

Chapter 5. Darien

COLONIAL GEORGIANS by Jeannette Holland Austin

There was a need for military outposts in the southern province to protect the main settlement of Savannah, as well as South Carolina. The southern borders of the colony needed strengthening. Parliament granted twenty-six thousand pounds to make a settlement on the Altamaha River. In Great Britain and in Scotland, an organization called the "Society for Christianity of the Scots" was formed. This organization sent money to the Trustees in London in the interest of taking care of any Scots who wished to migrate to Georgia.

The first real departure had begun in the Highlands, with Daniel McLachlan, who wrote a letter to the Trustees complaining of high rents which caused many people in Inverness to starve. McLachlan was a clergyman whose ministry took him through the ragged mountains to poor people and who had recruited about 700 or 800 honest persons who wished to migrate to Georgia.¹

The Highlanders supported Bonny Prince Charles, the Stuart Pretender to the throne in 1715, rather than the House of Hanover. Because of this, many lost their lands and titles, particularly in the Isle of Skye, exclusively owned by the Macdonalds and Macleods. They were anxious to begin again. Oglethorpe was interested in this appeal and made arrangements for the Highlanders to come to America.

The discouraged Scots were easily persuaded by Captain Mackay who told them that Georgia land could be had for the asking. The Trustees set aside 20,000 acres to be used for cultivation. This land would support whole clans, including Rev. MacLeod's congregation from the Isle of Skye.

At the site of old Fort King George, the Highlanders established another military outpost. They called the settlement Darien, in memory of the ill-fated expedition made by their countrymen to the Isthmus of Darien in Panama.²

A month after the Highlanders arrived at Barnwell's Bluff, Oglethorpe came by scout boat. He had just concluded an expedition to St. Simon's Island where he had laid out plans for a new town and fortification (Frederica).

During the summer months Oglethorpe returned to lay out the town of Darien. He selected a higher bluff overlooking the river about one mile west of the Barnwell Bluff outpost. A town was surveyed and town squares laid out with commons on the east and north and acreage lots to the west of Fort King George. Also, a road which would go from Savannah to New Inverness (Darien) was scouted by Capt. Hugh Mackay, Jr. with his Company of Rangers and Indian guides furnished by Tomochichi.³

¹ Dated London, 9 May 1735

² 1697

³ Fort King George, named for King George I of England, was constructed in 1721, as the southern outpost of the British Empire in North America. The fort was a typical small European field fort enclosed by a triangular earthenwork and surrounded by a moat on two sides. The fort's main defense was a 26-foot square blockhouse, and a log palisade stood in the moat to deter enemy soldiers and Indians. The gabled blockhouse had three stores: a powder, ammunition and supply storage room on the lower level, with a gun room on the second floor having cannon ports in the walls, and a third floor which was used for lookout. Excavations have revealed the existence of several palmetto-thatched huts, a barracks and officers' house as well. Abandoned in 1732, however, two South Carolina rangers remained at the station to keep an eye on enemy movements in the area until 1734.

The settlement consisted of 177 persons, including women and children, led by prominent Scotsmen such as John Mohr Macintosh⁴ and Hugh Mackay. They were trained warriors, known to be experts in soldiering, and selected by Oglethorpe for this purpose. The Highlanders emplaced cannon on the existing earthworks, built huts for the soldiers and for their families. A small kirk was constructed for holding divine services, with Rev. John McLeod (from the Isle of Skye), as their Presbyterian minister. The poorer Highlanders enlisted in General Oglethorpe's army, while others farmed, raising cattle and cultivating timber, while John Mohr McIntosh, a man of substance, kept the storehouse at Darien and traded with the Indians.

The Highlanders respected Oglethorpe, as he was a gentleman who chose to spend his nights on the ground wrapped in the Highland plaid, rather than take a soft cot or tent. He dressed himself in the Highland habit to inspect the troops where the first military parade of British troops occurred. The Highlanders made an impressive sight in full regalia, with claymore, side arms and targes (shields), as they marched in review before him. Whenever he visited, the well-disciplined and orderly Highlanders always honored their General by wearing full costume. About a month after Oglethorpe's visit, Samuel Eveleigh, a Carolina trader, wrote his comments to Harmon Verelst: "When Mr. Oglethorpe came up to Barnwell's Bluff, where the Scotch Highlanders are settled on the north side of the Altamaha River, in his Highland habit, several of those people (hearing that he was come) cried out, 'Mr. Oglethorpe, Where's Mr. Oglethorpe', not knowing him from the rest of their brethren. And at night they Prepared a very good bed for him, but he refused on any terms to accept it, But went into the woods, made a fire (being very cold) under a great tree and there slept all night with Captain Dunbar." ⁵

Oglethorpe was impressed with his Highlanders, and wrote the Trustees that the people in Darien were more industrious than those in Savannah, but could not be put under the direction of anyone in Frederica because no one understands the Highland language. For this reason the Highlanders were most useful under their own chiefs.⁶

⁴ Sometimes referred to as John McIntosh Mohr.

⁵ Samuel Eveleigh to Harmon Verelst, 24 March 1736, from South Carolina

⁶ The following families are listed among the first settlers of Darien: Jo. Bain, James Baillie, John Baillie, Kenneth Baillie, Kenneth Bain, Will. Bain, Joseph Burges, Will. Calder, John Caldwell, Alexr. Cameron, Colin Campbell, Alexr. Chisholme, Donald Clark, Hugh Clark, Rob. Crookshanks, George Cuthbert, Jo. Cogach, Alexr. Cleaness, John Campbell, Jo. Denune, Captain George Dunbar, John Dunbar, George Douglass, Hugh Forbes, John Forbes, Donald Fraser, John Fraser, John Glass, John Grant, Margaret Grey, Mary Joliffe, Will. Kennedy, Christian Lossley, Alexr. Macdonald, George Macdonald, Hugh Macdonald, Donald Macdonald, Norman Macdonald, Will. Macbean, Duncan Macbean, Archibald Macbean, McWillie Macbean, Will. Macbean, Ranald Macdonald, Farquar Macgilivray, Lachlan Macgilvray, Murdow MacInver, George Main, Alexr Mackay, Angus Mackay, Bain Donald Mackay, Donald Mackay, John Mackay, Niel Mackay, Will. Mackay, Cha. Mackay, James Mackay, Jo. Mackay, John Mackay, William Mackay, Will Mackay, Marion Mackay, George Mackay, Alexr. Mackenninie, Tho. Mackenzie, Will. Mackenzie, George Macdonald, Adam Mackintosh, Jo. Mackintosh, Benj. Mackintosh, Donald Mackintosh, John Mackintosh, John Mohr Macintosh, Robert Macintosh, Roderick Mackintosh, Hugh Mackintosh, Angus Macleod, Donald Macleod, John Mcleod, John Maclean, Simon Maclean, Alexr. Macoul, Norman Macpherson, Robt. Macpherson, Alexr. Macmurrwick, Ja. Macqueen, James Macqueen, James Miller, David Miller, Alexr. Monro, Donald Monro, John Monro, Robt. Monro, Will. Monro, Cath. Morrison, Hugh Morrison, Jo. Morchison, James Munro, Alexr. Murry, Jo. Murray, William Robertson, James Ross, Donald Shearer, Sutherland, Robert, Alexr. Sutherland, Anne Stewart, David Stewart, John Sinclair, John Spence, Alexr Tolmie, and Hugh Watson. (A List of the Early Settlers of Georgia by Coulter)

Most Scottish settlers came from the Isle of Skye. After the Battle of Bloody Marsh, land grants were given to members of Oglethorpe's Regiment. Among them was Patrick Sutherland who received acreage on the first bluff on the Sapelo River, which was named *Sutherland's Bluff*. Others who received land grants were: William Harris, Roderick McIntosh, David Delegal, Daniel Demetre, John Todd, John Jones, Norman McDonald and Robert McDonald.⁷

Most of the plantations located in the Darien area were in low-lying sections, sometimes submerged by river water from the Altamaha. Much of the low, swampy lands are wild, and remain undeveloped. People simply lived close to the marshes, and were bogged down by swamps. It is always believed that this damp, swampy virgin land was the cause of yellow and swamp fevers which plagued the residents from the earliest of days. Even the Presbyterian Church was built near the swamp.

Settlement in Darien flourished after the Spanish fleets left America, and plantations were established on the Altamaha River. In 1744 *The Great Thicket* was awarded to the three Clark brothers who emigrated with the original Highland clans in 1736 - Daniel, Donald and Alexander. The tract was located near present-day Carneghan, Oldnor and Barber Islands, east of present-day Harris Neck. It consisted of marshes and streams and was close to the broad waters of the South Newport River.

Sir Patrick Houstoun developed a 100-acre plantation near Cat Head, west of Darien, and John Polson and Roderick McLeod owned lands near Bruro Neck in the present-day Shellman Bluff area. Other land grants on the Sapelo River went to: John McIntosh, George McDonald, Donald Kennedy, James Steward, George Kidd, Donald McDonald, William Mackay, John Mackay, William Munro, Ranald McDonald, John Grant, Peter Grant, Gilbert Grant, Anne Demetre (as guardian of William Thomas Harris), Hugh Morrison, Hugh Clark, Donald Clarke, Lachlan McIntosh, Angus Clarke, George McIntosh, William Clarke, Henry Calwell, Alexander Mackdonald, John Perkins, William Buchanan, Donald Mackay, Sr., John McIntosh (B), John McIntosh (M) and William Low.⁸

James Wright owned 2,075 acres on the Altamaha River, adjoining the islands owned by Captain Raymond Demere and Colonel Mark Carr. He named his plantation *New Hanover*, and received this acreage from a Land Grant dated 3 November 1761. Demere first built a home near General Oglethorpe's on St. Simon's Island, *Harrington Hall*. It was enclosed with cassina hedges conspicuous for its beauty and comfort.

Among the residents of Cat Head Creek were Lachlan McIntosh and Sir Patrick Houstoun, who owned over 1,000 acres.

Sapelo Island had Grey Elliott who owned 9,520 acres (included Sapelo, Blackbeard and Cabretta Islands); Robert Baillie, 1,000 acres; Donald McDonald; George McIntosh; Roderick McLeod; John McIntosh; Daniel Demetre, and others.

Wahoo Island. John Barber, granted 111 acres on 5 May 1757, who also had 111 acres on Richard Oldnor's Island and 111 acres on Barbers Island.

Lewis Island. Thomas Young, 267 acres granted him 3 January 1775, on the Altamaha River, St. Andrew's Parish.

Doboy Island: Jonathan Bryan granted 83 acres 7 August 1759. Also, Bryan owned 900 acres on Broughton Island, being party 760 acres of marsh land and 140 acres of swamp on the Altamaha River, granted him 4 July 1758.

Black Island. William McIntosh granted 500 acres on 6 September 1774, surrounded by the Altamaha River.

⁷ Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater by Buddy Sullivan

⁸ Entry of Claims for Georgia 1733-1755 by Pat Bryant