

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

White Oak Grove Church

White Oak Grove was the second local church established in Bucklesberry in the late-1890s. The first, Hickory Grove, was chartered in 1860. As with many nineteenth century rural churches, founding documents for White Oak Grove are scarce.

Bucklesberrian, Oscar Edward Herring, Jr., church clerk has studied the history of White Oak Grove for many years. Although information on the origin of the Church is limited, his research includes recollections of what may have been an earlier church building located west of Bear Creek about a mile and half from the current Church site on Kennedy Home Road.

Oscar has long believed that the homeplace of Robert Lee Pelletier, Sr. (1871-1920), once situated on the corner of Bear Creek and Ben F. Herring Roads, could have been a church building. He recalled from his boyhood years in the 1940s, "When I attended school I waited at this intersection and in this building for the school bus. There was visible evidence that the building [may have been] a former church."

Like Oscar, Dr. Leo Richard Anderson, MD, now a resident of California, was born and reared in Bucklesberry. He wrote a letter that shared what may have been early roots of White Oak Grove. Excerpted below, Leo also identified the Pelletier homeplace:

"Lewis [Rev. Louis Barkley Foss] apparently preached some and considered himself a Free Will Baptist minister. He traveled to different churches in the area. He was ordained to preach the Gospel of the Church of God on 19 November 1893. Around 1999 [sic., 1899] he built a church near Bear Creek. The land was deeded to the church, but when the land was sold the new owner claimed the church, and it was later turned into a dwelling and then became the [Robert Lee] Pelletier, [Sr.] home. It has since been torn down and a new home was built next on the site. In the church was a table 18 feet long and three feet wide. They served the Lord's Supper on this table and the meals consisted usually of fried chicken or some other meat. The women who belonged to the church wore black bonnets, long dresses and no jewelry."

The existence of the old Pelletier homeplace house that Oscar and Leo witnessed is not in question. Others in the Bucklesberry community, some still living today, also remember the old house. However, one could question Leo's detailed account suggesting the Pelletier homeplace had been a church building and possibly the original site for White Oak Grove, since it clearly was not his firsthand knowledge.

By the time Leo was born in the mid-1930s, White Oak Grove had been operating at its current site for more than three decades. Because it predated his birth, Leo could not have observed the dress and attire of the women who attended services in the earlier church building that he referenced. Moreover, he had no direct communication with, or contemporary knowledge of, Rev. Louis Barkley Foss (1834-1908), who preceded him by almost thirty years.

The source of the information in Leo's letter is not a mystery and can be explained by his lineage to Louis Foss. Leo's mother was Lucille Foss Anderson (1916-2013), long-standing member of White Oak Grove Church. Her father was Simon Foss (1873-1955), son of Louis and Nancy Dawson Foss (1842-1905). An eyewitness of his father's ministry, Simon may have helped erect the church building identified in Leo's letter. In all likelihood, then, Leo first learned about his great-grandfather, Louis' work directly from his grandfather, Simon, who was still alive when Leo was a young adult.

Unfortunately, without other supporting documents or independent sources, such as the deed mentioned in the letter, much of Leo's account is virtually impossible to substantiate. The far greater challenge is proving the unnamed church that Louis built was indeed the founding site of the White Oak Grove Church.