

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Christmastime 1880

Glittering lights at Christmastime are commonplace in twenty-first century America. But electric Christmas lights were not popularized until the 1960s. As for electricity, 90% of farms in the country did not have power in the mid-1930s, which prompted Congress to pass the Rural Electrification Act of 1936.

The earliest national advancements in electric lighting occurred in 1880. Wabash, Illinois became the first town in the U.S. to be completely illuminated by electricity, and Thomas Edison received a patent for his incandescent light bulb. In December that year, Edison excited the local public by introducing electric Christmas lights for the first time, displaying them outside his laboratory in New Jersey.

With neither electricity nor decorative electric lights available in rural America in 1880, Christmastime reports from Bucklesberry and greater La Grange had little to do with the season and focused mostly on routine news of the day:

1880, December 23: "Winter is booming. Clear, cold weather with white frost. J. W. Rice, one of our La Grange merchants, has sold his stock of goods to C. P. Barrow. William E. Hines who is running a country store, four miles from town, and another in La Grange, is selling at cost. H. M. McDonald and lady, of La Grange, are visiting relatives in Wilmington. Wish them a pleasant visit. Simeon Wooten, Esq., a cotton buyer and merchant of La Grange left on the 11th inst., for Cincinnati, to purchase livestock and arrange for the pork trade next season. Adam C. Davis, Jr., Principal of La Grange High School, is having his school house enlarged, with a view to the accommodation of a greater number of scholars next session. Joseph Kinsey principle [sic.] of Kinsey's School, La Grange, has issued a circular bearing testimonials of the faculty at [UNC] Chapel Hill. The testimonials give Mr. Kinsey's school a good reputation. Rev. W. P. McCorkle of the North Carolina Conference M[ethodist] E[piscopal] Church, has been assigned to La Grange Circuit, and will occupy the parsonage in this town. He is well spoken of as a minister, and a gentleman of accomplishments. Rev. W. H. Willis of the Methodist Protestant Church, preached his valedictory in La Grange, last Sabbath. His labors among us the past year, have been highly appreciated, and we trust will be productive of much good. We all wish him well. Rev. John Paris of the M[ethodist] P[rotestant] Church and whose residence is in La Grange, has been assigned to duty on Albemarle Circuit, 100 miles from his home. The itinerant system is mixed with inconvenience, but is thought by some to be the most successful....The dwelling of Mr. Joshua Daley, a highly esteemed citizen residing in the La Grange neighborhood [Bucklesberry], was entered by burglars one night last week, and robbed of a trunk containing

\$240.00 in money and other valuables. The trunk was afterwards found in the woods nearby together with some \$26.00 in silver money, which the rogues failed to carry off. Two [individuals], an old man named Wright, and a young boy, were arrested on strong suspension.—[*Goldsboro Messenger*]....The following short summary will show what the [Lenoir] Superior Court, now in session is accomplishing. More civil cases have already been tried in these two weeks than in five or six years before....Wm. C. Fields vs. Wm. H. Whitfield—action of Ejectment, plaintiff claiming title to the life estate of defendant in a tract of land near La Grange. Verdict for plaintiff." (*Kinston Journal*)

1880, December 23: "The children of the New Hope Sabbath School will have a Christmas tree tomorrow (Friday) evening, with appropriate services. W. F. Kornegay, Esq., will address the children on the subject of Sabbath Schools. The Mendelssohn Club gave an enjoyable entertainment at the Town Hall Tuesday night. It was in all respects a very fine entertainment. We learn that Mr. Wright has forwarded something...\$12.00 to the Oxford Orphan Asylum." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)