

A Colonial Love Story



John Wentworth, my wife's 6th great grand uncle, lived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. And even though he was smitten with his cousin, Frances Deering Wentworth, who felt the same affection for him, as a loyalist, John had political aspirations. And so to Frances' dismay, he "went to England, no positive pledge of marriage passing between them."

In his absence, another cousin, Theodore Atkinson Jr., wooed Frances, winning her heart. He proposed to her, and they married on 13 May 1762 when she was 16 years old. She sat for her portrait at the age of nineteen.

Sadly, a few years later, Theodore developed a "lingering illness," and was expected to die. During that time, John Wentworth had returned to the Province of New Hampshire as the newly appointed royal governor of the colony.

The Wentworth and Atkinson families lived in houses within view of each other. If the ancient gossip is true, Frances had various methods of communicating to John how her husband's health was faring, by hanging a handkerchief out of her window.

On 28 October 1769 Theodore Atkinson Jr. died. The event that followed caused at least a few colonial jaws to drop.

"On one day Theodore breathed his last. His burial took place on the following Wednesday; by the Governor's order all the

bells in town were toiled, flags were hung at half-mast, and minute-guns were fired from the fort and from the ships-of-war in the harbor. On Sunday the weeping widow, clad in crapes, listened in church to the funeral eulogies; on Monday her affliction was mitigated; on Tuesday all the fingers of the seamstresses of the country roundabout were flying; and on the next Sunday, in the white satins and jewels and fardingales [hooped skirts] of a bride, she walked up the aisle the wife of Governor Wentworth." [from *New England Legends* by Harriet E.P. Spofford, 1871]

The colonists' victory in the American Revolution made John the last royal governor of the New Hampshire colony. After fleeing the country, Frances was appointed a lady-in-waiting at the court in England, and John was given the governorship of Nova Scotia as a reward for his loyalty.

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