

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Kirby E. Sutton (Part 6)

After a decade of work as a local merchant, Bucklesberrian Kirby Edward Sutton (1866-1930) landed his first job as a traveling salesman in 1896. Stationed in Baltimore, MD, Kirby's success as a drummer eventually propelled him to a position with the prestigious Baltimore firm, L. Greif and Brothers, Inc., by 1908. At one time, the second largest company of its kind in the country, L. Greif and Bros. specialized in manufacturing men's clothing.

The nature of Kirby's job required living out of a suitcase much of the time. Although he probably rented a room in Baltimore for extended visits at the corporate office, he often stayed at hotels when he was on the road. From 1897 to 1908, Kirby's name appeared routinely on hotel guest lists published in newspapers around the State in areas where he was doing business. Hotels indicated Baltimore as his business residence.

But Kirby's out-of-state employment was not limited to Baltimore. He worked briefly with an unknown establishment in Boston, MA during 1898. That year, on one business trip, he was a guest at the Orton Hotel in Wilmington where Boston was listed as his residence (*The Wilmington Messenger*, March 30).

Back home, Kirby was not without a place to hang his hat. The 1900 Census listed Kirby as a boarder with Redding M. Harper, proprietor of the former Fields Hotel in La Grange. He continued to be listed as a boarder with Mr. Harper in the 1910 and 1920 Censuses.

Kirby's home visits with family and friends after business trips was often reported in the social news column, for example:

1903, July 24: "Mr. K. E. Sutton returned to his home in La Grange today, after spending several days with relatives here." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

By the mid-1910s, in the prime of his life, Kirby was pursuing business and farming careers. True to his country roots, he skillfully showed expertise at both:

1914, June 20: "Mr. Kirby E. Sutton, of La Grange, who, in addition to being one of the leading traveling salesmen on the road, stands at the front of the progressive farmers of the County, reports cotton blossoms on his splendid farm in the far-famed Bucklesberry section..." (*Kinston Free Press*)

1915, June 18: "According to R[edding] M. Harper of La Grange, Mr. Kirby E. Sutton, successful drummer and progressive farmer, is the first to send in a new cotton blossom. This will cause his drummer-farmer friend, Mr. Tom Harvey, to sit up and take notice." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

By 1918, Kirby had amassed a 1,200-acre farm in Bucklesberry that was characterized by *The Wilmington Morning Star* (January 30) as one of the finest in eastern North Carolina. He produced results that were impressive and large-scale:

1918, December 13: "Forty-six hogs slaughtered on the plantation of Kirby E. Sutton in Lenoir County last week weighed 10,970 pounds, an average weight of 240 pounds." (*The State Journal*, Raleigh)

1919, August 1: "He Grows Them Big...a beet weighing 11 1/4 pounds grown on the farm of Mr. Kirby Sutton at La Grange. It was probably the largest ever seen here..." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Kirby's work as a traveling salesman may have slowed considerably by the close of the 1910 decade, although his business career continued. The May 20, 1920 issue of *The Fayetteville Observer* identified him as a farmer and a dealer in cotton and fertilizers.