

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dempsey E. Wood

Among Bucklesberry's earliest, most colorful characters was Dempsey Eugene Wood (1847-1921). Farmer, businessman, sportsman, and politician, Dempsey's accomplishments and influence were widely heralded across the State.

Dempsey was the second of three children born to James (1815-1875) and Elizabeth (Betsy) Sutton Wood (1829-1849). He was only seventeen months old when his mother died unexpectedly at the young age of 19 after being thrown from a horse. His older brother, Jesse, was a three-year old toddler at the time, and sister, Harriet (Hattie) Eliza, was an infant no older than about six to eight months.

Dempsey's mother was the daughter of John (1779-ca. 1858) and Elizabeth Aldridge Sutton (1790-aft.1860) of Bucklesberry. John outlived his daughter by almost a decade. In a demonstration of unusual love and dedication, John remembered Elizabeth's children (his grandchildren) in his will by bequeathing a share of Bucklesberry land to them that would have gone to their mother, had she lived. Published in 1850, one year after Elizabeth's death, John's will read in part:

"I give unto my three grandchildren Dempsey Wood, Jesse Wood, and Harriet Eliza Wood the remaining one fourth part of all the property loaned to my wife except the land with the following stipulations, condition and proviso, first: I direct that a Guardian shall be appointed to take charge of their property...until my said grandchildren, Jesse, Dempsey and Harriet E. Wood shall arrive at lawful age or marry. Provided now if either one of my said grandchildren shall die before arriving at lawful age or marriage I desire the surviving one or ones shall have the whole of the property or if either one of my said grandchildren, Jesse, Dempsey and Harriet E. Wood shall die without leaving any heir lawfully begotten of their body, I desire the surviving ones to have the property of the deceased one leaving no children. Provided further now in case if all of my said grandchildren, Jesse, Dempsey, and Harriet E. Wood should die without leaving any heir lawfully begotten of their body, I devise that all their property hereby devised to them in this clause shall be equally divided between all my children to them, their heirs and assigns forever."

Upon their grandfather's death, Dempsey and his siblings instantly became landowners in Bucklesberry. Understandably, their father, James, was appointed guardian to oversee their land.

The property inherited by the Wood children enlarged the family's land holdings. Located on the outskirts of Bucklesberry along Kennedy Home Road in the Pot Neck section, James already

owned a plantation just north of Harper's Landing on the Neuse River that he had inherited from his father, Jonas Wood, in 1836. There James built one of the largest two-story houses ever constructed in Bucklesberry during the 1840s for his young wife, Elizabeth, and their three children.

After Elizabeth died in 1849, James married Lucetta Wood, a distant cousin from Greene County, although the year of their marriage is unknown. Dempsey and his brother and sister were young adults when Lucetta gave birth to the first of her and James' three children around 1857.

Interestingly, both Dempsey and brother, Jesse, along with their families continued to live in the home place house until 1892 when their properties were divided. The house was eventually sold to someone outside the family.

Located directly off of Kennedy Home Road, the architecturally ornate house, beautifully restored, still stands. Known as the Dempsey Wood House, it was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1971.