

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 16)

After nearly a quarter-century of affiliation with the Baptists, Bucklesberry's first church ended its second full year as a Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church in 1887. But not without more change and unrest.

Rev. W. E. Swain, installed as pastor in December, 1884, delivered his last sermon at Hickory Grove in December, 1887. Assigned to preach the first Sunday of each month, his attendance was inconsistent throughout the year for reasons unknown. He was appointed to the Winston-Salem Mission of the M. P. Church the next year.

By late summer, there was renewed Baptist interest among some in the Church. Local educator, Joshua J. Herring, Jr., with distant family ties to the Primitive Baptists, gave his Sunday School lecture to a large congregation at Hickory Grove the end of July.

At the Church picnic in early-August, Rev. J. D. Stanford, a Presbyterian preacher known for proselytizing Baptists, along with Baptist minister, Rev. G. W. Sanderlin of the Beston community, Wayne County spoke to a crowd of eager listeners. Rev. Sanderlin, in particular, was enthusiastically embraced and commended for his message by local newspapers. The text and topic of his sermon were not reported.

Whether the Church was swayed by Revs. Stanford's and Sanderlin's sermons to the point of second-guessing their 1885 decision to leave the Baptist denomination is unknown. Perhaps not coincidental, Rev. Sanderlin was back in the area at the re-opening of the La Grange Baptist Church a few weeks later on Sunday of Thanksgiving week.

Writing for the State's Baptist publication, *The Biblical Recorder*, Rev. Sanderlin shared his first-hand account of the event and his thoughts about the waning influence of the Baptists at that time:

1887, December 7: "Last Sunday (Nov. 27th) was a red-letter day in the history of the Baptist cause at La Grange and the country round about. La Grange (formerly Moseley Hall) is a pretty little town on the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, fifteen miles from Goldsboro, and about forty-five miles from New Bern. Just after the [Civil] War [Civil War] it numbered less than two dozen houses and less than two hundred inhabitants. Now it contains a population of one thousand, with many nice dwellings, church and school buildings, etc. The Baptist Church at this place before the War was very strong in numbers, wealth, etc. but became greatly weakened as a result of the War, and has barely been able to sustain 'a name to live.' Meantime other

denominations have come in and occupied the ground once dominated almost exclusively by the Baptists. The Methodists (Episcopal), Disciples and Kehukee Baptists have each put up new church buildings, and the Methodist Protestants have one in course of construction. By the establishment of so many fine schools (all of them largely patronized) at La Grange, the place is no longer provincial, but has become cosmopolitan in character and influence. The Davis Military School is located here with about 20 new buildings and nearly 200 cadets gathered from all parts of the United States. Here also we have the Kinsey School for Young Ladies, with fine new buildings, and a patronage of between 75 and 100 young ladies and girls. Here, too, is the La Grange Collegiate Institute (a mixed school) with about 105 pupils. And a portion of the year there is, in addition, a Public School with an attendance of between 60 and 75 of both sexes. This is an educational record scarcely equaled, certainly not surpassed, by any town of the same size in the South..." (*The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh)

The conclusion of Rev. Sanderlin's insightful account will be shared in next week's Bucklesberry article.