OLD SHEENEZER

James W. Holland

October 17, 1936
Name of site: Old Ebenezer.

Location: The site of Old Ebenezer is about one-fourth of a mile from Dixie Highway at a point known as Bird Mill Place.

Accessibility: Due to its proximity to the Dixie Highway, it may be considered accessible, even though there is no road to the site itself.

Description of Setting: The approach to the site of Old Ebenezer is through a marshy region, characterized by dense pine woods.

Description of Site: The old town was abandoned 100 years ago, and, at best, was only a group of crude shelters, which were in use somewhat less than two years. Hence all traces of its original character have passed away and, to all appearances, no town ever existed there.

Historical Narrative: During the three years prior to the settlement of Georgia (1733), a violent persecution by the Catholic clergy of the Lutheran inhabitants of the penal state of Salzburg forced some 50,000 Salzburgers to flee to various parts of Europe. A party of these exiles, chiefly through the efforts of Samuel Ursinus, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, and the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, was directed to the colony and its passage to that place provided. The Trustees of Georgia allowed each of the immigrants fifty acres of land in fee simple and provisions sufficient to sustain them until their land should yield crops.

Accordingly, forty-two Salzburgers and their wives and children — in all a party of seventy-eight — left Breslau, where they were joined by their chosen religious teachers, the Rev. John Martin Bollside and the Rev. Jeremias Christian Groenn. Thence they sailed for Dover, where they took the oath of loyalty administered by the Trustees of the Georgia Colony.

In March, 1734, the Salzburgers arrived at Savannah, where the English settlers received them with greeting, the firing of salutes, and a feast featuring "very good and wholesome English strong beer." Temporarily housed in tents at Savannah, the Salzburgers selected the location of the site of the settlement by the Christian Vogel, their temporal leader, and General James Oglethorpe.

The site chosen was on a crooked, sluggish little stream which wended its way some 25 miles to the Savannah River, which was only six miles distant in a straight line. Here, the stream and the town site were named "Ebenezer," and there the energetic German refugees proceeded to build shelters and to clear the land. Before the work had been completed, the Salzburgers
had founded in their new settlement the first Sunday School (as opposed to catechetical) in Georgia and one of the first in the world.

Although doubtless cheered by the arrival, in 1735, of fifty-seven of their countrymen and, about a year later, by the addition of about eighty more in the "great embarkation," the Salzburgers were becoming increasingly aware that they had been mistaken as to the fertility of the land selected. In sickness prevailed and their isolation was depressing. In 1736, then, Bolzius and Cronau petitioned Oglethorpe to relocate their congregation on more suitable land. After some hesitation, Oglethorpe complied, establishing the Georgia Salzburgers at Ed Bluff on the Savannah at the mouth of Ebenezer Creek. The new town was given the same name as its predecessor, which rapidly declined, soon to become a cow-pen and the first of the "dead towns" of Georgia.

**Historical Evaluation:** Old Ebenezer is definitely of interest as the refuge of a group of people who were persecuted in their own land; it is a site connected with the traditions of America as a land of liberty. More particularly it illustrates the philanthropic motives in the founding of Georgia by the Trustees and General Oglethorpe. The site is historically important, too, as the location of the first of the unfortunate towns of colonial Georgia, which have completely faded away, due to unhealthful qualities, barrenness and swampy condition of soil, and a combination of other causes. Among these are numbered Sunbury, Narrika, New Ebenezer, and others, but Old Ebenezer was the first of them.

**Sponsorship:** The Georgia Salzburger Society doubtless is interested in this site, as is also the congregation of Jerusalem Church (Lutheran) at New Ebenezer; Rev. L. C. Banker of Rincon, Ga., pastor. Dr. C. A. Linn, pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension, Savannah, has made extensive studies in the history of the Georgia Salzburgers and, no doubt, may be considered among the probable sponsors of treatment of the site of Old Ebenezer.

**Restoration and No Nails:** Aside from the construction of a parking area, none would be proposed.

**Previous treatment:** None.

**Suggested treatment:** In view of the fact that the site marks the first home in America of a group whose descendants have become worthy citizens of our nation, and the fact that it was the first of Georgia's "dead towns", it is thought of sufficient importance to warrant the erection of a bronze marker.

**Bibliography:** (See bibliography for "New" Ebenezer — there are no materials which deal with Old Ebenezer alone; hence most of the items in the bibliography of "New" Ebenezer are applicable to the Old as well).
A early map (circa 1735) of the County of Savannah showing location of Old Savannah. From Urlasarv Tracts, vol. 1, Ga. Historical Society Library, Savannah.
Name of site: New Ebenezer

Location: In Effingham County, Georgia, about 25 miles up the Savannah River from the City of Savannah.

Accessibility: New Ebenezer is reached by turning off State road 40, at Rincon or at a point five miles north, and proceeding over a fair sand road for a distance of eight miles. It has been announced in the press (Savannah Morning News, Oct. 16, 1916) that the road from Rincon to Ebenezer is to be paved by the State highway commission and "the work will be rushed to a finish." This action on the part of the State will, of course, make Ebenezer more accessible and will correspondingly increase its availability as an historic site.

Description of setting: The eight-mile road to Ebenezer from Rincon passes through a region of wild unkept beauty. Except for an occasional very small cotton patch, it is not under cultivation and the living conditions of the few families which reside on the road approximate those of the American frontier. At the end of the road is a grove of giant virginia pines and live-oak, partly shrouded in long Spanish moss, and through through this vista a dark red brick structure is plainly visible.

Description of site: The only structure remaining of the many which once comprised the prosperous town of Ebenezer is the Jerusalem Church, the brick building mentioned above. Constructed in 1860, it is, nevertheless, in an excellent state of preservation. A view on the north side, and the altars gallery of the interior are interesting features. In the churchyard is a small marker simply bearing the legend: "Ebenezer 1733-1856." The site is on a high bluff overlooking the Savannah River and the point of confluence of Ebenezer Creek. East of the bluff is a cypress swamp.

Historical Narrative: After leaving the older Ebenezer, the Georgia Palatine, proceeding with the same energy and pluck, to establish an orderly and prosperous society at the new. Among their first accomplishments at the new site was the establishment, in 1757, of an orphanage to which, in the following year, George Washington, later founder of Bethesda Orphanage, was an interested visitor. The first church building in the Georgia colony was built in 1761, and it was there that the Palatine settled, in the following year, Henry Hulker.

In 1763 John Martin, Palatine, had been the leader in their journey across the sea, died, and was succeeded by Herman Lempke. Under his administration the church building which still stands was begun, in 1787, and completed under his successor, Christian Nebel, in 1790.
church the Jerusalem congregation, with 188 members, chiefly descendants of the original Salzburgers, still holds services on the second and fourth Sunday of each month. It is said to be the only colonial public building still standing in the state of Georgia and is the only building that remains of the once populous town of Ebenezer.

Throughout the colonial period of Georgia’s history, the Salzburger town of Ebenezer was noteworthy for the industry and law-abiding qualities of its citizens. Under such leaders as Bolinus, Grose, Lamke, and Rabenhorst, the political and social life of the people was controlled almost as much as their religion. There were no juries and no crimes, disputes being adjudicated by a commission of three or four elders appointed for that purpose by the minister. At one time, when money was scarce in the settlement, Rev. Bolinus issued alms of ordinary paper in amounts of money written over his signature. These were circulated at face value as currency among the Salzburgers — a striking commentary on their faith in their pastor and, likewise, on the inherent honesty of the community.

Near Ebenezer, the Salzburgers erected the first saw mill and the first grist mill in Georgia, and probably the first rice mill in America, with machinery of their own invention and construction. Perhaps the greatest industrial achievement at Ebenezer, however, was in silk culture, which they excelled in which they continued to engage after it had been abandoned as an unprofitable enterprise in Georgia. That they did not rely wholly upon this one crop, but were a self-sustaining people, some apparent from the observations of DeBrahm in 1751, when he found the Salzburgers raising wheat, rice, barley, corn, also flax, hemp, tobacco, and rice, indigo, maize, potatoes, melons, they plant mulberry, apple, peach, mastus, pumice, and guineas trees besides all manner of European Garden Herbs.

The Salzburgers developed the most numerous single population element in Georgia during the time of the Trustees, which, in fact, made Georgia more German than English. The town of Ebenezer reached the height of its importance about 1774; it was a flourishing town, and supported a lively trade with Charleston and Savannah.

The absolute decline of Ebenezer dates rather definitively from January 2, 1779, when it was occupied by British troops under Col. Richard Campbell, who burned all buildings within a few hundred feet of Jerusalem Church and fortified main post. The church was converted into a hospital that earned the church and other buildings were subjected to raids. For almost a year, hostile elements spread terror among the people, destroying and—many left their homes never to return.
Ebenezer, by reason of its central location, became the principal point on the thoroughfare from Augusta to Savannah, and remained in British hands until American troops under Gen. Anthony Wayne occupied the town in 1782. Soon thereafter, John Martin, governor of Georgia, and the legislature, met at Ebenezer, which thereupon became the capital of Georgia for a space of a very few days after which the government was moved to Savannah.

After the Revolution, with the aid of Dr. Muhlenberg, an effort was made to re-establish Ebenezer and to rebuild it to its former condition. This proved unsuccessful; the town never regained its former state of industry and seeming permanence. During this period when it seemed that its renaissance might become an actuality, it was designated the county seat of Effingham County but remained so only three years, 1796 to 1799. In the latter year the public buildings were sold and the county seat removed to Springfield.

Year by year thereafter Ebenezer became more sparsely populated, and in 1855, there were only two houses left and but one of those was occupied. In that year an ex-pastor of Jerusalem Church sadly viewed the ruins of the town and wrote: "Desolation seems to have spread over this once-favored spot its withering wing . . . scarcely anything is to be seen except the stumps and evidences of decay and death."

Yet again, Ebenezer was to play a part in the nation's history -- a very minor part this time -- when it became the scene of a series of skirmishes in the Civil War as Sherman's troops advanced upon Savannah. Fourteen years later, a Georgia historian pleaded with Old and New Ebenezer among the sites he called the "Dead Towns of Georgia."

Recent Ownership: Congregation of Jerusalem Lutheran Church located on the site of Ebenezer. The church would not consider relinquishing title to the church building and its immediate grounds, including cemetery, but would probably be interested in having a memorial park established on the remainder of the site of the dead town.

Sponsorship: The Salzburg Society of Georgia would be all too happy to be involved in any movement to institutionalize the memory of Ebenezer. This is not a church society, but a society of descendants of the Salzburg migrants, many of whom have left the Lutheran denomination. However, the constitution of the Society provides that a majority of the directors shall be Lutheran. The Rev. L. C. Dasher is either president of this Society or is very high in its councils. He is also pastor of Jerusalem Church and resides at Rincon, Georgia.
Historical Evaluation: As the site of the place where a group of German settlers in Georgia developed a sturdy industrious citizenship, it is significant in Georgia colonial history. In a larger sense, the place is significant as the home for people driven from their own country who found in America freedom to follow their religion without political interference. The industry of the German Salzburgers at Ebenezer was shown by their construction of the first saw mill and grist mill in Georgia and what is thought to have been the first rice mill in America. Furthermore, the church which stands today is a memorial to their labor, and was built 1767-1769. It is the only colonial building now standing intact in Georgia. In addition Ebenezer is an example of one of Georgia's dead towns — those places where the wheels of progress seem to have been thrown in reverse until not a trace of a town remains.

Restoration and Repairs: No extensive program of restoration would be advisable here. The church is kept in good repair by its congregation, which uses it twice a month for services. The restoration of the town would be a project entailing an expenditure beyond that warranted by its historical importance, interesting and important though it is in Georgia's colonial history.

Previous treatment: None, except repairs from time to time on Jerusalem Church. Picnic parties from Savannah and vicinity sometimes are held on the site of Ebenezer, but there have been no efforts to exploit it or even to improve it.

Suggested treatment: The improvement of the road, which, it seems, the state will undertake, and the clearing away of underbrush to make the site more accessible should be undertaken. The placing of a marker where the road turns off to direct tourists to Ebenezer, and to give them, in brief form, an idea of its historical significance. At the site, suitable markers should be placed indicating points of particular interest in the area.

Research required: Historical research should be undertaken, for the purpose of presenting an accurate, non-sectarian account of the history of the region. The placing of the markers in the area would also require a considerable amount of research.

Bibliography (for the most part, materials cited below are also pertinent to Old Ebenezer):

Sources
2. Colonial Records of the State of Georgia. Official records in which there are many references to the activities of the Salzburgers at Ebenezer.


4. Extract from the Journals of Mr. Commissary Van Bruff, of the Rev. Mr. Bollasius, &c. (London, for the S. T. G. K., 1784, reprinted in Peter Forre, Tracts, 'Washington, 1836-1846, Vol. IV, 1846, No. 5.)

5. Ebenezer Book containing early records of Jerusalem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Effingham, Ga., were commonly known as Ebenezer Church, tr. by J. C. Wright and ed. by C. W. Linn (Savannah, 1829). Translation of copy in Georgia State Library, Atlanta. Comprises church records, 1754-1781 of baptisms, marriages and burials.


10. Urlsperger, Samuel, "Zweckschriften und Beizustande der Siedlung in America emigration ... (Halle, 1744), 14 p.


Bibliography (cont.)

Secondary

Local.


4. Lima, Charles B., Georgia Salzburger Biennial, Issued by the Savannah Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America by the Local Committee, 1934. 30 p.

5. Stevens, William R., "A Brief History of the Silk Culture in Georgia," in Theodore W. Harris, Biographical Memorials of James Oglethorpe, Founder of the Colony of Georgia in North America (Boston, 1841). Chiefly about the Salzburgers of Ebenezer since it was they who took the lead in the silk industry.


General.
1. Goultor, E. Morton, A Short History of Georgia (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1933), pp. 84-8, 52, 87, 105, and 118. Places the Salzburgers in proper perspective as regards the history of Georgia as a whole.

2. Friis, Adele L., The Moravians in Georgia, 1735-1740 (Raleigh, 1925). The Moravians should not be confused with the Lutherans. In this history of the Moravians in Georgia, there is occasional mention of the contemporary Salzburgers in the same colony.

3. Grabow, A. E., Geschichte der Landeskirche in America (St. Louis, 1886).

G. McCall, Hugh, The History of Georgia; Containing Brief Sketches of the Most Remarkable Events Up to the Present Day (1806). Published in 1811 and 1816. Reprint, Atlanta, 1909. A Georgia History written before Ebenezer became a "dead town".

Local authorities

Perhaps the best informed local authority is Mr. Charles A. Linn, pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension, Savannah. Mr. Linn has studied the subject of the Georgia Salsburgers intensively in this country and in Germany and has written a doctoral dissertation in that field. The dissertation is not available, but there is a paper of his authorship on the same subject on file at the Savannah Historical Research Association, Hodgson Hall, Savannah.

Judge Gordon Leaviss, of Savannah, is in possession of much information especially as regards land records.

Another person possessing considerable information on the subject is Mrs. Harmaduck Floyd, Librarian of Georgia Historical Society, Savannah.

Rev. J. W. Hasher is the present pastor of Jerusalem Church and is best informed on current policies, present condition, etc. His residence is at Rincon, Ga.

Published plans and photographs

Plan of the town of Ebenezer appears in Le Bihan's History of the Province of Georgia . . . (1849); also in C. S. Jones, Dead Towns of Georgia, Coll. of Ga. Hist. Soc., IV (Savannah, 1876).

Photograph of Jerusalem Church in P. A. Strobel, The Salsburgers and Their Descendants (Baltimore, 1855); also in E. H. Souleret, Short History of Georgia (Chapel Hill, 1933), 90.
TWO VIEWS OF JERUSALEM CHURCH
At Ebenezer. Completed in 1769, it is said to be the only colonial building in Georgia standing intact. The virgin pines in the foreground are approximately a hundred feet in height.
Cemetery at Ebenezer
about 100 yards west
of Jerusalem Church.

SACRED TO HUMANITY
About one-eighth mile
northeast of church,
at base of bluff.
MONUMENT, KENNEBEC CEMETERY
In memory of Sitzburger leaders, Belzien, Gronsau, Leake and Rabenhorst.
Annual Meeting of Salzburger Society at Ebenezer, March 12, 1937

Clipping from Savannah Morning News, March 13, 1937.

MARCH 13, 1937

SPRINGFIELD MAN NAMED PRESIDENT

Georgia Salzburger Society Holds Election

DR. C. A. LINN SPEAKS

Settling of Ebenezer Great Historical Romance

Ernest B. Mingledorf of Springfield was elected president of the Georgia Salzburger Society yesterday at the annual meeting held at Ebenezer. The Rev. C. A. Linn, D. D., pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension, Savannah, was the principal speaker.

Other officers elected at the meeting included J. B. Keeler of Rincon, vice president; Fred B. Gann of Stillwell, secretary; and Milton Arden of Guyton who was re-elected treasurer.

New members of the executive committee elected for a term of three years were Bolls C. Zeigler, replacing J. B. Keeler; W. E. Cremer, succeeding W. A. Easley, and Mrs. Gussie Pool to fill the place left vacant by Mrs. Edle Morgan.

A committee composed of Dr. R. L. Gann and the Dr. Linn and Julian K. Scharps of Springfield was appointed to confer with officials of the WPA relative to obtaining a project to trace the lineage of the Salzburger family in view of the valuable connections with early Georgia history.

"The committee handling the work of having an ornamental sign placed erected around the old Zion Cemetery, containing the graves of two of the first ministers and several of the early members was appointed," Dr. Gann, who is chairman of the society, said.

Dr. Linn, Dr. Gann and Mr. Arden were named as a committee to obtain an enlarged picture of St. Ann's Church in Aiglsburg, Germany, at which the Salzburger congregation was organized August 31, 1733, before coming to Georgia. The picture will have a summary of the history connected with it, contained in three sections, and will be permanently framed. The present congregation that now worships at Ebenezer has maintained unbroken since 1733.

One other business matter taken up at the meeting was the address to the branch line road near Ebenezer route No. 21 to the church. Dr. Gann, Robert Cremer and Dr. Linn were appointed as a committee to see the proper officials about a slight change desired in the course.

Speaking on the romance that inspired the Salzburgers to leave the Austrian and Bavarian Alps for the wilds of Georgia, Dr. Linn delivered an inspiring address that brought out the true meaning of ideas, romance, life and self-denial.

"Romance may be described as the poetry of life," Dr. Linn said, "but rightly to appreciate the comparison we must remember that poetry is the cultivated, definitely controlled and organized use of language. Just as in life true romance is not haphazard indulgence in soft sentiments and pleasing pleasures, but is a controlled and regulated experience, looking to the achievement of some noble objective. The adventure connected with it is not to be classed as recklessness but as self-denial."

"In such a spirit of romance, Dr. Linn asserted, the Ebenezer colony of Georgia was established. He reviewed the hardships and the great difficulties and dangers they had to face and overcome. However, he said, their continual thanksgiving to God for His daily blessings is an indication that clouds did not hide the sunshine from them."

Continuing his discourse, the minister pointed out that when such an undertaking as that of the Salzburgers was carried out for the sake of faith in God and in the spirit of cheerfulness and thanksgiving, such as was manifest in their lives it is to be classed among the great historical romances of the world.