

# History

of

## Christ Church, Frederica, Ga.

The history of the Church on St. Simon's Island is, in its earliest period, closely interwoven with that of the colony itself; for from the very beginning of the settlement of Georgia the services of the Church were maintained among the colonists by public authority as one of the chief agencies for the common welfare. As to the utility of these services at that time, Oglethorpe says: "The change in the people since the arrival of the mission is very visible, with respect to the increased industry, love, and charity."

It should be kept in mind that this Church was, at the first, a part of the missionary work of Christ Church, Savannah, and was served, when there was no clergyman-in-charge, by rectors from that parish. Parish bounds were, indeed, established as early as 1758, but it was a full fifty years later before the parish was really incorporated. Hence it is, and contrary to the general opinion, that the first five ministers of this Church were missionaries, appointed by either the Bishop of London, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, or the Colonial Trustee in whom the appointment vested. There were five such missionaries, afterwards nine rectors, making a total of fourteen officially placed clergymen to date.

The narrative therefore easily resolves itself into three periods: The Mission; The Parish Organized; The Parish Reorganized.

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## First Period

The Mission

I

Rev. Charles Wesley, 1736

The first foundation of the town of Frederica, the very name of which is now little more than a memory, was laid by General Oglethorpe on the fifteenth day of February,

1736, and our Church life dates from the same day, when all of the colonists joined in Evening Prayer.

The first clergyman was the Rev. Charles Wesley, a devoted Priest of the Church of England, who came with Oglethorpe as his private chaplain and secretary, but who, as chaplain, took full charge of the mission work of the place and garrison. He at once began the daily services, and a noonday prayer-meeting, which all alike, whether military or civilian, were compelled to attend, being summoned thereto by the drums of the soldiers.

Almost the first building within the walls was one intended in part as a chapel—its site is now covered by the waters of the Frederica River. This building was of "tappy," or tabby as it is now called, a combination of lime, sand, and oyster shells, mixed with water, and laid while thus plastic, in courses about a foot deep, between boards, the boards being removed as soon as the tabby was hard enough to begin another course.

This combination storehouse and chapel was 12 x 20 feet; the cellar and lower floor being used as storerooms, and the upper for a chapel. As long as the soldiers were stationed at Frederica, the chaplain of the regiment or other minister officiated in this building, and the services of the Church were kept up with regularity.

For a time all things seemed to move smoothly for the young Priest, Mr. Wesley, but his vigorous shepherding led at length to a rebellion on the part of the flock. False charges were brought against the chaplain, and the General, who at first believed them, made his life a burden. The proof of Mr. Wesley's entire innocence led, at length, to a reconciliation between the General and himself; but we cannot wonder that, lying desperately ill on the bare ground, and almost uncared for, the glamor of colonial life for him faded away. He concluded that his work was over, and in July of the same year he sailed for England, never to return.

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#### Rev. John Wesley

During the following sixteen months, the Island was given services occasionally by the still more devoted John Wesley, rector of Christ Church, Savannah, from which place he made his way on foot, trusting for the crossing of the larger rivers to the passing canoes of the friendly Indians. The fact of these visits to Frederica has been

questioned, but the writer has seen Wesley's own diary, in which he tells how he fell into the water from a small boat while embarking from Frederica; and the leaves of the diary showed the marks of the water.

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## II

**Rev. Geo. Whitfield**

1737 to 1738

Upon his departure, the Rev. George Whitfield, having been appointed by the Bishop of London to officiate as Deacon at Savannah and Frederica, sailed for Georgia, passing Wesley's vessel in the Downs.

Whitfield served the Churches to which he had been appointed very carelessly, his mind being intent on other objects.

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## III

**Rev. William Norris**

1740 to 1741

In 1739, the Rev. William Norris was appointed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts as missionary in Georgia, and during 1740 and 1741 was posted at Frederica. His character, we read, was very doubtful, his work seeming to have been productive of more harm than good.

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## IV

**Rev. Samuel Bosomworth**

1743 to 1745

In 1743, the Rev. William Barton, as Trustee for the Colony, placed the Rev. Mr. Bosomworth in charge at Frederica. This man had come out with Oglethorpe, as an adventurer and trader with the Indians, a woman of which race he later on married. She was a halfbreed, and had been Oglethorpe's interpreter with the Indians. He took Orders in the Church, but was a sad disgrace to them; for

he and his wife were constantly stirring up strife between the colonists and the Indians, and for the basest personal ends.

While at Frederica on one occasion, Bosomworth and his wife induced certain Indians there, who claimed to be chiefs, or representative warriors from the nearby towns and tribes, to proclaim one of their number emperor. This proclamation having been duly signed and witnessed, they persuaded the so-called emperor to deed to them the islands of St. Catharine, Ossabaw, and Sapelo. Later, Bosomworth got the Indians to proclaim his wife queen of all of the nearby tribes, and then, in order to make good their claim to the said islands, marched on Savannah, where there would have been much bloodshed, and very possibly the destruction of the colony, but for the wisdom and firmness of those in authority there. As it was, this pair cost the colony more than £10,000 before they were satisfied. The islands of Sapelo and Ossabaw being sold by the crown to cover expenses, and St. Catharine being given to the Bosomworths. In 1745, he was suspended from the ministry, much to the relief of a long-suffering community.

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## V

Rev. Bartholomew Zoaberbuhler

1746 to 1766

The following year, the Rev. Mr. Zoaberbuhler received charge, for a time, of the whole province. Landing at Frederica, he labored faithfully, not only here, but at Savannah and Augusta. He was the exact opposite of his predecessor, a man full of zeal and of earnest faith, with mature judgment and great discretion, counting his own life as nothing in the service of his Master.

For twenty years he traveled the whole length of the colony, serving the Church to the glory of God and the satisfaction of his people.

It was during this rectorship that the parish bounds were established, as follows: "The town and district of Frederica, with the islands of Great and Little St. Simon's, and the adjacent islands, shall be and forever continue a parish, by the name of St. James'." (Mar. & Craw. Dig., Vol. I, p. 149).

Mr. Zoaberbuhler died in 1766, lamented by men of every name and race.



THE SECOND CHURCH  
AT FREDERICA

## Second Period

### The Parish Organized, 1808

In 1790, the various small landholders left the Island for new homes on the mainland, and were succeeded, after some years, by about a dozen well-to-do indigo planters. It was not long, however, before these planters abandoned the cultivation of indigo for the newly introduced cotton plant, which promised better returns for their labor; and in a short while there were twelve large plantations on the Island, the owners being mostly Church people.

After their plans for the cultivation of cotton had been perfected, and feeling the need of having religious services established among them, these planters, with the other people of the Island in sympathy with them, created themselves a parish by the election of wardens and vestrymen; and in commemoration of the aid received from the mother Church, in Savannah, called themselves the "Wardens and Vestry of Christ Church, Frederica."

Under this title, they petitioned the Legislature for a grant of land on which to build a church, and which was, by its rental, to assist in the Church's support. In response to this appeal, the Legislature, on December 22, 1808, duly incorporated the parish, and granted to the Wardens and Vestry of Christ Church, Frederica, and their successors in office, all that land around the town of Frederica, called the "Garden Lots," comprising 100 acres, with three lots within the town. This land was rented to planters, and the proceeds paid aside for the erection of a new church; services meanwhile being held in a tabby building back of what is now (1910) the Anson Dodge Home for Orphan Boys, and later in a building near the Cross Roads, one mile east of the church. In this Act, William Page and Robert Grant were named as wardens, and Joseph Turner, John Couper, James Hamilton, Ramon Demere, Jr., and George Abbott as vestrymen.

## VI

(1)

*Rev. Dr. Best*

1800 (?) to 1810

The wardens and vestry called to the Church the Rev. Dr. Best, from the old country; and he was the first to occupy the position of rector, though he was the sixth minister at Frederica. Dr. Best remained till 1810, when he resigned, seeing no prospects of the church being built; for the wardens and vestry were depending for that purpose on the proceeds of the "glebe lands" acquired from the State. "It was not till 1820," to quote Dr. J. Holmes, "that the building was erected; in fact, not until a sufficient sum had been realized from the lease of the land."

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## VII

(2)

*Rev. Edmund Matthews, D. D.*

1810 to 1827

In 1810, the Rev. Edmund Matthews, D. D., was called to the parish, and served faithfully for fifteen years. Until the church was built in 1820, he officiated, as his predecessors had done, in improvised places of worship. He made the address at the laying of the cornerstone of the new church, and preached the first sermon from its pulpit. He was an excellent reader, and till relieved by an organ, led in the singing.

Dr. Matthews was one of the three clergymen composing the primary convention of the Diocese, in 1823, the others being the rectors of Christ Church, Savannah, the first established, and St. Paul's, Augusta, the third, this Church being the second.

It was in 1820 that, the funds from the "glebe lands" having accumulated sufficiently, the church was built, and in it the congregation worshiped till the breaking out of the Civil War, when the men available for service enlisted.

Dr. Matthews lies buried under a marble slab, supported on five pillars, near the southeast corner of the present church (1910), and the slab is said to point directly towards the place of the old altar.

That altar is still in practical use, the "mensa" of the old "communion table" being let into that of the new altar, while its legs support the "credence table," or shelf on which the elements are laid before being "placed" on the altar.

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During the year 1826, the parish received some ministrations from the Rev. T. C. Elliott, of South Carolina.

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### VIII

(3)

Rev. T. S. W. Motte

1828 to 1830

In 1828, the Rev. Mr. Motte, of Maine, took charge of the parish, finding only two or three communicants; but he admitted a dozen more during the next two years, at the end of which time he resigned.

During his rectorship, the "glebe lands" were re-surveyed, and found to be of quite large extent, being rented for \$250.00 a year.

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### IX

(4)

Rev. T. B. Bartow

1830 to 1840

In 1830, Bishop Bowen, of South Carolina, ordained Mr. Bartow to the diaconate, and placed him at Frederica as rector.

In 1831, the convention of the Diocese met for the first time in this church; the delegates from the Island being W. W. Hazard, Esq., Thos. B. King, Esq., and Dr. Thos. F. Hazard.

In 1832, new books were presented to the parish, and in one of these, in Mr. Bartow's own hand, we have a list of the communicants then resident on the Island: 11 Church people, and 3 Presbyterians (Reg., Vol. II, p. 276).

In 1836, there was held in this parish a Centennial of its Church life. At this meeting, there were interesting ceremonies, and an address by Mr. Thomas Spalding.

In 1837, the convention of the Diocese met for the second time in this church; the delegates at this time being





RT. REV. STEVEN ELLIOTT  
FIRST BISHOP OF GEORGIA

*Manuscript*

Messrs. W. W. Hazard, James Gould, and John Fraser. There were at this time as many as 13 communicants in the parish, from 14 white families, aggregating 100 persons; while the colored population amounted to about 2,000.

In 1840, an addition was made to the church, to accommodate the large number of colored people who wished to worship there; and there was presented to the Church also a new organ, and set of Communion plate.

This plate was unfortunately lost to the Church, by theft from the residence of Mr. William A. Couper, while he was a refugee on the mainland, during the Civil war.

The service in use today, or most of it, is that formerly belonging to St. David's, just opposite this place, on the main, in Glynn-County; for these two parishes were united under one pastor at the time of the Civil War.

It has been newly replated, as a gift from Bishop Reese, and is again restored to the service of the Church.

It was about this time that the "Missionary Bee-Hive Society," of which we have record later on, was organized in emulation of a prior community in the church steeple, which did good service for the parish, as its namesake did afterwards. The account of this community is as follows:

The church was in need of repairs, and the few Church people were unable to furnish the necessary funds. A gentleman passing the church one morning saw the steeple surrounded with bees, and being anxious to explain this newly-found hive, as nearly all of the bees from the surrounding places had forsaken their habitations, he made an examination, and found the steeple filled with honey; and later enough of it was sold to make the necessary repairs, and to add a vestry-room. Some ten years ago, a school-mate of the rector sent him this story in verse, written by his father, while a tutor on the Island, and afterwards the first missionary of our Church to go to Africa—the Rev. Dr. Savage.

On March 13, 1841, Bishop Elliott made his first visitation to this parish, continuing the services through the five days following. The Bishop says, "I found the church edifice in very excellent repair, and the grounds about in that order which indicates an interest in its welfare."

In September, 1851, Mr. Bartow resigned, to become a chaplain in the United States Navy.

X

(5)

Rev. Edward T. Walker

1842 to 1844

The next year, the Rev. Mr. Walker was elected rector. "Within the year, the glebe lands attached to the church have been sold, the proceeds invested, and the interest applied to the minister of the Church." Thus a quotation from the Journal of 1842, and evidently refers to a partial sale of the lands in question, as there was a sale of "glebe lands" in 1848.

On January 15, 1843, the second Sunday after the Epiphany, Bishop Elliott consecrated the church, assisted by the Rev. Dr. Vaughn, of Pennsylvania, Rev. F. J. Goodwin, of Long Island, the rectors of Christ Church, Savannah, and of this church.

During this visitation, the Bishop baptized 35 persons, most of them colored, 5 by immersion in the river at Frederica, and confirmed 28, mostly colored; bringing the number of communicants up to 41. This upbuilding was due to the earnest work of the Rev. Mr. Walker, "who," we read, "baptized great numbers of the colored people," and who, Dr. Holmes says, "succeeded in re-assembling the Church people of the Island; but from feeble health was obliged to retire, having been in charge only two years."

The Journal of the Diocese for the same years shows a still more reliable evidence of the spiritual vitality of the parish; the handful of Church people raising for home and foreign missions the sum of \$60.00, the colored people even adding to that amount, while the above mentioned Missionary Bee-Hive Society raised \$140.00 on its own account, and had the church repainted.

The Bishop says of the parish at this time: "I found the church much improved, the external appearance spoke well for the people, and the increased interest in spiritual things for the rector."

The Bishop was, however, far from being satisfied with his own work among the Colored people; and Dr. Holmes quaintly remarks about it: "The Colored people of the Island were all Baptists, and our beloved Bishop always collected them together on the Sunday afternoons of his visitations, and preached to them, and taught them understandingly and kindly, and they venerated him for his

goodness towards them; but he utterly failed to convince them that his Baptism, even by immersion, was valid. On one occasion, the rector presented him with a class of 40 for Confirmation, and they were delighted with the laying on of his gentle hands, and his fatherly benediction—but he found they were 'joined to their idols,' and he let them alone."

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**XI**

(6)

**Rev. Edmund P. Brown**

**1844 to 1868**

In 1844, the Rev. Mr. Brown took charge of the parish, in conjunction with St. David's, in Glynn County; and the year following, he was advanced to the priesthood, by Bishop Elliott, in Christ Church, Savannah.

Mr. Brown continued to labor faithfully till the beginning of the Civil War, when all Church life on the Island seems to have been suspended; but after the war Mr. Brown tried to re-establish the active work of the parish, though in the end he had to give it up, leaving the Island for good about 1868.

He reported 54 communicants, two-thirds of them Colored. Mr. Dodge records that during this rectorship the "glebe lands" were sold. This was evidently a second sale, as there had been a sale of these, or a part of these, lands in 1842, as stated in the Journal of that year. This is corroborated by Dr. J. Holmes, who places the sale in 1848. He says "It may be well to mention that the land upon which the old church (1820) stands, with the cemetery, was reserved, also three acres in the town of Frederica, when the remainder of the glebe lands were sold . . . in 1848, long after the first lease had expired, and the church had been vacant for many years; and the proceeds, \$1,000.00, invested in one of the Savannah Banks, and lay buried in the common ruin of the war."

There was also reserved a strip of land, twenty yards wide, for a distance of 500 yards along the road from Frederica beyond the Savannah, for the purpose of supplying wood for the rector.

The following is Mr. Dodge's statement of the condition of things after the close of the war:

"The war made many changes in the population of the Island. Within two years after the close of the war, but four or five white families, formerly resident here, returned. The places of those thus leaving have been filled but slowly.

The Church building was occupied by the Federal troops during the war, and to a great extent destroyed. The altar was used, apparently, for a meat block, and was broken in pieces, the pews burned, and the windows broken out. This last act of wanton destruction was the seat of decay of the whole structure.

"The endowment of the parish was lost by the failure of the Savannah Bank, and the people were too poor to rebuild their own church, or to support their own Priest; so that the work seemed ruined. Mr. Brown did, indeed, endeavor to renew it after the war, holding at the same time the parishes of Brunswick and St. David's; but in 1868 he abandoned the struggle, and left all three points vacant.

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"As before, in 1766, so now, a century later, the Island depended for occasional services upon the kindness of others, and many of the clergy gave their help willingly. Among others, should be named Rev. Messrs. Coley, Pinkerton, Boone, and Lucas, of Brunswick, and Rev. Samuel Benedict, D. D., of Savannah. But great as was the blessing of the services to those fixed in the Faith, we cannot wonder that many of the colored people were led astray therefrom, and fell away to the Baptist body; to which most of their fellow-Negroes belonged. So general was this defection, that but one of the communicants of that race remained. In 1879, there were on the Island some twenty white communicants, and the then Bishop of Georgia, Rt. Rev. J. W. Beckwith, D. D., appointed Messrs. Horace A. Gould and A. G. P. Dodge, Jr., lay readers. Services were kept up by them, and the legal life of the parish maintained by the election of new wardens and vestry on the call of the surviving members of the vestry of 1866."

This statement of Mr. Dodge, in the paragraph above, is a modest one, and gives to him who merely reads the account no idea of the fact that to him alone was due the resurrection of this wellnigh dead and buried parish—but of this, later.

It is with pleasure that the writer can add a few lines to show that the spirit of devotion was still alive in a few earnest Churchmen. Immediately after the close of the war, and on his return to the Island, Church services were resumed by the last member of the old vestry still resident here, Mr. Horace Bunch Gould. He read Evening Prayer

every Sunday in his own home, various other persons nearby also attending. This he kept up till 1875, when he surrendered this privilege to his son, Horace Abbott Gould, who continued to act as voluntary lay reader till he was duly licensed to serve officially some four years later. Mr. H. A. Gould changed the place of holding the service to the old church, and, in default of a better vehicle, making the trip in an ox-cart with the family, and having the service in the afternoon with such as would attend.

This service Mr. Gould continued till about 1889, when he removed from the Island; but he is again, and has been for years past, the lay reader of the parish, assisting the rector, when necessary, on his occasional visits to the Island.

The surviving members of the vestry of 1866, referred to above, were Messrs. William A. Couper and Horace B. Gould, the latter only being in residence, and it was on the call of these two that the continuity of parochial life was assured by the election of a new corporate body for the parish, in 1879.

## Third Period

### Parish Reorganized, 1879

It was to A. G. P. Dodge, Jr., before he took Holy Orders, that the parish owes so much, apart entirely from the earnest spiritual work in which he was engaged here from 1884, when he, as a Deacon, took charge, to 1898, when he, as Rector, laid down his life in her service. He came in 1879 on a visit to the Island; he remained to give fortune and life to the re-establishment of the Church here. He found it a dying remnant of a parish; he made it, from the missionary standpoint, the most important in the Diocese, for it became, by the gift of the greater part of the fortune of himself, and of his late wife, the center of the new missionary effort then initiated, which from two diocesan mission stations, begun in 1883 (the writer being the first Priest-in-charge), can now show 52 stations, 39 of these being the direct outcome of the money referred to above, sometimes called the "Dodge" fund, but technically known as the "Georgia Missions" fund.

Mr. Dodge was a man of remarkable personality, opposite attributes, and many attainments. He seemed to absorb knowledge without apparent study. A man of an unusually wide range of reading, he could give as soon as called for, accurate information on a variety of subjects, with which one would little expect to find a man of his years conversant.

At the time he consecrated himself to the Church, he had seen the world from the standpoint of a wealthy man's son, and knew well the renunciation he made when he gave his life to the Church in Georgia. That life beautifully illustrated the spirit of devotion that possessed him. Bishop Beckwith once said of Mr. Dodge, while yet a very young Priest, that in him was the making of a grand man, and this expectation was being realized year by year, when death overtook him, for to glorify God in the service of his fellow-man became the passion of Mr. Dodge's life. The writer has seen, somewhere, a verse that aptly states his conception of Mr. Dodge's ideals and work. Without being sure of the meter, the words are as follows:

"Three roots bear up Dominion,  
Knowledge, Will; these two are strong,  
But stronger still the third, Obedience:  
'Tis the great tap-root, that knit round the rock of Duty  
Is not stirred, though storm and tempest  
Spend their utmost skill."

It was this sense of his duty, as God's man, which led his will to that complete obedience which was exemplified in the consecration of fortune, talents, and life to the service of God, all used to lead men, through the Church's instrumentalities, to a closer union with God, that He thereby might have the Dominion.

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## XII

(7)

Rev. Henry E. Lucas

1882 to 1884

In 1882, Rev. H. E. Lucas, rector of St. Mark's, Brunswick, became Priest-in-charge, till the rector-designate, Mr. Dodge, could complete his Theological studies, and receive Ordination. Mr. Lucas served the flock with such regularity and such constant love that he is regarded by many of the older communicants as their spiritual father, says Mr. Dodge.

Under him, Mr. J. C. Chapman became the lay reader, and the services were for a time held under the old oaks, beside the ruined sanctuary, the supposed preaching place of John Wesley.

"In January, the new church was commenced upon the site of the older one, Mr. Chapman being its architect. It was erected, and endowed, in part by the late Ellen Ada P. Dodge, and in part by her husband, the present rector (1885), as her memorial."

It is in these few words that Mr. Dodge tells of the gift of this beautiful building, and of the generous endowment for the preservation of the parish.



XIII

(8)

Rev. A. G. P. Dodge, Jr., S. T. D.

1884 to 1898

On June 11, 1884, Mr. Dodge became rector, having been duly elected as such, and ordained Deacon to that end by Bishop Beckwith, in May of the same year.

December 6, 1885, at an election held pursuant to a call of the vestry of 1879, and of the sole survivor of that of 1866, and in accordance with the Act of 1808, Mallory P. King and Horace A. Gould were elected wardens, and W. C. Taylor, W. H. Gowan, W. A. Fuller, J. D. Gould, and H. Bagot vestrymen for the ensuing year.

On January 11, 1885, the rector was made Priest in St. Mark's Church, Brunswick, by Bishop Beckwith, and on the Feast of the Epiphany of the next year the church was consecrated. The following account is from the Church Press of that time:

"A specially interesting service was held on St. Simon's Island, Ga., on the Feast of the Epiphany. The Bishop of the Diocese, Rt. Rev. J. W. Beckwith, D. D., Revs. Thomas Boone, H. E. Lucas, Byron Holly, W. A. W. Maybin, H. B. Stuart-Martin, D. Watson Winn, and the rector of the parish, Rev. A. G. P. Dodge, Jr., met in the vestry-room of Christ Church, Frederica, whence, after robing, they marched in procession to the main entrance, where they were received by the wardens and vestry. Entering the church in due order, the service of consecration was begun by the antiphonal rendering of the appointed Psalm. At the proper place, Morning Prayer was read by Revs. H. E. Lucas and Byron Holly, Rev. Mr. Maybin reading the lessons. The Bishop was assisted in the Communion Office by the Rev. D. W. Winn, who read the Epistle, the rector reading the Gospel. Rev. Thomas Boone, Dean of the Convocation of Savannah, preached the sermon. The post-Communion was read by the Rev. H. B. Stuart-Martin, the Bishop pronouncing the benediction. The church edifice consecrated on this occasion is a perfect little gem; situated in a grove of venerable and majestic live oaks, and surrounded by God's acre, in which rest the remains of ancestors of many of those present at the service. Under the wide-spreading branches of one of these monarchs of the woods, in the old Colonial Days, the famous brothers, John and Charles Wesley, stood and preached to the new settlers.



RT. REV. JOHN W. BECKWITH, D. D.  
SECOND BISHOP OF GEORGIA

