

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 21)

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a period of instability for Bucklesberry's first church. An unsettling civil suit filed in Lenoir County Superior Court in 1889 by former Baptist pastor, Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash claimed the Church property had been previously deeded to the Union Baptist Association. The case was dismissed in August, 1890.

The Church would face a second, similar claim from Rev. Nash and the Association in the spring of 1892. Litigation over property ownership continued through the 1890s and into the early-1900s. The case was eventually heard by the North Carolina Supreme Court several times.

In addition to legal problems, Hickory Grove struggled with denominational identity. Although the congregation voted unanimously in 1885 to separate from the Baptists and to implement an M. P. Church government, the transition was sluggish. Maintaining a regular pastor was a problem. In addition, the Church occasionally allowed speakers with Baptist ties and leanings to minister, which likely telegraphed confusion, fostered discord, and caused some to doubt the earlier decision to separate from the Baptists.

By the turn of the decade, it was not clear to the public that Hickory Grove was affiliated with the M. P. Church. The 1890 edition of *Branson's Business Directory* listed Rev. W. W. Rose as pastor at Hickory Grove. However, Rev. Rose was affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal (M. E.) Church, South, not the M. P. Church.

The *Directory* was factually wrong about Rev. Rose altogether, an error probably due to publication timing. Not only was he not with the M. P. Church, he was not pastoring in the greater Bucklesberry area at all in 1890. In December, 1889, Rev. Rose had been assigned to the M. E. Church, South in Fremont, NC. His replacement, Rev. M. H. Tuttle, was appointed to the La Grange Circuit of the M. E. Church, South. For certain, then, neither Rev. Rose nor Rev. Tuttle were pastoring Hickory Grove in 1890, but rather Rev. J. F. Dosier of the M. P. Church:

1890, January 9: "The ministers of the different churches here have arrived and entered upon this year's work. Rev. Mr. Tuttle preached last Sunday at the M. E. Church here [La Grange]: the Rev. Mr. Dosier preached at Hickory Grove and Rev. Mr. Finch preached at Seven Springs. These are all new preachers in our place and these congregations are well pleased with their efforts." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

Not to be confused as one and the same, the M. P. Church and M. E. Church, South were distinctly separate branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church (M. E. C.). Around 1830, the M. P. Church broke from the M. E. C., founded in 1784. Representing former M. E. C. members, the M. P. Church continued to embrace the Wesleyan doctrine of grace, holiness, etc. as well as Wesleyan worship that included communion, fellowship and testifying, mutual accountability for daily living, and great hymns of the faith.

Differing from the M. E. C, however, the M. P. Church rejected external governance and control by bishops and mainline denominational hierarchy, choosing instead independent administration within local churches. In 1844, the M. E. C. split into the M. E. Church (northern section) and the M. E. Church, South over slavery and the extent of power exercised by bishops.

In 1939, the northern and southern sections of the M. E. Church merged with the M. P. Protestant Church to form The Methodist Church. In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church merged to form the current United Methodist Church.