

Mebane, Benjamin Franklin ^[1]

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Benjamin Franklin Mebane, physician and manufacturer of a widely used patent medicine, was born at Mason Hall in the part of [Orange County](#) ^[2] that became [Alamance County](#) ^[3] in 1849, the son of George Allen and Otelia Yancey Mebane. Young Mebane obtained his earliest education at [Caldwell Institute](#) ^[4] under [Alexander Wilson](#) ^[5]. In 1847 he was graduated from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6], where his senior graduating paper, written in 1846, was entitled "The Effects of Climate on the Physical and Intellectual Constitution of Man." He received the M.D. degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1850.

Mebane established a medical practice at Mason Hall, where he was born, and soon enjoyed the confidence of people throughout the region. It was observed that he demonstrated sincere concern for the ill, that "he never forgot to advise the sick about their eternal interests," and that he prayed at the bedside of those who were dying. His practice continued without interruption during the [Civil War](#) ^[7].

He patented a medicine that was produced by a company he formed in nearby Mebansville, where he moved his office. The Taraxacum Company sold its "Taraxacum Compound" throughout the nation; it was particularly successful in such distant states as Michigan, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri. The compound was also in demand on the East Coast between New York and North Carolina and perhaps elsewhere. Describing the remedy as a "vegetable tonic," Mebane advertised that it "Cures and prevents Indigestion and Dyspepsia" as well as asthma; in addition, he claimed that it prevented colic and cramps and was "a good appetizer." Although it was prepared from a secret formula, the name suggests that at least one of its ingredients was the dried rhizomes and roots of dandelions. Mebane's family continued to produce the compound after his death.

A [Democrat](#) ^[8], Mebane represented Alamance County in the General Assembly in 1879–80. By a very close vote in 1881, he was elected to one term in the state senate, where he represented the district composed of Alamance and [Guilford](#) ^[9] counties.

Married to Frances (Fannie) Lavinia Kerr of [Caswell County](#) ^[10] in 1857, Mebane was the father of five children: [Benjamin F., Jr.](#) ^[11] (m. Lily Connally Morehead), George Allen (m. Mary Holt), James Kerr (m. Carrie Banks Holt), Mary Belle (m. James Edwin Scott), and Fannie Kerr (m. H. William Bason).

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[Mebane Family Papers](#) ^[12] (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

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Additional Resources:

Vincent, William Murray. "Benjamin Franklin Mebane." *Historic Alamance County: An Illustrated History*. San Antonio, Texas: Historical Publishing Network. 2009. 52. <http://books.google.com/books?id=qL3RkMTRx1YC&pg=PA52#v=onepage&q&f=false> ^[13] (accessed July 2, 2013).

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