

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 39)

Hickory Grove was founded as a Baptist church in 1860. In 1885, the congregation voted unanimously to align with the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Conference. Omitted from the 1916 Conference listing of pastoral appointments for reasons unknown, Bucklesberry's first church effectively ended its affiliation with M. P. Conference in 1915.

Hickory Grove had been inactive for prolonged periods during its latter years as an M. P. Church, primarily due to the twenty-one years of litigation with the Union Baptist Church and former pastor, Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash. Facing the loss of its church property, the Court ruled in favor of Hickory Grove in 1910, permanently ending the matter.

Although the legal wrangling was over, the Church experienced several more years of operational struggle and inactivity. By 1916, Hickory Grove had joined the Methodist Episcopal (M. E.) Church, South Conference. A successful revival meeting led by Rev. K. F. Duval in November that year added thirteen new members by profession of faith, which breathed new life into the ministry of the Church.

Firmly ensconced with the M. E. Church, South Conference, Hickory Grove began receiving regular pastoral appointments. Over the next eight years, the following men supplied the pulpits for the La Grange Charge: Rev. K. F. Duval, 1916-1918; Rev. R. G. L. Edwards, 1919-1921; and Rev. R. E. Pittman, 1922-1923.

With a newfound denominational home, Hickory Grove's doors appeared to be open more regularly. For example, despite a criminal disruption, Hickory Grove was holding Sunday worship services in mid-summer 1917:

1917, July 21: "When John Sutton, Will Sutton, Allen Moore, and Jesse Davis were arraigned before Magistrate Peeble'e Saturday morning on the charge of disturbing public worship in Bucklesberry [Hickory Grove] last Sunday...it developed that there was some bad liquor at the bottom of the affair. The responsibility for the firewater was placed on Will Sutton, by the evidence in the estimation of the Magistrate, and another warrant was issued for Will....Jesse Davis was sent on to the La Grange Court on the charge of disturbing the worship; Will Sutton and Allen Moore were convicted of simple assault and fined \$5 each while John Sutton was sent to Judge Joyner to answer to 'assault with a deadly weapon,' to wit, a pistol." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Hickory Grove was ministering in the summer of 1919 as well. Thirty-five members reportedly donated an impressive \$290.00 offering toward the Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions held in Columbus, OH during June-July that year. Sponsored by the national M. E. Church, the extraordinary event was attended by more than one million visitors, according to C. J. Anderson (2005).

A decade later, Hickory Grove was still associated with the M. E. Church, South Conference in 1930. A late-summer revival signaled a flourishing Church:

1930, August 30: "Rev. R. E. Pittman, pastor of the LaGrange Circuit of the Methodist Church, has just closed a splendid revival at Hickory Grove in Bucklesberry. Mr. Pittman reports that the people of that section are a fine type, and he is very much impressed with the fine farming lands thereabouts..." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Historically, Hickory Grove's roots run deep with both the M. P. Church and M. E. Church, South. In 1939, the two Conferences merged to form the Methodist Church. Three decades later in 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren Church joined the Methodist Church to form the United Methodist Church (UMC).

Operating today under the UMC banner, Bucklesberry's first church reached its 160th year of ministry in 2020. Their milestone more than twice surpasses the median age of 73 years for local churches in America.