

Chapter 11. Declaration of War. October 1739

The War of Jenkins' Ear

COLONIAL GEORGIANS
by Jeannette Holland Austin

Britain and Spain were not honoring their trade treaties. After Queen Anne's War, the British had secured the Treaty of Utrecht, which was the right to supply the Spanish colonies with slaves and to send 500 tons of merchandise into their ports annually. The problems began when British merchants stretched the tonnage, and commenced smuggling more merchandise into Spain. The Spaniards tried to hold England to the allotted tonnage, but the English were preoccupied with the War of the Polish Succession (1733) and complaints went unheard. Too, the British became more menacing and disregarding of Spanish rights.

In January of 1739 the Convention of El Pardo was signed which meant that reparations of 95,000 pds. were to be paid by Spain to England for illegal seizures of vessels, and further that the boundary between Georgia and Florida (the Altamaha River) was to be considered temporarily the line of demarcation until a joint commission could make a final settlement. Another condition that neither side should increase fortifications in the region between the Altamaha and St. Johns rivers. But both parties were unwilling to honor this agreement, and war was inevitable. Disputes continued to escalate over slave trade.

England declared war on Spain. A month later, Spain accepted war. The struggle was for sea-power and world trade. Land battles would occur on the Georgia frontier, and water engagements would occur on the Caribbean sea. Edward Vernon was appointed Admiral of the seas and General Oglethorpe assumed command of the land forces. As war broke out between Britain and Spain, fighting commenced through the Caribbean and along the Georgia coast to the southern province of Frederica.

It was said that the Jenkins incident occurred off the coast of Florida. The Spaniards captured an Englishman who was smuggling goods. His name was Thomas Jenkins. For the violation, they cut off his ears. Then they told him to take the ears and show them to his King. Jenkins did return to England and complain to Parliament of his inflicted cruelty. But he also told them that fifty-two British vessels had been captured and plundered by the Spaniards. Lord Warpole's concern of Oglethorpe having the regiment too close to Spanish-Florida would provoke a war with Spain faded as the form of Thomas Jenkins entered the room. The Spanish were indeed provoked! Both sides would prepare for war.

On 3 October General Oglethorpe decided that it was time to put into writing the Declaration of War with Spain. He ordered all freeholders to be under Arms at the beat of the drum. Magistrates dressed in their gowns, and at noon seated themselves on the bench inside the court house. The recent Orders received from his Majesty's Secretary of State were written, along with a caution for all citizens to be watchful for the negroes who would attempt to escape to the Spanish in Florida. Oglethorpe assured the people that there were frigates cruising the coast, and that more ships would be sent for their protection.¹

Then he summoned a general meeting of all persons in Savannah, freeholders or not, telling them that it cut him to the heart to say that their subsistence was at an end, and that the Trustees had shut up the stores. He reluctantly posted a public manifest, asking all those owing debts at the stores to pay up, or to issue bond.

The next thing that he did was to order the arrest of Thomas Causton and ordered that Causton be sent to England as a prisoner to answer for his misapplication of the stores. The trustees were not happy with Oglethorpe's hasty actions, and instead of jailing Causton, allowed Causton to remain free and give a bail bond for his appearance. Causton tried to justify himself by going around telling everyone that the reason that he had kept the stores open was that he was afraid of the people starving.

¹ *ibid*

Only two days had passed since Oglethorpe posted his war manifest at Savannah, when the news was brought that the great Indian Chief, Tomichichi was dead. The first funeral held in Savannah was to be that of Tomichichi, a son of the great Oglethorpe, and king of the Yamacraws,² who died at his outer town four miles from hence, of lingering illness, being about seventy-seven years. His obituary noted that he had expressed the greatest tenderness for General Oglethorpe, and seemed to have no concern at dying except that this was a time when his life might be useful against the Spanish. It was Tomochichi who prevailed upon the Creek Indians to give up their land at Yamacraw Bluff and who assisted in the founding of the town of Savannah. This is where he desired that his body be buried - among the English.

While Oglethorpe awaited the arrival of his Indians, he took breakfast with Rev. Mr. Norris, who told him that evening prayers had ceased for want of candles, saying that he had sent some money to Mr. Jones to pay for candles from the stores, and been refused.

The corpse of Tomchichi was brought down by water. The General attended, as did the Magistrates and townspeople, meeting it at the water's edge. It was thence carried to Percival Square, the pall supported by the General, Colonel Stephens, Colonel Montaigut, Mr. Carteret, Mr. Lemon and Mr. Maxwell. A solemn column of mourning Indians, magistrates and townspeople walked behind the casket. All during the burial process, there was the firing of minute guns from the battery, and then the militia resounded by firing the small arms.

Oglethorpe ordered a pyramid of stone (which he said could be dug in the neighborhood) to be erected over the grave in the very center of town. It would be a great ornament in memory of Tomichichi, as well as a testimony of gratitude. Unfortunately the monument was never erected, and the biography of Tomochichi written by C. C. Jones, Jr., published in 1868 simply stated "the monument ordered by General Oglethorpe has never been erected."

The details are given in a letter from L. S. Sturtevant to Mrs. Barrow, about 1923 :³ "An old map by DeBrahm states he was buried in Wright Square. My aunt of 77 who had lived on that square was a girl, and others say that there was a pump there to which she went many a time with the 'old mammy' for water. This pump was afterwards moved over by the Old Chatham Artillery Company... Now, in July of 1877 my grandfather's furniture (Thomas Henderson) establishment on Whitaker and Broughton was burned down. As he owned property on York, near Bull, he decided to build there. These houses were made from hand-hewn timbers and hand wrought nails and built just a few feet from the ground....As he wanted to build nearer Bull Street, he decided to move a two-story house to the west of his residence on the garden lot. As the building was to be brick and three stories high, excavations had to be made for a foundation. When the workmen were digging they came across the skeletons of several Indians ... and by one was found handles, a silver tomahawk and whistle and other things which tended to show that it must have been a chief...."

Bad times lingered as stalks of the corn planted in the lowlands rotted before they matured, and corn planted on higher lands were attacked by worms. Nevertheless, when the Indians said that they had lost their harvest to drought, to pacify them, William Stephens sent a gift of fifteen hundred bushels of corn to Augusta.

10-13 October. The advancement of Mr. Christie to the place of First Bailiff shocked almost everyone, as he had grown so obnoxious, and scandalously lived in open adultery with the wife of Richard Turner - they had run away to the West Indies awhile back. Also, he had assembled a crowd of persons at Jenkin's to stir up strife and sedition. Mr. Williamson saw an opportunity for himself and pressed Secretary Stephens to give him Christie's job as Recorder even before the copies of records had not been turned over to the Magistrates. He reminded Stephens that his father in law was Thomas Causton. When Stephens ignored him, Williamson decided to venture off to Charles Town to practice law, but failing at that was soon back in the colony, urging

² Died 5 October 1739

³ Savannah Historical Society

Secretary Stephens for the appointment of Recorder, this time bringing with him a witness. The purpose of the witness was to affirm that the books and accounts would be brought forth. But Stephens only by seal and Holland Austin he hoped so.

In the meantime, Causton and Christie proceeded to *Ocstead* to doctor the accounts. These two gentlemen worked on the books, while selling goods belonging to the Trustees. Christie hid some documents pertaining to several estates,⁴ which were later found in a small chest having two locks. Stephens had to send his Magistrates to confiscate the chest. Some belongings to these estates had already been sold by Christie, but he denied this.⁵ Christie boldly advertised for sale some chairs, stools and table, and a few Dutch painted paintings.

26 October. News arrived from camp (Frederica) that the officers were too sick with fever and ague to do their duty. Nothing was going right ... war was pending with Spain, troops needed to be raised, there was public idleness and bickering, desertions, and a general lack of cooperation among public officials.

Before he left Savannah, Oglethorpe called together the officers, constables and tythingmen, and exhorted them to put aside their animosities and to unite themselves in promoting the public peace.⁶

Shrub trees were spouting in the public squares from a long season of rain, offensive weeds, insects and vermin increasing. That night all males sent out orders that upon the beat of the drum, whether inmates, freeholders or boys, should appear at sunrise to clear away the growth and debris. More than two hundred men showed up. Oglethorpe joined in the work, ordering a cask of bread and another of beer for breakfast, and another refreshment in the evening.

There was an early chill in November. Poor people began to arrive regularly at the doorstep of William Stephens' house in Savannah, begging for food. After's Oglethorpe's Manifest and the arrest of Thomas Causton, Stephens began taking the side of the people, and delivered his ideas of improvement on paper to the Committee. Right up front was the suggestion that changes to be made in the office of magistrates to limit their powers and abuses. Also, he presented his ideas of the most effective way to cultivate land, while suggesting that the people be granted land in fee simple, and be allowed to use Negroes. Was it too late? The colony was at war.

On 29 November. A ship from Charles Towne was wrecked at sea, losing a cargo of considerable value...butter, soap, candles, ropes, cordage, etc. It was under the command of soldiers belonging to Capt. Norbury's Company at Port Royal. The crew was believed to be drowned. Later, it was discovered that this vessel was pirated and the best of the cargo removed.⁷ This news caused more restless among the poverty-stricken citizens and a spirit of disconsolation carried itself to the farthest outpost. A spirit of disconsolation carried itself to even the farthest outpost.

No flag was hoisted on the 30th in honor of the Festival of St. Andrew which the Scotch traditionally celebrated in a grand style. Instead, the Scotch in Darien assembled themselves together inside the tavern where they fired guns, then drank several salutes to the occasion.

By Christmas a blanket of sullen gloom loomed over the colony, thus ending a frightful year of unusual cold, intense heat, drought, and suffering, without the prospect of a better economy. A handful for pitiful persons sat quietly in the pews of Christ Church while the Reverend Mr. Norris administered the sacrament. There was no feasting. Noble Jones and Mr. Burnishde came to town from their distant plantations, bringing with them three deserters who were unsuccessful in escape through an unknown wilderness, and who, being famished for want of food, surrendered to the first settlers.

⁴ William Wise and Clark

⁵ Journal of William Stephens

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Journal of William Stephens

Oglethorpe decided to revive the Company of Rangers previously under the command of Capt. McPherson, a company of 30 men, well horsed and armed - formerly commanded by Capt. John Cuthbert (deceased). Oglethorpe had lately sent Cuthbert into Carolina to buy horses, and furnished him money for that purpose, but notice came of his death from Mr. Scroggs. Cuthbert was known to be good natured, sprightly, he was generally beloved. He had made considerable improvements to his 500 acres up the River Savannah and was judged to have one of the best plantation in the country. He died suddenly, leaving a sister who took care of his house. The estate was considerable and an administrator was appointed.⁸

Oglethorpe informed the Trustees that he was fortifying the Town of Frederica, hoping to be repaid for his expenses. Then he sent Mr. Horton (who commanded the Southern Division in Oglethorpe's absence) to London with a letter explaining that his Regiment of Foot was unable to perform garrison duty or overtake Indians and horsemen. This meant that he was compelled to use Indian allies, and that sixty rangers who had been recruited as scouts, were successful in driving the Spaniards out of the mouth of the St. John's River.

Oglethorpe was afraid that Spanish-Indians would murder the colonists during night raids and torch their homes. He resolved to enclose Frederica with defensive works. A moat fed by the river was dug around the town and 10-foot timber walls were erected. Excavations have revealed evidence of this fence and trenches.

As conditions worsened in the colony by February of 1740, Savannah was practically deserted, with all the Jews gone. At Frederica, only thirty-four freeholders were left; at Darien only forty freeholders and eighty people. Mr. Whitefield, the Ebenezer minister, had carried the Moravians of Savannah to Pennsylvania; others headed for New York, but turned back because of severe weather.

The Spanish made preparations to attack the colony.⁹ The Georgia frontier lay wide open to the threat of Spanish conquistadors, and Oglethorpe prepared defense strongholds. For safety measures, he ordered that a beacon ninety-feet high be erected on Tybee Island and that a fort be constructed at the narrow passes of an inland river (called Ogeechee) which would serve to protect the settlement from an inland invasion from Augustine, Florida.

St. Simons Island was well-fortified. Frederica was outfitted with four regular bastions, a spurwork towards the river, and several pieces of cannon mounted to it. About ten miles from Frederica, a large battery was constructed which commanded the entrance into the sound. From this vantage point, ten or twelve forty-gun ships could sail, there being sufficient water on the bar (called Jekyll) for such ships to go over. Now Oglethorpe could enlist the aid from as far north as South Carolina, to the citizens as far south as Darien. The two fortifications on St. Simons Island, Frederica, and Ft. St. Simons, located near the village of St. Simon on the southernmost point of the island, served as watch-towers where Spanish sloops wishing to raid could be observed. By the time war was declared, Frederica had three hundred and thirty men stationed there.

A fort was built on the southwest part of Cumberland Island (then known as St. Peter's Island) and several pieces of cannon were mounted facing the inland passage to the island. This is where all ships and vessels must come. The fort consisted of a well-framed timber log-house, with a magazine under it, and several springs of water nearby. A palisade was built around the fort, and a scout boat was stationed at the island. Fort St. Andrew controlled inland navigation at the northern end of the island.

Another fort was Fort William which was located at the mouth of the St. Mary's River.

Augusta, located in the northern portion of the province, was now a thriving town, and directions were given for a fort to be built, to protect against any land invasions.

⁸ Mr. Jones

Also, Rangers were stationed at Bachelor's Redoubt, which was on the mainland, and at Pike's Bluff was a Corporal's guard.

COLONIAL GEORGIANS
It was impossible for the Highlanders to maintain communications with Darien, so a canal was cut through General's Island. The Scots at New Inverness (Darien), were exposed to danger, being the southernmost post near to Fort Augustine and they constructed a fort and mounted twelve pieces of cannon.

Near Captain Horton's plantation and brewery, defensive works were erected on Jekyll Island, and Oglethorpe sent a handful of Highlanders to defend Amelia Island.

Citizens at Savannah were afraid and began to build a large palisade-works with bastions inside the town, but the Trustees refused to finance this enterprise.

The regiment was composed of eight companies of infantry and one of grenadiers. They were equipped with the long musket – the famous "Brown Bess" as well as the infantry sword. The grenade-carrying grenadiers were picked for their size and skill in combat, and were the elite troops of the regiment. Most of the troops were garrisoned at Frederica as well as at the new fort of Ft. St. Simons which was located on the south end of the island. Small detachments were put at Ft. Argyle, Darien, Amelia and Cumberland Islands.

Meanwhile, Oglethorpe sent his loyal band of Creeks to spy on the castle at Augustine in Florida, and called upon Mary Musgrove to rouse 1,000 warriors and to dispatch runners into the Creek country.

The Spaniards were the first to draw blood when they slew two Highlanders stationed on Amelia Island. Three of the scout men who straggled off into the woods were attacked, two of them killed, the third missing, believed to be taken prisoner. One of the men killed was scalped, the other one's head taken off; no doubt, by Spanish Indians. The soldiers fired some guns and they fled in haste. The General, upon hearing, sent boats out in pursuit, without about fifty men, hoping to repay them, going down the River St. John's to a Spanish settlement. Oglethorpe's impetuosity caused him to waste no time in rushing southward to the mouth of the St. John's River. He harried the countryside, but could find no Spaniards. Lieutenant George Dunbar was ordered to go on up the river to capture two forts located west of St. Augustine – Picolata and St. Francis, but withdrew when he saw the strength of the fortifications. On New Year's Day ¹⁰ Oglethorpe returned to attack both forts, going by water in fifteen boats, taking with him his Highlanders and Indians. This attack resulted in cutting off the enemies connections with their settlements in western Florida around Pensacola. A Sergeant's Guard of 12 men were dispatched to Amelia Island who fortified the area with a palisade and two or three small pieces of cannon.