

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Match Made in Heaven (Part 4)

Dating and courtship differ. There are no long-term relationship expectations for a man and a woman who are merely dating. Quite the opposite, the goal and end result of courtship is almost always matrimony.

Courtship was the basis for many marriages prior to the twentieth century. In the late 1800s, "The man and the woman usually were members of the same community, and the courting usually was done in the woman's home in the presence (and under the watchful eye) of her family..." (Burzumato, 2007). Letter writing was also a large part of the courtship process.

Laurah Wood (1856-1934) of Bucklesberry married Rev. William Ellis Swain (1856-1923) of Washington County during Christmas week of 1890. Their relationship probably began soon after William's assignment as pastor of the La Grange Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church Mission in 1885.

Hickory Grove Church in Bucklesberry was one of the four churches under his charge. As residents of Bucklesberry, Laurah and her family lived less than a mile from the church. Therefore, they likely attended worship services at Hickory Grove.

William had ample opportunities to court Laurah during his three-year term as pastor. His pastoral reassignment to the M. P. Church in Winston-Salem in 1888, however, was a considerable distance from La Grange. The move potentially placed their budding relationship at risk.

In all likelihood, they exchanged letters other over the next few years. William also made numerous trips back to La Grange which allowed their courtship to continue. Published news documented a few of his visits. Several were coupled with preaching engagements in La Grange:

1888, Sept. 2: "Rev. W. E. Swain, pastor of Winston Methodist Protestant Church, arrived here [Greensboro] this morning on his way to La Grange..." (*Greensboro Daily Workman*, cited in *The Wilmington Messenger*)

1888, Sept. 8: "Rev. W. E. Swain, pastor of Winston Methodist Protestant Church, who went down recently on a visit to friends of La Grange, returned on the west bound train as far as to this place last night, and went up to his place at Winston this morning..." (*Greensboro Daily Workman*)

1889, June 29: "Rev. W. E. Swain of the Winston Methodist Protestant Church, went down to La Grange yesterday to be present and assist at the dedication of a new church at that place tomorrow..." (*Greensboro Daily Workman*)

1889, July 14: "Rev. W. E. Swain, formerly the pastor of the M. P. Church [Mission] here, was visiting in our town [La Grange] last week." (*The Weekly Journal*, New Bern)

1890, Sept. 4: "Rev. W. E. Swain is assisting this week in a series of meetings in La Grange. He will return in time to fill the pulpit of the M. P. Church [Winston] next Sunday." (*The Union Republican*, Winston-Salem)

More on the marriage of Laurah Wood and Rev. William Ellis Swain will be shared in an upcoming Bucklesberry article.