

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 10)

Hickory Grove Church ended a quarter-century-long relationship with the Baptists in September, 1884 by withdrawing from the Union Baptist Association, a historic action for Bucklesberry's first local church. In April, 1885, a second milestone occurred when they crossed denominational lines by aligning with the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church.

The honeymoon period with the M. P. Church was soon interrupted, however. Former Baptist pastor, Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash, was back in the pulpit by the end of the month. Whether invited to preach, or whether he personally called for a last-minute meeting, is unknown:

1885, April 29: "Rev. B. W. Nash was here last Saturday, and went to Hickory Grove on Sunday to preach." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Despite the brief distraction from Rev. Nash, the Church continued to set-up a new church government. They were assisted by various M. P. Church preachers for the balance of the year. Included was Rev. R. H. Wills, president of the M. P. Church Conference of North Carolina:

1885, June 17: "Rev. R. H. Wills preached at Hickory Grove on last Sunday 11 o'clock, and at the M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] Church here [La Grange] Sunday night." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Part-time pastor, Rev. W. E. Swain of the M. P. Church, installed at Hickory Grove the previous year, met his regular first Sunday monthly appointment in August. Joined by Rev. Jacob Simpson, also of the M. P. Church, the two held a series of revival services:

1885, August 5: "Rev. W. E. Swain, assisted by Rev. Mr. Simpson, is conducting a protracted meeting at Hickory Grove this week. The congregation at that place last Sunday was very large, and we hope to hear of many additions to the Church before the meeting closes." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Not as fruitful as had been projected or hoped, the Church's membership roll did not swell as a result of the revival meeting:

1885, August 9: "The protracted meeting at Hickory Grove closed last Tuesday night. No accessions to the Church." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Without losing a step in its efforts to operate as a M. P. Church, Hickory Grove opened its doors to host a local meeting in the fall of the year:

1885, October 28: "The fourth quarterly conference of the M. P. Church for La Grange Mission meets at Hickory Grove next Saturday." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

As the calendar year came to a close, Rev. Swain kept his commitment to hold monthly services and telegraphed his intention to continue in the new year:

1885, November 5: "Rev. W. E. Swain preached at Hickory Grove last Sunday. The next appointment at that place will be 1st Sunday in January, 1886." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Unfortunately, former Baptist pastor, Rev. Nash did not exit with grace. In October, while Hickory Grove was hosting the quarterly M. P. Church meeting, Rev. Nash was in Mount Olive at the annual meeting of the Union Baptist Association. There he questioned whether Hickory Grove held a rightful deed to the church property, a charge that would take a decade to play out in the courts.