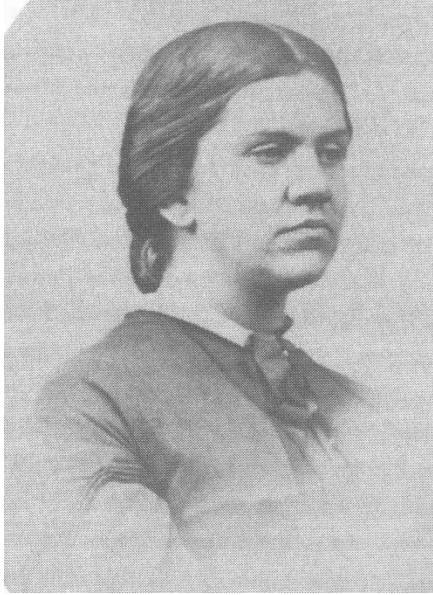


JANE BRIGGS SMITH



Born: Aug. 19, 1834 in Hanson, Plymouth, MA

Died: Jan. 22, 1925 in Hanson, Plymouth, MA

Appointment(s):

New England Freedmen's Aid Society
Washington, D.C.
1864

Mitchelville – Hilton Head, SC
Jul. 1865

School Principal – Sumter, SC
1866-1870

1834-1925

Jane Briggs Smith, daughter of Captain Joshua and Saba (Drew) Smith, was born on August 19, 1834 in Hanson, Plymouth County, Massachusetts. During and after the Civil War, Miss Smith taught former slaves in Hilton Head, Port Royal and Sumter, South Carolina and in Washington, D.C.¹ She met her husband, Friend Fuller Fiske (1826-1906) while she was in the South. He was working as a civilian nurse during the Civil War.² Jane was first sent by the New England Freedmen's Aid Society to Washington, D.C. where she served less than one year³. She then was appointed July 1865 as a teacher to Mitchelville by NEFAS and was sponsored by the Cambridgeport, Massachusetts branch.⁴ After slightly more than one year at Mitchelville, Miss Smith was sent to Sumter, SC as a school Principal.⁵ Jane wrote several letters from Sumter to William Fuller Fiske, including one dated March 4, 1867

¹ New England Freedmen's Aid Society. Boston, Massachusetts. *The Freedmen's Record*, Vol I No 7 July 1865 Hilton Head, SC., p 118.

² Fiske, Jane Briggs Smith, Papers, 1806-1923. American Antiquarian Society: Manuscript Collections. "Collection Description". Social Network and Archival Context. <https://snaccooperative.org/details/19432663/2836050>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Zeise, JoAnn. "Dawn of Freedom: The Freedmen's town of Mitchelville on Hilton Head. Island, S.C." M.A. thesis. University of South Carolina. 2012, pp 58-59.

⁵ Fiske, Jane Briggs Smith, Papers, 1806-1923. Ibid.

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about salaries and one written January 12, 1868 about the role of religious instruction in her curriculum.⁶

Jane Smith was an outspoken abolitionist and a free-thinker and advocated for the rights of the freedman. Just two months after the Civil War ended, Miss Smith advocated for the right to vote for freedmen. She once said that working for social justice is what brought her to the South and she would remain until she felt she could do no more.⁷ She wrote to her future husband on August 20, 1865 that there was an ‘imperative need for *legal* justice and *social* justice for the freed people.’ Dougherty says she “was a staunch advocate of the ‘social justice’ she felt was due to the black people.”⁸ Jane said she wanted to teach freedmen so that they could go “teach where white teachers were not allowed to go.”

She wrote to her future husband in 1866 : “My duty is there, my inclination leads me there; a great noble work is there which I am fitted to help do’ my heart is in it – why should I turn away?”⁹ Jane finally realized that her time working with the freedmen was coming to a close when her sponsor informed her that they had to cut back on teaching staff due to dwindling interest in the north and declining revenues which she spoke about in her diary entry of April 4, 1871. Jane Briggs Smith had worked in the South with the freedmen for seven years – six with the New England Freedmen’s Aid Society and one in a public school for blacks. She had worked twice as long as the average stay of white teachers from the north.¹⁰

The couple married on October 8, 1872 and settled down to a life of farming in Webster, New Hampshire.¹¹ The couple had two children, but only one lived into adulthood; their son William Fuller Fiske, born in 1876. He became an entomologist for the New Hampshire Experimental Station, the Gypsy Moth Laboratory, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and as a special investigator of sleeping sickness in Africa for the Royal Society of England. Fiske family legend believes that he disappeared while on one of his investigations in Africa.¹²

Jane remained in Webster on the farm for a few years after her husband’s death, but her diminishing eyesight forced her to move in with her niece, Caroline Moore Smith

⁶ Fiske. <http://americanantiquarian.org/Freedmen/Manuscripts/fiske/03-14-1867.html> and <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Freedmen/Manuscripts/fiske/01-12-1868.html>.

⁷ Butchart, Ronald E. Schooling for the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876. Chapel Hill, NC: the University of North Carolina Press, 2010., p 117.

⁸ Dougherty, Kevin and Robert Pauly, Jr. American Nation-Building: Case Studies from Reconstruction to Afghanistan. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Co, Oct 2017.

⁹ Fiske, Jane Briggs Smith Papers, Opcit. Smith to Fuller Fiske July 31, 1866. <http://faculty.assumption.edu/assumption.edu/aas/Manuscripts/fiske/98-08-1866.html>. accessed Feb 12, 2019.

¹⁰ Butchart, p118.

¹¹ Ibid. “Manuscript Description”.

¹² Ibid

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Thomas in Hanson.¹³ Jane died in Hanson on January 5, 1925 and is buried in Fern Hill Cemetery.¹⁴

Note:

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS NAME OF COLLECTION: Fiske, Jane Briggs Smith, Papers, 1806-1923

Jane Briggs Smith Fiske's Papers, 1856-1829 are held by the American Antiquarian Society in Boston, Massachusetts. Jane Briggs Smith kept a daily journal from the time she married and the result is a series of thirty-four pocket diaries spanning the years 1871-1910. The other major part of the collection of her papers are the letters she wrote to her future husband, Friend Fuller Fiske from South Carolina and Washington, D.C., 1865-1871. Later letters include many to her son, William Fuller Fiske.

The forty-five letters from Jane to Friend Fuller for the period June 25, 1865 to January 23, 1871, written during her tenure in the South, contain comments regarding her students, abolition, the enfranchisement of the freedmen, and academic and pedagogical discussions. Her letters express her philosophies on several subjects and chronicle her ever changing moods ("... my temperament is decidedly mercurial. ..."--22 January 1868). There are also 49 letters from her son William Fuller Fiske.



¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Findagrave.com Memorial ID 193446450 created 27 Sep 2018 by Pamela R. Tombstone in Fern Hill Cemetery, Hanson, Plymouth, Massachusetts.