

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dempsey E. Wood (Part 13)

Farmer, sportsman, and politician, Dempsey Eugene Wood (1847-1921) was also an accomplished business man. By 1906, he held the record as the longest-serving member on the influential Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad (A&NCRR) board of directors.

Described as a man "of much substance and of large affairs, accustomed to deal in great matters of business," (*The Morning Post*, Raleigh, 1904, May 24), Dempsey helped shepherd the A&NCRR through several decades of administrations as it impacted growth and progress for the State.

A private stockholder himself, Dempsey was an able representative for the Railroad and skillfully articulated issues and concerns of private investors:

1904, September 18: "Mr. Dempsey Wood of Falling Creek, director of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad on the part of the private stockholders, was here [Raleigh] yesterday. 'The lease of the road is giving entire satisfaction,' said Mr. Wood. 'The people along this line are highly pleased and Mr. Howland's [Howland Improvement Company] work promises to revolutionize that section. There is a sense of relief that the [rail] road is removed from politics and local factional fights. The directors will soon pay every cent of outstanding accounts except the \$325,000 bonded debt, on which the leasee pays interest. The State and private stockholders will get their dividend next year and from then on every year.' Some of the stockholders favor foregoing a dividend for a couple of years and taking up the bond debt when due. This would enhance the value of the stock." (*The Morning Post*, Raleigh)

Dempsey promoted expansion of the Railroad in critical regions of the State, including Morehead City to Beaufort, and he closely monitored the progress:

1905, August 27: "Mr. Dempsey Wood of Falling Creek...[is] well pleased with the prospects for the development of the country along the line of the [rail] road. Mr. Wood says the dissatisfaction that has existed on the part of a few people since the [rail] road was leased to the Howland Improvement Company is gradually dying out, and that the lease is the best thing that could have happened for all interests connected with it. He says the work of laying new iron is progressing rapidly and many other improvements are being made, stone culverts being put in and ditches opened along the roadbed. 'A few people,' said Mr. Wood, 'are skeptical about the company's building a railroad bridge across the sound between Morehead City and Beaufort, but the bridge is certainly going to be built, and there is something great for that section back of it

all....It would never have been possible, under State control to develop that section like it is going to be done under the lease...." (*The Morning Post*, Raleigh)

Throughout his many years of distinguished service on the A&NCRR board, Dempsey never lost sight of the importance of the Railroad in his own backyard, not excluding Snow Hill, just north of Bucklesberry and La Grange:

1906, August 25: "Mr. Dempsey Wood.... feels greatly encouraged at the progress the Hines Bros. Railroad is making in building a line to connect Snow Hill and Kinston. Of the 14 miles to be constructed the greater part has been graded and for several miles the steel rails have been placed. Mr. Wood is eager for the completion of this annex which will bring Raleigh and this part of the State into direct communication with Kinston, Snow Hill and that region. This will be brought about by a connection with the Raleigh & Pamlico Sound Railroad." (*The Raleigh Times*)

In next week's final article on Dempsey, his unusual move away from Bucklesberry and his sudden death will be shared.