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Mrs. Newkirk

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This is an interview of Mrs. Ne Kirk of Rincon, Georgia. Her family- the Helmys- came from Germany with the original Salzburger who settled at Ebenezer in Effingham County.

Interviewed by: Debbie and Sandra Ulmer

Mrs. N. The Salzburger was a colony of people that landed at Old Ebenezer in 1734. They came from Salzburg, Austria, at that time was Salzburg, Germany. And they The Catholics forced them away from their homes. They got help from the king, and they traveled around about a year before they came on to America. It was a Lutheran Colony, and the church was actually formed before they left to come to America. They settled at what was known as Old Ebenezer. Really, they were in contact with Oglethorpe in Savannah, and he helped them a place. And they came up to Abercorn, and then they came on to Old Ebenezer and established a homestead there. And they stayed at Old Ebenezer for two years, but it was such a low place, and there was so much sickness until they got permission from Oglethorpe to move higher and close to the river. So they moved from Old Ebenezer to what is now, we know, Ebenezer. It's on the bank of Savannah River. They were people that came from a mountainous country, and they settled in the swampland, and there was so much fever and hardships, that so many of them died, there would be several that would die in one day. On account of the water that they drank was one of the things. The town of Ebenezer was copied from the plans of the city of Savannah. Ebenezer was one of the churches that was established before the Revolutionary War, and it was used during the American War for independence. The British under Colonel Archibald Campbell occupied the town of New Ebenezer and used the Church building first as a hospital and later as a stable for the cavalry horses. Due to the death of so many of the mothers at childbirth, they had to do something about the children, and they had the first orphanage, I think, in the United States. And they built this orphanage home, and today this museum that they have at Ebenezer is a copy of the orphanage although it's built in much better material. When they decided to build a better church, and they were going to build this brick building, they made the bricks down at the river. And the women would bring them in their aprons up the river bank up to where the Church is located. And that's how they got the church built. And the silver bells that they had there- well one of them's a silver bell, I don't know about the other- was given by John Wesley.

Reverend John Martin Bolzeus and Reverend Israel Christian Grenau were the pastors. And the first of four transports of Salzburger exiles arrived at Savannah on March 12, 1734. In 1779, the thriving town of Ebenezer was captured by the British. 1783, the Continentals under General Anthony Wayne drove the British out of Ebenezer. And in July 1782, the Georgia legislature met in the church. And all that remains of the town now is that the Lutheran people in the neighborhood still worship in the church. The town wasn't successful due to fever, diarrhea, and diphtheria.

The town of Rincon was when they put the railroad track. See, people came out to the trains. You know, that's how all the little towns got started.

- S. U. That's how it started, because it was a train station ?
- Mrs. N. They were putting the railroad track through.
- S. U. How many years was ther in between that time ? (Between the fall of Ebenezer and the growth of Rincon)
- Mrs. N. Oh, a hundred years.
- S. U. This wasn't anything in between ?
- Mrs. N. Just trails, I guess. Oh, the Salzburgers were friendly with the Indians. Tomichichi was very good to them. They would kill meat, a deer, and cook it and bring it to the Salzburgers, but the would stay there and wait and see that it was divided.
- D. U. The Indians would ?
- Mrs. N. Um-hum. They wouldn't give it to them and just walk away. They wanted to see that, you know, everybody got some.
- D. U. What's Tomichichi famous for ?
- S. U. He gave the land to Oglethorpe.
- Mrs. I. One of the squares in Savannah, you know, is named after Tomichichi. He was very friendly with the white men. You know, he taught them how to grow corn.
- S. U. He persuaded the Indians to give the land to Oglethorpe, too, didn't he ?
- Mrs. N. I imagine so.
- S. U. Was Ebenezer and Savannah governed on the same lines ?
- Mrs. I. Yes, they were under, I guess you'd call it, ruled in a fashion by oglethorpe. See, they were expecting the Spanish to come in here. And to protect Savannah, they put these little colonies around, and some people that have studied it said that's why they put the Salzburgers up here to protect them. And, you know, different colonies that were coming in. See, there was three transports that came, therr ships. The Purzburg was the first ship that came, and they were strictly religious people. They came for religious rights, but they weren't able to feed themselves, and they weren't skilled in things enough to take care of themselves. So, then, some

skilled laborers came in, like a cobbler and carpenters that could build, and they had special titles for them that came later. And they were the ones that built up the town. Because they had no way of getting anything. Even if they had money, they couldn't buy anything. They had to produce everything they used. And, of course, they had to have somebody that was skilled in building. And the ladies learned to weave and things like that because they'd have to make their cloth. They would send materials and things over, but, you see, the ships came over so seldom until, well, they just didn't have things to do with.

- S. U. Who was the leader of the Salzburger's ?
- Mrs. N. Bolzeus and Grenou.
- D. U. About how much acre did Ebenezer take in ?
- Mrs. N. I know they gave each person a lot for a home, and then they would give them some acreage for a farm. But they lived close together, because they depended on each other for help and in time of sickness or any danger or anything like that. They had to depend greatly on the neighbors.
- D. U. About how many were in the group that came over ?
- Mrs. N. Seems like it wasn't but fifty-something.
- D. U. Altogether ?
- Mrs. N. In the first the group.
- S. U. How many groups came ?
- Mrs. F. Three. I think our family came on the second transport.
- D. U. Did a lot of the families from Ebenezer settle in Rincon and Effingham County afterwards ?
- Mrs. E. Yes, and a lot of them moved away. I think it's toward the back (of the church) you can see the handmade bricks. You can see the fingerprints.
- D. U. On the church ?
- Mrs. N. On the bricks.
- From 1736 to 1767, the town grew into a thriving community of some 1,000 persons and had gained some degree of prosperity. In 1767, the decision to build a permanent church building was made and actual construction started under the leadership of the pastors, Lembke and Rabenhurst. And the church was finished in 1769.
- S. U. How many more years did they hold up until it fell?

- Mrs. N. That was gradual. People gradually moved away. You take in my daddy's day, they all lived out there and everything. Around 1890, they were working on putting the railroad through here, and a lot of them moved from Ebenezer to Rincon. My grandfather moved out here. And then gradually, as they married, they moved away - the young people. One reason the young people left the church was because they had the services in German, and the old German people would not accept the English language. And, as the young people came along, they'd go to the churches that used the English language.
- S. U. Well, if they moved from Ebenezer to Rincon, if Rincon wasn't here yet, how'd they do that?
- Mrs. N. Well, they would go down to Goshen. I think they went to Goshen a lot. That's this little church as you come in. That once belonged to the Ebenezer Church. And they would walk from Ebenezer to Goshen.
- D. U. About how many miles is that?
- Mrs. N. Oh, from Rincon it's five miles to Ebenezer, and then to Goshen, it's three. That's eight miles.
See, Abercorn was a kind of a settlement, but they would go across the river. They'd go over to Purzberg a lot. And, see, a lot of the Salzbergers married people from South Carolina. They would come across the river in boats from over - well - they mention Purzberg, but I don't know of other places, whether they would come. Because Charleston had already been settled.
During the Revolutionary War, I told you, the church was used for a hospital, and then it was used for a stable, because the British had took over the town.
- D. U. Do you know how Rincon got it's name?
- Mrs. N. Yep, I can tell you everything about Rincon. Rincon was named by George D. Wadley. And he named it for a little prosperous town in Mexico. The word "rincon", I think, means "small." I think he was a surveyor, because his name is on the map at the courthouse of the town of Rincon, and he signed it as a surveyor. So, he must have surveying for the railroad. And they came in here about 1890 to build the railroad. And when they did, different people came and built little stores and things like that, you know, for the railroad people. And they had a boarding house for the railroad people. And it was just like any new town. Rincon thrived. It did a lot of business back in the early, early days. Let's see, I'll show you some of the stores and things in Rincon. In the beginning, it was mostly people that came in with the railroad and people that were following the railroad. Now, there was one of the stores. That was the post office. That's

my daddy standing there. That was his store right across from the depot. And the depot was right in the center of town.

D. U. What was your family's name ?

Mrs. N. Helmy.

D. U. And they came in with the second transport ?

Mrs. N. I think we came in on the second.

D. U. Has most of your family been here ever since ?

Mrs. N. Um-humm. But there's not too many Helmys left. A few of them - a cousin moved to South Carolina; some of them moved to Savannah, and that's all.

D. U. What were some of the original families ?

Mrs. N. The Gnanns, the Waldhours, Seckingers, Zittrouers, Dashers, Kesslers, Reizers.

D. U. Most of those families are still here aren't they ?

Mrs. N. Um-humm.

D. U. What is left of Ebenezer now? Just the cemetery and the church ?

Mrs. N. Just the church. And the Ebenezer community where some of the older families are living, but now they're selling the land. New people are moving in. There's a lot of new people that's moved in in the last five years.

D. U. Down where Ebenezer was ?

Mrs. N. Not down at the church but that area. There by Long Bridge, there's a lot of people. They're all new people - out of town people.