

Perspectives

A Tribute to a Man and His Vision

by W. Todd Groce, Ph.D.

ON FEBRUARY 12, 1733, JAMES EDWARD OGLETHORPE AND his hardy band of Englishmen and women landed at a site on a river bluff where sits today the city of Savannah. Oglethorpe arrived with a dream. He wanted to create in this new colony a better world, free from the ills of modern society, where the less fortunate of England would be able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. He would do this by shielding the young colony from those things he saw as an impediment to economic opportunity: large landholdings, slavery, religious rancor, drunkenness, and legal disputes. It was an experiment in reform, and Georgia would be his laboratory.

The experiment only partially succeeded. The new colony, after a few years, didn't look quite like he had originally envisioned. Despite his best efforts, human nature asserted itself and Georgia soon took on the characteristics of the other British colonies. But this in no way detracts from the nobleness of the effort and the honor of the founder and his vision.

This February the Georgia Historical Society will celebrate, as a part of our signature educational program Georgia Days, the 275th anniversary of the founding of Georgia and honor the man who started it all, General Oglethorpe. To properly mark this momentous occasion and recognize our founder, we've planned a number of exciting new events, including a birthday bash and awards gala, that will add to the traditional Georgia Day parade and other school programs.

We pay homage to Oglethorpe during this anniversary because of who he was and what he did for Georgia. Very few colonies have that one figure that can be pointed to as the sole founder. Oglethorpe conceived the idea of the new colony, personally planted it in the contested region between English South Carolina and Spanish Florida, led its armies in its early struggle to survive, and gave shape and structure to its law and society and a unique urban plan to its first city. Although not among the colony's royal governors, he dominated Georgia's short colonial history like no other.

We remember Oglethorpe not only for his leadership but also for the things he believed in. Whereas other colonies were established for religious purposes or for profit, Georgia was formed primarily for philanthropic reasons. Oglethorpe demonstrated that we can create a better society, a place where economic opportunity exists for all. He not only got the young colony on its feet, he engrafted his vision on its early development. The values he brought to Georgia—hard work, equal opportunity, and the grace found in a second chance—still resonate with us 275 years later.

For all these reasons, we will honor the man and his vision this February as we celebrate the 275th birthday of the special place he created. Please join us in doing so. *G*

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