

PORTRAITS OF COURAGE



STORIES OF
BAPTIST HEROES



Julie Whidden Long

LOUISE (LULU) FLEMING BAPTIST MISSIONARY DOCTOR



(Photo courtesy of Florida Baptist
Historical Society)

Who: Louise (LuLu) Fleming

Where: From Florida to Africa

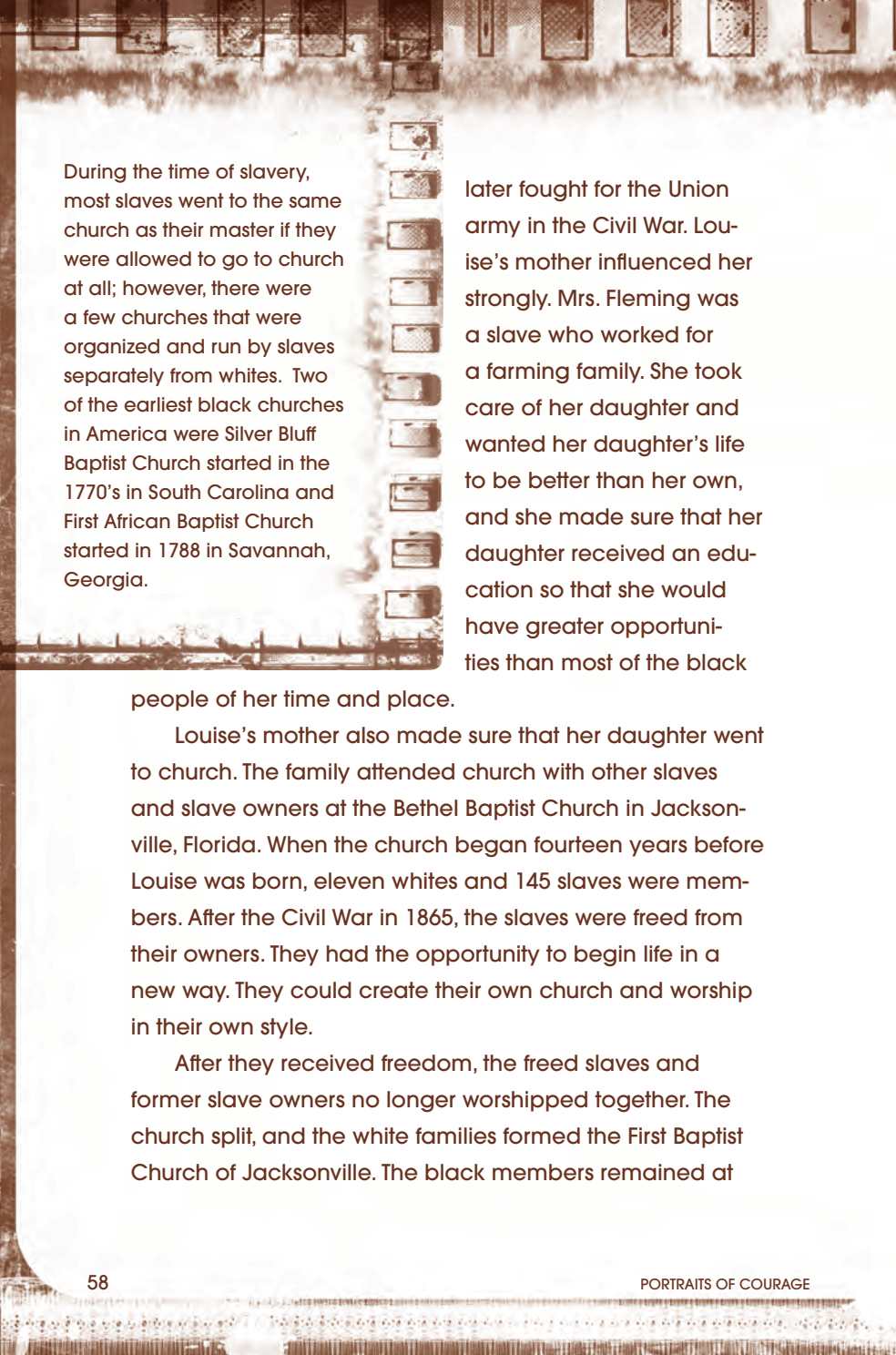
When: 1862-1899

What she did: Went to medical school and served as missionary in Africa

Louise Fleming is a Baptist hero whose life ended with much more prominence than it began. At the beginning of life, Louise was a slave child with few

and little opportunity. By the end of her short thirty-seven-year life, Louise had made history as a woman working in the areas of missions and medicine.

Louise Fleming, nicknamed “LuLu,” was born in Clay County, Florida, in 1862. Her father left home when Louise was less than a year old, and she never saw him again. He



During the time of slavery, most slaves went to the same church as their master if they were allowed to go to church at all; however, there were a few churches that were organized and run by slaves separately from whites. Two of the earliest black churches in America were Silver Bluff Baptist Church started in the 1770's in South Carolina and First African Baptist Church started in 1788 in Savannah, Georgia.

later fought for the Union army in the Civil War. Louise's mother influenced her strongly. Mrs. Fleming was a slave who worked for a farming family. She took care of her daughter and wanted her daughter's life to be better than her own, and she made sure that her daughter received an education so that she would have greater opportunities than most of the black

people of her time and place.

Louise's mother also made sure that her daughter went to church. The family attended church with other slaves and slave owners at the Bethel Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. When the church began fourteen years before Louise was born, eleven whites and 145 slaves were members. After the Civil War in 1865, the slaves were freed from their owners. They had the opportunity to begin life in a new way. They could create their own church and worship in their own style.

After they received freedom, the freed slaves and former slave owners no longer worshipped together. The church split, and the white families formed the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville. The black members remained at

Bethel Baptist Church and continued to meet together. They were led by Pastor C. B. Simmons.

From her mother, Louise learned that church was important. From Pastor Simmons and other teachers, Louise learned about Jesus and the Bible. When she was fourteen years old, she made a promise to follow Jesus. She began to teach a Sunday School class. The church leaders and even the pastor were amazed at how much she knew about the Bible.

After completing the tenth grade, Louise moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, and taught school. She was such a good teacher that a visiting pastor noticed her gifts and arranged for her to go to college. She was proud to have a chance to receive an education, just like her mother wanted her to do. Louise attended Shaw University, graduating as valedictorian, at the top of her class, in 1885.

During the time of Louise's graduation from college, African American women were forming mission societies to carry out mission work around the world. They first organized groups in local churches, and then churches gathered together in national organizations. These women worked together to raise money to send missionaries to other parts of the world.

Because of her interests in service, teaching, and missions, Louise was appointed to serve as a missionary in 1886 by the Women's American Baptist Missionaries Society. This group of women affiliated with the American Baptist Missionary Union. Louise became the first African

American woman appointed by that society to serve as a full-time missionary in Africa, going to the Congo. During the time that Lottie Moon served as a missionary in Asia to spread the gospel, Louise worked on another continent as she ministered to the people of Africa.

Louise was excited about her opportunity to serve. On board the ship in 1887, she wrote: "I was truly happy then, and since I have set sail . . . I am happier; when I reach the doleful shores I shall be happiest."

When she arrived in the Congo, Louise continued her teaching. She spent much of her time with young African women who came to the mission school. She worked hard to educate them, teaching English and sharing God's love with them. The condition of the women there touched her heart. In her report to J. W. Murdock of the American Baptist Historical Society in 1888, she wrote, "All our converts thus far are men. Oh, how I long to see the women reached." As she developed relationships, she visited with these women in their homes in the

afternoons so that she could share the gospel with them.

Louise served in the Congo for five years until she became ill and had to return to the United States. When she



sailed, however, she brought with her several African young people whom she enrolled in American schools so that they could receive the same quality education that she had.

While Louise recuperated from her sickness, she realized how much that the people of Congo needed medical care. She decided to stay in the United States to train to be a doctor so that she could go back and help them. She enrolled in medical school and was the first black woman to attend the Women's Medical College at Philadelphia. She received her degree and returned to Africa in 1895.

When she returned to Africa, Louise went to Irebu in the upper Congo. There she served as a medical missionary for a large area and treated and healed many people. She was a popular speaker, sharing with mission groups in different denominations about her experiences in Africa. Sadly, despite her medical experience, Louise could not heal herself when she became sick in 1898 with a disease known as African sleeping sickness. She returned to the United States for treatment, but she died in Philadelphia in 1899.

Louise Fleming is a role model for Baptist women. She valued education, coming out of a childhood in slavery to finish college and medical school so that she could teach and care for others.



The Medical School that Lulu attended

She was a faithful missionary, committing her life to missionary service in Africa and making her way as the first black woman missionary sent there by her mission society. She even inspired other black women to begin other foreign mission programs and societies. Louise Fleming was a Baptist hero, faithful to her early Baptist upbringing and continuing to serve Baptists all over the United States as their representative in the mission field.

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Written by Julie Whidden Long, this 128-page book, designed especially for younger youth and older children, presents the stories of Baptist heroes. These heroes lived in various countries and centuries and represent many phases of Baptist life. By highlighting the biographical dimension of the Baptist past, these inspiring stories help readers appreciate the personal contributions of heroic Baptist men and women.



Rev. Julie Whidden Long is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Georgia. She previously served as minister of children and families (2005–2013) and associate pastor (2013–2018) at FBCX Macon. Additionally, Rev. Long was the associate director of Baptist Women in Ministry (2018–2019) and launched a coaching and consulting practice in 2020. A native of Fitzgerald, Georgia, she is a two-time graduate of Mercer University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Christianity and History from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in 2002 and a Master of Divinity from McAfee School of Theology in 2005. She is married to Jody Long, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia, and they have two children.