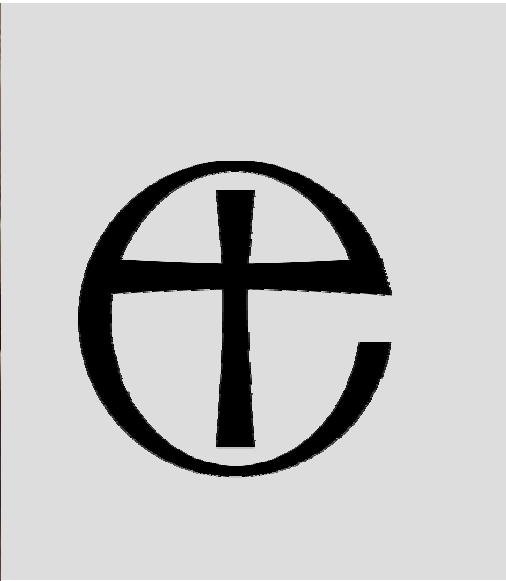




Charles Wesley in Georgia



Charles Wesley

Charles Wesley was instrumental in the founding of modern Methodism though his brother John is more famous. Charles is known as a writer of over 6,000 hymns, including “Hark, the Herald Angel Sings” and “Christ the Lord is Risen Today.” As a young minister with his first parish in the frontier of Georgia, he found his evangelical duties very trying. His experiences at Frederica illuminate many of the difficulties for settlers from British cities as they attempted to create a home in the wilderness.

Charles Wesley Before Georgia

Charles Wesley was born in Epworth, England in 1707 and was the 18th of 19 children. His father was an Anglican preacher and Charles followed in his footsteps after his education. He attended Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford where he graduated in 1729. Working as a college tutor, he was a founder

of the Holy Club at Oxford but appears somewhat reluctant to become a minister. In September 1735, however, he was ordained as a deacon and then as a priest in the Anglican Church in September of 1735. Within a month he was on a journey to the first trial of his life as a minister.

Charles Wesley In Georgia

Charles Wesley set sail for Georgia on October 21, 1735 with his brother John who was doing missionary work for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. While John was assigned to be the minister at Savannah, Charles served as General Oglethorpe’s secretary of Indian affairs and minister to the soldiers and settlers of Frederica. He arrived on March 9, 1736 and recorded in his journal, “about three in the afternoon, I first set foot on St. Simons island, and immediately my spirit revived. No sooner did I enter upon my ministry, than God gave me, like Saul, another heart...”

When Charles arrived at Frederica he found very primitive conditions and he held services in the open and small prayer meetings in the temporary palmetto huts the settlers constructed. Preaching, however, was not his only job at Frederica. Seven days after his arrival he recorded in his journal, “I was wholly spent in writing letters for Mr. Oglethorpe. I would not spend six days more in the same manner for all Georgia.”

Wesley was constantly involved in the personal struggles of Frederica’s settlers and quickly earned James Oglethorpe’s disfavor. In his journal, he noted, “At half- hour past seven Mr. Oglethorpe called me out of my hut. I looked up to God, and went. He charged me with mutiny and sedition; with stirring up the people to desert the colony.”

At this point in his life, Charles lacked the physical, emotional and mental stamina needed to cope with such a difficult life on the Georgia frontier. While Charles had no love for the conditions in Georgia, many of the Georgia settlers had no great love for the Wesleys. To recent settlers struggling to survive on the harsh frontier, the immediate needs of safety and survival mattered far more than the strict piety espoused by both John and Charles Wesley.

On May 12, 1736, Charles left Frederica eventually bound for England. He recorded his feelings in his journal, “I was overjoyed at my deliverance out of this furnace, and not a little ashamed of myself for being so.

Charles Wesley After Georgia

Back in England, Charles’ spiritual growth continued. He served as a curate at St. Mary’s, Islington for a short period in 1738, but upon increasing opposition from both parish and diocese he “took to the fields”.

As an itinerant evangelist he preached all over England, Wales and Ireland. By 1756,

Charles had ceased his itinerant practice and confined his preaching to Bristol, home of his family and in London. At times he argued with his brother John over the direction of Methodism. He died at the age of eighty in 1788 and is buried in the churchyard at Marylebone.