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

Marsh, Ben, Jones, George Fenwick, Urlsperger, Samuel

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Foreword to the Reissue

The Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America offer an extraordinary window into the day-to-day lives of colonists establishing new settlements in North America. A unique mix of Protestant propaganda, social history, community study, spiritual biography, and environmental and economic reportage, the reports were originally edited by Lutheran theologian Samuel Urlsperger (1685–1772) in the imperial city of Augsburg, Bavaria, in the eighteenth century and published in Halle under the title Ausführliche Nachricht von den saltzburgischen Emigranten, die sich in America niedergelassen haben (1735–51). His reports were carefully crafted from a patchwork of rich colonial sources, by far the most important of which were the intimate observations of the German religious pastors who assumed responsibility for the community’s evolution. It was in Rotterdam, Holland, in 1733 that Rev. Johann Martin Boltzius and Rev. Israel Christian Gronau first encountered numerous families of Protestant exiles from Salzburg, Austria. Thanks to the financial and political support of German Protestant networks (especially the Francke Foundation at Halle), the Georgia Trustees, and the English Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, the exiles became transatlantic settlers, relocating to a new township that they established upstream from Georgia’s new capital, Savannah.

In the space of twenty years, Urlsperger amassed the reports from the pastors’ travel diaries, letters, lists, grievances, and requests, while further information was parsed from settlers, colonial authorities, and correspondents. Gronau died in 1745, but he was succeeded by Hermann Lemke as an assistant pastor to Boltzius, the latter offering real continuity within the
Ebenezer settlement until his death in 1765, well beyond the lifespan of the *Detailed Reports*. The end products were by no means neutral publications, for comparison with surviving original documents in Halle indicate that multiple filters were in place to ensure the published messages were in step with what the editors wished to convey. The selection of events and the voices expressed by the pastors were with one eye on eventual publication, while Urlsperger happily omitted elements “he thought best unsaid”—meaning that readers of the *Detailed Reports* have to penetrate their overarching intent to demonstrate a story akin to wider tropes in the American creed: Cities on a Hill and Manifest Destiny. News of these Pietists successfully overcoming the trials and tribulations of Atlantic colonialism was intended to shore up German Protestantism, to support Anglo-German diplomatic networks, and to bring patronage for the future support of European religious refugees.

In spite of these editorial dangers and the relentless sermonizing, the sheer volume of material and the extraordinary depth of insight into the personal lives of a host of Georgia settlers present real opportunity for historical reconstruction through the eyes of participants in colonial encounters, conflicts, and community building. Indeed, one of the ironies of a curated archive intended to show a singular power at work is that the *Detailed Reports* clearly reveal the multiplicity of peoples, interests, languages, and ambitions at play in the eighteenth-century Low Country. Pioneer settlers—themselves a heterodox bunch not just from Salzburg but from the Rhineland, England, Scotland, Ireland, French-Swiss cantons, the Piedmont, South Carolina, and the Caribbean—were sandwiched between European imperial powers, in the shadow of powerful Indigenous peoples and the growing presence of racial slavery and people of African origin in neighboring British colonies. Though at first resistant, by the early 1750s the leaders of the Ebenezer settlement had publicly reconciled themselves to what they described in the *Detailed Reports* as the need and the “opportunity” to invest in the purchase of enslaved Africans to labor on their estates. As in other areas, this was a reflection of how several of the settlement’s idiosyncrasies faded as the township’s economy and society became integrated into wider regional patterns and markets.

There is no question that since the *Detailed Reports*’ translation and publication, scholars of German-speaking peoples in the Atlantic world
have—to use a Salzburg occupation—mined extensively and innovatively among these sources for fresh insights into processes of diaspora, worship, exchange, and cultural creolization. At first, the *Detailed Reports* provided texture for groundbreaking works in the late twentieth century that traced Georgia’s early social and cultural history, including George Fenwick Jones’s own syntheses and Harold E. Davis’s rich exploration of colonial life.3 Later generations drilled into particular facets of the Salzburgers’ experiences and their relationship to wider trends in the German Atlantic, including Renate Wilson’s exploration of charitable and medical networks, A. G. Roeber’s assessment of ideas of liberty and property among German Lutherans in British America, and other works comparing the development of Moravian immigrant streams, with whom relations were sometimes strained in Georgia.4 More recently, scholars have used the volumes in pursuit of microhistories, genealogical and biographic snapshots, and contingent works that address how questions of gender, agriculture, slavery, and migration intersected in the disjointed world of the mid-eighteenth-century Low Country.5 Far from the simple story of conquering the wilderness that they originally purported to chart, the *Detailed Reports* retain huge potential. Renewed attention to the commentary they offer will complicate and nuance ongoing research into how Georgia’s earliest Europeans misunderstood, adapted, competed, influenced, and transformed not only their immediate locale but also the larger Atlantic world.

Ben Marsh

Notes


