Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America...

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INTRODUCTION

Readers of previous volumes of this series are familiar with the Georgia Salzburgers. Newcomers are urged to read the preface to one of them or to Henry Newman's Salzburger Letterbooks or the Salzburger Saga. To understand this volume, it will suffice to know the following: The Georgia Salzburgers were a small fraction of the twenty thousand or more Protestants expelled by Archbishop Firmian from his realm in 1731, long after such intolerance was thought to be a thing of the past. Like other Protestant nations, the people of Great Britain were deeply moved and inspired by the religious zeal of the Salzburger exiles, and the exiles' plight became one of the many factors contributing to the founding of the colony of Georgia, an expressed goal of which was to offer refuge to persecuted Protestants. Aid for the exiles was undertaken both by the Trustees for Establishing a Colony in Georgia and by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, a benevolent society in London designed to bring Christianity to the lower classes and to the overseas colonies. To achieve their purpose, these two bodies turned to Samuel Ursperger, the senior of the Lutheran ministry in Augsburg, a free city in southern Germany, who was himself the descendant of Protestant exiles from Austria.

The first emigrants for Georgia were recruited at Memmingen, another South German city, from stragglers of the great expulsion and from earlier exiles who had remained in that vicinity rather than accompany the bulk of emigrants, who had accepted the hospitality of Frederick William, the "Soldier King" of Prussia, in his territories of East Prussia and Lithuania. All three of the later groups, or "transports," of Georgia Salzburgers were recruited from exiles who had found refuge in the Protestant cities of southern Germany.

The first Salzburger transport was organized at Augsburg during the month of August 1733. From there they marched to the Main River under their conductor, Baron Philip Georg Friedrich von Reck, who then took them by boat to Rotterdam and by ship
to Dover and then on to Georgia. In Rotterdam they met their pastors, Johann Martin Boltzius and his assistant, Israel Christian Gronau, both former instructors at the Francke Foundation in Halle, a charitable and educational institute founded by August Hermann Francke, a Pietist theologian. Pietism was a movement within the Lutheran Church which aimed at a more personal and intimate relationship with the Deity. This first transport arrived in Georgia on 12 March 1734.

James Edward Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia, placed the Salzburgers on a creek some twenty-five miles northwest of Savannah, the location being chosen primarily for military reasons. Here the Salzburgers founded the first German-speaking community in Georgia, which they named Ebenezer, meaning "The Lord hath helped so far." Although the soil at first appeared fertile, two unproductive years proved that the area was not only inaccessible and unhealthy, but also completely sterile. At the end of one year the first transport was joined by a second one, this time under the guidance of Jean Vat, a citizen of the Swiss town of Biel. As a dutiful and obedient Central European, Boltzius had previously sided with Oglethorpe against the dissatisfied among his congregation, yet he finally agreed with Vat that the area was unsuitable and that his congregation would perish if it remained there.

During the spring of 1736, in a dramatic confrontation with Oglethorpe, Boltzius persuaded him to allow the Salzburgers to move to the Red Bluff on the Savannah River, where there was better soil and also access to the outside world. There they were joined by a third transport, this time consisting not only of Salzburgers but also of Austrian and Carinthian exiles who had been residing at Regensburg in hope of recovering their children, who had been held back by the Catholic authorities. By taking the name Ebenezer with them to the Red Bluff, the Salzburgers gave a semblance of continuity and thus spared Oglethorpe and the Trustees much embarrassment. The former settlement, which became a cowpen or ranch for the Trustees' cattle, was now redesignated Old Ebenezer, and the new settlement was named New Ebenezer. With time, the word "New" was dropped.
Old Ebenezer had failed not only because of the poor soil, but also because the land had never been distributed as promised. As soon as the land at New Ebenezer was allotted, it became productive, and the Salzburgers were quickly recognized as the best cattle raisers and farmers of the colony. Much of their success was due to their astute pastor, who revealed not only great concern but also considerable administrative ability as well as practical wisdom. As these Detailed Reports show, he was keenly interested in everything that occurred in his congregation. Unfortunately for secular readers, Boltzius devoted more space in his reports to the spiritual dimension of Ebenezer life, which was what his superiors and most of his readers wished to read. Food, clothing, and shelter were "external" (äusserlich) matters and therefore of secondary importance. To delete any of his Pietistic ramblings, no matter how repetitious, would be to falsify the reports.

Because of their success, the Salzburgers were joined by Swiss from Purysburg, the unsuccessful Swiss settlement down and across the Savannah River, and also by indentured Palatine servants from Savannah. During the year 1740, although ten able-bodied men were absent fighting for Oglethorpe at the siege of St. Augustine, the Salzburgers constructed the first gristmill in Georgia, which continued to cause them much work in 1741. To complete the mill, Boltzius had delayed construction on the church which was to be built with funds collected by the great evangelist George Whitefield expressly for the church. The church was finally completed in 1741.

Boltzius' dependence on Whitefield's largess proved embarrassing when Whitefield, an Anglican, embraced predestination, apparently under the influence of his young Presbyterian chaplain, Jonathan Barber. This pernicious dogma ran counter to that of the Pietists, who constantly preached that Christ had died for all sinners who would believe in Him, not just a select few who had been chosen for all eternity by God's Decretum Absolutum. As soon as Whitefield's defection was noticed, his name all but disappeared from the Detailed Reports, at least from Urlsperger's censored edition.

While Boltzius' reports for 1741 give an insight into the economic and social situation of his
congregation, he gives far more space to its spiritual concerns. To judge by the space Boltzius allotst to it, God's greatest work during the year was not the good harvest or the completion of the church, but the conversion of the sinner Josef Ernst, a disobedient and impenitent parishioner, whom God humbled with a loving chastisement.

Urlsperger bowdlerized Boltzius' reports before publishing them in the Ausführliche Nachrichten, his contemporary edition of Boltzius' Journal. This present volume of the Reports, until mid-November, is based on the unexpurgated manuscripts preserved in the Archives of the Francke Foundation and is therefore especially revealing. Unfortunately, this is the last of the unexpurgated manuscripts.

The long and sometimes difficult manuscript source has helped delay completion of this volume. Frau Magdalena Hoffmann-Loerzer and Mrs. Renate Wilson deserve especial praise and thanks for their skill and patience in the long and tedious task of deciphering the difficult script and for their share of the translation. I also wish to express my thanks to the University of Maryland, whose liberal policies have allowed me the time necessary for translation and research. Thanks are also due to the trustees of the Marie Fehrenkamp Estate Income Fund of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension in Savannah for supporting the initial typing of this lengthy volume; and gratitude is likewise owed to the R.J. Taylor, Jr. Foundation of Atlanta for subsidizing subsequent word processing.

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