

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Playtime Places

Prior to machinery in the 1900s, farmers needed every available hand they could get, including children, to operate their working farms. For Bucklesberry residents, the relentless grind of seemingly unending work on the farm left little time for leisure. Still, they found time to play.

Several popular recreation spots included Aunt Ella's fishing hole, Charlie Sutton's swimming pool, Pine Bush Beach (sandbar), mouth of Bear Creek, Slick Rock, and the Hardy Bridge sandbar. Folks would gather at these playtime places to lounge, socialize, swim, and fish. They still exist today in Bucklesberry, although on private posted land.

Aunt Ella's fishing hole is a slough (marshy pool) whose waters are fed by nearby Neuse River. Located a short distance from the Pine Bush sandbar, Aunt Ella's is encircled by woods and situated about a half-mile from the Joel Elmore Cemetery off of Kennedy Home Road. Bucklesberry patriarch, Jack Randall Sutton, age 90, says the fishing hole was named after Ella Mae Rackley Elmore, wife of Jeremiah Onestrus Elmore, who owned the land generations ago. When Jack was a younger lad, Aunt Ella's was filled with sizeable Chinquapin perch and bream, and fishing there was good. Today, several large Cyprus trees with bulging roots are found in Aunt Ella's fishing hole, giving it an ancient look from yesteryear.

One current Bucklesberry resident recalls a time when the late Pauline Sutton and husband, Clellan Sutton were fishing at Aunt Ella's in the early-1960s. Clellan stepped away to explore, leaving Pauline to fish at the edge. The dirt underneath her feet suddenly caved, causing her to plunge into the water. Facing a potentially drowning situation, Pauline went under several times. She was able to dog-paddle to a tree root, grabbed it, and began screaming for Clellan, who quickly arrived, dived in and pulled her to safety. Known for a good laugh, Pauline jokingly told folks afterwards that she "saw Jesus" when she fell in the water!

Charlie Andrew Sutton's swimming pool is located about a quarter-mile in front of Jack Randall Sutton's and Sue Sutton's house off of Kennedy Home Road. Almost completely overgrown with tall weeds and vines, only one corner of the pool is visible today. Roy Clark, black man who worked on the farm, helped Charlie construct the pool in 1938. They used wood forms, and mixed and poured the concrete themselves.

Charlie decided to build the pool when he learned that his son, Wilton Sutton, age 12 at the time, almost drowned in the Neuse River on a swimming excursion with his younger brother, Jack, and local cousins, Hugh Edward Sutton, John Warters Sutton, Sr., and Walter Edward Sutton. Filled with cool water from a natural overflow, the swimming pool was open to local family and friends for many years.

Pine Bush sandbar, identified as “Pine Bush Beach, Moseley Hall” on Internet maps, is located on the Neuse River near Aunt Ella’s fishing hole. Neighborhood folks enjoyed the sandbar much like coastal area people enjoy Atlantic Beach.

In a 1995 interview with local genealogist, Glenn Fields, the late Clellan Sutton claimed there used to be a landing near the Pine Bush sandbar where river boats would deliver supplies to area farmers. Jack Sutton agreed, stating that his father, Charlie, used to get fertilizer from New Bern transported by steamboats that unloaded at this landing. On the actual landing site today, facing the scenic Neuse River, sits a beautiful, rustic log cabin home built by Tuffy and Troni Baker. Several old cable clamps from the landing were still visible before lost to erosion from Hurricane Matthew in 2016. The current Pine Bush Road in Bucklesberry got its name from this famous landing.

The mouth of Bear Creek that empties into the Neuse River was also a frequent spot for swimming and fishing. A large, old oak tree with a rope for swinging into the Neuse is now gone. About a half-century ago, Bucklesberry Boy Scout Troop 554 held activities and events at this site, according to Harvey Suggs and Dr. Jeff Sutton, both Eagle Scouts.

Just up the mouth of Bear Creek is Slick Rock. Appropriately named, a ridge of large rocks stretched across Bear Creek at Slick Rock in which some of the clearest, coolest water flowed. Local residents say there was a time when Bucklesberry boys would skinny-dip at Slick Rock. Of course, Bucklesberry girls were hesitant to visit Slick Rock, for obvious reasons.

The sandbar at Hardy Bridge was probably the most popular of the Bucklesberry recreation sites. Decades ago, and before Hardy Bridge was constructed in 1954, the sandbar was called Sutton Seine Beach. An 1866 hand-drawn map by William Arthur identified the sandbar as a fishery. Up until the 1960s, folks would congregate at the sandbar to visit, wade in the water, and fish, as it was easily accessible from the Hardy Bridge Road. Men used to rake the River with a fishing net (or seine), which yielded turtles, eels, snakes, and catfish that eventually made it to dinner tables.

Caption for accompanying photograph:

Hardy Bridge sandbar, Bucklesberry, called the Sutton Seine Beach in the late-1800s.

