

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 9)

Bucklesberry's first church, Hickory Grove, drew widespread attention during the late 1800s. Newspapers as far away as Charlotte, Greensboro, Wilson, and New Bern, and closer home in Goldsboro and Kinston, reported on the Church.

A relatively small assembly in a deeply rural area, the interest in Hickory Grove was highly unusual. But news outlets had direct access to information about the Church from charter member, Samuel Ivey (S. I.) Sutton (1834-1904), a local Bucklesberrian and reporter. With insider knowledge from week to week, much of it first-hand, S. I. documented Church happenings in social news columns that were published routinely.

Much of the coverage focused on Hickory Grove's gradual departure from its Baptist roots. Chartered in 1860, the Church withdrew from the Union Baptist Association in September, 1884, ending a quarter-century connection with the Baptists. This decision signaled the beginning of a historic denominational shift for the Church.

Seven months later, Hickory Grove crossed denominational lines altogether when it decided to formally align with the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church:

1885, April 8: "...A resolution was introduced and adopted, without a dissenting voice, that the [Hickory Grove] Church adopt the discipline and form of church government of the Methodist Protestant Church, and elected delegates to represent them in the next Quarterly Conference of that church. It will be remembered that the Church at Hickory Grove, sometime during last year, severed its connection with the [Union Baptist] Association to which it was then attached, and became an independent church organization, since which time it has been without pastor or church affiliation. It had become evident to a large majority of the members that the condition of the Church required some action, and a church meeting was called, with the result before stated. The Church is located in one of the best sections of this County, the citizens are among the most independent, and we hope to see the Church in a prosperous condition." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

In retrospect, the Church's decision to align with the M. P. Church was unexpected. Just one year earlier, prior to separation from the Baptists, Hickory Grove appeared to be leaning toward joining with the Methodist Episcopal (M. E.) Church when it called one of its ministers, Rev. J. D. Carpenter to be part-time pastor.

Apparently, though, Hickory Grove's desire to be independent, mentioned twice in S. I.'s April 5, 1885 news piece, was the reason why they chose to align with the M. P. Church, which promoted self-governing local churches. Not so with the M. E. Church, South.

Although the M. P. Church and M. E. Church, South both originated from the Methodist Episcopal Church (M. E. C.) founded in 1784, the M. P. Church was organized in 1830 as a split of the membership from M. E. C. who wanted local congregational governance. The M. E. C., on the other hand, believed bishops must exercise supervision over pastors and congregations, a practice continued by the M. E. Church, South, which split from the M. E. C. in 1844.