

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

White Oak Grove Church (Part 7)

White Oak Grove was chartered in 1900 as a Brethren church under the leadership of founding pastor, Rev. Louis Barkley Foss (1834-1908) of Bucklesberry. *The Gospel Messenger*, magazine of the Church of the Brethren, published letters and reports about the planting of White Oak Grove that began around 1893. Included was the following, now historically important 1902 letter from Louis:

1902, October 4: "FROM LA GRANGE, N.C. It may be of interest to the Brotherhood to know somewhat of the little church of [White] Oak Grove, situated in the eastern part of Lenoir County, North Carolina. When the church was first organized it went by the name of the Church of God. The church was started by the writer. We went by that name for a good many years. But on reading the tracts of the [Church of the] Brethren and comparing the same with the Scriptures I saw that we were not carrying out the whole law as laid down in the Sacred Word. Still our faith and practice were nearly alike. I had no one to help me in that faith. It was several years before I could discern any fruits from my labors. I had all manner of discouragements to encounter; but these words of Scripture gave me encouragement to work on: 'Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.' Gal. 6:9."

"Before our house was erected I conducted our meetings in an old log house by the roadside [Bear Creek area of Bucklesberry]. We had some glorious meetings there. I think at one time some six or eight united with the church. We were having a happy time in that old log cabin. I have to pass by that old log cabin to get to our house of worship. The thought of the happy hours we enjoyed in it often comes fresh to my memory as I pass by. But alas there are no sweets, but what there is some bitter. Persecution commenced, and some even went so far as to try to make the people believe that the doctrine I was preaching was false and could not be found in the Scriptures. I bore all patiently, looking unto Jesus to give me more courage to preach that faith. Oh, what consoling words we find in Matt. 7:7. I shall never forget Bro. Landon West, for the many soul-cheering letters he wrote me, admonishing me never to get tired in the work, for I would reap in due season. God bless the dear brother."

"My next step was to try to build a house. Persecution commenced again, and some did everything to discourage me to build. I know where my trust and stronghold lay, oh! it was in the Lord. So I went to work trying to make up the money by subscription. And the Lord put it into the hearts of the kind people to cast in their mites. I took the whole responsibility on myself to have the lumber for the house sawed. I was told by some, after I had the lumber sawed, that I would never get the house built. I did not allow that to stop the work. I pressed on, and with

God's help the house was built, and now we have a frame house twenty by thirty feet where we can worship God and none can shut the doors against us. I was out some on the house. But I freely gave it and would rather have been out more than to have failed in my undertaking. After our house was built, I wrote to Missionary Board of the Brethren church at Elgin, IL, to send me some help, so that we could more fully establish the faith of the Brethren. How thankful I feel that they heard the cry. It was not a great while before our highly esteemed brethren, H. C. Early and J. M. Cline, responded to the call, and how happy we were to greet them. They have both left a lasting impression in the church and the community. How sweet the thought, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'"

"We called a council meeting and turned over to the Brethren church. We were re-baptized and organized a Church of the Brethren faith Sept. 17, 1900. Bro. H. C. Early was elected elder of the church and the writer was elected to the ministry, and then placed in the second degree, in order that he might look after the church in the absence of the elder. The [White] Oak Grove congregation now numbers eighteen members."

"We also extend our thanks to the Board for sending a missionary (N. N. Garst) among us. I am sorry to state that our elder, H. C. Early, tendered his resignation on account of having so much other business to attend to. But we feel thankful that he did not leave us without an elder. He said that Bro. T. C. Denton would fill his place. The church then elected Bro. Denton as our elder. We wrote him of the proceeding of the church, and the brother accepted the place. He will be with us on the thirteenth of this month. God grant that he will be able with God's help to gather many into the fold. Our love feast will take place on Saturday night before the third Sunday of this month. Brethren, pray for us and that the [White] Oak Grove Church may grow and flourish. Louis Foss. La Grange, N.C., Sept. 12." (*The Gospel Messenger*, p. 640)