

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 18)

Established around 1860, Hickory Grove's origins as a Baptist Church are well-documented. An 1885 Church vote to separate from the Baptists and to align with the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church launched a new era for Bucklesberry's first church. But efforts to implement another church government were slow-going.

Just two years later in 1887, the Church was experiencing instability and unrest. In his third year as pastor, Rev. W. E. Swain was a pulpit no-show several times. Subsequently, he was appointed to another pastorate in Winston-Salem in December.

There were also indications of renewed Baptist interest that year. As the fall of 1887 unfolded, several men with Baptist ties and leanings delivered messages at the Church. Coupled with the widely heralded re-opening of the La Grange Baptist Church, some at Hickory Grove may have second-guessed their decision to leave the Baptists.

With the 1888 New Year came a new pastor. Rev. W. T. Totten replaced Rev. Swain at the La Grange Mission of M. P. Churches. Strangely, there is no record that he ever graced the pulpit at Hickory Grove, although he was responsible to preach there once a month. The only reported Church activity for the entire year was a ladies' joint venture with the La Grange M. P. Church:

1888, May 30: "The ladies of the M. P. Church at La Grange, assisted by those of Hickory Grove Church in Bucklesberry, that noted section for an abundance of good things to eat, will give a dinner at the new M. P. Church building, for the benefit of the church building fund, on Wednesday June 6th, it being on the day of the Davis School commencement. We are unable to give the bill of fare, but a good dinner at a reasonable price may be relied upon." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Rev. Totten's pastorate lasted only one year. He was succeeded by Rev. W. M. Pike in 1889. As with Rev. Totten, there are no indications that Rev. Pike met any of his monthly preaching appointments at Hickory Grove, suggesting more apparent inactivity at Hickory Grove. The only reported Church activity that year was a special meeting held by State head of the M. P. Church:

1889, April 3: "Rev. Mr. Mills, President of the North Carolina Methodist Protestant Church preached at Hickory Grove Saturday and at La Grange Sunday morning and night." (*The Goldsboro Headlight*)

Rev. Mills' visit was significant and probably signaled the Church's need for oversight. In all likelihood, he came with the intent of propping up a struggling M. P. Church.

By year's end, Rev. Pike had been re-assigned to the Roanoke, NC Mission. Following him at the La Grange Mission was Rev. J. F. Dosier:

1889, December 11: "Rev. J. F. [Dosier], who has been assigned by the M. P. Church to this mission, is expected to arrive here the last of this month, and will hold his first church service at Hickory Grove the first Sunday in January [1890]." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Although there are no reports of pastors supplying the pulpit in 1888 and 1889, the Church may have kept its doors open with lay speakers. Nonetheless, as the 1880s concluded, Hickory Grove was about to face the most challenging time in its history. The new decade would be dominated by a legal matter that lingered and crippled the Church for years. More in next week's Bucklesberry article.