

Our Mission: Researching, preserving and promoting the Legacy of Florida Baptists

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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 2026, the LEGACY monthly issues will feature brief personal profiles of those men and women whom we call:

“Florida Baptists’ Heroes of the Faith.”

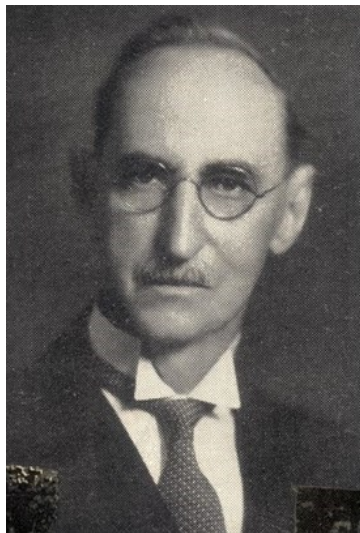
JACOB LEE WHITE

Jacob Lee White (b. 1862; d.1948) a native of North Carolina, served 68 years in the preaching ministry, the most notable tenure having been at the Central Baptist Church, Miami, for 20 years.

Growing up in Forsyth County, North Carolina, Jacob White had an impression that he would be a preacher, but at some point he decided to be a lawyer. However, in 1878, at age 16, while attending preparatory school he responded to the call of God to accept Jesus as his Saviour and “decided at once” to pursue the preaching ministry. The following year he preached his first sermon. He was baptized, ordained and married in the First Baptist Church, Shelby, N.C.

Between 1881 and 1886 he attended Wake Forest College and concurrently served at various times as pastor of three churches. Before he graduated in June 1886, White was called to the pastorate of the First Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C. He subsequently served other North Carolina Baptist churches in Elizabeth City, Durham and Asheville.

Rev. White resigned the Asheville congregation in 1895 to go to the First Baptist Church, Macon, Ga. While serving as pastor of the church for the next 12 years “he achieved his most notable success,” according to one biographer. **As an effective evangelist, he led large numbers of people to make professions of faith in Jesus Christ. Rev. White also led the church to make one of the most significant offerings to foreign missions, in the sum of \$3,000, which in 2026 dollars would be \$117,152.**



In the Spring, 1907, Rev. White resigned to accept the pastorate of the First Baptist Church, Beaumont, Texas, where he served only eight months on account of a health issue. For the next nine years he served various churches in Memphis, Tenn., and Georgia churches in Macon and Atlanta.

On April 1, 1916, he began service with the First Baptist Church, Miami, in a 300-seat wooden church building. As a result of Dr. White’s effective evangelistic preaching ministry and during his first 16-years as pastor the membership grew from 450 to over 1,850 members. That growth necessitated, at two separate times, the church to build a new larger sanctuary. The second structure, built in 1928, featured Italian Renaissance architecture which in its own right became a downtown Miami tourist mecca.

The mission outreach and focus of First Baptist resulted in the starting/sponsorship of seven churches in the Miami area. The church also became a significant advocate for Southern Baptists' missions by eventually financially sponsoring 13-foreign missionaries.

Dr. White organized the Southern Bible Conference that was held each winter during his pastorate. The conference, which featured Bible scholars from England and America, drew pastors and laypersons from across the country.

The Depression of the 1930s placed a negative impact upon churches in Miami, including First Baptist, as winter tourists stopped financially supporting the churches. Dr. White led the First Baptist church members to agree to merge with a similarly challenged Temple Baptist Church. **The new congregation was formally organized on May 3, 1935, and was named the Central Baptist Church. The combined congregation continued to meet in the sanctuary of the former First Baptist.**

Dr. White and his wife Dovie Poston (m. 1886), were the parents of eight children – six sons and two daughters. Significantly, four of the sons – Lee McBride, James, Russell and Charles – all entered the gospel ministry. Additionally, a grandson, James L. White, III, was ordained in 1946 and began ministry serving in Louisville, Ky.

Although he retired in 1936, Rev. White continued to fill pulpits and participated in evangelistic events across the country. One of those preaching assignments was a Thanksgiving service in Madison, Florida, which became his last sermon. The following night he died quietly in his sleep.

[RESOURCES: B. J. W. Graham, editor, "Jacob Lee White," *Baptist Biography*, Vol 3; "In Memorium," *Florida Baptist Witness*, January 20, 1949; "Dr. J. L. White, 86, Dies; Veteran Miami Minister," *The Miami (Fla.) News*, November 26, 1948; "Dr. J. L. White," biographical records, Central Baptist Church, Miami, held by the Florida Baptist Historical Society.]

LOUISE "Lulu" CECILIA FLEMING



Louise "Lulu" Cecilia Fleming (b. 1862; d. 1899) was one of the most remarkable Baptist women in Florida in the late 1800s who served as a physician missionary in Congo, Africa. Lulu, as she was called by her family, was born in Hibernia (near Green Cove Springs), Clay County. She was the daughter of a former slave, called Cleo, who prior to the Civil War had been owned and named by the Fleming family which operated a farming business from their plantation.

The Fleming Plantation family and their now former slaves – Cleo, Lulu and her six siblings – attended the Bethel Baptist Church in Jacksonville. This church was organized in 1848 with eleven whites and 145 slaves. After the Civil War the church divided along racial lines. The white members embraced the name First Baptist Church, Jacksonville. The black members organized into to what they called Bethel Baptist Institutional Church of Jacksonville which functions to the present day.

Lulu Fleming was a serious student of scripture. At the Bethel Church she taught the adult Sunday school class, which included her pastor. A visitor who observed her teaching was so impressed that he returned to his Brooklyn congregation and secured financial support for Fleming to attend Shaw University.

Although only having completed a tenth-grade education, Lulu Fleming attended Shaw University in 1884 and 1885 and graduated as class Valedictorian on May 27, 1885. **In her final semester at the University, Lulu Fleming felt the call of God to foreign missions' service. The Women's American Mission Society of the West – inspired by reports of a great revival in the Congo – sought out single women to serve as missionaries in the African continent. Lulu Fleming was the Society's first black female missionary.**

Lulu Fleming was appointed to the Congo in May 1886 and was assigned to Palabala, lower Congo. Her primary assignment was serving as matron and teacher at the mission station's school. On weekends she visited area villages conducting preaching services and leading Bible studies and witnessing activities in the homes of the women villagers. While on the mission field Fleming was emotionally moved by the medical needs of the Congolese. As a result, upon her return to the United States to recuperate from a prolonged illness, Ms. Fleming enrolled as the first black female to attend and graduate from the Women's Medical College at Philadelphia (now known as the Medical College of Pennsylvania).

The Women's Missionary Foreign Mission Society of the American Baptist Convention commissioned and assigned the now Dr. Fleming to Ireba, in the upper Congo, on October 2, 1895. Her medical missionary tasks encompassed a very large geographical area. Lulu Fleming's ministry, as she later wrote, was "healing the sick and preaching the word" by sharing the "Bread of Life" whenever and wherever possible. During this service she became ill with the African Sleeping Sickness. She returned to the United States for treatment and died at Philadelphia on June 20, 1899.

Few Florida women have influenced the cause of Christ as valiantly and as faithfully as Dr. Louise Fleming. She is a role model for Baptist women in education, medicine, and mission service. Her legacy has endured in the Congo into the twenty-first century.

[RESOURCES: Joseph R. Moss, "The Missionary Journey of Louise Lulu Fleming, M.D.," a Florida Baptist Historical Society monograph; Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, "Louise 'Lulu' Cecelia Fleming," *African American National Biography*, Vol. 3.; and Florida Baptist Historical Society files.]

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**You Can Create Your Own
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by Financially Supporting the Ministry of the
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Through its Endowment Fund

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