

## \* BAPTIST HERITAGE \*

## Blanche Groves: Missionary to China, Hong Kong (1889-1986)

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**A**s a teenager on a farm in Bridgeport, Texas, Blanche Groves felt God calling her to foreign missions. She surrendered to that call and planned her education with an eye to the mission field. In 1920, armed with degrees from Decatur Baptist College and Baylor University, Ms. Groves boarded a boat for China. Her assignment was Soochow, a beautiful city of canals and camel-back bridges near the Yangtze River. In those early years Mrs. Groves worked as a teacher and an evangelist in Shoochow. Particularly gifted in working with boys, Ms. Groves organized a Sunday School class of young men who called themselves the Bereans.

When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, American missionaries were evacuated to Shanghai. There they tried to help alleviate the suffering of the thousands of refugees that poured into the region. Blanche Groves spearheaded an effort to set up an emergency hospital to treat the sick and wounded. Determined to return to Soochow, she sewed cash into the lining of her clothing and began working her way back to her home through military checkpoints without a military pass. At the last gate, she presented the guard with a Bible study diploma she had received from the Sunday School board. The bright ribbons and seals impressed the guard enough to allow her past the final checkpoint into the Baptist compound. Back in Soochow she witnessed mass executions and heard “agonizing accounts of rape, forced labor, family separation, starvation” and persecutions. The Japanese would not allow her to remain in Soochow long, but she and other missionaries continued to pressure the Japanese until they were finally permitted to return in June of 1938.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Ms. Groves was briefly interned in her home in Soochow before being repatriated to the United States. Five years later, Ms. Groves returned to China. When she stepped off the train, she was greeted by a parade of Chinese friends and a band that played “The Eyes of Texas.” However this joy turned to sorrow in 1950, when after 30 years on this mission field, Blanche Groves was forced to leave by the Communist regime. The presence of foreign missionaries placed Chinese Christians in danger. As she left, Blanche Groves felt her heart was breaking into fragments, but found comfort in the knowledge that “I leave, others leave, but Christ does not leave; and his kingdom work is not dependent upon any individual.”

Ms. Groves went on to serve the Lord in both Hawaii and Hong Kong. In Hong Kong she started a Bible study in the living room of her apartment that grew into a church of nearly 1,500 members. She returned to the church to be honored as its “mother” in 1970 and 1974. In her retirement, Blanche Groves used Bridgeport, Texas as her home base for another twenty years of service as a missions advocate. Ms. Groves went home to be with the Lord in 1986 at the age of 97. She consistently, unreservedly shared the gospel through five Chinese regimes and three wars.

**In her 48 years as a Southern Baptist missionary, Blanche Groves was a teacher, a discipler, a church planter, a relief worker, and an evangelist. Her life stands as a testimony of what God can do with a teenager in Texas who dared to lift her eyes to the world.**



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