

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 37)

The dust began to settle for Bucklesberry's first church after the final Court judgment was handed down in 1910. The long legal battle with Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash and the Union Baptist Association was over. First filed in 1889, six lawsuits initiated by Rev. Nash attempted to seize Hickory Grove Church property that he alleged had been deeded to the Association. All failed in Court.

The years leading up to 1910 were difficult for the Church. Along with other La Grange Circuit churches in the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Conference, Hickory Grove depended on the Conference to supply a pastor annually. But from 1899 to 1902, there was no one to regularly shepherd the flock, suggesting the doors of Hickory Grove may have been largely closed.

The appointment of Rev. J. F. Dozier to the La Grange Circuit in 1902 brought much-needed stability and hope to Hickory Grove as it awaited the final Court decision of 1910. A faithful pastor for six years, Rev. Dozier was followed by Rev. J. F. Abernathy in 1909 who provided five more years of uninterrupted pastoral service.

At the end of Rev. Abernathy's term in 1913, the Church entered into another ministerial drought. The Conference appointed Rev. W. H. Neese to the La Grange Circuit in 1914. However, he became ill soon after his arrival to the community:

1914, April 1: "Rev. W. H. Neese, Methodist minister of La Grange, and Mrs. Neese have returned home after a protracted confinement in the Kinston hospital with typhoid fever." (*The Kinston Free Press*)

Rev. Neese's illness may have left Hickory Grove's pulpit empty for much of 1914. By year's end, he had relocated to the Gastonia area, where he was apparently in good health again:

1914, December 22: "There will be a Christmas tree and exercise at Union Grove Methodist Church of which Rev. W. H. Neese is pastor, Wednesday evening at 6 o'clock. Everybody will be welcome." (*The Gastonia Gazette*)

The Conference next appointed Rev. J. W. Allred to the La Grange Circuit in 1915. Strangely, he received a dual appointment for the La Grange and Rockingham Circuits. By early January, Rev. Allred was in Greensboro, and he preached regularly throughout the year in the Rockingham Circuit churches, according to published records.

There is no indication, though, that he ever preached at Hickory Grove or the La Grange Circuit during 1915. Although Rev. Allred had a car, the one hundred fifty mile drive to La Grange from his Greensboro residence probably made travel practically impossible, factoring in poor roads and inclement weather:

1915, April 15: "Rev. J. W. Allred of Greensboro, was with us Sunday, and we expected him to preach for us at Fairmount Church at night; but owing to the high winds and clouds that indicated rain, and as Brother Allred had come down in his automobile, he thought it best to return Sunday afternoon." (*The Courier*, Asheboro)

The pastoral dry spell that began in 1914 spilled over into 1915. Unfortunately, Hickory Grove found no relief from the M. P. Conference that year. Without explanation, the Conference excluded the La Grange Circuit altogether from its annual listing of pastoral appointments for 1916. The Circuit continued to be omitted in subsequent years as well.

Hickory Grove's affiliation with the M. P. Conference, then, effectively ended in 1915. Without a denominational home, Bucklesberry's first church faced yet another major crossroad as the new year rolled in.