

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

River Lifeline

The Neuse River was a lifeline for Bucklesberry during much of its early history and development. Long-time admirer of this old community, Council S. Wooten (1840-1930), called Bucklesberry the Valley of the Neuse. He rightly understood the geological and agricultural impact of the River on surrounding farm land and its people.

Bucklesberry soil is "a snuff or brown color....rich in vegetable matter or humus," wrote Mr. Wooten in 1886, found in "low grounds that make out from the River," with "elements of fertility in it that is capable of being brought to the highest state of cultivation." (*Goldsboro Messenger*, August 2, 1886).

The lifeline of the River did more than produce nutrient-rich soil for farming. On the waters of the Neuse, goods and supplies were transported by boat and steamship in and out of the community. The site of a local family home place today, Pine Bush Landing on the Neuse was a central loading and shipping site in Bucklesberry in the 1800s. The following activity was a common occurrence:

"The steamer *Kinston* arrived last night with a full cargo of cotton and quite a number of Bucklesberry farmers. They deserted the ship before our reporter arrived but he caught the shadows of Messrs. D.[Dempsey] Wood, D. S. Sutton, L. Barwick, C. R. Bizzell, J. Sutton and others whose names he could not ascertain. We hope to see them today." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern, December 15, 1885)

In addition to transportation benefits, the Neuse River also yielded marl, a valuable fertilizer. A lime-based substance, marl neutralized acidity in soil and improved productivity of crops. It loosened hard, clay soil, fostering more effective farming. The positive effects of marl were immediate and long-lasting, according to an 1887 report in the *Ann Arbor Courier* (Michigan).

Samuel Ivey Sutton (1834–1904) farmed in the Frog Point section of Bucklesberry for many years. Adjacent to the River, his 200-acre farm was located on the east and west sides of the current Hardy Bridge. In the River bed, S. I. identified marl:

"S. I. Sutton, Esq., whose land is bounded South by Neuse River, has found marl in the bed of the River. The River being extremely low, he put in four hands last Friday, who drew out a quantity of the marl. It is 2 percent lime." (*Goldsboro Messenger*, October 11, 1880)

Finally, fishing in the Neuse provided food and sport for local families in Bucklesberry as well as a business opportunity for some. The following accounts were typical:

"Messrs. Jerry [Jeremiah, Sr.] Sutton and Dempsey Wood, Jr., have bought a fishing establishment on Neuse River near Pine Bush." (*Goldsboro Messenger*, March 29, 1880)

"A catfish five inches between the eyes, was captured by Junius E. Sutton one day last week." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern, August 29, 1883)

"Mr. L. J. Moore caught a fine shad Saturday night that weighed nine and one half pounds. Shad are very scarce." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston, March 22, 1904)

The Neuse River is no longer the lifeline that it was centuries ago, except in one major way. As with ancestors before us, this ancient waterway commands the respect of residents in Bucklesberry and beyond in its ability to drain farm land and channel flood waters during catastrophic weather events.

[Caption for accompanying photograph]

A major loading and shipping site in Bucklesberry in the 1800s, Pine Bush Landing on the Neuse River today.

