

# Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

## S. I. Sutton (Part 1)

Samuel Ivey Sutton (1834–1904) was uniquely gifted, a true Renaissance man, defined as one “who has acquired profound knowledge or proficiency in more than one field.” (Dictionary.com). Known as Ivey or simply, S.I. (pronounced, “Sigh”), he lived most of his life in Bucklesberry. He was afforded no formal education that we know of, and few economic opportunities that might have caused his many talents to emerge. Yet his accomplishments were extraordinary.

With this article, we begin a series on the remarkable life of S.I. Sutton and his public service. From humble beginnings, he rose to prominent leadership that was widely recognized. Unfortunately, there is little information about his childhood.

The earliest known record of S.I. is found in the Hardy and Annie Hill Sutton family Bible. Hardy (1803–1861) and Annie (1807–1881) reared 14 children in the Bucklesberry community. Penned prominently at the top of a page in the back of their family Bible, and above the names and birth dates of their own children, was S.I.’s full name and birth date of November 8, 1834. Although not a biological child of Hardy and Annie, the placement of his name in the Bible suggested a special and personal relationship of some kind between Hardy and Annie and S.I., or possibly with other relatives of S.I.

His name memorialized in the family Bible, S.I. was not an adopted member of the Hardy and Annie Hill Sutton family, nor did he have a routine place at their dinner table. An analysis of the household headcounts provided in the 1840 and 1850 Censuses for Lenoir County indicate that S.I. did not reside with Hardy and Annie, at least when he was six years old (S.I.’s age in 1840) and at 16 years old (S.I.’s age in 1850). All children born to Hardy and Annie in these two time periods are accounted for in the Censuses, and there were no other household members listed who were of S.I.’s age.

We know one aspect of S.I.’s physical development, present at birth, that is noteworthy. Genealogist, Martha Mewborn Marble, has documented a communication between Pat Amour and Essie Simmons, who stated that S.I. was club footed, a form of physical disability. The severity of S.I.’s club foot is unknown. The adverse effects of any disability can range from mild to severe. That said, we do not know for certain the debilitating impact of S.I.’s club foot had on his life, specifically, his mobility and ability to move about. Since corrective surgery was not available in his day, S.I. may have had to seek accommodations for the duration of his life.

A current descendant of S.I. witnessed family discussions that included one of S.I.’s granddaughters, born in 1896, and before S.I.’s death date of 1904, who remembers that her grandfather walked with a limp. Whether this was due to S.I.’s club foot or from natural aging is

unknown. If S.I.'s club foot resulted in a significant impairment on his mobility, he may have required the use of a cane or walking stick at some point in his life.

Interestingly, an 1882 news piece written by S.I. himself, then-itemizer (or field reporter) for *The Daily Journal* of New Bern, acknowledges a walking stick he received as a gift. The entry was a gracious note of gratitude to *The Daily Journal* staff: "Your itemizer returns thanks for the beautiful present—a gold-headed walking stick received from C. C. Taylor, the JOURNAL's traveling agent on Saturday morning on which is inscribed 'Presented to S.I. Sutton by the New Berne JOURNAL.' It will be carefully preserved as a memorial of your kindness."

Gavels are often awarded ceremonially to individuals from organizations in recognition of their achievement, service, retirement, and so on. So are plaques. But rarely is a cane or walking stick presented to someone for recognition. Early U.S. Presidents received canes as gifts, and they would sport canes to embellish their attire. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who experienced paralysis due to polio, however, used a cane for support, not for fashion, and surely not for recognition. Whether *The Daily Journal* gave S.I. a walking stick to acknowledge his service as a community reporter, or for mobility support, or possibly for both, remains a mystery.

At this point, some readers may be questioning the thesis of this article. That is, how could a person with a club foot be a Renaissance man? Stay tuned. More about the life of S.I. Sutton will be shared in future articles.