

Annie Fellows Johnston

1863-1931

Kentucky author Annie Fellows Johnston received widespread fame and popularity from the late 19th Century and into the early 20th century as a prolific author of books for children. Her thirteen-book Little Colonel series beginning with *The Little Colonel* (1895) was broadly read. She authored over fifty-one books and contributed short stories to periodicals such as the *Youth's Companion*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, *St. Nicholas Magazine*, and others. She also had two other series: the Cosy Corner Series included ten books and The Jewel Series, seven books. With few exceptions, most all her books were issued by the Boston publisher L. C. Page.

In the flyleaf of her book *The Land of the Little Colonel: Reminiscence and Autobiography* (1929) *The Boston Transcript* described Anne Fellows Johnson as "... a rare gift in producing little stories in the nature of allegories full of spiritual significance and beauty... the most gifted and the most helpful of present-day writers for young people."

Her work is now considered anachronistic, depicting the antebellum South still transitioning from the Civil War, and must be taken in the context of the times. Sue Lynn Stone McDaniel, in her article "The Little Colonel: A Phenomenon in Popular Literary Culture," characterizes Johnston's writing as having led several generations of impressionable young readers to idealize the Old South and accept selfless values which she taught through the Little Colonel series.

Most all her characters and settings are said to depict real places, people, and life experiences and are mostly set in a fictionalized Peewee Valley, Kentucky she called Lloydsborough Valley.

Born Annie Julia Fellows in 1863, she grew up with her mother, brother Erwin and two sisters, Lura & Albion, on a farm in McCutchanville, Indiana, near Evansville. Her father, Albion, a Methodist minister, died when she was two. Annie began writing poems and short stories as young girl. She was a voracious reader, said to have read every book in her Sunday school library. She attended district school and upon graduating at 17, taught there briefly.

Annie attended the University of Iowa for one year (1881-82). She returned to Evansville where she taught three years, before taking a job as a private secretary. She then traveled for several months through New England and Europe, and the influence of these trips appeared later in many of her works. Upon returning, she married her cousin and widower William L. Johnston who had three young children. He was supportive of her writing. William died in 1892, leaving Annie a widow with his children to support. It was at that time that Annie began her career as a writer.

Johnston moved to the Pewee Valley in 1898. She loved the leisurely pace and aristocratic lineage of its people. But shortly, she was beset by tragedy. In 1899, her step-daughter Rena, died and her step-son John's health deteriorated. In 1901, she took him West to a more favorable climate; first in Arizona, then California, and Texas. He died in 1910. From 1904-1910, she wrote four books set in the Southwest and four books in a continuation of the Little Colonel series.

In 1910, Annie returned to Pewee Valley and published five books during this period. She lived there until her death in 1931. In 1935, Twentieth Century Fox released *The Little Colonel*, a film with Shirley Temple playing the part of the Little Colonel, a role well suited to her. Lionel Barrymore played the part of the Old Colonel.

Her publishing career spanned from 1895-1935 and included 51 books. From 1895-1914, she published at least one book per year and in fourteen of those years published multiple books. Her most productive year was 1904 when she published four books.

She is buried in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Evansville, Indiana.