

## Eugene Robert Eller and Frances Elizabeth Greer Eller

Born in a log cabin near Moravian Falls, NC, on September 21, 1900, Eugene Robert Eller was the fifth son in a family of ten children. To help support the family, he had to quit school at the age of eleven and go to work in a furniture factory. During his teen years his pastor's wife led him to Christ and he joined First Baptist Church, North Wilkesboro, NC, where his family then lived. He later felt called to preach and went back to school in the sixth grade at the age of 19 - working at many odd jobs to pay for his education at two small mountain boarding schools where he completed his high school work. He was licensed to preach in 1919 by his home church which also ordained him in 1925. "Gene" entered Mercer University in Macon, GA, in 1925, with painful eyes weakened by illness, a deep faith, a fierce determination to follow the will of God into the ministry, and \$4.25. He continued all types of work to support himself and go to school.

During these years of education, he was very seriously ill several times and was treated by two different physicians who charged him very minimal fees for their services with the request that he pass on the help to other young men as he was able. Though in pain most of his adult life, he was never afraid of hard work and he was always dedicated to God in everything he attempted. Frances Elizabeth Greer was born in Newton county GA. on September 20 1903 and grew up in the home of a farmer; she, too, learned hard work from childhood. Upon graduation from high school, where she loved learning and enjoyed playing basketball, she began teaching first grade and attending University of Georgia summer schools. In the mid-summer of 1918, she accepted Christ during a revival in the Luther Hays Presbyterian Church (named for her great-grandfather) in Hayston, GA.

It was while Miss Greer and the Rev. Eller were living in the same boarding house in Fort Gaines, GA, that these two met, fell in love and married on December 23, 1930. On their honeymoon, the couple visited Mr. Eller's parents and the new Mrs. Eller joined the Baptist Church and was baptized by her new husband. She then moved her membership to Ft. Gaines Baptist Church where the couple began their ministry together.

Bro. Eller pastored several churches in the Ft. Gaines area during the late 20's and early 30's, his first pastorate having been the Damascus Baptist Church in Cuthbert, GA. He was called to First Baptist Church, Franklin, NC, after he held pastorates in Pelham, GA, Augusta, GA and Pickens, SC. In each of these places, Bro. Eller was pastor, but his wife was frequently referred to as his unpaid "educational director."

She was always very supportive of him in all his duties as a minister, in addition to becoming a leader and church teacher in her own right. While living in Georgia and South Carolina, both the Ellers frequently attended and led in many types of local church, associational and state Baptist events for various church organizations. Mr. Eller always manifested a keen interest in and knowledge of missions and he felt particularly led of God to witness to boys and young men. In his book, *Every Boy Needs A Man*, he tells many of his experiences. By her own admission, Woman's Missionary Union was the favorite church organization of Mrs. Eller, and she worked tirelessly to build this organization in each local church. Because of their interests,

it seems rather fitting that in February, 1956, Mr. Eller became the Superintendent of Missions (now called Director of Missions) for Piedmont Baptist Association, headquartered in Easley, where the Ellers moved. In this capacity they continued to serve together and Mrs. Eller took even a more active role in

leading Woman's Missionary Union. She served as WMU Director for the Association from 1958 to 1962 and 1969 and as President of the South Carolina Woman's Missionary Union from 1963-1968. As the SC President, she was also a Vice-President of the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, a position which placed her on the Executive Board of the convention-wide WMU. During his tenure in Piedmont Association, Bro. Eller was a pioneer in helping to form the Southern Baptist Conference of Directors of Missions. He served as President of this organization and presided over their third annual meeting in San Francisco in 1962. Both the Ellers were regular promoters of, participants and leaders in religious camps and assemblies, especially those whose programs were centered around any type of missions. Bro. Eller frequently took RAs camping long before camping was popular and equipment was plentiful. The Ellers made many trips to Camp Rawls and later to Camp McCall and Camp LaVida--always with a car full. They were thrilled when plans for White Oak Conference Center began to unfold and Bro. Eller used the tithe from an honorarium to make the first donation to start the Center. Throughout their marriage, the Ellers gave of themselves that others might know the Lord and have the opportunity to learn how to serve Him. Mr. Eller retired at the end of 1968 but continued to serve by preaching and participating in Schools of Missions (now called World Mission Conferences). He died on February 13, 1976 and is buried in Hillcrest Memorial Park, Pickens, SC.

Mrs. Eller continued to reside in Easley and lead in her local church and in the associational WMU after Mr. Eller's death. She was always recognized as a creative and enthusiastic teacher and leader. For many years she taught a Sunday School class at the Easley Baptist Hospital for ambulatory patients and hospital personnel. When closed-circuit TV became available in the hospital, patients could attend her Sunday School class from their beds. In 1985, Mrs. Eller wrote - in long-hand - a history of the WMU of Piedmont Association. The next year an illness made it necessary for her to move to Nashville, TN, where she could be near family members. Mrs. Eller died August 9, 1996.

Submitted with family permission.

Dean Eller (Historian)