

The Moravians in Georgia, 1735-1740

by

Adelaide L. Fries

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Preface

In the life of any individual, association, or nation, there will probably be one or more occurrences which may be considered as success or failure according to the dramatic features of the event and the ultimate results. Of this the Battle of Bunker Hill is a striking example. On the morning of June 17th, 1775, a force of British soldiers attacked a small body of raw, ill-equipped American volunteers, who had fortified a hill near Boston, and quickly drove them from their position. By whom then was the Bunker Hill Monument erected? By the victors in that first engagement of the Revolution? No, but by proud descendants of the vanquished, whose broader view showed them the incalculable benefits arising from that seeming defeat, which precipitated the great struggle, forcing every man in the Colonies to take a position squarely for or against the American Cause, convinced the timid that only proper equipment would be needed to enable the American army to hold its own against the foe, and taught the British that they were dealing, not with hot-headed rebels who would run at first sight of the dreaded "red coats", but with patriots who would stand their ground so long as a charge of powder remained, or gunstocks could be handled as clubs.

Very much the same line of argument may be applied to the first attempt of the Moravian Church to establish a settlement on the American Continent. The story is usually passed over by historians in a few short paragraphs, and yet without the colony in Georgia, the whole history of the Renewed Church of the Unitas Fratrum would have been very different. Without that movement the Moravian Church might never have been established in England, without it the great Methodist denomination might never have come into being, without it the American Moravian provinces, North or South, might not have been planned. Of course Providence might have provided other means for the accomplishment of these ends, but certain it is that in the actual development of all these things the "unsuccessful attempt" in Georgia, 1735 to 1740, played a most important part.

In preparing this history a number of private libraries, the collections of the Georgia Historical Society, the Congressional Library, the British Museum, were searched for data, but so little was found that the story, in so far as it relates to the Moravian settlement, has been drawn entirely from the original manuscripts in the Archives of the Unitas Fratrum at Herrnhut, Germany, with some additions from the Archives at Bethlehem, Pa., and Salem, N. C. For the general history of Georgia, of the Moravian Church, and of the Wesleys, Steven's History of Georgia, Hamilton's History of the Moravian Church, Levering's History of Bethlehem, Pa., Some Fathers of the American Moravian Church, by de Schweinitz, Strobel's History of the Salzburgers, Tyreman's Oxford Methodists, and Wesley's Journal have been most largely used.

The history of the Moravian settlement in Georgia falls into that period when dates are much confused through the contemporaneous use of the old style, or Julian calendar, and the new style, or Gregorian calendar. As the latter is now current everywhere, except in

Russia and the Orient, it is here employed throughout, old style dates being translated where they occur in the records.

Special thanks are due to Rev. A. Glitsch, Archivist at Herrnhut, for courtesies extended while the author was examining the invaluable collection of papers entrusted to his care, and also for his supervision of the copying of such documents as were selected; to Mr. Isaac Beckett, of Savannah, for information respecting the Moravian lands; to Mr. John Jordan, of Philadelphia, for copies of deeds and other papers relating to the settlement; to Mr. W. S. Pfohl, of Salem, for assistance with the illustrations; and to Mr. John W. Fries for suggestion and inspiration for the work, and the constant encouragement and sympathetic interest without which the author's courage would have failed during the tedious years of gathering material for the book, which is now presented to those who may find in it something of explanation, something of interest, concerning the Moravian settlement in Georgia, and the broader history which the story touches on every side.

August, 1904.

Adelaide

L.

Fries.

Chapter 1. Antecedent Events

The Province of Georgia.

It was in the year 1728 that the English Parliament was persuaded by James Oglethorpe, Esq. -- soldier, statesman and philanthropist, -- to appoint a committee to investigate the condition of the debtors confined in the Fleet and Marshalsea prisons. The lot of these debtors was a most pitiable one, for a creditor had power to imprison a man for an indefinite term of years, and the unfortunate debtor, held within the four walls of his prison, could earn no money to pay the debt that was owing, and unless friends came to his rescue, was utterly at the mercy of the oft-times barbarous jailor. The Committee, consisting of ninety-six prominent men, with Oglethorpe as Chairman, recommended and secured the redress of many grievances, and the passing of better laws for the future, but Oglethorpe and a few associates conceived a plan which they thought would eradicate the evil by striking at its very root, the difficulty which many found in earning a living in the overcrowded cities.

In 1663 King Charles II. had granted to eight "Lords Proprietors" the portion of North America lying between the 31st and 36th degrees of latitude, enlarging the boundaries in 1665 to 29 deg. and 36 deg. 30 min. By 1728 most of these Lords Proprietors had tired of their attempt to govern the colonies they had established in "Carolina", and in 1729 seven of the eight sold their interest to the English crown, the district being divided into "North Carolina", "South Carolina", and a more southerly portion, nominally included in the latter, which was held in reserve.

To this unused land the thoughts of Oglethorpe turned, and he and his friends addressed a memorial to the Privy Council, stating "that the cities of London, Westminster, and parts adjacent, do abound with great numbers of indigent persons, who are reduced to such necessity as to become burthensome to the public, and who would be willing to seek a livelihood in any of his majesty's plantations in America, if they were provided with a passage, and means of settling there." They therefore asked for a grant of land lying south of the Savannah River, where they wished to establish a colony in which these unfortunate men might begin life anew, and where Protestants, persecuted in some parts of Europe, might find a refuge. They also offered to take entire charge of the affair, and their petition, after passing through the usual channels, was approved by the King, George II, a charter was prepared, and the great seal was affixed June 9th, 1732.

This instrument constituted twenty-one noblemen and gentlemen a body corporate, by the name and style of "The Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America", and in them was vested full authority for the collecting of subscriptions and the expending of moneys gathered, the selection of colonists, and the making and administering of laws in Georgia; but no member of the corporation was allowed to receive a salary, or any fees, or to hold land in the new province. The undertaking was to be strictly for the good of others, not for their own pecuniary benefit. The charter granted to them "all those lands, countries, and territories situate, lying and being in that part of South Carolina, in

America" between the Savannah and Altamaha, gave them permission to take over any British subjects, or foreigners willing to become such, and guaranteed to each settler the rights of an English subject, and full liberty of conscience, -- Papists alone excepted. This apparently pointed exception was natural enough, since from a political standpoint the new colony was regarded as a valuable guard for the Protestant English Colonies on the north, against the Indians and Roman Catholic colonists to the south, who had been keeping the border settlers in a continual state of uneasiness, even in times of nominal peace. Moreover England had not forgotten the terrible experience of the latter half of the preceding century, when it was war to the death between Catholic and Protestant, and the latter party being the stronger the former was subjected to great and unpardonable persecution, many were executed, and all holding that faith were laid under political disabilities which lasted for a hundred and fifty years.

The plans of the Trustees were very broad. They intended "to relieve such unfortunate persons as cannot subsist here, and establish them in an orderly manner, so as to form a well regulated town. As far as their fund goes they will defray the charge of their passage to Georgia -- give them necessaries, cattle, land, and subsistence, till such time as they can build their houses and clear some of their land." In this manner "many families who would otherwise starve will be provided for, and made masters of houses and lands; * * * and by giving refuge to the distressed Salzburgers and other Protestants, the power of Britain, as a reward for its hospitality, will be increased by the addition of so many religious and industrious subjects."

Each of the emigrants was to receive about fifty acres of land, including a town lot, a garden of five acres, and a forty-five acre farm, and the Trustees offered to give a tract of five hundred acres to any well-to-do man who would go over at his own expense, taking with him at least ten servants, and promising his military service in case of need.

But there was a commercial as well as a benevolent side to the designs of the Trustees, for they thought Georgia could be made to furnish silk, wine, oil and drugs in large quantities, the importing of which would keep thousands of pounds sterling in English hands which had hitherto gone to China, Persia and the Madeiras. Special provision was therefore made to secure the planting of mulberry trees as the first step towards silk culture, the other branches to be introduced as speedily as might be.

Filled with enthusiasm for their plan, the Trustees proceeded to spread abroad the most glowing descriptions of the country where the new colony was to be settled.

"The kind spring, which but salutes us here,
Inhabits there, and courts them all the year.
Ripe fruits and blossoms on the same trees live --
At once they promise, when at once they give.
So sweet the air, so moderate the clime,
None sickly lives, or dies before his time.
Heaven, sure, has kept this spot of earth uncurst,
To shew how all things were created first."

So wrote Oglethorpe, quoting the lines as the best pen picture he could give of the new land, and truly, if the colonists found the reality less roseate than they anticipated, it was not the fault of their generous, energetic leader, who spared neither pains nor means in his effort to make all things work out as his imagination had painted them.

The Trustees having, with great care, selected thirty-five families from the number who wished to go, the first emigrant ship sailed for Georgia in November, 1732, bearing about one hundred and twenty-five "sober, industrious and moral persons", and all needful stores for the establishment of the colony. Early in the following year they reached America, and Oglethorpe, having chosen a high bluff on the southern bank of the Savannah River, concluded a satisfactory treaty with Tomochichi, the chief of the nearest Indian tribe, which was later ratified in a full Council of the chiefs of all the Lower Creeks. His fairness and courteous treatment won the hearts of all, especially of Tomochichi and his people, who for many years remained on the best of terms with the town which was now laid out upon the bluff.

The Salzburgers.

The Salzburgers, referred to by name in the proposals of the Georgia Trustees, were, at this time, very much upon the mind and heart of Protestant Europe. They were Germans, belonging to the Archbishopric of Salzburg, then the most eastern district of Bavaria, but now a province of Austria. "Their ancestors, the Vallenges of Piedmont, had been compelled by the barbarities of the Dukes of Savoy to find a shelter from the storms of persecution in the Alpine passes and vales of Salzburg and the Tyrol, before the Reformation; and frequently since, they had been hunted out by the hirelings and soldiery of the Church of Rome, and condemned for their faith to tortures of the most cruel and revolting kind. In 1684-6, they were again threatened with an exterminating persecution; but were saved in part by the intervention of the Protestant States of Saxony and Brandenburg, though more than a thousand emigrated on account of the dangers to which they were exposed.

"But the quietness which they then enjoyed for nearly half a century was rudely broken in upon by Leopold, Count of Firmian and Archbishop of Salzburg, who determined to reduce them to the Papal faith and power. He began in the year 1729, and ere he ended in 1732 not far from thirty thousand had been driven from their homes, to seek among the Protestant States of Europe that charity and peace which were denied them in the glens and fastnesses of their native Alps.

"The march of these Salzburgers constitutes an epoch in the history of Germany. * * * Arriving at Augsburg, the magistrates closed the gates against them, refusing them entrance to that city which, two hundred years before, through Luther and Melancthon and in the presence of Charles V and the assembled Princes of Germany, had given birth to the celebrated Augsburg Confession, for clinging to which the Salzburgers were now driven from their homes; but overawed by the Protestants, the officers reluctantly admitted the emigrants, who were kindly entertained by the Lutherans.

"The sympathies of Reformed Christendom were awakened on their behalf, and the most hospitable entertainment and assistance were everywhere given them." Only a few months after the signing of the Georgia Colony Charter, the "Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge" requested the Trustees to include the Salzburgers in their plans. The Trustees expressed their willingness to grant lands, and to manage any money given toward their expenses, but stated that they then held no funds which were available for that purpose.

In May, 1733, the House of Commons appropriated 10,000 Pounds to the Trustees of Georgia, "to be applied towards defraying the charges of carrying over and settling foreign and other Protestants in said colony," and over 3,000 Pounds additional having been given privately, the Trustees, at the suggestion of Herr von Pfeil, consul of Wittenberg at Regensburg, wrote to Senior Samuel Urlsperger, pastor of the Lutheran Church of St. Ann in the city of Augsburg, who had been very kind to the Salzburgers on their arrival there, "and ever afterward watched over their welfare with the solicitude of an affectionate father." On receipt of the invitation from the Trustees, seventy-eight persons decided to go to Georgia, and left Augsburg on the 21st of October, reaching Rotterdam the 27th of November, where they were joined by two ministers, Rev. Mr. Bolzius, deputy superintendent of the Latin Orphan School at Halle, and Rev. Mr. Gronau, a tutor in the same, who were to accompany them to their new home. In England they were treated with marked kindness, and when they sailed, January 19, 1734, it was with the promise of free transportation to Georgia, and support there until they could reap their first harvest from the fifty acres which were to be given to each man among them.

They reached Charlestown, South Carolina, the following March, and met General Oglethorpe, the Governor of Georgia, who was intending an immediate return to Europe, but went back to help them select a suitable place for their settlement, they preferring not to live in Savannah itself. The site chosen was about twenty-five miles from Savannah, on a large stream flowing into the Savannah River, and there they laid out their town, calling it "Ebenezer", in grateful remembrance of the Divine help that had brought them thither. Baron von Reck, who had accompanied them as Commissary of the Trustees, stayed with them until they had made a good beginning, and then returned to Europe, leaving Ebenezer about the middle of May.

Unitas Fratrum.

But while the Salzburgers received so much sympathy and kindness in Germany on account of their distress, other exiled Protestants, whose story was no less touching, were being treated with scant courtesy and consideration.

On the 6th of July, 1415, the Bohemian Reformer, John Hus, was burned at the stake. But those who had silenced him could not unsay his message, and at last there drew together a little body of earnest men, who agreed to accept the Bible as their only standard of faith and practice, and established a strict discipline which should keep their lives in the simplicity, purity, and brotherly love of the early Apostolic Church. This was in 1457, and the movement quickly interested the thoughtful people in all classes of society, many

of whom joined their ranks. The formal organization of the Unitas Fratrum (the Unity of Brethren) followed, and its preaching, theological publications, and educational work soon raised it to great influence in Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland, friendly intercourse being established with Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers as they became prominent.

Then came destruction, when the religious liberty of Bohemia and Moravia was extinguished in blood, by the Church of Rome. The great Comenius went forth, a wanderer on the face of the earth, welcomed and honored in courts and universities, introducing new educational principles that revolutionized methods of teaching, but ever longing and praying for the restoration of his Church; and by his publication of its Doctrine and Rules of Discipline, and by his careful transmission of the Episcopate which had been bestowed upon him and his associate Bishops, he did contribute largely to that renewal which he was not destined to see.

In the home lands there were many who held secretly, tenaciously, desperately, to the doctrines they loved, "in hope against hope" that the great oppression would be lifted. But the passing of a hundred years brought no relief, concessions granted to others were still denied to the children of those who had been the first "protestants" against religious slavery and corruption, and in 1722 a small company of descendants of the ancient Unitas Fratrum slipped over the borders of Moravia, and went to Saxony, Nicholas Lewis, Count Zinzendorf, having given them permission to sojourn on his estates until they could find suitable homes elsewhere.

Hearing that they had reached a place of safety, other Moravians took their lives in their hands and followed, risking the imprisonment and torture which were sure to follow an unsuccessful attempt to leave a province, the Government of which would neither allow them to be happy at home nor to sacrifice everything and go away. Among these emigrants were five young men, who went in May, 1724, with the avowed intention of trying to resuscitate the Unitas Fratrum. They intended to go into Poland, where the organization of the Unitas Fratrum had lasted for a considerable time after its ruin in Bohemia, but, almost by accident, they decided to first visit Christian David, who had led the first company to Herrnhut, Saxony, and while there they became convinced that God meant them to throw in their lot with these refugees, and so remained, coming to be strong leaders in the renewed Unity.

Several years, however, elapsed before the church was re-established. One hundred years of persecution had left the Moravians only traditions of the usages of the fathers, members of other sects who were in trouble came and settled among them, bringing diverse views, and things were threatening to become very much involved, when Count Zinzendorf, who had hitherto paid little attention to them, awoke to the realization of their danger, and at once set to work to help them.

It was no easy task which he undertook, for the Moravians insisted on retaining their ancient discipline, and he must needs try to please them and at the same time preserve the bond of union with the State Church, -- the Lutheran, -- of which, as his tenants, they were officially considered members. His tact and great personal magnetism at last healed

the differences which had sprung up between the settlers, the opportune finding of Comenius' `Ratio Disciplinae' enabled them with certainty to formulate rules that agreed with those of the ancient Unitas Fratrum, and a marked outpouring of the Holy Spirit at a Communion, August 13th, 1727, sealed the renewal of the Church.

"They walked with God in peace and love,
 But failed with one another;
 While sternly for the faith they strove,
 Brother fell out with brother;
 But He in Whom they put their trust,
 Who knew their frames, that they were dust,
 Pitied and healed their weakness.

"He found them in His House of prayer,
 With one accord assembled,
 And so revealed His presence there,
 They wept for joy and trembled;
 One cup they drank, one bread they brake,
 One baptism shared, one language spake,
 Forgiving and forgiven.

"Then forth they went with tongues of flame
 In one blest theme delighting,
 The love of Jesus and His Name
 God's children all uniting!
 That love our theme and watchword still;
 That law of love may we fulfill,
 And love as we are loved."

(Montgomery.)

At this time there was no thought of separating from the State Church and establishing a distinct denomination, and Zinzendorf believed that the Unitas Fratrum could exist as a `society' working in, and in harmony with, the State Church of whatever nation it might enter. This idea, borrowed probably from Spener's "ecclesiolae in ecclesia", clung to him, even after circumstances had forced the Unity to declare its independence and the validity of the ordination of its ministry, and many otherwise inexplicable things in the later policy of the Church may be traced to its influence.

Halle Opposition.

In 1734 Zinzendorf took orders in the Lutheran Church, but this, and all that preceded it, seemed to augment rather than quiet the antagonism which the development of Herrnhut aroused in certain quarters. This opposition was not universal. The Moravians had many warm friends and advocates at the Saxon Court, at the Universities of Jena and Tuebingen, and elsewhere, but they also had active enemies who drew their inspiration principally from the University of Halle.

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