

# Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

## Hickory Grove Church (Part 12)

Despite nearly 135 years of affiliation with the Methodist denomination, Hickory Grove Church operated almost a quarter-century as a Baptist church in its early years. In September, 1884, it made the historic decision to withdraw from the Union Baptist Association.

Within a matter of months, Bucklesberry's first church found a new home, voting to align with the Methodist Protestant (M. P.) Church in April, 1885. Implementing a new church government generally went well for the remainder of the year with the leadership of Rev. W. E. Swain, who held worship services the first Sunday of each month.

As Hickory Grove moved into the first full year with the M. P. Church in 1886, Rev. Swain continued as pastor. Month after month, he met his commitment to preach:

1886, January 6: "Rev. W. E. Swain, of the M. P. Church, returned to his charge last Friday, and preached his first sermon for this year at Hickory Grove last Sunday. Mr. Swain preached to the churches on La Grange mission last year, and they are highly pleased to have him returned to the mission this year." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1886, February 11: "Rev. W. E. Swain preached at Hickory Grove last Sunday, his regular appointment." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

As the Church's first pastor under the M. P. Church banner, Rev. Swain showed that he could partner with other area preachers in disseminating the Gospel:

1886, February 11: "A protracted meeting began at the M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] Church in this place [La Grange] last Sunday night, conducted by Rev. Mr. Mendinhall of the Church of Friends, and Revs. Rose and Swain of our place. The meetings will continue through the week, and it is hoped that good will be accomplished." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

Shortly after the revival meetings, Rev. Swain became seriously ill, causing concern among folks in the area:

1886, March 18: "We are sorry to hear that Rev. W. E. Swain is still quite sick in Bucklesberry. Mr. Swain has many warm friends in that community who are cheerfully giving him every

possible attention and who will continue to do so. We truly hope to see him up and out again soon." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1886, March 25: "Dr. J. M. Hadley, attendant physician during the recent illness of Mr. W. E. Swain, reports that gentleman convalescent, which we are happy to learn." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Although the nature of his sickness is unknown, Rev. Swain recuperated nicely and was back in the pulpit within weeks:

1886, April 7: "Rev. W. E. Swain preached at Hickory Grove last Sunday, his first sermon after his recent illness. We think he is quite himself again." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Hickory Grove began to flourish with the M. P. Church under Rev. Swain's ministry. More on the Church's growth in 1886 will be shared in an upcoming article.