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Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Lillian Sutton Perry (Part 2)

The death certificate of Lillian Sutton Perry (1864-1946) names Bettie Gray Sutton (1842-1904) as her mother and Manorah Sutton as her father, both of Lenoir County. Lillian's mother can be verified from numerous sources. However, the existence of Manorah (or Manoah or Minoah) Sutton cannot be proven in any public documents, including U.S. Census records.

A little known document, the 1879 will of William (Old Billy) Sutton, Jr. (ca. 1796-1884), provides the earliest, definitive evidence that Lillian's father was not Manorah Sutton. Instead, the will names Old Billy's son, Noah Henry Sutton (1838-1865), predeceased at the writing of the will, as her father. The will also identifies Bettie (Gray) Sutton as Lillian's mother and further names one proven brother, William Franklin Sutton (1862-1913).

Two additional records corroborate Noah Sutton as Lillian's father. One is the death certificate of Lillian's brother, William, which identifies Noah Sutton and Bettie Gray as his parents, and, by extension, Lillian's. The other is the 1885 marriage license for Lillian and Daniel Elijah Perry, Sr., which, like her brother's death certificate, indicates Noah Sutton and Bettie Gray as her parents.

With paternity verified, Lillian's ancestry through her Sutton lineage can be traced to Bucklesberry, then part of Dobbs (now Lenoir) County. Her father, Noah was one of eight children born to William (Old Billy) and Rachel Harper Sutton (ca. 1804-bef.1860), which made them Lillian's paternal grandparents. Noah's father, Old Billy was one of four known children of William Sutton (ca. 1760-bef. 1820) and Sarah Arendall Sutton (ca. 1770-bef. 1840); thus, they were Lillian's great-grandparents.

William, along with Benjamin and John, Jr., were the three known sons of John Sutton (ca. 1730-bef. 1773), who migrated from Bertie County in the mid-1700s. His purported wife was Ann Ward Sutton, although it is unknown whether she was the mother of his children. The descendants of these three sons were largely responsible for populating mid-nineteenth century Bucklesberry.

John Sutton, then, was Lillian's twice great-grandfather. A proven Bucklesberry descendant through her Sutton family line, her strength of character and life accomplishments are a testament in-part to her heritage.

Scant information is available on Lillian's early life. She was only ten months of age when her father, Noah, died. Sometime between his untimely death in 1865 and the U.S. Census in 1870, Lillian's mother, Bettie, married a second time to Noah's brother, Edward L. Sutton, Sr. (1847-1908). The practice of a widow marrying her deceased husband's brother, called a Leverite marriage in some cultures, was not unheard of back in the day, even in rural America.

The Census record of 1870 shows Lillie (Lillian), age 6, and her brother, Willie (William), age 8, living in the household of her grandfather, Old Billy. Also in the household were her mother, Bettie, second husband, Edward, and their twin daughters, Clyde and Minnie, both nine months of age. Lillian and her brother, Willie, then, were stepchildren of their Uncle Edward.

Some have questioned how Bettie could have been married to both brothers, Noah and Edward. Wrote the late historian-genealogist and Bucklesberry descendant, Martha Mewborn Marble (1944-2019), "The [grave] stone for Betty [Bettie] Gray Sutton states she was the wife of Edward. I don't think the brothers married the same person," (www.olddobbers.net). Had digital Census records and other research tools been available at the time, the explanation would have been clear. Bettie indeed married both brothers.