

Stoddard, Lucy Maria (Hersey)

(1824–1888)

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Lucy Maria (Hersey) Stoddard was a Millerite woman preacher recognized for her successful revivals.

Early Life

Lucy Maria Hersey was born March 14, 1824, in Worcester, Massachusetts, to Charles (1800-1869) and Lucy Hall (1803-1849) Hersey. She experienced a personal conversion to Christ as a youth. In 1842, at the age of 18, she felt compelled to preach. She accompanied her father on a trip to Schenectady, New York, where he was invited to share his faith. Listeners were “opposed to *female speaking*,” yet when her father was asked to share, he was speechless. After a long silence, the host remarked: “Bro. Hersey has a daughter here who talks some in conference meetings when at home in N.E. [New England], and if there is no objection raised by any one present, we would like to hear from *her*.”¹ Lucy proved to be a good speaker, and the crowds that came were so large that the meetings had to be transferred to the courthouse.² As Ellen White and other women preachers in the nineteenth century found, the novelty of a woman preaching often drew a large audience.

Preaching Ministry

Hersey resigned her local teaching post to work full time proclaiming the “call to repentance,” inviting people to be ready for Christ’s soon return. In January 1844 Lucy joined forces with another woman preacher Sarah J. Paine in proclaiming “the Second Advent near.”³ They labored for a week in Ware Village, Massachusetts, where reportedly 25 to 30 people were converted. Reportedly, the listeners were “chained by the power of God.” Their final meeting lasted 2 ½ hours. They traveled on to several other homes and meeting houses sharing their faith. Lucy exhorted “her Advent sisters to be laboring for God, in some way or other, so that they may be the means of saving, at least one soul, who shall shine bright in glory.”⁴

On February 6, 1844, another report from Albany, New York, noted: "Sister Hersey has spoken to overflowing houses." She preached three times included the largest crowd of listeners yet up to that point to gather at the Adventist "House of Prayer."⁵ By March, she accompanied S. C. Chandler in conducting a "course of lectures" in Troy, New York.⁶ While he conducted lectures in Troy, "Sister Hersey also lectured in the Baptist and Presbyterian Churches to immense audiences."⁷ By June she was preaching in Cooperstown, New York "with good success, to full houses."⁸ Numerous reports testify to her faithful labors that resulted in conversions.

Hersey was the featured speaker at several Millerite camp meetings. At one such gathering in Canandaigua, New York, it was reported that "many from curiosity crowded to hear sister Hersey, who were almost unawares divested of their prejudices, and captivated with the charms of truth. I hope none of our sisters upon whom the spirit is poured, will withhold their talents and influences in this important crisis. They are among the most useful laborers in the field. For authority see Luke ii. 36-38, and Acts ii. 17, 18. Whom God calls let not man reject."⁹ According to Martha Spence, describing her experience at the Rochester, New York, Millerite camp meeting, "Our dear sister Hersey, from Worcester, Mass., is an able and very interesting lecturer, as much so, I think, as any of our brethren in the field. In her weakness, the Lord, by his spirit, makes her very strong."¹⁰ Other women preaching at this camp meeting included Mary A. Seymour (1819-1881),¹¹ Martha Spence, and Emily C. Clemons (1818-1900).¹² Another report added that Hersey gave three lectures at Talman Hall "to crowded audiences: many of whom listened with profound attention, and not unfrequently in tears to her discourses."¹³

After the Great Disappointment, Hersey remained constant in her belief of Christ's soon return. On January 23, 1845, she married Joshua C. Stoddard (1814-1902) in Canaan, New York.¹⁴ They had eight children: Charles (b. 1846), Jennie (b. 1849), Truman (b. 1852), Herbert (b. 1855), Willis (b. 1858), Clarence (b. 1860), and Nena (b. 1862).¹⁵ She was remembered as "a popular and successful lecturer on the doctrine of the advent near,"¹⁶ who remained "steadfast in the truth" and active among the Advent Christian denomination. The Advent Christian denomination ordained women from its foundation. As a member of the denomination, Hersey became the second woman minister in Massachusetts.¹⁷ She worked as a revivalist and temperance lecturer in the Advent Christian Church for over forty years. While working as a pastor of the Second Adventist Church in Rochester, New York, she also was president of the local branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.¹⁸ Lucy died on January 3, 1888, in Rochester, New York, and is buried in Hope Cemetery, Worcester, Massachusetts.¹⁹ Her obituary described her as "the famous Adventist preacher."²⁰

Legacy

Hersey's preaching converted other significant Adventist ministers and inspired at least one other woman to preach.²¹ Isaac C. Wellcome (1818-1895) recalled that "Jonas Wendell, and several ministers who are now proclaiming the gospel state that their conversion was through her preaching."²² Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875), during his second visit to the United States, noted the effectiveness of female preaching among the Millerites.²³

According to historian Everett Dick, “great revivals crowned her work.”²⁴ Such preaching was possible in the liminal space created by the Second Great Awakening which made the public more open to women speaking about religious topics.²⁵ Historian Catherine A. Brekus has highlighted Hersey’s highly effective ministry as one of the examples of prominent women preaching during the Second Advent awakening.²⁶

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NOTES

1. Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message* (Boston: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1874), 305-306.

2. Ibid.

3. L. Hersey, “Letter from Brother L. Hersey,” *Signs of the Times, and Expositor of Prophecy*, January 3, 1844, 163.

4. Ibid.

5. *The Midnight Cry!* February 15, 1844, 239.

6. S. C. Chandler, “Extra of a Letter from Bro. S. C. Chandler,” *The Midnight Cry!* March 7, 1844, 262, 263.

7. H. Heyes, "Letter from Bro. H. Heyes," *The Midnight Cry!* March 21, 1844, 286.
8. See report in *The Midnight Cry!* June 20, 1844, 388.
9. O. R. L. Crosier, "Letter from Bro. Crosier," *The Advent Herald, and Signs of the Times Reporter*, October 2, 1844, 67.
10. Martha Spence, "Camp Meeting Near Rochester," *The Midnight Cry!* August 1, 1844, 22.
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13. See note in *The Midnight Cry!*, August 1, 1844, 24.
14. "Marriages," *Massachusetts Cataract and Worcester County Waterfall*, February 12, 1845.
15. For genealogical sources, see: <https://www.ancestry.com/invite-ui/accept?token=8Y507ekAqIBEoP6xstwSCSM7DhrCw90pBY4G-IWlcvS=>.
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17. Obituary, *Democrat and Chronicle*, January 5, 1888, 6.
18. Ibid.
19. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/176430776/lucy-maria-stoddard>.
20. Obit. *The Sun*, January 7, 1888, 1.
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22. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message*, 305-306.
23. Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to North America*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1855), 88.
24. Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), 121.
25. Heidi Olson Campbell, "Women in Adventism," in the *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*, eds. Michael W. Campbell, Christie Chow, Denis Kaiser, and Nicholas Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 493-509.
26. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 319-321.

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