

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Settler John Sutton (Part 15)

By court order, orphan George Wiggins was apprenticed to settler John Sutton (ca. 1730-bef. 1773) in 1768. Although primarily an indenture of servitude, it involved more than teaching George a trade. John was directed to provide George with lodging and subsistence as well as reading and writing instruction, suggesting the arrangement was tantamount to an informal adoption.

Orphans were often taken in by relatives or community people and treated as apprentices during the Colonial era. Therefore, John, George and his deceased father Gersham Wiggins Sr. were probably not strangers.

Like John Sutton, the Wiggins family were landowners in the Bucklesberry area. George Wiggins Sr., brother of Gersham Wiggins Sr., owned 270 acres on the west side of Falling Creek, which, at the time was geographically contiguous to the east side of Bucklesberry. Per his will proved in 1750, he bequeathed 200 acres to his wife Margaret Wiggins and the remaining 70 acres to his nephew Gersham Wiggins Jr. Both were area residents and named as heads of households in the 1769 tax list for old Dobbs County.

John Wiggins, another brother of Gersham Sr., also owned land in or near Bucklesberry. His acreage adjoined that of local landowner John Giles whose 250 acres was located on the north side of the Neuse River, east of Stirrup Creek, according to a 1745 land grant to Giles.

Orphan George's father Gersham Sr. owned land in the Bucklesberry area, too. From a warrant and plat issued to him in 1746, he later received a Colonial land grant patent from King George III:

"Gersham Wiggins Three hundred acres Johnston [County] on the No. side of Neuse River including Sloop Landing beginning at a white Oak on the river bank and runs No 62 Wt 216 poles to the Center of three pines John Gilles [sic. Giles] line thence So 45 Wt 130 poles to a white Oak in a Swamp thence No 65 Wt 78 poles to a maple near the mouth of Stirrup Creek thence down the meanders of the run to the beginning ~ March 17th 1756. Arthur Dobbs" (nlandgrants.com, p. 99)

John Giles, then, owned land that adjoined the properties of both Gersham Wiggins Sr. and his brother John Wiggins. Interestingly, Giles also had land that adjoined several of John Sutton's properties.

Three land documents in the Clellan Thomas Sutton Collection name John Giles in conjunction with John Sutton. A 1748 survey of 160 acres for John Giles in Bucklesberry on the north side of the Neuse River was presumably acquired by John Sutton soon after he migrated from Bertie County by 1750. Another 1757 survey of 275 acres for John Sutton in Bucklesberry adjoined land owned by John Giles. Finally, a 1763 receipt to John Sutton was for purchase of a patent for 100 acres on the north side of the Neuse River that adjoined John Giles' land.

One other document currently in the possession of a Bucklesberry Sutton descendant (anonymous) is relevant. A 1763 King George III land grant awarded 75 acres to John Sutton on the north side of the Neuse River that adjoined land owned by John Giles.

The prominence of John Giles' name as an adjoining landowner in several Gersham Wiggins Sr. and John Sutton land documents in the same time period and in the same geographic area is not happenstance. In all likelihood, John Sutton and Gersham Wiggins Sr. were not just associates who lived in the Bucklesberry community, they may have been close neighbors who knew each other well.

This would explain the court's decision to assign Gersham Sr.'s orphan son George to John Sutton in the 1768 indenture. Perhaps the greater mystery is why the local Wiggins family did not embrace their own by taking George into one of their households.