

**The Role of NFA Camps in Agricultural Education for Rural African American Boys in
North Carolina**

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Introduction

During the 1920s and onward to the 1960s, schools were primarily segregated. This meant that only white rural boys could participate in the FFA organization, leaving little opportunity for rural African American boys. Seven years after the establishment of the National FFA Organization, the New Farmers of America, also known as the NFA, was established (Strickland, 1995). Students in NFA chapters received training in traditional farming areas and even participated in chapter events such as contests. An additional event NFA members could participate in, was going to camp (North Carolina Future Farmers of America Association, 2018). These camps offered rural African American students valuable skills and benefits they could carry with them the rest of their lives.

Conceptual Framework

Historical analysis highlights important events from an era in history and signifies events which we can learn from today (Rury, 2006). The purpose of this historical research study was to document the establishment and organization of North Carolina NFA camps, and to describe leadership and recreational opportunities available to students involved in the NFA organization. The specific objectives of this study were to answer the following questions:

1. Who was S. B. Simmons and what was his impact on the New Farmers of America organization?
2. How were North Carolina NFA camps established?
3. What were the details and activities of North Carolina NFA camps?
4. How did North Carolina NFA camps benefit NFA members?

Methodology

Historical research methods were used to guide the questions and objectives of this study. The researcher used primary sources of information whenever possible (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). These primary sources include documents such as diaries, manuscripts, and data collected by state and federal agencies that have responsibility for agricultural education or historical information for the United States. This method utilized the documents of the North Carolina State University Rare & Unique Collections, as well as, the archives. The researcher also used secondary sources that included data from published newspaper articles and information provided by institutions in the agricultural education and cooperative extension field.

Results/Findings

Born Sidney Britten Simmons in North Carolina in 1884, Mr. S. B. Simmons led a long career associated with agricultural education. He served as the Assistant State Supervisor for Negro Schools. At the time of his arrival, there were 23 departments of vocational agriculture, with 24 teachers in the state. His work with county and state offices left 144 teachers amongst 142 departments in the state at the time of his death in 1957 (Bell, Dean, Johnson, & Yates, 1958). A trailblazer for the NFA, Simmons's ideas for a camp date back to 1927 when the state's first NFA camp was held at the Pitt County training school. Simmons realized that due to distance and poor roads, one camp in North Carolina could not serve boys all over the state. As a result, two district camps were established—one at Chowan Beach, near Winton, and a Boy

Scout Camp near Kings Mountain. After the establishment of the two district camps, the North Carolina NFA decided that one North Carolina NFA camp, established at Chowan Beach, was advisable. In 1949, Dr. William Sharpe of New York City, deeded 4,500 acres of land on Queen's Creek in Onslow County to the Hammocks Beach Cooperation. The North Carolina NFA immediately put in an application for a 50-year lease on 27 acres of the land. The site was selected as the North Carolina NFA Camp and work began on its development (Dedication Program of the S. B. Simmons Camp 1958). The early facilities of the newly established North Carolina NFA camp consisted of boys being housed in old army tents and eating meals at the dining room for the North Carolina Teachers Association, which was located about one mile away. Multiple camp fund drives were launched for the construction of an administration building and bath house. Enough funds were raised and another fund was launched in 1955 to construct cabins to properly house the NFA campers for the following year (Mosquito Express, 1956).

The objectives of the S. B. Simmons Camp in North Carolina were to develop leadership, citizenship, sportsmanship, and moral values among the campers who attended. Public speaking was a skill practiced at the North Carolina NFA camp as boys ran for camp chief. Each candidate had to prepare speeches explaining why they should be selected as chief. Additional skills were taught through classes at the NFA camp. Through these classes, the NFA campers were able to learn about leadership and how to serve as a leader. Leadership classes covered areas such as duties and responsibilities of various committees, and the essentials of an active chapter. Through the various activities, classes, and past-times across the camp, over the course of a week, campers could reap many benefits that shaped them into stewards of agriculture who possessed great skills that could follow them the rest of their lives (Mosquito Express, 1956).

Conclusions

In 1965, a national merger between the Future Farmers of America and New Farmers of America occurred. The S. B. Simmons camp was left open and served as an FFA Camp for youth studying vocational agriculture across North Carolina. The purpose of the camp remained similar in giving supervised recreation and leadership activities to the youth studying vocational agriculture in public schools. The camp still called for giving supplemental training and education in agriculture, conservation of natural resources, and leadership.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

As the New Farmers of America Organization no longer exists, it is important to understand how rural African American youth are still benefitting through opportunities available to them, just as North Carolina NFA youth could benefit from the S. B. Simmons Memorial Camp. Opportunities providing benefit for African American youth in the National FFA Organization are at an all-time high. The same benefits that North Carolina NFA members received at the S. B. Simmons Memorial Camp are still being offered to African American members in North Carolina, and across the United States. There are leadership workshops at the local, regional, and state level that prepare students to lead a changing world. Citizenship, patriotism, cooperativeness and healthy lifestyles are among the same objectives of the North Carolina NFA camp that are still being promoted today through the National FFA Organization (National FFA Organization, 2018).

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