

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 5)

The first local assembly in Bucklesberry was Hickory Grove Church. Purportedly chartered in 1860, it was originally associated with the Baptists. In 1891, the Church officially changed affiliation to Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which eventually became part of the current United Methodist Church.

Hickory Grove's roots in the Baptist denomination could not be more clear. Previous *Gazette* articles identified Baptist preachers and Baptist associations that held meetings at the Church from its early years. As the 1880s unfolded, though, Bucklesberry's first church faced ecclesiastical troubles.

In 1883, Hickory Grove was without a pastor. Serving in what appeared to be an interim position, Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash (1831-1911) of the Union Baptist Association supplied the pulpit. By October that year, Church members elected another Baptist minister, Rev. James D. Cavanaugh from Duplin County to be part-time pastor. Assigned to preach on the fourth Saturday and Sunday each month, Rev. Cavanaugh served faithfully throughout 1884, even into the fall:

1884, August 28: "Rev. J. D. Cavanaugh preached at Hickory Grove last Saturday and Sunday, his regular appointment." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

Earlier that year in the spring, however, the Church trustees inexplicably voted to call a second pastor, Rev. J. D. Carpenter, to preach alongside Rev. Cavanaugh, albeit on different Sundays:

1884, April 30: "Rev. J. D. Carpenter will, by the unanimous consent of the trustees, preach at Hickory Grove on the 3rd Sunday in each month at 3:30 p.m." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

The Church's inability to find a full-time pastor may have been the main reason why a second part-time pastor was chosen. But it was Rev. Carpenter's denominational affiliation that surely raised eyebrows, for he was not a Baptist preacher.

At the time he was called to Hickory Grove to provide pulpit support, Rev. Carpenter was pastor of the La Grange Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. With its long-standing Baptist connections, Hickory Grove's choice of a second co-pastor from the Methodist denomination was unusual indeed.

The decision to call a preacher outside the Baptist mainstream signaled dissatisfaction among the congregation, probably over the Church's future, although it is unclear what those specific concerns might have been. Beyond dissatisfaction, the move to bring in a Methodist pastor likely telegraphed deeper division within the Church body.

Not everyone was happy with Rev. Carpenter, in particular, the former interim pastor, Rev. Nash. Bucklesberryan Samuel Ivey (S. I.) Sutton (1834-1904), charter member of Hickory Grove and then-contributor to several local newspapers, reported on the growing tension within the Church and pressure it was facing from without:

1884, May 11: "The *Baptist Review* [Rev. B. W. Nash, editor] has its back up over the action of the trustees of the Hickory Grove Church in consenting for the Rev. J. D. Carpenter to preach there once a month, and question their right do so without instructions. Instructions from whom? The trustees and citizens of that community [Bucklesberry] built the Church, and is it right to deprive them of the privilege to say who shall, or who shall not, have monthly appointments? The trustees are unable to see or recognize any authority over them in this matter." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Hickory Grove's historic separation from the Union Baptist Association would occur before the end of 1884. But the Church would not depart altogether from Baptist affiliation until a later date.