

CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

History Series: The History of John Wesley and the Methodist Church

Compiled by John H. Evans

Sabbath Oct. 15, 2006

PART 3: THE WESLEY FAMILY AND LIFE



SUSANNA ANNESLEY WESLEY



SAMUEL WESLEY, SR.

In order to understand the Methodist church, its origin, doctrines, organization, and above all its spirit, it is important to know at least something of the nature of the Wesley family. John Wesley's Father's side includes:

Bartholomew Wesley: John Wesley's Great grandfather

John Wesley: John Wesley's Grandfather

Samuel Wesley (1662-1735): John Wesley's Father

John Wesley (1703-1791)

John Wesley's great grandfather, grandfather and father were all Anglican priests and graduates of Oxford University. However, his grandfather was a dissenter from the Church of England and so his father (Samuel) was educated as a dissenter. As young man, however, Samuel converted to the established church; though he never fully agreed or totally accepted all their doctrines. This became a continuing tension throughout his life. He was a very strong-minded independent thinker.

John Wesley's mother's side includes:

Dr. Samuel Annesley: John Wesley's Maternal Grandfather, a clergyman

Susanna Annesley Wesley: John Wesley's Mother

(Susanna was the youngest of 25 children - yes, that's correct, 25!)

Susanna and Samuel Wesley married and had 19 children, though only 10 survived to adulthood. John Wesley was the 15th child and the second surviving son. He was named John Benjamin after two previously born sons who did not survive, though the family

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never used the middle name. His older brother was named Samuel Jr. and there was an older sister, Martha, whom John seemed to be close to throughout their lives. Charles was about five years younger than John. (Of the 19 children, 13 survived to adulthood.)

Susanna Annesley Wesley, by her own choice, was confirmed at an early age in the Anglican Church, the established Church of England. Fortunately her father recognized her intelligence and talents and gave her the best education available. This, combined with a very strong and independent mind, led to many differences of opinions between her and her father. This was the pattern, too, in her marriage to Samuel Wesley. They had many “vigorous” disagreements, sometimes resulting in a separation of several days. On the whole, though, the marriage was happy and obviously fruitful. (Maybe the 19 children were partly the result of their reconciliations!). Samuel’s rigid and uncompromising character also caused frequent animosity not only with his flock but with most people in the village.

Susanna by nature was a teacher and since she had little respect for the existing methods in the schools she home schooled her children. When each child reached the age of five they were given one day to learn the alphabet. This sounds threatening, but the testimony is that she made education interesting and exciting. She also set aside one hour each week for each child. Thursday evening after evening meal was for “little Jackie” (as John was affectionately called by his parents). This so impressed John Wesley that later, when away from home, he wrote asking her to keep this hour for him. That time was meaningful to him throughout his life.

After her husband’s death in 1735 Susanna rotated living with her children. At age 70 she went to live with John in London and from then on made her home with him. She died at age 78 in the parish house of Wesley Chapel. By all criteria, Susanna Wesley was one of the world’s most remarkable and wonderful women.

In Samuel and Susanna Wesley we have a combination of excellent ancestry, intelligence and talents, acquired culture, strict discipline, human sympathy, moral goodness, religious fervor and common sense. From the Epworth rectory came three outstanding scholars and preachers: Samuel, John and Charles.

John Wesley’s Tribute to His Mother:

Take her all in all, I do not believe a human being ever brought into the world, and carried through it a larger portion of original goodness than my dear mother.

Everyone who knew her loved her, for she seemed to be made to be happy to be herself, and to make everyone happy within her little sphere. Her understanding was as good as her heart: it is from her that I have inherited that alertness of mind and quickness of apprehension without which it would have been impossible for me to have undertaken half of what I have performed. God never blessed a human creature with a more cheerful disposition, a more generous spirit, a sweeter temper, or a tender heart.