

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church

Time and the constantly changing culture have understandably altered Bucklesberry over its two hundred seventy year history. Even the few old but enduring buildings are either severely weatherworn or they have undergone such significant improvements and repairs that they only slightly resemble their original construction.

One of the oldest buildings is Hickory Grove Church, purportedly chartered in 1860. Situated directly off Kennedy Home Road, Hickory Grove was the first local church built in Bucklesberry. A brief glance at the Church might lead one to conclude that it has always been a bricked structure. But not until the early 1900s, some fifty years after the Church was established, did the first bricked buildings appear in North Carolina.

An unpublished book outlining the history of Hickory Grove, written by a group of congregants who had access to old records, states that the Church building was bricked in 1964. The book also affirms it was indeed a wooden structure in the beginning:

"When the church was begun in 1860, there were only three wagons in the [Bucklesberry] community. They belonged to Jere[miah] Sutton [Sr., 1836-1900], Benjamin [Franklin] Sutton, [1838-1897] and Levi Hill [Sr., 1830-1893]. These three wagons hauled the lumber for the church from Southwest [Creek] Mill near Pink Hill, from early dawn until dark to build this church. The carpenters we do not know by name, but by their work, they were the best at that time." (p. 2)

In addition to structural changes, Hickory Grove also switched denominational affiliation along the way. The monument sign by the Church today identifies it as a United Methodist Church. For as long as most locals can remember, it has been associated with the Methodist denomination.

Other available records, however, indicate that Hickory Grove was not always Methodist. In his personal account of the Church as he witnessed it in 1891, Rev. Dr. Esek Arnold Wright (1842-1920), an evangelist at the time, revealed surprising information, specifically, that Hickory Grove operated as a Baptist church for the first thirty years of its existence.

Published in 1906, some fifteen years later, Rev. Wright's reflections of his first-hand observations are highly descriptive and detailed, leaving little doubt that the church he visited is the same Hickory Grove Church today. His factual explanation of the Church's denominational origin may be the most direct proof that it was a Baptist church in its early years:

"Brother Harris and I...rode out to 'Hickory Grove Church' (in the rich 'whortleberry' [or Bucklesberry] section of Lenoir County)—a church located about five miles southeast from La Grange. This church was first built by a denomination known as 'the North Carolina Baptists,' a denomination peculiar to that State; for they are nowhere else to be found. The preacher who organized this church was Rev. B. W. Nash, the leader of the denomination in North Carolina. I think there were, all told, about six preachers of this denomination in Eastern Carolina. As long as Rev. Nash had charge of this church it flourished 'as a green olive tree.' Rev. Mr. Nash was an educated man—a true Christian and a first-rate preacher; he was gifted as an orator—the people of 'whortleberry' [Bucklesberry] liked him very much. The church building built under his administration, was a fine country church; it was forty feet wide and sixty feet long, painted white with green window blinds, plastered inside and well benched, with a nice pulpit, painted cherry color, and a chancel-rail extending all around the pulpit, with about four feet distance from pulpit to railing." (*North Carolina Christian Advocate*, Greensboro, October 25, 1906)

The final part of Rev. Wright's account of Hickory Grove Church will appear in next week's Bucklesberry article.