

Fish, Mary Frances Maxson (1843–1868)

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Michael W. Campbell, Ph.D., is 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 F. Maxson Fish, an early Adventist believer from Adams Center, New York, was closely associated with church leaders such as James and Ellen White and J. N. Andrews during the 1860s and wrote regularly for church periodicals.

Born in February 1843, Mary grew up in a Seventh Day Baptist home.¹ She experienced a conversion at age 12 when she “gave her heart to the Saviour.”²

From July through August 1862 M. E. Cornell and J. N. Andrews held evangelistic meetings in Adam’s Center. Their tent was located near a Seventh Day Baptist meetinghouse, and when it rained or was windy, they were granted permission to use this facility. At the conclusion of the meetings, fourteen “arose” to make their decision to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.³ Through these meetings, Mary became “deeply interested in the advent doctrine.”⁴ Andrews remarked on how “peculiarly painful” it had been for Mary “to break her former religious connections in order to embrace the present truth.”⁵ For her part, she described her decision for the “glorious truth” this way: “The few weeks that I have been trying to obey it, have been the happiest of my life.”⁶ She loved the truth even if it came at personal sacrifice.

From the time of her conversion until her death, Mary was both active in her local church and loved to write for Adventist periodicals. Some of the most vivid descriptions of early Adventist worship services (including the



Grave of Mary Frances Maxson Fish.

Photo courtesy of Charles Beach. Source: *Find a Grave*,

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95395073/mary-frances-fish>

Lord's Supper) appear in her articles.⁷ In 1865, Mary, who had never enjoyed the best of health, joined the "Adventist invalid party" (those church leaders at denominational headquarters including the Whites) who were so ill that they went to western New York to seek natural remedies at Dr. James C. Jackson's "Our Home on the Hillside."⁸

About 1867 Mary Maxson married Joel D. Fish (1839-1870).⁹ Unfortunately, in late 1866 or early 1867, she contracted the tuberculosis that caused her slow "decline." Andrews described a worship service held shortly before her death at which he called on her twice to give a testimony. Although she could "only speak in a whisper," she testified of her faith as "a deathbed disciple of the Lord." James and Ellen White also visited her on her deathbed and prayed with her. "We found her very near her end," wrote Ellen White in her diary. "Oh, how precious seemed the dear Saviour in the trying hour of death!"¹⁰

Mary F. Maxson Fish passed away on January 15, 1868, and is buried in the Union Cemetery at Adams Center, New York.¹¹

SOURCES

Andrews, J. N. "Sister Fish." *ARH*, February 25, 1868.

Andrews, J. N and M. E. Cornell. "Tent Meeting at Adam's Center, N.Y." *ARH*, August 19, 1862.

"Mary Frances Maxson Fish." *Find A Grave*, Memorial no. 95395073. Accessed December 12, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95395073/mary-frances-fish>

Maxson, Mary F. "From Sister Maxson." *ARH*, August 25, 1863.

Maxson, Mary F. "The Late Fast." *ARH*, May 29, 1866.

Taylor, C. O. "Mary F. M. Fish obituary." *ARH*, February 4, 1868.

White, Ellen G. Diary, January 5, 1868, in Manuscript 12, 1868. Accessed December 11, 2020. Ellen G. White Writings, https://egwwritings.org/?ref=en_Ms12-1868¶=3013.23.

NOTES

1. "Mary Frances Maxson Fish," *Find A Grave*, Memorial no. 95395073, accessed December 12, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95395073/mary-frances-fish>. An obituary in *The Sabbath Recorder* (December 5, 1867) describes Mary's father, Harvey Maxson (1810-1867), as an "influential member" of the Seventh Day Baptist church; see "Harvey Maxson," *Find A Grave*, Memorial no. 88431039, accessed 12/12/2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/88431039/harvey-maxson>.

2. C. O. Taylor, "Mary F.M. Fish obituary," *ARH*, February 4, 1868, 126.

3. M. E. Cornell and J. N. Andrews, "Tent Meeting at Adam's Center, N.Y.," *ARH*, August 19, 1862, 93. The Seventh Day Baptist church divided with the second congregation organized as "The Seventh-Day Advent Church at Adams Centre" in March 1862, according to *History of Jefferson County, New York* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1878), 251.
4. Taylor, "Mary F.M. Fish obituary."
5. J. N. Andrews, "Sister Fish," *ARH*, February 25, 1868, 170.
6. Mary F. Maxson, "From Sister Maxson," *ARH*, August 25, 1863, 103.
7. See, for example, Mary F. Maxson, "The Late Fast," *ARH*, May 29, 1866, 205.
8. See note in *ARH*, September 19, 1865, 128.
9. "Joel D. Fish," Find A Grave, Memorial no. 15334442, accessed December 11, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/15334442/joel-d-fish>. No marriage record has been located but the tracing of her surname appears to indicate that they were married at some point in 1867.
10. Ellen G. White, Diary, January 5, 1868, in Manuscript 12, 1868, Ellen G. White Writings, accessed December 11, 2020, https://egwwritings.org/?ref=en_Ms12-1868¶=3013.23.
11. "Mary Frances Maxson Fish," *Find A Grave*, Memorial no. 95395073.

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