

FRANCES A. LITTLEFIELD



1836-1921

Born: 1836 in Hallowell, ME

Died: 1921 in NY

Appointment(s):

American Missionary Association
Whitehead Farm, VA
1864

Lumber Camp – Hampton, VA
Oct. 1864

Grove Hill Plantation – Ogeechee, GA
Oct. 1865

Melrose Plantation-Daufuskie Island, SC
Mar. 1867

Union Hill, TN
1870-1871

Talladega College – Talladega, AL
1873-1877

Frances Littlefield was born in Hallowell, Maine about 1836. She first applied in 1864 to the American Missionary Association to be a teacher to the freedmen in the South.¹ Frances was appointed to Whitehead Farm in Virginia in the same year where she worked side by side with African American teacher Clara S. Duncan.² Clara was a 24-year old free black woman who was an orphan working her way through college by cleaning houses and teaching. Frances was insulted by local whites for associating so closely with a black person. Clara left the farm in March 1864 to return to Oberlin College in Ohio.³ Frances finished out the school term and then returned to Vermont to visit friends and family.

Miss Littlefield was then sent by the AMA in October 1864 to a lumber camp near Hampton, Virginia where she met her future co-teacher, Esther W. Douglass. At the

¹ Littlefield, Frances. American Missionary Association Archives. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University, Amistad Research Center. [Letter to George Whipple, Boston, 12 Dec 1864].

² Richardson, Joe M. Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association & Southern Blacks, 1861-1890. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986. P 193.

³ DeBoer, Clara Merritt. His Truth Is Marching On: African Americans Who Taught the Freedmen for the American Missionary Association, 1861-1877. Routledge Press, Nov 10, 2016. Reprint of 1995 edition. Chapter II, p 106.

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camp, there were a few white families of the men who logged, cut and loaded timber for shipment to Baltimore's ship-building industry.⁴

In October 1865, Frances and her co-teacher from the lumber mills, Esther Douglass., were sent by the AMA to the Ogeechee area about twenty miles from Savannah, Georgia.⁵ They operated a school from the parlor in their home in the main house which they renamed 'Spinster Hall' on Grove Hill Plantation. The landowner predicted their failure. "Those women in there think they are doing something great, but those children only learn like parrots. They [the teachers] will soon come to the bottom of their brains."⁶ Their school attracted 120 students on the first day from seven neighbor plantations, with some children walking as far as six miles barefoot through marsh waters to school.⁷ In a letter to Samuel Hunt, Miss Littlefield noted that "[the students] who remain are very orderly and studious. More so than any children I ever taught at the north."⁸ With the help of a third teacher from Savannah, Frances and Esther also opened an 'industrial school' teaching freedwomen and girls to "cut patterns, baste, sew buttonholes and make collars for shirts."⁹

In June 1866, the two teachers went North for summer break and one of their students, James Grant, wrote to the AMA begging them to send the two women back to Grove Hill: "please to send them to the Grove Hill Plantation again for they have done so much good here and have been so kind to the sick they we all feel that they are dear friends to us."¹⁰ While the teachers were up north, the Freedmen's Bureau Act passed in March 1865 allowing Grove Hill Plantation and Grove Point to be sold to ex-slaves in 40-acre plots by General Sherman's Field Order No 15. However, the freedmen only had title to the crops they produced and merely temporary title to the land. The plantation owner, Mr. Burroughs had returned to claim his land by paying his back taxes. He signed a contract with the ex-slaves for their labor and granted them continued use

⁴ Stanley, J. Taylor. "A History of Black Congregational Christian Churches of the South". NY: United Church Press for the AMA, 1978. Digitized NC: Eton College, Oct 9,1994, p 36. https://archive.org/details/ahistoryofblackc00stan_djvu.

⁵ Ibid.

- Douglass, Esther W. Papers, 1887-1909. "Joy in Service: My Life Story", No 1, 11. American Missionary Association. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University, Amistad Research Center.

- Smith, Janel Janiczek. From A Northern Home to a Southern School: - Cultural Imperialists or Just Stubborn Yankees. Georgia Southern University. Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies. Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 58. Spring 2013. p 165. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/58>.

⁶ Jones, Jacqueline. "All Educational Politics are Local: New Perspectives on Black Schooling in the Postbellum South" in Rethinking the History of American Education, pp 57 William J. Reese and John L.

Rury, eds. <https://www.history.wisc.edu/publications/rethinking-the-history-of-american-education>.

⁷ Ibid, pp 56-57.

⁸ Littlefield, Frances. American Missionary Association Archives. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University, Amistad Research

Center. Item #19617: [Letter from Grove Hill Plantation, GA to Rev S Hunt Feb 1, 1866.].

⁹ Jones, Jacqueline. Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War. NY: Vintage Books, 2009, p 256.

¹⁰ Jones, :All Educational Politics". pp 58-59.

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of the main house for their school and a residence for the teachers. Littlefield and Douglass returned in the fall of 1866 to the plantation prepared to open the classroom. But no sooner had they started school, than the owner proceeded to evict the two teachers in the middle of the term.¹¹ So Frances and Esther sadly packed up and prepared to leave for their next AMA assignment.

Thus, in March 1867, the pair were off to Daufuskie Island, a remote location off the coast of Hilton Head Island and accessible only by ferry or private boat.¹² The two AMA teachers from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts had just left in 1867 and there was still a great need for teachers. The Stoddard family who had bought Melrose Plantation in 1837 from the Mongins had fled Daufuskie to Savannah in 1861, but John Stoddard returned in 1866 to reclaim his property.¹³ He signed contracts with the former slaves for their labor and reserved a building for their school. Two other AMA teachers on Hilton Head Island, Eliza Ann Summers and Elizabeth Hill, visited Esther and Frances on Daufuskie on April 11, 1867 and Eliza commented that the plantation's gardens were amazingly beautiful with unusual flowers in abundance;

If I could only describe this place. It's useless to try, for all my life, I never saw such a beautiful place...[nothing] that would be a thousandth part compared with this....I should think there was as many as 50 varieties of roses without stretching it one bit. I could not begin to describe the different sizes, shades, and colors of these roses besides the many other flowers that I had never heard of or seen before....¹⁴

Eliza also noted that the two teachers were the only white people that she saw on the entire island.¹⁵ Esther and Frances decided to spend summer break 1867 with their friends in Ogeechee. One day they took a boat to Savannah to obtain supplies for the next school term on Daufuskie. Miss Douglass relates what happened:

Miss Littlefield was seized with Billious fever and the doctor said she must go north. I went back to the Island, taking a barrel of supplies, expecting that when the schools closed in Savannah, a teacher would come to be with me. Before the boat reached the

¹¹ Ibid. p 59.

¹² Smith, Janel Janiczek. From A Northern Home to a Southern School: Cultural Imperialists or Just Stubborn Yankees. Georgia Southern University. Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies. Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 58. Spring 2013. p 165. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/58>.

¹³ Trinkle, Michael, ed. "Archaeological Investigations at Haig Point, Webb . Oak Ridge, Daufuskie Island Beaufort County, South Carolina". Research Series 15. Columbia, SC: Chicora Foundation, Inc, March 1989, p 42.

- Hersch, Jenny and Sallie Ann Robinson. Images of America: Daufuskie Island. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2018, p 15.

¹⁴ Martin, Josephine W. ed. "Dear Sister": Letters Written on Hilton Head Island 1867. Beaufort, SC: Beaufort Book Co, Inc, 1977. [letters by AMA teacher, Eliza Ann Summers to her sister].p 64.

¹⁵ Ibid. p 63.

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Island, I was too sick to sit up and knew I had the fever. For three weeks I was on my bed there before the teacher came. . . . Colored women came in to do my bidding there and brought oysters and chicken but I could not eat. I tried to get well after the teacher came, but in vain, so one day my bed was laid on the boat and I on it. The house was shut and to Savannah we went. From the boat I was taken to a berth in a steamer bound for New York. ..¹⁶.

So Miss Littlefield was sent back to Vermont for recovery. While her co-teacher, Esther was living with her sister in Tennessee, she taught in Union Hill, Tennessee for a bachelor Methodist minister who had been turned away from the church because of his loyalty to the Union. He opened his own church and school and applied to the AMA for a teacher and Miss Douglass heeded his call. He did everything he could for her comfort, even sending and paying for Frances Littlefield to come to provide her company.¹⁷ Frances had recovered from the 'fever', so she went to Tennessee where she spent at least 1870-1871 with her colleague Esther Douglass.

After Esther left Tennessee, the American Missionary Association transferred Frances to Talladega, Alabama where she taught in black schools for most of the 1870s.¹⁸ Frances died in 1921 in upstate New York. She is buried in Sherburne West Hill Cemetery in Sherburne, Chenango County, New York.¹⁹

¹⁶ Stanley, J. Taylor. "A History of Black Congregational Christian Churches of the South". NY: United Church

Press for the AMA, 1978. Digitized NC: Eton College, Oct 9, 1994, p 39.

https://archive.org/details/ahistoryofblackc00stan_djvu.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ American Missionary Association. *31st Annual Report and Proceedings at Annual Meeting 1877*, p 65.

https://ecom/books?id=N_T0tyYa65sC&dq=frances+littlefield+%2B+American+missionary+association+source=gbs_navlinks_s. (Talladega College 1873, 1875. 1876)

- American Missionary Association. *The American Missionary*, Vol 19, p 29.

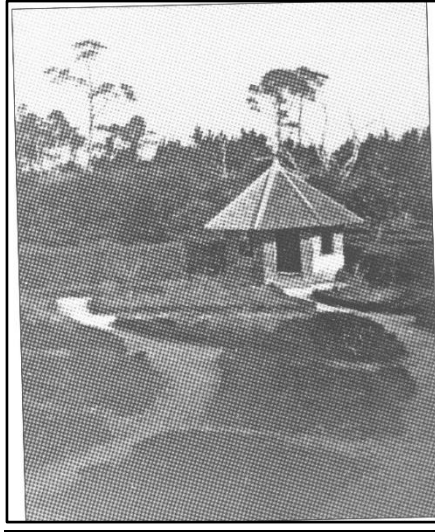
Talladega College Instructors for .Nov 1873 and Feb 1876.

- Jones, *Saving Savannah*, p 396.

¹⁹ Findagrave.com Memorial ID:81836447 11 Dec 2011 created by Dovia; maint by Diane Branham.

Sherburne West Hill Cemetery; Sherburne, Chenango Co, NY, Lot 60 E Grave #8. Tombstone added 10 May 2014 by Theron Rogers.

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Melrose Plantation Gardens and Gazebo

Designed by James Henderson

Installed 1845-1847

Owned by John Stoddard II

& his wife Mary Lavinia Mongin