

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 17)

After nearly twenty-five years of Baptist operation, Hickory Grove began its second year as a Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church in 1887. What should have been a year of stability and growth turned out to be more change and unrest for Bucklesberry's first church.

The Church pastor for three years, Rev. W. E. Swain, was absent from the pulpit several times during the year for reasons unknown. In December, he was appointed to another pastorate in Winston-Salem.

By late summer, there were indications of renewed Baptist interest among some in the Church. Joshua J. Herring, Jr., a local educator with distant family ties to the Primitive Baptists, gave a Sunday School lecture in July to a sizeable crowd at Hickory Grove. In early-August, Baptist minister, Rev. G. W. Sanderlin preached a message at the Church picnic that was enthusiastically received. Both men may have caused some to second-guess the Church's 1885 decision to break from the Baptists.

Yet another event may have influenced a faction in the Church to reconsider its Baptist roots. The re-opening of La Grange Baptist Church in late-November, a Sunday-long affair, drew widespread attention. Present that day was Rev. Sanderlin. Perhaps not coincidental, he may have drawn some admirers from Hickory Grove who were impressed with his visit to Bucklesberry a few weeks earlier.

The State's Baptist journal, *The Biblical Recorder*, published Rev. Sanderlin's observations of the event. The first part of his account acknowledged the waning influence of the Baptists in the La Grange area at that time. Below is the last part of his insightful account:

1887, December 7: "The growth of La Grange, the establishment of so many schools there, giving to it a cosmopolitan character and influence, etc., lead the Baptists to realize how inadequate were their facilities for meeting the increased responsibilities thus pressed upon them. Their [La Grange Baptist] Church building had been taken as a hospital by Sherman's army in 1865, and the marks of defacement by the soldiery still remained. The building was not sufficient to seat the local congregation, and, in addition, the large number of [Davis Military] Cadets and other students. Sunday after Sunday large numbers of these had to be turned away unable to hear preaching from a Baptist preacher in a Baptist church. What was to be done?...Enlargement and improvement of the old building was agreed on. A building committee was appointed, and the work commenced in August [1887]. In seating capacity twenty feet were gained, and many other

improvements were made, and on last Sunday one of the most beautiful and commodious Baptist church buildings in the State was re-opened for the public worship of God."

"The people gathered from every quarter for twenty-five miles around, and the large house was crowded....The sermon on the occasion was preached...by Rev. Thomas Hume, D. D., of the State University [Chapel Hill], and a noble sermon it was on the importance of a personal dedication of all we have and are to the service of the Lord, his text being the 20th verse of the 14th chapter of Zechariah--'In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, *Holiness unto the Lord,*' etc. Never was a subject more timely or more forcibly presented than this. Never was an audience more impressed or delighted..."

"At night the church was again filled with a large audience who listened with profound attention to another sermon from Dr. Hume from the text: 'Remember Lot's wife.' The interest was intense, and a feeling of deep solemnity pervaded the whole congregation as the preacher, inspired in manner, thought and utterance, inveighed against half-heartedness in religion and urged sinners to 'flee from the wrath to come.' After the sermon the church partook of the Lord's Supper and received one member by letter."

"Thus closed one of the most wonderfully delightful days and occasions it has ever been the privilege of any church and community to enjoy..." (*The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh)