

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 22)

Legal and denominational issues dominated the 1890s for Bucklesberry's first church, crippling its ability to minister effectively for years. An 1889 civil suit filed by former pastor, Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash in Lenoir County Superior Court alleged that the Union Baptist Association owned the Church property. The suit was roundly dismissed in 1890, but Rev. Nash filed another similar claim in 1892 that legally entangled Hickory Grove for much of the decade and into the next century.

In addition to legal problems, the Church struggled with denominational identity. The 1890 *Branson's Business Directory* suggested it was affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal (M. E.) Church, South. However, a January, 1890 news report clearly stated that Rev. J. F. Dosier of the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church was their newly-appointed pastor.

The conflict in denominational identity became more pronounced and puzzling in 1891. Although the Church officially voted to separate from the Union Baptist Association and to align with the M. P. Church in 1885, a second, inexplicable Church vote occurred in the spring of 1891 with the same objective and resulted in the same action.

There is no question that Hickory Grove Church voted twice on the same matter. An eyewitness account of the second 1891 Church vote was chronicled by Rev. Dr. Esek Arnold Wright (1842-1920) years later in the *North Carolina Christian Advocate* (1906). Evangelist at the time, Dr. Wright preached a two-week revival meeting at the Church in 1891 with Rev. W. L. Harris, pastor of the La Grange Circuit of the M. P. Church. Rev. Harris replaced Rev. Dosier who had been transferred to Randolph, NC that year. Below are Dr. Wright's recollections:

"On account of some dissatisfaction with their pastor [Rev. B. W. Nash, Baptist], the members of this church [Hickory Grove] in the spring of 1891 sent for Brother [W. L.] Harris, who resided at La Grange, to come out to the church and preach, explaining the doctrines, government and polity of the Methodist Protestant Church. This Brother Harris did, and, after hearing him, the members called a Conference together of all members, male and female, and resolved to go into a body to the Methodist Protestant Church. They also instructed the Board of Trustees to make a deed of trust and church building to the Methodist Protestant Church of North Carolina." (*North Carolina Christian Advocate*, Greensboro)

"In a short while all this was done, and then they unanimously called Brother Harris to be their pastor until Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, which he (Brother Harris)

consented to do. So when I went to these [revival] meetings with Brother Harris I found this church organized under the Methodist Protestant banner, and working well. A good membership of about 150, and well-equipped Sunday-school with about one hundred pupils and six or eight good teachers. At the fall Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church this church was received into full fellowship, recognized as being of the same 'faith and order,' and was attached to the La Grange Circuit, and Brother Harris was sent to be their pastor for 1892." (*North Carolina Christian Advocate*, Greensboro)

Why Hickory Grove voted twice to separate from the Baptists and to align with the M. P. Church is a mystery. Was the earlier 1885 vote simply unknown or possibly disputed by the congregation in 1891, thereby prompting a second vote? Did the Church fail to properly document the 1885 vote, which Church leaders recognized in 1891, thus the need for a second vote?

Was the second vote of 1891 essentially a signal of unwavering unity and determination directed toward former Baptist pastor, Rev. Nash, whose second legal claim against the Church was in-progress that year? Interestingly, the 1891 Church action resulted in Hickory Grove deeding the Church property to the M. P. Church of North Carolina, a clear indication that the trustees and congregation held no regard for Rev. Nash's claim.