

## Chapter 21. The Royal Governors

### COLONIAL GEORGIANS

During the Trustee period, James Edward Oglethorpe (1733-1743) had no title from the Trustees and should be called "Resident Trustee", and William Stephens (1743-1751), Henry Parker (1751-1752), and Patrick Graham (1752-1754) were called "President of the Colony of Georgia." Georgia under the crown dated from 1752 to 1777.

The Governors who administered the business of the colony after 1752 spent most of their time negotiating with the Creek Indians and funding from King George for presents to issue the natives. In 1762, the Cherokee Chiefs were taken to London where they are paraded before dignitaries.

The Royal Governors were responsible for negotiating the treaties that opened settlement to one-eighth of present-day Georgia. During the Royal period, there were three Governors: John Reynolds (1754-1757), Henry Ellis (1757-1760), and James Wright (1760-1776). Finally, Archibald Bulloch (1776-1777) and Button Gwinnett (1777) were named "President of the Council of Safety".<sup>1</sup>

John Reynolds (1754-1757) was born in 1713, and joined the navy at the age of fifteen, later becoming an officer. After his brief title of governor, he was allowed to resume his rank in the navy, and over a fifteen-year period he commanded seven different ships. In 1775 he was made a rear admiral and promoted to vice admiral in 1778. Before his death on 3 February 1788, he was promoted to admiral. As Governor of Georgia, Reynolds had extensive powers, as he could adjourn the Assembly, suggest legislation, veto bills, pardon, command the militia, erect forts, etc. During his tenure he printed paper money, taxed Negro owners, and established an elaborate slave code. His mannerism offended friends such as Patrick Graham, James Habersham and Noble Jones.<sup>2</sup>

Henry Ellis (1757-1760), was born in England in 1721, died 21 January 1806. Ellis arrived in Savannah February 1757 and was received with enthusiasm because of his distinguished reputation. The difficulties with the Indians extended into Georgia and to Fort Prince George on the Savannah River. After much disaster and bloodshed, nearly all of the Cherokees were defeated and a Treaty of Peace was concluded. On account of ill-health, Ellis requested his recall, but the government refused to give up such a valuable man.<sup>3</sup>

James Wright (1760-1776), Bart., was Governor 1768-1776 and again from 1779-1782), was born in Charles Town, South Carolina ca 1714. His grandfather was Chief Justice under King James II of England and his father of Chief Justice of South Carolina. He died in England 20 November 1785. Wright arrived in Savannah 11 October 1760, having practiced law in South Carolina. During his tenure, a number of plantations were reclaimed and restored.<sup>4</sup> When Wright took office in 1760, Georgia's population was barely 6,000 inhabitants. The military force consisted of sixty men belonging to His Majesty's Independent Companies, of two Troops of Rangers, each numbering five officers and seventy privates. The militia was organized as an infantry unit, and had 1,025 men. Agricultural development was increasing, as 3400 pounds of rice was exported by 42 vessels.

Governor Wright appointed William Grover as Chief Justice 13 April 1759, but suspended him in 1762. Wright gave as his reasons: Grover was absent from council meetings,

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<sup>1</sup> Georgia Official and Statistical Register. [Atlanta, GA: Department of Archives and History.](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Governors of Georgia by James F. Cook

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs of Georgia, Vol. I, pp. 31

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* pp. 224.

opposed and thwarted measures conducive to the general good even though paid an annual salary of 50 pounds, sought to influence the deliberations and opinions of the General Assembly, was arbitrarily and oppressively refused to attend a special court of oyer and terminer ordered for the trial of vagabond Spaniards who had, near Darien, murdered McKay, his wife and two Negroes, and was insubordinate and contumacious towards the Governor.<sup>5</sup>

Thereafter, Governor Wright appointed Anthony Stokes to be successor to Grover, who came to Savannah from England in 1760. He was made Chief Justice in 1763 and fared well in his job. However, he was arrested in March of 1776 as an act of reprisal for the imprisonment of some American officers, but was released on parole. His house and papers were destroyed during the American Revolution, when Savannah was shelled in December of 1779. He left for England in 1782.<sup>6</sup>

Archibald Bulloch (1776-1777) was elected to the provincial assembly in 1772 and made Speaker of the House, but The body was dissolved by Governor Habersham, the acting Governor 1771-1773, because of growing differences between Great Britain and its colonies. He was Governor of Georgia from 1776 to 1777. He was known to have irreproachable character.<sup>7</sup>

Button Gwinnett (1777) was born in England about 1732, and located in Savannah in 1765 as a general trader. In 1772 he was a farmer on St. Catharine's Island, but became Governor of Georgia in 1777, congressman and signer of the Declaration of Independence. He died in a duel with the famous General Lachlan McIntosh on 15 May 1777.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* Vol. II, pp. 254-255

<sup>6</sup> *Memoirs of Georgia*, Vol. II, pp. 255-256

<sup>7</sup> *Memoirs of Georgia*, Vol. I, pp. 225