

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Dog Days 1886

The dog days of summer come every year between July 3 and August 11. Hard to miss, the oppressive heat signals their arrival. Ask your neighbors why we call them, 'dog days,' and you'll get a variety of answers.

Although it accurately forecasts weather only half the time (same as flipping a coin), the *Farmers' Almanac* correctly lays out the science behind dog days. At this time of year, when viewed from the earth, the sun is situated in the same region as Sirius, the brightest star of the constellation, Canis Major, or 'Greater Dog.' Thus, the name, dog days.

The hottest part of the summer typically occurs during dog days. But the extreme heat is not due to added radiation from Sirius. Rather, the tilt of the earth forces rays from the sun to hit the earth's surface more directly, resulting in longer, much hotter days.

Aside from severe heat, the dog days of 1886 in Bucklesberry were nothing out of the ordinary. With analysis and a touch of light-hearted commentary, Samuel Ivey (S. I.) Sutton (1834-1904) reported the day-to-day happenings in the rural community of Bucklesberry where he was reared. He wrote about church services, weather, sickness, and deaths, but mostly crops:

1886, July 7: "Rev. Mr. Swain preached at Hickory Grove last Saturday night and Sunday, his regular appointment. Mr. Swain has served the Church for over twelve months and has given the congregation, which has steadily increased, perfect satisfaction so far as we have been able to learn. We wish him much success in the work in which he is so earnestly engaged. We regret to learn that lice are very seriously damaging cotton in many places. We hear that on the farms of Mr. Noah Rouse, J. S. Wooten and others, near here, the cotton is literally ruined in many places. The opinion is that too much rain and cloudy weather is the cause, and that a few days of fast, warm weather will remove the cause....We have seen and hear of the crops from different sections of the county, and in nearly every place the complaint is too much rain. The crops are not so prosperous as they appeared a month ago, especially corn, and cotton on light land. The grass is pretty bold and has a good footing in some places, and still the crops are in better condition, as to cultivation, than one would expect to see, the over-abundance of rain considered. We visited that justly good reputed section, Bucklesberry, a few days ago and found the crops in a good state of cultivation, and promising, but not as much so, as they usually are. The people in this section do no plant all cotton, but arrange their crops so as to have their well-filled barns and smoke-houses at home. We saw some very fine corn on Ben[jamin Franklin] Sutton's [1838-1897] farm, on Frog Point, which he thinks will yield ten barrels per acre if the season is

favorable from this on. The citizens of this community never say that 'farming don't pay,' and the same system practiced by them will make those who say so think otherwise. Raise your own supplies." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1886, July 14: "It rains frequently and sometimes oftener. Crops are having too much rain for the best....There is but little sickness in our community just now, that we hear of. Rev. Mr. Swain preached here last Saturday and Sunday night. Large crowd in town last Saturday evening to the surprise of some....Neuse River is unpleasantly high for some farmers along its course, and destructively to others. Much damage to crops has already been done, and still more will be, if a fall don't come soon....A party was prosecuted and bound over for fishing a few days ago. To be compelled to fish would be punishment enough for us. We don't like it, and then we never could tell anything like a respectable fish lie..." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

More news from the dog days of 1886 will be shared in the next Bucklesberry article.