

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 6)

After almost a quarter-century of affiliation with the Baptists, Bucklesberry's first church, Hickory Grove, was on the brink of denominational change in 1884. The earliest indication was in April that year when Church trustees appointed Rev. J. D. Carpenter, a minister from the Methodist Episcopal (M. E.) Church, South, as co-pastor.

This action was highly unusual since, just six months earlier, the congregation of the Church had elected Baptist minister, Rev. J. D. Cavanaugh from Duplin County as pastor. Rev. Cavanaugh was already preaching regularly at the Church when the trustees unpredictably called Rev. Carpenter to co-pastor.

The selection of a Baptist minister was in keeping with Hickory Grove's long-standing Baptist roots. However, the trustee's choice of a co-pastor from another denomination was clearly out of sync. Whether the trustees were usurping their authority by appointing a second pastor is unclear. The congregational vote should have superseded unilateral action by the trustees.

In all likelihood, two co-pastors from different denominations signaled division within the Church. Oddly, on one occasion, the co-pastors held a meeting together:

1884, August 13: "Rev. Mr. Carpenter will be with Rev. Mr. Cavanaugh on Saturday of his next regular appointment at Hickory Grove." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Nonetheless, for the duration of the year, both pastors worked in tandem to supply the pulpit as assigned. Rev. Cavanaugh preached every fourth Saturday and Sunday of the month, and Rev. Carpenter conducted services every third Sunday.

Reports over the remaining months of the year suggest that the influence of the Baptist denomination, represented by Rev. Cavanaugh, began to diminish. At the same time, the M. E. Church, South, under Rev. Carpenter's leadership, gained increasing presence and acceptance:

1884, June 26: "Rev. J. D. Cavanaugh filled his regular appointment at Hickory Grove last Sunday. No preaching Saturday for want of a congregation." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1884, July 23: "Rev. J. D. Carpenter preached at Hickory Grove last Sunday, as previously announced. His sermon was attentively listened to, and full of edification to Christians and

admonitions to non-professors. Such discourses are a blessing to any congregation. His next appointment will be announced hereafter." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1884, September 11: "Rev. J. D. Carpenter is conducting a protracted meeting at Piney Grove [M. E. Church, South] in Wayne county, with encouraging prospects. Rev. J. N. Andrews will...preach at Hickory Grove on the third Sunday in this month, September, at 3:30 o'clock p.m. The community is invited." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*). Note: Rev. Andrews was also associated with the M. E. Church, South.

By the fall of 1884, the membership voted to withdraw the Church from the Union Baptist Association:

1884, September 25: "The members of Hickory Grove Church are requested to meet next Saturday. The pastor[s] can't be there, but the Church must be prepared for the annual meeting, and other business may need attending to." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1884, October 1: "But few of the members of Hickory Grove Church met last Saturday to prepare the Church for the Association....After thoroughly discussing things pertaining to the Church in general, a motion was made and unanimously adopted withdrawing the Church from the Union [Baptist] Association. The Church now stands without denominational affiliation, and no action was taken or suggestion made as to future operations." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Why so few members were present for this historical vote that changed the denominational fate of Hickory Grove Church is unknown.