illustrates the 1734 boundaries of Orange County, Virginia, when the county extended from western Virginia to the Mississippi River and northward to the present-day states of Wisconsin and Michigan:

