

Chapter 19. Midway. 1752

COLONIAL GEORGIANS

The largest settlement after the charter was surrendered was Midway, a community situated between Savannah and Darien, located in St. John's Parish, Liberty County, begun about 1752.

The first Midway Congregational Church was built by a group of persons who were descendants of passengers onboard the ship *Mary & John* in 1630, who settled on the shores of Massachusetts at a place they called Dorchester. As Puritans, they objected to the Witch Trials of Massachusetts, and sought a safe haven for freedom of worship. Some of them removed to Connecticut and settled another Dorchester, which is known today as Windsor. In 1695, part of that group removed to South Carolina and founded another Dorchester. Then, in 1752, some of the South Carolina colony from Dorchester, Williamsburg, Beach Hill, Charles Towne and Salem, South Carolina removed to Georgia, settling on the Midway River, again calling their settlement Dorchester, and naming their meeting house, Midway Church.

Rev. John Osgood was born 1710 in Dorchester, South Carolina. Reverend Osgood had had served 56 years as the minister at Dorchester, and debated the question of leaving the area on account of low, marshy lands. His flock were mostly agricultural people, and, as their families grew, having sufficient farm land was a real problem.

"Our ancestors, having a greater regard to a compact settlement and religious society than future temporal advantages, took up but small tracts of land, many of which, after their decease, being divided amongst their children, reduced them still to smaller, in consequence of which our lands were generally soon wore out....Young people, as they grow up and settled for themselves, were obliged, for want of lands, to move out from us...." ¹

Osgood's wife was Mary. They raised hogs, sheep and cattle, having more than 10 slaves at his death. ² Nephews were: John Baker; John Osgood Harley, son of James; and Thomas Baker. Grandchildren: John and William Quarterman, sons of John Quarterman. Children of daughter, Sarah Way were left one-third of the estate, viz: Sarah, Elizabeth, John, William and Elijah Quarterman. Other grandchildren: Mary and Joseph Way. Mary Baker, the daughter " of my wife's sister, Elizabeth Baker"; John Godfrey, son of Hannah Alexander, formerly Hannah Godfrey; Susannah Andrew, daughter of Benjamin Andrew; Mary Bacon and Saunders Andrew, children of Joseph Andrew; sister-in-law, Lydia Winn.

In 1752, Benjamin Baker was appointed to survey and lay out sundry tracts of land on and adjacent to the Midway and Newport Rivers. Surveyors were Henry Younge and Thomas Ellis, and large land grants were subsequently given to the Puritans for settlement. The first eighteen families were granted 500 acres of land each which were located on the head of the Midway River, as follows: Benjamin Baker, Parmenas Way, John Quarterman, John Elliott, Samuel Bacon, Edward Summer, Edward Way, John Stevens, John Mitchell, Samuel Way, John Shave, John Osgood, Sarah Mitchell, William Baker, Richard Spence, Josiah Osgood, Richard Baker, Elizabeth Baker, Samuel Burnley, Nathaniel Way, Moses Way, Thomas Way, Joseph Winn, and, a glebe for the minister of 300 acres.

The members of the South Carolina congregation from Dorchester, Williamsburg, Beach Hill, Charles Towne and Salem were granted 500 acres each at Midway in August of 1752, being granted to ~ John Stevens, Sr., Benjamin Baker, Parmenus Way, John Lupton, Rev. John Osgood, Samuel Stephens, Barock Norman, Daniel Slade, John Winn, Samuel Bacon, Edward Sumner, Anderson Way, Richard Spencer, William Baker, Sarah Osgood, Richard Girardeau, Samuel Burnley, James Way, Richard Girardeau, Samuel Burnley, James Way, Joseph Bacon, Jonathan Bacon, John Norman, Nathaniel Way, Richard Woodcraft, John Mitchell, Sarah Mitchell, John

¹ Howe's History, Vol. I, pp. 567

² Last Will and Testament of John Osgood, Preacher, dated 2 June 1773, probated 27 August 1773; Codicil dated 18 June 1773 appointing son-in-law, Parmenas Way, executor of the will.

Edwards, John Elliott, Joseph Way, William Graves, Joseph Norman, John Stewart, Samuel James, Joseph Glass, Robert Echols, John Quarterman, David Russ, William Lupton, Richard Baker, John Stevens, Jr. Joseph Osgood, John Weston, Joshua Clark and 400 acres for a glebe.

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The second land grants were on 6 August 1752, totaled 9,650 acres, grates to ~ Daniel Dunnon, Isaac Dunnon, John Graves, Palmer Goulding, Joseph Massey, Thomas Stephens, Jr., Isaac Bradwell, N. Bradwell, James Christie, Hugh Dowse, Elizabeth Simmons, Peter Goulding, Elizabeth Baker, William Chapman, James Baker, Rebecca Quarterman, Joseph Stevens, Thomas Stevens, Joseph Bacon, Jr., John Wheeler, Joseph Baker, Thomas Way, Jr., John Shaw, John Churchell, Moses Way, Daniel Connor, Joseph Winn and John Gorton.

The selected site for a town was located on the Midway River. Of those first settlers of 1752 were Benjamin Baker and his family, and Samuel Bacon and his family. Mrs. Baker died the day after they arrived. In March of 1753, Parmenus Way settled. In 1754, seventeen families included the pastor and two single men, John Quarterman, Jr. and Moses Way. Among the other first settlers were the families of John Stevens, Richard Spencer, Richard Baker, Josiah Osgood, Sarah Mitchell and John Mitchell. Midway grew quickly in prosperity between 1752 and 1755, as settlements enlarged with the promise of land grants. Too, slavery was permitted, and the black coastal soil could be sewn with cotton, and rice cultivated in the marshes. These people were the moral intellectual leaders of early Georgia. The charter was surrendered; land grants were bountiful, and this congregation forged a community and progressive economy, bringing with them trades and industry, all the ingredients which the Trustees had desired for colonization. In 1761 Rev. Mr. Osgood commented: "At the great and beautiful improvement in the Midway settlement, the fine plantations, the large and well finished meeting house, the good public roads, in what seven years before was looked upon as an almost impenetrable swamp." ³

Large land grants were available on the Midway River between Savannah and Darien, and this where the Midway Church was founded. Rev. John Osgood led the cause, moving with his congregation. In 1792, the original church burned to the ground by the British during the Revolutionary War. However, another one was soon erected – a large square clapboard structure, which stands today as a tourist attraction with its adjoining cemetery. Rows of white pews are furnished with individual gates, and an imposing balcony overlooks the sanctuary. In those days, families purchased individual pews, always sitting in the same spot. During its existence of 113 years, there were a total of 752 members, among them being the Rev. Abiel Holmes, father of Oliver Wendell Holmes; the Rev. Jedidiah Morse, father of Samuel F. B. Morse; and the Rev. I. S. K. Axson, grandfather of Ellen (Axson) Wilson, wife of President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1771, Rev. Osgood's health failed, and he died. After his death, the church was without a regular pastor for 4 years, and they used "visiting" ministers.

A few of these settlers were from Inverness, Scotland and Shrewsbury, New Jersey, but most of them had their beginnings in 1630 in the counties of Devon, Dorset and Somersetshire when they met at Plymouth, England to elect Reverend John Warham and Reverend John Macerick as Ministers to take them to New England. Sailing in March of 1630, they reached America in two months, landing at Mattapan, where a town was laid off called "Dorchester". Five years later, they founded the Puritan element in South Carolina, in response to a call of Joseph Lord, who announced that there was no religious persecutions in Carolina. Here, they settled on the Ashby River, about eighteen miles from Charles Towne, naming the village "Dorchester". From there, bands of Puritans migrated to Georgia. During the Revolutionary War, many were driven from their homes into South Carolina, but afterwards returned to rebuild plantations, for this was a good place to grow rice.

Still, the character of the settlers was important for settlement. On 2 March 1750, James Ellison, late of Pennsylvania, a planter, petitioned the Board for 300 acres of land upon the River Medway more than a year ago, but the Board, being unacquainted with his character and

³ Howe's History, Vol. I, p. 317

abilities, postponed his petition until they had knowledge of him. Allowed 200 acres, adj. to lands granted to John Bailow on said River.⁴

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by Jeannette Holland Austin
Kenneth Baillie had a rice plantation in Liberty Co., he resided on St. Mary's Island, but he called it *Baillie's Island*. The Baillie family later became Tories, fighting with the British in the Revolutionary War, and their lands and estates were confiscated.

For years, until the American Revolution, life centered around this congregation, and the community prospered as people such as John Stevens and John Elliott (Georgia Trustees) developed their land grants. Many rice plantations were established along the Medway River, it's muddy shores being ideal for rice cultivation. Now that negroes could work the land, rice became gold.

Generations of families like the Bakers, Jones, Quartermans, Bacon, etc. flourished here, up until the civil war. A nearby community, Sunbury, was developed by some of these settlers as a coastal resort, to escape the summer fevers and malaria of plantation life. As rice plantations with negro slave labor brought prosperity into Georgia and the Carolinas, it also brought overseers for absentee owners.

As part of the Revolutionary War crisis, about 1778, the Congregational Church was driven from Georgia, but started settling again at Midway in 1782.

⁴ Colonial Records of Georgia by Candler, Vol. VI