

# The Moravians in Georgia

The Moravians in Georgia, 1735-1740 by Adelaide L. Fries chronicles the trials and contributions of Moravian missionaries in colonial Georgia, highlighting their faith, perseverance, and cultural interactions during a pivotal era.

## Chapter I. Antecedent Events.

The chapter "Antecedent Events" unfolds the historical context leading to the establishment of the Georgia colony, initiated through the humanitarian efforts of James Oglethorpe and others empathetic to the plight of debtors in England. The narrative traces the origin of Georgia in 1728, when the English Parliament, influenced by Oglethorpe, looked into the deplorable state of debtors imprisoned for indefinite terms. Oglethorpe envisioned a solution to address the root causes of poverty and imprisonment by proposing the establishment of a new colony in America, catering not only to debtors but also to providing a haven for persecuted Protestants from Europe.

In 1732, King George II approved the charter for establishing the colony of Georgia, managed by "The Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America." This charter emphasized the benevolence of the initiative, forbidding any member from profiting personally, permitting the settlement of British subjects and foreigners willing to assimilate, and offering them the rights and freedoms of Englishmen, excluding Catholics due to political and religious tensions of the time.

The chapter highlights the Trustees' multifaceted intentions behind the colony - to offer a fresh start to the impoverished and persecuted, to serve as a strategic buffer against Spanish Florida, and to stimulate the economy through the cultivation of silk, wine, oils, and drugs. Their recruitment of settlers was marked with promises of land and subsistence, underscored by idealistic descriptions of the Georgian climate and soil's fertility.

Special attention is given to the plight of the Salzburgers, German Protestants expelled from their homes due to their faith, who were invited to settle in Georgia with support from both British Parliament and private donations. Their settlement, Ebenezer, symbolizes the broader sanctuary Georgia offered to those persecuted for their religion in Europe.

The narrative also explores the historical context of Moravians and their persecution, offering a brief on the *Unitas Fratrum's* origins, their struggles for religious expression, and eventual migration under the auspices of Count Zinzendorf to Saxony. This recounting sets the stage for their later involvement in Georgia, presenting a tableau of religious fervor, exile, and the quest for a place of safety and freedom.

Oglethorpe's leadership and vision are central to this narrative, underscoring his role in negotiating with Native American tribes and his unwavering commitment to the equitable and humane principles upon which Georgia was founded. This chapter meticulously traces the confluence of humanitarian, economic, and geopolitical motivations that birthed Georgia, setting the scene for the diverse and complex tapestry of its early colonial society.

## Chapter II. Negotiations with the Trustees of Georgia.

In "The Moravians in Georgia," Chapter II dives into the intricate negotiations led by Count Zinzendorf with the Georgia Trustees to secure a settlement for the Moravian community and the Schwenkfelders—an exiled religious group under Zinzendorf's temporary protection. The unfolding narrative highlights the complex religious and political landscape of the 18th century, where the desire for religious freedom intersects with colonial ambitions in North America.

Zinzendorf, influenced by the hospitable ethos of his estate and driven by a blend of benevolence and strategic planning, aimed to secure refuge for the persecuted Schwenkfelders and create a Moravian settlement in Georgia. The journey toward this goal was fraught with bureaucratic challenges and geopolitical sensitivities, including accusations against Zinzendorf of harboring dissenters, which he navigated by requesting a judicial examination to clear his name. However, the expulsion decree against the Schwenkfelders from Saxony pushed Zinzendorf to expedite his plans, leveraging his noble status and connections for negotiations with the Georgia Trustees through anonymous proposals that balanced a deep commitment to religious freedom with compliance to British colonial laws and obligations.

These negotiations culminated in securing land grants and logistical arrangements for the Moravian settlers, who, despite initial plans, ended up diverging from the Schwenkfelders—the latter eventually choosing Pennsylvania over Georgia due to counsel from other religious communities. Despite this separation, the Moravians persevered, guided by their missionary zeal and the broader vision of Zinzendorf for a settlement that could serve both as a sanctuary for religious exiles and a base for missionary activities among indigenous peoples.

Through adept navigation of political and religious complexities, Zinzendorf and the Moravians embodied a vision of utopian community building that intertwined faith, migration, and colonial expansion, all while maintaining a delicate balance of loyalty to sovereign powers and adherence to religious conviction. The narrative intricately details the historical context, the diplomatic skill, and the unwavering faith that propelled the Moravians toward their eventual settlement in Georgia, marking a significant chapter in the broader tapestry of religious migrations to the New World.

## **Chapter III. The First Year in Georgia.**

once, Spangenberg and his company were filled with joy and thankfulness, made ready to receive their Brethren, and vigorously pushed the work upon their house that it might be entirely ready for occupancy.

## **Chapter IV. Reinforcements.**

Consequently, when it was decided to send out the third company in 1740, Pennsylvania, and not Georgia, was chosen as their destination.

Meanwhile, the Moravian settlers at Savannah pushed forward with their plan of living in communal harmony, their efforts being directed towards the development of their communal farm, the establishment of their trades, and the mission work among the native American tribes. Their communal system of living provided not only for their material needs but also fostered a deep sense of community and shared purpose in their religious life.

Despite the eventual dissolution of their communal living model in various Moravian settlements due to evolving circumstances and community needs, this early experiment at Savannah left a lasting legacy. It demonstrated the viability of communal

living based on shared spiritual and material goals and laid the groundwork for the development of subsequent Moravian settlements in North America.

Their integration into the local community witnessed through cooperative endeavors, such as brick making and the intended linen weaving project, enhanced their economic stability while preserving their distinct religious character and missionary zeal. Thus, the Moravians in Georgia, through the leadership of individuals like Spangenberg and Nitschmann, not only succeeded in establishing a foothold in the New World but also impacted the social and economic fabric of their adopted homes through their industrious and devout communal life.

## **Chapter VI. Disintegration.**

some years Superintendent of the Moravian Church in England. His epitaph, chosen by himself, was characteristic of the man, XII Corinthians, II:5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

Thus the Moravian settlement in Georgia, begun with such high hopes in 1735, came to an end. The members, far from abandoning their missionary zeal, simply shifted the focus of their efforts to locations that offered greater acceptance and less political entanglement. Their legacy in Georgia, though brief, was a testament to their commitment to their faith and to their principles of peace, even in the face of adversity and opposition.

## **Chapter VII. Conclusion.**

Chapter VII of "The Moravians in Georgia" concludes the book by detailing the Moravians' later attempts in Georgia, spanning from 1740 to the post-Revolutionary War period and focusing on the challenges and shifts in their missionary and settlement efforts.

In 1740, John Hagen arrives in Savannah with intentions to join the missionary work with the Cherokees, only to find the Moravians had left Georgia. Encountering health problems, he seeks help from Whitefield's household and decides to stay in Savannah, engaging in religious work and gardening, upon realizing the difficulty of reaching the Cherokees. His attempts to establish a congregation among the Germans in Savannah are met with both support and controversy, especially from Whitefield due to differing views on predestination. This theological disagreement forces Hagen out of Whitefield's favor and leads him to find sympathy and a new base with John Brownfield among others in the Savannah and Purisburg communities.

The narrative shifts to the 1746 proposal by General Oglethorpe to renew Moravian efforts further up the Savannah River, a plan eventually aborted due to lack of execution. By 1774, there's a renewed attempt to serve in Georgia through missionary work among slaves at the request of Mr. Knox. Ludwig Mueller and John George Wagner venture to Georgia. They face challenges, including severe fever and the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, which disrupts their work and eventually leads to their departure from Georgia.

Subsequently, the focus turns to the Moravian property in Savannah. Initially granted to leaders August Gottlieb Spangenberg and David Nitschmann in the 1730s, these lands see a fluctuating interest, with eventual plans for missionary use. These ambitions are thwarted by the Revolutionary War and legal disputes over land ownership and occupancy that extend into the early 19th century. The chapter also recounts the departure of various Moravians back to Europe or other colonies, deaths within the community, and an extensive log of arrivals and departures that underscores the transient and often turbulent nature of the Moravian mission in Georgia.

The conclusion of the chapter, and the book, offers a reflective look at the Moravian efforts in Georgia, marked by initial enthusiasm, subsequent challenges, and shifting dynamics of colonial American society. Despite various setbacks, the Moravians' dedication to their missionary work and community aspirations remain evident, showcasing their resilience and adaptive strategies amidst the evolving landscape of early American history.