

**FROM HERETICS TO PARAGONS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE
SALZBURGER IDENTITY IN THE GEORGIA FRONTIER, 1734-1765**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

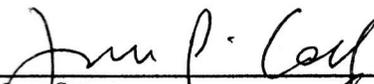
by

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ABSTRACT

On 31 October 1731, on the two hundred and fourteenth anniversary of Martin Luther's publication of his Ninety-Five Theses, Catholic Archbishop Count Leopold Anton von Firmian, prince-bishop of Salzburg in present-day Austria, expelled over 20,000 Protestant Lutherans from their homeland. The Trustees for the Establishment of the Colony of Georgia in America, the rulers of the newly formed colony of Georgia from 1733 to 1752, accepted roughly two hundred of the refugees into their English colony, and in 1734 these particular Salzburgers founded the frontier village of Ebenezer. This community struggled to carve out a new life in the frontier, eventually rising to prominence in the following two decades as the most industrious of the varied communities in the fledgling colony.¹ The Salzburgers were inarguably loyal, hardworking people as a whole. However, the development of their reputation as pious and prosperous colonists was a direct result of the optimistic language used by Ebenezer's head pastor and *de facto* leader, Pietist-trained Johann Martin Boltzius, in his numerous correspondences with his spiritual and secular authorities.

While Boltzius usually described the religious practices and socioeconomic status of the Salzburgers simply and objectively in his correspondence, he often went to great lengths to portray his congregants in as favorable a light as possible. The purpose of this was to engender continued spiritual and financial support from overseas benefactors and political favor from Georgia's temporal leaders. From a spiritual standpoint, Boltzius highlighted the piety and collective prosperity of the Salzburgers to endear them to the

¹ Kenneth Coleman, *A History of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 23.

Pietist leadership in Europe. Of high importance in this endeavor was the establishment of the town orphanage in 1737, a clear recreation of the famed Halle Orphanage and arguably the first true orphanage in the American colonies. Also crucial to the good reputation of the Salzburger was the outspoken way in which Boltzius supported the Trustees' initial plans for the colony. He consistently portrayed the Salzburger as loyal to the tenets of the founders, especially with regard to supporting their prohibition of slavery. Therefore, while the public perception of the Georgia Salzburger as both Lutheran Christians and German colonists was at times an accurate reflection of their personal qualities, Boltzius's shrewd attempts to construct an idealized image for the Salzburger in the eyes of his spiritual and secular authorities ultimately proved a critical element for the success of the Salzburger during the Trustee period.