

# Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

## White Oak Grove Church (Part 4)

Former Bucklesberrian, Dr. Leo Richard Anderson, MD indicated in a letter that his great-grandfather, Rev. Louis Barkley Foss (1834-1908) was an ordained preacher who established a church in the Bear Creek area around 1899. Some have speculated this church was the earlier site of White Oak Grove, currently located on Kennedy Home Road, and that Louis was the founding pastor.

A little known book authored by historian, Roger E. Sappington, PhD in 1971, independently substantiated Leo's claim. Entitled, *The Brethren in the Carolinas: The History of the Church of the Brethren in the District of North and South Carolina*, the book documented the origin of White Oak Grove (or Oak Grove) and confirmed Louis Foss was indeed the founding pastor.

Dr. Sappington cited reports from *The Gospel Messenger*, official weekly magazine of the Church of the Brethren. He summarized a series of communications published in the magazine between 1896 and 1905 that were either written by or referenced Louis and his associate, Rev. Noah N. Garst (1879-1942). Assigned by the governance of the Church of the Brethren, Rev. Garst was the home missionary to the newly established White Oak Grove Church.

Remarkably, the reports not only chronicled the establishment of White Oak Grove in 1896 and Louis' role as founding pastor, but they outlined in Louis' own words his doctrinal transformation from Free Will Baptist to Church of the Brethren. The first two magazine reports are reprinted here:

1896, December 5: "Bro. Louis Foss, of La Grange, NC, formerly a Baptist minister, writes us that he was led to embrace the true faith and order of worship by some of the tracts published by the Brethren. There is power in well-prepared tracts, and it pays to distribute them." (p. 776, *The Gospel Messenger*)

1896, December 12: "From La Grange, NC. I was formerly a minister of the Baptist faith. I got hold of some tracts published by the Brethren's Missionary and Tract Committee, and saw, after reading them with great care, that I was in error. In defiance of all the persuasions of my many friends, and even my wife [Nancy Dawson Foss], I resolved to obey 'the whole truth,' and leave the faith I had been advocating. I told them I was confident I had now found the apostolic form of doctrine, and if they would not go with me, I should have to leave them. So I did, and I thank the God of heaven and earth, that He was so kind and merciful to me as to show me the right way!"

"Brethren, never in my life before did I feel as happy as I did when I stood on the banks of the stream [probably Bear Creek], and talked to the people who came to see me baptized by trine immersion."

"We have a small Brethren church organized here [Bear Creek area of Bucklesberry]. You may be sure that I am doing all that lies in my power, to show the people that ours is the form of baptism practiced in the days of the apostles. Brethren, I have a hard task before me, for the churches around here are of a different faith. I think there is but one little church in the State of North Carolina that is trying to adhere to the faith that was once delivered to the Saints. Louis Foss. Nov. 20, [1896]" (p. 795, *The Gospel Messenger*)

Louis' obituary, published in the same magazine, indicated he was aligned specifically with the Free Will Baptists before embracing the Brethren Church form of worship. The Brethren were also commonly known as German Baptist Brethren.