

## **James Edward Oglethorpe**

James Edward Oglethorpe was the ultimate founder and entrepreneur of a new colony in Georgia. The colonization commenced in February of 1733 with the arrival of Oglethorpe and prospective colonists.

James Edward Oglethorpe was born in Yorkshire, England on December 22, 1696. He was the tenth and last child of Eleanor and Theophilus Oglethorpe. Though frequently in London, the Oglethorpe family maintained a large family estate in Godalming, a small Surrey town near London. He grew up in Westbrook Manor (later the Meath Home). After graduating from Eton and Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Oglethorpe began a military career in 1717, fighting against the Turks under Prince Eugene of Savoy.

But the real story of Oglethorpe begins with his friendship with an artist/architect, Robert Castell who was jailed in 1728 in Fleet Prison in London for failure to pay his debts. The warden placed the gentleman in a cell with a man infected with smallpox. The architect soon died from smallpox. Afterward, Oglethorpe went on a campaign against debtor's imprisonments; his articles were published in newspapers around London.

Oglethorpe was convinced that the poor people on the streets of London would improve their lot, if only they had the opportunity. The differences between the classes were as prominent in daily activities, even to the extent of what clothing a person could wear. Oglethorpe had an idea to populate the Georgia colony with the down-trodden. The opportunity came with the Earl of Egmont with whom he corresponded while he was in the colony, and some 21 other investors wishing to profit from the silk industry in the new colony of Georgia. Oglethorpe was offered the opportunity of becoming its founder of civil affairs, and general of military affairs.

The 21 or 22 English entrepreneurs expected to gain a profit from the business of cultivating the production of silk from the silkworm. Many of the first settlers were encouraged to plant 500 mulberry trees. Mr. Paul Amatis, a German, was sent to the Georgia Colony to head the production. In a letter from Mr. Amatis to James Oglethorpe, dated September 8, 1734, he wrote:

"....all the silk that I have drawn off for the past year in three different quantities....and I pray you also to cause people skilled and expert in the manufacture to come to see the said silk, and I have no doubt that they will find it in all its perfection, quality by quality...however I hope that this year silk will be more lustrous and not so smoky

because of the precautions which I shall take...also how generous I have been in this enterprise since I have spent nothing...except those expenses I have been obliged to pay out of my subsistence along without having first wished to give you the marks of my skill; I hope that those persons you will completely satisfied in seeing results of my labors...."

China was the major producer of fine silks at the time. Ultimately, however, Oglethorpe sent specimens of the new silk to London for inspection, and the results were favorable.

Luckily, the Creek Indians were friendly and Oglethorpe found a true friendship in Chief----- . The Creeks wrote a letter to Oglethorpe declaring that they were descendants of the Mayans! This document was taken to England. It was kept for many years in Clarence House until Prince Charles gave it to a local historian to take back to America. Chief Tomachichi allowed John Wesley to teach his Christian bible in the villages, and his final wish was to be buried in ----- square in Savannah. While visiting the Savannah Historical Society, I came upon some old newspapers which set out to prove the location of Tomachichi's grave. The diggings discovered a tomahawk and several personal items of the chief, thus proving that he was buried there!

### **The War of Jenkin's Ear**

Meanwhile, the trade disputes between Great Britain and Spain came to a head in 1739 when Captain Robert Jenkins appeared before a committee of the House of Commons and exhibited what he alleged to be his own amputated ear, cut off in April 1731 in the West Indies by Spanish coast guards, who had boarded his ship, pillaged it, and then set it adrift. Public opinion had already been aroused by other Spanish outrages on British ships, and the Jenkins episode was swiftly exploited by members of Parliament who were in opposition to the government of Robert Walpole.

The situation thrust Oglethorpe into a land war with Spain. Spain had its bastille in St. Augustine, Florida since the 1500s. During the heat of summer, Oglethorpe, unaware that recent repairs had been made to the bastille, planned to surround the fort and prevent the Spanish from getting supplies. The siege was a failure, as his cannonballs failed to penetrate the structure, and the English fell sick with dysentery. Oglethorpe, himself, became so ill that it was necessary to carry him back to the fort on St. Simon's Island on a stretcher. Knowing that the Spanish would retaliate, the English spent the next two years fortifying the region, even adding a small fort on Amelia Island. Spanish ships having a complement of more than 2000 warriors, arrived on the southern tip of St. Simon's Island in 1740 and began their march up Frederick Road to the fort on the

northern end of the island (Fort Frederica). The Spanish moved slowly, camping along the way. They expected to meet the enemy in the traditional field, and battle face to face. However, about halfway to the fort, the Spanish were attacked by a small force of English soldiers and Scottish Highlanders who lunged at them in the style of guerilla warfare. The site was named Bloody Marsh because it is said that the marsh grass was painted with blood! The confusion led to the dispersing of the Spanish. Meanwhile, Oglethorpe sent some spies out with the message that the English outnumbered the Spanish. The Spanish commander did not believe the tale, but he chose to avoid further confrontation and sailed to Cuba.

### **After the War with Spain**

Oglethorpe was in the colony for fifteen years. He had never slept inside a house. When meeting the highlanders in Darien, he honored the Scots by wearing the plaids. He was known to have slept in a tent under a large oak tree in the village. He bundled up his troops and returned to England about 1744. Fort Frederica fell into disrepair without the economy of the army. Eventually, the settlers moved into Liberty and Chatham Counties.

### **Oglethorpe in England**

Oglethorpe won the land war with Spain, yet several years had passed, and he received no recognition for it. General Oglethorpe was soon sent on a campaign that failed and brought him to discredit. Eventually, he married a widow. It is said that he lived to be 102 years of age.

### **The Georgia Colony.**

The trustees paid passage fees for a great many people who went to Georgia, first interviewing them to determine what crafts they would bring to the colony. Oglethorpe's dream of saving poor people by taking them to the new colony began to fall apart. Storms, droughts, and wet seasons plagued the colonists, and by 1740 there were a good many poor people in Savannah. A group of people from Scotland became known as "the malcontents." They were lazy, and trouble-makers. During early 1740 they ran off to Charleston.

The 22 entrepreneurs, unsuccessful and unwilling to further finance a silk business and

colonization, gave up the colony to King George in 1752.

Sources: Colonial Records of Georgia by Candler; Georgia and Georgians by Lucian Lamar Knight, Volume 1; <https://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/james-edward-oglethorpe/>> Georgia Historical Society; Savannah History Society, et al.

---

Online Links: (for members of Georgiapioneers.com)

<https://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/james-edward-oglethorpe/>>Georgia Historical Society</a>

<https://georgiapioneers.com/restricted/shelves/shelves4.html>>Colonial Records, viz: immigration lists, traced genealogies of the first immigrants, Colonial Records of Georgia by Candler; Land Grants, etc.</a>