

## **Agricultural Education and FFA History in North Carolina**

The beginning of Agricultural Education in North Carolina Public Schools can be traced to the 1911 General Assembly which passed the County Farm Life School Act. This act appropriated \$25,000 a year to establish one such school in ten selected counties. The Craven County Farm Life School in Vanceboro was the first school established to teach agriculture in North Carolina. In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Act which provided federal funds for teaching Agriculture and Home Economics in public secondary schools. Agriculture courses were quickly added to the curriculum of many high schools throughout the state.

### **The Early Beginnings**

As early as 1920, interest in judging livestock was high among vocational agriculture students. During this year, 76 boys from 16 schools competed in a judging contest. Agriculture teachers and state leaders in North Carolina began to realize a need for a formal organization for students enrolled in agriculture courses. During the annual North Carolina agriculture teachers' conference, Walter Newman, State Supervisor of Agriculture Education in Virginia talked to teachers about the success of a boy's club begun in there. Tom E. Browne, North Carolina State Director of Vocational Education (1918-1946), began to support the introduction of a club for boys of agricultural education in the state and with the help of Roy Thomas, State Director for Vocational Agriculture and A.T. Allen, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, work was begun to establish such a club. The club, known as the Young Tar Heel Farmers was incorporated in the fall of 1927 under the laws of the State of North Carolina. These individuals were instrumental in guiding the YTHF and FFA in the early years.

On Wednesday, June 20, 1928, 300 delegates of vocational agriculture students representing 110 rural high schools from 66 counties attended meetings at NC State University (then State College). The first meeting was held Wednesday evening in Pullen Hall, where Dr. Clarence Poe, Editor of Progressive Farmer was the principal speaker. The Young Tar Heel Farmer Band of Garner and Apex supplied the music for the night. The next day a dairy judging contest was held and the top four scoring individuals composed the team to judge in the national Dairy Judging Contest that was to be held in Memphis, Tennessee in October 1928. The winners were Percy Malpass (Acme-Delco HS, Columbus Co.), Harry Fidler (Franklin HS, Sampson Co.), Early Hurley (Troy HS, Montgomery Co.), and Andrew Garrison (Fairview HS, Buncombe Co.). A visit to the State College Poultry plant was also conducted. The afternoons on Thursday and Friday were given over to recreation and athletic contests between chapters according to regions of the state. Thursday

evening a ceremony was conducted to award the degree of Carolina Farmer (now the State Degree). NC Governor A.W. McLean addressed the group. Seventeen members received the Carolina Farmer Degree:

Elmer Daniels, Spring Hope HS (Nash Co.)  
William Winstead, Spring Hope HS (Nash Co.)  
Otto Owens, Ellenboro HS (Rutherford Co.)  
Joe Morrison, Rock Springs (Lincoln Co.)  
Wade Turner, Lillington HS (Harnett Co.)  
Rom Phillips, Contentnea HS (Lenior Co.)  
Sheron Forest Contentnea HS (Lenior Co.)  
Allen Holloway, Middleberg HS (Vance Co.)  
Forest Hunt, Cool Springs HS (Rutherford Co.)  
Barton McCain, Sparta HS (Alleghany Co.)  
Leon Calhoun, West Edgecombe HS (Edgecombe Co.)  
Odell C. Austin, Aurora HS (Beaufort Co.)  
Milton Wood, Chinquapin HS (Duplin Co.)  
Warren Alberty, Dobson HS (Surry Co.)  
Leland Hairr, Piney Grove HS (Sampson Co.)  
Burnell Banks, Richlands HS (Onslow Co.)

To reach the degree of Carolina Farmer, a member must have taken two years of vocational agriculture, must have \$300 on deposit from project (SAE) work, have an average of 85% on school subjects, lead a group successfully for 20 minutes, pass an examination on vocational agriculture submitted by State Supervisor of Vocational Agriculture Education, and be active in other school activities such as debates and athletics. On Friday morning, the state officers were elected and a banquet was held at the Women's Club. The first state officer team included:

President – Wade Turner of Lillington HS (Harnett Co.)  
Vice President – Glenn Holcombe of Whiteville HS (Columbus Co.)  
Secretary – Howard Steed of Middleburg HS (Vance Co.)  
Treasurer – Hubert Morris of Tabor HS (Columbus Co.)  
Reporter – Edward Hudson of Rockingham HS (Richmond Co.)  
Executive Committee – Elmer Daniels of Spring Hope HS (Nash Co.)  
Executive Committee – Phil Howell of Rosewood HS (Wayne Co.)  
Executive Committee – Warner Jernigan of Acme-Delco HS (Columbus Co.)  
Advisor – J.K. Coggins

Later that year, on October 4, the Young Tar Heel Farmers Association was chartered. Following the formation of the National Organization of Future Farmers

of America in 1928, The North Carolina Association of Future Farmers of America was chartered on September 1, 1929 and the transition from YTHF to FFA was implemented. At the 2nd national convention in Kansas City, Missouri in 1929, North Carolina's own Wade Turner was elected as the 2nd national president of the organization. He was the first national officer from North Carolina and was also one of 29 FFA members to receive the first American Farmer Degree in November 1929.

### **The North State Farmers**

During this era, public schools were segregated with black and white students attending separate schools in North Carolina and many other states. In 1928, the Future North State Farmers was organized in North Carolina for African American students enrolled in agriculture courses. Several states had similar organizations and in 1935 the first national meeting of these groups were held and the New Farmers of America (NFA) was formed. At this meeting, Elbert Pettiford of North Carolina was elected to the first NFA national officer team and S.B. Simmons, an agriculture teacher educator at Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro was chosen as National Executive Secretary. He held position until his retirement. W.T. Johnson, a member of the Vocational Agriculture Supervisory Staff served as National NFA Executive Treasurer for many years. In 1964, Congress passed legislation which prohibited segregation in public schools. This led to the merger of the NFA and FFA both nationally and in North Carolina in 1965. Since that time, the FFA has attempted to meet the needs of all students in agriculture courses.

### **North Carolina FFA Camps**

Early in 1926, State Director of Vocational Education, Tom E. Browne and State Superintendent Dr. Clyde A. Erwin began securing a camp for all students of vocational agriculture. The Pharr and Adkerson Real Estate Company of Charlotte leased the original campsite at White Lake to the FFA in 1927. The company also loaned \$7,395 for the construction of buildings and site improvement. All the money was paid back in 1933 out of camp receipts at a rate of \$2 per member plus \$10 donations from 80 agriculture teachers and staff members. This camp was 400 yards from the lake. Per National FFA correspondence, the North Carolina FFA Camp at White Lake is the oldest FFA camp in the United States.

From 1933-1938, approximately \$12,000 was accumulated from the \$2 fee in excess of actual expenses. This money was used to purchase a five-acre plot on the lakefront for \$3,500 and the remainder was used to pay our part of a \$25,000 Works Progress Administration. This part of the lake was known as Gray Moss Beach. During World War II, the camp was closed and was leased to the Army for

free. The camp was renamed as the R.J. Peeler Camp in 1966 to honor the state's FFA executive secretary upon his retirement. A historic marker was presented to the camp in 1989 and the state officers and National FFA Vice President Dan Shoroer participated in the ceremony. In 1993, the camp name was changed again to the North Carolina FFA Center at White Lake.

The first year of camp 896 boys visited White Lake during the summer months. The NC State Agriculturist wrote in its October 1931 issue, "The camp is the first of its kind in the United States, designed especially for students in vocational agriculture." The camp opened June 4, 1928. Camp season ran from then until September 1, with the exception of June 18 – July 2 for agriculture teachers' conference and the state FFA convention. Each camp week ran from Monday through Saturday. Camp facilities consisted of a dining and assembly hall, a director's cottage and six cabins, each holding 30 students. The staff was a camp director, playground director, and two cooks. The activities included baseball, tennis, swimming, fishing, and boating. The total cost of the camp was four dollars, of which two dollars was used to repay for the buildings and equipment. Members were also required to bring their own food, including:

- 1.5 dozen potatoes
- 1 cup of rice
- 2 cups of corn meal
- 1 head of cabbage
- .5 lbs of lard
- 1 quart of butterbeans
- 1 can of fruit
- 1 lb of bacon
- 1 dozen tomatoes
- 1 pint of jelly
- .5 cup of cheese
- 6 squash
- 1 dozen apples
- 3 cups of sugar
- 3 dozen beets
- 1.5 dozen eggs
- 2 cups of grits
- 6 carrots
- 1 dozen sweet potatoes
- 1 dozen pods of okra

6 bell peppers  
1 live chicken  
1 lb of flour  
1.5 dozen ears of corn  
3 cantaloupes

In addition to the food, Camp director J.S. Howard purchased bread by the hundred loaves in the community. The first meal was Monday night and the last was lunch on Saturday. Below is a brief example of the first camp schedule.

6:45 Whistle blows  
7:00 Morning exercises  
7:15 Swim  
7:45 Breakfast  
8:20 Camp clean-up  
9:00 Bunk inspection

Assignments made for the day: Wood pile, kitchen, kill chickens, peel potatoes, shell beans, rake/smooth athletic fields, work on camp roads and sidewalks

10:00 Sports  
11:00 Swimming lessons  
12:00 Dinner and rest hour  
2:15 Baseball for a couple of hours and then swim  
6:45 Supper and evening left open for reading, indoor games and radio  
11:00 Camp retires

In 1937, the organization needed another camp to accommodate all desiring to attend camp. The site was located 22 miles northeast of Ashville and was a former CCC Camp. It was leased the land from the US Forestry Service for \$100 per year. The site contained 18.5 years and purchased the land on October 1, 1940 for \$4,650. The camp was named the Tom Browne FFA Camp.

Beginning in 1927, NFA member participated in a weeklong camping program at the Pitt County Training School in Grimesland. In 1932, the camp was moved to Kitrell College in Vance county. In 1953, a 27-acre site was located on Queens Creek near Swansboro (Onslow Co.) was leased. This camp was dedicated 1958 and was known as the S.B. Simmons Camp.

Because of declining participation, fire damage to some facilities, and other factors, the Tom Browne Camp was sold to Buncombe County in 1979 (the funds from the sale built the girls dorms at White Lake and in 1991 the FFA transferred its lease and assets at the S.B. Simmons Camp to the North Carolina Association of Vocational Educators and Other Professional Workers.

In the 1985, the FFA Center began to update its facilities for FFA members. Changes started with the addition of a new meeting facility sponsored by the North Carolina Alumni. Today, it is referred to by members at the Alumni building reflecting on their sponsorship. In 1994, the Center added a new lodge which included 25 lodge rooms, a meeting room and kitchen and the lake piers were replaced in 1997 after Hurricane Fran. Finally, in 2008 the dining and recreational facilities were replaced along with the horseshoe pits. Other additions over the years include a basketball court and putt putt course. Today, the North Carolina FFA Center at White Lake continues to meet the needs of FFA members and other groups.

#### State FFA Convention

Since the first state convention in 1928 at State College, convention has been held every year with the exception of 1935 due to the polio outbreak and 1942 because of World War II. The North Carolina FFA State Convention has been held at a number of locations since that first meeting in Pullen Hall at State College. The annual meeting has also been held at the Sir Walter Raleigh Hotel in Downtown Raleigh (1947), Reynolds Coliseum at NC State, Talley Student Center at NC State (2002-2007), the NC State Fairgrounds, and was recently moved to the Raleigh Convention Center in Downtown Raleigh in 2009. The Convention is the highlight event of the year for the organization where members receive recognition and awards, participate in high energy sessions, career development events, give back to the Raleigh community through service activities, visit the career show, and take educational tours.

#### Other Significant Events

In 1949, a collegiate FFA chapter with 105 active members was organized at State college. That charter was reissued in 1999. Since that year, two other collegiate FFA chapters have been chartered – one at Mount Olive College in 2002 and another at North Carolina A&T in 2000. In 1957, Clarence Chappell of Perquimans county became the first FFA member from North Carolina to be named Star Farmer of America. After seven years of work, his net worth in his SAE totaled more than \$72,000. Franklin Howey from Union County is the only other FFA member from North Carolina to receive this coveted award, who was named in 1987. In 1968,

North Carolina reached its highest membership total in our history when 31,869 students joined as members of the organization. In 1969, girls were officially given the right to membership in the organization. The same year, Alvin Ray Hickman became the first African American elected as a State Officer. It would be 10 years before the first female was elected as the State Officer. Beth Smith fulfilled that role in 1980. Beth also became the first female from North Carolina to receive the American Farmer Degree.

In 1972, the North Carolina FFA Alumni Association was formed and the state FFA foundation was chartered in 1976. In 2003, the foundation became part of the North Carolina Agriculture Foundation, Inc. where it continues to operate today. In 1996, staff and services for Agricultural Education and FFA were established in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at NC State University by special action of the North Carolina General Assembly. Program staff was previously headquartered at the NC Department of Public Instruction. In 2003, North Carolina celebrated the 75th anniversary at the state FFA convention. At the convention, various items were placed in the time capsule which is to be opened at the 100th state convention. In 2009, a membership campaign was launched called TRUE BLUE: The Race to 20,000 as a step to achieve the full membership potential of the state. North Carolina continues to enable student success through 42 career development events, 47 proficiency award areas, various leadership conferences and workshops, and award recognition. Student success remains the primary mission of the FFA.

### **Key Moments in NC FFA History**

1911

NC General Assembly passed the County Farm Life School Act, which appropriated \$25,000 a year to build ten schools. The Craven County Farm Life School in Vanceboro was the first school established to teach agriculture in North Carolina

1917

US Congress passed the Smith Hughes Act, which established vocational agriculture in public schools

1927

Work began to establish a club for boys enrolled in vocational agriculture classes

1928

First State Convention was held; 300 delegates, representing 110 rural high schools from 66 counties attended meetings at NC State; convention was held here for 18 years

Young Tar Heel Farmers Association was chartered

17 members became the first to receive the Carolina Farmer Degree (now the State FFA Degree)

The Future North State Farmers was organized for African American students enrolled in agriculture

Young Tar Heel Farmers began a camping program at White Lake, NC; this is the oldest FFA Camp in the nation

1929

The transition from Young Tar Heel Farmers to FFA was implemented when the National FFA Organization officially chartered the North Carolina Association of Future Farmers of America

Wade Turner was elected as the 2nd National FFA President; the first national officer from North Carolina

1935

Due to polio outbreaks, state convention and the camping program was not held

1940

Tom Browne FFA Camp was developed and established in Barnardsville (Buncombe County)

1947

19th State Convention was moved for the first time to downtown Raleigh and held at the Sir Walter Raleigh Hotel

1949

A collegiate FFA chapter with 105 active members was organized at State College

1957

Clarence Chappell of Perquimans County became the first member from NC to be named Star Farmer of America

1958

The S.B. Simmons NFA Camp was officially opened in Swansboro (Onslow County)

1965

1965 The FFA and NFA merged both nationally and in North Carolina

1966

The NC FFA Camp name was changed to the RJ Peeler FFA Camp to honor the retirement of the executive secretary

1968

North Carolina reached its highest ever recorded membership total of 31,869 members

1969

Girls were officially admitted into the FFA

Alvin Ray Hickman of Acme Delco, became the first African American member elected as a State FFA Officer

1972

The North Carolina FFA Alumni Association was formed

1976

The North Carolina FFA Foundation was chartered

1979

Tom Browne FFA Camp was sold to Buncombe County; funds from the sale built the girls dorms at the RJ Peeler FFA

1980

Beth Smith of Ledford, became the first female elected as a State Officer; she also became the first female from NC to receive the American Farmer Degree (now the American Degree)

1985

The RJ Peeler FFA Camp added a new meeting facility sponsored by the Alumni Association

1989

A historic marker was presented to the FFA Camp at White Lake

1990

Kelly Butler of Bartlett Yancey became the first female elected as State FFA President

1991

S.B. Simmons Camp was transferred to the NC Association of Vocational Educators and Other Professional Workers

Charles Keels began a 3-year term as the National FFA Treasurer

1993

The RJ Peeler FFA Camp was changed to the NC FFA Center

1994

The NC FFA Center added new lodge facilities

1996

Staff and services for Agricultural Education and FFA were established to the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at NC State University by special action of the North Carolina General Assembly. Program staff were previously headquartered at the NC Department of Public Instruction

2002

74th State Convention was moved to the Tally Student Center at NC State University

2005

Tanisha Glover of Eastern Randolph, became the first black female member elected as a State FFA Office

2008

The NC FFA Center added new dining and recreational hall facilities

Courtney Clapp of Eastern Randolph, became the first African American female to be elected State FFA President

2009

81st State Convention was moved to downtown Raleigh and held at the new Raleigh Convention Center