

# Hearts Of Edenton

Love and Marriage in Historic Edenton

The Love Triangle:  
Hannah & James Iredell

This week, we are sharing the dramatic love story of James and Hannah Iredell. It begins like the perfect Hallmark Channel movie-Hannah Johnston, niece of colonial governor Gabriel Johnston and sister of Samuel Johnston, a rising star in North Carolina's political scene, has a suitor in Nathaniel Dukinfield, 5th Baronet of the Baronetcy of Dukinfield in Cheshire, England. This seems like a logical match, but fate intervenes in the form of Samuel Johnston's young law apprentice-James Iredell.

James Iredell, son of a merchant, is certainly not wealthy. Indeed, he had emigrated to North Carolina from his home in England to help support his family when his father's health started to fail. The Comptroller of Customs for the port at Edenton, James Iredell is fortunate to be welcomed into the social circle of the elite Johnston family. Soon, he not only meets Hannah Johnston, but, PLOT TWIST, he also befriends Nathaniel Dukinfield!

The two friends are caught in a classic love triangle, each yearning for Hannah but still exercising gentlemanly fairness. In a letter dated March 5, 1772, Dukinfield writes,

"I believe I should not have written to you again till in England, had it not been to have acquainted you that I have repeated my letters to Miss Hannah Johnston...I cannot think of relinquishing her upon a single refusal. But if I find that her affections and yours are engaged to each other, I shall then desist my own importunities, in hopes, nevertheless, of being continued as a friend. I shall endeavor in all my power to make you both happy. But till that time I can't entertain an idea of quitting my pursuit..."

Dukinfield later writes to his friend about how he believes that Hannah must prefer James to him, as she had rejected his letters.

*Is Hannah really about to choose a less-than-affluent law student over a member of the English nobility?*

In a letter dated October 22, 1772, James Iredell writes to his father that "I have then, sir, presumed to offer my addresses to Miss Hannah Johnston, Mr. Johnston's youngest sister, and I add with unspeakable happiness, they have been successful...In short, sir, she is a young woman whom I fondly, passionately love, and whom my cooler reason tells me is every thing I could wish..."

Hannah and James Iredell are finally married on July 18, 1773! James Iredell would go on to become a Patriot in the American Revolution, and would later become one of the first Associate Supreme Court Justices for the United States of America. Sadly, one day while riding the court circuit, James Iredell falls terribly ill, and passes away in Edenton on October 20, 1799, at just 48 years old.

While Hannah certainly could have re-married, as was common for a woman of her social status, she chooses not to, and passes away on September 13, 1826, after living almost 27 years without her husband. They are buried together at Hayes-Hannah's home during their courtship, and the place where they fell in love.