

# Boyd, Maud “Mary” (Sisley) (1851–1937)

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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).

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Maud Sisley Boyd was a Bible teacher, editor, compositor, Bible worker, school matron, and missionary. She was “the first woman missionary sent” by the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Foreign Mission Board.<sup>1</sup>

## Background and Early Outreach Efforts

Maud Sisley was born on November 25, 1851, in Kent, England, to John (1805-1859) and Susannah née Gower (1820-1910) Sisley. Maud was one of eight children.<sup>2</sup> Her two oldest brothers moved to the United States to help support their family.<sup>3</sup> After her father died, she went with her mother and remaining siblings to the United States to a farm located in Convis, Michigan. J. B. Frisbie (1816-1882) pitched a tent in their neighborhood, and her oldest brother, John (1841-1890), became an Adventist because of Frisbie’s meetings. Her mother also became a Sabbath keeper in September 1863.<sup>4</sup>

A visit by James and Ellen White convinced her mother to sell their farm and relocate to church headquarters at Battle Creek, Michigan, so that Maud and her siblings could “have better educational advantages.” Ellen White reportedly saw this widow and her children in vision. She urged the believers in Battle Creek to offer them “a warm welcome and make them feel at home.”<sup>5</sup> At this time, she began to work in the Review and Herald Office as a compositor, a role she continued for a decade. She was an early student of Goodloe Harper Bell (1832-1899) who held evening classes for Review workers under the trees in Bell’s front lawn, until later when suitable space was found. A firm supporter in spreading the Adventist message, she was an early adopter of tithing and generously gave to other endeavors. For example, in 1873 she secured \$10 in shares in the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association.<sup>6</sup> Two years later she gave \$11.50 toward the “Pacific Mission.”<sup>7</sup> She also traveled with a group of young people from Battle Creek to attend the first official camp meeting held in Wright, Michigan, in 1868. At one point, she and her friend Elsie Gates worked in self-supporting ministry as a colporteur and Bible worker in Ohio.<sup>8</sup> This endeavor was later regarded as the first time that two Adventist “ladies” entered “the work of house to house visitation with our tracts and periodicals.”<sup>9</sup>

## Pioneer Missionary to Europe

An active member of the tract and missionary society in Battle Creek in 1877, she shared about her call to mission service:

While kneeling in prayer about 7:00 one evening, I heard a voice distinctly ask me this question: "Are you willing to do anything that the Lord wants you to do?" At this time I had been a member of the church for 10 years, and I had often thought I was willing to do anything.... [But] I now found that I had not made the wholehearted surrender that I thought I had.<sup>10</sup>

Viewing herself "arraigned before the judgment seat of God," Maud wept and prayed until midnight. She surrendered herself to God. The next morning, she received a call from the Foreign Mission Board to go to Europe.

On November 17, 1877, she left Boston for Europe traveling with William (1835-1897) and Jennie (1836-1921) Ings.<sup>11</sup> Maud would later become particularly close to Jennie, whom she described fondly as "a mother and sister,"<sup>12</sup> as they assisted in missionary work from early morning until 6 pm and spent their evenings studying the French language and having family worship using their French Bibles.<sup>13</sup> The Ings and Maud met J. N. Andrews (1829-1883) in London. Andrews was in London to purchase some additional equipment that would enable them to set type.<sup>14</sup> Their arrival "gave new courage" to these early missionaries. They returned together to Basel, Switzerland, where she assisted with the early publishing work including the translation and editing of the church's paper, *Les Signes des Temps*.

A room in the house where the mission family resided in Basel, about twelve feet square, I should judge, was set apart for the office. Here we set the type for our French paper and various tracts in German and French. When the forms were ready for the press, Charles Andrews took them in a handcart to the city, where the printing was done. The sheets were brought back to the house in the same vehicle, and folded and addressed on our dining room table.<sup>15</sup>

When Andrews took his daughter, Mary (1861-1878), back to Battle Creek, due to tuberculosis, eight people remained in Switzerland. Maud noted how no two of them were from either the same family or nationality. A particular highlight for Maud, was that she set the type for the very first Adventist tract in the Italian language!<sup>16</sup> She was saddened when her friends, the Ings, went to England to pioneer work there but reported from a letter from them that "the country seems ripe for the message." She expressed the hope: "I believe a great work will be accomplished there. I feel interested for my native land."<sup>17</sup> With regard to setting type, she reported that they had to sometimes have pieces made at a local foundry. "We have to vary in some particulars," she wrote, "from American style in order to suit the French taste."<sup>18</sup> Maud's interest in the French culture is also seen in her accounts. She reported seeing a funeral with women carrying the coffin and the men following behind. She asked Mary White, who was going with her husband, Willie, and mother-in-law, Ellen, to Europe, to bring a mop for cleaning floors because she had not been able to find one in Europe. She also encouraged Mary to buy calico

or cotton clothes in America as they were expensive in Europe, but woolen products were cheap, and she could buy those clothes once she got there.<sup>19</sup>

In 1878 she learned of two new converts from Italy who were more conversant in French, German, and what was of keen interest, Italian. They had tried to produce a few tracts in that latter language, and with such meager resources, she offered to have one of these young men take her place at the publishing house so that someone who could be more effective at producing literature in this new language could assist Andrews.<sup>20</sup> By April 1879 Maud had joined J. N. Loughborough (1832-1924) and his wife, Anna Mariah (1840-1907), in Southampton, England, to follow up on interest as a result of Ings's efforts.<sup>21</sup> She had already wanted to work for her own people, and had stayed in close contact with her friends, the Ings, in their missionary labors. She supported this pioneer tent evangelism work by "giving Bible readings and doing house-to-house labor."<sup>22</sup> "A contented, happy mind makes most any place pleasant," she wrote about her missionary experience, "and without it everything is disagreeable and distasteful."<sup>23</sup> She stayed "only six months" before returning home. Well educated and independent, she was the epitome of the "new woman" of the late nineteenth century. (A "new woman" was one who defied traditional mores and engaged in public roles outside the home. Such women were typically independent and well-educated social reformers and often held jobs.<sup>24</sup>)

## Return to America

Maud returned to the United States in time to attend the second annual session of the General Sabbath School Association held in Battle Creek, Michigan.<sup>25</sup> Here she met another participant, the widower Charles L. Boyd (1843-1898). The couple wed on December 8, 1879, in Battle Creek, Michigan.<sup>26</sup> They afterward went to Nebraska where he served as conference president, and Maud led the Nebraska Tract Society.<sup>27</sup> She supported him in missionary work as they traveled in "a covered wagon" across the region. In 1880 she was listed as contributing \$10 as a "life member" of the denomination's general Tract and Missionary Society.<sup>28</sup> In 1883 Charles became president of the church's work in the Northwest Territory (today Washington, Idaho, and Oregon). Here their two daughters were born: Ella (b. Jan. 3, 1883), and then about ten months later, Ethel (b. 1883).<sup>29</sup>

## Pioneer Missionaries to Africa

On May 11, 1887, the Boyds went as part of the very first group of Adventist missionaries, with Dores A. Robinson, to Cape Town, South Africa.<sup>30</sup> When Peter J. D. Wessels (1856-1933), who anxiously waited in Cape Town for a month for their ship to arrive, he wondered what these missionaries would look like. He assumed that they would dress differently so when he "saw a lady standing in one of the cabin doors, and from her plain dress" he deduced "that she was one of our people." He was happy to at meet Maud and was soon united with the rest of the group.<sup>31</sup>

Tragically, the Boyds' youngest daughter Ethel died at age three and a half in Africa. The Boyds left the other missionaries to travel to Kimberly, where they conducted evangelism and organized a church of 21 members in Beaconsfield.<sup>32</sup> Maud reported that there were nine young men that she was training as colporteurs:

The canvassing work looks more encouraging now than ever before. Instruction has been given to a regular class during our general meeting just past. Some of our canvassers have had a good experience, others have had none. It is to be hoped they will all make a success of it.... It seems to me we must depend mostly upon our literature, as it is so difficult to reach the people by means of preaching, and I am very thankful that the Lord does bless the canvassing work here.<sup>33</sup>

They remained in Africa until January 6, 1891. They left Africa on the steamer *Tartar*.<sup>34</sup> They stopped over in London before leaving February 11 for New York on the *Majestic* of the White Star Line.<sup>35</sup> They completed the journey in just under a week, the fastest ship to cross the Atlantic Ocean at the time, and as they arrived, they admired "the magnificent Statue of Liberty" which "held her electric torch to light us safely home in our native land."<sup>36</sup> They reached Battle Creek in time to attend the 1891 General Conference Session.<sup>37</sup>

## Later Labors

At this 1891 General Conference session Maud's husband Charles was asked to take the presidency of the Tennessee River Conference, a position vacated by the death of E. E. Marvin, and located in Nashville, Tennessee.<sup>38</sup> The Boyds were early workers in the American South working to break down racial barriers in response to Ellen White's resounding call to break down racial barriers and to work for the downtrodden Blacks in the American South. While there she described how they were "much perplexed over the color line" not wishing to have black members sit behind the white people, but instead to create an "L" shaped church with a slanted pulpit that allowed both black and white to worship together in a more egalitarian manner. This was an early attempt to utilize space to break down racial barriers. "It will give them just as good a chance as the white people and yet no one can object as they will be separate and yet all together." She credited Ellen White with inspiration to make sure "that both colors should hold membership in the same church."<sup>39</sup> The next year, Charles reported back to Ellen White, the great care in striking a balance to make progress in terms of integration without "overdoing" it lest the Lord's "work will be marred." He added that since receiving Ellen White's letter they had been able to unite the segregated churches into one congregation. "So that now, by the grace of God," he reported back to Ellen White, "we have but one church and one Sabbath school."<sup>40</sup> The "wall of partition between God's children" should be broken down because we are "all made 'of one blood,' and all redeemed by One blood." The Boyds believed in breaking down racial barriers as much as they possible could. He added: "I feel sure that the union of the two churches will result in much good."<sup>41</sup> Maud was particularly active in establishing two mission schools while also teaching her two daughters. Such educational and evangelistic work they believed was pivotal in establishing the nascent work in the South. Ellen White's son,

Edson White, would build a missionary steamboat called "The Morning Star" that contributed to reinforcing some of these early efforts in the American South.

In 1898 they were in the process of "opening a special religious enterprise" in Asheville, North Carolina.<sup>42</sup> But Charles died on July 2, 1898, and was buried in Riverside Cemetery in Asheville.<sup>43</sup>

After Charles' death in 1898, at the request of Ellen White, Maud went to Australia to assist with the newly formed Avondale School. She left with her daughter, Ella, and mother, Susannah, to serve as missionaries there. This "elegant widow" was "highly respected as a teacher."<sup>44</sup> She spent nine years as preceptress (women's dean), matron (cook), and educator. She popularized a class on cooking. Students were "quite enthusiastic" especially when it came to "the privilege of sampling their productions in the dining room."<sup>45</sup> She also served for a time as the secretary of the Victorian Tract Society.<sup>46</sup> In 1907, her daughter, Ella, went as a missionary to Tonga, and that same year Maud went to assist the Adventist school in Warburton.<sup>47</sup> Two years later Maud returned to Avondale.<sup>48</sup>

Maud spent three additional years in Bible work in New South Wales and Victoria. When her sister, Nellie Sisley Starr, fell ill, she returned to Massachusetts to be closer to her sister while continuing to conduct Bible work. During the last seventeen years of her life, she served as a Bible teacher at the Loma Linda and Glendale Sanitariums in California. She spent one school year (1927-1928) teaching at Oakwood Junior College in Alabama.<sup>49</sup> After her sister died, she returned in 1934 to Australia to live with her daughter, Ella Boyd Paap (1883-1951).<sup>50</sup> Here she died on May 17, 1937, and was buried next to her mother, Susannah, in the Avondale Adventist Cemetery in Cooranbong, New South Wales.<sup>51</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "Of Special Interest," *ARH*, July 8, 1937, 24.
2. Basic genealogical details can be obtained from: <http://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tools/tree/187412650/invitees/accept?inviteId=92b68ca7-4ac8-4a8c-8fb1-e7656c2da55a> [accessed 1/14/23]
3. See reference to Richard T. Sisley (1848-1920) supporting his family by working in the United States in F. A. Detamore, "An Aged Worker Fallen," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, June 1-15, 1920, 14, 15.

4. Maud Sisley Boyd, "Early Experiences," *Australasian Record*, June 7, 1937, 1-3.
5. Ella M. Robinson, *Stories of My Grandmother* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1967), 132.
6. See list of shares in *ARH*, September 16, 1873, 112.
7. See list of donors, *ARH*, December 16, 1875, 192.
8. Brian E. Strayer and Michael W. Campbell, "Boyd, Charles L. and Maude (Sisley)," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 321-322.
9. See note under "Personal," *Australasian Union Record*, March 1, 1901, 15.
10. Cited by Ella L. Coombs and Dorothy Minchin-Comm from a private letter. See Ella L. Coombs and Dorothy Minchin-Comm, "The Sisleys: Lives of Sacrifice and Service," *Adventist Heritage*, Spring 1993, 70-77.
11. Wm. Ings, "Arrived in Europe," December 20, 1877, 195.
12. Maud Sisley to Mary White, May 8, 1872, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Basle, Switzerland: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 32.
15. Maud Sisley Boyd, "Early Experiences," *Australasian Record*, June 7, 1937, 2.
16. M. S. Boyd, "The First Italian Tract," *ARH*, September 18, 1924, 61.
17. Maud Sisley to W. C. White, July 9, 1878, White Estate Incoming Correspondence.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Maud Sisley to Mary White, July 9, 1878, White Estate Incoming Correspondence.
20. Maud Sisley to S. N. Haskell and W. C. White, February 14, 1878, White Estate Incoming Correspondence.
21. J. N. Loughborough, "Southampton, England," *ARH*, May 1, 1879, 142; *ST*, May 8, 1879, 150.
22. J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement. Its Rise and Progress* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1909), 418.
23. Maud Sisley to Mary White, September 27, 1878, White Estate Incoming Correspondence.

24. The "new woman" was the first wave of feminism that emerged from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that refers to independent women seeking change within a male-dominated society. For a brief overview, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Woman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Woman) [accessed 1/15/23]. See also Heidi Olson Campbell, "Women in Adventism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*, eds. Michael W. Campbell, Christie Chui-Shan Chow, Denis Kaiser, and Nicholas P. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).
25. "Second Annual Session of the Gen. S. S. Association," *YI*, December 3, 1879, 200.
26. Michigan, U.S., Marriage Records, 1867-1952, accessed from Ancestry.com 1/13/23.
27. Cf. the reports in *ARH*, August 16, 1881, 124.
28. See list of donors, *ARH*, July 1, 1880, 32.
29. At the time of the birth of their daughters there was considerable controversy about whether Adventist families should be having children. See letter from M. S. Boyd to W. C. White, December 21, 1921, in the Ellen G. White Estate. [https://ellenwhite.org/media/document/2316?flowpaper\\_search=%22Maud%20Sisley%22](https://ellenwhite.org/media/document/2316?flowpaper_search=%22Maud%20Sisley%22) [accessed 1/13/23].
30. Loughborough, *Great Second Advent Movement*, 424, 425.
31. P. J. D. Wessels, "The Rise of the Message in Africa: Testimony of One of the First Two Believers," *ARH*, June 27, 1929, 14.
32. "Fifty Years of Advent Progress in Africa," *Southern African Division Outlook*, June 1, 1937, 3. See also "Our South African Mission," *The Home Missionary*, September 1890, 199.
33. Mrs. M[aud] S[isley] Boyd, "From South Africa," *The Home Missionary*, July 1889, 56.
34. "Movements of Missionaries," *ARH*, February 24, 1891, 119; C. L. Boyd, "South Africa," *ARH*, March 17, 1891, 166.
35. *Ibid.*
36. H. P. Holser, "Notes by the Way," *ARH*, March 10, 1891, 156.
37. See announcement of arrivals, *ARH*, March 3, 1891, 144.
38. "The Conference," *ARH*, March 24, 1891, 192.
39. Maud Sisley Boyd to Nellie Starr, November 4, 1894, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.
40. Maud Sisley Boyd to Ellen G. White, May 17, 1895, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.

41. Ibid.
42. See Obituary, *ARH*, July 12, 1898.
43. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/42758177/charles-l-boyd> [accessed 1/12/23].
44. Noel Clapham, ed., *Seventh-day Adventists in the South Pacific, 1885-1985: Australia, New Zealand, South-Sea Islands* (Warburton, Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing Company, 1985), 155.
45. M. S. Boyd, "Cooking," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, May 15, 1904, 6-7.
46. See note under "Personal," *Australasian Union Record*, March 1, 1901, 15.
47. See list of appointments, *Australasian Union Conference Record*, September 30, 1907, 15.
48. J. H. Paap, "Avondale School," *Australasian Union Conference Record*, October 25, 1909, 6.
49. A. E. Sanderson, "In the Southern Conferences," *ARH*, July 26, 1928, 21; see also *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: The Official Directories 1928* (Takoma Park, DC: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1928), 69, 276.
50. See note by G. B. Starr announcing her departure for Australia. See *ARH*, June 14, 1934, 24. Also see note about her arrival on the *Monterey* on June 18, 1934, in *Australasian Record*, July 2, 1934, 8.
51. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/85255324/maud-sisley-boyd> [accessed 1/12/23].
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