

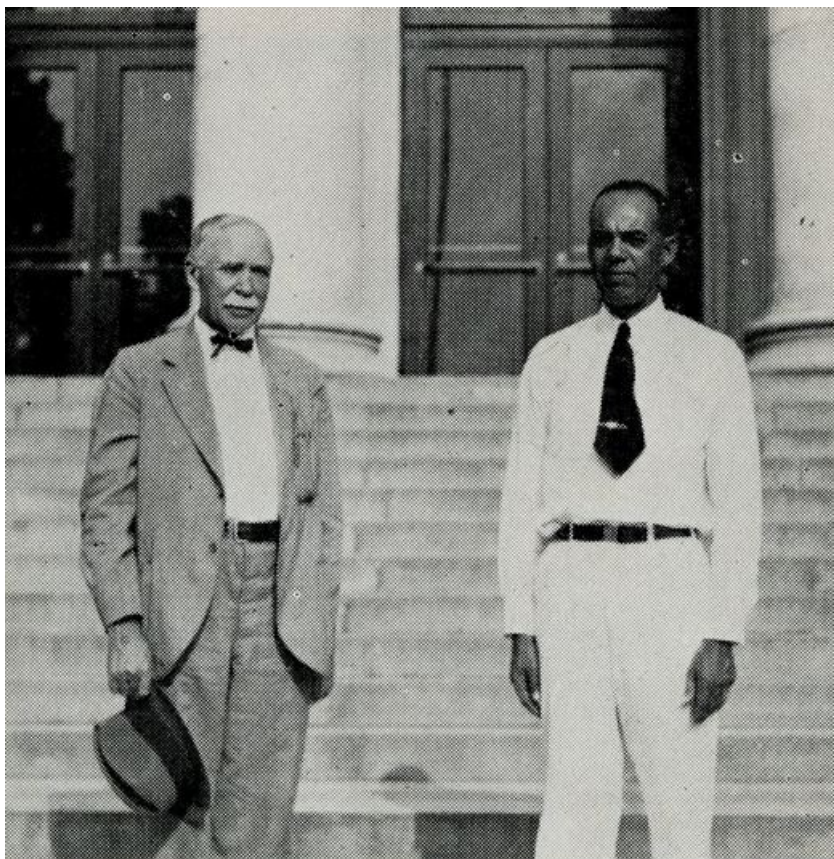
Mitchell, John W. ^[1]

Mitchell, John William

By James Stewart, NCSU Libraries, 2015

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6 May 1885-7 Jan. 1955



Rare and Unique Materials.

^[3]John William Mitchell was a pioneering African American extension agent and educator who became one of the most well known Cooperative Extension ^[4] agents in the nation. A native of Morehead City, North Carolina, Mitchell graduated from the State Colored Normal School (now Fayetteville State University ^[5]), earned a B.S. in agriculture from the Agricultural and Mechanical College for The Colored Race (now North Carolina A&T State University ^[6]) in 1908 and studied sociology in graduate school at Indiana Central University in Indianapolis (now the University of Indianapolis).

After serving as an assistant and lead principal at two high schools, he became an extension agent in 1917. At first he served the North Carolina counties of Bladen, Columbus and Pasquotank, commuting from county to county by horse or bicycle.

In 1922 Mitchell was appointed to the newly created extension service district office at the A&T campus in Greensboro where he would direct the extension activities for 15 counties. During this time he is said to have built one of the largest Negro 4-H Clubs in the nation. In 1940, following the death of C. R. Hudson, who was responsible for extension and 4-H club work for the entire state, Mitchell became the "State Agent for Negro Work" or the state extension agent for African Americans.

In the A&T position John W. Mitchell was well known for his financial and innovative leadership in the lives of the state's African-American farmers. He was also active in academic and community efforts between Whites and Blacks. He participated in the North Carolina Commission on Inter-Racial Cooperation ^[7] to advocate for state and national anti-lynching laws, and he spoke at churches for Race Relation Sunday services.

In 1943 Mitchell moved to Virginia after he was appointed the field agent for the United States Extension Service ^[8] to represent 17 southeastern states or the "Upper South's Field Agent in Negro Extension Work." His office was based at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. During the Second World War and postwar era, 4-H membership soared, and Mitchell

served as Director of Regional 4-H Club camps for Black children in addition to multiple roles as chair director or secretary for national and regional agricultural conferences.

By 1950 Mitchell was renowned as one of the top agricultural experts in the nation. That same year [Livingstone College](#) [9] awarded him an honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities for his work in improving the rural life of farmers in the South. Three years later, United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Ezra Taft Benson appointed him to the specially created post of National Extension Leader on the staff of the Division of the Department of Cooperative Extension Work, the highest rank ever given up to that time to a person of color within the national extension organization.

Mitchell was still serving in this position when on he passed away in Baltimore, Maryland, on January 7, 1955, at the age of 69. In his memory the J. W. Mitchell 4-H Camp was dedicated in June 1956 in Onslow County, North Carolina, and a building was named for him at Fayetteville State University in 1955. Mitchell's legacy has continued for decades. He was inducted into the N. C. A&T School of Agriculture Hall of Fame in 1996. At a 2014 centennial celebration he was remembered as one of five key pioneers of the A&T Cooperative Extension program.

(*The extension agent John W. Mitchell should not be confused with Dr. John W. Mitchell (b. 1905), the principal physiologist of the USDA Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering in Beltsville, Maryland.)

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- See more at: <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/news/special-collections/life-of-an-extension-a...> [14]

Additional Resources:

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Image Credit:

["Dr. C. B. Smith, who recently retired as assistant national director of the extension service, with J.W. Mitchell Negro District Farm Agent, at the Negro 4-H Short Course at A. & T. College, Greensboro.] Photograph. ca. 1938. From "Annual Report of Agricultural Extension Work in North Carolina 1938," North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering of the University of North Carolina and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Co-operating, N.C. Agricultural Extension Service, 1938. Item ua102_002-001-bx0017-006-001, Cooperative Extension Service, Annual Reports, Special Collections Center at NCSU Libraries. https://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/ua102_002-001-bx0017-006-001#... [16] (accessed February 8, 2016).

Additional Images:

Jones, R. E. "African American State agent John W. Mitchell at desk." Photograph. September 1940. Agricultural Extension and Research Services Collection (UA023.007), Special Collections Research Center at NCSU Libraries. https://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/ua023_007-007-bx0025-009-068#... [17]

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