

# Priest, Mary Lucinda (Crandall) (1823–1889)

---

## 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 Priest was an early Millerite convert who was among the earliest Sabbatarian believers. She was a stalwart supporter of James and Ellen White who regularly reported to the *Review*. Mary is best remembered in the annals of Adventist history as one of four women who, with S. N. Haskell, founded the Vigilant Missionary Society and served as the secretary of that organization from its inception until her death.

## Early Life and Advent Belief

Mary embraced Adventist doctrine in 1842. She married a fellow Advent believer, Lewis Hartley Priest, Jr. (1822-1883), who in turn reported that he experienced conversion at age 17. The couple married on August 31, 1844, and together experienced the Great Disappointment when Christ did not return on October 22 of that year. She later reflected on the “bright side” of her Millerite experience:

Our disappointment was great. Our hope was deferred, and our hearts were made sick. We did need patience then; but, thank the Lord, we have been sustained until now. We have waited long, but are sure that in God’s



Mary L. Priest

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

own good time Jesus will come.<sup>1</sup>

## Sabbatarian Convictions

In 1852 the Priests were among some of the earliest to accept the seventh-day Sabbath. Lewis spent most of his life working at a nearby machine shop.<sup>2</sup> Mary expressed her newfound faith:

My faith is growing stronger daily. I see that the wicked are ripening for destruction. They will not have this man, Christ Jesus, to rule over them. O, no, they choose rather to enjoy the pleasures of this world for a season. But O, their end, their dreadful end! On the other hand, I feel [in] my soul that the third angel's message is increasing in power, and it seems to me that we shall very soon hear the loud voice.... I feel like giving myself wholly to the Lord, and remember that there is a class who are called, chosen and faithful, who will be with the Lamb; and he shall overcome; for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He will be the hope of his people and the strength of the children of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Mary shared in 1857 how the *Review* was a "welcome messenger" that "comforted" them.<sup>4</sup> The next year she reported about their struggle waiting for Christ's return "in the perils of the last days" and that her "only safety is girding on the whole gospel armor."<sup>5</sup> The next year she reported again how she wished to "endure hardness as good soldiers" and "fight their way through" temptations by believing that Jesus "is able and willing to make a way for their escape." Despite living in perilous times, provision was made for "an abundant entrance into the kingdom." Now was the time "to be awake" before it is "forever too late."<sup>6</sup> In 1862 she again warned how they were "living in perilous times" and "forming characters for eternity."<sup>7</sup> She added:

Could we realize that Jesus notices every act, as much as if in the flesh, and among us, should we blush with shame, that we turn from him with such neglect? . . . My heart aches while I reflect how many times he must turn away with a frown! . . . But soon he'll cease his pleading. O let us wake up, let us be in earnest in the closet, and cry for clean hearts. The fountain must be cleansed. And when about the duties of life, let every act tell for God and his truth.<sup>8</sup>

In 1863 she expressed how lonely they felt in Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup> Although she was consistently described as having frail health, in the winter of 1862-1863 she described a peculiar "lung difficulty," which was most likely the onslaught of tuberculosis that both she and her husband ultimately died from. She reported on traveling to New Ipswich, New Hampshire, to visit the believers there—presumably Leonard Hastings and other believers who met in his home—among other places, and the need to rally to the support of evangelists, specifically J. N. Loughborough and Moses Hull, as they went about holding evangelistic meetings.<sup>10</sup> She noted how she was "raised up" in "answer to prayer" when Daniel T. Bourdeau anointed her.<sup>11</sup> She described again how "The little company of believers in this vicinity, are striving to overcome."<sup>12</sup> In another letter she challenged fellow believers to take up their own individual responsibility and not depend upon ministers to do their duty for them.<sup>13</sup>

## Organizational and Missionary Developments

Later, when a congregation was organized in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, in 1864, the couple were two of the original eight charter members. After the congregation's organization, the company covenanted together to meet every Wednesday at 3 pm for prayer. Even if they could not be present, they would take time to pray for one another "to plead with God to pour out His blessing upon this little band of commandment keepers."<sup>14</sup>

Mary reported in 1868 about her personal struggle to adopt dress reform. "My influence was against it for a long time," she confessed. "I can not think any one [*sic*] can really dislike the short dress or shrink from the cross of wearing it more than I have." She reported how her surrender to this cross had led to spiritual renewal. "It seems to me that these reforms are some of the great stepping-stones to this glorious place [heaven]. May we be able to overcome and finally meet on the other shore."<sup>15</sup>

Mary was the leader of a group of ten women who met each week to pray at their church.<sup>16</sup> As they regularly mailed tracts to interested persons, one week while meeting at the home of S. N. Haskell on June 9, 1869,<sup>17</sup> he proposed that these women form themselves into a society.<sup>18</sup> Haskell credited Ellen White for encouraging them to organize such missionary efforts.<sup>19</sup> The women believed this was a way that they could conduct missionary work, and expected that "the brethren were too busy to engage" in such "missionary work" (although later on some men also assisted them).<sup>20</sup> She became the first secretary, a position she held until her death; with her friend Roxie Rice elected as the first president.<sup>21</sup> Her records show she wrote 6,000 letters to persons she corresponded with in conjunction with sending Adventist literature. She explained:

The plan of operation of this Vigilant Missionary Society was for each member to visit a portion of her neighborhood during the week, distributing literature, and talking with the people as opportunity afforded. Lists of names were secured of people near and afar, and prayerful thought was put into the wrapping and addressing of the papers and the writing of letters to accompany them. Each Wednesday afternoon at three o'clock, the members of the society would meet to report and counsel over the work which had been done, and to encourage each other by prayer and personal experience.<sup>22</sup>

According to Haskell, he described how the members would report on the work they had done during the previous week:

Their plan was for each to visit a portion of the neighborhood during the week, carrying with them tracts on different subjects. As they visited the people, and found an interest in any particular subject, they were prepared to emphasize the truths stated by leaving a tract on the subject. All who engaged in this work were bound by ties of unity and sympathy, and when any of the members moved to other parts of the country they continued their work and reported to the Vigilant Missionary Society. This developed into extensive correspondence, which necessitated the appointment of a correspondence agent, who would report cases to the society, and the members would then write letters and send tracts to these individuals.<sup>23</sup>

Soon there were reports of interested persons both across the country and in various parts of Europe and other parts of the world. This missionary work became a catalyst for a worldwide Adventist missionary expansion, especially once J. N. Andrews and others established a missionary presence in Europe.

The next year they discovered they were out of literature. At the New England Camp Meeting, they approached James and Ellen White, to share with them more about their work. A friend reported how James White told them to bring them a basket. They could only find a large laundry clothes basket, which James White filled up with literature:

We looked at Elder White, we looked at the basket, and at each other. Finally expressing our grateful appreciation to Elder White, we trudged off with all we could carry. We did not expect to enlighten the world, but did intend to do good work in New England. Elder White always remembered that Missionary 'basket' and the V.M. Society, and soon called Elder Haskell to start similar missionary activities in other conferences, till the missionary work reached from coast to coast.<sup>24</sup>

## Later Years and Legacy

In 1879 Mary became a "Life Member" of the General Tract Society.<sup>25</sup> In a report for the New England Vigilant Missionary Society, she noted 323 letters written, 100 letters received, 102 families visited, with 1269 periodicals distributed and an additional 3,814 tracts or pamphlets distributed. As a result, they had obtained 52 new subscribers for periodicals.<sup>26</sup> By January 1, 1881, she reported 32 members of the South Lancaster, Massachusetts, branch of the Vigilant Missionary Society who worked together to conduct such work.<sup>27</sup>

Mary died on January 11, 1889, in Lancaster, Massachusetts.<sup>28</sup> Her last words were, "The Anchor holds."<sup>29</sup> She is buried next to her husband, who died in 1883, in the North Village Cemetery in Lancaster, Massachusetts.<sup>30</sup>

Mary is remembered in Adventist historiography for her pivotal role in leading an intrepid band of early Adventist women to do missionary work. As the work was organized, these missionary efforts became part of a network of women who worked diligently to share the Adventist message through personal outreach and through sharing written letters and printed material. Such efforts became an integral part of a growing Adventist outreach effort by the fledgling denomination.

---

### SOURCES

Andross, Matilda Erickson. *Story of the Advent Message*. Takoma Park, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1926.

Ball, Lizzie C. Rice. "The Vigilant Missionary Society." *ARH*, August 13, 1925.

"Encouraging Words." *Signs of the Times*, May 13, 1880.

"Lewis H. Priest obituary," *ARH*, January 22, 1884.

"Life Members of the General Tract Society." *ARH*, February 27, 1879.

Lloyd, Ernest. "The Power of the Pen in Missionary Endeavour." *The Church Officers' Gazette*, October 1921. This article also appears in *The Missionary Leader*, December 1921.

Loughborough, J. N. *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909.

"Mary L. Priest obituary." *ARH*, February 5, 1889.

"Mary L. Priest obituary." *Signs of the Times*, February 25, 1889.

[Priest, Mary L.], "Extracts from Letters." *ARH*, September 29, 1859.

Priest, Mary L. "From Sister Priest." *ARH*, February 19, 1857.

Priest, M. L. "From Sister Priest." *ARH*, August 5, 1862.

Priest, M. L. "From Sister Priest." *ARH*, June 16, 1863.

Priest, M. L. "From Sister Priest." *ARH*, December 27, 1864.

Priest, M. L. "From Sister Priest." *ARH*, March 12, 1867.

Priest, Mary L. "From Sister Priest." February 25, 1868.

Priest, Mary L. [Letter]. *ARH*, October 18, 1853.

Priest, Mary L. [Letter]. *ARH*, June 17, 1858.

Priest, Mrs. M. L. "Report of N. E. V. M. Society," *ARH*, *ARH*—Supplement. February 13, 1879.

Priest, M. L. "Words of Cheer from an Old Friend of the Instructor." *Youth's Instructor*, April 4, 1883.

Shadel, S. T. "Laymen's Missionary Movement." *Lake Union Herald*, February 24, 1926.

"South Lancaster, Mass., V. M. Society Report for Quarter Ending Jan. 1, 1881." *ARH*, March 1, 1881.

Taylor, Clifton L. "The Sick Were Healed." *ARH*, October 31, 1963.

---

## NOTES

1. M. L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," *ARH*, March 12, 1867, 166.

2. "Lewis H. Priest obituary," *ARH*, January 22, 1884, 62.

3. Mary L. Priest, [Letter], *ARH*, October 18, 1853, 120.
4. Mary L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," *ARH*, February 19, 1857, 127.
5. Mary L. Priest, [Letter], *ARH*, June 17, 1858, 39.
6. [Mary L. Priest], "Extracts from Letters," *ARH*, September 29, 1859, 151.
7. M. L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," *ARH*, August 5, 1862, 79.
8. Ibid.
9. See summary of letter, *ARH*, March 10, 1863, 119.
10. M. L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," *ARH*, June 16, 1863, 23.
11. Ibid. This incident was later noted by Clifton L. Taylor, "The Sick Were Healed," *ARH*, October 31, 1963, 8.
12. M. L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," *ARH*, December 27, 1864, 39.
13. M. L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," *ARH*, March 12, 1867, 166.
14. Lizzie C. Rice Ball, "The Vigilant Missionary Society," *ARH*, August 13, 1925, 18.
15. Mary L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," February 25, 1868, 171.
16. S. T. Shadel, "Laymen's Missionary Movement," *Lake Union Herald*, February 24, 1926, 7-8.
17. This date is recorded in the diary of Mrs. J. W. Mace. See Lizzie C. Rice Ball, "The Vigilant Missionary Society," *ARH*, August 13, 1925, 18.
18. Ernest Lloyd, "The Power of the Pen in Missionary Endeavour," *The Missionary Leader*, December 1921, 1-2.
19. "Encouraging Words," *Signs of the Times*, May 13, 1880, 212; J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 442-443.
20. See account of S. N. Haskell reprinted in Ernest Lloyd, "The Power of the Pen in Missionary Endeavor," *The Church Officers' Gazette*, October 1921, 3-4.
21. Matilda Erickson Andross, *Story of the Advent Message* (Takoma Park, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1926), 160.
22. Ibid.

23. As quoted by Ernest Lloyd, "The Power of the Pen in Missionary Endeavour," *The Church Officers' Gazette*, October 1921, 4.
24. Lizzie C. Rice Ball, "The Vigilant Missionary Society," *ARH*, August 13, 1925, 18.
25. "Life Members of the General Tract Society," *ARH*, February 27, 1879, 69.
26. Mrs. M. L. Priest, "Report of N. E. V. M. Society," *ARH*, *ARH—Supplement*, February 13, 1879, 3.
27. "South Lancaster, Mass., V. M. Society Report for Quarter Ending Jan. 1, 1881," *ARH*, March 1, 1881, 141.
28. "Mary Lucinda Priest," Find a Grave, 2023, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/160268532/mary-lucinda-priest>.
29. "Mary L. Priest obituary," *ARH*, February 5, 1889, 95; "Mary L. Priest obituary," *Signs of the Times*, February 25, 1889, 126.
30. "Lewis Priest," Find a Grave, 2023, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/160268152/lewis-priest>.

---

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