

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

White Oak Grove Church (Part 9)

Bucklesberrian, Rev. Louis Barkley Foss (1834-1908) was the founding pastor of White Oak Grove. Initially organized as a Church of God (formerly, Christian Union), it was officially chartered by the Church of the Brethren in 1900.

White Oak Grove was not the only church planting effort at the time by the national Brethren leadership, however. Two 1903 reports published in *The Gospel Messenger*, magazine for the Brethren Church, identified additional outreach efforts in the greater La Grange area. One report was reprinted previously. The other report follows:

1903, April 18: "Seven Springs—Our meeting at Ground Nut, northeast of La Grange three miles, closed March 29. One awaits baptism till the third Sunday of this month. Bro. [Louis Barkley] Foss was with us on the day of the close. After returning home and visiting those nearer I started out for Genoa, sixteen miles east of Seven Springs; visited and distributed over three hundred tracts and made arrangements for meeting on the first Sunday in May. At this place the great question is baptism and kindred ordinances, for it is a Quaker settlement. It seems to be nearly all the talk whether one should be or not be baptized, and almost everything else treating the subject is brought forward to oppose it.—N. N. Garst. Seven Springs, N.C., April 9." (*The Gospel Messenger*, p. 256)

Noticeably absent in both 1903 reports was mention of White Oak Grove, the only known Brethren Church to have been officially planted in the area. Yet two years earlier in September, 1900, Louis had constructed a 20-by-30-foot building where the chartering service was held. Formerly situated on the corner of Bear Creek and Ben F. Herring Roads, Louis reported in a 1902 letter that 18 members had been meeting at the Church that year.

The silence from Rev. Garst in both 1903 reports on the status of White Oak Grove was not unintentional and signaled trouble ahead for the fledging church. One of two 1904 reports was an indisputably veiled reference to Louis and the work he had established. Unfortunately, it presented a bleak outlook for White Oak Grove and for future church planting efforts in the area for the Brethren:

1904, April 30: "North Carolina Mission. It may be a question in the mind of some dear supporter [i.e., Rev. Louis Barkley Foss] of this mission whether it will be a success, as the work [i.e., White Oak Grove Church] has now been running and having close attention for more than three years, with only a few members gathered in during that time, and some of them disowned;

but I have hopes for it yet, and am willing to stay with it or help it along in any way I can. When I first came here more people came to church [i.e., White Oak Grove] than during the second and third years. The spies came out and took back a fearful report, perhaps; the curiosity seeker, wanting to know just what was going on, made his appearance, and some of all classes were moved to come until they saw and heard all they wanted to; then, settling back to their old profession, they left a small and better crowd. The past three years have been a period of opposition which has not ended and never will, but the opposition has settled back even so much that I think the noisy period is over. I have tried to make this period a seeding time, that I believe will have its harvest if patiently cared for during the next few years. Beginning Jan. 1, and up till now, I have had thirty-five meetings with the best of attention and fairly good interest, though the weather has been the most severe since we came here. We have been rained out, snowed and frozen out, because our people are not used to going to church except on fair days. Our house for worship [i.e., the building Louis erected] has no ceiling and no plaster on the walls; the frame is just weather boarded and the doors and windows, put in the frame. I notice an improvement in interest, in attendance and attention. Dear readers, remember the cause here before Him who is able to build it up and prosper it. N. N. Garst. Seven Springs, N.C., April 22." (*The Gospel Messenger*, p. 285)

Initiated in 1896, the entire outreach of the Brethren Church for the eastern half of the State was led by Rev. Louis Foss and home missionary, Rev. Noah Garst. With White Oak Grove as its only chartered work for a decade of labor, the national Brethren leadership quietly suspended church planting efforts stationed in the greater La Grange area by the end of 1905.