

Jones Journal

"A BETTER COUNTY THROUGH IMPROVED FARM PRACTICES"

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"Tinkers, To Evers, To Chance"



Tinkers, to Evers, to Chance is a phrase that every baseball fan is more or less familiar with because it immortalizes the most famous double-play combination in the history of baseball.

The three pictures above that have been captioned Tinkers, to Evers, to Chance are something that everyone in this area is much more familiar with than even this famous trio who had such a wonderful ability to knock off the double-out.

The tall, gummy, fantastic weed known as Nicotina Tabacum to the scientist, as tobacco to the newspaperman and as "baker" to a great many of those who produce it, is, indeed, a peculiar phenomenon in this 20th Century world of today.

Used in such a short space of time pours forth one of the richest businesses and the most universal habit today indulged in by the peoples of the world.

This year this strange and exotic weed again proved to many thousands of "tobacco experts" here in Eastern Carolina that it is not only peculiar but is one plant that dares the "expert" to predict its ability to fool everyone.

Dry weather had frightened several years' growth and had cultivated a huge crop of ulcers among those who labor with, finance and make plans on the outcome of the tobacco crop.

The crop in many parts of this, the world's greatest tobacco growing area was folding up and dying—or so it appeared.

North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture L. Y. "Stag" Ballentine, a dairyman who should have stuck with his cows, came out with a huge and calamitous prediction that the crop was hurt to the tune of a hundred million dollars and then a few weeks later after riding around and observing the sorry condition of the tobacco crop in most parts of the state Commissioner Ballentine raised the ante by another hundred million bucks and the newspapers dragged out their biggest and blackest headlines to point with alarm and view with tears.

But then along came a thunder shower or two and a little moisture penetrated down into that high-powered fertilizer that was powder-dry about the tobacco roots and the crop began to jump—literally almost. In a week fields that had looked like a 99 per cent loss were pointing ever upward and Mama and Papa Tobacco Farmer had pulled out the Sears, Roebuck catalog and were dreaming rich fall time dreams again.

So much for Tinkers, or Nicotina Tabacum.

Evers, the pivot man on this double-play combination of the world's most fantastic and abundant crop, is the man who

Tinkers make the catch and begin to throw to second base. There's not much he can do after the ball has been hit—but hope.

The tobacco farmer can buy the best seed, the highest priced fertilizers, the finest machinery for tending a tobacco crop but he also has to supply a strong measure of faith mixed with a little prayer from time to time during the time that he is mortgaged—body and soul to this pilliant weed.

When the ball is tossed to him—when the weed is golden ripe then it becomes his nasty, hot and tired lot to pluck the leaves, transport them to the curing barn and then watch over them with breathless anticipation un-

til the moisture content has been reduced to the profitable minimum and the leaves have reached that highest level of marketing desirability.

From the curing barn to the packhouse where more care must be exercised in selecting the leaves of one color and bundling them together so that the different "grades" will command the eye and demand the price being paid for that peculiar and particular type when the auctioneer leads the buyers past.

The end of the double-play, rich, rewarding and exciting comes when the "ball" finally lands in the hand of the nicotine slave who plucks its from its sterile and expertly designed package and applies the flame

that develops the fumes which, if but for a moment, affords the relaxing and exhilarating effects of "a smoke."

Whether the jeweled paw of millady, the pale mitt of an adolescent who is sneaking a few puffs between high school classes, the grimy hand of the laborer or the palsied hand of the aged; the story is the same and it is a profitable story.

From the backwoods and the rolling hills, from the swampland borders, from near and from far, the hordes come to listen and hum a little as the auctioneers trembles his tonsils and assaults the air with his pungent price pleadings. Some in a battered truck or ancient vintage flyver—even still a few in mule

wagon make the pilgrimage to town to hear the chant, to smell the rich smells, to taste the town-tastes, to walk the hard streets, to elbow through the sweating crowds and to take home a little of the excitement and money so widely distributed on this day of days.

The Cadillac-farmer with his richly dressed sons and daughters walk down the aisles of Golden Weed and try to act as if this is something for "poor folks" to worry about.

But beneath their \$100 frocks and under their painted hides they too can feel the pulse of profit and the enchantment of this, the Day of Days.

And who can't?

Today (Thursday, August 21) the Kinston Tobacco Market begins its 58th consecutive year of sales service to the thousands of farmers from every direction who through the years have built it into the world's second largest tobacco market. The story of this market, the crop it handles and the many satellite businesses built around it, is, to a large degree, the major history of Kinston and Lenoir County.

Although it is recorded that Kinston had a "tobacco warehouse" as early as 1770, it is not likely that this was a sales floor in the modern sense but was more probably a storage facility for the plantation owners who shipped their crop down the Neuse to New Bern.

The 125 years between that "tobacco warehouse" and the actual birth of the sales houses that today play such an important part in the life of the community was a period in which tobacco all but left the Kinston area and moved to the Piedmont areas of North Carolina and Virginia. King Cotton was left to rule and practically ruin Eastern Carolina and it was not until the last decade of the 19th Century that tobacco again began to play a vital part in the affairs of the Kinston area.

Jesse W. Grainger, one of the more prominent and most far-sighted citizens of the community in that day, purchased \$500 worth of tobacco seed and rode in horse and buggy about the county begging farmers to plant the seed and grow a crop of tobacco. In 1885 it is recorded that Lenoir County only had 45 acres of tobacco. Grainger promised those farmers who would accept his free seed that he would build a warehouse and buy their tobacco.

The farmers accepted his word and he kept it by building the town's first warehouse of the modern era at the corner of Heritage and Vernon, a spot now occupied by the large tobacco processing plant of the Dixie Leaf

Tobacco Company. Not being familiar with the intricacies of the tobacco selling world, Grainger went into the producing part of the state and brought back a young man named Luther Tapp to manage this first sales floor. By 1895 B. W. Canady had built another warehouse on the next block south of the Grainger floor and soon a third was to be constructed under the name Central Warehouse, at the same site still occupied by today's modern Central Warehouse. Canady called his house the Atlantic, since, as he put it, it was the warehouse nearest the Atlantic Ocean. Grainger's house was known as the Kinston-Carolina.

With the arrival of Tapp and many other Piedmont Country men in the community Kinston rapidly began to make a reputation for itself in the tobacco sales world and today it continues its upward march with only the Wilson market remaining ahead of it in total pounds sold and in money paid out and it is admittedly likely that Wilson's sales and cash outlay will ultimately be passed by the Kinston market. This assumption is based upon the fact that the Kinston sales area includes more acres of tobacco than any other single market in the world.

Refusal of major tobacco buying companies to furnish the Kinston market with buyers on an equal ratio with Wilson has caused the market to miss many loads of tobacco that passed on through to Greenville or Wilson for quicker sales during the early part of the season.

Last year Kinston's 14 sales floors sold a total of 79,126,469 pounds of this famous weed for an average of \$56.52 per hundred pounds, which includes producer sales and resales. The total farmers' sales on the market reached 71,494,945 pounds at an average of \$56.39 per hundred pounds, making a total of \$40,310,504.10 that was paid out through these producers' sales last fall.

Only Farmville, among the major markets sold for a higher average and its average of \$56.72 was just 33 cents higher in the hundred pounds, which wouldn't be enough to pay a farmer for hauling his tobacco to that market if he lived in the Kinston trading area.

During the '51 sales season the Kinston market showed a gain of just under 15 million pounds over the '50 selling season, while Greenville only registered a 12 million pound gain, Wilson only an eight million gain and Rocky Mount only a seven million pound gain.

Since the beginning of systematic record keeping on the sale of tobacco there has been a wide fluctuation in the average price paid the farmer for this back-breaking crop. In 1919, when records begin, the flue-cured crop sold for an average of \$49.30 per hundred pounds. That year the flue-cured acreage was 521,500 and the yield per acre was set at 612 pounds.

From 1919 until 1931 the price of tobacco continued to march ever downward until it hit what everyone hopes to be the all-time low of \$8.80 per hundred pounds. That year the flue-cured acreage was set at 638,550 and the average yield was fixed at 692 pounds per acre.

After hitting that sub-basement price level in 1931 the price of the Golden Weed began its march upward until in 1950 the all-time high average of \$56.50 per hundred was set with 640,000 acres that yielded 1,341 pounds per acre.

The greatest acreage of flue-cured tobacco ever planted came in 1939; the year in which acreage controls were temporarily kicked out and the planter poured their money and labor into 343,000 acres of the flue-cured types of tobacco. The price dropped from the 1938 level of \$22.70 down to \$13.20 and when the 1940 planting time rolled around again tobacco farmers had persuaded Congress to let

them have back the acreage controls they had kicked out the year before. The crop in 1940 was dropped back to just over half of the 1939 acreage at 498,000 acres.

In 1943 for the first time since the post-World War I boom the price of the weed passed to \$40 average and since 1943 it has never dropped below that level.

The 1951 crop of 735,000 acres that averaged 1,303 pounds to the acre and averaged \$53.75 per hundred pounds grossed more money than any crop in the history of tobacco growing, when the growers received \$532,952,000—well over a half-billion dollars.

Kinston, located as it is, on the northern edge of a great tobacco growing area that has no principal market of its own can look toward even greater success in the future. Lenoir County has this year 21,948.9 acres of tobacco, Jones County has 8,544 acres, Craven has 13,428.9 acres, Caretort has 2,107.4 acres, Onslow has 9,830.5 acres, Duplin has 24,220.2 acres and Kinston is nearer to more of this whopping 80,000 acres than any other market—which is more acreage than lies within the sales area of any other market. This does not include one acre of the Greene, Wayne and Pitt County crops that are regularly sold on the Kinston market, some of which lies closer to other major markets than to Kinston. Prominent citizens of both Greene and Pitt counties have holdings in Kinston warehouses and thus are able to influence many million pounds of tobacco from these two counties to come to the Kinston sales floors.

About 500 United States agricultural technicians are doing technical cooperation work abroad under programs of this government and the United Nations.

There are one billion acres of grazing land in the United States