

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

White Oak Grove Church (Part 15)

Two churches with the same name operated in Bucklesberry in the late 1890s. Both were called White Oak Grove, sometimes just Oak Grove. By November, 1896, Rev. Louis Barkley Foss (1834-1908) had organized a small congregation that worshipped in a log cabin. He eventually erected a building on the west side of Bear Creek. The church was officially chartered by the Brethren and formally named, White Oak Grove in September, 1900.

Meanwhile, by 1899, just a mile away on the east side of Bear Creek, Josiah Sutton, Jr. (1834-1902) had erected a building with the goal of establishing a Free Will Baptist (FWB) church. Initially named, Oak Grove, the church was slow in developing.

Probably not well-connected with FWB clergy, Josiah, Jr. was a layman and may have struggled to find a pastor. Some of the first services occurred in May, 1899 by two local preachers, Rev. Henry D. Harper and Rev. John Grubbs. Not FWBs, both were associated with the Disciples of Christ or Christian Church. By 1902, Josiah, Jr.'s church secured its first FWB pastor of record:

1902, June 4: "Rev. A[lfred] E. Rouse preached at [White] Oak Grove last Sunday, his regular appointment." (*Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Rev. Rouse was a noted FWB preacher who held revival meetings at various FWB churches in the Mt. Olive area and beyond throughout the 1890s. Even in 1902 while he was pastoring Josiah, Jr.'s church, he remained on the revival circuit, holding meetings at Jones Bay (Pamlico County) and at Deep Run. Previously from Duplin County, he was residing in Seven Springs by 1897, which allowed for a reasonable commute to Bucklesberry to preach.

Blessed to have been used by God to plant a church, Josiah, Jr. passed away on November 1, 1902 after a mortal battle with Bright's disease. His death did not mean dissolution of his church, though. Rev. Rouse continued to serve as pastor for the next several years.

The winter of 1904 reportedly may have been a fruitful time for the fledgling church. Visitors from outside the heart of Bucklesberry showed interest and attended services:

1904, February 9: "Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Waters, of near La Grange, attended church at [White] Oak Grove on Sunday." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Rev. Rouse performed the important pastoral work of visitation at White Oak Grove. He maintained a close relationship with the family of Josiah, Jr., including his son, Albert Hardy Sutton (1858-1911):

1904, February 24: "Rev. A. E. Rouse of Mt. Olive, visited Mr. A. H. Sutton yesterday." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

For reasons unknown, Rev. Rouse's pastorate at White Oak Grove ended in 1904. By August that year, he received an appointment to Winter Green FWB Church in Cove City.

The White Oak Grove Brethren Church established by Rev. Foss dissolved by 1905 or soon thereafter. Similarly, there are no published accounts of activity at White Oak Grove FWB Church from 1905 through 1914. Whether it was operating at all during this period is unknown.

For certain, church doors were closed by 1915. An effort to revive Josiah, Jr.'s church came the same year, but not from FWB clergy. As it had done in 1899, the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church) stepped in to supply the pulpit:

1915, May 28: "Mr. S[amuel] W. Sumrell, the well known preacher of the Christian Church will preach at [White] Oak Grove Church in Bucklesberry section at 11 o'clock Sunday. The church building...has no regular services or religious body worshipping in it and Mr. Sumrell hopes to arrange for some regular services." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)