



Kate Aylesford or the Heiress of Sweetwater

Charles J. Peterson

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Plexus Publishing is proud to present this revival of Charles J. Peterson's *Kate Aylesford*, a "long lost" historical romance set in Southern New Jersey during the American Revolution. The novel first appeared in 1855, was re-released in 1873 as *The Heiress of Sweetwater*, and spent the entire 20th century out of print.


Today, only a few cherished copies of the 19th century editions are known to be in existence, and, abetted by its rarity, the novel has achieved a legendary reputation in the Pinelands area of South Jersey. In recent decades, area residents have taken to sharing photocopied versions of the book. This has served both to enhance the book's mythical status and to preserve a unique fragment of local history. .

Kate Aylesford features a memorable cast of characters, an imaginative plot, and a compelling mix of romance, adventure, and history. The novel is striking for its exquisite sense of time and place, dramatic action scenes, and authentic characterizations. *Kate* herself, as novelist Robert A. Bateman describes her in his Foreword to this edition, is "an unusually strong and well-educated female protagonist, who holds her own—emotionally and intellectually—during a patriarchal time when women were readily considered the inferior sex."

Set against a vivid Revolutionary War backdrop, the story begins with an orphaned *Kate Aylesford* and her aunt sailing home from England, and encountering a gale-force storm along the Jersey coast. In an exciting scene, *Kate* and her aunt are shipwrecked, then rescued by Major Gordon and a small band of valiant men. Other highlights of the novel include the Revolution's Battle of Chestnut Neck, *Kate's* kidnapping by a character based on the infamous South Jersey highwayman, Joe Mulliner, and her subsequent, harrowing escape through the Pine Barrens.

Author Charles J. Peterson (1819-1887) was a prominent editor and publisher in the Philadelphia literary scene of the mid-19th century. He was co-publisher of the *Saturday Evening Post* in the 1840s, and publisher of the successful *Peterson's Magazine*. He was the author of four novels and several popular military histories.

Every scene is painted vividly and graphically, and the reader seems moving among living persons and a spectator of scenes of actual occurrence.

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