

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 15)

Chartered around 1860, Hickory Grove operated as a Baptist church for almost a quarter-century. By 1887, it had transitioned into a second full year as a Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church. The early part of the year went smoothly for Bucklesberry's first local assembly. But events in the summer and fall pointed to unrest within the congregation and with the pastor.

Assigned to preach the first Sunday of each month, Rev. W. E. Swain was absent from the pulpit in June for reasons unknown. In his place was Rev. J. D. Stanford, a Presbyterian preacher with a reputation for proselytizing Baptists.

Rev. Swain returned to preach in July, only to be eclipsed by a local educator, Joshua J. Herring, Jr. With distant family ties to the Primitive Baptists, Mr. Herring delivered a Sunday School lecture to a sizeable congregation at the end of July.

Rev. Stanford resurfaced at the Hickory Grove Sunday School picnic held the first Tuesday in August. He was joined by prominent Baptist preacher, Rev. G. W. Sanderlin. Noticeably absent was Rev. Swain:

1887, August 11: "The picnic at Hickory Grove last week was a complete success. Everybody present enjoyed themselves to the fill. There were rations in abundance and to spare. The speaking before dinner by Rev. J. D. Stanford, and after by Rev. G. W. Sanderlin, is said to have been most excellent. We are unable to give even a synopsis of the speeches, but hear that Mr. Sanderlin's captivated the crowd. The people are highly pleased with all things connected with the picnic, and we hope they will be stimulated to renewed efforts for the future. For good eating, and plenty of it, Bucklesberry can't be beaten, and now let them show that they are equal to the task in other things." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

A six-day revival meeting commenced the same Tuesday of the picnic and continued through the next Sunday. The preacher for these meetings is uncertain, but it may have been Rev. Sanderlin who was well-received at the picnic. However, Rev. Swain was observably absent on the Sunday that concluded the revival, although it was his assigned day to preach at the Church:

1887, August 10: "The protracted meeting at Hickory Grove closed last Sunday on account of the indisposition of the pastor [Rev. Swain]. Six were added to the Church." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

The August revival was undoubtedly a success. Nonetheless, Rev. Swan held another revival within weeks, inviting the help from another M. P. Church pastor who would eventually replace him, although probably unbeknownst to the congregation at the time:

1887, September 8: "Rev. Mr. [W. T.] Totten of the Roanoke circuit M. P. Church is assisting Rev. Mr. Swain in a protracted meeting at Hickory Grove this week." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

Why another revival was held so soon after the earlier one is unknown. As Church pastor, perhaps Rev. Swain viewed the Baptist preachers who spoke at Hickory Grove in the earlier weeks as interlopers, and that the congregation was showing Baptist leanings again. Yet strangely enough, Rev. Swain himself offered his services at a nearby Baptist church the same month:

1887, September 21: "Rev. W. E. Swain will, by invitation, preach at Union [Baptist] Church, on the south side of Neuse [River], on the evening of the first Sunday in October. A cordial invitation is given to the public." (*The Daily Journal*)

Rev. Swain was absent for his Sunday appointment in October but preached his regular first Sunday service in November, along with an additional Saturday service.

Unfortunately, the end of Rev. Swain's pastorate was imminent. By the close of 1887, and with the respectful tone of an obituary, the local newspaper reported his departure from Hickory Grove Church:

1887, December 14: "Rev. Mr. Swain preached here last Sunday and Sunday night. He will leave next Friday for Winston, [N. C.] his charge for the next year. For three years Mr. Swain has served the congregations of this mission with perfect satisfaction and they regret to give him up. But our loss is the gain of another to which we reluctantly submit. Mr. W. T. Totten will serve the mission the ensuing year." (*The Daily Journal*)