

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Fourth Time's a Beauty

Third time's a charm. But fourth time's a beauty. So wrote *Forbes* magazine about Marubi, a cosmetics company whose application to trade on the stock exchange was finally approved on the fourth attempt in 2019.

'Fourth time's a beauty' could have described Bucklesberrian, Benjamin Franklin Sutton (1838-1897) and his four marriages. Not just the fourth, though. His first, second, and third times at wedlock were beauties as well. All four wives remained devotedly married to Benjamin. However, he outlived his first three wives: Henrietta Rouse (ca. 1846-1878); Laura Rouse (1858-1881); and Elsie Ann Herring (1853-1886). Fourth wife, Mary Francis (Fannie) Dixon (1864-1910) survived him and married a second husband, George Washington Wynne (1832-1910).

Benjamin's multiple marriages caught the attention of a traveling reporter for *The Sun* news outlet of New York in the early 1890s. The reporter was a guest of Benjamin and Mary Francis at their homeplace, formerly located on Hardy Bridge Road. Eventually published in 1910 and entitled, 'His Beloved Wives: Useful Tombstones in the Front Yard of a North Carolina Home,' the reporter's article included pseudonyms for Benjamin's wives:

"Ever hear of Bucklesberry?" said a man from North Carolina the other day. "Well, it is a district in Lenoir County about twenty miles from Goldsboro. Twenty years ago it used to abound in curious characters."

"Almost everybody in the neighborhood was named Sutton. At the time of which I speak about the most representative citizen of the community was Ben[jamin Franklin] Sutton. Ben had one of the nicest, neatest little one story houses you ever saw, and when one day I met him on the road and was invited to partake of his hospitality at midday dinner I accepted with alacrity."

"We entered the house from the rear and almost immediately sat down at a table that literally groaned under the weight of ham and sweet potatoes, collards, corn pone, turnips and huckleberry pie. Ben's hospitality made him see that I got away with the whole of an enormous second helping."

"I strolled out upon the front porch after the meal and to my horror there stood in the yard, just in front of the house, a row of four handsome tombstones, each with a grave attached. My host had lingered inside, so I went out and inspected the stones. One bore the inscription, 'To my beloved

wife, Annie.' The second was, 'To my beloved wife, Kate.' The third read, 'To my beloved wife, Maggie,' and the fourth, 'To my beloved wife, Jennie.'"

"Good heavens, have I struck a Bluebeard?' I exclaimed. Then I looked at the dates of decease. They were from two to five years apart. I turned around, and there was the present Mrs. Sutton [Mary Francis] looking at me with a smile on her face."

"Look pretty, don't they?' she said, 'You see, Ben likes to sit out here on the porch and look at the tombstones and tell me what a good wife Annie or Kate or Maggie or Jennie was to him. It doesn't hurt me, and he gets lots of fun out of it.'"

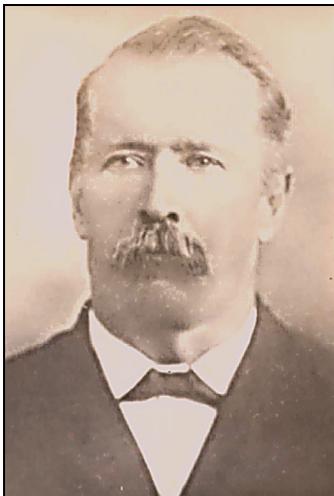
"But you can bet your sweet life there is no place there for me. In the first place I made him promise me before we were married that he wouldn't put me there if I died before him. In the second, I mean to outlive him. You see, Ben looks pretty husky, but he is nearly 60, and I am not yet 30."

"Oh, no, I don't mind the tombstones of the graves. For one thing, they keep [strangers] away from our place....The only thing I mind about it is that people try to tease me and tell me that Ben's already got my tombstone ready, lettered and all, except as to the date of my death, but I guess I'll fool them all."

"She did, too. Poor Ben was gathered away to her numerous predecessors within a year or two after that. I have never been down in that part of the State since then, so I don't know what she did with the tombstones." (*The Sun*, New York, June 5, 1910)

Mary Francis respected Benjamin's wishes and preserved the tombstones. By the end of her life, she had a change of heart and realized there was indeed a place for her at the family graveyard. Although she and second husband, George, relocated to Greensboro, NC in 1907, he transported her remains back to Bucklesberry when she died in 1910. She was promptly buried alongside Benjamin and the other three wives.

The Benjamin Franklin Sutton Cemetery is maintained to this day by the family.



[Caption to accompany photograph]

Benjamin Franklin Sutton (1838-1897) of Bucklesberry.
Undated photograph courtesy of a family descendant.