

**LEGACY, as the monthly newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, has as its mission to highlight the legacy forged by the people and events in Florida Baptist history. During 2022, the LEGACY's monthly issues will feature Florida Baptists' missions' commitment as reflected in the people and events that inspired their fellow Baptists in the fulfilment of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to faithfully, "go and make disciples of all nations."**

### **Missions Commitment Supported Leadership Transition**

The missions' awareness and commitment among Florida Baptists continued to grow and to be nurtured during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Promotion of this missions' awareness was reflected in the growth of Ladies' Missionary Societies in churches and associations. As noted in the January *LEGACY*, Ann Hester Bailey gave statewide leadership to the missions' emphasis for five years before her death in 1886.



Recognizing the effectiveness and growth of the Ladies' Missionary Societies, Florida Baptist's Corresponding Secretary W. N. Chaudoin in 1887 turned to **Lucina B. Telford** (b. 1826; d. 1894), to assume statewide leadership as Corresponding Secretary for Women's Work. Telford and her husband, Robert, had previously served as American Baptist-appointed missionaries in Bangkok, Siam, and Swatow, China. Since 1883 the Telford family had resided in DeLand and Lucina Telford had worked with Ann Hester Bailey in organizing Ladies Missionary Societies across Florida.

### **The Tireless Leadership of Lucina Telford**

According to Martha Trotter's history of the Florida WMU, Lucina Telford, who in her first year as corresponding secretary, established 16 new ladies' mission societies and 25 children's mission bands. She also: wrote letters encouraging church members in their financial liberality and self-denial to support mission causes; visited societies; and distributed literature, including the *Foreign Mission Journal*, *Helping Hand* and *Little Helpers*.

Mrs. Telford, along with Mrs. W. D. "Bettie" Chipley, were among the ten women from across the South who participated in the 1886 organization of the Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention. Subsequently, the national W.M.U. established a week of prayer and Christmas offering that in 1918 was named in honor of Lottie Moon, an SBC missionary to China. The only Florida church contributing to the offering during its first year (1888) was the Sumterville Ladies' Missionary Society and Children's Band whose combined gifts totaled \$5.50 (\$161.41 in 2022 dollars).

During Mrs. Telford's tenure the women began supporting the missionary work of **William F. Wood and Adela Fales** in Havana, Cuba. Wood, who had been a pastor of the Baptist Church at Fernandina, became burdened for sharing the Gospel in Cuba. In 1883, the Florida Baptist State Convention's State Board of Missions appointed Wood (b. 1826; d. 1890) as missionary to the over 1,000 Cubans in Key West, who had escaped the political and economic turmoil in the island nation. The following year, Wood and Adela Fales – serving as State Board

of Missions-appointed missionaries – traveled to Cuba to undertake evangelistic outreach in the predominately Roman Catholic country. Florida women subsequently supported three girls attending the Cuban Baptist Girls' High School.

Despite a physical infirmity – that resulted in her being bed-ridden the last year of her life – Mrs. Telford remained steadfast and tireless through hand-written letters to encourage women to raise funds to support missionary endeavors and embrace the Biblical mandate to share the claims of Jesus Christ in Florida and around the world. Lucina Telford, who died July 17, 1894, was commended in the 1894 Minutes of the Florida Baptist State Convention which stated, “Not many women more deserving than she of the Master’s commendation of another, ‘she hath done what she could.’”

### **Florida Women Organize into Missionary Union**

Since its 1881 organization, Florida’s Woman’s Missionary Work had functioned under the auspices of the State Board of Missions and W.N. Chaudoin, who was responsible for selecting and appointing the woman’s corresponding secretary. However, with the organization of the national W.M.U., and following the lead of other states, Florida women decided it was time to re-organize with a similar structure. As a result, during the annual meeting of the Woman’s Missionary Work in Plant City on January 12, 1894, the attendees voted to establish a Central Committee. The newly organized autonomous Central Committee would now select their own corresponding secretary and give overall direction to woman’s missionary work in Florida. However, the State Board of Missions still had final review and approval of the Union’s budget and distribution of mission gifts. The women elected Mrs. T.D. Crawford of Ocala as president and **Miss Jennie Lucena Spalding** (b. 1861; d. 1931) of DeLand as corresponding secretary. Age 33, Miss Spalding had served alongside of Mrs. Telford and the State Board of Missions had asked Miss Spalding to serve as acting corresponding secretary until the State Board could elect a successor to Mrs. Telford.



During Mrs. Spalding’s tenure the mission’s organization thrived. In 1894 when she took office, there were 55 societies and 31 children’s bands. Five years later, there were 1,800 women enrolled in 139 societies and 850 children in 43 bands.

### **Women were Called “Potent” in Evangelization**

Jacksonville pastor George K. Allen in a report to the Florida Baptist State Convention annual meeting characterized the missions-minded women as having a “head to think and plan, a heart to feel and desire, and a hand to execute and serve. Her piety, her zeal, her toils and her prayers have ever been potent factors in rescuing the lost, promoting the welfare of Zion, and hastening the evangelization of the nations.”

### **Mary Taylor: Florida’s Newest Home Missionary**

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Florida Baptist Woman's Missionary Union membership rejoiced when one of its young women, **Miss Mary A. Taylor** of Tampa, was appointed by the SBC Home Mission Board as a missionary to Havana, Cuba. She was the first native Florida Baptist woman to volunteer for mission service outside the United States, although the appointment was technically a domestic assignment. [At the time mission work in Cuba and Panama was assigned to the SBC Home Mission Board rather than the SBC Foreign Mission Board.] In 1902 Taylor had to resign due to health issues. Providentially, after several months of recuperation, she announced being ready to return to missions’ service, stating, “wherever the Lord would have her labor.” During the January, 1903, annual meeting of the Florida Union, delegates voted to provide a salary to support Taylor’s service as a Florida missionary to the Cubans in Tampa’s Ybor City.

### Frank Fowler: Florida's First SBC Foreign Missionary

In the nineteenth century, several men and women had responded to God's call to carry the Gospel to the "uttermost parts of the world." The first of these was **Thomas J. Bowen**, (b. 1814; d. 1875) who had served as a pastor and itinerant missionary for the Florida Association. He was appointed by the SBC Foreign Mission Board in 1849 to serve in Liberia, Africa (known today as Nigeria). He later served in Brazil. **Louise (Lulu) Cecilia Fleming** (b. 1862; d.1899) of Green Cove Springs, holds the distinction of being the first female African-American born in Florida to serve as a Baptist missionary. Appointed in 1886 by the Women's American Baptist Foreign Missionaries Societies, Fleming trained as a medical doctor to serve in the Congo (known today as Zaire). Melrose native **Frank J. Fowler** (b. 1870; d.1933) holds the distinction of being the first native Floridian appointed by the SBC Foreign Mission Board (now called the International Mission Board) on July 18, 1904, as a missionary to the new mission field of Argentina, South America.

### Florida Union Became Fully Self-Governing

Between 1900 and 1919, the Woman's Missionary Union continued to enlarge its work of mission's education and the collection of money to support missions work. By 1904 when the Florida Union celebrated its first decade as an independent auxiliary to the State Convention, the number of societies had increased to 144 in 1904 from 55 in 1894. Mission gifts collected by the woman's organization between 1894 and 1904 totaled \$22,024.46 (in excess of \$689,939 in 2022 dollars). In 1906 the Florida Baptist State Convention and the Woman's Missionary Union changed their respective constitutions to make the Union an entirely self-governing body, which could elect its own officers, decide its own policy and specify its own budget, expenses and gifts.

At the request of the State Board of Missions, the Florida Union established an **annual week of prayer for state missions**. The effort had a two-fold purpose: raise missions' awareness among Florida Baptists and raise funds to be used for special mission needs within the state. The Florida Woman's Missionary Union observed its first Week of Prayer for State Missions in November, 1908, which continues to the present day.

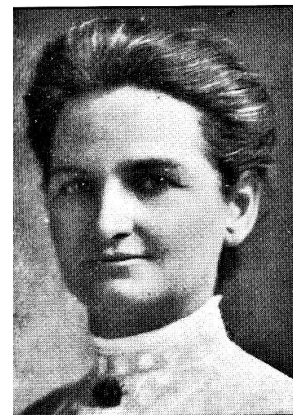
### Florida Baptists' Missions Commitment

Apart from the women's missionary focus, Florida Baptists in general, who were ten percent of the state's mostly rural population as the twentieth century dawned, could not help but be affected by multiple mission challenges. The commitment and effectiveness of the State Board's 34 pastor-missionary personnel assisted many of the 262 mission churches that were financially assisted by the other 468 fully functioning congregations. Those churches combined reported a total 23,136 members, of whom 1,070 were received through baptisms.

### Women Elect New Leader

Having served as Florida W.M.U. corresponding secretary and treasurer for 18 years, Miss Jennie Spalding resigned in 1911. She was succeeded by **Mrs. H. C. Peelman** (b. 1866; d. 1943), who had been assisting Miss Spalding as field secretary for some time.

In 1913, at the request of the SBC Home Mission Board, Mrs. Peelman went to Cuba and organized the first Woman's Missionary Union in the island nation. Although Mrs. Peelman was able to establish several W.M.U. groups, she became burdened for the spiritual welfare of the country. "There is still a very great work to be done and no funds to do it with," she later reported in the *Florida Baptist Witness*. "The results of the gift of life to Cuba are so apparent. Shall we not rally as never before to the cause of Home Missions." Mrs. Peelman's recognition of the growing mission field in Florida at the height of World War I led Florida women to become



actively supportive of mission work among the growing populations of emigrant Cubans in Ybor City and Italians in West Tampa.

### **The Layman's Movement**

The Layman's Missionary Movement of the Southern Baptist Convention was the Baptist response to an interdenominational Layman's Missionary Movement, begun in 1907, which sought to enlist business men in the support and task of missions. The major project sponsored by the SBC Layman's Movement between 1913 and 1919 was to raise money for liquidation of the debts owed by the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign Mission Boards (known as the 75-Million Campaign).

Florida Baptists, between 1900 and 1920, discussed the movement and had it studied by several committees, but never took any significant action. Then in 1925, a report on the movement was brought to the State Convention, provoking considerable discussion of the need for such a movement among Baptist men. The result was the organization of committees in various regions of Florida to coordinate the work of men's missionary unions already in existence.

The movement sought to enlist men in: providing loyal support and cooperation with their pastor; striving to establish Men's Missionary Unions in "leading" churches; promoting Biblical stewardship; promoting every church member making weekly offering contributions; and involving men in evangelism. This men's missionary endeavor was the forerunner of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood of the South which was redefined in 1927.

***This series on Florida Baptists' Missions' Commitment  
continues next month***