

Mewborne, James Marion ^[1]

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by Lala Carr Steelman, 1991

22 Mar. 1848–28 Oct. 1924

James Marion Mewborne, farmer, Farmers' Alliance ^[2] leader, state senator, and public servant, was born in Vance Township, Lenoir County ^[3], the son of Levi and Susan Parrott Mewborne. He became prominent during the Farmers' Alliance movement and held a number of positions at both the state and local levels. In 1889 Mewborne succeeded William H. Worth ^[4] as business agent of the Lenoir County Alliance. In the same year he was elected a member of the three-man executive committee of the North Carolina Farmers' State Alliance and remained in that post until he became president of the order in 1893. Reelected president in 1894, he served until 1895. In 1892–93 he was a lecturer for the Second Congressional District.

Politically ambitious, Mewborne was the Farmers' Alliance Democratic ^[5] candidate for Congress from the Second Congressional District after illness forced William J. Rogers of Northampton County ^[6] to withdraw. Mewborne's late entry into the race and questions concerning his loyalty to the Democratic party resulted in his defeat by the black incumbent, Henry P. Cheatham ^[7].

Mewborne's liberal leanings led him to join the People's party ^[8] in 1892. He served in the state senate in 1895, the year the Fusionists ^[9], a coalition of Populists and Republicans, won control of the legislature. Elected commissioner by the North Carolina Board of Agriculture ^[10], he took office on 15 June 1897 and served until 1 Jan. 1898. On that day, he became superintendent of the state penitentiary and held the position for one year. When the People's party collapsed, Mewborne affiliated with the Republican ^[11] party, which he served for years as county chairman. In 1910 he directed the census for the Second Congressional District. After 1900, however, he concentrated largely on his farming activities.

Deeply religious, Mewborne had strong moral and political convictions which he expressed in impassioned words. He was described by contemporaries as a "Christian gentleman." A lifelong member of the Christian church ^[12], he belonged to the Wheat Swamp congregation. After his second marriage, he moved to Kinston and taught the adult Sunday school class in the Gordon Street Church of Christ.

Mewborne and his first wife, Eliza Palmer, were the parents of two sons, J. Hyman and Noah Palmer, and two daughters, Mary Glenn (Mrs. A. C. Bizzell) and Susie (Mrs. James J. Rogers). His second marriage, to Pattie Parrott, produced three sons, Edward Bruce, James Marion, Jr., and John Franklin, who survived their father. Mewborne was buried in Maplewood Cemetery, Kinston.

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