

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dempsey E. Wood (Part 7)

Farming has always been central to Bucklesberry and part of the ancestral fabric for those born and reared here. Most who inherited land continued the farming tradition, some to the present day. For example, Robert Hardy Sutton, Jr. (Sonny) and Frederick Dwight Sutton (Freddie) both earned college degrees in the field and returned to carry-on their family farms.

Other Bucklesberrians emerged from their agricultural roots to different occupations, leaving farming altogether in the past. Still others kept on farming and skillfully worked additional jobs at the same time. Such was the case with Dempsey Eugene Wood (1847-1921).

Best known as the ultimate sportsman, Dempsey was recognized across the State as a champion angler and crack shot. Had he lived in the current century, he might well have made a career from his fishing and hunting talent. But these were leisure activities for Dempsey, possibly a diversion from his busy life that included several occupational pursuits.

As for work, Dempsey was born and reared on a farm in Bucklesberry in the Pot Neck area, which catapulted his long career as a farmer. By the late 1880s, he had obtained a seat on the esteemed board of directors for the growing, influential Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, a position he held until his death. Also an elected politician, Dempsey represented Lenoir County for a term in the North Carolina House of Representatives from 1883-1884.

Able to successfully manage multiple jobs at the same time, Dempsey's accomplishments as a farmer earned him the respect as both a savvy practitioner and an insightful prognosticator. In other words, he was able to operate his own farm with distinction, yet he could expertly evaluate the status of farming generally.

As a young farmer in his early thirties, local newspapers began reporting on Dempsey's farming abilities. Several reports discussed his analytical skills in observing and assessing results of outcomes from his own farming which he then compared with that of other local farmers:

1879, March 25: "Dempsey Wood, Jr., from Bucklesberry, reports the cholera playing havoc with his hogs. Out of seventy-five he has thirteen left. He says that one of his neighbor's hogs has been with his ever since the cholera appears, and he eats every one as fast as they die, and instead of catching the disease has fattened on the diet." (*Kinston Journal*, reprinted in *The Winston Leader*)

1879, July 3: "Dempsey Wood, Jr. reports that his wheat did not turn out as much per acre as he expected. That he only got 350 bushels from a field which he estimated would yield 500 bushels. He says that Jerry [Jeremiah, Sr.] Sutton had ten acres of beautiful Fultz wheat which, before cutting, was guessed at 120 but turned out only 70. George Allen Herring has the best return per acre that we have yet heard from—80 bushels from 10 acres." (*Kinston Journal*)

1881, June 16: "The Bucklesberry sportsman, that was reported in last week's JOURNAL as buying Northern hay, has been found to be Mr. D[empsey] Wood, Jr., one of the best farmers in that section. We learn from some of his neighbors that he has over 20 stacks of fodder on hand, and had been swapping fodder for hay to feed one of his drive horses..." (*Kinston Journal*)

More on Dempsey's farming career in next week's issue.