

Colonial Georgians

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Introduction

The belief that Georgia was settled by prisoners from Newgate Prison is misunderstood as only eleven families came from Newgate.

Many of the King's English subjects were poor and unemployed. It seemed that it would be a good thing if these unfortunate souls could be taken off the streets of London and transported to the colonies where they could create a stable economy for themselves and thus bring ultimate wealth to the entrepreneurs (Trustees).

The Mother country had its domestic problems. As farmland was being converted into pasturage for sheep, the English under-classes were migrating into the cities in search of employment. The ambitious James Oglethorpe, Sir John Percival, later Earl of Egmont, gentlemen of substantial means, resolved to found a colony which could accommodate the urban under-class of England, as well as the poor protestants of Europe. The plan appealed to Oglethorpe, especially after being wounded when a friend of his was cast into Newgate Prison for failure to pay a debt.

Oglethorpe consulted with a number of possible benefactors who provided money and support as well as influence in Parliament for the proposed colony. First, funding was sought from religious groups and private individuals, but when donations for such a philanthropic venture were inadequate, the entrepreneurs turned to Parliament.

Oglethorpe and Percival argued that Georgia would provide as a bastion against the Spaniards in Florida and serve as a buffer colony to His Majesty's colonies. The poor English families, who were actually recruited to settle Georgia, were to do as citizen-soldiers. Oglethorpe was influential in obtaining approval from the Privy Council on 27 January 1732 and the charter was signed by His Majesty King George II on 21 June 1732. Twenty-one philanthropists became the Trustees of the new colony and would control Georgia from 1733 to 1752.

The Trustees were established as a body politic with Oglethorpe selected to lead and establish the new colony. The Trustees were ~ John Lord Viscount Percival of Ireland, Edward Digby, George Carpenter, James Oglethorpe, George Heathcote, Thomas Tower, Robert Moor, Robert Hucks, Roger Holland, William Sloper, Francis Eyles, John Laroache, James Vernon, William Belitha, John Burton, Richard Bundy, Arthur Bedford, Samuel Smith, Adam Anderson and Thomas Coram.

The charter was entitled "The Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia in America ... to be a body politic and corporate in deed and in name forever". The territory for the colony was designated as lying between the Savannah and the Altamaha Rivers and westward (to the Pacific), lands taken from South Carolina. Before leaving England, Lord Warpole, knowing Oglethorpe's authoritarian style and impetuous behavior, cautioned him not to put settlements near to St. Augustine, and thus stir up the Spanish

Because of the Trustees' interest in colonizing and establishing the colony, the twenty-one could not own land or hold office for profit, nor receive income or salaries. A Common

Council of fifteen Trustees was formed, for the express purpose of making reasonable laws and ordinances, and having the power to inflict punishment to offenders. For quit rent purposes, they made annual reports of receipts and expenditures, and all land grants were registered in England.

Eventually, as the Trustees formulated their plans, a search was begun for enterprising and industrial types of persons. Their advertisements in the newspapers promoted Georgia's warm climate and soil as "The Most Delightful Country of the Universe". Religious freedom was assured to European Protestants, and Georgia was further described as a "Comfortable Retreat for Persecuted Foreign Protestants and other Indigent Industrious Foreign Protestants". Protestant ministers were encouraged to bring their entire flocks to the colony where rum and slavery was not allowed, and they could worship without persecution. The Crown would pay the passage of the "worthy poor", artisans and tradesmen. It was to function as a charity colony, with basic tools and foodstuffs supplied during early voyages. Rules were established for strict conditions within the settlement: land was given to males, to be reverted back to the colony in the event of death, and rum and slavery being disallowed. However, the founders saw it as more of a social experiment than anything else.

Additional English benefactors who made charity donations for the settlements of the colony were: Lady Saunderson, widow, Lord Percival, Robert Hucks, Esquire, Richard Ricards, Esquire, George Hadley, Esquire, Rev. Mr. Robert Selwood, Rev. Dr. Edward Maynard, Lord Tyrconnel, William Reyner, John Salmon, William Lord Digby, Rev. Mr. Francis Fox and the Duke of Mountague.

Hundreds of potential colonists appeared before the Trustees, asking for passage. Included were hopeful prospects such as Andrew Blackburn, a merchant from Glasgow, who notified the Trustees of his intention to settle in Georgia.

As colonizing began, various individuals involved themselves, such as the Duke of Chandas who, in 1735, recommended that Mrs. Mary Pember and Jacob Jobart and his wife be sent. John Strange petitioned the board not to send Edward and Elizabeth Ash until they had paid a debt owed him.

Land Grants were issued as incentives for settlement, particularly to those who would be transporting servants at their own expense. All persons sent at the Trustee's expense had to be approved, and hundreds of persons appeared in London, seeking permission to be transported to the new province. Some of the first applicants were: Cornelius Sanford of Bristol attended the Trustees 30 April 1733 requesting 500 acres of land (granted) in order to carry over six servants; 17 May 1733 Edward Jenkins was granted 100 acres of land to carry over two servants at his own expense; On 23 February 1737, the Trustees received a receipt from the bank of 12 pounds paid for by John Venables for the subsistence of his son for one year; and others.

Many people applied, but records do not substantiate their settlement, notes in the Earl of Egmont papers provide some names of some of the first persons who offered to go: February 1732, John Salmon, for potash trade; November 1732, Dr. Henry Herbert; 14 February 1733, Richard Sanders, age 18, servant; 14 February 1733, Robert Sanders, age 44, servant. In 1734, Mrs. Robert Sanders (also spelled Saunders) stated that she was willing to go if her husband is there; 13 October 1733, John Scott Other notes were actual embarkations: 13 October 1733, William Johnson Dalmas; 1734, William Calloway; 1734, Humphrey Bright; 1734, Richard Millechamp; 1735, John Robinson, on account of The African Company.

The Earl of Egmont was an active trustee who kept meticulous journals on persons desiring to go to Georgia, as well as A List of Early Settlers. The settlers are listed under two headings. First, Those who went from Europe to Georgia at the Trustee's Charge and, second, those who went on Their Own Account. The settlers are listed in alphabetical order, followed by parallel columns with the following headings: age, occupation, date of embarkation, date of

arrival, lots in Savannah, lots in Frederica, and “Dead, Quitted, Run Away”.¹ Contents of these manuscripts are published in “A List of the Early Settlers of Georgia” edited by E. Merton Coulter and Albert B. Saye.

The Trustees elected to pay the passage of the “worthy poor”, whom they expected to become industrious servants, indenturing themselves for as long as seven years’ service in the colony. Some were specifically sent as servants to certain officials, magistrates, or other citizens who paid their own passage. Oftentimes, as in the case of German emigrants, they traveled to the colony and were then placed out.

In 1728 the system of redemption commenced in England. Redemptioners were persons who had not previously engaged themselves to an employer for indenture, but who instead obligated themselves to the ships’ captain. The captain would pay for their passage, and upon arriving they could choose their employer and make their own terms. This worked well for those who traveled with families or in village groups, as they could indenture themselves to the same employer. Also, if the redemptioner could get a friend to reimburse the captain, he would be free. On 20 June 1739, Captain Thomson billed the Trustees #826.2.11 for one hundred and sixteen heads of German servants which had been delivered to Oglethorpe.

In October of 1732 the Trustees resolved to send over 114 persons – men, women and children. These persons were those having straightened circumstances, who were unable to follow business in England. And, if they were in debt, could get leave from their creditors go. The condition was that they needed a commendation from their minister, church-wardens or parish overseer. James Oglethorpe decided that he would venture at his own expense to settle these persons in Georgia.

The Trustees formulated a pattern of government, according to the powers given them by the Charter – a Court of Judicature for trying causes (Criminal and Civil) in Savannah, Magistrates, Bailiffs and a Recorder, as well as inferior officers such as constables and tythingmen. To serve in these public trusts, they selected men they thought the most prudent and discreet, however, as time progressed, some of their choices proved distressful to settlers in their dishonest and self-serving negotiations.

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