

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 8)

Chartered in 1860, Bucklesberry's first church, Hickory Grove, withdrew from the Union Baptist Association in September, 1884. It was a historically significant action, given the Church's quarter-century connection with the Baptists.

Uncertain of its new denominational home, Hickory Grove was reportedly an Independent Baptist Church for a brief period after separating from the Association. For the duration of 1884, preachers from a variety of denominations supplied the pulpit. The year ended with a call to Rev. W. E. Swain of the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church to serve as part-time pastor:

1884, December 31: "In accordance with an invitation extended by the Church at Hickory Grove, Rev. W. E. Swain, of the M. P. Church, will preach at that place the first Sunday in each month, at 11 o'clock a.m., beginning the first Sunday in February, 1885. The members of the Church and Christians, and people in the community, are cordially invited." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

The new year rang in with no services at Hickory Grove in January, however. Reporter, Samuel Ivey (S. I.) Sutton of Bucklesberry, charter member of the Church, suggested the possibility of foul play from Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash, former pastor affiliated with the Union Baptist Association:

1885, January 1: "Rev. Mr. [A. J.] Hiers....did not preach at Hickory Grove, as announced, probably because it was announced that Rev. Mr. Nash would preach there on that day, which we learn he failed to do. It may be that the last appointment was intended to prevent the first, and if such was the object it was effective." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*). Note: Rev. Hiers was the pastor of the Missionary Baptist Church in La Grange at the time and was allied with the Union Baptist Association.

For reasons unknown, newly-appointed Rev. Swain did not make his first preaching assignment in February as projected. Instead, his inaugural service came in March, according to S. I. Sutton, who signaled further action to come by the Church:

1885, March 4: "Rev. W. E. Swain preached a most excellent and instructive sermon at Hickory Grove last Sunday. There was no preaching or meeting of Church on Saturday, the appointment not being sufficiently known. There will be a meeting of the Church on the first Sunday in April,

to which all members are especially invited, the object being to take some action with a view to the future good of the Church at that place." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

As Rev. Swain was settling-in, the Church's other part-time pastor, Rev. J. D. Carpenter, assigned to preach third Sunday of each month, was transferred in late-December, 1884 by the Methodist Episcopal (M. E.) Church, South to Hyde County. His replacement, Rev. Alpheus McCullen, possibly having become aware of Hickory Grove's leaning toward the M. P. Church, tendered his resignation:

1885, March 18: "Rev. Mr. McCullen requests us to give notice that he has recalled his appointment at Hickory Grove." (*The Daily Journal*, new Bern)

A second historically significant action by the Church, one that has impacted its direction to the present day, will be shared in next week's Bucklesberry article.