

# Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

## Hickory Grove Church (Part 19)

Bucklesberry's first church was established around 1860. Within a few years of separating from Baptist affiliation in 1885, Hickory Grove began to struggle with implementing a new church government under the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) banner.

Troubles surfaced in 1887. Several men with Baptist ties and leanings spoke at the Church, possibly causing some in the congregation to doubt their decision to break from the Baptists. Understandably, Rev. W. E. Swain, in his third year as M. P. Church pastor, could have perceived the visiting speakers as interlopers. His pulpit commitment became sporadic, and by year's end he was appointed to another pastorate in Winston-Salem.

Hickory Grove did not have a pastor exclusively its own. Rather, it shared a pastor with three other local churches that comprised the La Grange Circuit of the M. P. Church, which included the La Grange Church, Oak Grove Church in Pitt County, and Tabernacle Church in Greene County.

After Rev. Swain's departure, Rev. W. T. Totten, served as pastor of the La Grange Circuit in 1888. Rev. W. M. Pike followed in 1889. There is no evidence to suggest that either pastor preached at Hickory Grove over the two-year period, even though they were assigned to preach one Sunday a month. As the 1890 New Year rang in, the future looked more hopeful for Hickory Grove:

1890, January 9: "The ministers of the different churches here have arrived and entered upon this year's work. Rev. Mr. Tuttle preached last Sunday at the M. E. [Methodist Episcopal, South] Church here [La Grange]: the Rev. Mr. [J. F.] Dosier preached at Hickory Grove and Rev. Mr. Finch preached at Seven Springs. These are all new preachers in our place and these congregations are well pleased with their efforts." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

No sooner had Rev. Dosier settled-in, a bombshell report about Hickory Grove was published in local newspapers. The Church was facing legal jeopardy that threatened its very existence:

1890, January 23: "The *Kinston Free Press* tells of a strange case....It seems that sometime ago there was a congregation of Christians, calling themselves Union Baptist [Association], at Hickory Grove, this [Lenoir] County. By private subscription they obtained funds to build a church, which was built upon the land of Mr. Junius Sutton, who made a deed to certain persons for the land upon which the church stood as "trustees for the Baptist church at Hickory Grove."

Sometime afterwards the donor of the land, the trustees and whole congregation at Hickory Grove gave over bodily to the Methodist [Protestant] Church, since which time services have been conducted there by the Methodists alone to the exclusion of Rev. B. W. Nash, the chief preacher and leader of the Union Baptists. Now Mr. Nash brings suit to recover the property as trustee for the Union Baptists." (*The Wilson Advance*) Note: The news report was in-error about Junius Eli Sutton (1847-1931) donating land for the Church. Rather, it was Junius' twin brother, Julius Eri Sutton (1847-1925).

Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash was no stranger to Hickory Grove. He pastored the Church in 1882-1883 during its final years with the Union Baptist Association. Loyal to the Baptist cause, Rev. Nash believed Hickory Grove had no authority to separate from the Association and to align with the M. P. Church. In a report presented at the annual meeting of the Association in Mount Olive in October, 1885, Rev. Nash questioned whether Hickory Grove held a rightful deed to its property.

With funding from the Association, Rev. Nash and several trustees were charged with investigating the Church's deed, which took years. By January, 1890, Rev. Nash had filed suit in Lenoir County Superior Court on behalf of the Association.