

Bucklesberry, Back in

Lillian Sutton Perry (Part 14)

The premature passing of Lillian Sutton Perry's (1864-1946) husband Daniel Elijah Perry (1857-1897) was not the only death she had to deal with in 1897. Her mother-in-law Susan L. Rhem Perry (1834-1897) died within nine months of Dan's homegoing:

1897, December 4: "Mrs. Susan Perry, wife of Mr. Eli Perry, died last Wednesday. She was about sixty years old, and was sick one week." (*The Weekly Journal*, New Bern)

Now matriarch of the family with five young children, Lillian was flung into the role of head of household. With the settlement of Dan's estate in July, 1897, Lillian immediately became the manager of investments and properties jointly held with her late husband.

But there were other properties she also had to superintend. Two weeks before her death, property owned by Susan Perry and her second husband, Eli Hamilton Elsworth Franklin (E. H. E. F.) Perry (1831-1912) was divided among Lillian and her children. Combined with land Lillian inherited from her grandfather, William (Old Billy) Sutton (ca. 1796-1884) in 1885, and property bequeathed from her late husband, Lillian found herself in the fiduciary capacity of overseeing multiple properties.

In addition to managing real estate, rearing children and homemaking, Lillian had to handle the difficult, but proper commemoration of her late husband by securing his gravestone. She did so by the first-year anniversary of his death:

1898, April 8: "Mr. T. R. Huffines, of Rocky Mount, has been here several days and will leave today. He has erected a monument over the grave of Mrs. Susan Perry, wife of Mr. E. H. E. F. Perry, in the lot at the cemetery. It is very neat, a rustic design similar to the one over the grave of Mr. D[aniel] E. Perry. Mr. Huffines has also erected a monument, of a rustic design, over the grave of Mr. Noah Sutton, on Mr. E[dward] L. Sutton's plantation. Mr. Noah Sutton was a brother of Mrs. Lillian Perry and Mr. E. L. Sutton." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

This report included an unintentional error. Noah Sutton (1838-1865) was indeed the brother of Edward L. Sutton, Sr. (1847-1908); however, he was not Lillian's brother. Rather, Noah was Lillian's biological father. Lillian's mother, Elizabeth (Bettie) Gray (1869-1938) was first married to Noah. Lillian and her brother, William (Will) Franklin Sutton, Sr. (1862-1913) were the result of that union. Upon Noah's untimely death from Civil War service, Bettie married Noah's brother, Edward, from which six children were born.

The extraordinary early career success of Lillian's late husband, Daniel E. Perry, could have been viewed by some as a 'hitching star' of sorts for Lillian. But time eventually proved that perhaps it was the other way around.

Despite the additional burden of managing family business after Dan's death, Lillian never forgot her most important role. An honorable woman, she remained a faithful homemaker and mother. Her dedication to Dan's memory and their children should rightly be viewed as a far greater hitching star for Dan. Lillian's unwavering love and devotion to family had more lasting value than the professional and political fame Dan had garnered during his lifetime.