
WOMEN HERALDS OF “THE ADVENT NEAR”

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The options available to women in nineteenth century America were consistently limited and limiting. Educational, professional, and other opportunities were generally closed to them simply because of gender. But a movement like Millerism, unconventional in a variety of ways, gave many women novel and important occasions for service. The role of Ellen White in Seventh-day Adventism, which has been explored so thoroughly that it will not be treated here, is only the most noteworthy example.

Then as now, women were, on the average, more concerned about religious matters than men; so it is not surprising that women played important roles in the Millerite movement both in public and behind the scenes. And, of course, the spiritual lives of women who exercised no leadership responsibilities at all in the Millerite movement and its successor communities of faith nonetheless reflected the distinctive imprint of this dramatic religious reform. In what follows, I want to explore the experience of both kinds of women—the public and private—associated with the Millerite movement from 1820 through 1870. While this article is not an exhaustive study of all Millerite women who were important for the movement, it does attempt to examine the bulk of the significant extant materials regarding these women.

Perhaps the first significant Millerite woman was Lucy P. Smith, who married William Miller in 1803. She took care of many of the chores around the Miller farm, leaving her husband free to study and continue his education. Throughout their lives together, she was intensely supportive of her husband.¹

Charlotte Elizabeth Poor

Dr. Charlotte Elizabeth Poor, an English woman, was the only daughter of the Reverend Michael Browne. Born in Norwich, Great Britain, in 1792, she died in 1846. She devoted her life to Christian missions in India. Adventist historian Isaac Wellcome describes her as “a woman of high rank, deep piety, superior talent, great fortitude and perseverance.” She wrote many books and tracts dealing with religious matters, twelve volumes of which have been preserved. Through her writing and speaking she defended and celebrated the Millerite mes-

sage.² Her important role in the Millerite movement was as a missionary abroad.

Harriet Livermore

Harriet Livermore (1788-1868), described herself on the title page of her 1835 book, *The Harp of Israel*, as “a



mourning pilgrim, bound to the Promised Land.” Writing to her friend Elias Boudinott in this book, she composed hymns for the “Cherokee nations and Indians everywhere” in North America. Seeing these Native Americans as outcasts, she declares that she “left the states in 1832 to seek lost sheep in the wilderness.”

She alluded to the divine mercy that sustained her; God, she said, “saw me alone. Other females were in company with a husband, or a father, or a brother, or in charge of a Missionary, and a member of his family.” She claimed that she was the only “pilgrim” who had gone to teach the Indians who was not a member of any religious sect and who was all alone in the world except for a father and a brother. Her stated reason for writing her hymns was to give testimony to an “immortal and eternal friendship, for the afflicted red man.” She wanted, she said, to lay her

book of hymns at the foot of the cross so that "when the red men come to Calvary to weep and pray, let them take it, and sing praises and thanksgiving to the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world."³

Livermore authored and published a fifty-nine-page tract in 1831. *Millennial Tidings* concerns a letter written by Jewish Millerite convert Joseph Wolff to Christians in England and Ireland. When, she said, she studied Wolff's declaration that 1847 would be the year of Jesus' second advent, she "was filled with sensible rapture, and sincerely echoed to the tidings, 'come Lord Jesus, come in triumph, and reign in great power and glory.'"⁴ Desiring to share her belief in the imminent advent with others, she republished Wolff's "prophetical letter" with a brief but very well-researched abstract of the Jewish convert's life. Because of her special burden for the spiritual welfare of Native Americans, she wanted to send the tract to them and to missionaries. She believed that the Indians were the "lost" ten tribes of Israel. Though "poor" and "sickly" at the time she published this tract, Livermore, who noted that she was not seeking profit of any kind from the sale of her work,⁵ was an ardent proponent of belief in the imminence of Jesus' second coming.

Lucy Maria Hersey Stoddard

At the age of 18, Lucy Maria Hersey Stoddard felt herself called to proclaim the gospel publicly. She resigned from a Worcester teaching post to preach in the early 1840s. Associating herself with Sarah J. Paine, "the first female that preached in Massachusetts the Advent of Christ at hand," she enjoyed notable success as an evangelist.

In 1842, she accompanied her father to Schenectady, New York, to visit friends. They discovered that an advent believer there was willing to open his house to her father so that he could speak about the imminent second coming. Wellcome commented, "The people were so opposed to female speaking, the brother thought it would offend if the daughter should speak." Her father was not a preacher, and when the meeting began there were moments of silence as he found that he had nothing to say. "After long silence," Wellcome says, "the brother remarked: 'Brother Hersey has a daughter here who talks in some conference meetings when at home in N.E., and if there is no objection raised by any one present, we would like to hear from her.'" She waited for objections, and after none were made she spoke. Those in attendance were "melted in contrition." To enable more people to hear her remarks, the court house was obtained for her. Reporters attending her meetings had her discourses published in the morning papers. "The houses and galleries were crowded and the meetings continued until the galleries settled by the weight of the multitudes." Laboring in central New York for six months, she

preached "every evening and three times on Lord's day." Some time after this, she married J. C. Stoddard. Their team ministry continued until her husband's health failed. Then she continued on her own to preach in a variety of locations. Of Lucy Stoddard, Wellcome said:

She has been the humble instrument of gathering sheaves for the Kingdom of God, and is strong in the faith that Jesus will soon return to gather his scattered flock . . . Elder Jonas Wendall and many other ministers now proclaiming the gospel, state that their conversion to the truth was through her preaching. This should encourage others, whom the Lord calls, not to refrain because they are females.⁶

Sarah J. Paine Higgins

Sarah J. Paine Higgins was the first female preacher in Massachusetts. She was the last surviving member of a group in Worcester, Massachusetts, who heard William Miller preach there. On Thanksgiving Day, 1842, that group organized an Adventist church.⁷ Unfortunately, we know little else about her life and career, and it appears that the limited opportunities available to women during her lifetime made it difficult for her to continue a public role after the Disappointment.

Mary L. Priest

Born in 1823, Mary L. Priest accepted Millerite teachings in 1842. Shortly after the Disappointment, she and her husband began to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. In poor health for several years, she nonetheless led a group of Christian women in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, in distributing religious tracts and in ministering to the poor and sick. This group organized the Vigilant Missionary Society in 1869, and she became its first secretary, holding this office until her death in 1889.⁸ The Society's members wrote letters to share their convictions in a personal way, concerning themselves especially with one-time Adventists who had "fallen away," as well as with new converts and absent members.

During her lifetime, Priest wrote over 6,000 letters, following up the thousands of periodicals previously sent out by the Society. So deeply ingrained was her missionary zeal that just a few hours before she died she seems to have been attempting to answer letters. She used even her last illness and her own death as a witness for God; her final words were, "The anchor holds," and she requested that the sermon for her funeral be an encouragement to faithfulness.⁹

What was life like for the "average" Millerite or Adventist woman during this period? An October 28, 1856 letter to *Review and Herald* editor Uriah Smith from

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a Canton, Illinois, woman named L. M. T. Ayers gives us some clues:

Bro. Smith: It is with hesitation that I take the liberty to address you, being a stranger not only to the brethren generally, but partially to your peculiar views. About 28 or 30 years since, there was a great excitement in the vicinity where I lived in consequence of the prophecies being proclaimed that soon the Saviour would return; and that the end of all things was near. Though I was then only 10 or 12 years old, the idea of seeing my Saviour so soon thrilled my soul with emotions of pleasure. Though the prophecy apparently failed at that time, the impression remained; and often in my wanderings, my favorite lines would give vent to my pent up aspirations: "How long, dear Saviour, O how long shall that bright hour delay? . . ."

She went on to say that she had read William Miller's book with interest, adding that she doubted "the propriety or ability of man to fix a definite time." She wrote poignantly of Jesus' injunction to his disciples to watch for his return:

About the year 1836, the claims of heaven compelled me to forsake the traditions of men, and "Remember the Sabbath . . ." Being only desirous of truth, I have tried, unbiased, to bring each new theory advanced, "To the law and to the testimony," adopting such as stood the test.

Though she had never heard any Adventists preach, and knew none personally, her subscription to the *Review* made her aware of what was occurring in the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist community. Lonely, she asked: "Why cannot some of our brethren come this way? How can the people believe that of which they have heard naught save reproach and denunciation?"¹⁰

In the year prior to the Great Disappointment, women continued to proclaim the Millerite message. A letter in the August 24, 1843, *Midnight Cry* told of a "female prayer meeting" in Ottowa, Illinois:

We have a female prayer meeting every Wednesday, where we read Miller's *Lectures* and all the good sermons we can get. We have long been praying the Lord to send some of you here. One lecture last winter by Bro. Branson, is all we had. If you can send us any help, do so. I want Brown's *Experience* very much to read in our meetings.¹¹

In the same issue, one H. H. Rodgers wrote from Oxford, New York:

We have been favored with the labors of our much esteemed Brother, K. C. Collins, Sister Rice . . . during the past winter,—the results have been glorious in the towns of Norwich, McDonough, Smithville, Oxford Green, Binghamton, Cortland, Ithaca, and Owego. More than 1,000 converts are the fruits . . .¹²

In Oswego County, New York, a "Sister Richards" was proclaiming the imminence of the second Advent.¹³ According to one Samuel Rhodes:

Sister Richards has done much, under God, in awakning the mind of the public to the grand and glorious subject of the Second Advent . . . though she has been violently opposed by the learned D.D.'s, some of whom take the trouble to go some distance to meet her at her appointed meetings to openly and publicly oppose the truth. But while they oppose, we see in a most remarkable manner, the fulfillment of prophecy.¹⁴

Another woman was lecturing in Attica, New York:

Olive Maria Rice.—This devoted sister is still laboring in this State. She lectured recently at Batavia, and Pine Hill, Genessee Co.; and Attica, Wyolming Co., near which place she was lecturing Oct. 3d. The effect is good, wherever she goes.¹⁵

Accepting the Millerite message was often a source of stress for women. A Hannah Dunning, for instance, was "suspended from church privileges" by the Associate Reformed Church "until she repent" of her Millerite errors, including adult baptism and the use of Millerite hymnody.¹⁶ Social conflict would obviously have been especially difficult for Millerite women, given women's limited social and economic options in nineteenth century America. But women who believed in the Millerite message were willing to engage in potentially painful conflict if necessary because of their convictions. Abigail Mussey provides a clear example.

Abigail Mussey

She was born in New London, New Hampshire, on August 31, 1811, the daughter of Zaccheus Messer, a farmer, and Hannah Hutchins. Her parents were Baptists. When in the 1830s she and her husband, Levi, a Universalist, encountered Millerite teachings, she concluded that Miller's views were correct and that, still unbaptized, she was in need of divine grace if she was to be prepared to meet Jesus at the second coming. Levi feared that a change of religious convictions on her part would alienate her from him, and while he did consent to let her read her Bible, he refused to permit her to go to Millerite meetings or associate with Millerites.

Millerite meetings would "scare" Millerite convictions into her, he believed, and she would desert him. After hiding her Bible from her, he finally relented in his opposition to her newfound faith and began reading the Bible, too. In 1838, both were baptized by a Freewill Baptist Minister.

When the members of the prayer meeting held at the Mussey home divided over the question of William Miller's message, Abby said: "I could not bear to be separated from any part of them. Yet, for the sake of God's



Abigail Mussey

truth, I felt willing to take my stand in favor of what I honestly believed to be Bible truth, and suffer the consequences." Most members of the group agreed to support Millerite teaching and a brother Bowles, who was defending it. However, unless Bowles stopped preaching Millerite doctrine, the group would be excluded from the Lisbon Quarterly Meeting of the Freewill Baptist Church. Bowles said he would cease his preaching in order to preserve peace, but the Freewill Baptist Church demanded that he denounce Millerite views. His appeal that his views be tested by the Bible was ignored; the breach led ultimately to the closure of the Whitefield Church. Describing this moment in her life, Abby said, "Oh, I felt happy in being rejected for the truth's sake!"¹⁷ Her little church did not commit itself to belief in a specific time for Jesus' return. But on the day her brother learned that she believed that Jesus would come again some time in 1843, he accused her of being a Millerite, and told her that she could not stay at his home that night as she had planned. She said that she would stay, and arrived at his home anyway, despite what he had said.¹⁸

Describing the Disappointment, she said that as 1843 drew near, "We as a church, we all united in our expectations. The world rejoiced and we mourned."¹⁹ After her husband and eldest son died, she worked among the sick in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She did not think at first that she knew enough to preach, and she feared being called a "preacher woman." Nonetheless, she found that she received preaching appointments. Even a Methodist minister who had preached a sermon urging his hearers to "keep the woman out, in obedience to Paul" was very supportive of her message about the second coming and the nearness of Jesus' return. Describing the situation for women, she later wrote:

Preachers that oppose female laborers can shut up their houses, and refuse to give out their appointments; but they can't shut up the private houses, or school-houses, and they cannot hinder others from giving out appointments; so there is no danger of shut doors or the way being hedged up Doors opened, and I moved on, with sword in hand and the gospel armor on, with loving all and fearing none. I knew in whom I believed, in whom I trusted, and who had sent me out. My mission was from heaven, not from man. My faith stood not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.²⁰

Visiting the "Huckleberry Tent" of mainly blacks at the Wilbrahan Camp Meeting in Massachusetts in 1860, she accepted black people as her brothers and sisters. Preaching at black churches at Clarence and at Clements (holding 13 meetings at Clarence in four weeks) in 1861, she related that "I felt I was with a portion of my father's family." As she was preaching among the blacks in Bay Shore, J. B. Fitch arrived from Cornwallis and asked her to go into that area to preach. Her response was: "According to my promise, I must go I felt to praise God that he had called me to preach free salvation to rich and poor, bond and free, black and white, male and female, old and young, high and low, and none has any right to say, 'Stop!' or hedge up the way."²¹ "The Yankee woman preacher," as she was called, held meetings twice a day during the week. She was called to preach in Hall's Harbor, Hull's Harbor, Port Williams, Sheffield Mills, and

Alesford. She was an enthusiastic and active preacher during and after the Millerite movement was in flower.

Lauretta Elysian Armstrong Fassett

Lauretta Elysian Armstrong Fassett engaged in a team ministry with her physician husband, O. R. Fassett, after 1844. When she and her husband first heard William Miller giving a series of lectures in Lockport, New York, in the winter of 1843-4, they were both Presbyterians. Her husband was the first to accept Millerite views, and she became concerned that he was experiencing a "religious mania" and had been captivated by a delusion. Soon, however, she, too, accepted the Millerite message



A contemporary artist's view of William Miller

and was "as ready to leave all for this great work" as was her husband.²²

When he lectured in Lewiston, New York, she accompanied him and visited people in their homes. They ministered in Albany, New York, and in Springfield, Worcester, and Boston, Massachusetts.²³ In Niagara County, New York, both would separately visit families in different districts. Although raised and educated in upper-class society, Fassett could adapt herself to those from all walks of life. Her husband wrote:

The educated, intelligent, and refined in society, found in her cultured mind, with modest and chaste demeanor, such superior knowledge in revelation and divine things, and such experience, as often to confound them; and they felt they were in the presence of a superior. The lowly and humble poor, saw in her such gentleness, modesty and humility, mingled with the grace of love, as to feel they were visited by an angel of mercy.²⁴

At Seneca Falls, Fassett was asked to offer some public addresses at a camp meeting. She was opposed to the idea, having been taught that it was inmodest and unbecoming for a woman to speak in public, and that women's preaching had been forbidden by Paul. However, "[p]revalued upon by entreaty, she threw aside her prejudices, stifled her feelings, overcame her training, and made the attempt to please others, and satisfy herself if the Lord's will was in it."²⁵ Although her husband reported that she was "not brilliant, nor eloquent," her first effort was marked by "her devoted piety, and her earnest zeal for the salvation of souls." Reflecting on what he believed was clearly her divine calling, he wrote:

The spirit of the Lord was with her; and there came to me, though as opposed as herself to women's taking the place as teacher or preacher in public, the scripture: "On my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit; and they shall prophecy [sic]." (Acts 2:18.) This kept me from ever hindering, or placing the least thing in the way of her duty, fearing I might grieve the Holy Spirit, by which she was divinely aided in reaching the hearts of her hearers with the words of life as they fell from her devoted lips. I soon felt I had an "help-meet" indeed, in the new gift revealed in my wife, which wiser ones in the church than ourselves discovered, and brought to light and use.²⁶

Seeking to witness to her father and other relatives, she went to see them in Oswego, New York. She was quite unprepared for their extreme hostility for what they perceived as her belief in false and heretical doctrines. They not only denounced her and her husband, but sought to prosecute him for neglect of his medical profession and to confine Laurretta at home to keep her away from her husband. Before she left his home, she heard her father disown her as his daughter, cutting her off from any relationship with him as long as she held to her Adventist views. She wrote to her father, though years would pass without a reply. Finally, upon the occasion of the death of her eldest sister, when Laurretta was living with her husband and son George and daughter Eliza in Providence, Rhode Island, he wrote to her and invited her to visit him. He admitted that, though he still believed that she and O. R. were in great error, he knew that they were sincere in their faith. There was a joyous and lasting reconciliation of father and daughter.²⁷

In January, 1845, in Providence, Rhode Island, Laurretta and O. R. shared the pulpit. Both felt embarrassed to be recompensed for their preaching labors with money. "Most of our years," they said, "we have had no stipulated salary for our labors, trusting in the Lord to provide, and often laboring with our own hands to supply our needs."²⁸ J.V. Himes invited O. R. to take an associate pas-

torate with him at the Kneeland Street Advent Church in Boston; there is no mention of the invitation's also being extended to Laurretta. She was very ill at this time. However she continued to take part in all religious meetings and to visit among the people, when the Fassetts moved to Sandy Hill, New York.

In November of 1867, Fassett joined her husband in Minneapolis, Minnesota, visiting for a while with Joshua Himes and his family who were living in Buchanan, Michigan.²⁹ At this time, she experienced a complete recovery of health, and "the duty of public labor in the ministry of the Word revived." She "endeavored to excuse herself from Christian work of this kind. But the more she refused to comply, her conscience was the more troubled, and her enjoyment fled."³⁰

While her preaching ministry was very successful, she experienced great physical distress and personal loss in Minnesota, too. She developed painful rheumatic neuralgia during a revival, causing her to end the series of meetings. Then her twenty-two-year-old son, George, died of drowning, and because of her husband's heavy ministerial commitments at the time she had to take care of most of the funeral arrangements. She also developed an eye disease, "granular lids," which became chronic and was a constant threat to her vision.³¹

The presence of Laurretta Fassett in the pulpit in any place "would call a large congregation to hear her instructive and deeply spiritual discourses, in which their feelings and hearts would be touched. It was so to the end of her labors near her home."³² In addition to her preaching, she had "much domestic care and labor in connection with her public duties." The Fassett home was opened to all, and since hired help was often scarce and money to pay for it even scarcer, she not only did all of her own housework, but she also milked cows, raised fowl, and churned butter. "When she was so pressed with domestic duties, her sermons were unstudied and unprepared until she entered the cars, and there, and at the depots, she would make her preparation for two sermons commonly." She never neglected her private prayer life, though, nor Scripture reading. Somehow, she managed this double labor, "a herculean task . . . for much stronger women . . . to the astonishment of all . . . Her toils and labors, her sacrifice of ease and of the comforts of home, often, for the salvation of souls, finally told on her naturally slender constitution."³³ O. R. did not once indicate



A contemporary artist's view of Lucy Miller

that he had offered to help his partner complete household chores. She died in April 14, 1884, at her home in Independence, Minnesota, almost sixty-three years old.³⁴ Isaac Wellcome wrote that she was "considered a logical, systematical, and able expounder of the Scriptures and a faithful Christian worker . . . a faithful co-worker with her husband from the beginning, and often supplying the desk to the satisfaction of large audiences, and working arduously in social meetings and 'pastoral visits'."³⁵ It is no wonder, then, that her husband subtitled her biography, *A Devoted Christian; A Useful Life*.

Mrs. John Crouch

Mrs. John Crouch, a sister of Samuel S. Snow and the wife of one of the Adventist preachers, witnessed in a very dramatic way in a meeting led by Joseph Bates in the August 12-7, 1844, camp meeting in Exeter, New Hampshire.³⁶ Bates's talk, on the second coming, began to show a lack of enthusiasm. Suddenly, Samuel Snow rode up on his horse and came into the meeting, sitting next to his sister and her husband. He began to tell her of his convictions about the cause of the apparent delay in the arrival of the second advent and to explain why he believed it would occur on the Day of Atonement in the autumn of 1844. This view would ultimately lead to the growth of the so-called "Seventh Month Movement," which proclaimed that the second coming would occur on October 22, 1844. Suddenly rising and interrupting Bates, Mrs. Crouch said:

It is too late, Brother Bates. It is too late to spend our time about these truths, with which we are familiar . . . It is too late, brethren, to spend precious time as we have since this campmeeting commenced. Time is short. The Lord has servants here who have meat in due season for His household. Let them speak, and let the people hear them. 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him.'

With that urgent introduction, Bates invited Snow to speak. Snow presented what became the "Midnight Cry" message.³⁷ It was noted that, although Mrs. Crouch never held a church office, she was in command.³⁸ This may have been so, but perhaps it was a reflection of the circumstances of women in mid-nineteenth century America that no one seems to know what her first name was. She is identified only by her relationship to her brother, Samuel Snow, and her husband, John Crouch. Nothing else seems to be known about her.

Rachel Oakes Preston

Rachel Oakes Preston, *nee* Harris, was born in Vernon, Vermont, in 1809. Baptized in 1826 into the Methodist Church, she became interested in the seventh-day Sabbath in 1837. She became a Seventh Day Baptist over the strong protestations of her Methodist minister. Joining the

Seventh Day Baptist Church at Verona, Oneida County, New York, she carried religious literature to Washington, New Hampshire. She tried to introduce the Sabbath to Adventists there, but they were quite intent on making preparations for the Second Advent and they did not heed her message.

In 1844, she embraced Adventism, after the Great Disappointment. Although she asked that the Verona Seventh Day Baptist congregation drop her name from their membership rolls, they refused because she had done nothing of which they disapproved; she still observed the Sabbath, they contended. Thus, she was a member of both groups.³⁹ Seeking again to share her belief in the seventh-day Sabbath with the Adventist community and others in the Washington area, she persuaded Frederick Wheeler, a Methodist and Adventist minister from Hillsboro, New Hampshire, of the truth of her Sabbath message. One Sunday morning in 1844, Wheeler had presided over a communion service in Washington, saying, "All who confess communion with Christ in such a service as this should be ready to obey God and to keep His commandments in all things." At this point, she had wanted to stand up and tell him that he had better set the communion table back and put the cloth over it until he himself began to keep the commandments of God. However, she said nothing. When she saw him later in March of 1844, however, she confronted him with the biblical evidence for the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Before long, he became a seventh-day Sabbath keeper.

As a result of her influence on Wheeler, many other Washington-area Adventists also began to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. While they did not accept the "Sabbath truth" as a body, five members of the Christian Society did. Directly and indirectly, Rachel Oakes Preston, who died in 1868, was responsible for the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath by the Millerites who ultimately became Seventh-day Adventists.⁴⁰

Clorinda S. Minor and Emily C. Clemons

In the wake of the Disappointment, Clorinda S. Minor, of Philadelphia, and Emily C. Clemons, a school principal from Rochester, New York, began publishing the *Advent Message to the Daughters of Zion*, a Millerite periodical aimed specifically at women. The May 8, 1844, *Advent Herald* said of the *Advent Message*:

This work is designed to advance the Advent cause among women of our land. Something of this kind seemed to be needed. If it should be wanted in future we may continue it . . . It will be seen that it is conducted by Sister C. S. Minor of Philadelphia, Pa., who is favorably known by her writings in the "Midnight Cry," for the past years.⁴¹

When she saw him later in March of 1844, however, she confronted him with the biblical evidence for the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Of Emily Clemons, the *Advent Herald* of February 14, 1844, said:

Emily C. Clemons—our estimable and pious sister of the Presbyterian Church in Rochester, N.Y., who has the charge of the Ladies High School in that place. She now attends the Adventist meeting, and is devoting what time she can get from the arduous duties of her school, to the spread of the Advent doctrine. (1/25/44).⁴²

Clemons wrote several articles for the 1844 *Advent Herald*. Of the three proposed *Advent Message* quarterlies, only two are extant: 1.1 (May 1844) and 1.2 (Sept. 1844). Minor also wrote a Millerite poem, "The New Earth," in 1842. In the first issue of the *Advent Message to the Daughters of Zion*, "An Appeal to the Women of Our Beloved Country" spoke of the need for women to be ready when Jesus returns, to heed the simple, humble, and self-educated William Miller, and to keep the faith of Jesus. Arguing that God often spoke in unexpected ways and in unexpected places, Minor and Clemons urged their "beloved countrywomen" to "be wise for ourselves" rather than shunning the Millerite movement because of the widespread prejudice against it.⁴³

In 1842, Clemons wrote "The Hope of the Gospel," in which she proclaimed a hope grounded in the good news contained in Scripture, a hope in a coming Savior. During the same year, Minor published *The New Earth, A Poem*. It is based on Isaiah 65:17, "For, behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind," and on Isaiah 66:22, 2 Peter 3:13, and Rev. 21:1.⁴⁴

The second issue (1844) refers to women as handmaidens of the Lord, and notes that women "ministered . . . [to Jesus] through all his weary path." They urge that, when Jesus appears again, women should be found waiting, like Mary at the sepulcher. Proclaiming the good news of the impending second advent is a ministry, they say, which "may surely be ours . . ." This task "becomes the trusting tenderness of woman, and it is worthy of her high resolve and unwearied zeal . . ."⁴⁵

Marian Stowell

In 1844, anticipating the second coming, Marian Stowell and her family sold their farm. They therefore had nothing to which to return after the Disappointment, and Edward Andrews invited the destitute Stowells to live with him and his family in Paris, Maine. In 1846, fifteen-year-old Marian read a tract defending the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath; she and her brother, Oswald, kept the next Sabbath. That Monday, she gave the tract to the seventeen-year-old son of their benefactor to read. Through her influence, John Nevins Andrews, who became Adventism's first official foreign missionary, began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath as well.⁴⁶

Praise God that he had called me to preach free salvation to rich and poor, bond and free, black and white, male and female and none has any right to say, 'Stop!'

Minerva Jane Loughborough Chapman

Minerva Jane Loughborough Chapman, born in 1829, devoted twenty-six years of her life to the *Review* and *Herald Publishing Association*; nine of these were spent as editor of the *Youth's Instructor*. In 1866 she and her husband, Oscar, moved to Battle Creek and she joined the *Review* and *Herald* staff as a typesetter. A responsible employee, in 1875 she became treasurer and in 1876 secretary of the Central SDA Publishing Association (which became the *Review* and *Herald Publishing Association*). She served as secretary until 1883. Treasurer of the General Conference from 1877 to 1883, she also worked as corresponding secretary of the General Conference. She edited the *Youth's Instructor* from 1875 to 1879 and from 1884 to 1889.⁴⁷ A highly organized and orderly person, she put everything in order on the day she died in 1923 at the age of 94.⁴⁸

Annie R. Smith

Annie R. Smith, poet and editorial assistant, was born in 1828; she became an Adventist in 1844. In 1850, forced to give up teaching because of problems with her vision, she continued to have an intense interest in writing. After she sent her poem, "Fear Not Little Flock," to the *Review* and *Herald*, she was invited to join the staff as a proofreader and copy editor. When she went to Saratoga Springs, New York, from New Hampshire to assist with the *Review* she was twenty-three years old. She became one of the first editorial workers in the denomination. Her hymns and poems were widely circulated.⁴⁹ She contributed forty-five poems to the *Youth's Instructor* and the *Review*. She wrote a book of poetry called *Home Here, and Home in Heaven; with Other Poems*, in 1855.⁵⁰

Among her most famous poems, which appears as a hymn in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, is "The Blessed Hope," published in August, 1852.⁵¹ She experienced severe emotional pain when she was disappointed in love—her hopes raised but her love not returned. She was in love with J. N. Andrews, but he loved someone else. It has been argued that this personal loss led her to lose interest in life;⁵² in any case, four years after she came to work at the *Review*, she was dead at twenty-seven of tuberculosis.

Mary A. Seymour

Mary A. Seymour, who died in 1884, wrote *The Excellency of the Lord's Anointed* [sic] or *Christ the Promised Messiah* [sic] in 1855. Her sixty-five-page pamphlet concerned her initial belief in the essential equality of God 'the Father' and God 'the Son.' At the time she held this belief she was twenty-five and "licensed by

the General F.W.B. Quarterly Conference.” Interestingly, only three years later, when she wrote the pamphlet, she had reversed her stand on this question, now arguing that ‘the Father’ was greater than ‘the Son’ and that the two were not equal or identical.⁵³ She seems to have been a licensed preacher and a teacher of Christian doctrine, but we know very little about her except through this one literary endeavor.

Helen M. Johnson

Helen M. Johnson is known primarily through two works, one a collection of poems and the other a tract in which the Christian church is poetically described. She was born in 1834 and died in 1863; according to her own account, her *Poems* was written “at an early age.” Part of one poem, “The Missionary,” gives a sense of her style and sensibility:

“Farewell, O, farewell!” the fond husband sighed,
As she wept in his arms, that beautiful bride;
“Stern duty commands me, and shall I delay,
When my Saviour himself is pointing the way?”⁵⁴

In her *Bride of Christ*, published in connection with the Second Advent Conference in Canada East, she tells the story of the church in allegorical and poetic fashion. She wrote:

While gross darkness and superstition covered all the land, . . . the infant Bride of Christ gazed around upon a world abandoned in ignorance, to the most absurd idolatry, and the greatest crimes . . . She was born amid scenes of sorrow and persecution, and placed in the school of Christ. She sat at his feet, . . . he made commandments[,] and she obeyed them. She was proud and rebellious when she first came under his discipline, but he taught her humility.⁵⁵

Mary D. Wellcome

Mary D. Wellcome wrote at least three interesting works during the period of 1856 to 1868. The first of these—*A Sketch, Being a Vindication of the Writer's Course in Regard to Her Public Labors in the Cause of God, and Final Separation from Her Family*—raised the very sensitive question of whether a woman who believed herself called to public ministry had the right to choose this calling over her responsibilities to her family. Writing to remove the “false impressions” which had circulated about her extensive travels, and her subsequent complete separation from her family, she explained that before taking up her public ministry she had waited until her husband had become convinced that God was directing her steps. She claimed that she had obtained his verbal and written consent before continuing in her work for several years.

Changing his mind, her husband later asked her to make a public confession that her course of activity was

wrong, to pledge herself to discontinue her ministry, and thus, as she saw it, to ignore her own convictions about her duty. This she would not do, and so he voluntarily released her from all obligations connected with her marriage and told her to “go and finish her mission.” As she told it: “The writer accepted the freedom proffered, choosing rather to forego the comforts of a home, the companionship of a beloved and only child, and become a wanderer, with Jesus for the bridegroom of her heart . . .” She believed, she said, that God would eventually vindicate her cause.

Since the summer of 1845, she had felt especially impressed to labor even more actively. Bearing witness and testifying about Jesus in meetings, she was impressed to visit the sick, the poor, and the neglected, and to write. At first she dismissed these impressions as satanic. But when a “devoted sister” announced that God had told her that Wellcome had been called to labor for Christ but was ignoring the call and thus was backsliding, she decided to enter enthusiastically into the work of ministry. Discouraging her greatly, her husband said that her impressions were diabolical. Fearing to be lost for eternity, she determined to continue her ministry.⁵⁶

She felt called to go to Massachusetts; instead, however, her husband decided that they would both go to Maine for a while to minister. When she had no peace, she decided to go to Boston to answer her call, and her husband no longer opposed her. Relating that her husband had been impressed before this to go and preach the gospel, she asserted that he nonetheless continued to flee, Jonah-like, from the call.

From 1849, she had many opportunities to preach and engage in other activities as part of her ministry. Her travel expenses were, she said, provided by God; thus, she did not need to use any of her husband's meager funds. She explained that he had “escaped” from his call to ministry by going into business with his brother, but that the business had failed—leaving him with a substantial debt. In May of 1854 she asked to be released from her marriage obligations because she thought that her husband was

hindering her work for God. She quoted him as replying: “I never did, I do not now, ask you to stay at home all the time, nor to go with me; I only ask that when you go I may know it, and where, and that I have a companion, though she is not with me.”⁵⁷

When she told him that she believed that God was guiding her in her labor, he said, she recalled, “This I dare not oppose, lest I be found standing against

God.” She said that he wrote several letters to other people, relating that he thought God had called her to “labor in a more public capacity than the generality of females” and “that God uses her talent for good. I have no doubt.”

Her husband later asked her to make a public confession that her course of activity was wrong, to pledge herself to discontinue her ministry.

Of herself, she said, "I seemed to hear the voice of God saying unto me, 'I have chosen thee to be a witness of the power of saving grace, and to persuade others to seek for full salvation through Christ. I have ordained thee to do this work.'"⁵⁸

Throughout this work, she did not once refer to her husband by name. In fact, he was none other than the well known Isaac C. Wellcome of Yarmouth, Maine, author of the *History of the Second Advent Message*. Surely everyone who knew her at that time knew the identity of her husband, so there was no real need then to name him. An obituary from *The World's Crisis* links the two:

Charles H. Wellcome. Died in Yarmouth, Me., June 13th, 1864 of diphtheria, Charles H. son of I. C. and M. D. Wellcome, aged twelve years and six months.⁵⁹

An account of the boy's death, signed by Mary Wellcome, appeared in *the World's Crisis* of the preceding week. Another son who had died several years before was mentioned.

In 1868, Mary Wellcome wrote and published *The Millennium*, a historical-theological treatment of the millennium. In a third work, *Spiritualism Exposed*, she defended Christianity and critiqued the claims of spiritualism.⁶⁰

Anna Eliza Boyd Smith

Anna Eliza Boyd Smith preached at camp meetings and conventions, did missionary work among the black population of Philadelphia and in New York, and was the first leader of united missionary efforts among Advent Christian women. Born to Quaker parents in Philadelphia on July 20, 1825, she heard William Miller preach in 1842, when she was 17. She was a graduate of the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, as well as a successful business person who operated jewelry and cutlery stores. Though she managed stores for twenty years, she ultimately became convinced that Christ would return soon and that she must focus full time on communicating the Advent message to blacks in New York.⁶¹

Her mission work in New York began in 1863, and two missions were established. Visiting the sick and poor, giving Bible readings, distributing religious tracts, and holding prayer meetings in tenement houses, she opened a mission house on October 13, 1867. This was the Star of Hope Mission.⁶² On April 6, 1866, she was ordained to the ministry.⁶³

A small church in Hackensack, New York, was built with funds she received as a result of her preaching ministry. When a group of women banded together in 1860 to hold annual meetings at the Wilbraham camp meeting, they decided in 1867 to organize themselves into a formal association, the Union Female Missionary Association.

Anna Smith served as president for some years until she asked to be relieved of this responsibility because of her heavy missionary obligations. Miriam McKinstry was the secretary and treasurer of the Association for some years.⁶⁴

While Anna Smith was in New York, she started a periodical, *Woman and Her Work*, which was published by the Association. This paper was later enlarged and published in Rochester, New York. Its editor was E. S. Jennings, a woman preacher; it was also published in Concord, New Hampshire. Although it served its purpose effectively, it had to be discontinued in 1872 for lack of funds and because those responsible for its production had to travel so extensively.

Some contemporary men were very suspicious of a women's organization and what it might accomplish. Many men did not readily accept women preachers and may have done something to deter their success. These attitudes discouraged the women, and after a few years they discontinued the organization.⁶⁵

In 1867, Smith was invited to speak at Hackensack. When she arrived there, she found that some people were opposed to women preachers. Thus, she did not speak; "I took all patiently," she wrote, "and will wait for the Lord to work."⁶⁶

A physician was contributing to the work of the Mission by providing the money to pay the employees' salaries. When he wrote to her that he had heard that she taught and preached doctrines he regarded as incorrect, and threatened to cut off his financial help unless she and her workers united with some "respectable church," she said that she could not do so and would put her complete trust in God to provide for her and the others.

In April, 1872, her health began to fail and she turned over responsibility for the mission to the Zion Conference in New York.⁶⁷ She had hopes of being an independent missionary. In March, 1875, she received a letter from Thomas J. Cox. She had written to him to ask his advice on the question whether she should accept a call to pastor the Second Advent church in Rochester, New York. He strongly encouraged her to stay with the mission where she currently was, and she took his advice.⁶⁸ Her stance was consistently non-sectarian, and she occasionally engaged in evangelistic work with other people. It is not certain when she died, but there was evidence that she was still alive in 1896.⁶⁹

Beulah Mathewson

Beulah Mathewson was born in September of 1819 and died on April 27, 1892. On the occasion of her death, Frank Burr, a prominent Advent Christian minister wrote:

The story of the Queen of Sheba proved that women, like men, find their greatest happiness in mental and moral improvement

She was a woman of much culture and ability, of an ardent temperament and with mental faculties much above the ordinary grade of human intellect. She bent all her energies to the great work of spreading the gospel of the coming Kingdom and her presence at camp and general meetings was always that of an enthusiastic worker in the cause of Christ. She was a great help to her excellent husband in his ministerial work and often filled the pulpit as a preacher in a very acceptable way, although she shrank from such a public position unless she was needed.⁷⁰

In 1873, her pamphlet, *Woman from a Bible Standpoint: or Do the Scriptures Forbid the Public Labor of Woman*, was published by the Advent Christian Publication Society. In that work, she said:

Woman, as God's final creation, is man's "helpmeet" or "helpmate." This term means one like or as the man, standing opposite or before him; implying that woman was to be a perfect resemblance of the man, possessing neither inferiority or superiority, but being all things like and equal and unto himself. The very term seems to indicate, at least, her position to be the opposite of what modern fancy may have painted her—a kind of sylph-like creature, partaking more of the ethereal than the material, a beautiful statue, a doll, a mere plaything, destined to no share in the sober realities of life. Nay, a helpmate is a being that can sympathize with and enter the sphere of meditation and feeling peculiar to man, and to assist him in all the vocations of life, whether physical or mental.⁷¹

Further, Mathewson cautioned, to take a narrow view of the function of a "helpmate" from mere domestic "nature" would not have authoritative support from women's Creator. "Are not the examples of holy women in scripture patterns for us to copy?" she inquired.

Though written almost a century and a quarter ago, her arguments, which remain convincing, sound familiarly modern. She noted that while Sarah was obedient to her husband when he functioned as the oracle of God, God had said to Abraham when he disagreed with his wife, "In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice." Mathewson restored Miriam to her proper place as joint leader of the nation of Israel with her two brothers. And, calling Deborah "Israel's chief magistrate and prophetess" while referring to Barak as Israel's military commander, she describes Deborah not only as exemplifying courage, true patriotic intrepidity, valor, and ardor for the people's salvation but as having been given her leadership role by God.

Mathewson observed that a woman who, because she left a throne to travel more than 1,200 miles to seek to understand heavenly wisdom, would in the judgment condemn a whole generation because of her piety. This was, of course, the Queen of Sheba, whose story proved that women, like men, find their greatest happiness in mental and moral improvement—and that Christ could highly commend a woman occupying a throne.

In answer to the claim that man was the "head" of woman, and that woman was not therefore to teach man in a dictatorial way, she maintained that while God is said to be the head of Christ, this is not taken to mean that Christ had no public labor to perform. She discussed the two places in the Bible, 1 Cor. 14:34-5 and 1 Tim. 2:11-2, often used to justify the claim that women could not lead out in public worship, and pointed out that a variety

of customs had changed since the first century. Synagogue custom used to permit the men present at a service to refute the speaker, ask questions, and object—liberties not enjoyed by women at the time—even though custom had changed and at present this right was not typically accorded to men or women. Women had not been well educated, and were not usually taught to read or interpret the Bible or commentaries.

Believing that scripture limited women's public ministry only to preclude their dominance or dictatorship, she argued that this limitation posed no real obstacle to ordinary teaching of women or men by a woman. If women could never teach men, she pointed out, they could not teach any Sabbath/Sunday School classes and mothers could not teach their children, especially their sons. The "silence" enjoined in 1 Cor. 14:34 would prohibit women even from *singing* in church, since Paul recognized singing as speaking, teaching, and admonishing one another.

She refused to concede that the Bible degrades and enslaves women. She commented:

Woman was created as a help to man. Was she created to help in matters of the least importance? Does man need more help in temporal than in spiritual things? She can assist him much in spiritual as well as temporal things, if he will only receive her. Being formed from his side, it seems natural and easy that man should curve his arm in a direction to support her in this her proper place. But what if he make the curve so as to divide and elbow her at a greater distance from him, not accepting her assistance? He bruises his own flesh, acts against his own interest, consequently must be the loser.⁷²

Somehow, she does not seem quite to fit Frank Burr's description of a woman who "shrank" from public position.

Miriam McKinstry

Miriam McKinstry, an Advent Christian pastor with her husband Levi C. McKinstry in Beebe Plain, Quebec, in 1880, was born in 1846. When she lectured, her specialty was the four great empires of Daniel. Her husband, a history teacher, helped her make the connections between prophecy and history. A book, *The World's Great Empires*, which may have been co-authored by the two, was the result of their cooperation. In her lecturing career, she spoke in twenty-five states in North America and in four Canadian provinces. She died on February 22, 1930, in Boston, at eight-four years of age.⁷³

Accounts of the careers and contributions of Millerite women are undoubtedly and unfortunately limited. Opposition to religion in general and to women's religious efforts in particular; the women's own reticence about assuming public roles; and the self-imposed silence resulting from the shame and embarrassment caused by the Great Disappointment may all have affected the availability of material regarding these women.

Still, despite the paucity of relevant material, there is enough evidence to make clear that women were important to the Millerite movement and that the Millerite movement was important for women. Gifted evangelists and missionaries contributed significantly to Millerite

efforts to spread the gospel as they understood it. And the movement offered women community, identity, and opportunities to exercise their gifts.

The Millerite movement affected American religion in a variety of ways; among its valuable contributions was the sometimes grudging recognition and support it offered women in a period during which they were even more marginal than today. The stories of the Millerite women considered in this article remind us that openness to women's gifts and responsiveness to women's needs is a genuine, if not always remembered, part of the Millerite heritage.⁷⁴

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