

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hickory Grove Church (Part 35)

The 1910 ruling by Judge Charles Mather Cooke was absolute and final, permanently ending Hickory Grove's twenty-one year legal battle with former pastor, Rev. Bushrod Washington (B. W.) Nash and the Union Baptist Association. First initiated in 1889, a total of six lawsuits eventually failed in Court. Rev. Nash never received legal authority to recover Church property that he alleged had been deeded to the Association in 1872.

Hickory Grove did, in fact, deed its property to an outside entity, but not to the Union Baptist Association. In 1885, the congregation voted unanimously to separate from the Baptists and to align with the Methodist Protest (M. P.) Church. A deed of trust was made to the M. P. Church Conference six years later in 1891.

Evangelist at the time, Rev. Dr. Esek Arnold Wright (1842-1920) witnessed the transfer of property during a two-week revival he conducted at Hickory Grove that year with Rev. W. L. Harris, pastor of the La Grange Circuit of the M. P. Church. Dr. Wright's recollections were published in 1906:

"On account of some dissatisfaction with their pastor [Rev. B. W. Nash], the members of this Church [Hickory Grove] in the spring of 1891 sent for Brother [Rev. W. L.] Harris, who resided at La Grange, to come out to the church and preach, explaining the doctrines, government and polity of the Methodist Protestant Church....They also instructed the Board of Trustees to make a deed of trust and church building to the Methodist Protestant Church of North Carolina," (*North Carolina Christian Advocate*, Greensboro, 1906).

No doubt, the many years of litigation that Hickory Grove endured severely crippled its ability to serve the congregation and the community. For instance, there were extended periods when the Church went without a pastor. The November, 1898 filing of the sixth and final lawsuit marked the beginning of a particularly long ministerial dry spell that lasted from 1899 to 1901.

At the time, Hickory Grove was one of several churches that comprised the La Grange Circuit of M. P. Churches, the other two being the La Grange M. P. Church and Harris' Chapel. Thus, as member churches, the State M. P. Conference was responsible for supplying a pastor annually.

Rev. C. E. Forlines was appointed to the La Grange Circuit in 1899. Mentioned more than a dozen times in the local newspaper that year for his service, not once was it reported that he preached a Sunday service at Hickory Grove. In all likelihood, the Church was not operating on a

regular basis in 1899, if at all. Probably intended to rekindle Church operation, Rev. Forlines held revival services at Hickory Grove in the fall of the year:

1899, November 3: "Revs. C. E. Forlines and R. M. Andrews have closed a series of meetings in Bucklesberry and gone to Harris' Chapel to begin a meeting there." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Rev. J. G. W. Holloway was assigned to the La Grange Circuit in 1900. There are no public records indicating he ever preached a Sunday service at Hickory Grove in 1900, once again suggesting Church doors may have been closed.

The Conference did not supply a pastor for the La Grange Circuit in 1901, which left Hickory Grove and the other two M. P. Churches entirely without a pastor. In November, 1901, the Conference announced that Rev. G. L. Reynolds would serve the La Grange Circuit in the upcoming year.

By the summer of 1902, Bucklesberry's first church was again holding services, signaling the end of a three-year ministerial drought that began in 1899:

1902, June 11: "Rev. Mr. Ryndles [sic., Reynolds] filled his regular appointment at Hickory Grove Sunday." (*The Daily Free Press*)