

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Farmers United 1873

Almost a decade after the Civil War ended, local farmers were feeling the painful pinch of an increasingly depressive economy. Although cotton production was swelling, the labor force had diminished, and prices for cotton sales were sinking.

Farmers and their families were facing a financially bleak future. Simply put, cash flow was low. There was little money to purchase needed, life-sustaining supplies and services to survive. Times were lean and difficult.

In 1873, farmers united and organized for the purpose of voicing their concerns for what they believed to be inequity among the broader business community. The ultimate goal was to influence public policy and regulation. The *Goldsboro Messenger* newspaper published the proceedings of an important gathering of Lenoir County farmers on May 24, which was preceded the week before by a public announcement:

May 19: "The attention of a portion of the citizens of our community has been attracted by a notice requesting the farmers of Lenoir County to meet at La Grange, on the 24th inst., for the purpose of adopting something for our relief. The cause for this is that the physicians of this County have formed an Association, adopted and published a fee-bill for their professional services....When we meet we [should] consider, not only a portion, but as far as possible, all of the evils that affect our interest. Let us not try to destroy any association that has been formed, but form another that has long been needed, a Farmers' Association; not for the purpose of raising a fine pig, but to promote hog raising; not for the purpose of producing the largest amount of cotton on an acre, but for the general improvement of the agricultural interest of our County. Until this is done all our meetings will be in vain."

The proceedings of the May 24 meeting included seven carefully crafted resolutions written in scholarly language. The first resolution follows:

May 24: "Pursuant to notice, the Farmers of Lenoir County convened in La Grange on Saturday, May 24th. R. L. Wooten called the meeting to order and stated that one object of their meeting was to draft resolutions denouncing the meeting of the Physicians of Lenoir County. On motion of James Wood, R. L. Wooten was elected President, and J. M. Hines, Jr., Secretary."

"On motion of S[amuel] I[vey] Sutton a Committee of seven was appointed: S. I. Sutton, James Wood, James Waters, W[illiam]. E. Hines, J. B. Harper, M[iller] B. Creech and Jerry Warters. The Committee appointed to draft resolutions presented the following:"

"Whereas the order of the day is organization by the members of each and every calling, for the especial and averred purpose of protecting the common interest of those who are engaged in such calling, and, whereas, the tendency of many of such organizations is to lead to monopolize opposition and ruin to the farmer and laboring man, and thus bring want and suffering to the houses of all; are, whereas, the great interest of all classes depend upon the unrammeled success of the farmers; and whereas, hitherto, in this section no organized concert of action has been entered into by the farmers for their mutual protection, be it therefore resolved, That under all existing circumstances it becomes our duty, not only for the protection of our interest as a class and ourselves and families but for the common good of our State and County, that we as a class should be united and organized."

The historic May 24, 1873 meeting of farmers included six more resolutions. They formed a society called the La Grange Farmers and Laborers Mutual Protection Club. Lenoir County farmers eventually established an association referred to as a Grange, as did other counties at the time. More will be shared in the next *Bucklesberry, Back in the Day* article about the remaining resolutions and how Granges influenced the community and the State for good.