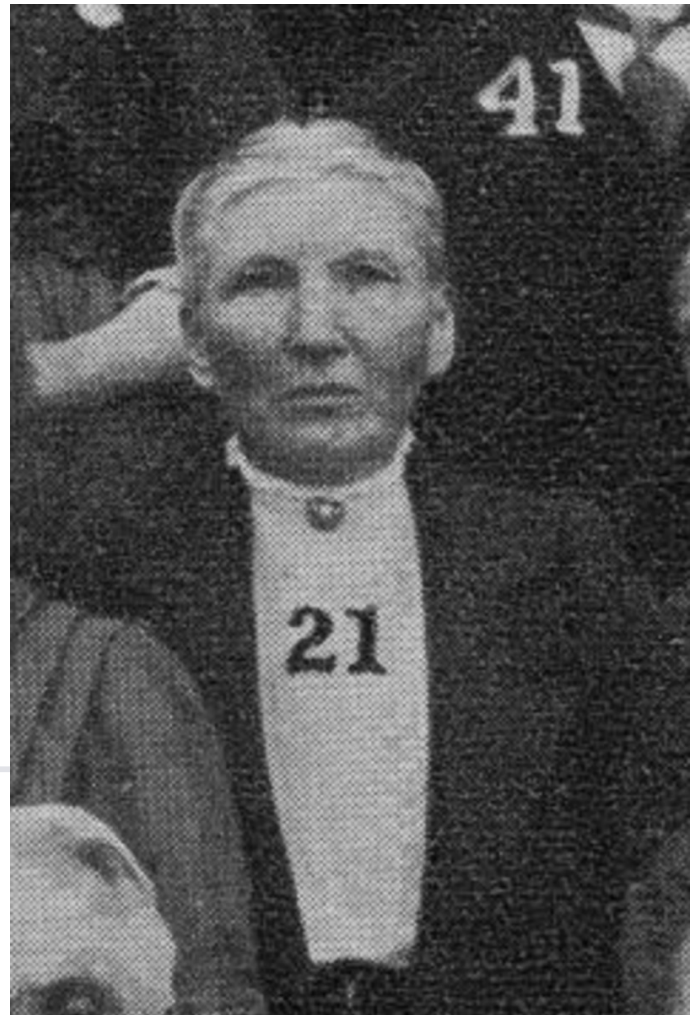


Armitage (previously Tripp), Mary Caroline "Karen Marie" (Mortensen) (1859–1950)

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Michael W. Campbell, Ph.D., is North American Division Archives, Statistics, and Research director. Previously, he was professor of church history and systematic theology at Southwestern Adventist University. An ordained minister, he pastored in Colorado and Kansas. He is assistant editor of *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Review and Herald, 2013) and currently is co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*. He also taught at the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (2013-18) and recently wrote the *Pocket Dictionary for Understanding Adventism* (Pacific Press, 2020).



Mary Mortensen Armitage at 1913 General Conference.

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

Mary Mortensen Tripp Armitage was a Bible worker, foster mother to Ellen White's granddaughters, and pioneer missionary to Africa.

Born on April 26, 1859, in Denmark to James Jens Mortensen (1827-1912) and Karen Olsdatter (1839-1915)¹ she emigrated with her family to the United States in 1865.² Her family then moved to Racine, Wisconsin, and then to Brown County, Minnesota. As a young woman she served as a Bible worker in Minneapolis and subsequently attended Battle Creek College. As early as 1879, she contributed 50 cents toward the Danish mission.³

In the early 1890s, while Ellen White and her son W. C. White were missionaries in Australia, she took care of Ellen's twin granddaughters, Ella and Mabel, who affectionately referred to her as "Aunt Mary"⁴ and later recollected how they owed "much" to her "for the faithful motherly care she gave us."⁵ In 1895, when W. C. White became engaged to May Lacey, he began to make arrangements for them to come with Mary to Australia. When word spread that Mary hoped that she might become their stepmother, Ellen did not believe her coming to

Australia would be wise.⁶ Initially the Foreign Mission Board considered having her go to Switzerland as a school matron.⁷

Instead, when the widowed George Byron Tripp (1853-1898) consulted then church president O. A. Olsen, he was advised to find a spouse before going to Africa. Two days later, on April 2, 1895, Mary and George were married in Battle Creek, as Mary became the stepmother to his twelve-year-old son, also named George. The *Review and Herald* carried a note of their departure on April 10, 1895, from New York City, in the company of W. H. and Nora Anderson, Mrs. E. J. Harvey, and a note that Dr. A. S. Carmichael would soon follow later.⁸ They became pioneer missionaries into the interior of Africa.

Life was difficult for Mary Caroline during these early years in the founding of what became the Solusi Mission. By 1897 she described their seeking refuge or being “imprisoned” as they sought safety away from the conflict. She noted how locals came to them pleading “Give me food, or I die.” “We cannot feed them all,” she added, “for we have not the food, neither can it be obtained for money. O the horrors of war! May I never have to witness them again!” They had taken in eleven children and claimed all eleven as their own to clothe and feed. “We have done all that we can, yes, more than we are able to do with the present supply of food, in taking care of the starving children.”⁹

Mary also noted how she was glad they came into possession of two cats to help reduce the rats who came and nibbled on their noses or playing hide and seek and jumping on the bed. Despite placing a steel trap, it kept them awake at night.¹⁰ She also noted that “men have as many wives as they can buy. When a man wants another wife, he looks for her as one would look for a horse or a cow. Finding one that suits him, he offers the father the sum he wishes to give, and if the sum suits, she is his wife, or property. He takes her home, and if she does not obey him, he gives her a beating.”¹¹ She described how two ladies with children strapped to their backs “came rushing and screaming into our house.” She saw an angry man at the door who she “drove . . . out of the house” even though “I suppose he gave his wives a beating when they returned home.”¹²

Tragically, her husband, G. B. Tripp and stepson, George, both died of malaria in 1898. Another missionary, Frank Benjamin Armitage (1864-1952) also lost his wife during the same epidemic. The widowed missionaries wedded on February 22, 1899. Together they founded the Somabula Mission (later renamed the Lower Gwelo Mission). In 1901 Mary, along with her second husband, Frank, attended the 1901 General Conference session as delegates.¹³ In 1907 they transferred to the Maranatha Mission in Cape Province. They later served at Bethel, Kolo, and helped to also open the Spion Kop missions. Together they would have two daughters, Irene R. Allen Armitage (1901-1990) and Evelyn Reynolds Armitage De Borde (1909-1984). In 1916 Mary suffered a severe head wound that required surgery.¹⁴ They remained in Africa until 1925 when her health forced them to return permanently to California. She died April 12, 1950, in Loma Linda, California, and is buried in Montecito Cemetery in nearby Colton.¹⁵

SOURCES

Anderson, W. H. *On the Trail of Livingstone*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1919.

[Mary Martensen Tripp]. "A Missionary's Life in Matabeleland." *ARH*, February 2, 1897.

Obituary. *ARH*, June 1, 1950.

NOTES

1. Denmark, Select Baptisms, 1618-1923 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014 [accessed 10/8/21 from Ancestry.com].
2. 1930 United States Federal Census, Census Place: Red Bluff, Tehama, California; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 0013; FHL microfilm: 2339959 [accessed from Ancestry.com 10/8/21].
3. *ARH*, April 3, 1879, 112.
4. Ella M. Robinson, "That Self Denial Box: A Personal Experience," *The Youth's Instructor*, Aug. 19, 1952, 15.
5. Ella M. Robinson, "Early Recollections of my Grandmother," *The Youth's Instructor*, March 16, 1948, 12.
6. Jerry Moon, "Mary Caroline Mortenson [sic]," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013).
7. Foreign Mission Board Minutes, March 13, 1895, 152.
8. See *ARH*, April 9, 1895, 240.
9. [Mary Martensen Tripp], "A Missionary's Life in Matabeleland," *ARH*, February 2, 1897, 70.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. "General Conference Session Recording Secretary Minutes for 1901—Committee on Credentials," https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCSM/1901/GCRS1901_ComCredentials.pdf [accessed 10/8/21].
14. "Ladysmith Sanatorium," *South African Missionary*, March 13, 1916, 3.

15. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/154284152/mary-caroline-armitage> [accessed 10/8/21].

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000