

# ELLA P FENTON



**Map of Hilton Head Island  
Before 1861  
Compiled from deeds by  
Fred Hack, Sr.**

Born: Abt. 1845 in NY

Died: Nov 28, 1867  
Stoney Plantation, Hilton Head, SC

Appointment(s):  
American Missionary Association  
(AMA)  
Stoney's Plantation Fairfield School  
Hilton Head, SC  
Nov. 1866 – May 1867

Ella P. Fenton was born about 1845 in New York to Stephen F. Fenton (1804 VT - 1864), a physician, and Emily Dewey (1814-1874). She was on the US census in 1850 residing in Sandy Creek and the 1855 New York state census in Richland, both towns in Otswego County, New York. Ella was living in Bedford, Westchester County, New York and was there in the 1870 US Census. She mentioned in her application to the American Missionary Association that she felt her experience teaching several black children who lived with her family in New York qualified her to teach the freedmen in South Carolina<sup>1</sup> Ella left Mt. Kisco, New York in November 1866 as a teacher appointed by the American Missionary Association to serve the freedmen at Fairfield School on Stoney Plantation, Hilton Head Island until May 1867.<sup>2</sup> Upon her arrival, she wrote a letter to Rev. Samuel Hunt in New York describing her voyage, but especially her new home - its surroundings and the people she first encountered in South Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richardson, Joe M. Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks 1861-1890, p 168.

- American Missionary Association. *The American Missionary*, Vol XI, No 4, 'Teacher's List 1866-67'. New York: April 1867.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Fenton, Ella P. American Missionary Association. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University, Amistad Research Center. Item # H6285: [Letter Dec 6, 1866 from Hilton Head to Rev Samuel Hunt].

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She returned home to New York in May 1867 for a Northern summer vacation and returned to Hilton Head in November 1867 with her sister Emily to re-open her classroom, but died shortly after her return to the island.<sup>4</sup> Her death was referred to in letters of teachers about the risks of teaching in rural and remote areas.<sup>5</sup>

Ella died on November 28, 1867 and her obituary was published in February 1868 in the *American Missionary* newsletter wherein was stated that she had been a good teacher for the Association for several years.<sup>6</sup> They praised her: “She was a good teacher full of the missionary spirit, and her loss will be deeply felt by the people with whom she labored.”

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<sup>4</sup> *New York Herald*, newspaper. “Port of New York Departures”, Sunday, Nov 10, 1867, p10. Ancestry.com.

- Smith, Janel Janiczek, *From A Northern Home to a Southern School: Cultural Imperialists or Just Stubborn Yankees*, pp 178-9. Statesboro, GA: Georgia Southern University, Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies, electronic theses and dissertations 2013, <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/58>, accessed Sept 2, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp 374-375.

- American Missionary Association, *The American Missionary*, Vol XI, Feb 1868, p 78 [Letters from co-teachers praising her].

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p 74 [Obituary].