

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dempsey E. Wood (Part 9)

Some people play so hard that they hardly have time to work. Not so with Dempsey Eugene Wood (1847-1921). He made the most of both work and play. Recognized as a crack shot hunter and champion fisherman, Dempsey successfully juggled several careers, including business, farming, and politics.

He was regarded as one of the best farmers in Lenoir County and the surrounding area. Newspapers eagerly reported Dempsey's views about farming trends and crop conditions:

1902, September 11: "Dempsey Wood, a well known farmer of Lenoir County, says that on 90 acres in cotton he made last year 65 bales, which this year he will not get over 45. He says the drought has so affected his cotton that there is no bottom crop or top crop; only that at the middle of the plants. His cotton is so nearly all open that the first picking is getting practically all of it." (*The Wilmington Messenger*)

1905, August 27: "'Crops in my section,' said Mr. Wood, 'are deteriorating, owing to so much wet weather. It has been too wet, even for corn and it is not earing heavy. Tobacco is light and speckled with 'frog-eyes.' Cotton will not be so good on account of the last wet spell, and it had been too wet before that for a full crop. Pickling, which was begun more than a week ago, had to be suspended.'" (*The Morning Post*, Raleigh)

1906, August 30: "Mr. Dempsey Wood...says the excessive rain has done much damage to corn and cotton crops in the east, that the corn is sprouting in the ear and that the cotton crop seems to be cut short one-half. He reports the farmers much discouraged at the prospect. He says the Neuse River is full and muddy and a freshet is expected." (*News and Observer*, Raleigh)

Dempsey announced his retirement from farming in 1906 at the age of 60. Years after his retirement, news outlets continued to report his perspectives on farming:

1907, September 12: "Among the visitors to Raleigh yesterday was Mr. Dempsey Wood, of Kinston, who says that the drought has hurt the cotton crop considerably in Lenoir County, the dry spell forcing the cotton to open before it had matured. Having seen some of the crops about Raleigh he said that the cotton here was better than in Lenoir, that while the weed is not large that the cotton is well fruited, this being especially the case on Mrs. Florence P. Tucker's farm where he visited. He hoped that good weather with not too much rain would help the Lenoir crop,

but it was dry when he left and the cotton was really going backward." (*News and Observer*, Raleigh)

1911, February 18: "Two years ago Messrs. L. Harvey and Dempsey Wood, of Lenoir County happened to pass our [George N. Ives, New Bern] place on their way to Carteret Lodge for a day's fishing, and noticed our field of Canada peas and oats, which was then about ready for cutting. They stopped and examined it, and pronounced it the finest field of forage they had ever seen growing." (*The Progressive Farmer*, Raleigh)

Dempsey's work in business and politics will be the focus of next week's article.