

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

White Oak Grove Church (Part 10)

In a series of reports from 1896 to 1905, the early years of White Oak Grove were chronicled in *The Gospel Messenger*, weekly magazine of the Church of the Brethren. Bucklesberry's only Brethren work began to wane in 1904. Possibly one of the last services held at the church building erected near Bear Creek by founding pastor, Rev. Louis Barkley Foss (1834-1908), occurred in the fall of that year:

1904, November 12: "North Carolina. [White] Oak Grove.—We met for preaching Saturday night. Oct. 8, also Sunday. Sunday night we had our love feast. Nine surrounded the table. Bro. T. C. Denton officiated and Bro. N. N. Garst was assistant. One was received by baptism.—Ophrah Marstown [sic., Marshton], Richlands, N.C. Oct. 29." (*The Gospel Messenger*, p. 733)

Oddly, Louis was not mentioned in the report. Aging and in his early-70s, he apparently had no part in leading the worship service, although he was the founding pastor and a church elder. Whether he was even present for this meeting is unknown.

Two months later, Rev. Noah N. Garst, home missionary for the Brethren Church who had partnered with Louis in church planting efforts since 1900, opened another base of operations in the Darden community (near Williamston, NC) in Martin County. The same month, Rev. Garst penned a last report about White Oak Grove in which he announced the death knell, as it were, for the fledgling Brethren work:

1905, January 14: "North Carolina Mission Field. It has been a long time since I wrote a letter for *The [Gospel] Messenger*. The work is more promising now than ever since we came here [i.e., La Grange area]. Some reasons I will give, and some I shall not give in this letter. While it seems nearly impossible to advance where we first began [i.e., White Oak Grove, Bear Creek], I have hopes for that place [i.e., greater La Grange] and a plan by which I believe it will recruit during the year 1905. At Dail schoolhouse [in Seven Springs], where I have been holding monthly meetings during most of the time for three years, there is a much better interest.... N. N. Garst, Dec. 26 [1904]." (*The Gospel Messenger*, p. 30)

Two final reports in 1905 referenced both Revs. Foss and Garst, but neither mentioned White Oak Grove, likely suggesting it was no longer operating as a Brethren church. One of the reports indicated the two men had jointly made a donation to the Brethren Worldwide Fund. The other report was from Rev. Garst, who by November, 1905 had moved to Melvin Hill, NC (between Charlotte and Asheville) in Polk County to further the work of the Brethren Church. His exit

from the La Grange effectively ended the presence and church planting efforts of the Brethren Church in the area.

Having obeyed the Lord's leading in his life, Rev. Louis Barkley Foss died in 1908 at the age of 73 years. From Iowa where he was ministering that year, Rev. Garst wrote the obituary for Louis, acknowledging his founding work of White Oak Grove Church:

1908, May 23: "Death of Brother Louis Foss. Bro. Louis Foss, of La Grange, N.C., was born on one of the West India Islands, Nov. 30, 1834. In early life he came to the United States. Four years, I believe, he served in the Confederate army. May 8, 1858, he was married to Nancy Dawson, to which union were born six children. He and his wife united with the Freewill Baptist church, and he served that church for many years in the ministry and eldership. He was an earnest and conscientious man, ever ready to come nearer the truth or accept more light. Prior to 1900, he, together with Williams and Haynes, arranged a church similar in faith and practice to the Brethren or Dunker church, in which he held his membership for a few years, until Bro. H. C. Early preached there in 1900. At this time twelve were baptized and a church [White Oak Grove] organized by Brethren Early and Cline. Bro. Foss was elected to the ministry, and later advanced to the second degree. He was devoted and always ready for church work. March 28, 1908, he departed this life, and I feel sure that his departure brought him into association with the departed saints. His wife was also a member of the Brethren, or Dunker, church, and preceded him in death a few years. Bro. Foss will be missed as a father, brother and friend. May his children meet father and mother in the better world! N. N. Garst, Cherokee, Iowa." (*The Gospel Messenger*, p. 336).

[Caption to accompany photograph]



Rev. Louis Barkley Foss (1834-1908) was the founding pastor of White Oak Grove Church in Bucklesberry. Photograph circa 1902 courtesy of Toni Lynn Wade Sutton, of La Grange, third great-granddaughter of Rev. Louis and Nancy Dawson Foss (1842-1905).