

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.”

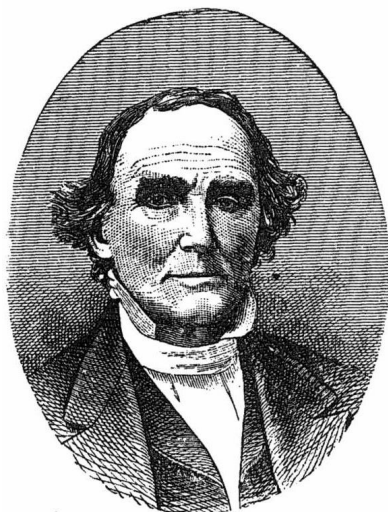
ROBERT FLEMING

Robert Fleming (b. 1797; d. 1880) was a native of Warren County, Georgia. His father Samuel Fleming (b. 1760; d. 1844) had migrated from Ireland to Georgia by 1830.

From an early age Robert Fleming demonstrated an interest in reading books having purchased his first book, “Webster’s American Spelling Book.” **He formally completed his education at age 17 and soon embarked upon a career of teaching. In those days, advanced training, let alone a degree, were not required, to teach basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Despite not having formal training, Fleming was considered an excellent English scholar which was reflected in his teaching.** In the course of his career Fleming wrote several small publications, which included the “Elementary Spelling Book.” Among the works with a religious theme were: “John’s Baptism;” “Life of Rev. Humphrey Posey;” and the “Georgia Pulpit,” which was a collection of sermons.

A Compelling Voice from Heaven

In 1820, at age 23, at a revival camp meeting held by Methodist Pastor Rev. James O. Andrew, Fleming became convicted of his sin nature. **He later reported, “The necessity of a divine mediator, of a divine atonement, of a divine righteousness – the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ – was most powerfully presented.** I felt that I was entirely unfit to appear before God in the judgment. I was without God and without hope.” This was a message with implications which Fleming had not heard while growing up in a family of Irish Presbyterians.



Intrigued by the Sunday night message by Rev. Andrew, Fleming returned to the Monday night revival session to again hear from Rev. Andrew. However, the voice he subsequently heard was not Rev. Andrew’s, rather a spiritual voice that challenged Fleming: “*You are a lost sinner; none but God, who made you, can save you.*” The young man fell back in his seat, overcome by emotion and began to cry uncontrollably. Several ministers gathered around Fleming to pray for the young educator. By his own account, Fleming said it was, **“some months later that I fully embraced Christ Jesus as my Saviour and was able to leave all my interests for time and eternity to His hands,”** according to a history written by J. H. Campbell.

“It was by searching the scriptures, especially by reading prayerfully the 6th chapter of Romans,” Campbell related, that Fleming, “became convinced of the truth of Baptists”

teaching and preaching. In June 1821, Fleming was baptized into the Union Church, Warren County, Ga. After six years, through pray and scripture study that matured his Christian walk, Robert Fleming realized that God was calling him into the ministry. In November, 1827, Fleming was licensed to preach the gospel.

An Itinerant Baptist Preacher

After several years of itinerant preaching, that further confirmed his ministerial calling, Fleming in 1830 was ordained into the pastoral ministry. Fleming filled his Sundays by preaching in churches across south Georgia's Wiregrass country between Thomasville and Brunswick. Some of those churches which met once or twice a month called Fleming to be their regular parttime preacher/pastor. As a bi-vocational minister, Fleming continued his full-time teaching career in the Georgia counties of Warren, Merriweather and Talbot.

In Campbell's biographical profile of Fleming, he said Rev. Fleming, "preached laboriously and successfully. Few men of his day were so particular in the preparation of their sermons. He frequently wrote them in full, which not many ministers of that day had either time or inclination to do."

Another observer of Fleming's preaching ministry, as noted in a *Christian Index* biography, reported, **"As a preacher he excelled until after he passed the zenith of his ministerial life. He was always sound to the core in doctrine and occasionally, up to the very last of his pulpit life, he would rise into flights of eloquence truly sublime."** His spellbound oratory often resulted in children, men and women responding to the conviction of sin in their life.

Served as Convention President

Fleming is listed in the 1857 Florida Baptist association annuals as one of the active Baptist preachers in the Georgia/Florida Corridor. During the 1856 annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention, meeting in Thomasville, GA., he was elected as president.

He was married three times, two of whom predeceased him. His first wife was Elizabeth Grenby, his second wife was Charlotte D. Sherwood, and his third wife was Mrs. R. A. Harris, widow of Dr. Bennet Harris.

[RESOURCES: J. H. Campbell. *Georgia Baptists*, pp. 422-425; *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia—Compendium*, 188; *Florida Baptist Historical Society files*.]

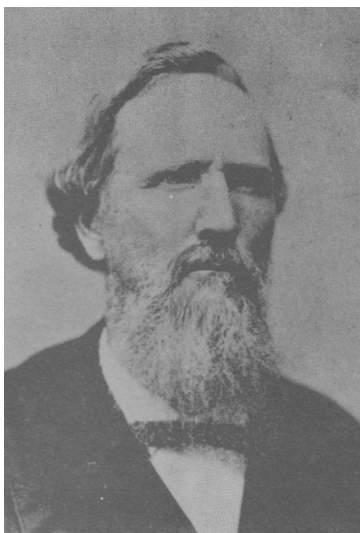
THOMAS E. LANGLEY

Thomas Edward Langley (b. 1834; d. 1890) was born near Forsyth, Georgia. He received his education in Perry, Georgia, and was a Latin and Greek scholar. Langley made a profession of faith in 1852 and later was ordained in January 1857. He remained in the ministry for 30 years until the loss of his health for several years before his death.

His first ministry service began as a preacher in Monroe and Houston counties, Georgia. Over the ensuing years Rev. Langley served as an itinerant preacher to Georgia Baptist churches in Knoxville, Fort Valley, Dawson, Smithville, Fort Gaines and Sharon.

The Florida Years

Langley and his wife Lavinia Norwood (m. 1851) moved to Washinton County, Florida in 1870 where they first settled in Orange Hill. To establish a source of income to support his family, he purchased land to grow and sell crops. The Langleys had ten children who would serve as the laborers for his farming enterprise.



Between 1871 and 1888, Rev. Langley served concurrently as the parttime pastor of the Campbellton Baptist Church (est. 1825), and the Greenwood Baptist Church (est. 1845). The two churches had approximately 20 and 50 members each during those years. As an itinerant preacher Langley initially also served three years as the first pastor of First Baptist Church, Chipley. The church was organized with 19 charter members in 1887. The church first met in a two-room school building on the site where the current Washington County Court House stands on Highway 90 in Chipley, Florida

He also served the Chipola Baptist Church, Altha, (Calhoun County), established in 1872 and the First Baptist Church, Marianna, (Jackson County) after being established in 1881.

Serving multiple congregations was possible because those churches met on a single Sunday once a month and he traveled a circuit during the month. As was typical of the period Baptist preachers received little or no payment for their service.

Associational Leader

During the mid-1870s Langley began serving as moderator of the West Florida Baptist Association (org. 1847), a position to which he annually was re-elected for 18 years. He also served the same association for four years as missionary and evangelist.

[[RESOURCES: Joan P. Chance, *History of First Baptist Church, Chipley, 1887-1987*; *West Florida Associational Minutes, 1890*; *Florida Baptist Convention Annual, 1891*; *Florida Baptist Historical Society files*.]