

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dempsey E. Wood (Part 10)

Bucklesberry native, Dempsey Eugene Wood (1847-1921) lived a full life of leisure and work. An avid sportsman, he was widely regarded as a champion fisherman and a crack shot hunter.

Although he loved the outdoors, Dempsey was also industrious, and he recognized the value of work. A successful farmer, his views on crop production and farming trends were readily reported by news outlets, even after his retirement from farming in 1906. Running the family farm kept him busy, but Dempsey aspired to politics.

An event held in Goldsboro in 1878 may have catapulted him into the political arena when he was a young man. Joining delegates from other eastern NC counties, with Col. N. B. Whitfield as chairman, Dempsey represented Lenoir County in framing an important resolution. Petitioning the State Legislature for funds to cleanup the Neuse River, the resolution read in-part:

1878, March 8: "This Convention, composed of delegates representing the people of the counties of Craven, Jones, Lenoir, Wayne and Johnston, respectfully petition your honorable bodies for an appropriation of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the improvement of the navigation near Hatteras Inlet, the Neuse and Trent Rivers and their tributaries, and for the removal of obstructions at the confluence of said Rivers near the port of New Bern. They respectfully represent that during the late [Civil] War vessels and other obstructions were sunk in the said Rivers near New Bern, and from non-use during that period and since, logs and other debris have accumulated in the said Rivers, rendering the same unnavigable except about – miles up the Neuse, and the navigation that distance is uncertain and unsafe..." (*The Observer*, Raleigh)

Two years later in 1880, Dempsey served as delegate for the Falling Creek section of Lenoir County to the State Congressional Convention.

He soon gained the respect of the broader community as a representative voice. In 1882, Dempsey was the conservative Democratic Party nominee for the NC House race. Opposing him on the ticket was Republican nominee, Daniel E. Perry. Dempsey prevailed and won the election based on the initial count:

1882, November 9: "Lenoir County has done nobly....The election of Dempsey Wood to the Legislature is claimed by about 75 majority..." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

The final election result, reported one week later, confirmed Dempsey's majority win of 1,351 to 1,211 votes:

1882, November 16: "Dempsey Wood, Democrat, is elected to the [North Carolina] Legislature by 150 majority over Daniel E. Perry, Republican." (*New Bern Weekly Journal*)

Days later, reporters commented on Dempsey's campaigning ability, suggesting he was a shrewd politician:

1882, November 18: "Politicians are hard to spot. A fifteenth amendment Republican in this Township, who is notorious for hard work and small results, and who pretends to be much needed to Republican principles, proposed to Dempsey Wood a few days before the election, that if he (Wood) would grind his (the Rep.) ax, that he (the Rep.) would work for him (Wood). Dempsey didn't accept, consequently he was elected." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

More on Dempsey's political career will be shared in next week's Bucklesberry article.