

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Match Made in Heaven (Part 8)

The chances of a country girl from Bucklesberry in Lenoir County marrying a country boy from the Albemarle Sound area of Washington County in the late 1800s were slim to none. For God-fearing people, however, there are no chance occurrences. Everything is providential, even marriage.

Such was the union of Lurah Wood (1856-1934) and Rev. William Ellis Swain (1856-1923). They married during Christmas week of 1890. Over the next eight years, they were blessed with three children: Lynette Grimsley Swain Moss (1892-1957), James Wood Swain (1894-1956), and John Paris Swain (1898-1983). Theirs was a match made in heaven.

Although she was a well-regarded teacher prior to her marriage, there is no evidence that Lurah taught school after she and William wed. Her life revolved around her husband's ministerial service. Never living in one place more than a handful of years, their residence always coincided with the location of Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Conference churches where he was appointed pastor.

William's career spanned almost forty years. He pastored mostly in or near the Piedmont area of the State in the counties of Alamance, Catawba, Davidson, Granville, Halifax, and Randolph. He also served two three-year appointments, 1885-1887 and 1894-1896, at the M. P. Circuit in La Grange, Lurah's hometown.

Regular re-assignments to different church circuits meant that Lurah and William would not have a permanent home during their lifetime together. Since buying a home was not financially feasible for most pastors, many church circuits offered parsonages to accommodate pastors and their families.

Lurah and William made their home in parsonages during his early appointments. But during his four-year term at the Asheboro M. P. Church in Randolph County from 1904 to 1907, they made the decision to build a house. In the spring of 1904, they purchased property in Asheboro and promptly began construction of a home:

1904, April 14: "Real Estate Transfers. D. B. McCrary and his wife to Rev. W. E. Swain one house and lot in South Asheboro on Fayetteville Street. Armfield & Laughlin one lot on Sunset Avenue to Rev. W. E. Swain." (*The Courier*, Asheboro)

1904, May 5: "Rev. W. E. Swain is building a residence on S. Fayetteville Street, which when completed will be a handsome residence." (*The Courier*, Asheboro)

Laurah and William may have wanted a more long-term, stationary residence for their children, all of whom were school-age at the time. The decision to have their own house in lieu of a short-term parsonage, though, may also have been influenced by William's increased involvement in the governance of the North Carolina M. P. Conference.

His elevation to the top leadership position occurred in 1907 when he was elected Conference President. In a large headline on page one, a public announcement was made in the State's prominent newspaper:

1907, November 21: "REV. W. E. SWAIN THE PRESIDENT—North Carolina Methodist Protestant Church..." (*The News and Observer*, Raleigh)

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