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Sir James Wright in Georgia: Local and Imperial Conflict in the American Revolution

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
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by

Andrea Lynn Williams

Accepted for High Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Introduction

In Sir James Wright's twenty-two years as the royal governor of Georgia, he lived through the Stamp Act Crisis, mob violence at the hands of the Sons of Liberty, and the threat of hostilities from South Carolinian patriots. He was imprisoned in his own home, escaped from the clutches of the patriots and returned to resume his post three years later. The only royal governor to administer a civil government in the midst of the American Revolution, Wright witnessed the duration of the war and played a significant role in the events that led to Georgia's separation from Britain. His correspondence from 1760 to 1782 attests to the relationship between the colonists and the British administration, as well as the communication—or lack thereof—between the local colonial government in Georgia and the imperial powers responsible for enforcing British authority in the Americas. Separated from his superiors by three thousand miles and made to deal with a colony in rebellion without sufficient support to carry out his executive powers, Wright identified flaws in the British system of colonial administration, such as its inability to handle an opposing trans-colonial force, its failure to respond to local needs while focusing on imperial goals, and its dearth of resources that left its authority spread too thinly across the thirteen colonies. The governor's circumstances in Georgia and the failures of his superiors to support his efforts to maintain peace at a local level made Georgia's participation in the fledgling American union impossible to prevent.

The primary sources that support the assertion that the British lost Georgia through a failure of cooperation and understanding between local and imperial levels of government consist of Sir James Wright's surviving correspondence compiled in the British National Archives and the Collections of the Georgia Historical Society. His perspective is integral to understanding this dynamic because, as the head of the civil government in Georgia, he was in a

position to document the disparities between his goals and those of his superiors. Wright provides a particularly informative account, because he was neither a rebellious colonist nor a distant British administrator. He attempted to keep Georgia out of the rebellion and witnessed firsthand the growing sedition within the colony. The governor had a strong sense of duty to the Crown, but was much more attuned to the situation in Georgia and what was needed to maintain peace and control than were his superiors. Though his perspective should have been highly valued, the authorities to whom Wright sent his pleas for assistance often ignored his advice because of his subordinate office and the differences in their agendas. Wright's papers, which document the growing desperation of the Georgia governor as his goals conflicted with those of his superiors, reveal the problems in administration that prevented the British from regaining control over Georgia.

Three main periods of Wright's governorship are represented in his letters to different authorities. His reports to the Board of Trade contain the most evidence of Wright's experiences during the Stamp Act Crisis, as well as his assessment of the atmosphere of discontent and rebellion in the colony. These documents are supplemented by his letters to individual administrators such as Secretaries of State for the Southern Department Henry Seymour Conway from 1765-1766 and Lord Shelburne from 1766-1768. It is in these papers that his relationship with the administration in Britain begins to emerge, and in which the first indication of the divide between local colonial government and imperial authorities is evident. The Stamp Act Crisis was the first instance in which Wright's skills as governor were really tried and in which the governor's communication with his superiors showed a disparity in local and imperial goals.

Wright's correspondence in the years leading up to Georgia's participation in the revolution attests to the strain on his relationship with Lord Dartmouth, the Secretary of State

from 1772-1775. With the Americans now organizing across colonial borders, Wright was powerless to prevent the tide of rebellion from sweeping into Georgia. Limited to action within his own colony, Wright looked to Dartmouth to solve the growing sedition throughout the colonies, but received little support. When violence in Georgia escalated, the governor's requests to Dartmouth for assistance went unheeded. Their failure to respond left Wright without a means of employing his gubernatorial powers, and allowed the Sons of Liberty in Georgia to gain influence. Wright's letters to Dartmouth show the powerlessness of the civil government in the colonies and how the administration's failure to support government at a local level enabled patriot leaders in Georgia to continue gathering strength up until Wright's arrest.

The third period of Wright's administration is significant for explaining the relationship between British imperial and local government during the American Revolution covers the years 1779-1782, when Wright once again acted as governor after the British had reclaimed Savannah. The situation had changed in the years since Georgia joined the revolution, and while Wright was still attempting to manage a civil government in a rebellious colony, his superiors were focused on conducting a campaign northward using Georgia as a starting point. Until Georgia was evacuated in 1782, the governor struggled to restore the colony to a peaceful state while his requests for troops to stabilize the province were ignored by the military and the administration. His letters to Lord Germain, who replaced Lord Dartmouth in 1775, show the conflicting goals of local and imperial government. While patriot resistance continued to exist in the areas around Savannah, Wright could not regain control of Georgia without military aid. Focused on subduing the Carolinas and Virginia, the military could not afford to send troops to Georgia, which made the province untenable as the war came to an end.

Wright's correspondence with his superiors makes it possible to explain how the British Empire was unable to hold Georgia—perhaps the least likely colony to join the other twelve in rebellion—as a result of failures in the system of administration between local and imperial government. British authorities could not afford to acknowledge local concerns without compromising their imperial objectives, leaving the empire unable to fully regain control over any area once a large segment of the population had committed to revolution. Within sixteen years of assuming his office, Wright would go from a beloved leader with the support of the people to a prisoner in the colony he once governed. In another six years he would return to Georgia, only to lose it once again when the British abandoned it to the Americans in 1782. Alienated from the colonists in rebellion and from his own government, Wright was in a unique situation to observe the entirety of the revolution and to provide commentary on the relationship between the imperial administration and his own government in Georgia.

Chapter 1: Stirrings of Sediton

When James Wright arrived in Georgia as governor in autumn 1760, the colony was not in the midst of riots and rebellion, as it would be throughout much of his term. For the first five years of his governorship, Wright and the colonists worked together for the benefit of Georgia and the British Empire. It was only with the passing of the Stamp Act, which benefitted the imperial government at the expense of American colonists, that the cooperation between local colonial leaders and their British administrators began to crumble.

From 1760 to 1766, there was a complete shift in the relationship between Georgian colonists and their governor. Bound by his duties to the imperial administration but also connected to local interests in Georgia, Wright was in a difficult position as royal governor. During the Stamp Act Crisis, Wright lost support from both sides, as angry colonists reacted against the man who represented British authority, and as his superiors failed to understand the severity of discontent at a local level. It is important to understand that it was not Wright himself, but the disconnect between administrators in Britain and colonists in Georgia that precipitated riots, and eventually rebellion, in the colony. The problems in British colonial administration that gave rise to the Stamp Act Crisis—conflict between local and imperial needs, as well as the lack of understanding between those in Georgia and those in Britain—foreshadowed the issues that led Georgia to join twelve other colonies in rebellion.

Harmonious Relations Before the Stamp Act

Though most of his twenty-two-year tenure as governor was marked by conflict, Wright's government in the years prior to the Stamp Act was peaceful and harmonious. He had inherited a fine political situation from the previous governor, Henry Ellis, and began his term with the colonists' approval, working to establish good relations with the people of Georgia and

building connections that he believed would serve him well in his office.¹ Five years later, Georgians would be rioting in the streets, political unity would break down, and the seeds of revolution would begin to germinate in the colony.

Study of the period of accord between the governor, his council, and the assembly suggests that Wright himself was not the catalyst for rebellion in Georgia. Peace and concord existed in the colony so long as the interests of the Georgians, local government, and imperial government aligned. During this time of unanimity before the Stamp Act Crisis, Wright developed ties with the Georgians that allowed him to appreciate the colonists' perspective on taxation and representation, affording him a better understanding of future events than his distant superiors in Britain. The breakdown of those same harmonious relations during protests over the Stamp Act and other legislation began Wright's isolation from the people he governed, shaping his perception of the situation in Georgia while also leaving him without any means of enforcing his ideas.

Royal government in Georgia was a relatively recent development. Until 1754, the colony had no governor or assembly. Instead, it was governed by a Board of Trustees established by James Oglethorpe in the charter of 1732.² Prior to becoming a royal colony, Georgia was an experiment in philanthropy. The original settlers were a combination of "adventurers", who paid their own passage and received 500 acres of land if they brought at least ten white servants with them, and debtors liberated from prison and given a chance at a new life in the New World.³ When it became clear that the Board of Trustees knew little about successfully managing a colony, the Crown took over in 1752, only twelve years before Wright became governor. Its

¹ David L. Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia: A History, 1733-1783* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006), 55.

² Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 84.

³ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 59.

recent foundation put Georgia in an interesting position during the Revolution. While a large number of the colonists had been born in England and had strong ties to the mother country, many others had migrated to Georgia from northern colonies, and considered themselves more American than British.⁴ The mixed loyalties of the population led Wright to believe that a significant number of Georgians would support the British Empire during the Stamp Act Crisis. While that may have been the case, the louder and more active members of the Sons of Liberty would make their presence known to a much greater extent.

Savannah was the center of Georgia's intellectual and cultural life. It contained a diverse society with members of the lower and middle classes residing in close proximity to the town houses of the wealthy, who also owned plantations to the west.⁵ The city was also the seat of royal government, and contained the governor's office, the meetinghouse of the colonial assembly, and the courts. The governor picked his council, which also served as a court of appeals and sat in the upper house of the colonial assembly. The lower house was popularly elected. This would have repercussions later during Wright's term as governor when rebellious factions took hold of the lower house and opposed the governor's royal authority.

The governor's position gave him charge over the civil and military forces in the colony, as evidenced by his full title, "Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of his Majesty's Province of Georgia, and Vice-Admiral of the Same."⁶ He was appointed by the king, and possessed the power to convene, adjourn, and dissolve the assembly, as well as the right to veto its acts. He could appoint all unelected officers not chosen by the Crown, and he controlled land grants. The governor also corresponded with the Board of Trade and advised the British government on

⁴ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 108.

⁵ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 104.

⁶ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 81.

colonial policy. He had no direct control over the actual procedures mandated by the king or his secretaries.⁷ The mark of a successful governor was the growth and economic prosperity of the colony over which he presided. Sir James Wright's administration in Georgia was marked by such developments, at least until the Stamp Act Crisis.

Before the Stamp Act Crisis, Wright proved that he was a successful colonial administrator at a local level who worked well with Georgia's inhabitants and who also made the colony profitable for the imperial administration. He was chosen as governor for the abilities he demonstrated as the attorney general and colonial agent for South Carolina.⁸ He often expressed his loyalty to the British Empire and his desire to implement the instructions of his superiors in his correspondence. Such an attitude toward the mother country served the Crown well in the figure of the governor, who was the empire's representative and main connection to the colonists. Though Wright's ultimate allegiance was to his superiors in the British administration, his success as governor of Georgia was also profitable for the colonists, which earned him a considerable amount of respect at a local level. While imperial and local interests aligned, Wright was a unifying force in the colony and a beloved administrator. Indeed, the naturalist John Bartram observed that Wright was "universally respected by all [the] inhabitants, [they] can hardly say enough in his praise."⁹ It was only when the British administration began imposing legislation contrary to the colonists' own objectives that the governor lost colonial support.

⁷ Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 5.

⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, s.v. "Wright, Sir James, first baronet (1716-1785)," by Edward J. Cashin, accessed June 23, 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/30035>.

⁹ John Bartram, "Diary of a Journey through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida from July 1, 1765, to April 10, 1766," annotated by Francis Harper, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 33, no. 1 (December, 1942): 29, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.wm.edu/stable/1005551>.

During the early years of his governance, Wright proved his aptitude by ensuring the expansion of the colony's trade and land. As a frontier colony, Georgia was mainly concerned with westward growth and the Indian fur trade. Arriving in the middle of the Seven Years' War, he made it a priority to establish good relations with the Creek Indians. When the Proclamation of 1763 actually extended Georgia's borders to the Mississippi, the governor saw that colonists were given every opportunity to settle the new land and to push the Creeks westward without severe conflict. He did this by meeting with members of Indian nations and signing treaties ceding land to the British settlers. In the first five years of holding office, Wright made Georgia profitable for the empire and the colonists alike by presiding over a period of geographical expansion, demographic growth, and relative peace with the native population that encouraged trade and economic productivity. Georgia's stability and progress under Wright promoted a great deal of unity between the governor and the assembly. The aligning interests of the colonists, governor, and British administration made for a period of political harmony that would exist until the Stamp Act.

Wright developed a good political reputation before arriving in Georgia that he continued to cultivate during his governorship, which suggests that his presence was not the precipitating factor for unrest in the colony. When Georgia's previous royal governor, Henry Ellis, heard that James Wright would be his successor, he wrote to the Board of Trade expressing his approval and calling Wright a "very capable and worthy man."¹⁰ Soon after arriving in the colony, the new governor began proving his competency. He bought large amounts of land, establishing plantations that aligned his interests with those of the landholders and showed his commitment to

¹⁰ Henry Ellis to Board of Trade, Oct. 20, 1760, in *Colonial Records of Georgia* vol. 28, Part 1, ed. Kenneth Coleman and Milton Ready (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 289.

Georgia. He eventually acquired 25,578 acres of land yielding 2,000 to 3,000 barrels of rice each year, making him the wealthiest man in the colony.¹¹ His willingness to invest in the colony's land and commerce served as a symbol of good will toward the Georgians and fostered positive relations between the governor and colonists. While Wright did profit from his position, he worked hard to promote the prosperity of the colony, unlike some governors in other colonies that saw the office merely as an opportunity for personal gain.¹² Those ties between Wright and the colonists, though later damaged by the Stamp Act and subsequent legislation, allowed him to understand their methods of living, as well as their hopes and concerns for the future of their colony.

Wright's willingness to work with the colonists in building a more prosperous Georgia was also evident in the legislature. The new governor addressed the Georgia Assembly on November 2, 1760, the day after Ellis departed for England. His introductory speech was well received. The assemblymen deemed him to be a man of "Integrity and Uprightness joined with solid sense and sound Judgment," and professed the belief that "such inestimable Qualities and Abilities certain we are cannot but tend to make us a happy and flourishing People."¹³ Although Wright could have instituted radical change in Georgia, he chose to follow the policies implemented by his popular predecessor. Ellis had pursued an agenda to establish better relations between settlers and Native Americans on the frontier, to expand the population of the colony, to increase Georgia's material wealth, and to foster cooperation between the governor and

¹¹ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 57.

¹² Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia 1763-1789* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia University Press, 1958), 3.

¹³ Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, Nov. 6, 1760, in *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, ed. Allen D. Candler, vol. 13 (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 439.

assembly.¹⁴ By following his predecessor's example, Wright further ingratiated himself with the Georgians, who had prospered under Ellis and hoped to do so under their new governor as well. Wright participated in assembly meetings and proposed legislation, but did not tightly control the Georgians, whom he felt could act responsibly on his suggestions.¹⁵ This cooperative relationship led to concord between the executive and legislative branches of Georgia colonial government, which continued until the Stamp Act in 1765. Language of "great Unanimity," "general Harmony," and mutual confidence abounded in colonial records, with Wright and the Assembly congratulating each other on their ability to work together.¹⁶

During this period Wright established a rapport with the colonists, and made an effort to understand their needs. The great lengths to which he went to ensure the growth of the fledgling colony further demonstrated his connections with his people. Within a year of his arrival, the governor's handling of Indian affairs greatly benefitted the colony. By restricting the number of traders allowed to do business with the natives, Wright kept potentially violent and unscrupulous colonists from doing business with the Indians while also establishing a tighter control over the number of trading overtures made to the native population. This encouraged tribes on the frontier to make peaceful and friendly overtures to the colonists in an effort to secure more trade. As a result, the number of conflicts between colonists and natives diminished. This relative peace also allowed the governor and the legislature to appropriate funding previously used in the defense of the frontier to construct a new fort at the mouth of the Savannah River. Located on Cockspur Island and called Fort George, the stronghold provided coastal protection for the colonists from

¹⁴ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 54.

¹⁵ W.W. Abbott, *The Royal Governors of Georgia* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 88.

¹⁶ *Georgia Gazette*, March 1, 1764, NewsBank/Readex, America's Historical Newspapers, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wm.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/>.

the French and Spanish, whose ships had been active around the coast during the Seven Years War. The deep waters near Cockspur Island also made Fort George an ideal location for Atlantic trade, promoting the Georgian economy.¹⁷ The new fort benefitted the Georgians in several respects, increasing their respect for Wright's ability to govern.¹⁸

One of the most important needs of a fledgling colony like Georgia was land on which to expand. Wright proved his commitment to Georgia's expansion several times over through the course of his term. When the British claimed victory over the French and Spanish at the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, it became necessary to come to an understanding with the natives to the west. Ordered by the Earl of Egremont to host a congress with native leaders in Augusta, Wright worried about the negative feelings of Indians toward the British at the time, but approved of the idea and believed he could make it a success. The outcome of the meeting between colonial governors from several colonies and representatives of the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Catawba, and Creek nations was a treaty professing friendship between the British and the natives, as well as a large cession of Indian lands to Georgia in atonement for past quarrels.¹⁹ The success of the congress for Georgia further endeared Wright to the colonists and established allegiances to the governor in the backcountry, where those on the frontier were grateful for Wright's ability to gain new land for the colony.

Such success in acquiring land was important to the colony and attested to Wright's commitment to Georgia's prosperity, nor was it the only time the governor succeeded in guaranteeing the colony's claims to land. That same year, Governor Thomas Boone of South Carolina claimed the right to grant land between the Altamaha River and the St. Johns River in

¹⁷ Sir James Wright to the Earl of Dartmouth, 20 December, 1773 in *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society* vol. 3, (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1893), 163.

¹⁸ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 91-92.

¹⁹ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 93-94.

Florida on the grounds that Georgia's charter did not include the land below the Altamaha. Upon discovering the South Carolina governor's intentions, Wright notified the Georgia Assembly, which appealed to its agent in London to retain the lands for the colony. He then went even further to protect Georgia's interests, supporting his colony's claim in letters to the Board of Trade, and saying that the land was needed in order to continue the flow of settlement. The governor asserted that the Georgians had done all the work to settle the colony, and should not have to see Carolinian strangers taking land from them.²⁰ James Wright was very clearly a governor who kept the growth and prosperity of his colony in mind, and who took steps toward protecting the interest of the colonists. He held the esteem of the Georgians for his great efforts to promote their welfare, and would continue to do for several years, until his position as governor would set him at odds with those very people he had striven to support.

The colonists' general satisfaction with Wright and the welfare of the colony begs the question as to why such harmonious relations broke down. The answer to that question begins with the Stamp Act, when the governor was necessarily set in opposition to the colonists due to his office and duties to the British Empire, and continues into the 1770s with the Georgians' reactions to increased legislation from the mother country. It was during protests against the Stamp Act that Wright would meet his first serious challenge as governor, and that his once "harmonious" relationship with the Georgia Assembly would begin to crumble. It was also the period during which Wright would first experience the isolation inherent to his office, with schisms created not only between the governor and the colonists, but also between the governor and distant British administrators, who could not observe and comprehend the situation as Wright could.

²⁰ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 100.

The Stamp Act as a Turning Point in Relations

Sir James Wright's role in enforcing the Stamp Act in Georgia is of particular significance in colonial history, as he was the only royal governor in the thirteen colonies to successfully implement the tax. Unfortunately for Wright, his success ultimately distanced him from the Georgians, and even his superiors in England. At times underappreciated by the British and vilified by rebellious colonists, the governor increasingly found himself alone in his actions and opinions that he considered to be correct. This alienation was in some respects an inherent part of his office, in that he was sworn to implement Parliament's legislation and carry out his duties to the king, regardless of its effects in the colony. Wright took his loyalty to the crown very seriously. Though he also cared for the Georgians and wished to see them prosper, his enforcement of the Stamp Act and clear duties to government made him an instrument of the empire in the eyes of angry colonists. The governor's understanding of local sentiment conflicted with his imperial responsibilities, placing him between the two sides in the conflict. During this period, Wright began to form opinions on how the colonies should have been handled and why Georgia responded so negatively to taxation. These perceptions were informed by his position as governor, and present a view of the conflict different than most of his contemporaries.

The Stamp Act, passed by the British Parliament on March 22, 1765, required American colonists to purchase stamped paper for legal and commercial papers, newspapers, pamphlets, almanacs, cards, and dice as a means of paying military debts from the Seven Years War.²¹ The British government, and specifically Chancellor of the Exchequer Lord George Grenville, believed that Americans must provide greater funding for the imperial support that had protected

²¹ *Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military Online*, s.v. "Stamp Act," accessed November 26, 2011, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.wm.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t63.e7811>.

their land.²² Prior to 1765, Parliament itself did not impose taxes on the colony, but rather acted through the king to request money in the form of royal instructions to governors and colonial assemblies. While this did allow the colonists a large degree of autonomy in dealing with their economy, it was never truly successful in raising large sums of money for the empire.²³ Grenville knew that a mandatory tax legislated by Parliament would provide funds much more reliably than royal instructions. Nevertheless, the unprecedented action of a tax on the colonies directly decreed by Parliament sparked controversy over political rights in America, and Georgia was no exception.

The taxation was opposed in Georgia and the other colonies on both ideological and economic grounds. The Americans viewed the Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765 as an infringement on the privilege to raise their own taxes for the support of the empire that they had enjoyed until that point. In an era after the English Civil War, when constitutional freedom from oppressive and unauthorized government was a source of pride for the nation, the Americans believed themselves to be following the precedent set by their English ancestors in opposing Parliament's ability to levy taxes on the colonies.²⁴ More radical colonists actually viewed the Stamp Act as part of a plot against liberty, and saw it as a threat to their freedom of government.²⁵

Pennsylvanian John Dickinson noted that while the amount of money demanded from the colonies under the Stamp Act was trivial, it was also very dangerous. In assenting to small taxation passed by Parliament, the colonists would be establishing a dangerous precedent for

²² Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 7.

²³ Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 22.

²⁴ Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 33.

²⁵ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 95.

greater taxation in years to come, legislated by a body 3000 miles away that did not understand the colonial economy.²⁶ The Stamp Act in particular encouraged outspoken opposition due to its very nature, for in taxing paper products, it targeted documents used by printers, lawyers, and merchants with the means to reach a large audience in their protests.²⁷ While many Americans loudly asserted that Parliament had no right to tax them, Grenville believed the only way to make the colonists recognize Parliamentary authority was to exercise it.²⁸ Britain's insistence upon taxing the colonies, paired with the widespread belief among Americans that they had the right to tax themselves, led to the active and often violent protest over the Stamp Act, which brought an end to the harmonious relationship and unified interests of Wright and the Georgia Assembly.

The Georgia committee of correspondence objected to the Stamp Act on the grounds that it added an unreasonable financial burden upon the colony that the assembly did not think the colony could support. Ideologically, they joined the northern colonies in protesting Parliament's right to tax them, and especially the idea of "virtual representation" put forth by Grenville and his secretary, Thomas Whatley.²⁹ When the Georgia Commons received word of the act's passing, they wrote to their agent in London, William Knox, asking him to express opposition to the tax on the grounds that it was a dangerous precedent in the colonies. Knox responded by writing a pamphlet to be published in Georgia, not condemning the Stamp Act as he had been asked to do, but supporting Parliament's right to pass taxation and legislation over the colonies through virtual representation. Upon receiving word of this pamphlet, Governor Wright

²⁶ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 101.

²⁷ S.F. Roach, Jr., "The *Georgia Gazette* and the Stamp Act: A Reconsideration," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 55 no. 4 (1971): 471.

²⁸ Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 62.

²⁹ Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia*, 18.

suppressed its release at the council of his friend and president of his Council, James Habersham.³⁰

Though Knox's writing eventually reached the colonists through the *Georgia Gazette*, Wright's attempts to conceal its message showed that he was intent on keeping peace for as long as possible within the colony. His unwillingness to promote the pamphlet also hinted that Wright himself may not have been personally in favor of the Stamp Act. Through the conflict, he was very careful never to reveal his personal feelings toward the tax, even in private letters. He did his utmost to enforce the act, as was his responsibility as the governor of the colony, but never went further in supporting the tax that many of the Georgians were so clearly against.³¹ Wright's loyalty and success in executing his duties proved to be both a blessing and a curse, however. While he did eventually succeed in quieting most of the riots and restoring some degree of peace to the colony, many Georgians also resented his willingness to carry out his duties so thoroughly. Thus Wright's competency as governor also served to alienate him from his people during the Stamp Act and the years following.

The first Stamp Act riot in Savannah occurred on Friday, October 25, 1765, when colonists marked the anniversary of King George III's reign by parading the effigy of a stamp officer throughout the town and burning it.³² Wright did not involve himself in the conflict until October 30, when threatening letters were sent to five Georgians from "inhabitants of the town of Savannah," accusing each of acting as the stamp agent.³³ The governor responded by reading the notes to the Georgia Assembly, asking it to approve a sum of money to be given as a reward to

³⁰ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 104.

³¹ C. Ashley Ellefson, "The Stamp Act in Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (March, 1962): 17, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/40578353>.

³² Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 105.

³³ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 107.

any colonists who could reveal the identity of the writer. The Assembly agreed, and Wright issued a proclamation published in the *Georgia Gazette* stating, “I do hereby promise a reward of fifty pounds sterling to any person or persons making such discovery...to be paid by the publick treasurer of this province upon the conviction of any one or more of the offenders.”³⁴ This was the first act of a very personal role Wright would take in the conflict. It was also one of the last times the assembly would fully support him during the riots. The degree to which he involved himself in managing the atmosphere of the colony and imposing the Stamp Act – more so than other governors, as the Wright himself would later note – would come to act against him in his relationship with the assembly and would damage his once-harmonious relationship with the colonists.

The Stamp Act was meant to go into effect on November 1, 1765, but as of October 31, Wright had not received a single sheet of stamped paper, nor had the stamp agent arrived. The governor wrote several times to the Board of Trade in London, expressing his desire to implement the tax, but complaining that he did not have the means to do so without the paper.³⁵ He swore the required oath to enforce the Stamp Act when he received it privately from a friend, but was continually frustrated by Britain’s inability to send the required materials.³⁶ Unbeknownst to Wright, the stamped papers had been held up in Charles Town, where they were unable to leave the port due to mob activity in South Carolina.³⁷ Caleb Lloyd, the distributor for South Carolina and the man in charge of sending the stamped papers to Georgia, was forced to flee Charles Town when a mob arose to destroy both the papers and the distributor himself. The

³⁴ *Georgia Gazette*, November 14, 1765, NewsBank/Readex, America’s Historical Newspapers <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wm.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/>.

³⁵ Wright to Board of Trade, 9 November, 1765, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 129.

³⁶ Wright to Board of Trade, 2 December, 1765, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 131.

³⁷ Caleb Lloyd to Wright, 22 November, 1765, Records created and inherited by HM Treasury, T1/449/201-204, The British National Archives, Kew, England.

Carolínians coerced Lloyd and the stamp inspector, George Saxby, into suspending their duties until the Stamp Act Congress petitions had been answered.³⁸ The failure of the stamped papers and the distributor to reach Georgia before the Stamp Act went into effect made Wright's duty harder and put the colony even further on edge. It would also come to exemplify major themes that Wright himself would observe throughout the Revolution, namely the effect of South Carolina in pushing Georgia toward rebellion, and the ineffectiveness of British organization and communication in comparison to that of the colonists.

A second demonstration in Savannah occurred on November 5, when a sailor chosen to symbolize a stamp agent was beaten and mock-hanged during celebrations for the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot.³⁹ With violence growing, Wright thought it his responsibility as governor to issue a proclamation "forbidding all Riots, Routs and tumultuous Assemblies, and ordering and commanding all Magistrates and Peace Officers to be vigilant and active in their respective duties," yet this only served to exacerbate the situation.⁴⁰ On December 4, Wright closed the port of Savannah, which had been kept open for trade until that time even though the Stamp Act was technically in effect, as the governor felt he could not deny the merchants their ability to export rice and goods that could spoil when he did not even know if the stamped papers were going to arrive.⁴¹ Wright's practicality in allowing tradesmen to continue shipping through November showed his concern for Georgia's economy and commerce, despite his efforts to enforce the Stamp Act and suppress riots. Feeling responsibilities toward both his colony and the British

³⁸ Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 156.

³⁹ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 105-106.

⁴⁰ Proceedings and Minutes of the Governor and Council, 12 November, 1765, in *CRG*, vol. 9, 437.

⁴¹ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 112.

Empire, the governor's decisions and actions were informed by his difficult position. Nevertheless, opposition to the governor was rising in Georgia.

The *Speedwell* finally arrived at the mouth of the Savannah River on December 5, 1765. Aboard the ship was the long-anticipated stamped paper necessary for the implementation of the Stamp Act. The papers were brought to shore and moved to a warehouse without incident, as several gentlemen had met with the governor previously to assure him that they had no intentions of destroying the stamps at that time.⁴² Nevertheless, that was only the beginning of Wright's ordeal. The stamp distributor still having not arrived, the governor could not let ships out of Savannah. Wright refused petitions from merchants asking to be allowed to sail without the stamps, as he considered granting their requests beyond the power of his office. His unwillingness to stretch his gubernatorial powers in order to issue stamps without a sanctioned distributor left Wright without the power to implement the tax immediately, despite his most fervent wishes to issue stamps to merchants. This too would be a constant theme in the following years, as the governor struggled to execute his power without the proper means from England. The lack of support from Britain would become a serious impediment to Wright's efforts to maintain control over Georgia as local and imperial concerns continued to diverge.

On January 2, 1766, just two days before the stamp distributor finally arrived in Savannah, Wright was personally called to subdue a riotous crowd. The "Sons of Liberty" in Georgia (who James Wright privately called the "Sons of Licentiousness")⁴³ had gathered in a growing crowd of about two hundred, and were planning to take the stamped paper from its

⁴²Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 112-113.

⁴³Wright to Henry Seymour Conway, 15 March, 1766, unpublished *CRG* vol. 37, 123, quoted in Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 106. The author W.W. Abbott appears to have had access to several unpublished volumes of *Colonial Records of Georgia* containing crucial sections of Wright's correspondence, which will be referenced frequently.

warehouse. The governor armed himself and ordered his officers to assemble their men. He then marched into the middle of the riotous crowd and inquired as to their purpose. The Liberty Boys demanded to know if a *pro-tempore* stamp distributor would be appointed, as merchants wanting to sail out of Savannah had requested.⁴⁴ Wright chided the group, protesting that “this was not a manner to wait upon the governor of a province, that he would not violate his oaths to his Majesty...and that in four months time, they would find he was a friend to liberty, while their measures were destructive to it.”⁴⁵ Apparently Wright’s words had some effect, since the Liberty Boys disbanded, though they vowed to reassemble if a stamp distributor was named.

The governor’s role in dispersing this riot provides insight into his personal beliefs and view of the Stamp Act, as well as his relationship with the colonists. He took a very active role in this manner throughout the conflict, which showed not only his commitment to his office, but the degree to which he wished to bridge the gap between colonists and the British peacefully. Once again, Wright did not assert his own views on the Stamp Act in particular, though he did openly state his loyalty to Britain, and that he believed the colonists had a duty to obey legislation passed by Parliament. At this point, the governor’s ties with the colonists were damaged but not broken, as evidenced by the fact that they did listen to him and disbanded without further violence. Nevertheless, his willingness to become personally embroiled in the Stamp Act conflict would not gain him any favor with the Liberty Boys, who would be a thorn in his side until the outbreak of the Revolution. Wright’s view that the colonists must remain loyal, in combination with his concern for the colony’s peace and commerce, kept him in a strange position between

⁴⁴ Abbott, *Royal Governors* 114.

⁴⁵ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 13, 1766, NewsBank/Readex, America’s Historical Newspapers, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wm.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/>.

the colonists and the British that he hoped to use to his benefit in quelling the insurrection in Georgia.

Having skillfully managed the situation for a time and with the stamp distributor, a Mr. George Angus, safely in the colony, Governor Wright re-opened the port of Savannah on January 7, 1766.⁴⁶ Though he spent four nights after his initial conflict with the Liberty Boys fully clothed and ready for action in case he should be needed again, the governor eventually saw the city return to an uneasy peace.⁴⁷ While Savannah was recovering from its initial riots, news of the stamp distributor and paper was just beginning to reach the backcountry. When Wright received news that Liberty people were assembling and arming themselves throughout the province, he sent out letters to those men he knew he would listen to his reason, compelling them to keep peace by encouraging others to do the same. The province quieted down, and Wright congratulated himself, writing that he “had the Satisfaction to find that [his] Weight & Credit was Sufficient to Check & Prevent all Comotions & disturbances in the Country.”⁴⁸

The governor’s ability to calm the province with naught but a letter to his supporters showed the strength of the connections he had built with those on the frontier through his earlier acts to expand the colony. While Wright would not always have the support of the backcountry in later years, he used his positive relationship with them to his advantage during the Stamp Act Controversy, once again demonstrating his ties with the colony. Clearly those Georgians did not see him as a mere extension of Parliament’s authority, but as one who had done a great deal to substantiate their position in America. But his word as governor was not enough when at the end

⁴⁶ Abbot, *Royal Governors*, 116.

⁴⁷ Wright to Board of Trade, 15 January, 1766, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 133.

⁴⁸ Wright to Board of Trade, 15 January, 1766, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 134.

of January, Wright again received news that the backcountry was aflame with rebellion, this time at the urging of Liberty Boys from Charles Town.

Conflict in Savannah resumed in February 1766, as rioters incited by Carolinians made their way to the city with the purpose of commanding that no stamped papers be issued until the result of the colonies' petitions to Parliament against the Stamp Act were known. Rumors flew that six hundred men were on their way to surround the governor's house to make demands. If he did not comply, they had vowed to destroy the stamped paper, and then the property of government supporters. Wright immediately moved the paper to Fort George on Cockspur Island, leaving fifty rangers and two junior officers to protect it.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Wright nervously awaited the arrival of the mob in Savannah. Though he again composed letters that convinced many to stop their advance, the governor heard reports that about three hundred men still continued toward the city. The day was saved for Wright when Captain Fanshawe of the *Speedwell* arrived near Cockspur Island in time for the governor to move the stamps onto the ship and bring the fifty troops back to Savannah, where they could stand against the insurgent Georgians. Reinforced by twenty sailors from the *Speedwell*, Wright then commanded nearly one hundred trained men to stand against the Georgian mob. When the colonists finally arrived in Savannah and witnessed the force they were up against, they argued for several hours and finally dispersed, leaving a few threats of reinforcements from South Carolina that were never carried out.⁵⁰

That conflict between Wright and the rebellious Georgians from the backcountry encapsulated the breakdown of good relations between the governor and the colonists. Though his word and position did still carry some influence, it did not prevent a mob of angry Georgians

⁴⁹ Wright to Board of Trade, 1 February, 1766, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 135-136.

⁵⁰ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 118-119.

from moving against him in his own capital city. While the Stamp Act did not mean an entire break between Wright and the colonists, it did begin a new chapter in his term when he would not enjoy the unanimity and concord that he once experienced with the Georgians and their assembly.

As Wright became more distanced from the colonists, he turned to the British government for support. Ever loyal to the empire and staunchly committed to his duties as governor, Wright expected aide from his superiors in government, but rarely found it. When the province had finally been calmed, and the Stamp Act had been repealed on March 18, 1766, he began to hear rumors of his imminent dismissal that had been spread by the Liberty Boys. When he asked Lord Shelburne, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, about these rumors, Wright was told that he was not to be removed. However, he did not receive any praise for his success in administering the Stamp Act. Instead, Shelburne reminded him that he must never appear to hinder the “just & decent Exercise of that Liberty which belongs to the People.”⁵¹ Disappointed and affronted, Wright responded that Shelburne might discover that “just and decent liberty” meant something altogether different in America than in Britain.⁵²

The Stamp Act Controversy had disillusioned Wright to the effectiveness and fairness of the British Empire, and he began to realize that his distant superiors did not understand the situation in the same manner as he did. While his letters to the Board of Trade before 1765 show a great deal of support without question, their correspondence after the Stamp Act displays his disagreement frequently.⁵³ The tone of his writing reflected this as well, as his frustration with

⁵¹ Lord Shelburne to Wright, 22 September, 1766, in unpublished *CRG*, vol. 37, 126-127, quoted in Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 121.

⁵² Wright to Shelburne, 1 January, 1767, in unpublished *CRG*, vol. 37, 174-175, quoted in Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 121.

⁵³ Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 122.

Britain's failure to supply him with adequate support grew. He began to see that his executive powers were nothing without a means of enforcing them, which needed to be supplied by Britain. In the face of growing sedition, Wright observed, "...my Lords, it seems very Clear that the Executive Part of Government requires Some further degree of Strength & Support."⁵⁴ This plea would become a sort of catchphrase of the governor in his later correspondence with British authorities.

During the conflict, Wright discovered that he could not expect the support of his fellow royal governors. While he was contending with a mob of Georgians marching on Savannah and refusing to let ships out of the harbor without stamped papers, he received news that Lieutenant-Governor Bull in South Carolina had decided to reopen the port at Charles Town. Though Bull claimed that he did this because there were no stamped papers to be found in his colony, Wright knew that he had been keeping them in Fort Johnson. This affected the Georgian governor when his people saw the actions of South Carolina administrators and demanded to know why he was not acting as Bull was, further angering the colonists and setting them against him. Wright complained in a letter, "I am Continually Perplexed & kept in hot water, not only by the Seditious Spirit & Base attempts of the People there in a Private Way, but by the Conduct of those in Authority, from whom I Conceive I ought rather to Expect Assistance."⁵⁵ Without even the aide of those in a position similar to his own, Wright was alone in his actions.

The Stamp Act Controversy created divisions between Wright and the colonists, as well as between the governor and the British government. Once a man of both Georgia and England, he was rapidly becoming a man of neither. His reactions to and perceptions of the Stamp Act, and eventually the American Revolution, would be formed by the separation caused by his

⁵⁴ Wright to Board of Trade, 15 January, 1766, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 132.

⁵⁵ Wright to Board of Trade, 10 February, 1766, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 137.

position between two opposing forces. As the imperial government attempted to establish tighter control over its American colonies in the wake of the Seven Years War, its objectives were in direct opposition to local concerns. With obligations at both local and imperial levels, Wright's letters are an important source displaying a unique outlook on events that add to the usual viewpoints of British administrators and rebellious colonials. The governor provided answers as to why he believed the Georgians joined the Stamp Act riots and why they eventually became involved in the American Revolution. While no historical figure is untouched by bias, Wright's perspective is valuable because it is inherently different from that of his contemporaries.

As to the question of why Georgians became so inflamed by the Stamp Act, Wright blamed the northern colonies and South Carolina. Of course, the colonists in his province had many of the same complaints as those in other areas, yet the governor believed that they were driven to action by outsiders. In this, he was correct. Besides the obvious incident of the South Carolina Liberty Boys inciting the Georgia backcountry to riots in February of 1766, the governor observed that the Sons of Liberty in Charles Town were making every effort to agitate the Georgians by sending "inflammatory papers, letters and messages"; indeed, Wright named those in South Carolina as those from whom "I am very clear all our disturbances and difficulties have been occasioned."⁵⁶ The role of South Carolina in pushing its southern neighbor toward revolution continued to concern Wright, who ascribed to them part of the blame for insurrection in Georgia throughout the entirety of the war.

Governor Wright observed the affect of events in northern colonies on the atmosphere in Georgia throughout his correspondence. In November of 1765, at the beginning of Stamp Act riots, he wrote, "The People have been for many Months Past Stimulated by Letters papers &c.

⁵⁶ Wright to Conway, 31 January, 1766, quoted in Charles C. Jones, *The History of Georgia*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 62.

Sent them from the Northward to follow their Example.”⁵⁷ It would appear that his assessment of the north’s influence on his colony was correct. The writer of a “Letter from Georgia” printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* observed, “when we received the first accounts of the opposition made to the stamp-act to the northward, the same spirit took place here, and there seemed to be a general dislike to it.”⁵⁸ Whereas the different colonies had been at odds for most of their history, as were Georgia and South Carolina in the land disputes over the Altamaha, the Stamp Act brought them together in common sentiment. Wright would eventually see their organization eclipse that of their administrators, making them more efficient in their efforts than the British an ocean away.

According to Wright, the Georgians that participated in the Stamp Act riots were not the majority, but only the more violent inhabitants.⁵⁹ His observation is supported by the aforementioned fact that Georgia consisted of a mixed population of settlers who had been born in England and who had arrived within a few years of the colony’s establishment, and another segment of the population already well established as Americans that had migrated to Georgia from the north. Wright was encouraged by his abilities to appeal to those he considered the most sensible and dispassionate members of the colony. In a letter to Secretary Conway on the situation in Georgia, Wright assured him that there were many colonists loyal to the government and entirely against the rebellious spirit of the Liberty Boys, but worried that they were having a difficult time during the riots, as they and their property were often the targets of violence.⁶⁰ The events of the Stamp Act began Wright’s strong support for Loyalists, with whom he may have identified more than any other party. Like the governor, they were inhabitants of the colony that

⁵⁷ Wright to Board of Trade, 9 November, 1765, in *CRG*, vol. 28, Part 2, 130.

⁵⁸ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 13, 1766.

⁵⁹ Ellefson, “The Stamp Act in Georgia,” 8.

⁶⁰ Wright to Conway, 31 January, 1766, quoted in Jones, *History of Georgia*, vol. 2, 64.

firmly believed in the British Empire's right to govern in America, whose land was taken from them in the process of war, who were displaced from their homes after American victory, and who stood in a dangerous position of truly belonging to neither side. In future correspondence, and even after the Revolution, the governor continued to stress their loyalty and hardships occasioned by their fidelity to the crown. Wright's own position encouraged him to seek the protection of the King's loyal subjects, and allowed him to observe that there were many in Georgia who did not share the opinions of the most rebellious colonists.

After the repeal of the Stamp Act, Georgia returned to a state of relative peace. Wright delivered an address to the Assembly congratulating it on having refrained from passing any acts expressing direct opposition to the Empire, as other colonial governments had done across America. He stressed the benevolence of the British government in repealing an act that had so thoroughly upset the colonists, and expressed his wishes that they would return to harmonious relations.⁶¹ The Assembly responded by affirming their loyalty to the Empire and by thanking the king for listening to their pleas to rid them of the Stamp Act, but also implying that the act was an evil that needed to be addressed.⁶² However, the damage in relations between the governor and the assembly had been done. They would never again enjoy the unanimity of previous years, and their future relations would be tense at best.

The Stamp Act ordeal began Wright's isolation from both his colonists and his superiors in administration. In 1766 he wrote to Secretary Conway expressing his worry that "I cannot have entire confidence in the people for some time, and your Excellency sees the insults his Majesty's authority has received, and which I am still liable to."⁶³ Having witnessed the rebellion

⁶¹ Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, 16 July, 1766, in *CRG*, vol. 14, 370-371.

⁶² Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, 17 July, 1766 in *CRG*, vol. 14, 374.

⁶³ Wright to Conway, 31 January, 1766, quoted in Jones, *History of Georgia*, vol. 2, 65.

and sedition over the Stamp Act in Georgia first-hand, and being personally subjected to the violence that accompanied it, Wright was much more attuned to the atmosphere in the colony than the administration in Britain. While his superiors mostly discounted the extent to which the Americans were willing to oppose increased taxation, Governor Wright spoke of their increased determination and continued desire for a new structure of government. In another letter to Conway, he wrote:

It is not to be supposed or expected that all Hearts & Party Spirit can subside at once. time & prudent Conduct can only effect that, and this Province is not without some violent Republican Spirits, full of rancor against the Government & Parliament, and still fix't in their strange mistaken Ideas of Liberty, and that no Power can tax or restrain them &c but themselves or Representatives of their own choosing.⁶⁴

While the governor recognized the need to handle the colony with care after the Stamp Act, he would not see such attention to “time & prudent Conduct” from Britain.

The conflict of 1765-1766 did not need to be the launching point for revolution. But when the colonists realized that Britain would continue to impose taxation and legislation upon them without their approval, anger over the Stamp Act combined with newly inspired fury to push Georgia toward Revolution. Throughout this period, Wright was a key witness. His refusal to deviate from his duties to the government during the Stamp Act Crisis, despite the fact that he ultimately desired to promote the welfare of Georgia, alienated the colonists that had once held him in the highest esteem. The lack of support and information sent by Britain, as well as Wright’s actual subjection to the violence in Georgia, fractured his relationship with Britain. His growing distance from both sides allowed him a unique perspective on the problems inherent to the system. However, that same distance left him without the power to influence the course of events, much to his growing frustration. Wright’s correspondence provides a valuable and unique

⁶⁴ Wright to Conway, 24 June, 1766, in unpublished *CRG*, vol. 37, 97-98, quoted in Abbott, *Royal Governors*, 123.

source that illuminates the reasons for Georgia's path to Revolution, the sentiments of both the British and the colonists, and the complete disconnect between the mother country and her colonies. It also highlights the governor's inability to change the course of events, no matter how competently he handled the situation. Wright's attempt to control the situation in Georgia during the Stamp Act Crisis without the active support of administrators in Britain was a prelude to troubles between local and imperial government to come when rebellion and sedition spread throughout the American colonies.

Chapter 2: Organization and Support

The repeal of the Stamp Act brought some relief from the tension in the American colonies. Though the polarizing effects of the legislation had driven Governor Wright and the assembly apart, the Georgia government resumed its activities as before with renewed hopes for reconciliation between colony and mother country. Wright did not expect a total dissipation of antagonistic sentiment in the colony, but he called the assembly into session and proceeded to administer the government with caution. There were no major signs of the previous rebellious spirit in the colony until January 1767, when Captain Ralph Phillips of the king's detachment of troops in Georgia specifically asked Wright to enforce the terms of the 1765 Quartering Act. Realizing the potential to renew tensions by asking the assembly to comply with the act, Wright composed his request to the House with care. Even so, the Georgia legislators stated that the Quartering Act, like the Stamp Act, set a dangerous precedent for imposed legislation in the colony, and that they would not comply with its terms.⁶⁵

After Wright's continued demands, the assembly eventually agreed to recognize the Quartering Act in the fall of 1767. Still, many colonists were reminded of their passionate opposition to the Stamp Act and the dangers they believed such legislation entailed. When an increasing number of acts and taxation were passed after 1767, Americans protested Parliament's legislation with renewed vigor. Letters were traded across colonial borders, newspapers published accounts of remonstrations from Massachusetts to Georgia, and many colonists began to organize themselves, while the British did little to check their growing resentment of Parliament and the Crown. As governor of Georgia, Wright witnessed the extent of sedition

⁶⁵ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 65.

across colonial borders and within Georgia itself. He recognized the severity of the situation, but was powerless to stop the tide of rebellion.

A number of factors combined to make Wright unable to prevent Georgia from joining the other colonies in rebellion. From 1765, American colonists were cooperating extensively across colonial borders, establishing organizations like the Continental Congress that facilitated communication and the proliferation of revolutionary ideology. With support for independence emanating from outside Wright's domain, he was unable to prevent the growing sense of unity across the thirteen colonies that brought influential Georgians into association with rebels in other colonies. The governor looked to his administrative superiors, who did have authority over the whole of the American colonies, to halt the spread of rebellion. Through his correspondence with these officials, Wright came to realize that the distance between local and imperial administrators made communication and understanding on a level similar to that of the Americans impossible for the British. The growing organization of the Americans contrasted with the relative differences between local and imperial authorities in the British system of colonial administration. The result of Wright's superiors' inability to understand the situation in individual colonies was that royal governors were left without the means to control their provinces while the communication between rebel organizations continued to flourish.

Because authorities in Britain could not comprehend the severity of Wright's predicament in Georgia and because they had a larger seditious movement to handle that was spreading across the colonies from north to south, the governor's requests for support were ignored or postponed. This left Wright without the means to enforce his executive powers within Georgia once the assembly became filled with Liberty Boys who could count on the loyalty of the militia. The violence of patriots in Georgia and South Carolina, which went unpunished due

to Wright's lack of resources, discouraged Loyalists from stepping forward to support the royal governor. The Loyalist population might have been a valuable resource to Wright for maintaining control over the province, but their reluctance to publicly announce their allegiance to the Crown made them useless to the governor.

Wright's correspondence is significant for this period because it illuminates the break in communication between local and imperial government that made the British administration unable to handle a trans-colonial rebellion. The problems in America progressed beyond the ability of any royal governor to address, but that did not mean that the needs of local authorities like Wright could be ignored without dire consequences. As the head of the local civil authority, the governor's assessment of the situation in Georgia and his increasing frustration as his requests for aid were not granted show how the governor's ability to control his colony's path toward revolution was limited by the decisions and support of his superiors.

Organization Across Colonial Borders

The first Continental Congress convened on September 5, 1774 in Philadelphia at the behest of colonists from Massachusetts. Enraged by the Boston Port Act, the Massachusetts Government Act, and other pieces of legislation directly punishing the colonists for their actions in what would come to be called the "Boston Tea Party," the Bostonians hoped to enlist the support of other colonies in their opposition to British policies. To Governor Wright in Georgia, this organizational effort by the Americans seemed a prelude to disaster. When circular letters from Massachusetts and Virginia arrived in Georgia addressed to the House of Assembly, the governor threatened to dissolve the body if it acted on the urges of the other colonies.⁶⁶ While Wright could threaten to dissolve the assembly, he could not prevent Georgia notables like Noble

⁶⁶ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 65.

Wimberly Jones, Archibald Bullock, John Houstoun, and George Walton from organizing a meeting at Tondee's Tavern in Savannah on July 27, 1774 to consider sending representatives to the upcoming Continental Congress.

The meeting of Georgian patriots at Tondee's Tavern produced several committees, one with the task of corresponding with other colonies to promote further organization among Americans, and another to gather materials in support of Boston.⁶⁷ Despite their efforts to rally Georgians against the British administration, the patriots felt they could not send delegates to the First Continental Congress until they discovered where the loyalties of the majority of Georgians lay. Governor Wright moved to prevent further collaboration by publicly declaring that he would arrest anyone discovered taking part in the second Tondee Tavern meeting. While concerned that some Georgians were rallying around such assemblies, Wright was encouraged by the fact that about 100 loyalists signed a document condemning the meetings in the tavern and their seditious intentions.⁶⁸ It was by no means certain, even as late as 1774, that the factions urging Georgia to join the other colonies in direct opposition to Britain would succeed.

The tide changed in Georgia when news of Lexington and Concord reached the colony on May 10, 1775. While they had been previously condemned by colonists to the north, and especially by their South Carolinian neighbors, for their timid support of opposition to British measures, the Georgians quickly called a Provincial Congress and elected three delegates to the Second Continental Congress.⁶⁹ Wright's alarm at this development is reflected in his letters to Lord Dartmouth, now Secretary of State for the Southern Department. On June 17, 1775 he wrote, "...they have entered into an Association...and whatever is agreed upon by the

⁶⁷ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 119.

⁶⁸ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 120.

⁶⁹ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 123-124.

Continental Congress, will undoubtedly be adopted and carried into execution here, and will meet with little or no opposition...”⁷⁰ The Georgian patriots’ participation in the Continental Congress and willingness to adopt their measures was particularly distressing for Wright, as he did not have the power to dispel the trans-colonial organization. His office allowed him and other governors certain powers over their own colonies, but had no provisions for something as unprecedented as the Continental Congress.

South Carolina’s Liberty Boys presented another front for colonial unity against the British that was outside Wright’s sphere of control. Because the shared border with South Carolina represented the geographical link between Georgia and the northern colonies moving quickly toward rebellion, the Liberty Boys in that colony had a special role influencing Georgian attitudes toward the conflict. Considering Georgia weak when it did not send delegates to the First Continental Congress, South Carolinians issued a number of threats to their southern neighbors hoping to press them into action. These warnings troubled Wright, who wrote of them to Lord Dartmouth on April 24, 1775. He reported that the South Carolinians held Georgians accountable for their reluctance to lend outright support to the Congress, and threatened to “cut the throats of the People of Georgia, if any Blood was spilt in New England.”⁷¹ South Carolina ceased all trade with Georgia, as ordered by the Continental Congress before the delegates from Georgia had arrived to take their seats in Philadelphia.⁷² The pressure exerted by South Carolina distressed both the governor and the colonists. The situation was made worse in Wright’s mind

⁷⁰ Wright to Secretary Lord Dartmouth, 17 June, 1775, in *CGHS*, III (Savannah: 1873): 183.

⁷¹ Precis of correspondence between Secretary Lord Dartmouth and Sir James Wright (Georgia) Provincial, 17 Feb-19 July, 1775. Dartmouth Papers, Domestic Records of the Public Record Office, Gifts, Deposits, Notes and Transcripts, PRO 30/29/3/5/17, The British National Archives, Kew, England.

⁷² Coulter, *Georgia A Short History*, 122.

by the fact that he had no means of controlling the actions of Americans outside Georgia, and was thus unable to bring any relief to Georgians from South Carolina's menacing activities.

While loyalists feared South Carolina's threats and violence, Liberty Boys in Georgia looked to the South Carolinian patriots for inspiration. Copying the actions of their northern counterparts, they organized a Council of Safety in June 1775 to ensure that the measures adopted by the Continental Congress were followed in their own colony. Wright's despair increased as he saw his executive powers stripped from him and repossessed by this colonial organization, to which the active patriots in Georgia gave their allegiance. The governor expressed his growing fears to Dartmouth in July of 1775:

They have appointed here what they call a Council of Safety and very nearly followed the example of the Carolinians Except as to Raising an Army...this Province having now Join'd with the others, I am well informed that the Gentlemen who came from Carolina assure the Congress here, that if they should on any Account want Assistance they should Immediately have it to the amount of 1000 men.⁷³

The connection with South Carolina is evident in the Proceedings of the Georgia Council of Safety, which frequently corresponded with its northern neighbor. Georgian patriots informed the Carolina Liberty Boys of the situation in their own colony, and often sent messengers between the councils to confer in person.⁷⁴ Wright's anxiety over South Carolina's influence again proved accurate, but there was little he could do to halt the growing cooperation between the two colonies.

Wright's observance that Georgia was a colony recently "Join'd with the others," in conjunction with his growing concern for the fate of his province, shows the extent to which organization across colonial borders presented a large issue for the royal governor. With the Carolinas willing to aid Georgian patriots in almost any respect to further their cause, and with

⁷³ Wright to Secretary Lord Dartmouth, 18 July, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 199.

⁷⁴ Proceedings of the Georgia Council of Safety, 1775 to 1777, in *CGHS*, vol. 5, 20-21, 36, 62.

the Continental Congress encouraging colonists from north to south to band together to present a united front, Wright was powerless to prevent outside factors from influencing Georgia's place in revolutionary history. The royal governor's correspondence with Dartmouth reveals his growing concern that Georgia would be invaded by the people of South Carolina, as well as his complete inability to prevent the Liberty Boys in another colony from disturbing his own province.

Problems Within the British Administrative System

As Governor Wright watched the American colonists organize themselves through trans-colonial correspondence, pledges of support, and assemblies, he could not fail to notice the comparative disorganization and lack of communication within the British Empire. Feeling Georgia slipping from his control, but powerless to quell the motivating factors for its rebellion, Wright attempted to turn to the governing powers that did have jurisdiction over the whole of the American colonies. Truly believing that it was the responsibility of his superiors to rectify the situation in America, Wright found that they underestimated the urgency he felt in responding to the impending crisis. Lord Dartmouth and his peers in government were distant and unresponsive to Wright's local needs, choosing to focus their attentions on New England instead of the entirety of what was fast becoming a unified territory. Wright soon came to realize that he could not even depend on the actions of his fellow governors to support him, and that he was truly without assistance in dealing with Georgian insults to colonial authority. The problems of distance and lack of understanding in the British colonial system were exacerbated by the breakdown in communication across the Atlantic, as Americans intercepted, opened, and altered correspondence between British administrators. Governor Wright felt that his superiors were the only power that could possibly counteract the unification of the colonists, and his letters reveal

his growing frustration upon finding that they were unprepared for calamity on such a large scale.

With the formation of the Continental Congress and the cooperation of Liberty Boys throughout the colonies, Wright understood that his position as governor was not powerful enough to keep Georgia at peace with Britain. He sincerely believed that it was the responsibility of his superiors, who did have the political reach to correct issues across colonial borders, to address the problems that had arisen from discontent with Parliament. His letters to Lord Dartmouth communicated the need for a “*higher authority* to remedy the Evil” being spread from one colony to another.⁷⁵ Using a language of deference, Wright attempted to convey his concerns to the British administration. Though respectful, the letters show his sense of urgency, as well as his conviction that it was the responsibility of imperial authorities to ameliorate the situation. The governor wrote to Dartmouth in this fashion in July 1775 stating, “Your Lordship will be the best Judge what is most Proper to be done, but I beg leave again most heartily to wish that Conciliatory Measures may Speedily take place or total Ruin and Destruction will soon follow, and American Lost and Gone.”⁷⁶ He repeated the need for his superiors to take swift action in September and October as well, even going so far as to state his presumption that he would be issued clear instructions for how to proceed.⁷⁷ Wright’s reliance upon his superiors to exercise their authority, combined with the British administration’s inability to comprehend the extent of the governor’s urgency, represents one major breakdown in the colonial system of government that prevented the British Empire from effectively handling the revolt in Georgia.

⁷⁵ Wright to Secretary Lord Dartmouth, 24 August, 1774, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 181.

⁷⁶ Wright to Secretary Lord Dartmouth, 29 July, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 200-201.

⁷⁷ Wright to Secretary Lord Dartmouth, 14 October, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 181.

Adding to Wright's frustration was his belief that he understood the affairs of Georgia much better than Lord Dartmouth and other administrators in Britain, who had never had the experience of governing in the colonies. He said as much in a letter to Dartmouth written in September of 1775 with the words, "I have often wished for the Honor of a Conversation with Your Lordship, I could have said much that there is no writing and Possibly might have given some useful hints."⁷⁸ In another letter he hinted that colonists on both sides of the conflict believed he would be more helpful in Britain than in Georgia, presumably because his executive powers were limited in the colony and he could better advise his superiors on how to bring about reconciliation by being in the same location as their administration.⁷⁹ Wright believed that his superiors could not understand what needed to be done on a local level to manage the revolution because they were blinded by their imperial viewpoint.

Though he was dutiful to the last and insistent upon following the orders of the British administration to the letter, Wright did not necessarily agree with his superiors on how to handle the rebellious colonies. Lord Dartmouth and other administrators believed that increased taxation and a more stringent hold on the colonies would keep the Americans in line. Wright, having witnessed the outrage with each new Parliamentary act of taxation, had a different view on how to reconcile the colonies with their mother country. He expressed his ideas to Dartmouth in August 1774, well before the violence of Lexington and Concord sparked outrage from Georgia patriots. The governor believed that conflict had risen to the point that coercive measures would not settle the dispute, but would only aggravate matters. Wright urged Dartmouth to recognize that the American colonies had grown far larger in size, population, and organization than had

⁷⁸ Wright to Dartmouth, 16 September, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 211.

⁷⁹ Wright to Dartmouth, 11 December, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 227.

ever been anticipated in the first attempts at colonization. This meant that they could not be handled as they had been up to that time. The governor therefore suggested the following:

...in order to Restore & Establish Real & Substantial Harmony affection & Confidence & that Great Britain may receive that benefit & advantage which She has a Right to expect from the Colonies it may be found advisable to settle the Line with respect to *Taxation &c* by some new mode or Constitution, and without which my real and candid opinion is, that however matters may be got at present & whatever appearance there be of amity & union the Flame will only be *smothered for a time* & break out again at some future day *with more Violence*.⁸⁰

Wright's assessment of the measures needed for reconciliation were, however accurate, far too radical and complex for Parliament. With internal divisions of their own, as well as a firm adherence to traditional colonial policies and a distance that rendered them incapable of grasping Wright's warnings, Dartmouth and his peers ignored the governor's message and continued in their own fashion. The failure of the British administration to heed the advice of royal governors like Wright, who lived in the midst of irate colonists and who were capable of understanding the underlying factors behind the rebellious atmosphere in America, was a major flaw in the colonial system. Compared to the leaders of the revolution, the British government suffered from hierarchical problems that downplayed the urgency of the conflict as reports rose through the ranks from governor to King and Parliament.

The issue of communication by mail further complicated the British Empire's handling of the revolution. While the American colonists benefitted from sending their correspondence within their own homeland, letters to and from the British administration first had to reach a port city, and then travel across the Atlantic before being read and answered. Obvious problems arose from the amount of time it would take for Wright to receive a response to his letters, leaving him without the authorization to respond to a situation for months at a time. An even larger issue occurred in the port of Charleston, where Liberty Boys had the opportunity to seize, open, and

⁸⁰ Wright to Dartmouth, 24 August, 1774, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 181.

often alter any letters they could recover.⁸¹ Governor Wright was aware that much of his mail was being read and waylaid, as he reported to Dartmouth that “every Letter directed to me both Public & Private were seized upon & opened in Charles Town...Your Lordship sees there is an End of all Correspondence And I cannot Attempt to send any Answers to Your Lordships Letters in Future from Hence by the Post to Charles Town...”⁸² The exchange between Wright and his superiors was made useless by their inability to communicate frankly with one another. It was impossible for the British administration to respond quickly and efficiently to the governor’s pleas and advice. While correspondence between the colonists was increasing and giving them cause for unification, the letters between Wright and the Secretary of State for the Southern Department were easily interrupted, hindering effective colonial administration.

The difficulties presented by the great distance between the British administration and the royal governors might have been tempered by cooperation between British officials in America across colonial borders. While it would seem logical for Wright to coordinate his efforts with the governor of South Carolina, Lord William Campbell, his counterpart’s actions only added to his own predicament. Because royal governors had no incentive or system for acting in tandem, they often handled the affairs of their colonies without regard for their neighbors. Adding to the lack of coordination between Georgia and South Carolina governors was the fact that Campbell had only arrived in June of 1775, taking over the government from Lieutenant-Governor William Bull II. As many Carolinians were adamantly in favor of rebellion, the change in administration came at a poor time when the acts of outright sedition in the colony were gathering force.

Wright complained to Lord Dartmouth about the inability of the South Carolina royal government to subdue Liberty Boys in a letter of August 1774. He claimed that Georgian patriots

⁸¹ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 51.

⁸² Wright to Dartmouth, 10 July, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 194.

were constantly encouraged by the Sons of Liberty in South Carolina, who acted without any strong opposition from their governor. Wright asserted that the South Carolina governor's failure to check the Liberty Boys in his own colony made Wright look too harsh and unreasonable to the Georgians. The public response to the lack of support and coordinated action between the governors of South Carolina and Georgia reminded Wright of the Stamp Act Crisis. In his letter to Dartmouth he stated, "...as in the time of the Stamp act, I am to be Reflected upon & abused for opposing the Licentiousness of the People and its thrown out, '*Why should our Governor do so & so when the People in 'Carolina have gone Greater Lengths than we have and the Governor has not taken any notice of it.*'"⁸³ Major problems in the British system of colonial administration existed outside of the simple explanation of distance. British government in America was not unified to the degree that the colonists had achieved with the Continental Congress. Royal governors did not consult or support each other, to the detriment of their power and reputation in the colonies, thereby diluting the effectiveness of their efforts to restore order.

A number of problems in the organization of the British colonial system of administration left Wright unable to act effectively and with enough urgency to keep Georgia from joining the other colonies in revolution. Though he attempted to reveal these flaws to his superiors, they did nothing to correct the underlying problems in the government of the colonies. Separated from his main correspondents in Britain by several thousand miles, Wright could not receive instructions in a timely manner conducive to dealing with the organization of the colonists. Wright was left unable to address the revolutionary situation effectively within his own colony due to his lack of authority outside of Georgia, the unwillingness of those who did have authority to change their

⁸³ Wright to Dartmouth, 24 August, 1774, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 180.

reaction to colonial dissent, and the failure of other royal governors to establish a consistent policy for dealing with such widespread rebellion.

A Lack of Resources

Wright did not sit idly in Georgia while the Liberty Boys conducted the revolution beneath him. On the contrary, he attempted to use his influence and good reputation in the colony to undermine their efforts.⁸⁴ The governor issued Proclamations against their meetings and actions. He attempted to manage the seditious leaders within Georgia's colonial government by dissolving the House of Assembly when its members were showing signs of active opposition.⁸⁵ But the effectiveness of his actions was limited by the resources at his disposal that allowed him to enact his executive power. The royal governor was a symbol of imperial power to the colonists, but he also relied upon them to recognize that authority. When they did not, his ability to enforce his proclamations was severely reduced. Without the loyalty of the militia and the assembly, Wright was forced to request aid from outside of Georgia—aid that would have to be provided by his superiors, who had proved to be unreliable. The powers of the royal governor were dependent upon the permission of higher British authority, leaving Wright with limited means to act independently. When the Council of Safety formed a government within the colony in direct opposition to his own, Wright was left without any means of counteracting the Liberty Boys. The lack of resources that left Wright without the ability to implement his authority was yet another factor that prevented the royal governor from keeping his colony from joining the revolutionary movement.

When it became apparent that rebellious activity in Georgia was escalating beyond the scope of his normal powers to control, Wright immediately requested material support from

⁸⁴ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 119-120.

⁸⁵ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 67.

Britain. The governor believed he needed a significant number of troops to restore order in Savannah, but there was no sign of the requested military reinforcement for months. Finally, he received word that a contingent of about 100 soldiers would be dispatched to Georgia from St. Augustine.⁸⁶ Aware that a meager number of troops would not be able to establish control over the Province, but would only serve to incite the Georgians, Wright asked Dartmouth to countermand that order. Wright claimed that, "...altho' an 100 men 12 or 15 months ago would have done it is not the case now, and...they would be lyable to continual insults having no Fort or other place of shelter whatever..."⁸⁷ The failure of the British administration to supply the governor with the number of troops adequate for the situation left Wright in an undesirable position. While Georgians would not be provoked by an absence of troops, he would have no means of asserting his authority over the Council of Safety.

In addition to troops, Wright requested a sloop to patrol the oceans around Georgia and the waterways connecting the port of Savannah to the Atlantic. Lord Dartmouth granted this request in February of 1775, but the ship had still not arrived in November of that year.⁸⁸ Wright's letters to Dartmouth reveal his anxiety over the absence of the ship over a period of several months. His concern was validated when the South Carolina Liberty Boys seized a shipment of gunpowder in transit to Savannah. This event was a disaster, since the shipment was intended for natives on the Georgia frontier as a peacekeeping gift.⁸⁹ Wright strongly believed that the gunpowder theft could have been prevented if only the sloop promised to Georgia had been delivered. His frustration and dismay show in a letter to Lord Dartmouth a few months later

⁸⁶ Precis of correspondence between Dartmouth and Wright (Georgia) Provincial, 17 Feb-19 July, 1775, Dartmouth Papers, The British National Archives, Kew, England.

⁸⁷ Wright to Dartmouth, 17 June, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 187.

⁸⁸ Wright to Dartmouth, 16 November, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 222.

⁸⁹ Wright to Dartmouth, 20 June, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 190.

in which he lets his emotions get the better of him. Wright's sarcasm cannot be ignored when he states, "I Presume His Majesty's Cruizer which was ordered to this Province in February last, has been Employed *much more* for His Majesty's Service Elsewhere, than She could have been here in Preventing the Gun Powder from being taken away in the manner Your Lordship has been Informed of, and Giving other Assistance which She might Probably have done."⁹⁰ Had Wright been allotted this ship and other means of support, the fear tactics and violence perpetrated by the Liberty Boys might have been more restrained, and might have allowed Wright to develop a base of support among Loyalists in the colony.

Without the means to exert his executive authority, Wright's position as governor was useless. He did what little he could to stop the Council of Safety from seizing political control, but realized that the more frequently he published proclamations without any sign of consequences for disobedience, the more comical and impotent he seemed. He made reference to his limitations several times in his correspondence with Dartmouth, and stated that his proclamations were openly ridiculed because they could not be enforced.⁹¹ When Wright consulted his own Council as to whether he should publicly condemn the actions of the Liberty People as illegal, they responded with a negative reaction, as Wright documented in his letter to Lord Dartmouth of June 17, 1775:

All that were present (six) were unanimous in opinion "that no Legal steps should be taken because as things are circumstanced no prosecutions would prove effectual and it would only exasperate and inflame." They were also clearly of the opinion that issuing such a Proclamation would only be held in contempt and expose the weakness of the executive powers and that unsupported as we are & threatened from the next Province, they advised that no steps whatever should be taken, but to represent a state of all their transactions and facts to Your Lordship.⁹²

⁹⁰ Wright to Dartmouth, 14 October, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 216.

⁹¹ Wright to Dartmouth, 24 August, 1774, in *CGHS*, vol 3, 181.

⁹² Wright to Dartmouth, 17 June, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 184.

Without the ability to enforce his executive authority, Wright realized that his actions would only exacerbate the situation. Once again, he relied on his superiors to provide a solution, but the instructions and resources never arrived. Concerned for their personal welfare and that of the Loyalists they protected, Wright and his Council did not wish to provoke the Liberty Boys without the means to properly subdue them.

Nearly at his wits' end, the governor's letters to Dartmouth became filled with increasing pessimism and hopelessness from 1774 through 1775. Though he recognized the severity of the Liberty Boys' actions, Wright was powerless to stop them from organizing into a provincial government with a greater ability to enforce their acts in Georgia than even the British government possessed. He summarized his position to Dartmouth saying, "it is really a Wretched State to be left in, and which its impossible to submit to much longer, Government totally Annihilated, and Assumed by Congresses, Councils and Committees, and the greatest Acts of Tyranny, Oppression, Gross Insults &c. &c. &c. committed, and not the least means of Protection, Support, or even Personal Safety..."⁹³ Feeling completely abandoned by his superiors in that his requests for resources and instruction were repeatedly ignored, Wright gave up hope of reestablishing order in Georgia and requested permission to leave his post for England.

In his frustration, Wright proved more than willing to give advice to his superiors. His solution for how to establish an efficient executive power in the colonies was to have the administration grant increased power to royal governors. Wright indicated that under the present system, officers in the province were appointed by the Crown. He proposed that royal governors be allowed to fill all offices themselves as a way to increase their influence in the colony and to give themselves the best means of establishing a support base within their province. In order to

⁹³ Wright to Dartmouth, 23 September, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 213.

assure Dartmouth that he was not seeking this change for his own personal gain, but for the greater benefit of the British government, Wright reminded the Secretary that he had asked to leave his post, and would not profit from any future alterations.⁹⁴ His suggestion to Dartmouth confirms that the governor could see important weaknesses in the system and believed there were ways to access alternative pools of support within a colony. The governor of Georgia came to understand that someone in his position could not rely solely on a distant administration, but would need to establish his own methods of political control. Essentially abandoned by his government, Wright began to consider that the royal governor was a better judge of necessities in his colony than his superiors across the Atlantic.

Sir James Wright bore witness to the growth of the Liberty Boys' power in Georgia, and was forced to watch them assume the powers of government while he waited for instruction and support from Britain. Without material resources in the form of a ship or a sizeable military force, the governor had no means of enforcing his power other than his waning personal influence. Even his Council recognized the fact that they could not act without exposing their own weaknesses and provoking active opposition from influential patriots in the colony. Wright's desperation for some means of subduing the rebellious factions in Georgia contained in his correspondence with Lord Dartmouth indicates that a lack of resources helps explain the inability of the governor to maintain control over his colony.

Political Influence of Liberty Boys and Reluctance of Loyalists

In the years between the repeal of the Stamp Act and the bloodshed at Lexington & Concord, supporters and members of the Liberty Boys made a steady gain in the House of Assembly. Men like Button Gwinnett, Samuel Elbert, Benjamin Andrew, and Noble Wimberly

⁹⁴ Wright to Dartmouth, 1 November, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 219.

Jones were elected to the assembly, and were also fundamental leaders of rebellion in the colony.⁹⁵ These men made no secret of their opposition to Wright, who dissolved the assembly several times when they made their affiliations with the Liberty People apparent in the legislature. While the governor was constantly aware of their efforts to join Georgia with the other colonies against British imperial rule, Wright never forgot that there were others in the colony who stood by the Crown. In fact, Wright believed the majority of Georgia colonists to be Loyalists. If that were indeed the case, the question of why the large segment of Georgian Loyalists did not rise up to aid the governor remained. Wright could not make use of the Loyalist population because they were much too afraid of the fear tactics employed by the Liberty People. Like Wright, the Loyalists felt abandoned by the British government, which was not protecting them from the violence of the patriots. Unwilling to subject themselves to mob insult and personal injury, the Loyalists would not be a resource Wright could use to restrain the passions of the Liberty People.

A large segment of Georgia's population retained its allegiance to Britain during the American Revolution. The governor may have identified most closely with these people, for many of them were also landowners loyal to Britain and threatened by the Liberty Boys for not showing their enthusiasm for rebellion. That Wright felt he had a duty to protect them is supported by the fact that after the British lost the war, he spent his remaining years at the head of a committee dedicated to obtaining compensation for Loyalists whose property was destroyed or taken by the Americans.⁹⁶ He reminded Dartmouth in his correspondence that there were still many colonists who did not condone the actions of the Liberty Boys, and asserted that those

⁹⁵ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 67.

⁹⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, s.v. "Wright, Sir James, first baronet (1716-1785)" by Edward J. Cashin, accessed June 23, 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/30035>.

engaging in sedition were not the majority, but only the loudest and most violent of the mob.⁹⁷ Yet Wright also knew he could not depend on Georgia Loyalists to openly speak out against the Liberty People, for they feared that they would become targets of hostility.

Loyalists in Georgia were right to be concerned for their safety if they revealed a strong opinion in opposition to the Liberty Boys. Wright included several accounts of violence committed against the supporters of government. He asked one victim, a mariner by the name of John Hopkins, to write an account of his treatment at the hands of the mob, which the governor then included in his letters to Dartmouth. According to Hopkins, he had disrespected the Sons of Liberty by drinking toasts to their detriment.⁹⁸ On July 24, 1775, the Liberty Boys took him from his house, tarred and feathered him in the public square, paraded him through town in a cart to the Liberty Tree and threatened to hang him. They let him go after forcing him to drink a toast to the “Damnation of all Tories & Success to American Liberty”. Hopkins identified several members of the mob, and noted that the crowd included carpenters, merchants, butchers, planters, and gentlemen from all parts of society.⁹⁹ This was not the only incident of brutality toward Loyalists in Georgia, but was one event in a campaign of fear tactics pursued by the Sons of Liberty to silence the supporters of the British Empire. In January 1776, Wright notified Dartmouth that the patriots had ordered every person who would not agree to join them in rebellion to leave the province, whereas the officers of the king would be detained and prevented from fleeing the colony.¹⁰⁰ The efforts of the Liberty People to frighten Loyalists to the extent

⁹⁷ Wright to Dartmouth, 1 November, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 219.

⁹⁸ Wright to Dartmouth, 29 July, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 200.

⁹⁹ The Deposition of John Hopkins, included in Wright to Dartmouth, 27 July, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 201-202.

¹⁰⁰ Wright to Dartmouth, 3 January, 1776, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 230.

that they would not actively aid the royal government were incredibly successful, as Wright recorded in his letters.

Governor Wright made sure to include the Loyalists' reasons for staying quiet in his correspondence with Dartmouth, perhaps in an effort to elicit more support from the Secretary by appealing to his sense of duty toward those people who still placed their faith in his government. He explained that those who did step forward to display their allegiance to the Crown were essentially placing a target on their heads that attracted the resentment of violent and passionate Georgians determined to harass them.¹⁰¹ Like Wright, the Loyalists felt that their safety had been neglected by the British administration. In his correspondence, Wright explained, "...those who disapprove of these things and wish well to Government say, 'Why should they expose their lives and properties to the resentment of the people when no support of protection is given them by the Government' And therefore they find it most prudent to waive opposition and remain quiet."¹⁰² The governor implored his superiors to send aid to the colony, for he believed that an acknowledgement of the situation and some form of protection would allow the Loyalists to step forward in support of the government.¹⁰³ But without any defenses, those who still felt allegiance toward Britain could not be a source of aid for Wright.

Despite the governor's pleas for his superiors to liberate the Loyalists from the cruelty of the Liberty Boys, aid did not come for them. Their desperate situation had a profound impact on Wright, who would dedicate his life after the war to righting some of the wrongs perpetrated against them. Although the Loyalist population might have been an incredibly useful resource to the governor, their reluctance to earn the enmity of the mob kept them from helping to restore

¹⁰¹ Wright to Dartmouth, 24 August, 1774, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 180.

¹⁰² Wright to Dartmouth, 17 June, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 183.

¹⁰³ Wright to Dartmouth, 16 November, 1775, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 222.

order in Georgia. Seeing that the royal governor had no means of protecting them, they preferred to stay quiet and hope that their allegiances would not be exposed to the Liberty Boys with disastrous consequences for their families.

Conclusions

As Wright was holding a meeting with his Council in January 1776, a group of Liberty Boys entered his mansion and placed him under house arrest. Upon hearing that several British ships had anchored in the Savannah River to replenish their supplies, the Council of Safety had issued a warrant for Wright's arrest in case the British meant to attack.¹⁰⁴ This move symbolized the complete break between the Sons of Liberty in Georgia and their royal government, and was the culmination of events that Wright had feared would occur for almost two years. With the ships ironically making their way to Georgia to take supplies for themselves rather than to lend aid to Wright, the British had failed to send any kind of support that would help the governor quell the rebellion in his colony.

Though Wright had proven himself to be a capable governor during the Stamp Act Crisis, he had no means to reestablish order after the organization of the Continental Congress and the events at Lexington & Concord had inflamed the province and moved the Liberty Boys to increasingly radical action. The cooperation between patriots across colonial borders exceeded Wright's sphere of influence, and could only be addressed by a higher power with the authority to halt the widespread organization of opposition before it reached a critical point. Though Wright constantly communicated the significance of this organization upon his superiors, his warnings fell on deaf ears as Parliament made no significant changes in the political structure of colonial administration that would allow reconciliation between the colonists and the British.

¹⁰⁴ Coulter, *Georgia: A Short History*, 126.

Too focused on specific areas of rebellion such as Massachusetts and concerned with their own politics, the administration did not anticipate the collaboration of revolutionary interests across thirteen colonies. Both the patriots and the British government realized that the main opposition to policy emanated from Massachusetts, but events in Boston produced very different responses from the trans-colonial organizations in conflict. The Americans used the violence of Lexington and Concord to gain support for their cause and to spur their sympathizers toward action. For the British, Massachusetts was a distraction. The imperial administration focused the majority of their efforts on subduing Boston, as they believed it might serve as a cautionary example to other colonies drifting toward rebellion. This attention to Boston left local authorities like Wright in the midst of growing sedition, but without the resources to address the problems in their colonies before small incidents developed into disasters. The British Empire's solution to American opposition would not work for Wright in Georgia. Not wanting to acknowledge the potential for rebellion in other colonies and convinced that their strategy in Boston would work, British authorities had reason to ignore Wright's claims that he needed support in Georgia. Trans-colonial organizations of patriots were united by the concern that what the British were doing in Boston could occur in their own localities and should be resisted. British administration, on the other hand, was divided between an imperial focus on Boston and the needs of local authorities elsewhere in the colonies.

Wright's superiors neglected to send the appropriate amount of support to the governor, leaving him without the tools to enforce his power and to halt the rebellion within his own colony. The local government in Georgia depended on the imperial government, which was unconcerned with the needs of one colony so far from the nucleus of sedition in New England. As the divide between the royal government and the Council of Safety grew more apparent in

Georgia, even the Loyalists who might have helped the governor did not wish to alert the Liberty Boys to their allegiances for fear of violent retaliation. Without the direct support of his superiors, Wright could not maintain control over Georgia. The problems in administration that allowed the colony to join its sisters in rebellion were not at the provincial level, but were flaws in the British colonial system that Wright had no power to influence, despite his observances and ideas for how to achieve reconciliation before events spun out of control.

Wright spent nearly a month imprisoned in his household. During this time he was forbidden to communicate with the British, whose ships remained in the Savannah River. Though he was isolated from the public, Wright was still in danger. Members of the mob would sometimes shoot through his windows, and he did not feel any security inside the governor's mansion. On February 11, 1776 Wright managed to escape out the back of his mansion, freeing himself from the clutches of the Sons of Liberty.¹⁰⁵ His flight from Savannah marked a new chapter in Wright's life and in Georgia's position in the American Revolution, as the governor became physically separated from the colony now in full revolt.

¹⁰⁵ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 73.

Chapter 3: Conflicting Local and Imperial Needs in the Theater of War

On February 11, 1776 Governor James Wright fled down the Savannah River until he came to Bonaventure Plantation, where he met with a boat prepared to carry him to the HMS *Scarborough*. From the safety of the British ship, the governor continued to write to his council and the Assembly, advising them to cooperate with the British forces and to provide them with supplies if the Georgians in control wished to ensure peace. Along with his assurances that the British forces were not there to attack the city, Wright issued a warning to the inhabitants of Savannah, imploring them to save themselves from ruin by reconciling themselves with the crown. Archibald Bulloch responded to his letters out of respect for Wright himself, but refused to heed his advice.¹⁰⁶ After a few skirmishes and the news from Generals Howe and Clinton that there were no military actions planned for Georgia, the *Scarborough* sailed north to Halifax, whereupon Wright embarked on his journey back to England.

Wright maintained the belief that his superiors could benefit from his advice and the experience he gained from governing a province in rebellion. While in England, he kept up correspondence with Loyalists in Georgia, who informed him about the state of the province. He then brought that information to Lord George Germain, who had replaced Dartmouth as Secretary of State for the Southern Department, in an attempt to persuade him to regain control over the colony while the patriots were otherwise distracted.¹⁰⁷ Wright and his supporters continued to urge Germain to retake Savannah, for they believed that the southernmost colony in rebellion had valuable resources that could be used in the war effort, could be governed successfully from Savannah, had ports that would be useful to naval operations, and could serve

¹⁰⁶ Russell, *Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia*, 73-74.

¹⁰⁷ Wright to Germain. 8 October, 1777, in *CGHS*, vol. 3, 246-247.

as a haven for Loyalists from other colonies.¹⁰⁸ From England this idea seemed realistic, but the governor would quickly come to appreciate the difficulties in carrying out his plans once back in the midst of rebellion.

When the British began to execute a new southern strategy for subduing the colonies, Savannah became an important focus. On December 29, 1778, British forces landed off Tybee Island, taking American general Robert Howe off-guard and gaining control of Savannah with ease. With the capital of the province back in British hands, Germain issued instructions to James Wright, giving him control of the civil government in Georgia with the purpose of showing the Americans that the empire did not intend to rule over them militarily, but would restore their governments as they had been before.¹⁰⁹ The British administration most likely asked Wright to return because he had been governor for almost twenty years in Georgia and had been very popular before the conflict escalated. The colonists had a great deal of respect for him, if not for the British Empire, which made Wright a good choice for reinstating government in Georgia.¹¹⁰ For his own part, Wright considered it his duty to attempt reconciliation between the people he once governed and the empire that held his loyalties. He once again boarded a ship across the Atlantic and arrived at Savannah with Lieutenant-Governor John Graham and Chief Justice Anthony Stokes in July 1779.

Wright's next three years in America were reminiscent of the years before his arrest in 1776. The British administration faced the same lack of coordination and understanding that Wright had encountered previously, while the Americans were more unified in their goals and in their efforts. As head of the British civil government in Georgia, Wright was chiefly concerned

¹⁰⁸ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 116-117.

¹⁰⁹ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 124-125.

¹¹⁰ Robert G. Mitchell, "Sir James Wright Looks at the American Revolution," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (December: 1969): 511.

with protecting the Loyalists in Savannah and with restoring peace to the area. This meant that he had to contend not only with his superiors in Britain, but also with the British military commanders upon whom he relied to defend the inhabitants of the city. Wright was in a position where he could see what the British administration could not; namely, the destabilizing effect of the rebel activity that sprang up after the army had moved north away from Savannah. While his superiors and the military focused on conducting their campaign northward, Wright was left with only a handful of troops to protect the city.

Though his superiors and the British military commanders thought the governor's requests for support were unfounded, Wright's prior experience with the rebellious colonists and his proximity to the violence unleashed by American raiding parties allowed him to understand the necessity of a military presence to maintain peace in Georgia. The governor's correspondence exposes fundamental problems in the structure of the British administration and in the coordination between civil government and military forces. In contrast with the American patriots, who were united in their goals both locally and across state borders, the British at different levels of command were at odds with each other. Wright's objectives did not match those of his superiors or the military, making his requests and advice seem unreasonable. Lord Germain and military commanders such as Clinton and Cornwallis believed they could depend on Loyalists to hold areas once the army had made initial efforts to subdue local rebels. If pro-British civilians could maintain control of their own surroundings, the army would be free to advance north and pacify other colonies.¹¹¹ Now engaged with the French and Spanish as well as the American patriots, the British army was focused on protecting its holdings in more than just the thirteen colonies in rebellion. The empire did not have enough troops to spend a concerted

¹¹¹ John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 199.

effort consolidating every locality. Wright and the Georgia Loyalists felt the repercussions of this policy as they were left to their own defenses against rebels in the backcountry. It was impossible for Wright to raise a functional civil government when the patriots continued to operate around Savannah and to have influence on the loyalties of its people. Though he requested support from the army commanders, they did not have the means to devote a substantial portion of their force to Savannah when they were spread so thinly over such a large empire. To the military and the administration—but not to Wright—the defense of Georgia was a luxury that could not be afforded. When local and imperial goals conflicted, the needs of the British Empire took precedence, leaving municipal authorities without the means to regain control over the province and ultimately allowing rebel resistance to continue until the war's end.

The American Enemy

Having witnessed the effective organization of the Continental Congress and the Sons of Liberty from 1774-1776, Wright was particularly conscious of the unity shown by Americans after his reinstatement in 1779. His letters and the memoirs of American commanders attest to the continued cooperation and aid existing between states that had not existed prior to the conflict. Though they were not free from their own disagreements between officers and difficulties in allocating military resources, the Americans were united in that they would not let Georgia be occupied by the British without resistance. The state's rebel civil government and military continued to respond to the Continental Congress, which made it clear that it would not allow Georgia to be taken without a fight. The leaders of the revolution could not afford to let one state in their association be taken by the British, as the loss of one province would call the mutual protection assured by the rest into question, thereby undermining the entire idea of a new united nation. Therefore, the Americans placed a greater importance on the retention of each

locality than did the British, who were focused on subduing the entirety of colonies in rebellion. The Georgians in rebellion continued to see themselves not as one isolated province, but as part of a larger whole engaged in a war for total independence.

The connection between Georgia and South Carolina patriots, which Wright had observed with increasing apprehension before his arrest, strengthened with the military operations that required support between the colonies. In 1781, Wright wrote to Germain stating his concern that rebels from the Carolinas would enter the Georgian back country and put the entire province in danger.¹¹² Since he routinely saw the violence committed by the rebels from the Carolinas and had been aware of the cooperation between the two colonies before returning to govern, Wright's experience led him to take specific note of the ties between Georgia rebels and their northern neighbors. The cooperation between the states meant that South Carolinians and Georgians could seek refuge wherever the British army was not present, and could resurface to perpetrate murders and raids as soon as the danger of a British force had passed.

William Moultrie, an American general from South Carolina, recalled the aid given to Georgia from South Carolina in his memoirs. He remembered when British commanders burned provisions in the areas surrounding Savannah upon hearing of the Americans' approach in 1782. Moultrie wrote, "The provisions were so effectually destroyed, that the Americans were obliged to depend chiefly upon South Carolina for their support."¹¹³ When the rebel civil government in Georgia feared a British attack and found its treasury empty, it appealed to South Carolina for aid. The patriots in that state responded with a \$100,000 loan to support the militia in the

¹¹² Wright to Lord George Germain, 5 March, 1781, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 337.

¹¹³ William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution: so far as it related to the states of North and South Carolina, and Georgia* (New York: David Longworth, 1802), 337.

backcountry.¹¹⁴ Wright was correct in his assessment of the strong connections between the two states. He saw that the Americans who had quarreled over colonial borders in the 1760s had come together a decade late to support each other against the British, and was rightfully alarmed by the implications of this united effort.

The unified cause of the Americans did not only exist between Georgia and South Carolina, but reached throughout the thirteen colonies. When rumors began to spread among patriots that the two southernmost colonies would be abandoned to the British, the Continental Congress issued an assurance that none of the new states would be left to the enemy. The Congress promised “that this confederacy is most sacredly pledged to support the liberty and independence of every one of its members, and...will unremittingly persevere in their exertions for the establishment of the same, and for the recovery and preservation of any and every part of these United States that has been or may hereafter be invaded or possessed by the common enemy.”¹¹⁵ The commitment of the states to each other’s defense through the Continental Congress was important for the rebels, who could feel as if they were supported by a larger national structure and that they had not been abandoned to the enemy.

At the same time that Wright was serving as the royal governor for the British in Georgia, a rebel government was also operating in the state. John Martin served as governor and issued proclamations with the support of his own council hoping to persuade Hessian soldiers and militiamen fighting for the British to defect to the Americans.¹¹⁶ Both the British and the rebels realized that a significant portion of the civilian population could be influenced and recruited to the support of one side or the other. It was therefore of the utmost importance to persuade those

¹¹⁴ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 126-127.

¹¹⁵ Moultrie, *Memoirs*, 220-221.

¹¹⁶ Wright to Under Secretary Knox, 16 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 374.

who had not already chosen a side through promises or by spreading hatred of the opposition.¹¹⁷ Martin's civil government did this in cooperation with the military forces led by Brigadier General Anthony Wayne, who was sent to Georgia by General Nathaniel Greene in the hopes that the British would be confined to Savannah.¹¹⁸ The collaboration between the American military and civil government was much more effective than the poor relationship between Wright and the British generals. Governor Martin used propaganda to convince a large number of the British forces protecting Georgia to join the patriots, while General Wayne kept the enemy confined to the city and maintained control of the backcountry. Though they did not force the British out of Georgia entirely, the rebels did cause Wright and his government great consternation, making them constantly fearful of their enemies' strength.

The American military and civil government in Georgia, while not particularly powerful, were able to rely on the support of other colonies and the Continental Congress to their benefit. Georgia patriots were secure in the knowledge that the Continental Congress could not dismiss them without raising the suspicions of other states that they might be forsaken next, thereby defeating the entire purpose of their union. Local Georgians knew they were connected to resources from across state borders, and did not feel entirely abandoned by their government. This outside aid allowed the Georgia patriots a degree of effectiveness and gave them common cause with Americans as far away as Pennsylvania. The same would not hold true for Wright in his experience as royal governor. The necessary mutual support of Americas was essential to their continued presence in Georgia and their ability to hold the backcountry, while British disunity in Georgia left them confined to Savannah looking for military aid.

¹¹⁷ Shy, *Numerous and Armed*, 219.

¹¹⁸ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 141-142.

British Local Government versus Imperial Administration

The defects in communication and understanding that had existed between Wright and his superiors before the governor's arrest did not disappear between 1776 and 1782. Although his experience and accomplishments qualified Wright to be reinstated as governor, the British administration attributed little overall importance to his civil government in the midst of a war, and did not give him enough credit. Though the governor had legitimate concerns and advice for his superiors, imperial authorities viewed his requests as outlandish and unnecessary. The rebellion exacerbated the lack of coordination between Wright and the British administration, as his local objectives were quite different from their agenda of subduing all thirteen colonies. While the administration seemed to think that the army could move on once military operations were successfully conducted in an area without much resistance remaining behind them, Wright observed that this was not the case. He witnessed the rebel activity in Georgia once the main body of British troops moved out. The administration, on the other hand, could not understand why Wright's government had not restored peace more quickly. Unlike the Americans, the objectives of local and imperial government were not aligned. This worked heavily to the disadvantage of the British and prevented Wright from pacifying the province.

Although Wright was in a better position than his superiors to understand the needs of his civil government and the situation in the province of Georgia, Lord Germain and others rarely gave serious consideration to his requests. Germain wrote to Undersecretary William Knox complaining about Wright's judgment that Georgia was not yet ready for another assembly to be elected because he doubted the loyalty of the inhabitants. Having lived through an era in which leaders of the rebellion had been elected to government, Wright was naturally wary of convening another disloyal assembly, and with good reason. But Germain discounted his

opinion, writing, “That opinion of his I trust is erroneous, and, among other things, makes me doubt whether he is equal to the undertaking of governing a province under the circumstances of Georgia.”¹¹⁹

Wright believed his civil government was instrumental in keeping the Province in British hands, and insisted that his observations on the state of affairs were valid.¹²⁰ Aware that his requests for aid were not being taken seriously, the governor explained to Germain that he had provided “the best & Clearest information I possibly could of the Situation of affairs here & it gives me great concern to find my Representations have had so little weight I most heartily wish the Consequences of it may not be of the most serious Nature.”¹²¹ Though Wright’s observations were justified—he later reported that known rebel leaders were walking around Savannah as if they had never been at odds with the British, and still had influence in the province—his superiors did not give them much credence.¹²² Wright was a valuable source to the empire for discerning the atmosphere of rebellion in Georgia, but his needs for the protection of the civil government did not fit with the military goals of his superiors, and were thus dismissed.

The British military and administration had a great deal more to worry about than Georgia from 1779-1782. After the Battle of Saratoga in 1777, France joined the Americans in the war against Britain. The involvement of a major European power was a major setback for Britain, as the arena of warfare expanded into the West Indies and even to the English Channel, threatening Britain’s imperial holdings and even England itself. Many considered this new element of the war to be vastly more significant and dangerous than the American push for

¹¹⁹ Germain to Knox, 12 March, 1779, Knox Papers, Clements Library, in Mitchell, “Wright Looks at the American Revolution,” 511.

¹²⁰ Wright to Knox, 16 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 371.

¹²¹ Wright to Germain, 1 May, 1781, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 348.

¹²² Wright to Germain, 17 August, 1780, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 312.

independence, and some even advocated ending the war in America and concentrating on defeating the French.¹²³ Though there was no immediate evidence that the French intended to invade Britain, they did have the naval resources to place nearly fifty ships of the line near British waters if they chose to do so.¹²⁴ The West Indies were also endangered by the French fleet, which put important British economic interests at stake. With the war in America going poorly and the West Indies threatened, the British were forced to commit the majority of their effort to protecting their imperial territories outside of the United States, leaving Clinton and Cornwallis with minimal troops.¹²⁵

There were different areas of opposition even within the areas in rebellion. Patriot militias existed throughout the thirteen states, attempting to gain the support of the rest of the population, hiding in the swamps when the army was present, and emerging again to raid Loyalist properties. This was the uncontrolled environment in which Wright attempted to establish civil government. But of even greater importance to the British military was George Washington's Continental Army. If that force could be defeated, the commanders believed, then resistance would crumble, former rebels would return their allegiances to the Crown, and the British would prevail.¹²⁶ This conflict between the protection from rebel militias on a civil level and the pressing need to defeat Washington's army divided the already thinly spread British forces.

To deal with the rebel presence that lingered far after British troops had moved on, and to accommodate the military's need to pacify a large territory, Germain and the military

¹²³ Shy, *Numerous and Armed*, 195.

¹²⁴ Piers Mackesy, *The War for America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), 355-356.

¹²⁵ Mackesy, *War for America*, 375.

¹²⁶ Shy, *Numerous and Armed*, 200-201.

commanders developed a strategy to use the Loyalist population in the south to maintain control over subdued areas once the army had departed. In this way, a small number of troops could be used to hold the entire south while the main body of the army moved north against Washington's army and through other areas that needed to be pacified.¹²⁷ The great flaw in this strategy was the degree to which it relied on Loyalists—many untrained and not as enthusiastic to engaged in military action—to suppress the remaining rebels. For Wright, this meant that the British would be actively opposed to sending him support in the form of troops, no matter how badly he thought they were needed for the protection of the Savannah citizens, who were supposed to be defending themselves. The governor would receive no aid in Georgia, which left the backcountry open to rebel activity and kept the British penned up in Savannah, useless to the greater war effort.

After retaking Savannah from rebel possession in 1779 on the orders of General Henry Clinton in New York, Lieutenant Colonial Archibald Campbell sent a request to his commander for more troops, but returned to England before completely subduing Georgia. Wright arrived a few months after his departure and found only about 1,000 British troops protecting Savannah from the rebels in the backcountry, which he did not consider enough for the defense of the city or for pacifying the rest of the province.¹²⁸ The governor's purpose in reestablishing a civil government was to show that the military would not control the inhabitants, but Wright soon found that a military presence was needed to protect the Loyalists in Savannah and to defend the area around Savannah, which was subject to raiding and violence. When French ships arrived in Georgia and laid siege to Savannah, the army again concentrated its efforts on holding the city. But after a British victory, General Clinton ordered the majority of troops onward to

¹²⁷ Shy, *Numerous and Armed*, 199.

¹²⁸ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 126.

Charlestown in January 1780, leaving Savannah stripped of most of its protection and vulnerable to the rebel opposition that still held the backcountry.¹²⁹ Once the British army under the command of Lord Cornwallis had captured Charlestown and moved into North Carolina in 1780, the patriots in the Georgia backcountry felt little pressure from their enemies, and were free to harass the Loyalists in and around Savannah.

Focused on the whole theater of war and not the stability of a local civil government, the British administration failed to understand that once the army moved north on its campaign, rebel forces would rise up to cause trouble for Wright and the Loyalists in Savannah. Germain frequently assumed that once the army had subdued an area, it would remain quiet after they left without a detachment of troops to maintain the peace. In his instructions to Wright before the governor arrived back in Georgia in 1779, Germain explained that although the military was moving on into South Carolina, it was very likely that Wright would need only return to Savannah and declare it at peace for it to be so.¹³⁰ A few years later in 1781, after Charles Town had surrendered to the British, Germain informed Wright that the army would be moving up to North Carolina and Virginia, but that the rebellion had entirely subsided in South Carolina with the British victory. The Secretary of State for the Southern Department hoped to encourage Wright with this news, assuring him that “These movements must of course deprive the rebelliously-disposed inhabitants of Georgia of all hope against overturning the King’s government...”¹³¹

Wright, who was in Georgia and could observe the aftermath of the army’s northward progress, knew otherwise. The governor witnessed the patriot forces that rose up after the British

¹²⁹ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 130-131.

¹³⁰ Germain to Wright, 31 March, 1779 in *Documents of the American Revolution: 1770-1783*, vol. 17, ed. K.G. Davies (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1979), 90.

¹³¹ Germain to Wright, 7 February, 1781, in *DAR*, vol. 20, 57

army moved north. Moultrie acknowledged this tactic in his memoirs, and recalled one such instance wherein “I was informed that the enemy had left the state of Georgia; upon that I advised the inhabitants thereof, to collect and attempt to gain as much of it as possible.”¹³² With his own property destroyed by the Americans and Loyalists fearing attacks from the rebels in the backcountry on a daily basis, Wright could not help but be frustrated when Germain wrote so cheerfully about the progression of the army away from Georgia.

Constantly reminded of how few forces remained to protect his civil government, Wright complained bitterly to his superiors and to military commanders about the situation in his province and his need for troops. While the governor struggled to bring peace to a province in rebellion, his superiors were focused on a larger goal. Germain was pleased with the progress of the military, while Wright felt the need to remind his superior that “Certainly the Progress of the King’s Army in N^o Carolina has been Rapid & the Advantages over the Rebels very great & Lord Cornwallis & his Army have acquired Laurels & much Honor but my Lord the Consequences have not been such as were wished and expected.”¹³³ The needs of the provincial government did not coincide with his superiors’ designs to conduct a campaign using Georgia as a launching point to proceed north into the Carolinas and Virginia. Without cooperation between the two levels of government, Georgia was left to the mercy of rebels in the backcountry who kept the province far from peaceful.

In August of 1780, Wright described the province as having no means of protection against rebel raiding parties, which infested the lands outside of Savannah, committing destructive acts of violence and murder.¹³⁴ In his memoirs, the American general Moultrie

¹³² Moultrie, *Memoirs*, 9.

¹³³ Wright to Germain, 5 May, 1781, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 349.

¹³⁴ Wright to Germain, 17 August, 1780, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 312.

supported Wright's assessment, remembering that Georgia "had been entirely laid to waste by the desolations of war: the rage between Whig and Tory ran so high, that what was called a Georgia parole, and to be shot down, were synonymous."¹³⁵ As governor of Georgia, Wright was fully aware that, contrary to the belief of his superiors, the rebellion was far from over in the southern colonies. In response to Germain's letters describing the success of British troops and his surety that Georgia rebels would soon disperse, the governor described the outrages committed by the patriots in the backcountry who were only encouraged by the distance of British forces. In 1782, just months before the British evacuation of Georgia, Wright penned the following letter to Germain:

I cannot ans^r for your Lordships intelligence from other Gentlemen, but *I* have not either *seen* or *heard* any thing like *Peace* or *Tranquility* here or in S^o Carolina since last February—We might have had *both* if the Troops had not gone into Virginia, but that Movement put an end to all Peace & Quietude this was, as I Plainly Saw & wrote your Lordship full 12 M^{os} ago--& S^o Carolina has been from that time & still is quite the *reverse* of being our Friend & Protector, as Your Lordship wishes & Expected.¹³⁶

Frustrated by his superiors' incorrect evaluation of affairs in Georgia, Wright could only continue to request support and offer advice while being repeatedly disregarded by those in Britain who could not understand the gravity of his situation.

The disconnect between Wright and the British administration stemmed from the distance separating the governor and his superiors, as well as their different agendas. Unable to observe and understand the extent of rebellion in Georgia, Germain did not have faith in Wright's correspondence. The governor's superiors believed that the Georgia Loyalists would help defend their own territory, and could not understand why Wright demanded troops from the military. When the Loyalists did not transfer their nominal support of the Empire into actions, the lack of material aid from the administration left Wright without the ability to restore peace to the entire

¹³⁵ William Moultrie, *Memoirs*, 336.

¹³⁶ Wright to Germain, 15 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 369.

province and without the means to establish an effective civil government. In trying to subdue rebellion in the entirety of the south, Wright's superiors had little patience for the complaints of a governor who they believed worried far too much about the backcountry. But from Wright's perspective, the absence of a formidable contingent of troops was devastating, and prevented him from carrying out his duties. The governor would receive a similar response from military commanders who were on the same side of the Atlantic as Wright, but who were much more concerned with their own maneuvers than with his ability to protect Georgia Loyalists and to reestablish government.

British Local Government versus Military Commanders

In his requests for military aid, Wright was forced to contend not only with his superiors in Britain, but also with the commanders of the British forces in America. Officers like Charles Cornwallis and Henry Clinton did not understand the problems that Wright faced in running a civil government without security in Savannah. Since the governor knew little about military operations, the army's commanders did not give his pleas serious consideration, despite the fact that his government was endangered. Like Germain, military leaders were focused on a larger campaign, with the goal of capturing major cities from rebel forces and facing the American army in the field. With the war now being conducted across the Empire and recruitment levels down, military commanders did not have troops to devote to the protection of local government.¹³⁷ The different concerns of the civil government and the military made cooperation between the two difficult, leaving Wright unable to effectively administer his province and allowing the Americans free reign in the Georgia backcountry.

¹³⁷ Mackesy, *War for America*, 369.

In 1779, the British military saw Savannah as a priority. When the French fleet appeared off the coast of Georgia and laid siege to the city in September, British General Augustine Prevost called for support and worked with Governor Wright to fortify the city's defenses.¹³⁸ Though at first the governor was afraid that the British would give Savannah up to the French, General Prevost responded to the French Admiral d'Estaing's terms of surrender that "it was the Unanimous opinion and Resolution of the *Civil* and Military that the Town should be Defended."¹³⁹ During the siege, the civil and military government worked together to defend the citizens of Savannah against the enemy presence. Facing the determination of the British and fearing the approach of hurricane season, the French fleet sailed away in October.¹⁴⁰ Wright's quarrels with the military began after this victory, when General Clinton ordered troops to move out of Georgia into South Carolina with the aim of taking Charlestown from the Americans. While the British army focused on its next battle, Wright's civil government was left without any means to restore peace in Georgia, and in the governor's own words, "Naked and Defenceless."¹⁴¹

Time and again the military commanders responsible for troop movement in the south failed to comprehend the difficulties Wright faced in reestablishing a civil government without adequate protection from the rebels in the backcountry. One of the governor's orders from Germain was to hold elections for the House of Assembly, thus reassuring the inhabitants of Georgia (and all Americans) that the British did not intend to rule over them by military strength, and would allow them to return to their previous form of government. Wright delayed issuing writs of election, fearing that he could not yet trust the loyalty of the populace in Savannah. This

¹³⁸ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 128.

¹³⁹ Wright to Germain, 5 November, 1779, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 260.

¹⁴⁰ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 128-129.

¹⁴¹ Wright to Germain, 6 November, 1779, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 269.

changed in 1780 following a proclamation put out by General Clinton that gave a pardon to all rebels who would offer themselves up to British forces and declare their allegiance to the Crown.¹⁴² The proclamation infuriated Wright, who feared that former patriots would come flocking to Savannah for protection, despite their former occupations committing violent acts its loyal inhabitants. The governor quickly issued writs of election before the decree could take effect, for he understood from previous experience that "...if these People Return, Many of them will have Influence Enough to get themselves Elected Members of Assembly."¹⁴³ General Clinton issued his proclamation with no thought or care as to how it might affect Wright's civil government in Georgia. Though the military would never see its repercussions on civil life, Wright thoroughly understood the implications of the proclamation and the potential disaster it could bring to Savannah. While the governor's civil government was meant to bring comfort to Loyalists, Clinton's proclamation allowed rebels to live under the pretense of loyalty, and even drove some who refused to take oaths to the British Empire over to the opposition.¹⁴⁴

Efforts to reestablish civil government in Savannah were further hindered by the murders and raids committed by rebels in the undefended areas around the city. When violent activity increased after the military moved into South Carolina, those who suffered were primarily Loyalists who had agreed to aid Wright in reestablishing peace and order. The governor wrote to Germain in 1781 describing one instance in which several parties of rebels had "...assassinated Eleven People, some of them in their Beds, & that the People Murdered were such as had very early shewn their Loyalty and attachment to Governm^t & who had been most active & usefull in Reducing the Rebellion & who were Principally to be depended upon for Magistrates & Militia

¹⁴² Shy, *Numerous and Armed*, 209.

¹⁴³ Wright to Germain, 14 March, 1780, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 280.

¹⁴⁴ Shy, *Numerous and Armed*, 209.

officers...”¹⁴⁵ The unwillingness of the military to contribute sufficient troops to Savannah actively harmed Wright’s efforts to establish government in the province, preventing him from carrying out the duties he was charged with upon being reinstated as governor.

The enmity between Wright and the commanders of British forces in America was well documented in correspondence. The governor blamed much of Georgia’s fractured state on the military’s failure to respond to his needs. Though their presence was sorely needed in the province for defense, the troops that did remain in Georgia quarreled with the governor over resources and often antagonized the inhabitants by plundering. Wright and other civil officials also believed the military to be jealous of the civil government’s authority in Savannah.¹⁴⁶ After finding his requests repeatedly ignored by commanders, the governor complained to Undersecretary William Knox,

The Generals &c. &c. have always Set their faces against this Province, as I have frequently Wrote you, and I Can’t tell why, unless it is because the King has thought Proper to Re-establish his Civil Government here—which the Military Cannot bear—and I have long Seen the will do Nothing for us, without a Positive order from home & which may now be too late.¹⁴⁷

When there was a small military presence in Georgia, the soldiers meant to be protecting the inhabitants often alienated them instead. Civilians were often intimidated by the army, which had no qualms demanding supplies and quarter from Georgian Loyalists. Often times the military’s obvious disregard for the distressing situation of civilians alienated the two groups. When the army moved on, Georgian inhabitants either realized everything they had disliked about the British and edged toward sympathy for the rebels, or felt abandoned and left to defend

¹⁴⁵ Wright to Germain, 5 March, 1781, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 335.

¹⁴⁶ Report of the Commissioners of Claims, included in Wright to Germain, 20 May, 1780, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 298.

¹⁴⁷ Wright to Knox, 16 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 371.

themselves, which also lost support for the military.¹⁴⁸ Wright was continually angered by what he considered to be the disrespectful attitude of the military and their disregard for his government. Indeed, the feelings seemed to be mutual, as letters from military commanders to Germain include their negative reactions to the governor's demands.

In 1782, General Clinton wrote to Lord Germain about Wright's concerns. He reported that nothing of significance had occurred in Georgia for some time, and that the governor's fears were inflated. Clinton included his belief that "...General Leslie will find himself sufficiently strong to send thither at least the reinforcement the governor wishes to have if General Green [sic] should move with a serious design against that post."¹⁴⁹ This letter shows that the military was concentrating on actual engagements with the Continental Army rather than the defense of civilians against rebel activity. When Clinton stated that nothing of consequence had taken place in Georgia, he was referring to the fact that there had been no major combat in the area. Other sources confirm that the province was far from peaceful or uneventful from a civil perspective. The general also puts the responsibility of sending reinforcements to Savannah on another commander, and then only if an American army appeared to be heading in that direction. The British army was not concerned with the type of activity that made Wright's position in Savannah difficult, but was attempting to engage the enemy rather than hold what had already been captured.

Having been in correspondence with Lord Cornwallis concerning prisoner exchange in 1779, the American General Moultrie heard from the British that "Gov. Wright and his chief justice, had just arrived at Savannah, and began to exercise his civil functions with a high hand, before the military had arranged their matters, which gave great offence to Col. Clarke, who

¹⁴⁸ Shy, *Numerous and Armed*, 233-234.

¹⁴⁹ Clinton to Germain, January 24, 1782, in *DAR*, vol. 21, 31.

commanded there...”¹⁵⁰ Even the Americans could see that the civil and military powers in Georgia were divided. Aware of the generals’ opinion of his requests, Wright despaired and gave up hope of receiving anything but dismissive responses from them.¹⁵¹ The lack of coordination between Wright’s government and the military put the British at a significant disadvantage in attempting to hold Savannah. The rebels in the Georgia backcountry, though not strong enough to attack the city outright, had but to raid the areas around Savannah and wait for the British to give up its occupation.

From 1779 to 1782, Wright pinned his hopes on the defense of Savannah on a request for 150 British cavalry to keep the rebels at bay. He appeal was not unfounded or unnecessary, for Americans committed their acts of violence and raiding on horseback, and could disappear before any troops were able to reach them on foot.¹⁵² In 1781, two years after his initial request, Germain responded to Wright, notifying him that “The scarcity of horses and horse-accouterments and the great use Lord Cornwallis found for cavalry were good reasons for his lordship’s unwillingness to spare you any...”¹⁵³ His superiors clearly siding with the military, Wright was left without much hope for reinforcements.

Wright’s hopes were raised when he received word from General Leslie that a contingent of soldiers would be sent to Georgia. But when the time came for the troops to leave for Savannah, Leslie changed his mind and countermanded the order.¹⁵⁴ Hearing reports that Clinton had nearly 20,000 troops with him, Wright could not understand why Savannah was not better

¹⁵⁰ Moultrie, *Memoirs*, 121.

¹⁵¹ Wright to Knox, 12 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 366-367.

¹⁵² Wright to Germain, 6 November, 1779, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 269.

¹⁵³ Germain to Wright, 4 June, 1781, in *DAR*, vol. 20, 153.

¹⁵⁴ Wright to Knox, 12 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 366.

protected from the rebels.¹⁵⁵ The military, on the other hand, believed his estimates of how much support was needed to be outrageous. In truth, troops were not spared for Savannah because the military commands' agendas were completely different than that of the governor's, they believed their goals to be more important to the outcome of the war, and their forces were spread too thin. While the military relied on civilian participation to shore up the army's efforts, commanders believe they could not afford to send troops to protect those civilians and their government at a local level.

Conclusions

In April of 1782, General Clinton once more required more troops to be moved out of Georgia to support the war effort to the north. General Leslie suggested that Georgia should be evacuated rather than leave Florida and South Carolina in a weakened state, and when Sir Guy Carleton replaced Henry Clinton as the British commander in North America, he was instructed to withdraw all troops from Savannah. Upon hearing of the orders to evacuate, the governor objected and suggested that the St. Augustine garrison could be moved to Savannah, but it was not to be.¹⁵⁶ Ultimately, Wright's civil government was not important enough to maintain as the war came to a conclusion.

As governor of a Loyalist city within a province in rebellion, Wright's position allowed him to observe what his superiors and the military could not. He saw that once the military moved north, the efforts of Loyalists in Savannah were not enough to keep peace in nearby areas or to regain control over the backcountry, which was in rebel possession. While the army believed that decisive victory over the Continental Army would go a long way toward ending the war, Wright knew that there was widespread support for revolution that would not disappear

¹⁵⁵ Wright to Germain, 16 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 370.

¹⁵⁶ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 143.

without a constant British military presence. Furthermore, the number of people sympathetic to the rebellion was growing, and could only be stopped by force rather than by weak proclamations hoping to gain the favor of rebels.

The military and administration could not acknowledge Wright's observations regarding local conditions without giving up the war. Since their strategies for executing the war factored in low troop numbers and an enthusiastic response from Loyalists, the military could not allocate troops to the protection of civil government in Savannah without halting their forward progress and pursuit of Washington's army. For the British Empire, committing troops to the protection of Georgia would mean abandoning their overall campaign to subdue the northern colonies. Wright, on the other hand, was so focused on his duty to Georgia that he could not come to terms with the fact that there were simply too few troops to give him protection. His focus was narrowed to his province—the high imperial stakes of the war were not of his concern. With the local and imperial government unable to appreciate each other's perspectives, British control in America suffered, allowing rebels to make a stronger, more unified showing to the rest of the civilian population.

Wright's assessment of the British failure to restore peace and effective civil government came in a letter to Undersecretary Knox in February of 1782, just a few months before the evacuation in July. He accused the administration of mishandling the province, writing the following in a letter to Germain:

...a Grand Error to Re-establish Civil Governm^t & not Support or Protect that Province against all Attempts whatever, this ought Certainly to have been done, as I Presume the intention was to be an Example to the other Colonies & to Shew the Difference between the Blessings of the Kings Peace & Civil Government &c. and Rebel Tyranny &c. but God knows we have had Little Peace here.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Wright to Knox, 23 February, 1782, in *GHSC*, vol. 3, 373-374.

Though the administration might have approved the idea of reestablishing a civil government in Georgia, they were not prepared to support it against rebel activity. Wright was left with orders and duties to carry out, but no material aid from the military to ensure that the Loyalist inhabitants of Savannah would be safe. Both the governor's superiors in administration and the commanders of the military were more concerned with a campaign against the Americans than ensuring that what they had already recovered remained stable. They did not understand Wright's situation and did not give credence to his complaints, despite the fact that he was the most qualified person to recognize the dangers of rebellion to the stability of the province. Strategies relying on Loyalists to protect themselves and to maintain peace after the army had moved on to its next engagement proved to be ineffectual and were at odds with Wright's need to establish government over those civilians. With the local civil government's goals completely different than those of the imperial administration and military, Wright's efforts to quell the rebellion in Georgia were in vain.

Conclusion

The last British troops evacuated Savannah on July 10 and 11, 1782, leaving the city open for the American civil government that was to replace Wright's administration. Higher estimates put the number of Loyalists who evacuated Georgia at around 3,100 whites and 3,500 slaves.¹⁵⁸ Many of these people went to East Florida and the Caribbean, but Sir James Wright returned to London for the last time, where his experiences as royal governor continued to affect his life. He became the head of a commission involved in obtaining compensation for Loyalists whose property had been seized when Georgia was lost. Wright himself had lost about £33,000 sterling over the course of the war, giving him cause to identify with the Loyalists and to aid them in recovering some of their assets.¹⁵⁹ He continued to help the Loyalists—who were, according to Bernard Bailyn, the real losers of the American Revolution—until his death in 1785 at age sixty-nine, just three years after the evacuation of Georgia.¹⁶⁰

Wright's correspondence with his superiors tells the story of the American Revolution in Georgia, not from the perspective of the patriot or the distant British administrator, but through the observations of the civil governor whose primary interest was the welfare of his colony. Georgia was perhaps the least likely of the colonies to join the rebellion. As the southernmost province, Georgia was in a geographical position that made it less likely to revolt. Though South Carolina put a great deal of pressure on the colonists, the Georgians were far removed from the nucleus of sedition in New England. A shared border with Florida and its status as a frontier colony also gave Georgians incentive to remain loyal to Britain. Established in the 1730s, it was

¹⁵⁸ Coleman, *Revolution in Georgia*, 144-145.

¹⁵⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, s.v. "Wright, Sir James, first baronet (1716-1785)" by Edward J. Cashin, accessed June 23, 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/30035>.

¹⁶⁰ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974): xi.

the colony with the freshest ties to the mother country, with many Georgians only one generation removed from England. Of the thirteen colonies that signed the Declaration of Independence, Georgia had the most incentive to stay out of the war. The fact that the province rebelled despite these numerous factors in favor of loyalty shows that the problems in administration and the differences between those in America and Britain could not be reconciled in any of the colonies. The flaws in the system that prevented the British from maintaining control in America were not limited to Georgia, but existed in all thirteen colonies that chose to seek independence.

Sir James Wright was a particularly competent governor, as evidenced by his handling of the Stamp Act Crisis. Well-loved by the Georgian colonists, he was often able to use his personal influence to avert violence. But in the years leading up to the revolution and during the war, even Wright's authority was not powerful enough to prevent Georgians from sending a delegation to the Second Continental Congress. As the passions of the colonists became more difficult to subdue and his superiors failed to send adequate material support, Wright could not maintain control of his government. His perspective as a local civil authority trying to preserve peace in his province is significant in understanding the problems in the British system. The governor's letters highlight these issues between local and imperial authority in Georgia, which explain why the British were not able to subdue the colonies in the face of continued resistance from a large segment of the population.

Georgian patriots might never have joined the revolution without the assistance and sense of unity provided by the Continental Congress and Councils of Safety. These organizations enabled the rebels to present a unified front to the British government, as observed by Wright in his complaints to his superiors about the support given to Georgia patriots from South Carolina and other colonies. These groups were able to garner support for the revolutionary movement

across all thirteen colonies. The extent of their organization exceeded the powers of any one colonial governor and was a surprise to the British administration, which hoped to exploit the vast differences between colonies that existed prior to 1765. While the Americans were united in most of their goals and were obligated to protect each state that had declared independence during the war, Wright's local government was at odds with the British imperial administration.

Britain lost the American Revolution in part because it attempted to fight an offensive war without the number of troops needed to maintain control of apparently subdued areas. When the French and Spanish became involved in the conflict, Britain was forced to defend its own borders and its other colonial holdings in the Caribbean with troops while also fighting in America. This comes through in Wright's correspondence when military officers could not afford to leave a large contingent of troops behind to maintain control of Georgia. Though still needed in Georgia, the British troops were also needed elsewhere, as there were too few soldiers to protect such a large imperial territory. Though the governor required forces in Savannah to support his authority and to protect Loyalists, the military and imperial administration needed to take the offensive and march north into the Carolinas, leaving Wright without a force to protect his government. Limited in troops, the British could not maintain control in one colony without failing to conquer and protect the rest, thereby losing the war. They could not leave troops protecting Georgia, as they it would mean having too few soldiers to advance further and subdue the remaining states in rebellion. With no way to protect the south while also advancing north, Georgia became a lost cause.

In his letters, Governor Wright identified the flaws in communication and differences in agenda that gave his superiors reason to ignore his advice, leaving him without the resources to administer a colony in rebellion. While his correspondence shows that the trans-colonial

organization of the patriots was a major reason for Georgia's eventual involvement in the revolution, the governor's inability to coordinate with the British imperial administration is even more apparent. Although he had proven his competency many times over and was attuned to the situation in Georgia, his superiors rarely took Wright's requests and advice seriously, as local and imperial goals did not align. The geographical distance of the administration from the colonies where events were taking place was a major problem, mainly because communication was easily lost or waylaid and because British authorities could not fully appreciate the situation as described by the governor. Ultimately, Wright's efforts did not prove enough to keep peace in Georgia without the full support of the British administration, which could not afford to protect one colony at the expense of risking a homeland invasion or losing the colonies to the north.

The defects in cooperation between local and imperial government prevented Wright from controlling his province, which was not a pivotal holding for the British Empire, but was one that could not be ignored by the Americans without compromising their cause. Wright's correspondence demonstrates that the situation in Georgia was such that had the imperial administration been able to effectively cooperate with the civil government in the province, the colony could have remained in British hands. But the possession of Georgia would only come at a high price—the abandonment of the north to rebel control. Georgia's independence might be called an American success, but it was more of a British failure. Because the empire could not commit to the protection of one colony without losing the whole, Wright and the Georgia Loyalists were abandoned by their government and eventually evacuated from their homes. Georgia's unique role in the American Revolution shows that even under the most favorable circumstances, the British administration could not maintain control over its colonies once a significant population in all thirteen provinces had taken up the mantle of rebellion.

Abbreviations

- CGHS* *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*. Vol. 3. Savannah, Georgia, 1873.
- CRG* *Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*. Ed. Allen D. Candler. 32 vols. New York, 1970.
- CRG* *Colonial Records of Georgia*. Ed. Kenneth Coleman and Milton Ready. 32 vols. Athens, Georgia, 1976.
- DAR* *Documents of the American Revolution: 1770-1783*. Ed. K.G. Davies. Dublin, 1979.

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