

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

White Oak Grove Church (Part 2)

The original church site for White Oak Grove is widely believed to be its present location on Kennedy Home Road. But Oscar Edward Herring, Jr., church clerk, has suggested that the old Pelletier homeplace, formerly situated on the corner of Bear Creek and Ben F. Herring roads may have been the first church building.

Reared in Bucklesberry, Dr. Leo Richard Anderson, MD, now a resident of California, also referenced the old Pelletier homeplace in a letter that discusses the purported earliest beginnings of White Oak Grove. He revealed that his great-grandfather, Rev. Louis (Lewis) Barkley Foss (1834-1908) built a church around 1899 which was later sold and converted to the Pelletier homeplace. Louis was ordained to preach by the Church of God in 1893, according to Leo, but "considered himself a Free Will Baptist minister."

Although the implication was there, Leo stopped short of definitively stating that the church Louis built was the original site of White Oak Grove, which has operated as a Free Will Baptist church since the early 1900s. The identification of Rev. Louis Foss in Leo's letter nonetheless is significant and may prove relevant to the origin of White Oak Grove Church should other documents come to light in the future.

Louis was a Civil War veteran and a member of the 27th North Carolina Infantry, Company C. After the War ended, he was keeper of the Company C record book. Almost a decade after his death, a local news outlet acknowledged Louis posthumously for his dedication in maintaining the record book. They also confirmed he was a preacher of the Gospel:

1917, January 30: "The book was kept by Louis Foss, the 'secretary' or clerk to the Company commander. Mr. Foss was a Dane, a native of St. Croix, one of the Danish West Indies about to be purchased by the United States, and a minister of the Gospel..." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Louis immigrated to America in the mid-1800s from the U.S. Virgin Islands, previously occupied by Denmark. The earliest record of his residence in the States was the 1860 Census. He lived in the Bear Creek area and was employed as a school teacher at the age of 25. In his household were wife, Nancy Dawson Foss (1842-1905), one-year old son, John William Foss (1859-1932), and two of Nancy's brothers, Benjamin Thomas Dawson (1836-1907), carpenter, and Simon Dawson (1832-1912), farm laborer.

Louis was closely associated with the Dawson and Herring families who represented the majority of the charter membership at White Oak Grove. Several Census records indicated Louis resided geographically near the homeplace of Benjamin Franklin Herring, Sr. (1828-1907). Further evidence of the strong mutual trust among the three families was Louis' involvement in their estates. He was executor of his brother-in-law, Benjamin Dawson's will, and a witness for the will of B. F. Herring, Sr.

Louis' relationship with the Dawsons and Herrings suggests he may have preached from time to time at White Oak Grove. Oddly, though, he is not listed as a charter member, and there is evidence he did not regularly attend White Oak Grove. For example, he was either preaching at, or attending, another church in Seven Springs in 1904, the same year services were being held at White Oak Grove by pastor N. N. Garst:

1904, May 8: "Rev. Louis Foss preached at Dail's school house on Sunday." (*The Daily Free Press*)

1904, May 16: "Rev. Louis Foss attended church at Dail's school house, near White Hall [Seven Springs], Sunday. There will be services at White Oak Grove Saturday and Sunday by the pastor, Rev. N. N. Garst." (*The Daily Free Press*)