

# **WHITEFIELD, GEORGE, 1714-1770.**

## **George Whitefield letters, 1739-1769**

Emory University  
Pitts Theology Library  
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### **Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Whitefield, George, 1714-1770.  
**Title:** George Whitefield letters, 1739-1769  
**Call Number:** Manuscript Collection No. 453  
**Extent:** .5 cubic feet (1 box)  
**Abstract:** A collection of letters written by George Whitefield, a popular evangelical preacher in the eighteenth century.  
**Language:** Materials entirely in English.

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### **Administrative Information**

#### **Restrictions on Access**

Unrestricted access.

#### **Terms Governing Use and Reproduction**

All requests subject to limitations noted in departmental policies on reproduction.

#### **Source**

Purchase, 1911.

#### **Custodial History**

These letters were part of the R. Thursfield Smith Wesleyana Collection, which Warren Akin Candler purchased from W. H. Smith in 1911. The materials in this collection were originally part of the Theology Library's collection, though transferred at one point to the Rose Library (part of the MSS100 collection), and transferred back to Pitts Library in January 2018. Some materials were previously part of an oversized bound volume containing letters of Wesley family members and other earlier Methodists. These letters were removed from the bound volume due to conservation concerns and all of these letters are marked with the note OBV1 and a page number to retain provenance information.

**Citation**

[after identification of item(s)], George Whitefield letters, MSS 453, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

**Processing**

Processed by Brandon Wason, April 2020.

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**Collection Description****Biographical Note**

George Whitefield was born in Gloucester, England, on December 16, 1714. His parents, Thomas Whitefield and Elizabeth Edwards, were proprietors of the inn where Whitefield was born. In 1732, Whitefield entered Pembroke College, Oxford University. The following year he joined the Holy Club, a group led by John Wesley that was focused on spiritual and academic discipline. The term "Methodist" was first applied to members of this group. After John and Charles Wesley departed Oxford for colonial Georgia, Whitefield took over the Holy Club. He graduated from Pembroke with bachelors in 1736.

In 1737, John Wesley returned from Georgia after an unsuccessful stint as the pastor of Christ Church in Savannah. Whitefield was Wesley's replacement in Savannah. He arrived in 1738. Whitefield's role in Savannah was only temporary because he was not yet ordained as an elder in the Church of England, yet while there he was moved by the need to establish a home for orphans. He returned to England for his ordination, which took place in 1739. While back in England, Whitefield raised funds for the Bethesda Orphanage. Whitefield also made a name for himself as an eloquent preacher at this time. He amassed a large following and began preaching in the fields because he was not welcomed in most Anglican churches at the time, partly because his large crowds were a nuisance but also because he criticized the spirituality of many Anglican clergy. Whitefield entrusted to John Wesley the communities that he organized in England. Later, Whitefield and Wesley would have a falling out over the theological issue of predestination.

In 1740, Whitefield constructed the orphanage in Savannah and continued to support the orphanage through his itinerant preaching ministry. Whitefield was a major figure in the Great Awakening, a series of revivals throughout the British colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. He drew large crowds from Georgia to Maine and became known as one of the most famous people in colonial America. Benjamin Franklin, in his journal, recalls hearing Whitefield preach in Philadelphia on more than one occasion. Franklin, a printer by trade, printed some of Whitefield's works.

Despite maintaining an arduous preaching schedule, Whitefield battled ill-health for much of his life. He died at the age of 55, on September 30, 1770, in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Whitefield was interred at the Newburyport Presbyterian Church, which he helped to found. His tomb became a pilgrimage site. Phillis Wheatley, the first African American woman to publish a book, memorialized Whitefield with a poem that earned her fame throughout the colonies. John Wesley preached the sermon at Whitefield's memorial service in London. Though Whitefield is remembered as a widely successful preacher and evangelist, he did not organize a religious movement like John Wesley did with Methodism. Nevertheless, Whitefield's influence on

American religious history should not be underestimated as he contributed significantly to the evangelical movement more broadly.

**Scope and Content Note**

This collection contains thirteen letters in total: twelve written by George Whitefield to various recipients and one letter written by Bishop Martin Benson to George Whitefield. The letters represent a large portion of Whitefield's itinerant ministry (1739-1769). The first three letters are part of a correspondence between George Whitefield and Bishop Martin Benson on the subject of Whitefield's field preaching, of which Benson disapproved. Whitefield also corresponded with notable Methodists such as Charles Wesley and Howell Harris.

Whitefield also corresponded with his nephew, James Whitefield, at the Savannah Orphanage. In Whitefield's letter to Eleazar Wheelock, he describes the "great awakening" taking place in New England during his 1764 tour of the area.

**Arrangement Note**

Arranged chronologically.

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## Container List

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	George Whitefield letter to Martin Benson (1689-1752; Bishop of Gloucester), 1739 Jul 2, Gloucester; ALS, 3 pages [OBV1:30]
1	2	Martin Benson (1689-1752; Bishop of Gloucester) letter to George Whitefield, 1739 Jul 3, Gloucester; ALS, 1 page [OBV1:31]
1	3	George Whitefield letter to Martin Benson (1689-1752; Bishop of Gloucester), 1739 Jul 24, London; ALS, 2 pages [OBV1:32]
1	4	George Whitefield letter to Howell Harris, 1741 Dec 28, Bristol; ALS, 3 pages [OBV1:33]
1	5	George Whitefield letter to Walter Peters, 1758 Oct 15, Rotheram; ALS, 2 pages
1	6	George Whitefield letter to [James Whitefield?], [1759?], no place; ALS, 2 pages (fragment)
1	7	George Whitefield letter to James Whitefield [his nephew in Savannah], 1759 Apr 12, London ALS, 2 pages (partially mutilated)
1	8	George Whitefield letter to [Wells], 1762 Jun 10, London; ALS, 2 pages
1	9	George Whitefield letter to Charles Wesley, 1762 Jul 29, Norwich; ALS, 3 pages
1	10	George Whitefield letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 1764 Apr 19, Boston; ALS, 2 pages; and note on verso by William Allen, September 26, 1857, Northampton, 1 page [OBV1:34]
1	11	George Whitefield letter to "My Dear Professor" [unaddressed], 1767 Jul 14, London; ALS, 2 pages
1	12	George Whitefield letter to William Lunell, [1768?], no place; ALS, 3 pages (trimmed)
1	13	George Whitefield letter to Andrew Kinsman ("My Dear Timothy"), April 25, 1769, Bristol; ALS, 1 page

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