

Chapter 4. Saltzburghers

COLONIAL GEORGIANS
By Jeannette Holland Austin

In Austria there was a financial depression that brought great suffering to the peasants. The Protestant Reformation by Martin Luther had been reasonably successful, particularly in the remote valleys of the Pongau at the headwaters of the Salzach, where peasants secretly embraced the new religion while pretending to be Catholics.

Europe was becoming tolerant of protestants, but in 1731 Saltzburg's new ruler, Archbishop Anton Leopold Eleutherius, Count of Firmian, launched a campaign to rid the country of heretics. The oppressive economy and persecutions that resulted in hardships on the peasant-protestant population, one that they could no longer bear. With the blessing of the Pope, Leopold signed the famous Edict of Expulsion on 31 October. The Edict required that all protestants who did not own land to leave the province within three weeks' time, and that the remainder of the population had to leave within 3 months. The hasty Leopold ignored the Treaty of Westphalia wherein he was required to give his subjects 3 years in which to settle their affairs.

So hasty was this departure, that the unfortunate countrymen, having inadequate clothing and supplies had to leave during the winter time, without even without realizing a destination. In the expellation, many perished. A few months later, others followed, taking with them what possessions they were able to transport in wagons. As they wandered through Europe, seeking homes, a meeting was held in London between Mr. James Vernon and Dr. Bundy of the Trustees. It was at this meeting that the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* ¹ was enlisted to help establish an asylum in Georgia for the persecuted Saltzburghers. Although this society was founded to bring the gospel to the poor of England and of the overseas plantations (colonies), it had already played a large role in the plight of the Saltzburger exiles by bringing it to the attention of the British public. The Trustees resolved to defray the expense of settlement, and that they would accept contributions from the Society as well as other organizations. This was the forerunner of the Trustees protecting the protestants who wished to migrate. ² Between 1729 and 1732 more than 30,000 Saltzburghers abandoned their homes and found sympathetic relief in protestant communities in Prussia, Holland and England. Most of them were from the broad valley of the Salza. All of protestant Europe welcomed the exiled Saltzburghers.

While the Trustees accepted the peasant population into their scheme to colonize, they sought reimbursement from Archbishop Leopold. Rev. Mr. Bolzius and von Reck were instructed to make inventories of individual losses and confiscated goods, and then demands were made on Leopold to return these effects. However, nothing was ever recovered. Nevertheless, the Trustees planned to defray the cost of passage as well as provide staples and necessary provisions.

In January, Benjamin Martyn, the Trustees' secretary, wrote to Oglethorpe that an invitation had already been sent to Germany for the sending over of fifty Saltzburger families to be paid for by various charitable collections.

The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge kept their agreement with the Trustees by calling upon Samuel Urlsperger, one of its corresponding members, who has recently published an invitation to the Saltzburghers to come to Georgia³, arranged for 78 persons to come to Dover, England, and then, at the expense of the Society, to be transported free of charge to Georgia.

Even though the main expulsion had already ended, a few stragglers yet remained in southern Germany. By mid-summer Urlsperger had collected 88 individuals to go to Georgia, but

¹ A missionary society in London

² 12 October 1732

³ Published 1733 at Frankfurt am Main

some of these back down despite much pressure, leaving only 57 still willing to go. Until they could be transported in October, they were housed in the Evangelical poorhouse in Augsburg.

By Jean-François Salzb
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The first group of devoutly industrious Saltzburghers met their religious leaders, Reverend John Martin Bolzius and the Reverend Israel Christian Gronau in Rotterdam, and from there they were transported free of charge to Dover, England where they swore an oath of loyalty to the Trustees. It was decided that the Trustees would defray the cost of passage, as well as provide some of the provisions. This first group of devoutly industrious Saltzburghers set sail on 28 December 1733 in the ship *Prince of Wales* destined for Charlestown, South Carolina.

As they proceeded, the journey became perilous, with storms occurring along the way. On 5 March 1734 the *Prince of Wales* arrived in Charles Towne.

Captain George Dunbar described the beginning of the voyage: "Our voyage thither was detarded by a profound calme which continued from Thursday 'til this morning which I thank God we were favored with a faire wind and likely to continue. The Indian King Quin and others are well and cheerful (remembering their English benefactors) except the Prince who is cold...but was much easier last night than any since he came on board. Messrs. Gordon and Vat manage the people with so much prudence and good...everything is as orderly as could be expected and I think myself extremely happy in both...." ⁴

The voyage had taken eight weeks. Rev. Boltzius, Rev. Gronau and von Reck went ashore where they were greeted by Robert Johnson, the Governor of South Carolina, and James Edward Oglethorpe. Oglethorpe was about to make a return trip to England, but postponed the trip so that he could conduct the Saltzburghers to Georgia. The passengers arrived safely in Savannah on 12 March 1734 where they were greeted by a German Jew, Benjamin Sheftall, who spoke to them in their native language and fed them a breakfast of rice soup. Some townsfolk turned out to welcome them by firing cannons and crying "Huzzah!" The new arrivals were given a good dinner and English beer, which was regarded as being very wholesome for the colonists.

Their leader, Mr. von Reck went into the wilderness on horseback alongside Oglethorpe to choose a place for settlement. Oglethorpe had selected a place about 20 miles north of Savannah, for military purposes, but he gave von Reck the privilege of selecting any site that he wished. Von Reck's selection was a poor one. It was located between two rivers, having open woods, balmy air, wide meadows, with cedar, walnut, pine, cypress, oak, myrtle and sassafras trees. But von Reck gave such a glowing description of the land which was to be the village of Ebenezer, that when the settlers arrived on the spot, they were disappointed to find it a barren waste land. ²⁰ The Saltzburghers named the town Ebenezer, meaning "the Lord hath helped so far".

Each man would be entitled to 3 lots – a lot for a house within the town, a garden plot near the town, and a tillage lot which was to be located a small distance from the town. The surveyor, Noble Jones, put off surveying the individual lots, and Thomas Causton refused to pay two soldiers to assist Noble Jones with the surveying. Also, Causton's boat was so poorly constructed that it took right to 15 days to make the trip from Savannah to Ebenezer.

Boats could not navigate Ebenezer Creek. They would have to clear a trail, cut a road, build seven bridges, and then drag all their supplies to the nearest village. The road was 8 miles long to the Scottish village of Abercorn. Meanwhile, the Saltzburghers took sick with dysentery, contracted from the Scots. The sickness was taken back to Ebenezer, and while people were sick, their cows strayed and crops failed. In the meanwhile, von Reck, ill with dysentery, returned to England where he gave a favorable report on the conditions of the Saltzburghers to the Trustees.⁵

Letter of Captain George Dunbar to the Trustees, dated November 5, 1734

By the end of March the first inhabitants decided to remove to Red Bluff, a better site for a village. Within two short years, the inhabitants of the older village joined them. A village plan was designed by Oglethorpe, which was similar to that of Savannah, in size of lots and width of streets. This site is a short distance from the South Carolina border in a local of cypress, cedar, walnut, oak and pine trees.

Ten casks of seeds arrived from Savannah, and the local Indians gave them deer. Paul Jenys, South Carolina Speaker of the House, sent African slaves to assist in felling trees and building huts. Colonists drew lots for their houses as the city was laid out and began planting corn and Indian beans. Their houses on the new site were completed by March 23rd.

Settlers made candles from berries of wild myrtles entwined throughout the wood, first boiling the berries to make a green wax. The sassafras grows splendidly, and by boiling the root an excellent tea is brewed. The sassafras was also used to brew a certain type of beer by combining molasses and pine tops.

The Austrians were very devout people and their ministers were Mr. Ortman, John Martin Bolzcius and Israel Gronau. They were cheerful and hard-workers. Oglethorpe did not seem to worry, having confidence in their industry. The first transport was deemed a success.

Although the Austrians faced prostrating conditions they viewed the mild climate and fertile soil as being ideal for agricultural prosperity. Almost at once, they commenced writing letters to their friends in Germany encouraging them to move to Georgia, saying that an advantage was that there was no frost and snow to hinder field work. To avoid the heat of mid-day, people worked from early morning until 10 o'clock , then in the afternoon from 3:00 o'clock until sunset.

By fall of 1737 many farmsteads were established on Mill Creek Bluff (also known as Abercorn Creek). After several lumber and grist mills were established, this area was known as the Mill District.

An Account of the condition of Ebenezer was furnished by Benjamin Martyn:⁶ "Fifteen miles from Purysburg on the Georgia side, is Ebenezer, where the Saltzburghers are situated; their Houses are neat and regularly set out in Streets, and The whole Economy of their town, under the Influence of their Ministers, Messrs. Bolzcius and Gronau, is very Exemplary. For the Benefit of their Milch Cattle, a Herdsman is appointed to attend them in the Woods all The Day...These are very industrious, and subsist comfortably by Their Labour. Though there is no regular Court of Justice, As they live in Sobriety, they maintain great Order and decency...They are very regular in their public Worship, which Is on Week-Days in the Evening after their Work; and in the Forenoon and Evening on Sundays. They have built a large and Convenient House for the Reception of Orphans, and other poor Children...The Number computed by Mr. Bolzcius in June, 1738, Whereof his Congregation consisted, was one hundred forty-six, And some more have since been settled among them."⁷

⁶ 1738-1739

⁷ Saltzburghers continued to be brought over for about twenty years, particularly in voyages gotten through the efforts of Mr. Vat and Rev. Mr. Whitefield; History of the Province of Georgia, pp. 24