

## **The Rev. Elbert Woodfin Ballenger (1847–1904)**

The Rev. Elbert W. Ballenger was born in 1847 near Walhalla, South Carolina. Coming of age not long after the shots at Fort Sumter began the American Civil War, Ballenger found himself joining other young men of his era supporting the effort as an enlistee in the Confederate Army. With military service concluded, studies at the University of Georgia followed. Ballenger then joined the North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Church as a pastor. Early on he served pastorates in Lafayette, Rome, Toccoa and Augusta, Georgia.

In 1885, the Rev. Ballenger was appointed pastor of the Rockmart Methodist Church. With his wife and three daughters he came to Rockmart at a time when the North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Church was discussing the possibility of establishing a school somewhere in the district. Rockmart was chosen as the site for the school and Piedmont Institute opened in 1889. The Rev. Ballenger played a major part in the founding of the school and was named its first president. His tenure as president ended when ill health forced him to step down. However, when his health recovered, he resumed full time ministry and he and his wife left Rockmart.

Piedmont Institute, located on the site of the present Rockmart City Hall, provided instruction from primary grades to two years of college. In operation until 1912, the school graduated over the period 110 young men and women. Among those graduates were two of Rev. Ballenger's daughters, Maybel Elizabeth in 1896 and Mayne Lucille in 1897.

During his tenure as the head of Piedmont Institute, the Rev. Ballenger and his family lived across from the school, in a two-story home still standing at the corner of Piedmont Avenue and Ballenger Street. The side street, running from Piedmont Avenue to Jones Avenue is named for Ballenger.

In 1904 when the Rev. Ballenger died, his remains were brought back to Rockmart for burial in Rose Hill Cemetery. His connection to the city ran deeper than just his pastorate of the local Methodist Church and his prominent position with Piedmont Institute years earlier. Two of his daughters married Rockmart men and were making their homes here the year of his death. Mayne Lucille was married to William B. Everett, a Rockmart banker, and Ludie Anne was married to Barclay Morgan, who along with his father and brother founded Morgan Hardware.

Ballenger rests beside his wife, Louisa Upshaw Ballenger and his eldest daughter, Maybel Elizabeth Ballenger Klunder. There are two things to note of interest about the Ballenger grave. One, its location was not random. The Ballenger graves are adjacent to the Everett family plot, due to his daughter's marriage into the family. Two, the marker is in the shape of a pulpit. An appropriate symbol for his years of dedicated Methodist ministry. Note also the nearby grave of the Rev. Ballenger's son-in-law, W. B. Everett and the unique statue atop the tombstone.

We remember and celebrate the life of the Rev. Elbert Woodfin Ballenger and his contributions to the 150-year Rockmart history.

Sources: "Rockmart Centennial Magazine," 1972

"Polk County, Georgia, The First One Hundred Years, Larry D. Carter, 2012  
Findagrave.com

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