

The Beginning of Germanna

From historian Ann Miller in an article for the Orange County Historical Society:

“Three hundred years ago, at the beginning of 1714, the area that is now Orange County (then the western ends of Essex, King and Queen, and King William counties) was bare of European settlements, but this was about to change. The fort and settlement planned for the horseshoe bend of the Rapidan River, at the area soon to be known as Germanna, would be the westernmost outpost in Virginia, and the gateway to the settlement of Piedmont Virginia and lands further west.



Detail of *Virginia, Marylandia et Carolina in America septentrionali Britannorum*, a mid-eighteenth century map published in Germany by Johann Baptist Homann. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

--Photo Courtesy of the Orange County Historical Society

“The historical record of settlement at Germanna begins with the April 28, 1714 order of the Virginia Council to build and equip the fort and build a road for the settlement of the first German colony at Germanna. The site was then in the western reaches of Essex County, well above the Fall Line, and far to the west of any other settlers. Lt. Governor Alexander Spotswood, noted the Council minutes, ‘proposed to settle them [the German colonists] above the falls of Rappahannock River to serve as a Barrier to the Inhabitants of that part of the Country against the incursions of the Indians, & desiring the opinion of the Council whether in consideration of their usefulness for that purpose the Charge of building them a Fort, clearing a road to their Settlement & carrying them thither two pieces of Canon & some Ammunition may not properly be defrayed by the public.’

“The Council concurred unanimously with Spotswood’s request and placed the German settlers ‘under the denomination of Rangers’ to exempt them from public levies. Part security force, part explorers, Rangers literally did ‘range’ through the frontier of settlement on patrol. Several orders of Council in 1711 had specified the make-up of Ranger patrols: “For the better protection of the Inhabitants of the Colony against the Incursions of Indians...ten men & and Officer out of each of the Frontier Countys be appointed to Range three days in a Week above the Inhabitants [i.e. to the west of the limits of settlement].’ Reinforcements could be drawn from county militia, and if needed the number of Rangers could be increased.

“In mid-May virtually on the heels of the Council’s approval of his request for public funds to be expended in the settlement, Spotswood made ‘a Fortnights Expedition to Reconnoitre the Nor[th]ward Frontiers & to fortify a place for Settling a Body of Germans above the Falls of Rappahannock.’ Settlement would proceed soon afterward.”¹

¹ Ann Miller, “Spring, 1714: The Beginning of Germanna,” *Orange County Historical Society*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring 2014), 1.