

The Romance of John Wesley

By Jeannette Holland Austin



John Wesley

Mrs. Wesley of Lincolnshire, England had seven sons who were ministers of the Gospel. When General Oglethorpe visited the family in Epworth to convince the lady to send one of her sons to Georgia, she declared that she regretted that she only had her two youngest sons to give to the cause, the others already engaged. They were clerics of the new religion of Methodism. It was catching on, but still unpopular. On the voyage over, the brothers had compassion for the savages and a strong desire to teach the Gospel to the Creeks in the region. John Wesley settled in Savannah and Charles Wesley in Frederica.

St. Simons Island.



Fort Frederica

Charles Wesley found it difficult to convince the settlers at Frederica to attend church service. They had never heard of the Methodists, and had no use for the strictness of a religion. As a result, they only allowed him residence inside a tiny hut built of palm leaves where they frequently tested his patience by removing his clothes and toothbrush. Too, there were frequent disputes amongst the colonists and Wesley found himself in the mix. Particularly, when Mrs. Anderson, whose husband owned a apothecary shop, called upon Wesley to chastise her maid, instead of chastising the maid, he tried to convince her to employ patience towards her maid. She exploded in a tirade of anger and revenge. Wesley was surrounded by rowdy opposition against prayer books, communion and the rituals of religion. Certain persons stayed up all night, drinking and disrupted church service by the firing of guns.

Savannah. John Wesley encountered a similar distaste for religion by the bawdy types of Savannah. His plea for a church building went unheeded. In fact, many years passed before the trustees enacted an allowance for a building, and even then its construction was sadly neglected. John Wesley

had one ardent admirer, a niece of the Magistrate, Thomas Causton. She was young and impressionable and bore an infatuation for Wesley. He taught her the catechism and took her along when he visited the Creeks.

All was well until the minister fell sick and Sophie went to visit him at his room in Savannah and nursed him for a day or so. During her care of him, Sophie had the impression that John would propose marriage. But Wesley was a poor minister without the means to support a wife. Too, his passion was to convert the savages. When he did not propose, she was so embarrassed that she told her uncle that he had humiliated her by not proposing marriage. Gossip spread. To save face, Sophie rushed back to her mother's home in Charleston. She soon met Thomas Williamson, an unsavory fellow who took advantage where he could. They were married a week or so later. Sophie took Williamson to Ockstead.

The following Sunday, the Williamsons attended church service. To attract the attention of Reverend Wesley, Sophie made a point of introducing her new husband. However, when she went to the altar, Wesley refused to give her communion! He gave the reason that she had not given notice of her intention. The public embarrassment was the last straw. Sophie's humiliation required satisfaction. Thomas Causton visited the minister wherein Wesley explained that it was the rule of the church that when one intended to take communion, they must give prior notice. Sophie was not satisfied. She urged her uncle to file a petition of petty charges against the minister. A long list of complaints from various persons added up to twenty-two charges. The nature of these charges were petty and vindictive and had no legal basis in the court. Nonetheless, Causton used his influence to bring the case and agreed not to be the judge. They had a trial, and a long list of petty charges and the refusal of communion to Mrs. Williamson, was read. Wesley repeated the same careful explanation of church rules he'd made to Causton.

After the first day of the trial, Causton insisted that Wesley make bond, or

be jailed. The poor minister had no money, and the judge was sympathetic. Wesley was allowed to return home that evening and return the following day. But fearing that the magistrate would put him in jail the following day, Charles wasted no time in arranging passage to Savannah. As the evening tide rolled out, his destination was Charleston where he would make passage back to Epworth. During the voyage, he wrote a letter to his brother describing his disillusionment in the new colony, and a short while later the unhappy Charles Wesley followed.

What Happened to Sophie.

The Wesley brothers were gone from the colony. The Williamsons returned to Ockstead. Thomas and Martha Causton had no children and Sophie was the only heir. Martha died soon thereafter, and the Williamsons were left in charge of the plantation. But Thomas Williamson was lazy and no account. He did nothing to improve agricultural conditions or contribute to its prosperity. After the drowning of Thomas Causton, they had no other recourse except to return to the home of her mother in Charleston. The plantation fell into a state of disrepair and neglect. There is no evidence of the remains of the lovely home which once overlooked Causton's Bluff and Augustine Creek as described by William Stephens.