

Greene, George Washington ^[1]

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by John R. Woodard, 1986

29 June 1852–17 Dec. 1911

George Washington Greene, Baptist minister, teacher, and missionary to China, was born at Globe. The names of his parents are unknown. In 1865 he was baptized in the Lower Creek Baptist Church, Caldwell County ^[2] by the Reverend John B. Powell, and the following year he was licensed by the church. After attending the local schools, he entered Wake Forest College ^[3] in 1866 at age fourteen and was graduated with a B.A. degree in 1870. He then entered the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Greenville, S.C. (now at Louisville, Ky.), where he remained until 1871. Greene returned to the Watauga County ^[4] area of North Carolina for a short time before serving as a state missionary in the Tarboro area. He was examined and ordained to the ministry on 2 and 3 Dec. 1871 by a presbytery called by the Wake Forest Baptist Church consisting of W. T. Brooks and Charles E. Taylor ^[5]. Greene reentered the seminary at Greenville, S.C., where he was graduated in 1875. A classmate later remembered that Greene was one of the best linguists that he had ever seen. He was "at home" in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and while a student was always off "on Sundays preaching and teaching in obscure and destitute regions."

After graduation, Greene began his lifelong work for the Baptist denomination as Sunday school secretary of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention (1875); he later served the convention as recording secretary (1878, 1885–89). He was pastor of the Hickory Baptist Church from 1876 to 1877, when he became principal of the Moravian Falls Academy, Wilkes County ^[6], a school sponsored by the Baptist churches in Ashe, Alleghany, and Caldwell counties and at Brier Creek. While there he was responsible for educating some of the leading citizens of the area, writing *Bingham's Elementary English Grammar* (1881), and founding the Moravian Falls Baptist Church (1886). In 1890, Greene was called to Wake Forest College as professor of Latin. According to Dr. G. W. Paschal ^[7], "he was an able linguist and a master of a good English style, but he remained at the College too short a time to establish the character, good or bad of his instruction."

From time to time Greene had a strong interest in missionary work. Finally yielding to the call, he applied to the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board which, on 8 June 1891, appointed him to Canton, China. After a train trip across the United States, he sailed on 26 Sept. 1891 from San Francisco on the Steamship *China* with his wife and children. A letter from Greene in November told of their safe arrival after a sixteen-day passage.

Greene spent his first year in China studying the language, preaching in English, and conducting prayer meetings and Bible schools. As a preacher, he had a message that comforted and strengthened the hearts of all classes; he also was responsible for the expansion and relocation of the cramped and unsanitary mission in Canton. As a writer, Greene realized very quickly that the Christians must have suitable literature. Most of his books were written for the preachers with whom he worked. Greene wrote the first church history in China. He also found time to compose lengthy letters to the various Baptist associations and to the *Biblical Recorder* in North Carolina. Several articles dealing with the Chinese language appeared in the *Wake Forest Student Magazine*. Greene was the author of books on Christian ethics and many small tracts and pamphlets. At his death he was within four chapters of translating *The Southern Baptist Convention Manual for Sunday School Workers* into Chinese. In addition, he was one of the first to see the need for a publication society and was active in the work of the China Baptist Publication Society. Nevertheless, Greene was—by nature and by preparation—at his best as a teacher. He was sent to China for this purpose and felt that this was his chosen work. There he worked hard to establish a model seminary for the Chinese and constantly endeavored to upgrade the curriculum. A leader among the native preachers, he was the first to suggest that the Chinese preachers were not helpers or assistants to the American missionaries but were their equals, "co-workers with their Master and ours."

Returning to North Carolina on furlough in 1910, Greene enrolled his children in Mars Hill College ^[8] and for six weeks taught a course on "The Uplift of China" at Ridgecrest (Bluemont Assembly). Afterward, he went back to China to continue teaching and educating the Chinese. He was taken suddenly ill while dining with his family. A physician was summoned but it was too late. Greene had died from apoplexy.

Greene's first wife, Dora Mauldin of Greenville, S.C., died on 22 Oct. 1890 and was buried at Wake Forest. She left three children: Anna (Mrs. S. R. Moore), born 1878; Pansy (Mrs. P. H. Anderson), born 1884; and Felix Bailey, born 1888. On 17 June 1891, Greene married Valleria A. Page in Morrisville. They were the parents of George William, Valleria (Mrs. M. T. Rankin), and Mary Katherine who died as an infant. Greene's widow continued to serve in China, and George William and Valleria also received appointments as missionaries.

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