

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dempsey E. Wood (Part 14)

A highly successful farmer, sportsman, politician, and businessman, Dempsey Eugene Wood (1847-1921) remained a resident of Bucklesberry and Falling Creek for most of his life. At age 59, he decided to retire and relocate to Kinston:

1906, August 25: "[Dempsey E. Wood] has announced his intention of giving up the farm, and will move to Kinston, where he has erected a commodious home." (*The Raleigh Times*)

By year's end, in addition to other land he may have amassed, Dempsey had disposed of the land he inherited from his grandfather, John Sutton (1779-1858) and father, James Wood (1815-1875):

1906, December 7: "Dempsey Wood, one of the most prominent farmers of Lenoir County, has sold his farm and will move to Kinston." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

Although his retirement may not have been a surprise to many, Dempsey's decision to sell his farm was surely a shocker to most folks in the community. Typical for the time, farm land usually stayed in the family line and was bequeathed to immediate heirs, primarily sons. Therein is the likely reason why Dempsey sold out.

Of the six children born to Dempsey and wife, Elmira (Wood) Wood (1845-1916), three of the four surviving daughters had married and left the farm to live with their husbands in nearby towns and communities. The one surviving son, Eugene, was coroner for Lenoir County and lived in Kinston. With no children to carry-on the family farm, Dempsey and Elmira may simply have concluded that selling was their best option.

Little is known about the spacious retirement home that Dempsey built in Kinston in 1906 or where it was located. But in 1915, Dempsey and Elmira moved to another home on Lenoir Street in Kinston:

1915, November 26: "Mr. L. R. George has sold his Lenoir Street home to Mr. Dempsey Wood, whose family will occupy it shortly. The consideration was \$3,750." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Just a few weeks before closing the deal on their new home, Dempsey purchased a help wanted ad in the local newspaper:

1915, October 19: "WANTED—Housekeeper needed for family of two. Apply to Dempsey Wood, Kinston, N.C." (*The Daily Free Press*)

Dempsey's need for a housekeeper may have signaled the impending, failing health of his wife, Elmira, who died five months later on March 28, 1916. Although her first obituary, published the day she passed away, stated that she died from, "infirmities of old age..." (*The Daily Free Press*), Greensboro's *North Carolina Christian Advocate* wrote in a later memorial that, "she had been sick for several months, and gradually faded away..." (May 4, 1916).

Dempsey outlived his wife by five years and died on June 7, 1921. Perhaps his two most enduring legacies were success as a champion fisherman and service on the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad board of directors. Interestingly, on the day he died, Dempsey was pursuing two of his deepest passions—fishing and the railroad. His obituary read in part:

1921, June 8: "Kinston was shocked yesterday morning to learn that Dempsey Wood, prominent and respected townsman, had died suddenly on the Norfolk Southern train...while en route to New Bern with friends on a fishing trip. The end was totally unexpected, Mr. Wood having appeared to be in the health and in good spirits when he boarded the train..." (*Greenville News*)