

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 25)

Lasting more than twenty years, the longest-running legal battle in Bucklesberry history may have been between Hickory Grove Church and Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash, agent for the Union Baptist Association. The nature of the rift began in 1885 when the Church decided to align with the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church after having operated as a Baptist church for about a quarter-century.

At Rev. Nash's direction, a total of six law suits were filed against Hickory Grove. All were initiated in Lenoir County Superior Court. Each suit claimed that the Church no longer owned its building and property because it had been deeded to the Union Baptist Association years earlier in 1872.

The first suit occurred in 1889 and was roundly dismissed in 1890. Filed by 1891, the second suit was dismissed the same year. Rev. Nash appealed to the North Carolina Supreme Court, but the high Court upheld the lower Court ruling, handing Rev. Nash a second defeat.

Rev. Nash's third bite at the legal apple followed quickly in 1892. The complaint for this suit, however, was markedly more amplified and detailed than the complaints for the first two suits.

Now a historical document at State Archives in Raleigh, the 1892 complaint sheds light on the particulars of the claim against Hickory Grove. The first two of seven points in the complaint were published in last week's Bucklesberry article. Points three, four, and five follow:

"3. That the Union Baptist Association is a proper legally constituted religious body composed of the associating together of the several Baptist churches known as Baptists and Union Baptists in the Counties of Wayne, Duplin, Greene, and Lenoir, for the purpose of worshipping Almighty God and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to the tenets and faith and on or about the 14th day of April A. D. 1883 met by Convention Assembled and for the Government of said Association and the churches or congregations composing the same adopted a Constitution [and] Articles of faith Rules of order providing for the devolution and transfer of this church property both personal and real, the appointment of Trustees and the successors to hold the same for the use and benefit of members of said Association and members of the churches composing the said Association and on behalf of said members, to hold, take, receive and recover by suit or other wise all property to their belonging by the Courts of this State."

"4. That on the __ day of __ 1872 the Defendants Julius E. Sutton and wife, Nancetta Sutton made and executed unto the Defendants B. F. Sutton, Jr., S. I. Sutton, Jerre Sutton, [Sr.], Thomas Sutton, and Levi Hill and their Successors a deed of trust conveying that tract or lot of land known as the Hickory Grove Baptist Church lot, in trust for the Baptist Church at Hickory Grove and for the use and benefit of the Baptist denomination, and that said deed of trust was duly proven, probated, and recorded in the Records of the Office of Registrar of Deeds for the County of Lenoir, on the __ day of __ 1873."

"5. That Defendants B. F. Sutton, Jr., S. I. Sutton, Jerre Sutton, [Sr.], Thomas Sutton, and Levi Hill accepted the terms of the trust imposed and conditioned in the Deed mentioned in paragraph 4 of this Complaint and as trustees of the Baptist Church at Hickory Grove entered upon the duties of trustees for and on behalf of the members thereof." (*North Carolina Archives*, Raleigh)

The final two points of the 1892 complaint will be shared in an upcoming Bucklesberry article.