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Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dempsey E. Wood (Part 2)

A man of extraordinary talent with a colorful personality, Dempsey Eugene Wood (1847-1921) lived much of his life in Bucklesberry. He made his mark locally as a respected farmer and was widely known as an accomplished businessman, sportsman, and State politician.

Journalists were intrigued with Dempsey's popularity, publishing more than 175 news reports about him over his lifetime. Several focused on his demeanor and character.

For example, Dempsey understood the importance of social graces. During his young adult years, he was hospitable to explorers who passed by his farm:

1879, June 30: "Last Monday morning at 5:15 o'clock, four young men, Messrs. Ed. Palmer, Wesley Long, Andrew Flanner and Jimmie Rogers, left Smith's bridge [Goldsboro area] on the Neuse River in a small open boat to row to New Bern. They carried everything necessary for the trip, including guns and ammunition to shoot game, a blanket each to sleep on, a tent and a coffee pot, as three of the party were very fond of that refreshing and invigorating beverage. They were also otherwise well provided for the inner man. The explorers reached White Hall [Seven Springs] at 2:30 P.M. where dinner was eaten. At this meal they disposed of the entire amount of rations of one man for the whole trip. Monday night they stopped with the well-known and popular young farmer, Mr. Dempsey Wood. Tuesday and Wednesday nights the whole party camped out, watches having been appointed each one taking his turn in regular order...." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Folks enjoyed being around Dempsey. They received him warmly at gatherings and showed interest in his opinion and perspective on a variety of topics, including farming:

1885, August 8: "The pleasant countenance of Mr. Dempsey Wood of Lenoir [County], smiled upon us last night. He reports crops good in his section." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

Evidently, Dempsey was a reasonably healthy man in good physical shape, which caught the attention of one reporter:

1885, February 18: "I knew many of these men [from Lenoir County]...for many years. There were the Wootens, and the Mewborns, and Dempsey Wood, old acquaintances...and others I cannot recall, as fine a body physically, and in every other respect, as one might chance to find anywhere. Where these Eastern county men get their fine physique from is a puzzle to a

mountain man who believes he possesses a monopoly of healthful air and pure water. These men breathing malaria, living on quinine, drinking water thick with tadpoles—as is the current belief outside of their domain—show a height of figure, a rotundity of person, a ruddiness of color, [and] a life of expression that would make a mountaineer open his eyes with wonder...." (*Weekly Raleigh Register*)

Dempsey was also a gregarious individual, blessed with a keen sense of humor. He enjoyed exchanging jokes with neighbors during his travels:

1885, July 23: "Mr. Dempsey Wood made a flying trip to the city [New Bern] yesterday, coming down on the excursion train, cracked a few jokes and returned on the freight...." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1886, February 18: "Mr. Dempsey Wood, of Falling Creek, was up to Goldsboro last week on a business trip. We do most truly wish Mr. Wood could have heard the joke that evening, for if there's any one [who] can appreciate a joke Mr. Wood can." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

More about Dempsey in the next Bucklesberry article.