

ROBESON STANDS AMONG FOREMOST FARMING COUNTIES OF WHOLE UNION

Biggest Livestock County in State and Strong Also on Cotton, Corn and Other Things--Makes Better Farm Averages Than Iowa, Banner Farm State

Bion H. Butler, in Raleigh News and Observer.

Lumberton, Sept. 18—If the people of Robeson county were as handy with the loud pedal as the people of the Sandhills county it is interesting to speculate on what this part of North Carolina would be. Get a bunch of men into conversation about the development of North Carolina and they lay stress on what the Sandhills is doing, and point with a lot of enthusiasm to the fact that Robeson is a mighty forward agricultural county, but tell them that Robeson has been making progress as fast as any county in the State, and it comes as a surprise. The impression seems to be in most places that Robeson is like Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin, who just grew, and was pretty much always this way.

But the romantic fact is that Robeson is a new county, and its prosperity is of recent date. More than that, Robeson is not a finished county, resting contentedly on the pinnacle of satisfied ambition and accomplished task. Robeson is pushing ahead about as fast as any part of the State and the big jobs are looming up in front, ready to be tackled, and with the plans forming to carry them out.

Big Growth in Ten Years

The census of 1900 showed Lumberton to be a sleepy little town of something over 800 people, without a factory or industry of any kind worth mentioning. The census ten years later found a suburb that had over 800 people. In 1897 Robeson county had one bank, the Bank of Lumberton, with a capital of \$15,000. That bank has a capital now of \$100,000 and fourteen other banks in the county, increase the banking capital in half a million dollars. Meanwhile a big chunk has been cut out of Robeson to make Hoke county. In 1900 a little cotton mill was started in Robeson with 10,000 spindles. Now in the town are four mills with 50,000 or 60,000 spindles and capital to half a million dollars. A product worth a couple of million dollars a year.

We are accustomed to think of Robeson county as a great agricultural section and correctly. But Robeson as a plain fact is a remarkable example of rapid transition. If we take the census tables for the last thirty of forty years we see that Robeson has climbed up from 16,000 people with mighty little apparently ahead of them, a community of mill men and turpentine hands, until it is now one of the foremost agricultural counties of the United States. The farm products of the county in 1910 passed the \$7,000,000 mark, a mark, which if all the counties in the State did as well, would mean that North Carolina could claim first place among the States of the Union. Robeson county, from beginning a nondescript in 1870, famed more for lawlessness and backwardness than for anything else, by 1910 had swiftly advanced to stand among the foremost farming counties of the whole Union. Robeson is one of the three or four counties that make the record crops of cotton in the United States. Robeson is one of the big counties of the South, and the foremost one of the State. Robeson is the biggest live stock county of the State. Twenty-five years ago the cotton crop ran about 10,000 bales. Since then it has mounted up to 75,000 bales. Twenty years ago practically no tobacco was raised in the county. Now it is almost as staple as cotton, with a crop in the four townships of Orrum, Sterling, White House and Fairmont, reaching about 5,000,000 pounds.

Two Good Tobacco Markets

Two good tobacco markets are in the county at Fairmont and Lumberton, and a new warehouse is expected next season in Lumberton. Tobacco is a newer crop than some of the others, and is rapidly finding favor. But the idea of varied crops has taken a hold, and is making a significant inroad in the agricultural practice. K. M. Barnes and Judge McNeill at the Farmers and Merchants Bank were discussing the expansion of crop range in Robeson, and they concluded that about twenty per cent of the normal cotton acreage has been given over this year to other things which include more oats, much more wheat, soy beans, peas, and a variety of new products. They mentioned particularly the amount of wheat sowed and harvested. A car load of wheat had just gone from Rowland to the mill, with several more to follow from there. At St. Paul 1,500 bushels await shipment. A new mill at Pembroke is completely overwhelmed with grain to be ground. The people are much pleased with the wheat experiment and will sow a greater acreage this season than last year.

Robeson is becoming a great corn county. The crop this year will be a big one. In the census year it exceeded a million bushels. All of New England in the same year made only eight times as much corn as this one county, the entire Pacific coast country made but little more than twice as much as Robeson, and the

whole mountain country from Kansas west to the California line made about eight times as much corn as Robeson county.

When it comes to the entire crop product of the county Arizona, Nevada and Rhode Island are three States that do not make a crop worth as much in the entire State as this one county makes, and New Mexico, Wyoming and Delaware barely exceed this one county in the total value of farm products. If the whole State of North Carolina had Robeson's crop record this State would show a farm product bigger than that of any other two States in the Union.

That is merely a tip as to what North Carolina can do if it digs in its toes.

To Moralize a Bit

Now to moralize a bit. Wyoming has within its borders over 82,000 persons who were born in other States, besides the native population. Robeson has a little over 51,000 inhabitants, nearly all native. If Wyoming, unable in the whole State to make more farm products than Robeson county, can attract 82,000 people from other States, what can Robeson do if the effort is made? Does Robeson need more people? I answer this by citing two or three things I have noticed in the county. Possibly the most significant is the Jacob swamp drainage project. By an act of the Legislature permission was granted certain persons to issue bonds to the extent of \$150,000 to drain 33,000 acres of land on the Jacob creek swamp. The main ditches have been cut. This 33,000 acres of extremely fertile land is becoming available for cultivation. To cultivate the land will take some 700 or 800 families. As Robeson county did not undertake this job of drainage just to spend good money I infer that Robeson wants more people. This Jacob creek improvement is directly across the Lumber river from Lumberton, a town that has grown with its suburbs to have about 5,000 people now. When this reclaimed land is filled with busy producing farmers the business of the town will broaden and more people will be wanted here.

Another answer as to whether Robeson wants more people is found in the incorporation of the Planters Bank and Trust Company, an institution that has been chartered with the right to issue \$150,000 capital stock, and which has for its purpose a banking business devoted largely to the aid of development of the county. This new bank is formed by two or three hundred of the progressive men of the county and expects to be in operation by the first of the new year. Agriculture and industry will be fostered by the company which is going on the theory that a growing, productive, developing community will continually create new business for a bank.

From Next to Nothing

Robeson county has made wonderful progress in the last quarter of a century, coming up from next to nothing to be one of the foremost farm counties of the United States. Yet if you ride out over the country roads you will easily see that Robeson has the bulk of its work ahead of the present date. The men who are draining swamp land and who are forming new banking and development plans see this with perfect clearness.

The census showed that of the entire land area in the county in 1910 not a third was improved in farms. That tells the big end of the story of this county. A county that is capable of making \$7,000,000 worth of crops on a third of its land, and much of that third cultivated in an indifferent style is a land of resources. By all of the laws of ordinary averages it is not very much of an exaggeration to figure that if Robeson should increase its acreage to three times the present acreage, and increase its production to a half million more than the present production a total could be expected of thirty million dollars a year.

To be interpreted the situation indicates that the remarkable advance the county has made in the last twenty years is nothing as compared with what it can do in another twenty years, and it is reasonable to expect that the big things of Robeson are not far ahead. What has been accomplished, so far has been done under more primitive conditions. Now the improved machinery of production is coming. Better implements, better ideas of doing things, better schools, better roads to get about, telephones, railroads, automobiles, better mail facilities, better mercantile and banking accommodations, electric power, better local markets, better everything that goes to help in development are available now.

New conveniences are contemplated. Bonds have been issued for putting Lumberton on an electric basis. An equipment will be provided that will give day and night current, so that small machinery and the modern electrical household devices can be used. A filter is to be created that will filter the river water for

certain extended uses. Already deep wells supply drinking water of the finest quality. Good streets have been built in Lumberton. Road improvement has commenced in the county, but has not yet gone to the extent it will before long.

Leads Even Iowa

All these things that count for progress are under way. Robeson has not yet entirely passed out of the woods. A lot of lumber is manufactured yet in the county, and considerable timber here and there shows that the saw mill has a job ahead of it before the land can all be turned over to the farmers who are heading this way. The whole population of the county is not engaged in farm work. A considerable number are in the towns, at the mills, on the railroads and other work. Those who are on the farms are making a crop that will average close to \$175 for every member of the family of every farmer in the county. Iowa is the most productive farm State of the Union. Iowa does not make a better average than Robeson does, yet Iowa is held up to us as a great State, which it is. Iowa has halted in its progress. Robeson is merely getting its gait, and catching the idea of doing things.

Robeson county has several advantages over Iowa. Iowa is limited to a certain kind of crops. Robeson can raise about all that grow in Iowa and in addition can raise what Iowa cannot raise. The 75,000 bales of cotton in Robeson are impossible in Iowa, but Robeson can duplicate the corn, the hogs, the cattle, the vegetables and can probably grow Iowa in almost any crop Iowa can make, for a longer growing season with more rain and more sunshine can outlast a limited amount of these essentials.

Robeson county is an interesting discovery. After the war it was in the woods. Like all the rest of the pine belt it was supposed to be good for little but lumber and turpentine. Then the cotton man commenced to make some cotton and he discovered a great cotton belt. He pushed that belt farther from the South Carolina line each year until it crossed into the upper end of Robeson, and on in to what is now Hoke. Pushing farther up into the hills it reached the Sandhills country, and spreading out there it has found more cotton land in fifty miles of Lumberton than was ever imagined possible. Now the whole country is recognized as a cotton country, and the vicissitudes that have overtaken the cotton market are showing the Robeson folks that the county is capable of being something else than simply cotton country.

Money for New Ventures

More than that money is accumulating to undertake new ventures along different lines. The cotton mills are evidence of this. The coming of the wires of the Yadkin River Power Company brings power to Robeson county, although it has some streams on which some local power can be generated, and which in time will be utilized. Those can be held in reserve while power from the Yadkin is convenient and abundant, and when needed can be developed to add to that of the adjoining powers from Hoke and Cumberland, for Robeson is surrounded with power.

Robeson is well provided with railroads. From east to west the Seaboard cuts the county in two. The Coast Line has two roads running north and south, while several smaller roads are tributary to these main lines affording easy access to all sections. Only an extremely limited area of Robeson county is as much as five miles from a railroad, which is unusual when the big size of the county is considered. With the good roads that are coming the question of farm hauling is no longer to perplex the folks of Robeson. Then all over the county model towns are springing up, which is another factor in the expansion of development. Robeson has Lumberton, Maxton, Red Springs, St. Paul, Lumber Bridge, and smaller places, conveniently located for the farm, so that a local commercial center is available in every neighborhood.

Yet with all that Robeson has done the prominent conviction that impresses the outsider is that here is a wonderful place for continued progress. Sweeping away for mile after mile, along the railroad, along the wagon road, the eye is greeted by the unending level country. You have heard of the Czar of Russia who wanted a railroad built from St. Petersburg to Moscow or some place out in the empire and who laid a ruler on the map and drew a line and told the engineers that was the place he wanted the road. Unfortunately it is hilly and broken in Russia, and the engineers protested. But the Czar insisted and that is all I remember about the story. But they tell me that the road from Laurel Hill to Navassa, near Wilmington, 101 miles in extent, is without a curve, and I do not doubt it, for any place you look out of the rear of the car you can see the track diminishing in a long thin line that

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