

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Small Business

Farming was the sole occupation in Bucklesberry when it was settled in the mid-1700s and for the century or more to follow. Operating as family partnerships, husbands, wives, and children all worked together to clear and cultivate reclaimed swamp land near the Neuse. They were true pioneers, and they survived and flourished.

Changing times and modernization of agriculture, though, forever diminished farming as a family enterprise. Moreover, farming is no longer the only occupation among Bucklesberry residents.

Increasingly since the mid- to late-1900s, some have found employment in various professions and trades in nearby cities and towns, all the while maintaining ownership of their land that has been passed down for generations.

But other lines of work had already emerged in Bucklesberry by the late-1800s. Either by necessity or choice, a number of descendants whose ancestors had only ever been farmers started small businesses.

For example, several men operated gristmills, lumber mills and gins, including John Willis Sutton (1838-1915) and brother, Nathan George Sutton (1847-1919), W. Henry Sutton (1861-1940), and Alexander Richard Sutton (1860-1928) with brother-in-law, John. D. Walters (1858-1944).

During the fifteen-year period from 1883 to 1897, newspaper reporters chronicled the successes and tragedies of these entrepreneurs from greater Bucklesberry and La Grange:

1883, January 11: "The boiler of the steam mill of J[ohn] W[illis Sutton] and N[athan] G[eorge] Sutton, about three miles from here, exploded Friday evening. What amount of damage I have not learned. Nobody hurt." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1883, February 15: "Messers. Edwards and ---, boiler makers from your city [New Bern], are up here repairing the boiler of J[ohn] W[illis] & brother [Nathan George Sutton]." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1883, September 6: "[W.] Henry Sutton has bought machinery and will put up a gin at Jenny Lind in a few days. He proposes to gin for the twentieth, the usual price." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1885, April 14: "Capt. A. J. McIntyre has sold his mill and gin property in town to J[ohn]. D. Walters and Alex[ander Richard] Sutton for the sum of two thousand dollars. We learn that he contemplates a country life in the future." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1885, August 12: "The mill of Messrs. Sutton & Walters has been provided with fixtures for grinding wheat. We have not heard as to the quantity of quality of the flour turned out." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1887, September 8: "An attempt was made one night last week, by some unknown villain to blow up the boiler and engine at Sutton & Walters gin in this place. The wretch placed a quantity of powder in the firebox and when the fire was kindled the next morning was exploded. Luckily the doors were all open and no damage was done. We think that every town and community should see that all stragglers go to work or make them leave. It is evident that these deeds are not perpetrated by anyone who is industriously employed." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1887, October 13: "Among the industries of our place should be noticed the mills, gin etc. of Messrs. Sutton & Walters. They are prepared to make good meal, excellent flour, gin cotton and dress lumber. They propose to give satisfaction to all who give them a trial." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1897, January 5: "The grist mill and planing machine of Sutton & Walters at La Grange were destroyed by fire last Saturday night. Loss reported about \$4,000, partially insured." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)