



Charlie and Angelique  
**MOTT**

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**F**or many years the story of Charlie and Angelique Mott has been a legend at Isle Royale. The story, in all its gruesomeness, is a true one; with, no doubt, certain embellishments having been tacked on through the years. Narrated here is this moving story as related by Angelique some years after her ordeal on Isle Royale in 1845. The scene is a small island in Rock Harbor, later named Mott Island in honor of the Mott's. Mott Island is the present site of Park Headquarters.



*cover illustration*  
*by*

Ranger-Naturalist STEPHEN D. VEIRS, JR.  
Isle Royale National Park

*this story*

From "A Biographical Sketch of the Lake Superior Iron Country" written by Ralph D. Williams and published in 1905 by the Penton Publishing Co., Cleveland.

"When I and my husband Charlie Mott were first married we lived at LaPointe. Mr. Douglas, Mr. Barnard and some other 'big bugs' from Detroit had come up there in the schooner Algonquin, looking for copper. From LaPointe Charlie and I went over with them, on their invitation, to Isle Royale. After landing with the rest I wandered a long way on the beach until I saw something shining in the water. It was a piece of mass copper. When I told the Algonquin people of it they were very glad and determined at once to locate it. They said if Charlie and I would occupy it for them Charlie should have \$25 a month and I \$5 a month to cook for him. Having agreed to the bargain we returned to the Sault to lay in a good supply of provisions. There I first met Mendenhall, the man who brought us into all this trouble. He said there was no need of carrying provisions so far up the lake and at so heavy an expense as he had plenty of provisions at LaPointe. When we got to LaPointe we found that this was not so. All we could get was a half barrel of flour (which we had to borrow from the mission), six pounds of butter that smelt badly and was white like lard, and a few beans. I didn't want to go to the island until we had something more to live on, and I told Charlie so, but Mendenhall over-persuaded him. He solemnly promised him two things: First, that he would send a batteau with provisions in a few weeks; and then, at the end of three months, he would be sure to come himself and take us away. So, very much against my will, we went to Isle Royale on the first of July. Having a bark canoe and a net, for a while we lived on fish, but one day about the end of summer a storm came and we lost our canoe; and soon our net was broken and good for nothing also. Oh, how we watched and watched and watched but no batteau ever came to supply us with food; no vessel ever came to take us away; neither Mendenhall's nor any other. When at last we found that we had been deserted and that we would have to spend the whole winter on the island, and that there would be no getting away until spring, I tell you such a thought was hard to bear indeed. Our flour and butter and beans were gone. We couldn't catch any more fish. Nothing else seemed left to us but sickness, starvation and death itself. All we could do was to eat bark and roots and bitter berries that only seemed to make the hunger worse. O, sir, hunger is an awful thing. It eats you up so inside, and you feel so all gone, as if you must go crazy. If you could only see the holes I made around the cabin digging for something to eat you would think it must have been some wild beast. Oh God, what I suffered there that winter from that terrible hunger, grace help me. I only wonder how I ever lived it through.

"Five days before Christmas (for you may be sure we kept account of every day) everything was gone. There was not so much as a single bean. The snow had come down thick and heavy. It was bitter, bitter cold and everything was frozen as hard as a stone. We hadn't any snow shoes. We couldn't dig any roots; we drew our belts tighter and tighter; but it was no use; you can't cheat hunger; you can't fill up that inward craving that gnaws within you like a wolf.

"Charlie suffered from it even worse than I did. As he grew weaker and weaker he lost all heart and courage. Then fever set in; it grew higher and higher until at last he went clear out of his head. One day he sprang up and seized his butcher knife and began to sharpen it on a whetstone. He was tired of being hungry, he said, he would kill a sheep — something to eat he must have. And then he glared at me as if he thought nobody could read his purpose but himself. I saw

that I was the sheep he intended to kill and eat. All day, and all night long I watched him and kept my eyes on him, not daring to sleep, and expecting him to spring upon me at any moment; but at last I managed to wrest the knife from him and that danger was over. After the fever fits were gone and he came to himself, he was as kind as ever; and I never thought of telling him what a dreadful thing he had tried to do. I tried hard not to have him see me cry as I sat behind him, but sometimes I could not help it, as I thought of our hard lot, and saw him sink away and dry up until there was nothing left of him but skin and bones. At last he died so easily that I couldn't tell just when the breath did leave his body.

"This was another big trouble. Now that Charlie was dead what could I do with him? I washed him and laid him out but I had no coffin for him. How could I bury him when all around it was either rock or ground frozen as hard as a rock? And I could not bear to throw him out into the snow. For three days I remained with him in the hut, and it seemed almost like company to me, but I was afraid that if I continued to keep up the fire he would spoil. The only thing I could do was to leave him in the hut where I could sometimes see him, and go off and build a lodge for myself and take my fire with me. Having sprained my arm in nursing and lifting Charlie this was very hard work, but I did it at last.

"Oh that fire, you don't know what company it was. It seemed alive just like a person with you, as if it could almost talk, and many a time, but for its bright and cheerful blaze that put some spirits in me, I think I would have just died. One time I made too big a fire and almost burned myself out, but I had plenty of snow handy and so saved what I had built with so much labor and took better care for the future.

"Then came another big trouble — ugh — what a trouble it was — the worst trouble of all. You ask me if I wasn't afraid when left alone on that island. Not of the things you speak of. Sometimes it would be so light in the north, and even away up overhead like a second sunset, that the night seemed turned into day; but I was used to the dancing spirits and was not afraid of them. I was not afraid of the Mackee Monedo or Bad Spirit, for I had been brought up better at the mission than to believe all the stories that the Indians told about him. I believed that there was a Christ and that He would carry me through if I prayed to him. But the thing that most of all I was afraid of, and that I had to pray the hardest against was this: Sometimes I was so hungry, so very hungry, and the hunger raged so in my veins that I was tempted, O, how terribly was I tempted to take Charlie and make soup of him. I knew it was wrong; I felt it was wrong; I didn't want to do it, but some day the fever might come on me as it did on him, and when I came to my senses I might find myself in the very act of eating him up. Thank God, whatever else I suffered I was spared that; but I tell you of all the other things that was the thing of which I was the most afraid, and against which I prayed the most and fought the hardest.

"When the dreadful thought came over me, or I wished to die, and die quick, rather than suffer any longer, and I could do nothing else, then I would pray; and it always seemed to me after praying hard something would turn up, or I would think of something that I had not thought of before and have new strength given me to fight it out still longer. One time in particular I remember, not long after Charlie's death, and when things were at their very worst. For more than a

week I had had nothing to eat but bark, and how I prayed that night that the good God would give me something to eat, lest the ever increasing temptation would come over me at last. The next morning when I opened the door I noticed for the first time some rabbit tracks. It almost took away my breath and made my blood run through my veins like fire. In a moment I had torn a lock of hair out of my head and was plaiting strands to make a snare for them. As I set it I prayed that I might catch a fat one and catch him quick. That very day I caught one, and so raging hungry was I that I tore off his skin and ate him up raw. It was nearly a week before I caught another, and so it was often for weeks together. The thing seemed so very strange to me that though I had torn half the hair out of my head to make snares never once during the whole winter did I catch two rabbits at one time.

"Oh how heavily did the time hang upon me. It seemed as if the old moon would never wear out and the new one never come. At first I tried to sleep all that I could but after a while I got into such a state of mind and body that I could scarcely get any sleep night or day. When I sat still for an hour or two my limbs were so stiff and dried up that it was almost impossible for me to move them at all; so at last, like a bear in a cage, I found myself walking all the time. It was easier to walk than to do anything else. When I could do nothing else to relieve my hunger I would take a pinch of salt. Early in March I found a canoe that had been cast ashore and which I mended and made fit for use. Part of the sail I cut up and made the strips into a net. Soon the little birds began to come and then I knew that spring was coming in good earnest. God indeed had heard my prayer and I felt that I was saved. Once more I could see my mother.

"One morning in May I had good luck fishing and caught no less than four mullets at one time. Just as I was cooking them for breakfast I heard a gun, and I fell back almost fainting. Then I heard another gun and I started to run down to the landing but my knees gave way and I sank to the ground. Another gun — and I was off to the boat in time to meet the crew when they came ashore. The very first man that landed was Mendenhall and he put up his hand to shake hands with me which I did. 'Where is Charlie,' said he. I told him he was asleep. He might go up to the hut and see for himself. Then they all ran off together. When Mendenhall went into the hut he saw that Charlie was dead. The men took off Charlie's clothes and shoes and saw plain enough that I had not killed him but that he had died of starvation. When I came up Mendenhall began to cry and to try to explain things. He said that he had sent off a batteau with provisions and didn't see why they didn't get to us. But the boys told me it was all a lie. I was too glad to get back to my mother to do anything. I thought his own conscience ought to punish him more than I could do."

Angelique died at Sault Ste. Marie in 1874.

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