

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 14)

Leaving behind a quarter-century of Baptist affiliation, Hickory Grove moved forward with its first full year as a Methodist Protestant (M. P.) church in 1886. By all accounts, the ministry grew under the pastoral leadership of Rev. W. E. Swain.

In addition to Rev. Swain's monthly preaching that year, Rev. T. J. Ogburn, then-president of the M. P. Conference of North Carolina, held a special service in June, 1886. By early August, the Church started a Sunday School. Revival meetings in the fall produced nine additions to the membership. The year ended with the M. P. Conference annual meeting in Enfield, N.C., attended by Rev. Swain and charter member, Benjamin Franklin Sutton (1838-1897).

Blessings flowed in the early months of the next year. The Church sanctuary received a musical facelift, and more members were added:

1887, February 9: "Mr. Swain preached at Hickory Grove last Sunday. The weather was unfavorable but a good congregation attended. The congregation and interest has been increasing at this Church for the last two years. One of the improvements to be noted is the purchase of an organ for the use of the Church. The members of this Church, and the people of the community, are liberal, and when they attempt a thing they do it." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1887, March 9: "Six persons were baptized and received into the Church at Hickory Grove last Wednesday night." (*The Daily Journal*)

Rev. Swain faithfully preached his monthly commitment during the winter and spring of 1887, his third year as pastor. The congregation swelled on some Sundays:

1887, May 4: "Rev. Mr. Swain preached to a large congregation at Hickory Grove last Sunday, his regular appointment." (*The Daily Journal*)

For reasons unknown, Rev. Swain did not preach his assigned first Sunday service in June, which opened the door for another preacher to supply the pulpit:

1887, June 2: "We are requested to state that the Rev. J. D. Stanford will preach at Seven Springs on Sunday morning and at Hickory Grove at 3 o'clock the same afternoon." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Interestingly, Rev. Stanford was a Presbyterian preacher with a reputation for proselytizing Baptists. Although Rev. Swain was back in the pulpit in July, his return may have been overshadowed by another speaker that month with distant family ties to the Baptists:

1887, July 21: "J[oshua] J. Herring, Jr. delivered his Sunday school lecture at Hickory Grove to a goodly number of the citizens in Bucklesberry." (*The Daily Journal*)

Mr. Herring was a local educator and twice great-grandson of Rev. Joshua Herring (1723-1801), one of the early pastors of Bear Creek Primitive Baptist Church, established 1756. Originally located in the Jason community north of La Grange, Bear Creek Church was the only place of worship available to the people of Bucklesberry and surrounding area through the mid-1800s. Prior to the start of Hickory Grove around 1860, Hardy Sutton (1803-1861), the Church's senior charter member, attended Bear Creek Church for a period of time.

Undertones of denominational unrest among the congregation at Hickory Grove were evident as the summer of 1887 came to a close. A rekindled captivation with the Baptists was apparent that continued into the fall. Meanwhile, Rev. Swain saw the final months of his pastorate.