

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Kirby E. Sutton (Part 3)

A sixth generation Bucklesberrian, Kirby Edward Sutton (1866-1930) descended from a long line of farmers who had lived and worked in the community since the mid-1700s. Farming, then, appeared to be a likely line of work for him. But Kirby showed considerable academic talent from his youth. So, his first career path eventually proved to be business, rather than farming.

Scholastically, Kirby was an honor student and one of the first Bucklesberrians to attend college in the late-eighteenth century. After a semester of study at the University of NC Chapel Hill in the fall of 1885 and a term at Eastman Business College, NY in the spring of 1886, Kirby returned home and began pursuing a business career.

In October, 1886, Kirby accepted a position with the newly-established Wooten and Wooten firm in La Grange, according to the *Goldsboro Messenger*. The nature of this establishment and Kirby's job are not known for certain. The Wooten and Wooten firm was likely the Shade Wooten and Brother general store and grocery that was operating in La Grange by 1896.

A prior relationship with the Wooten family probably explained why Kirby was offered a job with Wooten and Wooten. One of Shade Wooten's sons, Arthur Speight (A.S.) Wooten (1867-1917), attended grade school with Kirby in La Grange. Along with Kirby, A.S. also enrolled in Eastman Business College in the spring semester of 1886. A.S. was a bookkeeper by trade, but later operated a hardware store in Goldsboro.

Interestingly, two men who lived in the town of La Grange during this time period were named Shade Wooten. Their fathers, Council S. Wooten, Sr. (1804-1872) and Shade Wooten, Sr. (1799-1866) were brothers, which made the two Shade Wootens first cousins. Kirby's school buddy, A. S., was a grandson of Shade Wooten, Sr., so it is more likely that Kirby was associated with that line.

By the turn of the 1890s, Kirby was pursuing the mercantile trade in earnest and was recognized as a member of the merchant community:

1890, August 5: "Messrs. Kirby Sutton and J. D. Walters, merchants of La Grange, were on a business visit in this city [Goldsboro] yesterday." (*Goldsboro Daily Argus*)

As a young businessman, Kirby understood the value of collaborating with others. One of his early partners was a merchant in La Grange whose last name was Isler:

1890, December 10: "Mr. Kirby E. Sutton, of La Grange, of the prosperous and substantial firm of Isler & Sutton, a young gentleman brim full of energy and business sagacity, was on a visit to the wholesale establishments of our city [Goldsboro] yesterday." (*Goldsboro Daily Argus*)

Kirby's skills as a shrewd merchant and his knack for maximizing profits caught the attention of the greater business community:

1891, July 3: "Isler and Sutton is comparatively a new firm here [La Grange]. They began business two years ago, and the rapidity with which they have pushed to the front is remarkable. They deal in farmers' supplies and in cotton. The writer saw the account of their cash sales, and confesses to his astonishment at the figures. The junior member [Kirby Sutton] of the firm he has known for years and recognizes in him the essential elements of success—energy, perseverance and good judgment." (*The State Chronicle*, Raleigh)

Kirby continued to partner with other merchants over the next few years while growing his reputation as a wholesale grocer and cotton buyer. By 1896, Kirby had established the K. E. Sutton and Company in La Grange.

[Caption to accompany photograph]

Kirby E. Sutton (1866-1930) at his store front in La Grange, circa late-1890s. Photograph from the Estelle Sutton Creech Collection.

