



Who Was Ruby Forsythe?

Ruby Forsythe was born on 27 June 1905 on Chestnut Street, Charleston, South Carolina. She was one of 11 children. Lewis Burns Middleton, a brick mason, was her father. He had married Marthenia E. Brown Middleton, a laundress. Ruby attended primary school in the home of Sever Montgomery. Then, she attended the Normal School at the Avery Institute. The Avery Institute was created in 1865. It became a nationally recognized African-American education center. The Institute trained young adults for careers and leadership roles. It closed in 1954.

After graduation from Normal School, Ruby attended South Carolina State College. Ruby received her teaching license. After attending summer school, she earned her degree in Elementary Education. In 1924, she started her first teaching assignment at Mt. Pleasant's Laing School. The American Missionary Society ran the school. The next year, she moved to Clem Meyer School. During her lifetime, Ruby earned four honorary doctorate degrees.

Ruby married the Reverend William Essex Forsythe in 1928. Their son Burns Minard Forsythe was born in November of 1928 in Charleston. Ruby missed five months of school that year. She did not miss another day until she became ill in 1991. Although Reverend Forsythe moved to Pawley's Island to serve Faith Memorial Church in 1927, Ruby stayed in Charleston until the summer of 1937 to care for her parents. She would often join William during the summer months.

Holy Cross Faith Memorial School opened its doors in 1931 when Holy Cross, an Episcopal mission school, combined with Faith Memorial School, formerly

situated three miles to the south. Housed in a new building on the grounds of Camp Baskervill, Pawley's Island, the school was supported and run by the Episcopal Diocese. The school's mission included the educational, medical, and spiritual needs of Waccamaw Neck's African- American population.

In the fall of 1937, Ruby began teaching at Faith Memorial with her husband, William. In 1938, the school had three teachers and often as many as 185 students. Another teacher taught the first through third grades; Ruby taught fourth through sixth, and her husband taught seventh through tenth grades. Former students recall how they had to have their assignments completed before going home. Often, Reverend Forsythe would hold students until 10:00 pm before allowing them to leave. In addition to being a good teacher, Ruby believed she had another important role in the community. She felt that as a teacher and as a minister's wife she had to maintain a certain relationship with the community. She would attend funerals but not wakes, and weddings but not the reception. In other words, a teacher and minister's wife should not have fun!

Ruby Forsythe taught in this one-room school for 53 years. She died on graduation day in 1992. The school was known locally as Miss Ruby's School. Holy Cross Faith Memorial was the oldest one-room school in the United States when it closed in June 2000.

Activities:

1. Sometimes heroes come from the most unlikely places. Many never realize that their lives serve as an inspiration to others. Miss Ruby was one of those people. List five things about Miss Ruby's life that indicate she came from humble beginnings. You will get extra points for items that are available in the exhibit but not noted in this brief narrative.

2. Miss Ruby lived her life as a teacher in a one-room school house on Pawley's Island South Carolina. Yet, she is listed as one of America's most influential Black women in *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America* by Brian Lanker. Why do you suppose Miss Ruby is included in this book? For extra credit, try to find this book at your local library and report to the class on other African-American women from the book.

3. One-room school houses existed all over the United States in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early 20th centuries. With our growing population, this type of instruction became obsolete. How would teaching in a one-room school house be different from the types of classes you experience today? How would being a student differ?

4. Several websites have additional information about Ruby Forsythe. Do a Google search of her name and look at these sites. List the web address of each. Note why the site contains information on Miss Ruby. What new things about her life can you learn from these sites?