

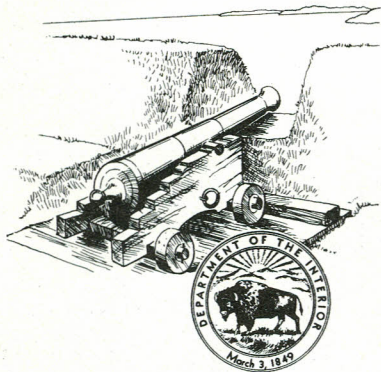
James Edward Oglethorpe

Fort Frederica

NATIONAL MONUMENT

Georgia





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United States Department of the Interior

Oscar L. Chapman, *Secretary*

National Park Service, Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

Fort Frederica (1736–48) served as headquarters for General Oglethorpe's military operations against the Spanish in Florida during the Anglo-Spanish struggle (1739–43) for the southeastern portion of the present United States

The ruins of an important eighteenth-century English fortified settlement are preserved at Fort Frederica National Monument. Both as defense and pivot for offensive operations, Frederica played a leading role in the English-Spanish hostilities that followed its founding. From Fort Frederica the English went to fight the Spaniards in Florida. To Frederica came the Spanish in their attempt to destroy the English southern colonies. And because Frederica had been built, the Spanish advance was checked. Then, its purpose outlived, Frederica became a dead town.

Spain vs. England

Spain claimed virtually the entire continent of North America. Her main interests, however, were in the rich Caribbean colonies, where each year fabulous cargoes of treasure were loaded aboard the galleons for the long voyage to Spain. And

since the treasure fleets had to sail past Florida coasts, Spain kept a firm grip on the Florida salient. St. Augustine was built. Franciscan missions throughout the southeast became an important part of the Florida defenses—for Indians friendly to Spain, the Spaniard reasoned, would be unfriendly to Spain's enemies. But this reckoning did not take into account the British farmer and the ubiquitous British trader. By the early 1700's most of the northerly missions were destroyed and the English had actually settled lands as far south as the Altamaha River in present-day Georgia.

It was chiefly through the influence of James Oglethorpe that a charter was granted in 1732 for a colony that would be a barrier to any Spanish advance from Florida—a protection to the Carolinas and Virginia. The colony was actually established at Savannah in 1733. Spain demanded its removal. To Spain the establishment of the colony was a violation of

the Treaty of 1670, an encroachment on Spanish territory, an intolerable threat to the slow-sailing treasure fleets (as England well knew) — Georgia must be destroyed.

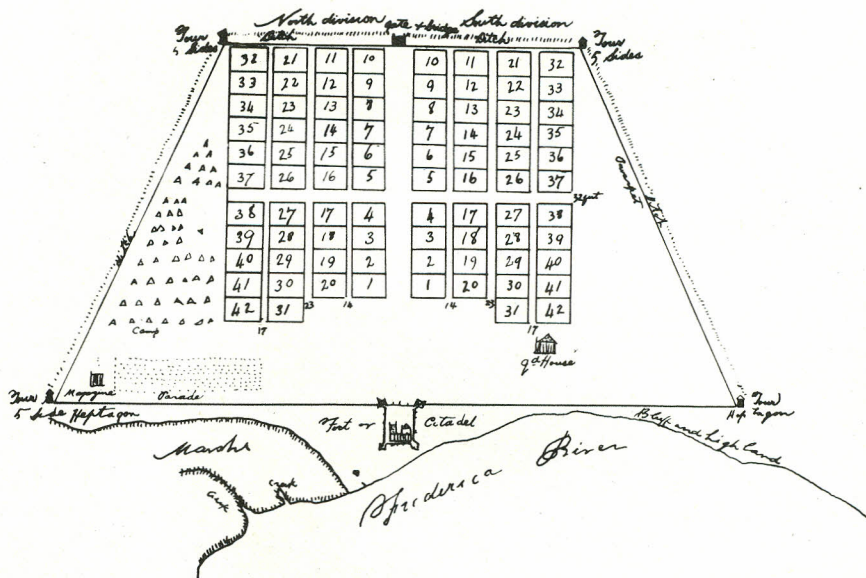
The Building of Fort Frederica

Soon after the establishment of the settlement at Savannah, Oglethorpe carefully surveyed the coast, selecting sites for forts to protect the southern boundaries of his colony. The strongest of the defenses that he built was Fort Frederica, on the west side of St. Simons Island at a strategic bend of the Frederica River. It was a site commanding both north and south approaches on the inland waterway, that navigable channel lying behind the coastal islands of the Atlantic.

On February 18, 1736, the first settlers started work on the fortification. "We immediately got up a house," wrote General Oglethorpe, "and thatched it with

Palmettoes, dug a cellar, traced out a Fort with 4 Bastions by cutting up the turf from the ground, dug enough of the ditch and raised enough of the Rampart for a sample for the men to work upon." Frederica was started and it was named after Frederick, Prince of Wales, the son of George II.

Within a month the fort was almost finished. A battery of cannon commanded the river. Then, as time went by and the expected Spanish attack failed to come, Oglethorpe extended the Frederica defenses. By 1742, the citadel and barracks were built of durable tabby. Officers were quartered in brick houses. In front of the fort was a ravelin mounting 18-pounders. And, reported the general, he proceeded to "enclose the whole town in which there was some very good houses. It is half a Hexagon with two Bastions and two half Bastions and towers after Monsieur Vauban's method upon the point of each Bastion. The walls are of earth faced



Early plan of the fortified town of Frederica

with Timber, 10 foot high in the lowest place and in the highest 13 and the Timbers from eight inches to twelve inches thick. There is a wet Ditch 10 foot wide . . ." As a companion fort to Frederica, in 1737 Oglethorpe built Fort St. Simons, an extensive fortification on the south point of the island. Yet, not everything was military. As early as 1736, those founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley, were active at Frederica.

The War of Jenkins' Ear

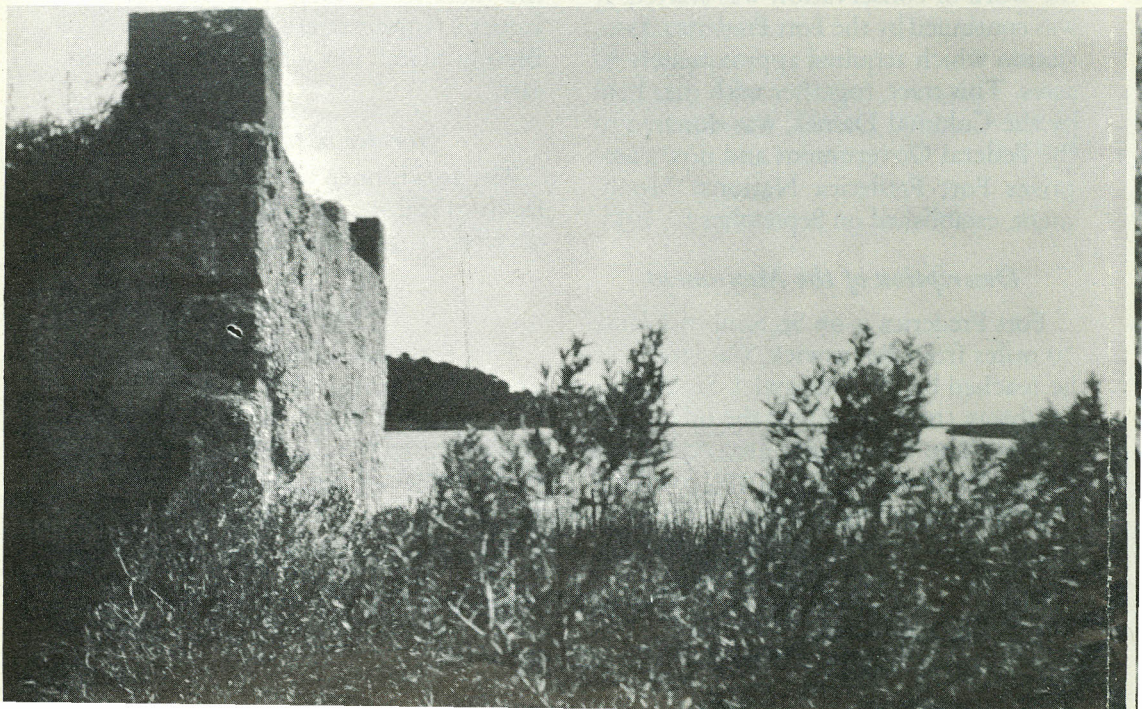
Oglethorpe insisted on the St. Johns River, in present-day Florida, as the boundary between Spanish and English colonies; Spain was equally insistent that the English withdraw beyond Port Royal, S. C. At last Florida's Governor Sanchez and Oglethorpe signed a treaty. However, Sanchez was sent to Spain in chains and hanged for malfeasance in office; Spain

intended to fight for her claims.

In years past, England had been granted certain trading privileges with Spanish colonies. So limited were these concessions that smuggling became the rule rather than the exception, and the Spanish *guarda costa* freely exercised the "right of search." Many English trading vessels were captured. On one occasion, it was alleged, a Spanish officer cut off the ear of one Robert Jenkins. When Jenkins told the story before Parliament, exhibiting the bottled ear as evidence, the English merchants clamored the louder for war; and the "War of Jenkins' Ear" began in 1739.

Oglethorpe welcomed the chance to move against Florida; but the Spaniards were ready, and his 1740 siege of the Castillo at St. Augustine failed. Admiral Vernon's naval activities in the Caribbean were dramatic, but hardly more successful, and it was soon possible for the Spanish to take the offensive.

The fort commanded the inland waterway



Bloody Marsh

The reprisal came in July 1742, led by the same man who had bested Oglethorpe at St. Augustine—Don Manuel de Montiano, Governor of Florida. His plan of campaign clearly showed how important was the strategic location of Fort Frederica as a bulwark for the southern colonies. "I regard as indispensable," read Montiano's instructions from the Governor of Cuba, "the invasion, before anything else is attempted, of the island of St. Simons." Fort Frederica was the headquarters for Oglethorpe's 900 men—Regulars, Rangers, Marines, Highlanders, Indian allies, and others.

On July 5, 1742, a powerful Spanish fleet of some 50 vessels, carrying about 3,000 men, forced the entrance to St. Simons Sound against obstinate resistance from Oglethorpe's vessels and the batteries of Fort St. Simons. The English withdrew to Fort Frederica, leaving the

southern fortification to fall into Spanish hands. Two days later, Montiano sent detachments to learn the island trails to Frederica. Marching along Oglethorpe's military road, they came within a mile and a half of Frederica. There Oglethorpe met them, driving them back toward their camp and posting his men to meet another attack. Montiano quickly sent 300 grenadiers forward, and the English retreated. This time their rear guard hid in dense brush, where the road skirted a marsh. The grenadiers halted within 100 paces of the English ambush. Believing the English were routed, they stacked their arms and prepared to eat. A Scotch cap raised on a stick was the signal for attack, and that day, July 7, 1742, British muskets took a toll of 200 Spanish lives. The Battle of Bloody Marsh was won.

Though this battle marked the turning point of the invasions, the fighting was not over. Montiano unsuccessfully attempted a landing at Frederica. Ogle-

The Old Moat, now overgrown with giant trees



thorpe in turn undertook a night attack; but a French volunteer forewarned the Spanish with a gun shot, then deserted to the Spanish camp. Back to Frederica went Oglethorpe to devise a clever ruse. The next day he freed a Spanish prisoner who carried a letter for the French deserter. The letter instructed the deserter to make the Spanish believe the British position was weak (as indeed it was)—then he should pilot their vessels near the woods where the “hidden batteries” were. Could the Frenchman do this, the letter indicated, his reward would be doubled. The epistle, as intended, found its way to Montiano. The confusion which it created in the Spanish war council, plus the appearance of British warships from Charleston, the already heavy losses, and other considerations caused the Spanish general to turn back. Thus ended the last and greatest military attempt to dislodge the British from the debatable lands in the southeast.

The Fortified Settlement

After the Spanish attack, the Frederica fortifications were greatly strengthened. The walls of the quadrangular fort were thickened to resist the impact of 18-pound cannonballs. Around the entire settlement was the 10-foot earth-and-timber wall, and now at the two inland angles of this wall, Oglethorpe built five-sided bastions topped by lookout towers. Within the town walls were many buildings of brick, wood, and tabby. Frederica looked like a permanent settlement.

The town experienced its greatest prosperity during the years 1742-43. All was bustle and activity. Outside the walls each settler had space for a garden plot, but aside from the soldiers, most of the people were craftsmen, not farmers.

From this strong base of operations, Oglethorpe struck again at St. Augustine



Barrack ruins

in March 1743. As before, the Spanish withdrew into their impregnable castillo; and Oglethorpe, disappointed again, left the St. Augustine area. In July, he sailed for England, never to return to America.

Decline of Frederica

Though the fight was by no means over, the conflict broadened and the theatre of war shifted. The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) was a death warrant for Frederica. British diplomats decided to treat the land between the Altamaha and Florida, which included Fort Frederica, as neutral ground. Only a guard was maintained at Fort Frederica. By 1754 the place was in ruins—houses were falling down, streets were overgrown, and, on the walls of the fort, 20 cannon lay dismounted and useless. In 1763, when Florida was ceded to England, the reason for Frederica's existence as a fortification was gone. A brief and colorful history was over.



Looking west toward the citadel ruins

But Frederica was not entirely forgotten. The remains of the citadel were acquired by the Georgia Chapter of the Colonial Dames of America in 1903, and the work of conservation was started. It was continued by the Fort Frederica Association which acquired approximately 80 acres. This tract, together with that held by the Colonial Dames, was donated to the Federal Government and now comprises Fort Frederica National Monument, established on September 10, 1945.

Description of the Monument

Fort Frederica is on St. Simons Island, 10 miles from Brunswick, Ga., and may be reached by the Brunswick-St. Simons Highway (toll bridge), or the inland waterway. The monument area comprises nearly 80 acres, including the fort site, the walled area of the town, and a burying ground to the east. The moat surrounding the town, the cemetery, portions of the citadel, and part of the

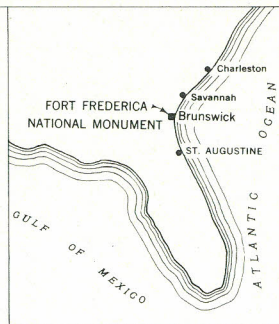
barracks, constructed of brick and tabby, are extant. Giant live oaks and tall Georgia pines make the monument a rare beauty spot. The citadel overlooks the marshes of Glynn which inspired Lanier's famous poem. The battlefield of Bloody Marsh lies 4 miles to the southeast.

Service to the Public

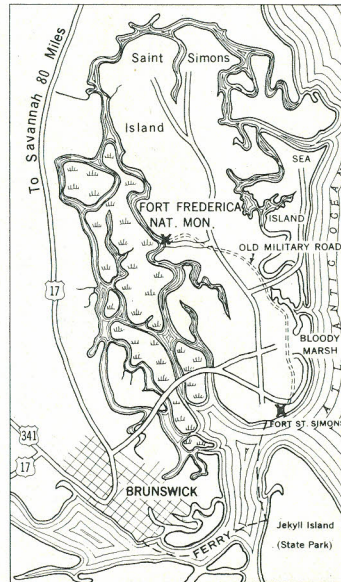
The area is open to visitors, but public facilities and services will be limited until development becomes possible.

Administration

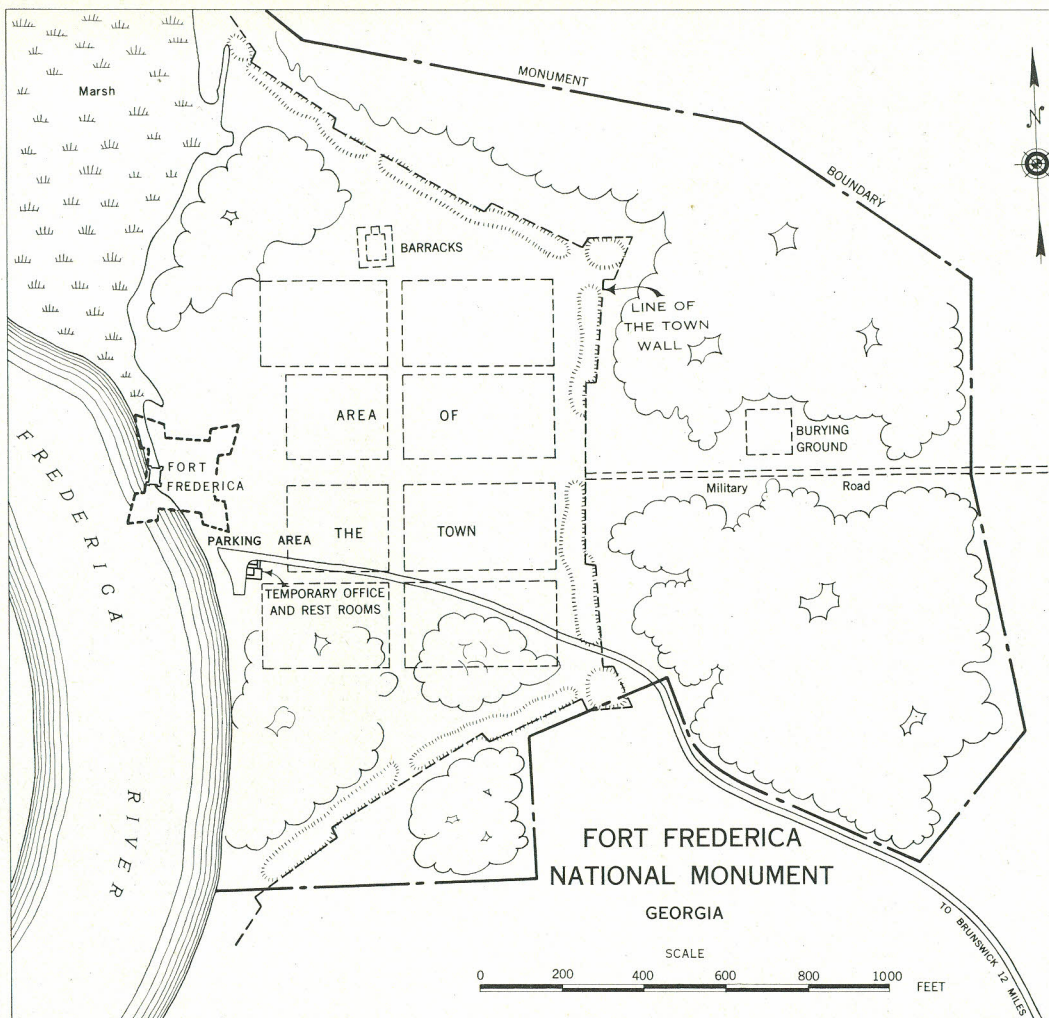
Fort Frederica National Monument is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. All communications should be addressed to the Superintendent, Fort Frederica National Monument, St. Simons Island, Ga.



VICINITY MAP



Drawn by E. F. Berry Dec. 1949 NM - FRE - 7009



FORT FREDERICA
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GEORGIA

SCALE

