

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Kirby E. Sutton

Compared with other households in Bucklesberry at the time, Kirby Edward Sutton (1866-1930) was born into a relatively small family of six. Kirby's parents were Josiah Sutton, Jr. (1835-1902) and Martha (Patsy) Hill Sutton (1831-1882). Older brothers were Albert Hardy Sutton (1858-1911) and John (Johnnie) William Sutton (1860-1906). Kirby's only sister was Elizabeth (Bettie) Ann Sutton (1868-1945).

Providing for the education of their children was a priority of Josiah, Jr. and Patsy. The 1870 Census indicated their two oldest sons, Albert, age 11, and Johnnie, age 10, were "at school" that year. Census takers assigned this label to children in a household who were being formally educated at a public or private school.

Not all school-age children in mid-eighteenth century Bucklesberry, though, received a formal education. Children too young to work in the fields and not in school were classified in the Census as "at home." Older children still living in the home and not enrolled in school or college were typically classified as "laborers on farm."

Albert and Johnnie probably attended Bucklesberry's one-room Hickory Grove School, the only neighborhood school in 1870. Formerly located off of Kennedy Home Road, the school was named after the current Hickory Grove Church, less than a quarter-mile away. Although the church was founded in the early 1860s, the exact year the school was established is unknown.

The La Grange Academy, a private, tuition-paying school opened by Dr. Preston W. Woodley in 1869-1870, was another school in the area. However, the Academy offered a secondary-level curriculum that emphasized "practical business education or thorough preparation for college" (*New Berne Weekly Journal*, June 15, 1882) that would have been inappropriate for elementary-aged Albert and Johnnie.

Not only did Josiah, Jr. want proper education for his own children, he wanted to ensure it for all children in Bucklesberry. In 1881, along with neighbors, Caleb Sutton (1827-bef. 1910) and Samuel Ivey Sutton (1834-1904), Josiah, Jr. accepted a two-year appointment to the District 15 school committee by the Lenoir County Board of Education.

Josiah, Jr. and Patsy continued to prioritize education with their third son, Kirby. The earliest known formal education for Kirby is in 1881, when he was 15 years of age and a student at the La Grange Academy lead by Professor Joseph E. Kinsey. During the two days of closing

exercises on June 15-16 that year, Kirby was chosen to deliver a recitation, 'Modern Youths,' and he joined three other classmates in a dialogue, 'The Canvassing Agent' (*Kinston Journal*).

Kirby continued his enrollment at the Academy for the 1881-1882 school year where he excelled as an honor student in both the fall and spring terms. At the commencement exercises in May, 1882, Kirby was selected as a marshal for his academic achievement. Among the students who delivered speeches, *The Daily Journal* of New Bern noted that "'Live for Something,' was an excellent piece and excellently said by K. E. Sutton." (May 22, 1882).

More will be shared in next week's article on Kirby's education, including college, and his career as a young businessman.