

SIR JOHN WENTWORTH AND THE PRETTY MAROON

In the summer of 1941, (when I was doing research for "His Majesty's Yankees" in the Provincial Archives, Halifax) the Assistant Archivist, Dr. James Martell, pointed out a portrait of Sir John Wentworth.

Then plain John Wentworth, former Governor of New Hampshire, this ardent Loyalist came to Halifax in the exodus from Boston in 1776, and departed with General Howe's army to New York. After the war he returned to Halifax with the post of Surveyor General of the King's Woods. In 1792 he became Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, and in 1795 received a British baronetcy. His wife, Lady Frances, had been notorious for her extra-marital love affairs.

Martell told me that, from time to time, a man of Negro blood named John Wentworth Collie came into the Archives to look at the picture of what he called "my great-grandfather, Sir John Wentworth". This very old man, J.W. Collie, lived on what was formerly the Wentworth estate at Preston, near Dartmouth.

Martell was incredulous at first, but he had satisfied himself that there were good grounds for believing Collie's statement. The History of Dartmouth, Lawrencetown and Preston, published in 1893, was edited and annotated by Harry Piers, then curator of the Provincial Museum at Halifax, who added valuable explanatory notes. The author was Mrs. William Lawson, born Mary Jane Katzman in 1828.

Her grandfather John Prescott purchased Maroon Hall at Preston in 1811, and called it Mount Cleverley after the maiden name of his wife. He died there aged 60 in 1820. In 1821 the widow Prescott sold Maroon Hall to a retired army officer, a widower named Christian Conrad Katzman. He married Martha Prescott, daughter of John, in 1822.

Their daughter Mary Jane, later Mrs. William Lawson, mentioned the clandestine love affair between Sir John Wentworth and a pretty Maroon woman, in her history of Preston. As her mother's people, the Prescotts, were living in Dartmouth at the very time when Sir John Wentworth was so busy on his Preston estate, she must have got the story from them. If not, they were well able to deny or confirm it. Certainly there was a definite legend in Preston and Dartmouth that Wentworth had an affair with one of the Maroons, and that there was a child of that affair.

In April 1947 I made a tour of Dartmouth and Preston with John P. Marten, who was then preparing the history of Dartmouth which he published in 1957. Finally we visited the site of Governor Wentworth's "farm". I quote from my diary entry, written the same day:-

"The Governor's farm is on a magnificent site, a steep rounded hill commanding a view for miles around. A negro family named Collie have a house close by the depression of the old Wentworth cellar. Old Collie (full name John Wentworth Collie) now in his 90's, is a grandson (note, this should read great-grandson -THR) of the great governor by one of Wentworth's serving wenches, a good-looking Maroon. Old Collie boasts, 'Ah, I got high blood in me!', and the local inhabitants say his father had refined Caucasian features and a fine manner, although his skin was very dark. We talked to John Wentworth Collie's grand-daughter, a healthy and intelligent young woman as black as the ace of spades, and sat a long time in the

Collie kitchen, trying to get some information about the governor's farmhouse. Very little survives except the fact that the governor had a cannon for firing salutes on holidays and to greet distinguished visitors, and the site of the gun-stand is still to be seen."

"The Story of Dartmouth" by John P. Martin, B.A., LL. D., deals mainly with Dartmouth itself, and makes little mention of Preston. There are some references to the Maroons, and the fact that Sir John Wentworth had a summer home on a Preston hilltop. He says nothing of the illicit love affair, although at the time I was with him he firmly believed it.

In his later years Mr. Martin was instrumental in transforming a former garbage and refuse dump into a small and attractive public park, which he named Wentworth Park in honour of Sir. John.

In his 80th year, Mr. Martin wrote me as follows:-

The statement on page 220 of Mrs. Lawson's History of Dartmouth, that George Colley was an illegitimate coloured son of Sir John Wentworth is entirely untrue, according to 87 year old William Hartlen of Westphal, who at one time ran a farm near the Wentworth site. Mr. Hartlen purchased what was known as the Philips farm, located on the opposite side of Governor Street and about 200 yards east of the Wentworth place where you and I were that Sunday afternoon, when as you say the Colley descendants "boasted of their ancestry".

William Philips was born in 1790, and on Jan.1, 1825 married Mary Jordan. Their children were Frances, William and Robert. Frances was born in 1830 and died in 1919.

Frances often told the Hartlens that her mother stated definitely that the father of George Colley was an Irishman, a workman on the Governor's place. According to Mr. Hartlen, Frances used to say that her mother told her that "Sir John Wentworth would not stoop to such a thing."

I told Mr. Hartlen that John Colley, a grandson of George, told me many years ago that he was really descended from Sir John. But Mr. Hartlen pooh-pooed all that, saying that's what the Colleys would like people to believe. Asked where the name came from, Mr. Hartlen said they were all known as "coolies".

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Who are we to believe? Mary Lawson, daughter and grand-daughter of intelligent and refined parents who lived in the Preston scene? Dr. James Martell, a trained historian and archivist, who had satisfied himself that the Lawson and Colley accounts were correct? Or the farmer William Hartlen, reciting something at third hand through ~~xxxx~~ Frances Philips, who died poor and alone in a Preston shack in 1919, and who thought the word "coolies" referred to Negroes when actually it was of Hindu origin and referred to Asiatics?

*J.H.R.*