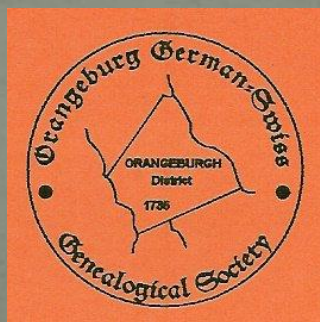


# Presbyterians in Orangeburg

The First Official Religious Affiliation in  
Early Orangeburgh District

---

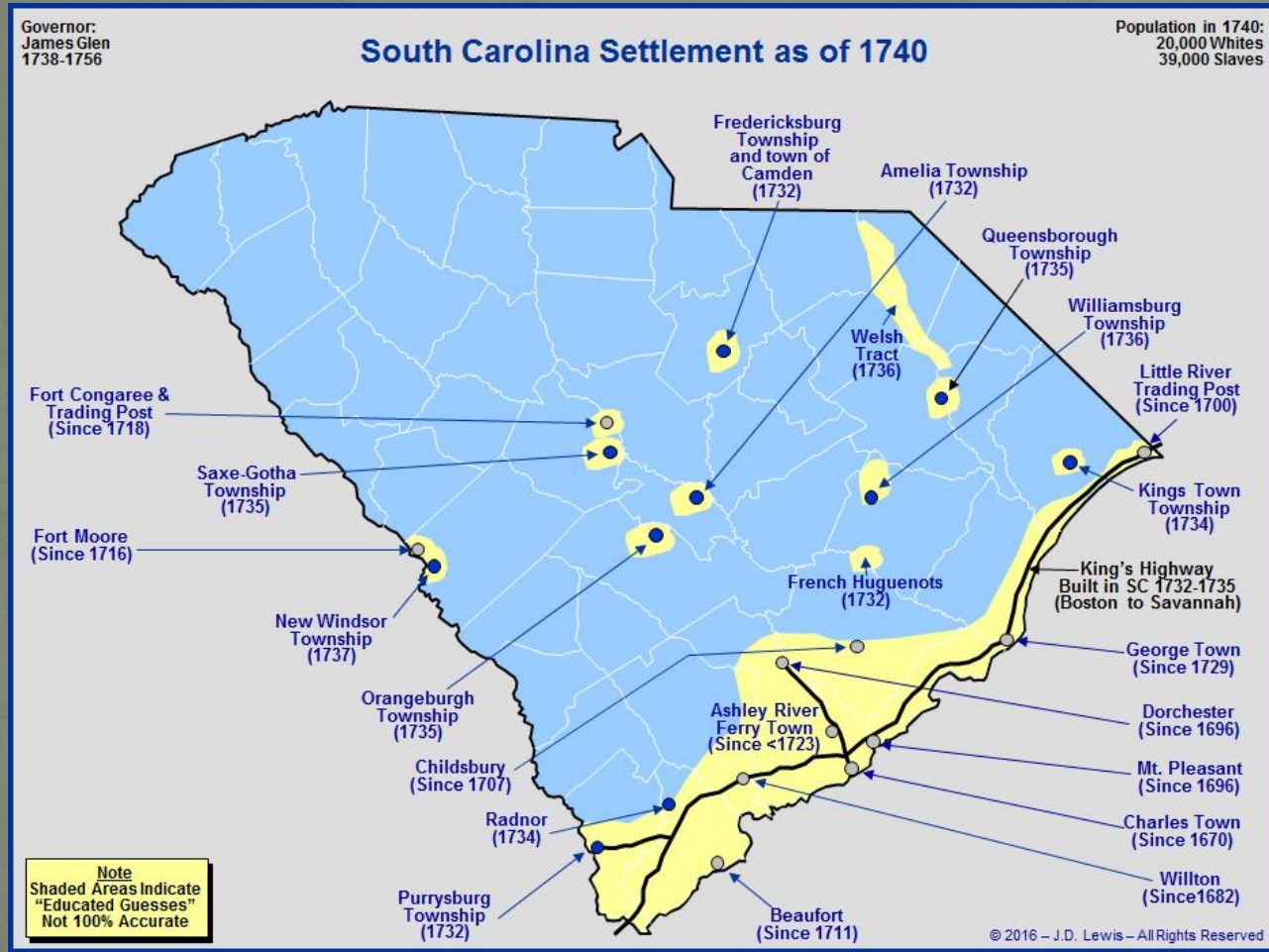


# The Western Frontier

When the inland townships were established by the legislature in 1732, the colony of South Carolina had made no provisions for ministering to the scattered population throughout the backcountry. Most backcountry colonists before the founding of the townships were English speaking cattlemen and Indian traders who apparently felt little need for spiritual guidance and support.

That changed when the townships brought family life and settled communities to the Carolina backcountry.

# The South Carolina Townships



Swiss  
Orangeburgh  
New Windsor  
Purrysburgh  
Saxe-Gotha

German  
Saxe-Gotha

English  
Amelia



# Old Orangeburgh Township

The colonists who were first recruited for the old Orangeburgh Township were Swiss. Unlike the scattered traders of earlier years, they wanted the support of a regular minister and the services of their church.

South Carolina was a British colony in which the colonial government was closely associated with the Church of England, and its Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). Although the SPG was responsible for ministering to the whole of the colony, their efforts were concentrated on the coast.

# Education and Languages

- Many of the Swiss settlers in Orangeburgh were illiterate.
- Most new settlers in the 1730's spoke the Alemannic dialects that are grouped together as German-Swiss. High German would have been more common in written documents. The Zaninis, however, were Italian Swiss (who changed their name to Jennings).
- The Purrysburgh Township, founded in 1732, included a number of French-Swiss, and there was a scattering of Italian-speaking families there including the Albergottis.

# The Swiss Church

Swiss settlers in the Carolina townships followed the Reformed Church that dominated in portions of Switzerland and some parts of Germany. This church was grounded in the theology of Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli, a contemporary of Martin Luther (1484-1531). It grew out of the larger movement called the Reformation, as did various other denominations of this time period.



# Huldrych Zwingli

Zwingli, unlike Luther, rejected transubstantiation. John Calvin of Basel followed Zwingli. The churches that followed their ideas are associated with the “Reformed Tradition.”

Today the best-known denomination in this tradition is Presbyterian, but historically the French Huguenots and Belgian Walloons were also Calvinist, along with the Swiss Reformed.



# Church and Politics in Switzerland

The Swiss Church was not “established” as the Church of England was. The church relationship was largely with the canton rather than the nation. Those relationships varied from close to quite distant, depending on the history of the canton. Some cantons (for example Fribourg, Appenzell Innherhoden) remained Roman Catholic.



# Religions of the Swiss Cantons



# The Churches in Germany

18<sup>th</sup> century German states were part of the Holy Roman Empire, made up of numerous states.

Southwestern Germany along the Rhine, the primary source of German immigration into South Carolina, was divided in religious affiliation. The Reformed Church was strong in some villages and states, the Lutheran in others, while Roman Catholicism persisted in some.

Some Orangeburgh Swiss families spent years in Reformed communities in southwestern Germany and emigrated to Orangeburgh during the 1735-1737 settlement.

# Denominations in South Carolina, 1730's

- Church of England (the established church, the majority on the coast)
- Presbyterians (Waxhaws, PeeDee, and around Beaufort where there was Scottish settlement)
- Huguenot (almost all assimilated by 1750)
- Reformed (in the townships below the Santee and in Charleston)
- Lutherans at Saxe-Gotha (about 280) in a combined Lutheran-Reformed congregation.
- Society of Friends (Quakers)
- Various unaffiliated Congregationalist and Baptist groups



# The Orangeburgh Families

- Alexander S. Salley, Jr., wrote in his *History of Orangeburg* that the Swiss settlers of Orangeburgh were Lutheran, but this was an error. Most Carolina historians have not known German and found it easy to conflate Swiss and later German settlers.
- When the origins of Orangeburgh families have been traced to a Swiss parish, their records are invariably in Swiss Reformed parishes.

# The First Orangeburgh Minister

In 1737 the Orangeburg settlers asked Hans Ulrich Giessendanner, a silver and goldsmith from Lichtensteig in Toggenburg (now part of Appenzell Ausserrhoden) in northwest Switzerland, to become their minister.

Giessendanner had emigrated with the group from Appenzell Ausserrhoden and St. Gallen that founded Purrysburgh. However, he had a falling-out with that group and settled instead in Charleston to pursue his trade.

# Lichtensteig, St. Gallen, CH





Giessendanner was not ordained in any denomination, although he had sought ordination in the Swiss Reformed Church and in the Reformed Church in southwestern Germany.

However, Giessendanner was not an “orthodox” member of the Reformed Church. He was a Pietist, a follower of a movement that combined the Reformed emphasis on personal piety with elements of Lutheranism.

There is evidence that Giessendanner believed in direct illumination in dreams and in instruction by angels.



# Giessendanner in Switzerland

Giessendanner was allied with the radical “Inspirationists” who believed that the Holy Spirit gave them direct revelations, often accompanied by physical contortions and vocal outbursts.

We have no evidence that other Orangeburgh settlers shared Giessendanner’s specific perspective, but it is possible.

This theological blend was not unique to Swiss settlers in South Carolina at the time. It has been said that Henry Laurens, Charleston slave trader and Revolutionary War leader of Huguenot origin, displayed a religion that was “a mixture of Calvinism and Pietism, with a touch of revivalism.”

# Giessendanner in Germany

In Switzerland Giessendanner was regarded as disruptive and was banned from St. Gallen and Zurich. He went on to Germany, where he experienced extreme rejection, even by local Pietists. He was accused of “taking God’s honor for himself.”

He returned to Switzerland. Ten years later a traveling Pietist minister wrote that he believed that Giessendanner had been treated very unfairly and was a man of integrity and sound faith.

Eventually Giessendanner resumed preaching, but local church authorities reacted badly. Giessendanner emigrated, leaving for Carolina with the Purrysburgh colonists.



# A New Minister: Rev. John Giessendanner

After only a year in Orangeburgh, Hans Ulrich Giessendanner died. The congregation asked his nephew, John Giessendanner, to assume his duties. John Giessendanner consulted Major Christian Motte, an official liason to the people of the township and a member of a Huguenot family.

Motte, a Calvinist himself, realized that the denomination active in the colony that was most consistent with the younger Giessendanner's Reformed theology was Presbyterian.

# Presbyterian Ordination

The Rev. John Giessendanner was born in 1721.

When he was examined by Presbyterian authorities in Charleston and ordained by the Presbyterian Assembly in Charleston he was only 18.

Alexander Salley, in his *History of Orangeburg*, treats Motte's advice and Giessendanner's subsequent license to preach through the Presbyterians as a mistake. It was not an error. Motte was correct in his theological understanding of the Swiss settlers.

# Frontier Morality

Some were not happy with the Rev. John Giessendanner's firm stance against drunkenness and other popular frontier pastimes. In 1743 Bartholomew Zouberbuhler, Jr., a candidate for Church of England orders from New Windsor Township, petitioned the Council to displace Giessendanner.

However John Hearn "and above four score of the Dutch and English Inhabitants of Orangeburg and the adjoining plantations" sent a protest to the governor, praising Giessendanner and declaring that Zouberbuhler was being encouraged by residents exasperated by his public reprimands for "great Irregularities and Disorders on the Sabbath."



In the petition in his defense, John Giessendanner was described as “a man of learning, piety, and knowledge in the Holy Scriptures, . . . Very articulate and intelligible . . . And always behaves himself with sobriety, honesty, and justice, encouraging virtue and reproving vice. (MS, Records of Governor and council, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1743, State Archives, Columbia).

The Rev. Giessendanner remained in Orangeburgh to preach against the disruptive and ungodly, with the approval of many of his congregation.

# The Church of England

In 1749 Orangeburg settlers petitioned the Council to allow Rev. Giessendanner to go to England to be ordained in the Church of England. Their reasoning was not theological.

The Orangeburghers said that they were “under the expectation of Enjoying the same Priviledges and Imunitys in Society which their Fellow Subjects do Enjoy.” They noted that they “have at all time Willingly and Chearfully contributed their assistance toward the Support and preservation of the Government . . . .”

Governor Glenn, in his letter to the Bishop of London, said that “Though bred a Calvinist, he is . . . Going to England for Orders.”

# An Expedient Change

In short, the Orangeburgh settlers had paid their taxes for years to maintain the colony and wanted the legal privileges of full citizens, which were available only to members of the established church, as well as the return of some of their tax money in pay for their minister.

They were not the first Carolinians in the Reformed tradition to follow expediency in their religious affiliation. In 1706 the Church of England became the established church in South Carolina. Very quickly, Huguenot congregations officially entered the established church “securing to themselves the obvious political and legal benefits of conformity.”



# The Reformed Church in America

Although Rev. Giessendanner and his congregation did not continue in the Reformed tradition, there is an offshoot of the Reformed Church in the United States today. It is the Reformed Church in America. It traces its history to the 1628 founding of Marble Collegiate Protestant Dutch Reformed Church in New York City. Reformed congregations are rare in the American South today. However, Presbyterians continue Reformed theology in our communities and our nation.

# The Church and the Backcountry

In about 1760 Rev. John Giessendanner's health deteriorated, and he died in 1761. No evidence has been found of any effort by the Church of England to replace him.

In the Waxhaws along the North Carolina border, Rev. Charles Woodmason was the lone itinerant Church of England minister to the scattered settlements there before the Revolution. Below the Santee almost all ministry was by Swiss Reformed ministers.

# Rev. Samuel Suther

Rev. Samuel Suther ministered to the people of Orangeburgh Township for several years after Rev. John Giessendanner's death. Rev. Suther was a Swiss Reformed minister who had immigrated into Virginia and travelled south. Suther eventually moved into North Carolina and was instrumental in establishing the Presbyterian Church there.

This is evidence that the congregation had actually continued in the Reformed tradition.



# First Presbyterian Church

The official presence of Presbyterian clergy and community in Orangeburg was reborn on 2 May 1835, with the founding of Orangeburg Presbyterian Church by pastor I. S. Keith Legare. There were 15 congregants.

The First Presbyterian Church is the theological successor to that early congregation.