

# Truett's example still an inspiration

BY KELLY PIGOTT | *Hardin-Simmons University*

Anyone in Texas during the early half of the 20th century asked to name the most important Baptist leader of the day probably would have answered, "George W. Truett."

Truett was born in 1867 and grew up near Hayesville, N.C., but he considered himself a Texan through and through. As a student at Baylor University, he served East Waco Baptist Church and grew under the mentorship of B.H. Carroll. In 1897, he was called to the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Dallas, where he remained until his death in 1944.

Aside from growing his congregation to become arguably the flagship church of Southern Baptists for its time, Truett's achievements can be seen on the placards and cornerstones of many institutions. When Samuel Augustus Hayden sought to divide Texas Baptists, Truett helped form Dallas Baptist Association in reaction to the Haydenite-controlled Dallas County Association. Truett saved the Baptist General Convention of Texas from financial ruin after the failure of the Seventy-five Million Campaign. He provided vital leadership in the founding of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. And Baylor Hospital practically came into being as a result of Truett's persuasive powers with wealthy donors.

A life-altering moment occurred when Truett accidentally shot and killed his friend J.C. Arnold in a hunting accident in 1898. He almost resigned from the ministry but after much soul-searching, he decided to remain as pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas. He became a much humbler man and a more powerful preacher in the process.

Another such moment occurred in 1917, when Truett served six months in Europe during World War I as a YMCA chaplain, preaching to the Allied troops. Truett's more conservative colleagues criticized him for participating in an organization that turned a blind eye toward drinking and dancing. But the experience deepened his commitment to peace and social justice.

Truett is best known nationally for championing religious liberty. His sermon on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in 1920 is considered a classic text on the issue, and his tenure as president of the Baptist World Alliance in the 1930s furthered the cause worldwide.

Truett was not without enemies, the most famous being J. Frank Norris of Fort Worth. And yet, Truett's greatest legacy was his character, which empowered his leadership and inspired future generations of ministers and leaders.