

# THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA NEWS LETTER

Published Weekly by the  
University of North Carolina  
for the University Extension Division.

The news in this publication is released for the press on receipt.

JUNE 30, 1926

CHAPEL HILL, N. C.

VOL. XII, NO. 33

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS

Editorial Board: E. C. Branson, S. H. Hobbs, Jr., L. R. Wilson, E. W. Knight, D. D. Carroll, J. B. Bullitt, H. W. Odum.

Entered as second-class matter November 14, 1914, at the Postoffice at Chapel Hill, N. C., under the act of August 24, 1918

## COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN N. C.

### III. COUNTY GOVERNMENT

The following is the third of a series of three articles on County Government by Paul W. Wager, which recently appeared in Southern Agriculturist.

Some maintain that any system of government will work well if in the hands of good men. Others think that the form of government determines its success or failure. There is only one element of truth in either position. Government is the people's business; the officials are only agents of the people, and the main cause of inefficient government in America is the indifference, or political ignorance, of the rank and file of the voters. Democracy assumes civic intelligence and mental alertness; it can thrive in no other atmosphere. One of the most discouraging, even alarming, symptoms in American politics, is the general apathy of the people. Only twice a year do they show any interest in public affairs—on election day and on the day they pay their taxes—and even then there is more display of passion than of intelligence.

The form of government is important; the type of men elected to office is important; but an alert citizenship will take care of both of these other features. On the other hand, no government is self-operative; any government will run amuck without the proper control. Democratic government depends upon popular control, and if it is not supplied there are apt to be disastrous results.

This does not mean that improvement in government must wait upon the political education of the masses. The two may move forward together. The one may contribute to the other. The best type of political education is political experience. A man may learn more about county government by spending a week on the grand jury than he had learned in all his life before. The citizens may become interested and educated in public affairs when they have the opportunity to exercise effective control. They have been fooled into believing that the popular election of a multitude of independent, uncoordinated officials is popular control, that the popular election of clerks and administrators for short terms is democracy. This is pure bunkum. A long ballot defeats popular control.

In a private corporation the stockholders choose a small board of directors; they, in turn, choose a superintendent or manager; he selects and controls all subordinates. In a county the voters choose a board of commissioners corresponding to the board of directors, but there the analogy stops. This board does not choose a county manager to act as its executive agent and to exercise authority over the clerks and department heads. Neither does the board itself appoint these subordinates or have any control over them. They are chosen by the voters and subject to no control except what the voters as a whole can exercise. This means no more than the failure to re-elect those who do not make a good impression. Frequently the most inefficient official is the most popular. I have in mind a county official who has completely neglected the work of his office and has transferred thousands of dollars of public funds to his personal account, yet is tremendously popular with the people. One farmer said to me, "He is a splendid fellow; he can have this office just as long as he wants it." This is an exceptional instance. Most county officials are honest, even though lazy and incompetent. Nevertheless the lack of definite, immediate, and constant control tempts an official to be careless, if not dishonest.

The prime necessity in a county, as in every other government, is a chief executive. The experience of cities has been that the city manager plan of government is more satisfactory than either the commission or the mayor and council plan. The present system of county government is not analogous to any of the three types. The county has never had a strong executive corresponding to a mayor. In North Carolina, there are county commissioners, but it is not the "commission plan." Only in Buncombe county, where the

three commissioners are full-time officials in charge of particular departments—finances, roads, institutions—may the commission plan be said to be in use.

In Alamance county the chairman of the board is a full-time official and has practically the powers of a county manager. But he is elected along with eight or ten other officials and can never exert any control over his colleagues except by courtesy. In Edgecombe, Pitt, New Hanover, Craven, and a few other counties, the commissioners appoint an "auditor" who is also a tax supervisor, a purchasing agent, and virtually a county manager. These instances illustrate the growing sentiment in favor of a county manager system. It is quite likely that the true county manager plan will be adopted in several counties as soon as there is general enabling legislation. The counties that have taken advanced steps have done so through local acts. The North Carolina Constitution is flexible enough to permit quite sweeping changes without an amendment.

There are many improvements that can be made in county government without changing the structure of government. Every county ought to install a modern system of bookkeeping. In a small county where the bookkeeping work would not keep a person busy, the bookkeeper could assist with recording or be given other clerical duties. A system of double-entry bookkeeping, with the proper control accounts, is of inestimable value to the commissioners. With a complete statement of the county's financial condition before them at each meeting they are able to act judiciously. Of course, the best system of financial control is the budget. Before final adoption of a budget, it should be given full publicity and the people given an opportunity to make suggestions or criticisms. After final adoption, it should be adhered to strictly. When the people are given a larger voice in determining how their tax money shall be spent, there will be less complaining about high taxes.

In a previous article I have indicated some of the abuses in assessing property and in preparing the tax rolls. North Carolina's newest tax law provides for the appointment by the commissioners of a county tax supervisor to instruct and assist the local tax listers. In many counties this officer is only a figurehead, but in a few counties the office has been raised to a level of real importance and usefulness. Nothing in the statute prevents the commissioners from employing such an official six, eight, or even twelve months in a year and entrusting him with the responsibility of discovering unlisted property and getting it on the books, and equalizing that which is on.

There is a general feeling that any sensible person can fill a county office, and therefore the offices should be given as rewards for faithful party service. There is no more reason to expect a good blacksmith to make a good clerk of court than to expect a good clerk of court to make a good blacksmith. In one county a clerk of court admitted to me that he did not know much about his office, but he had a deputy who knew it thoroughly. This was the truth. The taxpayers were supporting two men to do the work of one, and the official who had the title got twice as much salary as the deputy who did the work. This waste is even more evident in a register of deeds' office. A clumsy farmer who holds the office laboriously pecks away on his typewriter. The girl whom he employs for \$20 a week can record more papers in an hour than he can record in all day. There is no logic at all in filling clerical positions by popular election. Just so long as they are filled in this way the overhead expense of county government will be excessive. Still "politics" may be in evidence when positions are filled by appointment. This is quite noticeable when appointments are made by the commissioners. But if the appointment of subordinates is left to a chief executive, who himself is an appointee of the commissioners, there is likely to be a minimum number of political appointments. There will also be less patronage of other kinds.

More important than the short ballot,

### N. C. CLUB YEAR-BOOK

The Year-book of the North Carolina Club, containing the thirteen papers prepared and delivered before the Club during the college year 1925-1926, will be ready for distribution within ten days. The bulletin bears the title, "Town and Country Interdependences," and goes free to North Carolinians who request copies from the Extension Division of the University of North Carolina.

The thirteen chapters are as follows: The Small Town in History, by E. J. Woodhouse; Planning a County, by F. S. Wilder; The Community in North Carolina Historiography, by C. W. Edwards; Leadership and the Reconciliation of Town and Country Interests, by Edgar T. Thompson; The Federation of Agencies and Institutions for Local Community Welfare, by A. M. Moser; The Rural Mind: Is it a Myth?, by L. M. Brooks; Race Cooperation for Town and Country Advancement, by Arthur Raper; The Local Market Problem, by C. G. Grady; Should the Consolidated School Be Located in the Country or in the Town or Village?, by Brandon Trussell; A Community Program for the School, by A. M. Moser; A Community Program for the Church, by F. S. Wilder; A Community Program for the Bank, by Miss Katie Lindsey; Town and Countryside under One Local Government, by J. J. Rhyne.

The annual prize of fifty dollars for the best North Carolina Club paper, offered by Hon. J. W. Bailey of Raleigh, was won by Mr. Arthur Raper, whose paper on Race Cooperation for Town and Country Advancement was adjudged the best.

a county manager, adherence to a budget, or non-partisan appointments, is an alert, intelligent citizenship. There should be local organizations studying civic problems. Two North Carolina counties (Polk and Rutherford) have county clubs. In Virginia a civic spirit is being developed by means of community leagues federated into a county council. All such organizations are commendable. No city or county ever drifted into perfection. There must be an aim and a program. A comparatively new concept and effort is that of city-planning. We must also have county-planning. Would it not be fine if every Southern county had a county club or a county council to formulate and promote a 10-, 20-, or even 30-year program of achievement? Each county would be competing with its neighbors for superiority in physical attractiveness, economic status, intellectual level and general welfare. Government would become purposeful, a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, which too often is little more than public support of a few politicians.

### FEW FARM TRACTORS

North Carolina does not rank high in the use of farm tractors. As a matter of fact she ranks far down the list of states, not only in the number of tractors on farms but in the combined value of all farm machinery per farm. According to the 1925 census of agriculture there were 283,482 farms in North Carolina, of which 7,759 reported tractors. Only one state, Texas, reported more farms, but 17 states reported more farm tractors. Which means that when reduced to a comparable basis, per farm say, North Carolina ranks very low. North Carolina has 4.4 percent of the nation's farms, but only 1.6 percent of the nation's farm tractors. Eight percent of the farms of the nation reported tractors, against only 1.6 percent for North Carolina. In the value of all farm machinery we rank about as we do in the use of tractors. North Carolina produces a large amount of farm wealth each year, but she does it largely on the basis of a vast expenditure of human labor. Our per worker yield is not very large, due mainly to the fact that human labor on our farms is not reinforced with any fair amount of labor-saving, profit-producing machinery.

We are not contending that we should employ much more farm machinery

than we now use. We could not profitably do it, the nature of our present agriculture considered. It is not inconceivable, however, that the nature of our agriculture might be changed, with profit.

The general explanation for our modest number of farm tractors and the lack of farm machinery generally in North Carolina is: first, our small area under cultivation per farm. The tractor is not profitable on small farms as a rule. In cultivated acres per farm North Carolina ranks last in the United States. Only a fourth of our land area is under cultivation. Which does not mean that only a fourth of our land is capable of being cultivated. Second, the nature of our agriculture. Cotton and tobacco are our major crops. Both are hand-made cash crops, requiring only a few acres of land, but a large amount of human labor. Little machinery is required to produce these crops. A third factor is farm tenancy, which is largely coterminous with cotton or tobacco or both. A fourth factor is our negro farm population. And a fifth factor is the topography of the state, but this is not as important as is generally thought, for taken all in all North Carolina is a fairly level state. There is an abundance of land on which tractors and other machinery could be used. The explanation for the lack of farm machinery in North Carolina lies largely in the nature of our agriculture, and not in topography or the nature of our soils.

### A TEACHER'S RESOLUTION

"I am resolved to like the community in which my lot may be cast; to be a part of the civic and social life of the people; to be free from local, political and other antagonisms; to meet the parents and the patrons openly and frankly; to give and take in my dealings with my fellow teachers; to live free from professional jealousy; to be too large to be self-important or an autocrat or a martinet; to base school management on sound principles, not on policy, and to be firm and constant therein; to prepare myself adequately on the whole, and from day to day, to the end of solid service; to cherish good books and to seek companionship of thoughtful and serious men and women; to be alive as long as I live; to have faith in children, in God, and in myself; to teach from the great book of life as well as from school books; to be a helper and a leader, if possible, without as well as within the school room; to touch the lives of my pupils and to have no favorites; to talk about things, not people; to think and talk ideas, not gossip; to have worthy ideals in culture and conduct, and to live up to them; to have a larger purpose in teaching than merely to teach for money or as a makeshift to something better; for to discover, to develop and to set free the soul's latent powers is the greatest work of all; so help me God, to take this resolution to heart and thus be worthy of my calling."—John Meissner, Supt. of Schools, Willow City, North Dakota.

### CURRENT EXPENDITURES FOR RURAL SCHOOLS 1924-25 Per Child Enrolled in Rural Schools

In the following table based on State School Facts, Vol. II, No. 18, the counties are ranked according to the current expenditure for rural schools per child enrolled in rural schools for the school year 1924-25. Current expenditures include salaries of superintendents, principals, teachers, public welfare officers, rural supervisors, per diem and expense of County Board of Education, clerical and other administrative expense. Expenditures for outlay purposes are not included.

Durham ranks first in current rural school expenditures per child enrolled in rural school with \$40.42. Caswell is last with \$14.63.

State average current expenditure per rural child \$21.80; state average per city child \$38.91.

The two items that most largely determine the current cost of schools are, (1) length of school term, and (2) training of teachers.

Department of Rural Social-Economics, University of North Carolina

Rank	County	Current expenditure per rural child enrolled	Rank	County	Current expenditure per rural child enrolled
1	Durham	\$40.42	51	Jones	\$20.78
2	New Hanover	39.89	52	Harnett	20.64
3	Currituck	38.53	53	Martin	20.62
4	Buncombe	36.03	54	Person	20.55
5	Craven	32.17	55	Haywood	20.31
6	Guilford	31.39	56	Iredell	20.01
7	Pamlico	30.63	57	Chowan	19.95
8	Transylvania	30.41	58	Chatham	19.92
9	Gaston	29.91	59	Yrrell	19.91
10	Dare	29.71	60	Camden	19.78
11	Polk	29.27	61	Edgecombe	19.76
12	Moore	27.78	62	Gates	19.75
13	Wilson	27.40	63	Johnston	19.58
14	Washington	27.10	63	Stanly	19.58
15	Henderson	26.86	65	Pitt	19.54
16	Graham	26.80	66	Onslow	19.34
17	Jackson	26.77	67	Macon	19.17
18	Montgomery	26.51	68	Stokes	18.83
19	Carteret	26.42	69	Warren	18.81
20	Vance	26.42	70	Richmond	18.40
21	Granville	26.35	71	Randolph	18.38
22	Forsyth	25.75	72	Sampson	18.38
23	Rockingham	25.54	73	Anson	18.19
24	Pender	25.40	74	Brunswick	18.15
25	McDowell	25.08	75	Hertford	18.03
26	Hyde	25.05	76	Wilkes	17.92
27	Alamance	24.88	77	Halifax	17.73
28	Davie	24.77	78	Bertie	17.69
29	Catawba	24.71	79	Cabarrus	17.54
30	Cumberland	24.58	80	Mitchell	17.21
31	Mecklenburg	24.40	81	Lee	17.07
32	Swain	23.83	82	Lenoir	16.78
33	Alexander	23.77	83	Cleveland	16.77
34	Avery	23.13	84	Yadkin	16.76
35	Wayne	23.07	85	Union	16.66
36	Orange	22.78	86	Yancey	16.61
37	Bladen	22.76	87	Franklin	16.59
38	Wake	22.73	88	Madison	16.54
39	Northampton	22.62	89	Duplin	16.53
40	Lincoln	22.47	89	Robeson	16.53
41	Rowan	22.33	91	Ashe	16.41
42	Clay	22.04	92	Surry	16.27
43	Columbus	21.99	93	Hoke	16.15
44	Burke	21.88	94	Greene	16.12
45	Pasquotank	21.86	96	Scotland	16.93
46	Davidson	21.61	96	Watauga	15.93
47	Caldwell	21.33	97	Alleghany	15.36
48	Rutherford	21.07	98	Cherokee	15.17
49	Beaufort	21.01	99	Perquimans	14.89
50	Nash	20.80	100	Caswell	14.63