

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 11)

The long-standing relationship between Bucklesberry's first church and the Baptists ended with a decision to separate from the Union Baptist Association in September, 1884. Chartered in 1860, the members of Hickory Grove voted unanimously to align with the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church six months later in April, 1885.

Transitioning to a new church government went well for the most part. However, former pastor, Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash, deeply connected with the Association, was unhappy with the direction the Church was taking. He made a final pulpit appearance at Hickory Grove within days of the Church vote, possibly to protest.

Unfortunately, Rev. Nash did not leave quietly. Disgruntled and working behind the scenes, as it were, he was unable to come to grips with the Church's move away from the Baptists. Four months later in the fall of 1885, he attended the annual meeting of the Union Baptist Association in Mount Olive where he questioned whether Hickory Grove held a rightful note to their property:

1885, October 8: "The agent Rev. B. W. Nash for the [Union Baptist] Association on the title of church property...presented an elaborate report, which was read, received, and unanimously adopted. The report, which will appear in the minutes, presented Pleasant Grove and Hookerton Churches in Greene; and Lousin Swamp, Bethel, South West, and Hickory Grove in Lenoir, as having defective titles, and refers in each case to the necessary action in law to set up and fully establish the last or misplaced deeds. The Association at once, took in the situation, and without a dissenting voice a resolution was adopted to elect five Trustees on the part of the Association, in accordance with the Constitution, to take the matter in hand, and push the work to success. The Association, also, pledged its responsibility to sustain the Trustees financially. The Trustees are located as follows: One in Greene; two in Lenoir; one in Wayne, and one in Pender County. The matter was considered of so much importance to our denomination, that the agent [Rev. Nash] was not elected a Trustee; but re-elected as agent, and requested to push his investigations to the fullest extent the ensuing year..." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Bucklesberrian, Samuel Ivey (S. I.) Sutton (1834-1904) was a Hickory Grove charter member and news reporter during this time period. He was either was unaware of, or chose not to acknowledge, the legal battle being forged by Rev. Nash. Ironically by year's end, S. I. was singing the praises of denominational harmony among local churches in his social news column:

1885, November 19: "During a residence of three years in La Grange we have been pleased to notice the good feeling existing between the ministers and members of the different churches worshipping in this place. No controversy between members at the church, and but little denominational preaching from the pulpit. Christians have enough to do to resist the common enemy, and a united effort in this, will cause all to think more of religion and less of denominations." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

Five years later in 1890, Rev. Nash filed suit against Hickory Grove Church in Lenoir County Superior Court. Represented by S. I. Sutton and other Church leaders, Hickory Grove would not receive a legal ruling on whether they owned the land where their church building stood until 1896. The State Supreme Court would hand down the final decision.

More will be shared in an upcoming Bucklesberry article.