

Five Virginia Governors from Orange County

Often overlooked in the history of Orange County is the knowledge that five Virginia governors have come from this county. These are:

1. Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood served as governor from 1710-1722.

Governor's Palace in Williamsburg



Governor Spotswood completed the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, and all governors or their deputies lived there until Lord Dunmore fled in 1775.

--Photo by Larry Pieniazek courtesy of VirginiaPlaces.org

A summary of the life of Alexander Spotswood (1676-1740) from *Encyclopedia Virginia*:

“Alexander Spotswood served as lieutenant governor of Virginia from 1710 until 1722, ruling robustly in the absence of Governor George Hamilton, earl of Orkney. Born in Tangier, Morocco, Spotswood moved with his mother to England in 1683 and joined the military in 1693. After a seventeen-year military career, Spotswood was commissioned lieutenant governor of Virginia. Spotswood initially sought to improve relations with American Indians through regulated trade, to end piracy, and to increase gubernatorial power. He frequently and publicly expressed his unbridled contempt for those members of the House of Burgesses and Governor’s Council who disagreed with his policies and practices. But by the end of his administration, Spotswood had shifted from seeking to impose imperial will on Virginians to becoming a Virginian himself. He



Alexander Spotswood

--Digital photograph courtesy of *Encyclopedia Virginia*

He constructed ironworks in Spotsylvania County, making him the largest iron producer in the thirteen colonies, and designed and constructed the Bruton Parish Church building, a Williamsburg powder magazine, and the Governor's Palace. He also served as deputy postmaster general for North America after 1730. He died in 1740 in Annapolis, Maryland, while raising troops for the British campaign against the Spanish in South America."¹

Spotswood was a *Governor Under the Crown 1600-1775*: "After the restoration of the English monarchy, the governors were again appointed by the Crown. Many of these, particularly in the eighteenth century, never went to Virginia and were represented by deputies, usually designated as lieutenant governors. When there was no governor or lieutenant governor in residence, the functions of the office were performed by the president, or senior member, of the Council."²

2. Governor Hardin Burnley (1761-1809) was an interim governor. Born in Orange County, he was Acting Governor for five days (December 7-December 11, 1779) to help fill a void until the elected governor could assume his duties. Burnley was followed by another acting governor, John Pendleton who was governor from December 11-19, 1779 until James Monroe could finally be sworn in as governor (1799-1802). Burnley was a member of the Council of State acting as Governor.³

¹ Shrock, Randall. "Spotswood, Alexander (1676-1740)." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Google, Accessed July 16, 2021, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/spotswood-alexander-1676-1740/>

² Author unknown. "Governors of Virginia." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Google, Accessed July 16, 2021, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/governors-of-virginia/>

³ Author unknown. "Governors under the Crown, 1660-1775." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Google, Accessed July 16, 2021, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/governors-of-virginia/>

3. Governor James Barbour (1775-1842) from Orange County served from January 4, 1812-December 11, 1814. He was a Democratic-Republican who became a Whig.



Governor James Barbour

--Digital photograph courtesy of *Encyclopedia Virginia*

A summary of the life of Governor James Barbour from *Encyclopedia Virginia*:

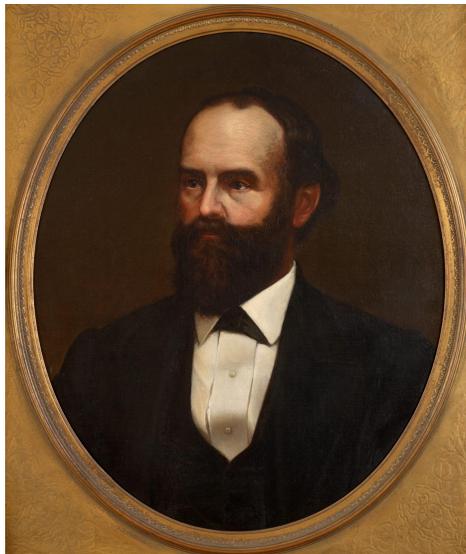
“James Barbour was Speaker of the House of Delegates (1809–1812), the governor of Virginia (1812–1814), a member of the U.S. Senate (1815–1825) and its president pro tempore (1819), and the secretary of war (1825–1828) and minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain (1828–1829) in the administration of President John Quincy Adams. Born in Orange County, he read law in Richmond and married his first cousin, Lucy Maria Johnson. (Barbour’s younger brother, Philip Pendleton Barbour, married Johnson’s sister.) As a member of the General Assembly, Barbour was a states’-rights conservative, but that changed over time. He became governor after George William Smith died in the Richmond Theatre fire, and his management of state affairs during the War of 1812 made him more appreciative of the need for a strong executive. In the U.S. Senate, Barbour supported a federal bank and federally financed internal improvements and served in Adams’s Federalist administration that was loudly opposed by many Jeffersonian Virginians, including Barbour’s own brother, then in the U.S. House of Representatives. After the election of Andrew Jackson, Barbour retired to his estate, Barboursville, where he focused on innovative farming techniques. He helped to organize the Whig Party in Virginia in opposition to Jackson’s policies. He died in 1842.”⁴

Governor Barbour was a *Governor under the Commonwealth*, 1776–1865: “Under the Constitution of 1776, the General Assembly elected Virginia’s governors for one-year terms. No governor could serve more than three consecutive terms or be elected again until after an interval of four years. When the office became vacant by death or resignation, the president or senior member of the Council of State acted as governor until the assembly was able to choose

⁴ Lowery, Charles. "Barbour, James (1775–1842)." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Google, Accessed July 16, 2021, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/barbour-james-1775-1842/>

a successor. The Constitution of 1830 left the election of the governor with the General Assembly but changed the term of office to three years with no eligibility for immediate reelection. Since the adoption of the Constitution of 1851, the voters have elected the governors for four-year terms with no eligibility for immediate reelection. The exception is the period of Reconstruction, 1865–1870, when the commanding general of the military district of Virginia named the governor.”⁵

4. Governor James Lawson Kemper (1823-1895) was born in Madison County and returned there after politics. In 1878 he sold his Madison homestead and moved his family to Walnut Hills, his last home near the town of Orange and resumed his law practice.



Governor James L. Kemper

--Digital photograph courtesy of *Encyclopedia Virginia*

A summary of the life of Governor James L. Kemper from *Encyclopedia Virginia*:

“James Lawson Kemper was a Confederate general during the American Civil War (1861–1865), who later served as governor of Virginia (1874–1877). Kemper volunteered in the Mexican War (1846–1848), but returned to his civilian life as a lawyer. He served five terms in the Virginia House of Delegates (1853–1863), including time as Speaker of the House (1861–1863). There he garnered a reputation for honesty and attention to duty. Kemper volunteered for service in 1861, and with his promotion in June 1862 became the Confederacy’s youngest brigade commander. Badly wounded at Gettysburg in July 1863, Kemper oversaw the

⁵ Author unknown. “Governors under the Commonwealth, 1776-1864.” *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Google, Accessed July 16, 2021, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/governors-of-virginia/>

Virginia Reserve Forces for the remainder of the war. He helped found the Conservative Party during Reconstruction (1865–1877). Soundly defeating the Republican candidate in the 1873 gubernatorial race, Kemper found himself, as governor, at odds with previous supporters over his progressive stance on civil rights, prison reform, and public school improvements. [He was governor from 1874-1878.] Still suffering from his wound, Kemper retired to his law practice, and died in Orange County in 1895.”⁶

Like Governor Barbour, Kemper was a *Governor under the Commonwealth*.

5. Governor James Lindsay Almond, Jr. (1898-1986) was born in Charlottesville but raised in Orange County.



Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., 1958-1962

--Digital photograph courtesy of *Encyclopedia Virginia*

A summary of the life of Governor James Lindsay Almond, Jr., from *Encyclopedia Virginia*:

“J. Lindsay Almond Jr. was a governor of Virginia (1958–1962) whose name became synonymous with Massive Resistance, the legislative effort used to prevent school

⁶ Coski, John. "Kemper, James Lawson (1823–1895)." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Google, Accessed July 16, 2021, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/kemper-james-lawson-1823-1895/>

desegregation in light of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, Supreme Court of the United States ruling in 1954. A Democrat and member of the Byrd Organization, Almond is famous for closing public schools in Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Front Royal in 1958 rather than integrating them. When the state and federal courts declared his actions illegal, Almond submitted, thus effectively ending the era of Massive Resistance to desegregation in Virginia.”⁷

Other facts about Almond from *Encyclopedia Virginia*:

“He first ran for Congress in 1945, following the unanticipated resignation of the sixth district representative Clifton Woodrum. After a swift campaign and landslide election, Almond was sworn in on February 4, 1946. During his congressional term, Almond participated in the debates on such major legislative efforts as the Marshall Plan and the Taft-Hartley Act, both of which he vigorously supported. In April 1948, he unexpectedly became attorney general of Virginia following the death of his predecessor, Harvey Black Apperson. Byrd specifically requested Almond for the job, since he knew that Almond’s speaking skills would be a vital asset in the Democrats’ 1949 gubernatorial campaign...Almond’s tenure as attorney general and most of his term as governor were dominated by one issue: school desegregation. By the time Almond ran for governor in 1957, Virginia was in the midst of a widespread effort to maintain segregation in its public schools. Almond won the election by pledging to uphold what became known as the Massive Resistance movement.”⁸

⁷ Eskridge, Sara. "Almond, James Lindsay Jr. (1898–1986)." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Google, Accessed July 16, 2021,

<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/almond-james-lindsay-jr-1898-1986/>

⁸ *Ibid.*