

Chapter 1

The Georgia Sojourn¹

Introduction

CHARLES WESLEY'S VISIT TO America (1735/1736) became formative for the rest of his life. It is important to note, however, that he went to the New World reluctantly. His brother John, already an ordained priest and thirty-two years of age, had made the decision to go to the Colony of Georgia as a missionary with Colonel Oglethorpe, and John persuaded Charles to take Holy Orders in the Church of England and accompany him to America as a missionary. Charles entered the priesthood with great hesitation, and he left England with many reservations. His father had just died, and his eldest brother Samuel was too busy as a schoolmaster to take care of their mother. Nevertheless, Charles consented to enter the priesthood and to be appointed as a missionary to the colony

1. All references to Charles Wesley's original manuscript of the Journal are cited as *MSJ* followed by the page numbers. References to the earlier published editions of the Charles's journal by Thomas Jackson (2 vols.) and another by John Telford (1 vol.) are cited respectively as "Jackson" and "Telford" followed by volume and page number. This chapter appeared as "Charles Wesley in Georgia," in *Methodist History* 45 (2007) 77–110. It is herewith revised. The Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church, which publishes *Methodist History*, has granted permission for the use of all portions previously published in the above cited journal.

of Georgia and as Oglethorpe's secretary. His mother had said, "Had I twenty sons, I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them more."²

John Wesley's *Journal* begins with his departure from Gravesend for North America, while Charles's commences with his arrival in Georgia. While on board the ship the brothers had encountered a band of Moravians with a very deep sense of confidence in Christ, especially in the face of death, and they had hope of discovering the same inner peace. As already noted, Charles's soul was greatly troubled. Nevertheless, he began his ministry in Georgia with hope.

Appointed as a missionary, he was also Secretary of Indian Affairs and Oglethorpe's personal secretary. In addition, he was given the care of some fifty English families. He had hoped to be a missionary to the Native Americans, but that never materialized.

Life in the colony of Georgia provided the young priest, who was twenty-eight years old at the time, the opportunity to lead in worship and prayers, and to perform other pastoral functions such as the administration of the sacraments of the church and pastoral counseling. Nevertheless, almost from the beginning of his four-month stay, there was constant strife in the colony, and he was often in the midst of it. There was tension with the Spanish, whose military had made forays into the Georgia area. There was also a less comfortable climate along the Georgia coastline with its sand flies and sweltering summer heat than that to which Charles was accustomed in England. This was not the common experience of a Westminster schoolboy and an Oxford University graduate.

Worst of all, tensions precipitated by two vindictive women, Mrs. Hawkins and Mrs. Welch, created tension between Wesley and Oglethorpe, the governor of the Georgia colony. Mrs. Hawkins, wife of the local doctor at St. Simon's Island, where Wesley was stationed, was the primary instigator of a scheme to destroy the reputations of both Oglethorpe and Wesley by pitting the two men against each other in the following way. Mrs. Hawkins told Wesley that Oglethorpe had made amorous

2. Moore, *Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, 1:234.

approaches towards her and had tried to sleep with her. She then told Oglethorpe that Charles Wesley had made similar overtures to her, not only in the colony but on board the ship *Simmonds* as well. These rumors spread throughout the very small population very quickly. For a time each man believed the truth of the rumors about the other, only to discover in the end that the entire matter was nothing but empty, false accusations.

This conspiracy against Charles Wesley weighed heavily on him, and when he finally made the decision to return to England, he was greatly relieved. Still, from time to time in the future he would reflect on the Georgia experience and think that in a return to the colony he would find true solace.

On September 24, 1735, the Trustees of the Colony of Georgia recorded an “appointment of Charles Wesley, AM, to be secretary for Indian Affairs of Georgia.” Just two days later they authorized “a new town in Georgia to be laid out, to be called Frederica.” On September 24 Charles was also ordained priest of the Church of England. On October 10 John Wesley was appointed “missionary at Savannah.”³ And on October 14, 1735, Charles and John embarked from Gravesend on the ship *Simmonds*, a two-hundred-ton vessel, commanded by Captain John Cornish, for the New World. On February 5, 1736, the *Simmonds* reached Georgia. On board were John and Charles Wesley, twenty-seven Moravians including Bishop David Nitschmann, the captain, and crew.

Charles spent his first month in Savannah, during which time little is known of his activities, except for some comments in John’s records. For example, an entry in John’s Journal from February 19 states:

My brother and I took boat, and, passing by Savannah, went up to pay our first visit in America to the poor heathens. But neither Tomochichi nor Sinauky were at home. Coming back, we waited upon Mr. Causton, the Chief Magistrate of Savannah. From him we went with Mr. Spangenberg to the Moravian brethren. About eleven

3. Extracts from the Minutes of the Trustees of the Colony of Georgia in *Historical Collections of Georgia*. All three quotations are on page 16.

we returned to the boat, and came to our ship about four in the morning.⁴

Charles, however, apparently did not begin his *MSJ* until he arrived on St. Simon's Island in March.

The Locus of Charles Wesley's Georgia Activity

From the time of Charles Wesley's arrival on St. Simon's Island most of his activity was located in and around Frederica. He was engaged in pastoral, priestly, and civil duties. As Oglethorpe's personal secretary/scribe, his mobility was significantly limited. For example, he did not travel with Oglethorpe on his expedition to encounter the Spanish. Oglethorpe no doubt felt Charles should be attending to his priestly and civil duties in the governor's absence.

There is a record in the *MSJ* of a journey Charles made to Savannah two months after his arrival on St. Simon's Island. He set out for Savannah on May 11 by boat, though the last five miles were on foot. He records that Mr. Ingham, Mr. Delamotte, and his brother, were surprised by his unexpected visit. Apparently he and John, however, had agreed that Charles would stay in Savannah and assume John's pastoral duties, while the latter traveled to Frederica:

Wednesday, May 19. According to our agreement, my brother set forward for Frederica, and I took charge of Savannah in his absence. The hardest duty imposed on me was the expounding the lesson morning and evening to one hundred hearers. I was surprised at my own confidence, and acknowledged it not my own. The day was usually divided between visiting my parishioners, considering the lesson, and conversing with Mr. Ingham, Delamotte, and Appee.⁵

There is only one additional paragraph about this stay in Savannah, an entry of May 25, concerning the visit to a young girl

4. *JWW* 18:149–50.

5. *MSJ* 34.

who was terminally ill, which is noted below. From May 19 to May 25 Charles provided no record of his activities in Savannah. On May 28 Charles included the long account of Oglethorpe's expedition, and he was no doubt back in Frederica at this time, most certainly by May 31, when he discussed Oglethorpe's message to him about going to court.

The Georgia Section of the *MSJ*

How may one describe the Georgia account in Charles Wesley's *MSJ*? What is the nature of the document? First of all, this is his personal record for the period from March 9 to July 26, 1737, when he was in the colony of Georgia. Charles's *MSJ* is in actuality a journal of part of his stay in Georgia. Out of a total of 137 days for which he might have recorded his activities, reflections, and reactions, there are existing records of only 56 days. That is slightly more than 40 percent of the total number of days. For March he recorded 17 days, omitting 5 days (his record begins on March 9). For April he recorded 15 days, omitting 15 days. For May he recorded 12 days, omitting 19 days. For June he recorded only 5 days, omitting 25 days. For July he recorded only 7 days, omitting 19 days (he departed Georgia on July 26). Whether there are other records yet to come to light for any of this period remains to be seen.

Not all of the material in the Georgia section of the *MSJ* originated with Charles Wesley. There are two large segments that are long reports from Oglethorpe. The entry of May 9, which also includes May 10, is a lengthy report of Oglethorpe regarding one of his expeditions. Charles writes in the third person about the expeditions. For May 28 there is yet a lengthier entry, which consists of an actual extract of Oglethorpe's letter regarding the expedition. It is written in the first person with quotations marks, hence, it appears to be Oglethorpe's own account.

There is the authentic Charles Wesley material, of course, both in longhand and in shorthand. One might surmise from John Telford's one volume of the *MSJ* that almost all of the shorthand passages have been transcribed and are included within

brackets in his edition. That is not the case, however. It would seem that Charles wrote the passages in shorthand to conceal the extremely sensitive content which had to do primarily with the intrigue on the part of Mrs. Hawkins, Mrs. Welch, their husbands, and his strained relationship with Oglethorpe. This theme will be addressed later.

Along with Charles Wesley's responsibilities in Georgia as Secretary for Indian Affairs, he was also Oglethorpe's personal secretary, and the local priest of the Church of England at Frederica. There is considerable information in the Georgia section of the *MSJ* regarding all of these duties, but particularly his practice of the priestly office.

Pastoral and Priestly Duties

On Tuesday, March 9, the day of Charles's arrival in Georgia, he recorded, "I spent the afternoon in conference with my parishioners. (With what trembling ought I to call them mine!) At seven we had evening prayers, in the open air, at which Mr. Oglethorpe was present."

The next morning, March 10, Charles wrote, "Between five and six in the morning read short prayers to a few at the fire, before Mr. Oglethorpe's tent in a hard shower of rain."

These *MSJ* entries on Charles Wesley's first two days in the colony indicate his regular practice of saying the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer in a long and short form.

On his second day in Georgia, March 10, he was already engaged in pastoral counseling:

Toward noon I found an opportunity of talking at the tent-door with Mrs. [Anne] Welch. I laboured to guard her against the care of the world and to give herself to God in the Christian sacrifice; but to no purpose. God was pleased not to add weight to my words; therefore they could make no impression.

After dinner I began talking with Mrs. Germain, about baptizing her child by immersion. She was much

averse to it, though she owned it a strong, healthy child. I then spoke to her husband, who was soon satisfied, and brought her to be so too.⁶

This later changed and Mrs. Germain recanted her consent.

During Charles's brief stay in Savannah to relieve his brother John, there is a moving account of his visit to a young girl, who was dying,

Tuesday, May 25. I visited a girl of fifteen, who lay a-dying of an incurable illness. She had been in that condition for many months, as her parents, some of the best people of the town, informed me. I started at the sight of a breathing corpse. Never was a real corpse half so ghastly. Her groans and screams alone distinguished her from one. They had no intermission; yet was she perfectly sensible, as appeared by her feebly lifting up her eyes when I bad[e] her trust in God, and read the prayers for the *energumens*. We were all in tears. She made signs for me to come again.⁷

On March 11 the *MSJ* states, "At ten this morning I began the full service [Morning Prayer], to about a dozen women whom I had got together; intending to continue it, and only to read a few prayers to the men before they went to work. I also expounded the second lesson with some boldness, as I had a few times before." This is Charles Wesley's first record of his preaching in Georgia.

Worship settings were often improvised, as one might expect in a frontier context. On Sunday, March 14, Wesley wrote, "We had prayers under a great tree." Further, "I preached with boldness, on singleness of intention."⁸ On Sunday, March 28, he mentioned that he "went to the storehouse (our tabernacle at present)."

6. *MSJ* 2.

7. *MSJ* 34.

8. This was probably his brother John's sermon, which Charles had copied. See Newport, *Sermons of Charles Wesley*, 306–13.