

## **Parker, Thomas Bradley** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Parker, Thomas Bradley**

by Lala Carr Steelman, 1994

**2 Jan. 1851–10 Feb. 1934**

Thomas Bradley Parker, agriculturalist, farm leader, and public servant, was born in Goldsboro, the son of William Right and Nancy Parker Parker. He had no formal education beyond the third grade but was self-taught. His daughter, Katharine Parker Freeman, recalled that he paid for German lessons with milk and absorbed learning "like a sponge absorbs water."

Farming was his main occupation, and he owned a truck and dairy farm four miles from Goldsboro, the present site of Cherry Hospital. His farming methods were scientific, and he encouraged diversified agriculture. Parker was an authority on alfalfa culture and fertilization. A frequent contributor to the *Progressive Farmer* <sup>[2]</sup>, he encouraged the development of commercial peach and apple orchards in the Sandhills and Brushy Mountains of North Carolina.

Parker's interest in farming led him to play an active role in the Farmers' Alliance, a national protest organization, informally labeled the Southern Alliance. He held a number of important posts in the *North Carolina State Farmers' Alliance* <sup>[3]</sup>, including business agent (1896–1907) and secretary-treasurer (1899–1907). Elected vice-president in 1913, he functioned as president during the annual meeting. Parker was president of the state alliance from August 1927 until August 1929. Elected state alliance lecturer in 1928, he worked in that office until his death in 1933. Thomas Parker served the alliance longer than any other official.

The State Farmers' Alliance encouraged farmers to seek public office, and Parker was elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives in 1896. Unlike most alliancemen who affiliated with the People's party after 1893, he remained a loyal *Democrat* <sup>[4]</sup>. His legislative career was short-lived as he moved from *Wayne County* <sup>[5]</sup> to Hillsborough in 1897. Later he resided in Raleigh.

Parker's outstanding service was in the field of agricultural extension. He was the first director of the Division of Co-Operative Experiments, which was started in 1908, and continued this work as director of Farmers' Institutes and Demonstration Work. One of his accomplishments was to organize Boys' Corn Clubs, which encouraged youth to increase the productivity of acres planted in corn. Corn clubs were forerunners of the *4-H Club* <sup>[6]</sup>. In 1918 Parker became the first superintendent of Warehouses in North Carolina and in that office promoted the building of warehouses. He retired from public office in 1920 but continued his activities in the State Farmers' Alliance.

For more than sixty years Parker was a member of the Neuse Lodge No. 6 of the Odd Fellows in Goldsboro. A Baptist, he was a deacon in every church in which he held membership—in Goldsboro, Hillsborough, and Raleigh. He was liberal in both his religious and racial attitudes.

On 8 Dec. 1874 he married Penelope Alderman. Parker's death occurred seven months after that of his wife. He was survived by five children: William A., Emma (Mrs. *Charles E. Maddry* <sup>[7]</sup>), John H., Frank, and Katharine (Mrs. L. E. M. Freeman). Funeral services were held in the First Baptist Church, Raleigh, on 11 Feb. 1934, and Parker was buried in Montlawn Cemetery.

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#### **Additional Resources:**

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