

## My Savannah Obsession

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My Savannah obsession took a little longer to develop than my St Augustine one. It's not that I had anything against Savannah... it's more like James Oglethorpe just sort of got my dander up. And it's not that I disliked the guy. It's just that, being a St Augustinian in my heart, I really resented his unrelenting eighteenth century efforts to take my city.

Okay, yes, I know the Spanish were just as bad about the Debatable Land along what is now the Georgia coast. However, when lines are drawn, you naturally see your side as being right and the other side as being jerks. So I snootily refused to make friends with Oglethorpe or to like his city, strictly on principle.

But Savannah has a way of wearing you down. Being an insatiable history hound, when a person or a place wears me down I have to absorb all I can about that person or place. Savannah got to me with her most lethal weapon: her giant, ancient live oaks with Spanish moss dripping almost to the ground, limbs extended over city streets making me feel like I was being embraced by loving arms.

I am a sucker for Spanish moss. Pure and simple. Yes, Savannah reeled me in with bait as simple as Spanish moss. Some days I feel like the dumbest fish that ever lived. But then, I am easily distracted by shiny objects.

So, Savannah got her hooks in me. I began to learn more about the city from which I had never lived more than four hours. I fell hopelessly in love with her quiet willingness to share, if I was willing to accept. Moreover, I made friends with James Oglethorpe.

To know Oglethorpe is to know Savannah, and to really understand Savannah, you have to understand James Oglethorpe. When you look at the city through his eyes and see it as he saw it, you can clearly see his dream for a colony. Not the colony of British rejects that Georgia is so commonly thought to be, but a colony of people who just wanted a second chance and were willing to work hard – and maybe even die - for that chance.

What would it take to plant a colony in a place where only Indians and alligators lived, and to survive there? Where would these people live? Who would build their houses? Where would they get food and clothing? The passengers that disembarked from the ship *Anne* in 1733 brought what they thought they would need in the way of relevant goods, and they brought seeds and materials to grow or build or make whatever else they needed that they didn't have.

What exactly does that mean? Well – it means if you got off the boat and realized you had forgotten your favorite shirt or your pillow or your fork, then you did without until you made, grew, or traded for another. No Walmarts or Dollar Generals to run to if you needed toilet paper or light bulbs. And this happened because of the vision of one man – a member of the gentry, who was willing to give everything he had to the people who believed in him and in themselves enough to take the risks they took.

Savannah overwhelms me. She overwhelms me not only with her sheer beauty and unique nature, but also in her strength and in the wonders that pop up everywhere I look. Savannah gives you very little for free. In order to know Savannah you have to make the effort to know her. She doesn't give herself up easily because she is a city of layers. To really know her, you have to peel off the layers to get down to the bone and then you find yourself sitting next to James Oglethorpe, looking out over the marsh, nodding and saying, "Now I see it. You were right." He gives you an appreciative smile in return and you vow you feel him pat your hand in friendship and acceptance because now, you know.

These days, I spend a lot of time with James, and with some of those who helped him build a colony: Mary Musgrove, Noble Jones, my own ancestors William Stephens and Henry Parker. Re-constructing these lives and purposes fascinates me. I am eternally grateful to the stupendously amazing staff at the Georgia Historical Society for their patience with me and their help as I sift through yet another box of documents for yet another tidbit of information to push me a wee bit farther along.

Because every little bit I gain expands and deepens my attachment to the city and to those who built it. Is that attachment worth anything? I don't know. Don't care. I read a wonderful quote by Mike Dolan (of Hawaiian Life): "Knowing the past makes you responsible as the caretaker for their story..."

Is it arrogant to think of myself as a "caretaker?" I don't know. Don't care. All I know is that I'm learning the past and now I will take the utmost care of the stories and share them with the future the only way I know how.