

# Scottish Settlement in Darien Georgia:

What was the importance of having the Scottish in Georgia?

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12/4/2012

FYE Georgia in Focus



A group of re-enactors called Clann Nan Con that portray early Scottish Settlers in Georgia

<http://www.blairsvillescottishfestival.org/demos.html>

## **Abstract**

Having a Scottish and Irish heritage myself, I have always been curious about the settlement of America by the Scots Irish. Since living in Georgia my family and I have gone to all the Savannah St. Patrick's Day parades (one of the most heavily attended in the US) and have always wanted to go to the Highland games. My yearning grew evermore to learn more about why Georgia was so influenced by the Scottish and Irish. I saw this paper as an opportunity to look more into the history of Georgia's Scottish, and as I researched, I learned why Georgia would have failed if they had not come. I found that the reason the Oglethorpe recruited so many Scottish was because of the Spanish and Native American threat to any colonies above and in Georgia. With the Scottish being here they were so fierce that for the longest time the Spanish were cautious of messing with them. And the Scottish customs and dress were so similar to the Native Americans, that almost no problems existed between them they and became friends, so the local Native threat was basically eliminated. So if the Scottish had not settled here in Georgia then there would probably be no United States of America today.

## Scottish Settlement in Darien, Georgia

For over 250 years the land of Georgia had been labeled the “Debatable Land” because of the constant fighting for control between the British, Spanish, French, and Native Americans. During those 250 years, Carolina was in constant danger of invasion by the Spanish and French and the colonists there were sending letters pleading for some kind of protection in the frontier of Georgia. Soon after, a failed attempt by the Scottish to bring James Stuart back to the throne of England (the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715), the Scottish that took part were sent to Carolina to help defend from the Spanish and Native Americans, thus being the first installment of Scottish settlers in the Georgia area of America. These Scots pushed back the French threat and established Fort King George on the banks of the Altamaha River (the later site of Darien), but was abandoned in 1727 because of the mounting cost of upkeep because of how unhealthy the site was.

By the time Fort King George was abandoned there had already been plans for a colony in Georgia as a barrier province. After attempts by three different people to make a Georgia colony a reality, James Oglethorpe entered the picture. After a close friend of his, Robert Castle, died in a debtor’s prison in London, Oglethorpe looked into establishing a colony where freed convicts and debtors could go and begin a new life. His petition was subsequently signed by King George II on 9 June, 1732 for “The Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia in America.” There were three main reasons why Oglethorpe wanted to colonize Georgia: a chance for people that were in debt to start over; to have a place where people could practice whatever religion they wanted freely; and to provide defense for the colonies above against any foreign and Native American threat. The first ship, Anne, left for Georgia in 1732 carrying Oglethorpe

and approximately 120 settlers: bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and other professions necessary for the success of the colony.

In London, in 1735, Oglethorpe and his trustees met together to discuss the defense of the colony. They decided on sending over 100 Scotsmen led by an experienced Lieutenant, and commissioned Hugh Mackay and Captain George Dunbar to recruit Highlanders. The Scots to be selected were to be interviewed and screened before being accepted to settle in Georgia. The Scotsmen needed to serve as both farmers and soldiers. They didn't want people that were poor and lazy to settle in Georgia, so they wouldn't have to worry about that with the Scottish because of their religious beliefs and the way they were raised as both farmers and soldiers by tradition proved that they would not be a waste of time. Oglethorpe also wanted families to come along, and because of his wealthy knowledge of the clan system of Scotland it wasn't difficult. Not to mention that since the Jacobite rising of 1715, and cattle prices falling drastically between 1730 and 1740, and many other problems in Scotland, the Highlanders were ready for something new.

Through careful planning between the Trustees and Oglethorpe, each prospective emigrant was promised 12 bushels of Indian corn, 100 pounds of meat, 30 pounds of butter, 100 pounds of cheese, and a bushel of salt a year after their arrival. A cow and a sow, a brass kettle, a shovel, and a pickaxe were also promised for every five heads. Every emigrant was also given weapons- a Georgia Firelock, a broad, sword, an axe, and targets. There were a few specific requirements for the Scotsmen to be recruited: They had to only speak the Highland language of Gaelic, but also had to be a "Gentlemen's Family" of good reputation, and had to be "Industrious, Laborious, and Brave." If those requirements were met then the emigrants were granted 50 acres of land. Not only Highlanders were recruited, but also indentured servants, who after only five years of working would be given land and their freedom.

When it came time to leave Scotland with the first group of Highlanders for Georgia, the Trustees took much care in making sure that everyone was accounted for and that they were fully trained and provided for. All the names, professions, date and birthplace of the emigrants were recorded, and two copies were made: one for Mackay, and one for the Trustees. They were told to bring their own bedding for the trip, but if they didn't have any it would be provided. The ship was given enough powder for 50 bullets for each of the emigrants for target practice. Since the Highlanders were essential to the colony they had to survive the trip, so each day they were ordered to leave their cabins (if the weather permitted), clean them out and sprinkle them with vinegar. They also had plenty of medicine so that if they did get sick they would recover well and survive. Since their arrival in September 16, 1735 was a success, more Highlanders in Scotland were more eager to come to Georgia so on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1735 a second ship prepared to leave for Georgia.

In January of 1736, the Scottish emigrants made their way toward the abandoned Fort King George. When they arrived the Highlanders decided to rename the site Darien, named after the failed attempt of a Scottish settlement in Panama (as if in defiance) due to tropical illness, poor provisions, and the marauding Spanish. When the Carolinians tried to discourage them saying "the settlement would be so close to the Spanish fort that they would be shot from within the Spanish houses" the Scots replied "We will beat them out of their fort and shall have the houses ready built to live in"- indicative of the stubbornness and bravery of the Scottish. Within weeks of settlement Darien took shape so that by the time Oglethorpe arrived on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Scots had constructed a batter, guardhouse, storehouse, chapel, several huts, and even a house for a widow of one of the men that died on the journey.

Oglethorpe was greatly respected by the Highlanders. Before the trip he sent for 9 yards of a bright tartan. The day he arrived in Darien he wore this tartan in the style of the Great Kilt- the style that was being worn by the Scottish Highlanders at this time in History. He wore it so well and looked so natural in it when he walked that it was said that some of the Highlanders didn't recognize him. He also earned more of their respect when he was invited to sleep in a tent on a cot with sheets but he declined and instead "wrapped in his plaid" and slept next to the fire with the others the way the Scottish would if they were in Scotland. One thing that caught Oglethorpe's attention was how well the Highlanders worked with the Native Americans. The reason for this was because the culture structure and the way the Highlanders dressed were similar to the Native Americans and this made it easier for them to relate with one another.

The first winter the Highlanders spent in Darien was the hardest. The crops that were said to flourish in Georgia did not, so they had to depend on the help of the Native Americans. After the first winter they fell into dealing with cattle, so that as soon became the sole source of income in Darien. They were able to produce milk and butter and could take part in trade for anything they might need with the other colonies.

On Oglethorpe's first trip to Cumberland Island he learned that the Scots had renamed it The Highlands. After his arrival he told Hugh Mackay of his plans for establishing Fort St. Andrews, and then he left to visit the other Islands around the Georgia coast. Mackay and the Scots immediately began working hard on Fort St. Andrews, so that by the time Oglethorpe returned to Cumberland Island the ditch had been dug around the site, a wooden parapet erected, and the grass and brush cleared for 50 yards around the ditch. When Fort St. Andrews was finished, Oglethorpe invited to bring the Highlanders back to Darien for the harvest season, but in Highland fashion they declared that while from the Spanish threat still existed they would stay

at the Fort. Oglethorpe allowed all but two married men that had families to stay. From Fort St. Andrews Oglethorpe moved a portion of his Highland forces to Fort St. George, which was built on the ruins of a fort constructed by Sir Francis Drake 150 years before. Sixty Scots stayed at this “desired post of Honor” since it was so close and exposed to the Spaniards.

In October 1736, a treaty was established with the Spanish which stated that Fort St. George was to be abandoned, dismantled, and become a “no man’s land”. After the treaty, Oglethorpe knew there would be trouble and kept a constant state of military preparedness. On November 13, 1739 two young Scots, John Mackay and Angus MacLeod were ambushed by about a dozen Spanish-allied Native Americans, their bodies beheaded and mutilated. The Highlanders and Oglethorpe immediately responded. They began their war of “annoying the Spaniards” by creating the Highland Independent Company of Foot, led by John “Mohr” Mackintosh; the Highland Rangers, led by Captain Hugh Mackay, and soliciting the help of the Chickasaws and the Cherokee. They wore colorful tartans, were armed with traditional broadswords, dirks, muskets, and targets (targes/shields), and began a long chain of battles over a series of Spanish forts: Fort Picolata, Fort St. Francis de Pupo, Fort San Diego, and Fort Moosa.

When they arrived at Fort Moosa on the tenth of June, The Highlanders entered the fort and the English that accompanied them remained outside. When some Highland Rangers were on their way back to Fort Moosa from a burning mission they claimed they heard Indians holding a war dance, which meant a skirmish was on its way. A Spanish raiding party was indeed on the way to Fort Moosa. When the attack began the Highlanders inside were still getting ready and were taken by surprise. The Spanish drove into the fort twice and were held back both times, but on the third advance they broke through and began a slaughter of the Highlanders and English.

Out of the sixty-seven highlanders that first accompanied Oglethorpe into Florida, fifty-one were either killed or captured, including John Mackintosh.

After their defeat at Fort Moosa the town of Darien suffered greatly. Of the original 250 settlers only fifty-three remained and of those over half of them were women and children. Eventually all of the original Scots left Darien and headed for South Carolina. But by the fall of 1741 the situation in Darien improved because of the new Scottish settlers arriving and reviving the town. In 1742 a Spanish invasion of Georgia began. In Frederica, Georgia, the British and Highlanders beat down and defeated the Spanish. The war against Spain would not officially end until 1748 with the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, but the war in Georgia had in essence been over since the Highlanders defeated the Spanish in Frederica. The original Scottish inhabitants of Darien began to come back, and Darien became a respectable trade town up until the Civil War when it was burned during Sherman's March to the Sea, but was later rebuilt.



## Discussion

During my research for this paper I have learned so much. I had not liked Georgia. I always thought it was some boring, flat, and uninteresting place. Learning about the Scottish influence in America was very uplifting, especially because I have Scots Irish heritage. Now I consider myself proud to live in Georgia.

The research I did has proven to me that without the Scottish Highlanders coming to Georgia, the other British colonies would have easily been taken over by the Spanish or French (most likely the Spanish). Without the stubbornness, hardheadedness and bravery that are so attributed to the Scots, the United States of America might not exist. It makes one think that something as small as picking the right kind of people to settle in an area would make the difference of whether or not a nation would exist in the future. Such knowledge makes me proud that I picked up the art and skill of making kilts, and learning about the culture of my ancestors. I look forward to diving even deeper into my heritage and embracing it fully.

## Annotated Bibliography

Bondurant, Emmet. *Darien, Georgia: The Scottish Plymouth Rock*. Retrieved December 4, 2012.

From <http://home.sprintmail.com/~ejb/Darien.htm>

Emmet Bondurant is a bagpiper and Scottish historian. I used his research for some points in my paper that my book didn't cover. He covers the settlement of Darien and the aftermath. I mainly used some of his points on the settlement and his information on the battle of Fort Moosa. He also has a list of the settlers of Darien and their offspring and some information on the State of Georgia Tartan.

Parker, Anthony. (1997). *Scottish Highlanders in Colonial Georgia The Recruitment, Emigration, and Settlement at Darien, 1735-1748*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press

This book was my main source and is my go-to reference for this paper. It goes over in detail the state of Georgia well before the Highlanders settle and even has actions that explain the situation in Scotland leading to the Highlanders being encouraged to go to Georgia. It has a great description of all the happenings in Darien and helped me find out all the information that I needed to finish the paper.