

Farmer, Foy Elisabeth Johnson ^[1]

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By Mary Lynch Johnson, 1986

6 Oct. 1887–29 May 1971

Foy Elisabeth Johnson Farmer, teacher and missionary, was born in Riverton, [Scotland County](#) ^[2], which was her father's birthplace. She was the second child and the eldest daughter of [Livingston Johnson](#) ^[3], a longtime leader among North Carolina Baptists, and Mary Frances Memory Johnson of Whiteville. She was educated in the public schools of [Greensboro](#) ^[4] and [Cary](#) ^[5] and in the Baptist Female University (now [Meredith College](#) ^[6]), where she received an A.B. degree in 1907. For a year following her graduation, she taught every subject in all four years of a [Wake County](#) ^[7] high school, with a classmate teaching the seven elementary grades. From 1908 to 1911, she taught in the preparatory department of [Meredith College](#) ^[6].

On 7 June 1911 she married Calder T. Willingham, a Southern Baptist missionary, and went with him in August to Kokura, Japan, where she did evangelistic work and taught classes in cooking, English, and the Bible. Willingham died in 1918, when the two were beginning their furlough in this country; in 1920 she returned alone to Japan. As the sole replacement of a missionary couple, she had charge of the book store and the program of evangelism in the city of Shimoneseki. In 1921 illness due to overwork forced her permanent return to the United States. The following year she married James S. Farmer, the business manager and later editor of the [Biblical Recorder](#) ^[8], who died in 1938. The Farmers had two children: Fannie Memory (Mrs. Thornton W. Mitchell) and James S., Jr.

Soon after her return from Japan, Mrs. Farmer was elected a member-at-large of the executive board of the Woman's Missionary Union of the [North Carolina Baptist State Convention](#) ^[9], a responsibility that marked the beginning of a long and vital association with that organization. Miriam Robinson, its executive secretary, wrote of her in 1972: "The stamp of Foy Johnson Farmer is seen on every page of [WMU history in North Carolina](#) ^[10] from the early 1920's through May, 1971." She was for three years mission study chairman, for three years prayer chairman, and for five years vice-president of that organization. These offices preceded her seven years' presidency from 1942 to 1945 and from 1946 to 1950. In 1945, she served as interim executive secretary. During these years she was also a vice-president of the [Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention](#) ^[10].

From 1954 to 1960 Mrs. Farmer served on the Foreign Mission Board of the [Southern Baptist Convention](#) ^[11] and from 1943 to 1963 she was a member of the board of directors of the University of Shanghai. Her deep interest in missions is evidenced not only by her active work in organizations, but also by her personal contact with missionaries. Unknown even to her immediate family for many years she kept prayer diaries, little volumes in which she recorded causes and people for whom she prayed as well as thanksgiving for answered prayers. Again and again the names of missionaries throughout the world appear, often with some special need for prayer of which she had learned from her correspondence with home and foreign missionaries. Many of them she came to know personally as guests in her home. It was sometimes said that her home was really a missionary hostel.

Her larger interests did not blind her to needs at home. She was often president of the missionary society and almost continuously teacher of a Sunday school class first in a country church and then in the two Raleigh churches she joined after her return from Japan. She was a trustee of [Shaw University](#) ^[12] (1946–53) and of [Meredith College](#) ^[6] (1933–63), in each case serving on the executive committee of the board. She was also active in the [Meredith Alumnae Association](#) ^[13] and in the [Raleigh](#) ^[14] branch of the [American Association of University Women](#) ^[15].

Mrs. Farmer was the author of seven books: *At the Gate of Asia*, *Publishing Glad Tidings*, *Mrs. Maynard's House*, *Sallie Bailey Jones*, *Hitherto*, *The King's Way*, and *Sacrifice and Song*.

Her funeral service was held in [Pullen Memorial Baptist Church](#) ^[16], Raleigh and she was buried in Oakwood Cemetery. Her portrait hangs in the classroom of the Jones-Farmer Bible Class in the First Baptist Church of Raleigh.

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