

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank You, we are deeply grateful to our relatives, friends, and neighbors for their expressions of sympathy and support following the passing of our beloved Wilhelmina Fortner. Your prayers, visits, calls, and acts of kindness have brought us immense comfort during this difficult journey.

Please continue to keep our family in your prayers.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The family wishes to extend our heartfelt gratitude and deepest appreciation to those who went above and beyond to provide comfort, care, and unwavering support to Wilhelmina:

- Teresa and David, for your constant presence, devoted care, and the deep friendship you shared with her.
- Lisa and Larry, for your tireless support and acts of kindness that brought her so much peace and comfort.

Your dedication and love will never be forgotten. We are eternally grateful for the role you played in her life and in ours.

ACTIVE & HONORARY PALLBEARERS

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A Celebration of the Life

of

Wilhelmina Fortner

Alpha

June 3, 1940

Omega

June 26, 2026



Services

Thursday, July 9, 2026 | 10:00 A.M.

Growing Valley Baptist Church

209 Harlem Street | Longview, TX 75601

Rev. Lafayette Herndon, Officiating, St. James Baptist Church | Rev. Dr. Lonnie L. Murphy Eulogist, Red Oak Baptist Church
Rev. Dr. Kelvin Lynch, Host Pastor, Growing Valley Baptist Church

Life and Legacy of Wilhelmina Fortner

June 3, 1940 – June 26, 2026

Wilhelmina Fortner artist, author, and the deeply cherished historian of Longview's historic "Preachers Hill" community, passed away peacefully June 26, 2026, at the age of 86. A woman of strength, creativity, and faith, Wilhelmina dedicated her life to ensuring that the vibrant history of Longview's early African American community would not be forgotten.

Born in 1940 in Longview, Texas, Wilhelmina was literally born into the history she would later preserve. Her lineage on "Preachers Hill" traces back to the late 19th century. She was the proud great-granddaughter of Ella Cotton Loyd, a pioneering Black woman and former slave's daughter who defied the societal boundaries of the 1880s by purchasing land on the hill to build a homestead for her 12 children.

Wilhelmina attended local school, where she vividly recalled historical moments such as school being dismissed early so the neighborhood children could gather at church to hear the legendary agricultural scientist George Washington Carver speak. Guided by the oral histories passed down by her great-grandmother Ella, grandmother Emma, and her mother Lucile. Wilhelmina developed an early and lifelong passion for education, historical preservation, and the arts.

Wilhelmina recognized that without a concerted effort, the rich history of the Black families who built Northcutt Heights and "Preachers Hill" would be lost to time. As an author and local historian, she documented the neighborhood's transition from a turn-of-the-century African American settlement to its current landscape. Her advocacy culminated in a historic milestone:

In February 2017, through her dedication and partnership with the Texas Historical Commission, an official state historical marker was dedicated at the foot of "Preachers Hill". It stands proudly below her lifelong home, permanently cementing "Preachers Hill" in Texas history.

Up until her final days, Wilhelmina championed the preservation of the original 136-year-old family home at 219 Clark Street, envisioning it as a restored community resource center to inspire future generations and support those in need.

Wilhelmina was a uniquely gifted visual artist who seamlessly blended her deep ancestral roots with traditional African art forms. She became widely celebrated for creating "Lukasa"—West African-style memory boards. Instead of traditional materials, Wilhelmina used beadwork, symbols, and intricate pieces inherited from her family to represent the passage of time, the events, stories, and the individual souls who inhabited "Preachers Hill". Her artwork, which served as physical storyboards of "African American" resilience, was proudly exhibited at the Longview Museum of Fine Arts, demonstrating her ability to turn memories into tangible forms of art.

Wilhelmina's life was deeply rooted in the church, which she always maintained was "the spiritual and cultural anchor of her community". She was involved in preserving the local religious history, from the legacy of St. Mark's Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (founded by freed slaves in 1867) to documenting how the historic 1906 Azusa Street Revival influenced meetings at "Preachers Hill" that led to the birth of congregations like her church Bethel Temple. To her neighbors, Wilhelmina was a comforting, steady presence. She lived by the philosophy her mother passed down: that "God brings His people through hard times with honor, grace, and determination". She was a guide to those looking for direction, a fierce protector of her neighborhood's legacy, Prayer Warrior, and Mighty Woman of God.

Wilhelmina's legacy lives not just in the state historical marker, or her beautiful Lukasa story boards; but in the spirit of the God she served, the community "Preachers Hill" she loved greatly, and ancestors whose stories she told so beautifully.

Rest in peace, Wilhelmina.

Order of Service

Officiant – Rev. Lafayette Herndon

PRELUDE.....Musician

PROCESSIONAL.....Clergy and Family

PRAYER

SCRIPTURES:

Old Testament

New Testament

SONG.....Rev. Kenneth Stinson

Pleasant Hill Baptist

READING.....Life and Legacy of Wilhelmina Fortner

RESOLUTIONS

REMARKS (2 minutes)

WORDS OF COMFORT.....Rev. Dr. Lonnie L Murphy

SONG.....Congregation