

ELIZA ANN SUMMERS



Born: Jan. 17 1844 in Woodbury, CT

Died: Jul. 30, 1900 in Woodbury, CT

Appointment(s):

American Missionary Association

Lawton Plantation - Hilton Head, SC

Jan. – Jun. 1867

1844-1900

Eliza Ann was born January 17, 1844 on Spruce Bank Farm in Woodbury to David Summers and Sarah Maria Upson.¹ On June 10 1869, she married Floyd Frost Hitchcock (1844-1925) in a double wedding ceremony at Spruce Bank Farm with her sister, Sarah Mariam, who married George C. Bradley.² Eliza Ann taught elementary school in Connecticut from 1863-1867. She submitted her resignation in December 1866 when she applied to volunteer her services as a teacher to the freedmen of South Carolina. She was appointed by the American Missionary Association in January 1867 as a teacher to former slaves on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina with her friend Julia Benedict.³ They arrived on Friday evening January 18, 1867 aboard the ship 'Grenada' and stayed in the Teachers' Home at Mitchelville with the House Matron, Mrs. Ellen Seymour and 3 other teachers, including Annie R. Wilkins from Boston, Charlotte

¹ Richards, Miles S. "Summers, Eliza Ann". *South Carolina Encyclopedia*.

University of South Carolina, Institute for Southern Studies, August 1, 2016.

<http://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/summers-eliza-ann/>.

- Martin, Josephine W, ed. Dear Sister: Letters Written on Hilton Head Island 1867, pub 1977, pp xxiii.

² Ibid. p xxv.

³ Ibid, p xxii.

- Butchart, Ronald E. *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010, p 79.

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M. Keith from Middleboro and Martha H. Clary,⁴ On January 22nd, Eliza Ann walked with Martha H Clary from Mitchelville to Drayton Hall Plantation which was near the Teachers' Home at Mitchelville.⁵

On January 23rd, Eliza Ann and Julia were both transferred to Lawton Plantation where they lived in the abandoned and vandalized plantation owners' house.⁶ Eliza described the house:

The house itself is a story and a half as most of the plantation houses are in this country. It has four rooms on the first floor, all large and pleasant, with a hall running through the center of it and stairs going up out of it. Two rooms upstairs and a wide piazza extends across the front. This house is built up on posts like the rest of them. A very nice cistern of water is just back of the house. It is the best water I have had since I started from home, very cool and clear⁷.

Until February 21, 1867, class was held in their home, but after that, they held two levels of classes in the 'Praise House' on the plantation. Eliza Ann and Julia were also responsible for travelling to both Braddock Plantation and Comfort Point to conduct classes there as well. Eliza was considering extending her stay, but the heat and Superintendent Mr. Judkins made her decide to return home as originally planned. Describing a visit from him on April 11, 1867, she openly shared her feelings about the new Superintendent.

We don't one of us like him at all. ...We don't fare quite as well as when Mr. Wright provided for us....At the home he gave all the young men that have called thee at all a talking to, telling them he should not allow them to come there but one evening the week. Then he told them he should sit up just as long as they staid, and said the teachers must go to bed at nine o'clock and get up all ready for breakfast at six... Well the day he came out here, he made me read a speech out loud to him...I was somewhat suprized after I had finished to have him tell me I was a good reader. (Martin,p 62)

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

⁵ Martin, p xxi.

⁶ Ibid. p xxii

⁷ Ibid, p 10.

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The people are teasing us to stay another month or more.
I think Julia will. What do you think about my staying?
If it were not for Mr. Judkins. I would like it very much.
The last time he was out here he gave Julia and I a lecture
on economy. (Martin, p 74)

Eliza Ann ended up lasting only 6 months in the heat of South Carolina. She departed South Carolina for home on June 20, 1867.⁸ Her health deteriorated after her return home and she was bed-ridden from July 5, 1867 until August 18, 1867. She died in Connecticut on July 30, 1900.⁹ She is buried in South Cemetery in Woodbury, Connecticut.¹⁰

There is a portrait of Eliza Ann in the book, Dear Sister on p xiii which was taken about 1869, just two years after she returned to Connecticut.¹¹ During her time in South Carolina, Eliza Ann kept a daily diary as well as corresponded with her sister Sarah about her life among the Hilton Head freedmen in 1867 and this was compiled in a book by her descendants, "Dear Sister": Letters Written on Hilton Head Island 1867, many years after her death. Her letters compiled in that classic book do not tell us much about the classroom, curriculum or teaching methods, but the letters are definitely a window on the life of a Northern white teacher in the South during Reconstruction. The letters to her sister Sarah tell us about the living conditions, the social life of the teachers on outings and her relationships with the freedmen and children. She richly describes in detail her surroundings, including the flora and fauna (p64), the poor roads and lack of transportation ("the roads are so sandy here that the horses can only walk", p 8), the unbearable climate and the horror of rats (p 36) and biting insects as well as tidbits about visits from teachers on other plantations. Her book creates a wonderful picture of Hilton Head right after the war and the lives of and interaction between the freedmen and the teachers.

⁸ Ibid. p xxiv, 99.

⁹ Ibid. p xxv.

¹⁰ Findagrave.com #45368567 Eliza Ann Summers Hitchcock, created 12 Dec 2009 by Gary Boughton and maintained by Rick Bart. Tombstone photo added by Gary Boughton. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/45368567/eliza-ann-hitchcock>.

¹¹ Martin, p xiii (photo).

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Tombstone of Floyd E. Hitchcock, his wife Eliza Ann Summers and three of their children, Willie G. 1875-1876; Frank L. 1872-1948 and Lottie E. Hitchcock 1870-1950.

Source: Findagrave.com

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial45368567/eliza-ann-hitchcock>.