In November of 1733, a group of 42 passengers boarded a ship in the port of Rotterdam destined for the newly founded colony of Georgia in British America. The passengers were former subjects of the prince-archbishop of Salzburg, all of them men, women, and children expelled from their Catholic homeland on account of their Protestant (specifically Lutheran) beliefs. This was the first of four transports bound for Georgia and carrying exiled Protestants from Salzburg. They ultimately settled on the Savannah River, founding the community they called Ebenezer. Ebenezer’s moment in the sun, as it were, was brief. It never fully recovered from the impact of the American Revolution, when it changed hands four times and was repeatedly raided and sacked.

In the early years of the Georgia colony, however, Ebenezer was for a time the most successful settlement in the colony — much more so than the nominal capital in Savannah, which had been settled largely by English and Scottish colonists. The Salzburgers of Ebenezer are best remembered today for their staunch support of Georgia’s ban on the importation of enslaved Africans into the colony. For almost twenty years, from Georgia’s founding in 1732 by a group of British philanthropists until 1751, when the ban on slavery was finally lifted, it was the only one of the thirteen colonies that legally excluded slaves. For much of that period, Ebenezer’s support for the ban proved crucial in upholding it.

Why did the Salzburgers oppose slavery? Why in 1739, just over five years after arriving in the Georgia colony, did they sign the second recorded anti-slavery petition in the history of the colonial South?

What light do the experiences of Ebenezer’s settlers shed on the larger history of German-speaking migrants in colonial North America? These are some of the questions addressed in my recent book, and this essay explores them further.

Salzburg, with its eponymous capital and mostly alpine hinterland, is today one of the nine federal provinces (Länder) making up the
Republic of Austria. Salzburger Land is popularly viewed as a quintessentially Austrian region (a reputation that owes much to the enduring popularity of The Sound of Music, the 1965 film musical). But for much of its history Salzburg was a separate ecclesiastical territory, ruled by a prince-archbishop exercising temporal as well as spiritual authority over his subjects. Not until 1816, in the wake of Napoleon’s defeat, was the territory definitively incorporated into Habsburg Austria.

Although Salzburg was in principle an ecclesiastical territory ruled by a Catholic prince, large pockets of Lutheranism had managed to endure two centuries after the Reformation. The survival of Protestantism owed much to Salzburg’s alpine landscape. The most mountainous areas of the territory, or what Salzburgers today call the Innergebirg, are located to the south, starting just below the capital and then fanning out toward Tyrol to the west and Styria to the east.

The shaded area on the map, denoting the alpine district known as the Pongau, is where most of the territory’s Protestant population was concentrated. The Pongau was geographically remote and its infrastructure of Catholic parishes relatively weak, circumstances that had hindered the process of re-Catholicization in the region.

Also contributing to the survival of Protestantism in the Pongau had been its lucrative silver mines. Especially in the Gastein valley, an important center of much of the industry, miners had been solidly Protestant ever since the early years of the Reformation. Likely they had been a major conduit for the arrival of Protestantism in the Salzburg territory. Having sometimes been employed on a temporary basis to work in the mines of Saxony, the heartland of the Reformation, miners returning from the north would almost certainly

---

have brought Protestant practices and beliefs back with them.\textsuperscript{6} Mining had long been a major source of revenue for Salzburg’s Catholic rulers, who for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had refrained from sustained persecution of Pongau Protestants. Despite occasional crackdowns, archbishops and their officials had generally preferred to look the other way rather than risk losing the skilled labor force on which production in the mines depended.

That began to change in the later 1600s, by which time the volume of silver and gold produced by Pongau miners had begun to fall precipitously.\textsuperscript{7} The declining profitability of mining in the region served in turn to weaken the economic incentives that had once mitigated religious persecution. Visitations and interrogations of suspected Protestants became more frequent, including house searches aimed at uncovering hidden troves of Lutheran Bibles, hymnals, and other devotional materials. The campaign intensified in 1727 with the accession of a new prince-archbishop, Leopold Anton von Firmian. Determined to uphold his responsibilities as a Catholic prince, Firmian proceeded to do what Counter-Reformation rulers had often done when confronted with recalcitrant heretics: he brought in the Jesuits. Actually there were only two of them, Michael Bauer and Michael Zech, but they were energetic and relentless in their efforts to expose secret Protestants. They stayed four years, from 1729-1733, conducting house searches and interrogating suspects. They also compiled a written record of their interrogations, almost five hundred interviews in the Gastein valley alone.\textsuperscript{8} Their efforts, along with those of local and territorial officials, yielded thousands of interrogations throughout the archbishopric, more than seventy cartons of which have survived in Salzburg’s state and ecclesiastical archives. These

\textsuperscript{6} Franz Ortner, \textit{Reformation, katholische Reform und Gegenreformation im Erzstift Salzburg} (Salzburg, 1981), 34-5.


\textsuperscript{8} Detailed summaries by the two Jesuits, Michael Zech and Michael Bauer, are found in the Salzburger Landesarchiv: Emigrationsakten, Karton 28: "Miserabilis Gasteinensium Status in tertia Missione detectus, & sincero descriptus calamo A. 1732, 3. Dec. . . ." and "Compendium Relationes de Missione Gastunensi 1733."
records are an invaluable source on the lives of Salzburg Protestants prior to expulsion, including many of those who later emigrated to Georgia. Their testimony reveals much about their lives and beliefs, including matters like their social backgrounds and occupations, the illicit books they owned, the hymns they sang at their underground conventicles, or the incriminating conversations they were alleged to have had with neighbors and chance acquaintances.

Although these investigations confirmed the persistence of widespread non-conformity in the Pongau, those conducting them warned that efforts at identifying Protestants had only scratched the surface. The Jesuit fathers described the mountains and valleys of the Pongau as infested with crypto-Protestant miners, peasants, and farmhands who had learned to evade intermittent persecution by concealing their beliefs. Or to use modern parlance, they had learned the art of passing: they were baptized, married, and buried in the Catholic Church, they made a point of attending Catholic mass at least occasionally, they joined their local Marian brotherhood, some even sang in the parish men’s choir. Privately, however, they worshipped together in clandestine Protestant conventicles, and many owned Lutheran books they kept hidden under piles of firewood, in shepherds’ huts on remote alpine pastures, or in the walls and roofs of cottages and barns.

Having found conclusive evidence of entrenched crypto-Protestantism, the Jesuit team concluded that any further efforts at reconversion were fruitless. Exposure and expulsion, not persuasion, were the only way to cleanse the Pongau of heresy. Ultimately the archbishop and his advisors reached the same conclusion. The ensuing expulsions were destined to be the largest forced exile of a religious minority in eighteenth-century Europe.

The numbers speak for themselves: in the five years that followed Firmian’s Emigrationspatent of 1731, around 20,000 men, women, and children were forced to leave the territory and resettle elsewhere. Most emigrated to East Prussia, where Frederick William I, eager to repopulate a territory still recovering from plagues that had devastated the region during the Great Northern War, welcomed the refugees and allotted them farmland. The number of those who migrated to the Georgia colony was tiny by comparison, with some 150 settling in Ebenezer between 1734 and 1736. During the following two decades they were joined by around
350 additional German settlers from the Ulm region of Upper Swabia and from Palatine territories along the Upper Rhine. These immigrants were mostly from rural households and came to Georgia not as religious refugees but in search of land. The largest number of these arrived in 1751-52, just after the repeal of the ban on slavery. Hence in the 1740s, when Ebenezer’s struggle to keep slavery out of Georgia reached its peak, most of the families living in the community were still Salzburgers.

In examining the lives of these settlers before and after exile, I relied on two sets of sources. One consisted of the interrogation records mentioned earlier, which I used to shed light on the settlers’ lives before their migration to Georgia. The other set, which proved valuable for reconstructing their lives on the Georgia frontier, were the journals and diaries of Johann Martin Boltzius.

Boltzius was an ordained Lutheran pastor born in Lower Lusatia, at that time a part of Electoral Saxony. He was head of the Ebenezer community from its founding in 1734 until 1760, when for reasons of health he turned over leadership to a younger pastoral associate. Trained at the University of Halle, a center of the Pietist movement, Boltzius was a representative of the larger, non-separatist wing of Pietism. Halle Pietists were fervent champions of the Salzburgers, and played a key role in raising the funds needed to resettle the refugees following their expulsion. It was at the request of Halle’s Pietist leader, Gotthilf August Francke, that Pastor Boltzius agreed to join the first transport of Salzburgers to Georgia as their leader and spiritual mentor.

Boltzius’s journals, diaries, and letters document the history of the Ebenezer community during its first quarter-century. The journals were published during his lifetime, and an eighteen-volume American edition and translation (1968–95) included much of his diaries. The recent publication of his letters, along with materials housed in the Georgia section of the Archiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen in Halle, on these transports see Melton, Religion, Community, and Slavery, 239–40.
makes Ebenezer one of the best documented German-speaking communities in the colonial South.14

Among other things they shed light on the role of Boltzius and the Salzburgers in efforts to prevent the introduction of slavery into Georgia. The Georgia colony was originally a utopian experiment, the creation of a group of London philanthropists known as the Trustees. In founding Georgia they were hoping to create a colonial society radically different from that of South Carolina, where a slavery-based plantation economy had been in place since 1700. That year fully half of South Carolina’s population (excluding indigenous peoples) consisted of enslaved Africans, and by 1720 the percentage had risen to two-thirds. The percentage continued to rise, and by the 1730s, the decade of Ebenezer’s founding, Charleston (or Charlestown as it was known prior to the Revolution) was importing on average two-thousand slaves per year.15

Military concerns loomed large in the decision to exclude slavery from Georgia.16 James Edward Oglethorpe, who is usually credited with articulating Georgia’s founding vision, was relentless in emphasizing the dangers that slavery posed to the military security of British America’s southeastern frontier. Oglethorpe conceived of Georgia as a buffer colony protecting the southern frontier of British America against possible attack by Spain from its colonial enclave in East Florida.17 The presence of slaves, he argued, would be dangerous for two reasons. First, he considered enslaved Africans a potentially seditious presence, a fifth column that the Spanish could enlist as allies in a military invasion from the south. Oglethorpe had good reason for concern: since the late seventeenth century, slaves in South Carolina had shown considerable ingenuity in manipulating Anglo-Spanish rivalry to obtain their freedom. In particular they deftly exploited Spanish policies, dating back to 1693, which sought to attract laborers to Florida by promising freedom and protection to fugitive slaves.18 Second, he was convinced that a society of slaveholders, small in number and enervated by luxury, would be incapable of defending Georgia from attack. Better for the colony to be settled by a populous class of yeoman smallholders, small
farmers willing and able to defend the southern frontier of British America. Here Oglethorpe voiced the concerns shared by some colonial observers in the lower South about the deleterious effects of an expanding, slave-based economy on the security and morale of European settlers.

In this respect, Oglethorpe had cause for welcoming the Salzburgers. As Protestant victims of Catholic persecution, they could be counted on to defend the colony in the event of a Spanish invasion. They were also hungry for land, and their rustic lives back in Europe made them ideal candidates for settlement on the frontier. The Salzburgers, in other words, embodied Oglethorpe’s vision of a colony populated by a free, self-sufficient yeomanry able and willing to defend Georgia against the nefarious designs of a Catholic colonial rival.

The Salzburgers did not disappoint. Indeed, Ebenezer would become what one might call the poster child of Trustee Georgia. Economic success had much to do with it. Here the Salzburgers of Ebenezer stood in stark contrast with their English-speaking counterparts in Savannah. Like most German-speaking immigrants in British America, they came from rural backgrounds and had arrived in the colony with at least some of the skills necessary for survival on a remote frontier. By contrast, Georgia’s English-speaking immigrants had mostly been urban dwellers. Only around fifteen to twenty percent of them seem to have arrived in the colony with much if any experience in agriculture.

This difference in background soon became apparent. Ebenezer farmers required less time to clear their land, they placed it more quickly under cultivation, and by the early 1740s, when disaffected English and Scottish settlers were picking up stakes and moving to South Carolina, Ebenezer’s Salzburgers had already achieved economic self-sufficiency. As William Stephens, the Trustees’ chief correspondent and representative in Georgia, observed in 1743, “Ebenezer. . .we see grown to such maturity as to need no further leading strings hereafter: and I wish it could be said so of Savannah and its neighborhood.”

Ebenezer’s economic success gave the Trustees a useful rejoinder to the so-called Malcontents, the colony’s disaffected proslavery faction, who were demanding a repeal of the ban on slavery. Consisting mainly of English and Scottish settlers in Savannah, the Malcontents insisted that slavery was necessary in Georgia because Europeans

---

19 The Trustees’ restrictive (and highly unpopular) policies on land tenure were conceived in this spirit. Georgia’s charter limited a household’s holdings to fifty acres for “charity settlers” (those whose passage to the colony had been paid by the Trustees), and five hundred for those who had immigrated at their own expense. To prevent the consolidation of smaller tenancies into larger ones, inheritance in land was initially limited to males and landholders were forbidden to sell or mortgage their holdings. See Paul S. Taylor, Georgia Plan: 1732-1752 (Berkeley, 1972), 22-30, 123-28.


21 This is my estimate, which I based on information provided in E. Merton Coulter and Albert B. Saye, A List of the Early Settlers of Georgia (Athens, GA, 1949), x-xii.

22 Colonial Records of the State of Georgia, 23:470.
were biologically unsuited for work in its hot and unhealthy climate.\textsuperscript{23} This argument had become standard in proslavery discourse of the period. Advocates of slavery in South Carolina, for example, had maintained that the physical constitution of Europeans could not withstand the arduous labor required for the cultivation of rice. African-born laborers, they argued, were more accustomed to the oppressively hot climate of the Carolina Lowcountry, and less susceptible to diseases like malaria that flourished there.\textsuperscript{24}

The example of Ebenezer’s Salzburgers gave the Trustees a ready-made response to this line of reasoning. If Europeans were biologically unsuited for work in its hot and unhealthy climate,\textsuperscript{23} this argument had become standard in proslavery discourse of the period. Advocates of slavery in South Carolina, for example, had maintained that the physical constitution of Europeans could not withstand the arduous labor required for the cultivation of rice. African-born laborers, they argued, were more accustomed to the oppressively hot climate of the Carolina Lowcountry, and less susceptible to diseases like malaria that flourished there.\textsuperscript{24}

The example of Ebenezer’s Salzburgers gave the Trustees a ready-made response to this line of reasoning. If Europeans were biologically unsuited for work in its hot and unhealthy climate,\textsuperscript{23} this argument had become standard in proslavery discourse of the period. Advocates of slavery in South Carolina, for example, had maintained that the physical constitution of Europeans could not withstand the arduous labor required for the cultivation of rice. African-born laborers, they argued, were more accustomed to the oppressively hot climate of the Carolina Lowcountry, and less susceptible to diseases like malaria that flourished there.\textsuperscript{24}
incapable of enduring the inhospitable climate of coastal Georgia, how did one account for Ebenezer’s economic self-sufficiency? If Europeans were physically unsuited for the rigors of rice production, how was it that by 1740 the Salzburgers were cultivating rice along the banks of the Savannah River? Later the Trustees might also have mentioned Ebenezer’s celebrated milling complex, with its gristmill and sawmills, or the groves of mulberry trees settlers had planted, which by the 1750s had made Ebenezer one of the largest producers of raw silk in the lower South. And — this was the coda of the Trustees’ case — Ebenezer colonists had achieved all of this without owning a single slave.25

Ebenezer’s anti-slavery petition of March 1739 echoed this argument.26 The petitioners brandished their economic success as proof that European settlers could thrive in the Georgia colony without importing slaves. As an example they pointed to their mastery of rice cultivation:

> We were told by several people, after our arrival, that it proves quite impossible and dangerous for white people to plant and manufacture any rice, being a work only for negroes, not for European people, but having experience of the contrary we laugh at such a talking, seeing that several people of us have in the last harvest, a greater crop of rice than they wanted for their own consumption.27

One should not, however, imagine the Salzburgers as proto-abolitionists brimming with moral indignation over the brutal enslavement of Africans. Like the Trustees, the petitioners never framed slavery as a moral and religious issue. Economic concerns were partly at work: as yeoman smallholders they worried about their ability to compete with slaveholding planters. Fear of slave violence also fed their support for the Trustees’ ban. Among other things the petition requested that “the Lord Trustees never allow Negroes to be brought to the vicinity of our town and used as slaves for the white people here, as we know from experience that neither houses nor gardens will be safe from theft, and that our very lives will not be safe from these savage people.”28 Ebenezer’s petition voiced not so much an antagonism to slavery as it did an antipathy toward slaves, who were depicted as violent savages whose presence in the community would endanger the lives and livelihood of its members. Fear of slaves was paramount, not sympathy with their condition.

What accounts for this fear? The timing of the Salzburgers’ arrival in the colonies had much to do with it. The 1730s was a violent decade in the West Indies, a world of which Ebenezer, like the rest of the

25 For an example of the Trustees’ response to the Malcontents, see Benjamin Martyn, An Impartial Enquiry into the State and Utility of the Province of Georgia (London, 1741). Martyn was secretary to the Trustees in London.

26 Published in Colonial Records of Georgia, 3:428-31.

27 Colonial Records, 3:429.

28 Ibid, 3:430.
Lower South, was an integral part. Boltzius’s journal records that the very day that he and the first transport of Salzburgers arrived in Charleston, where their ship first dropped anchor en route to Savannah — in other words, on their first day in British America — they entered a port rife with news of violent slave insurrections on the Caribbean islands of St. John and St. Thomas, where hundreds of European planters and their families had recently been massacred.29

Five years later (1739) the Stono revolt in neighboring South Carolina, the only significant slave uprising to occur in the colonial South, would have further stoked the Salzburgers’ fears. Six weeks after Stono these fears would have grown even more intense with the outbreak of war between Britain and Spain (the War of Jenkins’ Ear, 1739-48), a part of which was fought in Georgia and involved efforts by the Spanish to take possession of the colony. Ebenezer colonists knew about the revolt first hand, since several of the runaway insurgents had passed through the settlement on their way to St. Augustine in Spanish East Florida. Oglethorpe, who considered Stono an object lesson on the threat slavery posed to the internal security of Britain’s southeastern frontier, went out of his way to publicize the revolt and may have authored what remains our best source on it.30 For Ebenezer settlers, the effect of the revolt was to confirm their image of enslaved Africans as a menacing and violent people who should be kept out of Georgia.

Efforts by the Trustees to uphold the ban suffered a setback in 1743 when Oglethorpe was summoned by the War Office in London to answer allegations of misconduct relating to his unsuccessful siege of St. Augustine. Despite his exoneration he chose for personal and career reasons to stay in England rather than return to Georgia. With Oglethorpe no longer there to oversee continued enforcement of the ban, evasion became widespread.31 According to Boltzius, Georgia’s enslaved population had already reached 400 by 1748. The Trustees, convinced that enforcing the ban was no longer feasible, approved a series of measures that by 1750 had effectively rescinded the prohibition. Over the next two years they gradually relinquished their authority over the colony, which by the end of 1752 was directly subordinate to the crown. A quarter-century later, on the eve of the American Revolution, Georgia’s social, economic, and racial landscape looked much like that of South Carolina.

Ebenezer nonetheless continued to prosper, at least up to the Revolution. Increased demand for farmland, stoked by the arrival of three more transports of German immigrants in 1750-52, gave rise to the

---

30  This document, the “Account of the Negro Insurrection in South Carolina,” mentions the sighting of runaways in Ebenezer — *Colonial Records of Georgia*, 22/2:232-3. The account was first published in the *London Magazine and Monthly Chronologer* 9 (March 1740): 151—152. Although the author is not identified, Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Rebellion of 1739* (Oxford and New York, 2010), 154, attributes the account to Oglethorpe.
founding of more settlements beyond the Ebenezer core. In the process the population of the region more than doubled from around 250 to almost 600. Although some settlers proceeded to purchase slaves, rates of slaveholding in Ebenezer and its environs remained relatively low relative to the rest of the colony. In 1756 Boltzius counted no more than forty-two slaves in Ebenezer and its dependencies, which would have made the ratio of slaves to whites only about 1 to 10. In 1750, even before the ban formally went into effect, the ratio was already 1:5 and by 1761 it had reached 1:1.7. In 1769 the largest slaveholder in Ebenezer owned 23 slaves — a modest figure indeed compared with the roughly 200 enslaved Africans who labored on the rice plantations of the Savannah merchant James Habersham.32

Comparisons with German-speaking households elsewhere in North America suggest that Ebenezer’s low rate of slaveholding was not exceptional. Scholars have found similarly low rates among the Germans of Philadelphia as well as in heavily German rural counties elsewhere in Pennsylvania.33 Statistics on German slaveholding after the Revolution present a similar picture. North Carolina’s census of 1790 lists only twelve percent of German households as owning slaves, a percentage around three times lower than that of the state’s population as a whole. Virginia’s 1840 census shows slaveholding rates to have been only around ten percent in counties with a high percentage of German households.34

How does one explain this disparity in rates of slaveholding? In Pennsylvania, the destination of around 80% of all German-speaking immigrants to British America,35 the availability of indentured labor played a role. Since most of these immigrants came to the colony with some form of indenture, they offered a ready source of labor to more settled German families who had already acquired land. The wave of Germans who streamed into the colony between 1730 and 1756 yielded an especially abundant supply of labor, which in turn would have lowered the demand for the labor of enslaved Africans.36

The rural backgrounds of most German immigrants may also have reduced their dependency on the labor of slaves. Eighteenth-century observers habitually praised German immigrants for their proficiency in agriculture. Jacques Pierre Brissot, the future Girondin leader who visited the United States on the eve of the French Revolution, remarked that “the Germans are regarded as the most honest, most industrious and the most economical of the farmers.” Benjamin Rush, a native of Philadelphia and a signer of the Declaration of Independence,

32 See Melton, Religion, Community, and Slavery, 239-250.
celebrated the Germans of Pennsylvania as exemplary farmers and compared them invidiously with their neighbors: “a German farm,” he wrote, “may be distinguished from the farms of the other citizens of the state, by the superior size of their barns; the plain, but compact form of their houses; the height of their enclosures; the extent of their orchards; the fertility of their fields; the luxuriance of their meadows, and a general appearance of plenty and neatness in everything that belongs to them.” Even Benjamin Franklin, well-known for his nativist response to the waves of German immigrants who arrived in Pennsylvania during the 1750s, nonetheless conceded that they were industrious, frugal, and productive farmers.

Their agricultural abilities certainly served the immigrants well, as has been seen in the case of Ebenezer. But in closing this essay, I want to suggest that focusing solely on their proficiency as farmers obscures another aspect of their background that proved more decisive for their success. Prior to emigration, most colonial German immigrants had not been “farmers” in the strict sense of the word. By 1700, full-holding peasants subsisting principally from their land and livestock represented a minority of households in the central European countryside. Most were cottagers settled on small plots of land that were insufficient for their subsistence, so that their economic survival depended on non-agricultural sources of income.

That was especially the case in southwestern Germany, particularly along the Upper Rhine and its tributaries, where the majority of the roughly 84,000 German-speaking immigrants to British America had lived prior to emigration. There the growth of a rural, sub-peasant stratum had been closely tied to the prevailing system of partible inheritance (Realtteilung), the practice of distributing progressively smaller parcels of land among surviving children. As Wolfgang von Hippel argued more than three decades ago, the fractionalization of farmsteads resulting from this process was the driving force behind much of the emigration from the German south west. In the case of migration to British America, the vicissitudes of geography facilitated the process. The region’s proximity to the Rhine and its tributaries provided ready access to Rotterdam, the port of embarkation for most Germans migrating to the colonies. The Rhine waterway system also accommodated the flow of information between British America and the Rhine territories that helped recruit immigrants.

The agrarian landscape of southwestern Germany, with its fragmented holdings, was to be sure a negative “push factor” driving
features

Forum
Conference Reports
GHI News

emigration from the region. In a more positive sense, however, the ways in which rural households had learned to meet their subsistence needs in the face of limited agricultural resources helped equip them for the challenges they faced as newly arrived immigrants. Economic conditions in their homelands had forced them to be resourceful and creative, which meant developing a range of disparate skills and a rugged capacity to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. In his research on early modern Neckarhausen (southwestern Württemberg), David Sabean described the myriad and creative ways rural households responded to economic pressures through practices like the recovery of waste areas, the use of more complex rotation patterns, and the adoption of new strategies related to the sexual division of household labor. And in an economic world where land was scarce, these were households that also moved flexibly between the plow and the loom, the garden and the spinning wheel. This elasticity was a hallmark of the Upper Swabian cottagers (Seldner) from the Ulm hinterland, a shipload of whom migrated to the Ebenezer area in 1751. Residing on plots less than half the size of a peasant farmstead, Seldner families typically practiced weaving and other trades to supplement their income from agriculture. The rural community of Laichingen (Württemberg), the subject of Hans Medick’s rich microhistory, offers a similar example. Medick estimates more than one-third of Laichingen households were subsisting at least partly from linen weaving in 1722, a percentage that would almost double by 1797.

Ebenezer’s Salzburgers, even though they came from a different part of the Holy Roman Empire, also exhibited this kind of hybrid background. Back in their native territory, many appear to have had small gardens and a few livestock while also earning additional income through mine-related work. Some had been employed as pickmen or sack-carriers, others as lumbermen who felled, milled, or transported the wood necessary for smelting and shaft-bracing. Still others worked on the side as cobblers, carpenters, or smiths, usually in the winter months on the farmsteads of more well-to-do peasant households where these skills were in demand.

Already accustomed to lives that entailed mastering a range of skills, the exiles would have brought with them a versatility that proved indispensable for building a viable frontier community. Boltzus often praised this quality in describing individual members of his congregation. Ruprecht Schrempf was familiar with the locksmith’s trade “but can do almost every task asked of him,” and “because he can make

45 The occupations of Salzburgers prior to emigration are listed in surviving ship manifests, which can be found in the Egmont Manuscripts, 14212, fol. 2628 (Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Library) and in Henry Newman’s Salzburger Letterbooks, ed. George Fenwick Jones (Athens, Ga., 1966), 412-13. I was able to locate additional information on their occupational backgrounds in the voluminous interrogations housed in the Salzburger Landesarchiv: Emigrationsakten, and in parish baptismal registers (Bad Gastein, Hofgastein, Lichtenburg, and Saalfelden) located in the Salzburger Konsistorialarchiv.
all sorts of things, there is always enough work for him.” Stephan Rothenberger, “skillful in many things and of great usefulness to us,” was “undaunted in taking on all kinds of useful projects.” Gabriel Mauerer was valuable owing to his knowledge of both stonemasonry and carpentry, while Georg Kogler managed Ebenezer’s first sawmill and supervised the construction of its church.46 Boltzius much preferred colonists like these to more specialized artisans: “The reason we do not want skilled craftsmen from Europe to join us here is that these people then insist on doing only what falls within the competence of their craft.”47 Ebenezer settlers not only sowed and harvested wheat and corn; they practiced silk cultivation, established profitable milling complexes for lumber, grain, and rice, and earned income from various outside trades. Given their dependence on non-agricultural enterprises and trades, it is understandable that Ebenezer settlers would have considered slavery such a threat to their livelihood. Boltzius noted this aspect of their opposition when he observed that they did not want Georgia to become another South Carolina, where “negroes are taught every skill and then are used in all sorts of enterprises. This is the reason that white people have such a hard time earning their bread except if they become overseers of Negroes or keep slaves themselves.”48

“And since they have learned to learn something apart from agriculture, through the mills which have been built and in many other ways, they have managed well with God’s blessing.”49 Boltzius’s explanation for Ebenezer’s success underscored the hybrid blend of skills on which the survival of the community came to depend. This versatility deserves emphasis, especially given the prevailing image of early German immigrants as rustic peasants who prospered through their expertise as farmers. The stereotype of colonial German immigrants as practiced tillers of the soil is misleading, for survival on the frontier demanded more than an ability to raise crops and livestock; it required versatility, flexibility, and the capacity to improvise in a challenging environment. Colonial German immigrants were accustomed to a world where those qualities were essential. It would serve them well in their struggle to survive in, and adapt to, an unfamiliar and challenging environment.

James Van Horn Melton is Professor of History at Emory University. His previous books include Religion, Community, and Slavery on the Colonial Southern Frontier (2015), which was awarded the Austrian Studies Book Prize (2014–15); The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe (2001); and Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Education in Prussia and Austria (1988), all published by Cambridge University Press.

48 Ibid., 11:90; cf. 14:95.