

MARTHA ANN JOHNSON



1822-1871

Born: Sep. 17, 1822 in Peacham, VT

Died: Dec. 24, 1871 in St. Helena,
Beaufort Co., SC

Appointment(s):

National Freedmen's Relief Association (NFRA)
Perryclear Plantation – Broomfield School
Beaufort, SC
Feb. 21, 1863 – Jul. 1864

American Missionary Association
Brickyard Plantation – Hilton Head, SC
Oct. 11, 1864 - 1865

St. Helena Island (likely)
Beaufort County, SC
Oct. 19, 1867 – May 1871

Martha Johnson was born September 17, 1822 in Peacham, Vermont, the oldest of nine siblings. Martha was educated at the Peacham public school and attended the Franklin Academy in New Hampshire from 1838-39.¹ She never married. In the winter of 1842, she became a member of the Congregational Church in Peacham. In 1855, she accepted a position as Matron of the female workhouse on Blackwell Island, New York.² Her mother became very ill the same year and Martha returned home to care for her, but her mother died shortly thereafter. Then Martha took a position as a teacher at an industrial school in New York from 1859-1861.

Martha was one of the first teachers to serve the freedmen of South Carolina. On February 21, 1863 she was commissioned by the National Freedmen's Relief Association under Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, Military Governor of the Department of the South as a teacher to the freedmen in Beaufort, SC.³ She taught out of the

¹ Vermont Historical Society. Montpelier, VT. *Johnson Family Papers*, Vol I, Martha Johnson Letters, 1863-1872.

<https://www.vermonthistory.org/researchresearch-resources-online/civil-war-transcriptions/martha-johnson>.

² Ibid. MSA 185:4. [letters from SC to family from March 1863 to Dec 1865 about work as a teacher to the freedmen there].

<https://vermonthistory.org/research/research-resources-online/civil-war-transcriptions/Martha-johnson>

³ "National Freedmen's Relief Association. "Locations of Schools, Personnel and Teachers Spring and Fall 1863". <https://www.drbronsontours.com>

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Mission House in Beaufort with a contract for \$10 salary per month paid by the Association and transportation and rations paid by the U.S. government.⁴ She transferred June 3, 1863 to Perryclear Plantation on Port Royal Island where she taught in the Broomfield School.⁵ She and her co-teacher Martha Clary at Perryclear were visited by Rachel Mather who had recently been appointed as supervisor of all other teachers in the area.⁶ Martha suffered tremendously from the extreme heat in 1863 so returned home to Vermont for the next summer in July 1864.

Before her return to South Carolina in the fall, Martha separated from the NFRA and accepted a commission dated October 11, 1864 with the American Missionary Association on Hilton Head Island at Brickyard Plantation.⁷ Her AMA contract was for \$20 per month salary and the same rations as soldiers received from the government. According to Martha's sister Clarissa, the schools in Hilton Head were in the process of closing from 1865-1867, so Martha went back North in the summer of 1865.⁸ She stayed there until October 1867 when she signed a new contract on October 19, 1867 for Beaufort at \$15 per month for a total of eight months, but she remained in Beaufort County until her death.⁹ From her friend Martha Clary's letters, it is likely that their last assignment was in Beaufort County, but they were located on St. Helena. Martha wrote a letter to Rev. E.P. Smith of the AMA on February 3, 1868 in which she described her pupils' devotion to learning: "...they love school, come with smiling faces, eager for their lessons although they had a two mile walk with bare feet, somedays stopping to warm on the sunny side of the school house before entering."¹⁰ *The American Missionary* of May 1871 lists Martha as being in Beaufort from Sep. 1870 - May 1871.¹¹

She had been suffering from ill health for several years, but finally became very sick on Monday, December 11, 1871 with a high fever and inability to swallow. She died on sabbath morning, December 24th, 1871.¹² Martha was buried on Christmas

⁴ Clark, Clarissa. "Biography of Martha Johnson" [her sister]. Barre, VT: Vermont Historical Society. Johnson Family Papers. *Martha Johnson Letters Transcriptions*, MSA 185:5, 1871.

⁵ Smith, Janel Janiczek, "From A Northern Home to a Southern School: Cultural Imperialists or Just Stubborn Yankees", p 293. Statesboro, GA: Georgia Southern University, Jack N Averitt College of Graduate Studies, electronic theses and dissertations 2013. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/58>, accessed Sep 12, 2018.

⁶ Ibid. p 436.

⁷ Johnson, Martha. Vermont Historical Society. *Martha Johnson Letters Transcriptions* from Johnson Family of Peacham, VT Papers, 1854-1904. MSA 185. Letter 12 Apr 1871 from Hilton Head, p 14-15.

⁸ Clark, Clarissa, p 20.

⁹ Clary, Martha H. Vermont Historical Society. *Martha Johnson Letters Transcriptions* from Johnson Family of Peacham, VT Papers, 1854-1904. MSA 185. Letter from Miss Clary to Martha's father 26 Dec 1871 from Beaufort, p 14-15.

¹⁰ Johnson, Martha. American Missionary Association Archives. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University, Amistad Research Center. # H6935: [Letter Feb 3, 1868 from Beaufort to Rev E.P. Smith]..

¹¹ The American Missionary Association. *American Missionary*, Vol XV,

No 5, May 1871. Teachers Assigned by AMA to Beaufort from Sep 1, 1870-May 1871.

- Ibid. Vol XIII, NO 5, May 1869, p 100. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012370656/cite>.

¹² Vermont Historical Society. "Introduction to Finding Aids" ..

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Day in St. Helena's Episcopal Churchyard on Ladies' Island, Beaufort County, South Carolina.¹³

¹³ Findagrave.com Memorial ID: 84817978 created 11 Feb 2012 by Candy Wickhardt Pethe, Tombstone photo added by Pethe 2 May 2012.
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/84817978/martha-johnson#source>.