

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Match Made in Heaven (Part 5)

The six-year courtship of a teacher and a preacher that presumably began in 1885 eventually culminated in marriage. Educator Laurah Wood (1856-1934) of Bucklesberry married Rev. William Ellis Swain (1856-1923) during Christmas week of 1890. As with other God-ordained unions, theirs was a match made in heaven.

Laurah and William were accomplished individuals widely known in their respective professional circles; therefore, it is no surprise that their wedding was reported by multiple news outlets. Reprinted here are three:

1890, December 24: "Winston, N.C., December 23rd, 1890.—Rev. W. E. Swain, who has been the pastor of the Methodist Protestant Church here for the past three years, left yesterday morning [December 22nd] for La Grange, where this morning he wedded Miss Laura[h] Wood, an accomplished lady of that place. Mr. Swain is a plain, outspoken man, and a genial, whole-souled pastor..." (*The State Chronicle*, Raleigh)

1890, December 24: "Rev. H. W. Battle, pastor of the [Missionary] Baptist Church [Wilson], left on Monday for La Grange where on Tuesday he performed the marriage ceremony of Rev. W. E. Swain of Winston to Miss Laurah Wood of La Grange. The editor extends congratulations to the happy groom, who has won one of the finest specimens of womanhood in all Carolina. May both live long and prosper." (*The Wilson Mirror*, Wilson)

1890, December 25: "Rev. W. E. Swain, who for the past three years has so acceptably filled the pastorate of the Methodist Protestant Church at this place [Winston], left the city Monday morning. He was united in marriage Tuesday morning at nine o'clock in La Grange to Miss Laura[h] Wood, of that place...we wish for him and the young lady he is so fortunate as to win all the joys that are possible to mankind." (*The Western Sentinel*, Winston-Salem)

The ceremony was likely conducted at the Grace M. P. Church in La Grange, which William helped establish when he was pastor of the La Grange M. P. Mission from 1885 to 1887. He reportedly traveled to La Grange to participate in the dedication of the new church the year before the wedding (*Greensboro Daily Workman*, June 29, 1889). Still standing on the corner of North Caswell and East James Streets in La Grange, the former M. P. Church building is now the Heart to Heart Prayer House, a Disciples of Christ ministry.

As opposed to more popular twenty-first century weekend weddings in the afternoon, it was not unusual for nineteenth century weddings to occur on weekdays. Moreover, a morning ceremony was fashionable in the 1800s (partyspace.com). Thus, the Tuesday, December 23, 9:00 a.m. wedding for Laurah and William was most fitting for an erudite couple during that time period.

Rather than an M. P. Church preacher, the ceremony was conducted by Rev. Henry Wilson Battle, D.D., a distinguished Baptist preacher. The choice of Dr. Battle to perform the wedding may have been the bride's. Reared in Bucklesberry, Laurah probably attended the local Hickory Grove Church which operated as a Baptist work from 1860 to 1885. One report suggested she still had Baptist interests and leanings before she met William in 1885:

1884, Oct. 8: "Miss Laura[h] Wood, Mrs. Julia A Wooten, Jno. P. Joyner, and Jno. S. Bizzell, of La Grange, arrived in the city [New Bern] yesterday on their way to the Eastern Baptist Association." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

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