

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Strong Women

Behind every successful man is a strong woman. Few honest men would deny the reality of this timeless old adage. From its earliest days, Bucklesberry produced a number of successful men—Benjamin Sutton, Sr., Hardy Sutton, Josiah Sutton, Sr., Jeremiah Sutton, Sr., and Samuel Ivey Sutton—to name a few. Their lives spanned a one hundred and fifty year period, from Bucklesberry's founding in the mid-1700s through the turn of the twentieth century.

Alone, these tough and fearless men could not have survived the challenges of the fledgling, undeveloped countryside of Bucklesberry with its swampy, heavily wooded terrain. Truth be told, they prospered with the help and support of their wives. Indeed, they were strong women. An impressive example was Anna (Annie) Hill Sutton, one of the grand ladies of nineteenth century Bucklesberry.

Annie was born October 3, 1807 purportedly to Harmon and Nancy Hill. We know nothing of her childhood. She married Hardy Sutton (1803–1861), son of Benjamin Sutton, Sr. and Sarah Hardy Sutton. Annie and Hardy were parents of 14 children: Nancy; Thomas; Elizabeth; Martha (Patsy); William Harmon; Richard; Lemuel Hardy; Benjamin Franklin; John A.; Sally Hardy; Louiza; Junius Eli and Julius Eri (twins); and Christian.

Annie may have been about 14 years of age when she married Hardy, based on the birth date of their first child. Annie died April 21, 1881, outliving her husband by almost twenty years. At Hardy's death, Annie was left to care for their three youngest children living in the home on her own. She remained a widow for the duration of her life and never remarried.

Annie's strength of character as a mother was second to none. She wanted the best for the last of her brood. Twin sons, Junius and Julius, were fourteen years of age at the time of their father's death; sister, Christian was eleven. Annie was determined to provide them with a formal education. In the Clellan Sutton Collection of Bucklesberry papers are ten receipts, dated 1862 to 1866, for tuition paid by Annie to local educator, Samuel Ivey Sutton, for the instruction of her children.

Annie had her hands full, for certain. But in 1866 she had more than enough love in her heart to adopt her son, Thomas', eleven year old, illegitimate mulatto child, Samuel, thereby allowing her grandson his rightful Sutton surname and a place at her dinner table. Illiterate herself, Annie proudly recorded an X-mark above her name printed on the indenture of apprenticeship (adoption) document issued by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands of the State of North Carolina.

Annie also boldly accepted the role of chief financial officer. She handled various business matters related to the home and the farm, including paying bills. Even though her son, Benjamin Franklin Sutton, was named executor of his father's estate, Annie monitored one of the most important business tasks—paying taxes. The Clellan Sutton Collection contains receipts indicating it was Annie, the family matriarch, who regularly paid the farm taxes.

Her homegoing to heaven at the age of 73 was celebrated widely. In the April 28, 1881 issue of the Kinston Journal, Annie's death was noted twice—once as an announcement, and a second time in a lengthy obituary: "Mrs. Anna Sutton, an aged and highly respected and useful lady died in the Bucklesberry section...She suffered many months with a painful disease, refusing to receive medical aid until a few days before her death. She was certainly esteemed by many....We have watched her career from our earliest childhood, and can never cease to remember her scrupulous fidelity to every obligation, and a thousand other impulses which designated her as a good woman. Her patient endurance throughout her illness elicited our greatest admiration, and her placid resignation indicated full trust in the Great Power which giveth and taketh away life..."

[Caption for accompanying photograph]

Annie Hill Sutton (1807–1881)

