

Huntley, Maria L.

(1848–1890)

CECILIA RAMOS

Cecilia Ramos, B.A. in theology/pastoral ministry (Washington Adventist University). Ramos currently serves at the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in the Donor Relations department. She is active in her local church as an elder and worship leader, and assists with outreach and preaching.

Maria L. Huntley was a pioneering home missionary, secretary, treasurer, editor, writer, religious liberty advocate, and educator.

Early Life (1848-1869)

Maria L. Huntley was born on August 9, 1848, in Lepster, New Hampshire,¹ to Albert and Lucy Huntley (1817-1866;² 1820-1901³). Both were born in Marlow, New Hampshire, and were pioneers of the “Sabbath cause” in connection with the Advent Movement.⁴ Albert and Lucy wed in their native Marlow in 1840⁵ and had four children, three of whom did not reach adulthood. Maria was the second child born to the couple, after they lost an infant daughter in July of 1847.⁶

The Huntleys were active members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington, New Hampshire, during the church’s infancy and the family also assisted scattered groups of Sabbath-keeping Adventists in the vicinity.⁷ In October 1852, while returning home after a conference of Sabbath-keepers convened by James White at the Washington church, Lucy was thrown from a wagon and left in critical condition. After a session of fervent prayers led by Elder White and other church leaders, Lucy reportedly recovered and “the next morning seemed as well as before the accident occurred.”⁸ Later that year, another accident proved more devastating. Two-year old Elbridge, Maria’s youngest sibling, tipped over a kettle that Lucy had placed on the stove and was found covered in boiling water. Though the family did what they could for him medically and “plead[ed] with the Lord for his life,” the child died the next day.⁹



Maria L. Huntley.

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

Despite recurrent tragedy, the family's missionary spirit did not dim. By 1860, they had moved to Peterborough, New Hampshire, where they joined a small and scattered group of believers, and eventually started a church. Albert, a farmer by trade, served as elder for the Peterborough church and labored tirelessly for the Adventist cause in that city and neighboring towns.¹⁰ It was not long before the Huntleys experienced another period of suffering, however. In March 1866, Albert died unexpectedly, leaving his wife, his daughters, and his church devastated. This loss proved very trying to the evangelistic efforts in the Peterborough area in the years to come.¹¹ Just four months later, in July of 1866, Abby, Maria's youngest sister, also passed away at eleven years of age. This was extremely difficult for Lucy and Maria to endure as they became the only two surviving members of the Huntley family.¹² In the wake of tragedy, the two women sold their property and some belongings¹³ and by 1870 had moved to Lancaster, Massachusetts.

New England Missionary and Tract society (1870-1877)

In Lancaster, Maria lived with the Rowells, a family from the Lancaster church, and supported herself through dressmaking. Lucy lived nearby with the Weston family.¹⁴ She eventually married James Farnsworth in 1875¹⁵ and moved back to New Hampshire with her new husband and his children.

Due to Lancaster's proximity to Peterborough and the itinerant nature of Adventist pioneers, the women most likely already knew some of the people who attended the Lancaster church, such as Mary Priest¹⁶ and Stephen Haskell.¹⁷ Thus, Maria quickly embraced her new home and became active in the local evangelistic efforts. She joined the Vigilant Missionary Society—formed in 1869 by a small group of women from the Lancaster church—and served as its corresponding secretary for almost a decade. The women's initial purpose had been to visit and correspond with Sabbath-keepers who were discouraged and seldom able to congregate. When they organized as a society, they undertook systematic missionary visitation, distributing Adventist literature and bringing aid to those in need. They also mailed literature to every address they could acquire and corresponded with recipients who responded.¹⁸ Maria's main task was to train and coordinate volunteers for this endeavor across the country—and eventually across the world.¹⁹

When the New England Conference was formed a few years later and Stephen Haskell became its president, he created and modeled the first state Tract and Missionary Society after the Vigilant Missionary Society. In addition to writing letters to discouraged members, the "T. and M. Society" also served as a distribution center for Seventh-day Adventist tracts and periodicals. Maria served as the first secretary for the New England Tract and Missionary Society from 1872 to 1874, and then again from 1876 to 1877.²⁰ In her role she performed various secretarial duties, sent letters and tracts to members of the community, and assisted in creating systems and policies to ease the creation of new state societies across the country.

During her tenure at the New England state society she served as secretary of the New England Conference for the 1876-1877 term.²¹ She was also part of a small committee that was tasked with experimenting with hygienic cooking,²² and contributed articles to the *Review and Herald* and the *True Missionary*—a periodical dedicated almost exclusively to the establishment and development of missionary tract societies. Maria eventually became the foremost expert in her field, and her articles were highly valued. Some were reproduced in other Adventist publications such as the *Signs of the Times*,²³ and others were republished years after her death.

Move to Battle Creek (1878-1881)

The state tract and missionary societies became such successful evangelistic tools that James White thought it wise to create a General Conference Tract and Missionary Society in 1874, which would oversee all the state societies.²⁴ Because the project did not initially yield the expected results, Elder White, in 1876, asked Stephen Haskell and Maria Huntley to move to Battle Creek, Michigan, and provide the leadership needed to help the society flourish.²⁵ Subsequently, Maria was elected secretary of the General Conference Tract and Missionary Society, and moved to Battle Creek in 1878.

As secretary, Maria handled various tasks related to creating new state societies and improving existing ones. She traveled occasionally to visit and provide training to the societies' secretaries. She was also closely involved in the local society in Battle Creek, which was largely comprised of students from Battle Creek College. In 1881, her role expanded to include the position of treasurer, and in 1884 she was elected to the executive committee.

When the Health and Temperance Association was formed in 1879, Maria was elected as one of five corresponding secretaries, and in the ensuing year she became the association's sole secretary and treasurer, a position she held until 1883. She worked closely with Dr. John H. Kellogg, assisting him with the journal *Good Health* and with introducing health and wellness topics to the Sabbath School Association.²⁶ During this time, she also became acquainted with conflicts at Battle Creek College involving Professor G. H. Bell, becoming his ally and supporter.²⁷

Return to Massachusetts (1882-1887)

In early 1882, Maria moved back to Lancaster, Massachusetts, to assist in a new project—the establishing of a missionary training school in that city. In addition to serving as Lancaster Academy's secretary and a member of its first board of trustees, Maria was also an instructor of missionary classes. In 1887, C. C. Ramsey, the academy's principal at the time, stated, "No adequate history of the school can be written with the omission of the names of Eld. S. N. Haskell and his faithful coadjutors, Eld. D. A. Robinson, Miss M. L. Huntley...[W]ithout them the school would have had no history and probably no existence."²⁸

In addition to her duties at the academy and the (newly renamed) International Tract and Missionary Society, Maria was also selected to be a part of the Fourth Sabbath Readings Committee along with R. A. Underwood, W. C. Sisley, L. C. Chadwick, and George B. Starr. This was a nationwide initiative that devoted the fourth Sabbath of every month to missionary work. The committee was charged to set forth a plan to make these gatherings interesting and to produce and select materials to be read at the meetings.²⁹ Maria was an active member of this committee, suggesting ways to keep the Fourth Sabbath meetings relevant to church members, and contributing several articles through the years.³⁰

Maria also used her time in Lancaster to expand her education and nurse her health. W. C. White had been anxious for her to move to California to develop the missionary department at Healdsburg College. However, her frail condition led her to request more time for self-care and for completion of some coursework she believed would improve the efficacy of her work.³¹ In late 1887, there were also discussions of Maria moving to Europe to assist Stephen Haskell in the missionary work in England. This plan, however, came to a halt when Ellen White expressed strong opposition, warning Haskell that his relationship with Maria might be misinterpreted and thus they should keep their distance.³² By the end of the year 1887, Maria moved to California to take charge of the missionary department at Healdsburg College for the ensuing year, thus fulfilling W. C. White's wish.³³

Final Years (1888-1890)

After nearly a year in California, successfully developing the missionary department at Healdsburg College and teaching two large missionary classes, Maria moved back to Battle Creek in November of 1888.³⁴ The International Tract and Missionary Society was being restructured, and plans for a new branch office in Chicago were in motion. Besides her usual responsibilities, Maria was tasked with organizing three-month training institutes for foreign correspondents and secretaries for the foreign branches of the society to be held in Battle Creek, Chicago, and New England. She was also chosen, along with J. O. Corliss, to edit a newly established missionary department in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, and to serve on a committee charged with supplying reading material for ships nationwide.³⁵

The *Home Missionary*, a journal which provided a more organized way of distributing Fourth Sabbath Readings as well as other materials related to home and foreign mission, was founded in January 1889. During the journal's inception, Maria acted as chief editor and main contributor to the children's section. Her fondness for children and her burden for involving them in mission led her to correspond extensively with them, giving them tips on how to reach other children through letter writing.³⁶ The *Home Missionary* also served as an important tool for religious liberty. Maria was already heavily involved in circulating the *American Sentinel*³⁷—a journal that dealt exclusively with religious liberty issues—and devoted a large section of *The Home Missionary* to religious liberty literature and seeking volunteers for the cause.

Maria's numerous responsibilities soon began to have an impact on her frail health, however. In April 1889, she was hospitalized in the Battle Creek Sanitarium in critical condition.³⁸ Although not fully recovered, she became anxious to resume her duties by late August, and she requested to be resettled in Chicago for her next assignment. Knowing her tendency to neglect her health and fearing a relapse, W. C. White arranged to have Addie Bowen move with her to be Maria's assistant and to care for her as needed.³⁹

In Chicago, Maria took charge of the newly established International Tract Society branch office, and became assistant principal at the Central Bible School for Home and Foreign Missionaries. She taught some courses through correspondence and began a six-month course in home and foreign missionary correspondence in the special school for ladies.⁴⁰ She continued to be editor of the *Home Missionary* until 1890, when she was assigned the periodical's Home Mission Department and the Children's Page. She also worked arduously to create a system of circulating religious liberty publications across the country, hoping that it would help those in the South who were suffering religious persecution for violation of Sunday laws.⁴¹

In the midst of laying out plans and conducting her duties, Maria fell fatally ill. Although she was in agonizing pain, her greatest concern was whether she would recover enough to give instruction on the work to be done in the Chicago office. Her final days served as an inspiration to those who kept her company, as they saw her strength in the midst of suffering and her composure as she knew the end was near.⁴² Eight days after her relapse, on April 18, 1890, Maria peacefully passed away surrounded by friends; the cause of death declared "internal tumor."⁴³ A sizable group from the Chicago school followed the hearse to the train station to transport the casket to Battle Creek. The funeral service was held at the Tabernacle church in Battle Creek on April 21, where Uriah Smith gave a sermon titled "She hath done what she could" based on Mark 14:8.⁴⁴ Although her only living relative—her mother—was unable to travel, a large crowd gathered at the event and then formed a processional to Oak Hill Cemetery where her remains were buried. According to Jennie Thayer, "They [had] not had such a funeral in B[attle] C[reek]. since Elder White."⁴⁵

Legacy

Maria L. Huntley's contemporaries repeatedly described her as a quiet, hardworking, self-sacrificing woman who never took credit for her accomplishments but was content with simply seeing the work through. The extent of her work became more evident after her death, when it became impossible to replace her and letters flooded in from people all over the world whose lives she had touched through her faithful letters.

SOURCES

Chadwick, L. C. "Maria L. Huntley." *Home Missionary*, May 1890.

Huntley, Maria L. "International Tract Society," *ARH*, November 25, 1884.

Huntley, Maria L. "International Tract and Missionary Society," *ARH*, December 4, 1883.

Huntley, Maria L. "The New England School During Vacation," *ARH*, August 14, 1883.

Huntley, Maria L. Maria L. Huntley to John Harvey Kellogg, MD. January 12, 1879, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.

Huntley, Maria L. Maria L. Huntley to William Clarence White. July 12, 1885, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.

Huntley, Maria L. Maria L. Huntley to William Clarence White. December 20, 1885, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.

Huntley, Maria L. Maria L. Huntley to Ellen Gould White. September 16, 1886., accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.

"International Tract Society Proceedings." *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1889.

"International Tract Society Proceedings." *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, March 17, 1891.

Smith, Uriah. "General Conference." *ARH*, January 3, 1882.

Smith, Uriah. "Maria L. Huntley obituary." *ARH*, April 29, 1890.

Robinson, D.A. and Thayer, Eliza. "Mich. T. and M. Society." *ARH*, February 7, 1878.

White, Ellen G. Ellen G. White to W.C. and Mary White. September 3, 1877. Letter 13, 1877. Ellen G. White Writings. Accessed February 4, 2018, egwwritings.org.

White, Ellen G. Ellen G. White to G.I. Butler and S.N. Haskell. September 14, 1886. Letter 84, 1887. Ellen G. White Writings. Accessed February 4, 2018, egwwritings.org.

White, James. "General Tract Society." *ARH*, October 12, 1876.

White, W. C. "My Visit East," *ARH*, March 15, 1883.

White, William Clarence. William Clarence White to Maria L. Huntley. April 21, 1886, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.

White, William Clarence. William Clarence White to C.H. Jones. February 12, 1889, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.

NOTES

1. Although the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (rev. 1996) recorded her birth year as 1847, Maria was actually born in 1848—as was reported in a revision to her obituary from the May 1890 edition of *The Home Missionary* and her friend Jennie Thayer's personal diary. See "Correction," *The Home Missionary*, June 1890, 140 and Jennie Thayer, Personal diary, April 21, 1890, General Conference Archives.
2. L. W. Hastings, "Albert H. Huntley obituary," *ARH*, April 24, 1866, 167.
3. Marlow, New Hampshire, Certificate of Death FHL film no. 2079508, Lucy G. Farnsworth, Ancestry.com, accessed February 4 2018, <http://ancestry.com>.
4. Uriah Smith, "Maria L. Huntley obituary," *ARH*, April 29, 1890, 271.
5. New Hampshire, Marriage and Divorce Records, 1659-1947, Albert H. Huntley, Ancestry.com, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://ancestry.com>.
6. East Lempster, New Hampshire, Grave Memorial ID154351369, Infant Daughter Huntley, Findagrave.com, February 4, 2018, findagrave.com.
7. L. G. Huntley, "From Sister Huntley," *ARH*, February 17, 1853, 158.
8. "Eastern Tour," *ARH*, October 14, 1852, 96.
9. "From Sister Huntley," 158.
10. A. H. Huntley, "From Bro. Huntley," *ARH*, May 19, 1863, 198.
11. D. M. Canright, "Meetings at Peterboro, N.H.," *ARH*, August 11, 1868, 121.
12. Mrs. A. H. Huntley, "From Sister Huntley," *ARH*, September 18, 1866, 126-127.
13. Lucy Huntley, "Administratrix Sale of Real Estate and Personal Property," *Peterborough Transcript*, July 7, 1866, 3.
14. 1870 United States Federal Census *Lancaster, Worcester, Massachusetts*, Roll: *M593_653*; Page: 217, Family History Library Film: *552152*, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://ancestry.com>.
15. *Massachusetts, Town and Vital Records*, 1620-1988, Lucy G. Huntley, Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://ancestry.com>.
16. M. L. Priest, "From Sister Priest," *ARH*, June 16, 1863, 23.
17. Canright, "Meetings."
18. Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Department of Education, 2000), 147-148.

19. Mary Martin, "Report of the General Quarterly Meeting of the N.E.T & M. Society," *ARH*, June 24, 1875, 206.
20. Smith, "Maria L. Huntley obituary."
21. "Conference Directory," *ARH*, January 20, 1876, 24.
22. H. B. Stratton and M. L. Huntley, "Tract and Missionary Department," *ARH*, June 3, 1873, 198-199.
23. M. L. Huntley, "Letter Writing", *Signs of the Times*, August 19, 1875, 326.
24. Geo. I. Butler, "General Organization of the Tract and Missionary Society," *ARH*, August 25, 1874, 75.
25. James White, "General Tract Society," *ARH*, October 12, 1876, 120.
26. J. H. Kellogg and Maria L. Huntley, "The American H. and T. Association," *ARH*, January 16, 1883, 44.
27. Maria L. Huntley to James Springer White, January 22, 1881, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.
28. C. C. Ramsey, "Notes from South Lancaster Academy," *ARH*, March 22, 1887, 189-190.
29. "International Tract Society," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1887), 56.
30. W. C. White to S. N. Haskell, January 25, 1888. Letter B-W.C.W.049, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.
31. Maria L. Huntley to William Clarence White, September 20, 1885, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.
32. Ellen White to S. N. Haskell, September 1, 1887, Letter 50, 1887, accessed February 4, 2018, egwritings.org.
33. "Healdsburg College," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1886), 83.
34. "Until further notice...," *ARH*, November 20, 1888, 736.
35. "International Tract Society Proceedings," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1889), 85-89.
36. S. Addie Bowen, "Retrospective," *Home Missionary*, July 1897, 132-133.
37. "Our General Agents," *American Sentinel*, February 20, 1889, 40.
38. "We regret to announce...," *ARH*, April 30, 1889, 288.

39. W. C. White to D. T. Jones, August 30, 1889. Letter H-WCW-48, accessed February 4, 2018, ellenwhite.org.

40. "The Central Bible School for Home and Foreign Missionaries," *ARH*, December 17, 1889, 796-797.

41. L. C. Chadwick, "Maria L. Huntley," *Home Missionary*, May 1890, 95.

42. "International Tract Society Proceedings," *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, March 16, 1891, 123.

43. Smith, "Maria L. Huntley obituary."

44. Ibid.

45. Jennie Thayer diary, May 2, 1890.

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