

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Lillian Sutton Perry (Part 5)

Formal education in the mid- to late-1800s was not available to all children in the rural South, including eastern North Carolina and greater Lenoir County. Many school-age students were laborers on family farms after the Civil War during the Reconstruction period. One-room schoolhouses were operating, but some children could not attend school regularly, or at all, because of perpetual farm work. Others simply had no access to a school.

With Bucklesberry associations through her paternal line, Lillian Sutton Perry (1864-1946) and brother, William Franklin Sutton (1862-1913) grew up on a farm in the Kinston Township area. Both attended school and were blessed with a quality education. In his 1879 will, their grandfather, William (Old Billy) Sutton (ca. 1796-1884) bequeathed sufficient funds to pay for their tuition and board.

Lillian and William were students at the highly regarded Kinston Collegiate Institute during their adolescent years. The Institute was a tuition-paying, boarding school that served students in Lenoir and surrounding counties from 1871 to 1882.

An online, archived copy of the Institute catalog described Lillian's and William's education programs and related costs. William was enrolled at the Institute in 1878-1879 and studied mathematics and intermediate English. Lillian was not on the school roster that year.

Both were enrolled at the Institute the next school year, 1879-1880 and joined a student body of 133 students. William continued his study of intermediate English as well as advanced English, but not mathematics. Lillian's plan of instruction included intermediate English, Latin, and music.

William's tuition totaled \$33.50, which included \$15.00 for the intermediate English course, \$18.00 for the advanced English course, and \$0.50 for incidentals. Lillian's tuition was considerably more, totaling \$60.50 that entailed \$15.00 for the intermediate English course, \$25.00 for the classical Latin course, \$20.00 for the music course, and \$0.50 for incidentals.

Board per student was \$10.00 per month, excluding lights and washing expenses. The Institute calendar for 1879-1880 indicated a nine-month school year from September 8 to June 9. The total board for William and Lillian, then, was \$180.00. Combined with tuition, the cost of their education for 1879-1880 was a hefty \$274.00. Far from pocket change, their school bill was equivalent to \$7,000.00 in today's economy.

The honor roll for the 1880 spring term recognized eleven students who met the challenging, threefold requirement of "five-sixths recitations perfect, no tardy or absence, and perfect deportment at school" (*Kinston Journal*, May 20, 1880). No slight on their character or abilities, neither Lillian nor William were included.

At the closing exercises of the school commencement, Lillian sang in a small chorus and was commended for her work in helping raise funds for the new school chapel constructed that year. Short on dramatic polish, her recitation received a generally good review:

1880, June 17: "No one could realize the reality of the representation of Miss Lillian Sutton in the 'Old Maids Views.' She read the recitation charmingly, but her eyes and smiles belied any old-maid-ism for her. Her voice was hardly strong enough for the large Hall, and indeed few of the young ladies could be heard distinctly in the rear of the room. It will doubtless be ceiled before next June and have raised seats for the audience." (*Kinston Journal*)

Lillian remained enrolled at the Institute the next school year. At the June 23, 1881 commencement, she delivered another recitation, 'The Squire's Pledge,' and performed an instrumental duet, 'Californienne Polka' with fellow student, Hattie Tull.