

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Lillian Sutton Perry (Part 18)

A widow in her early thirties in 1897 with five small children, Lillian Sutton Perry (1864-1946) became head of household upon the death of her husband, Daniel Elijah Perry (1857-1897). Although she never married again, she demonstrated over time that caring for their children was the most important priority in her life.

Along with motherhood, Lillian was responsible for overseeing family business, including multiple farms. In addition, she managed other real property acquired with assets bequeathed from her husband's estate and that of Dan's mother, Susan Rhem Perry (1834-1897), and his stepfather, Eli Hamilton Elsworth Franklin (E. H. E. F.) Perry (1831-1912).

Lillian routinely rented rooms and houses that she owned, including the former Kinston Collegiate Institute building she purchased in 1900 that served as a boarding house. In 1903, she advertised rental property regularly:

1903, May 15: "Rooms for Rent.—Apply to Mrs. Lillian Perry." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

As a landlord, Lillian was concerned about her tenants' quality of life. In 1917, she reportedly advocated on their behalf for proper sewer service at the County Commissioners meeting:

1917, August 4: "In the matter of Mrs. L[illian] N. Perry relative to sanitary sewer in tenant houses, the same was referred to water and light commissioner to investigate." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

By 1914, parents in the greater Kinston and Lenoir County area expressed the need for a common playground area for children, beyond what was available at the smaller, less equipped local school playgrounds. The initiative to build an elaborate recreation site became an item of great interest on the Chamber of Commerce agenda. Public officials solicited proposals for property to purchase for the project. A civic-minded person, Lillian responded by offering to sell a tract of her land:

1914, September 19: "A considerable number of members of the Chamber of Commerce and other substantial citizens heard the report of the Chamber's committee on playgrounds Friday evening in the mayor's office at City Hall, and discussed proposed sites and ways and means for raising the purchase money. The committee states that options are had on eight acres for which Mrs. Lillian Perry wants \$30,000....[But] the meeting seemed to favor the purchasing of the

[Miss Tiffany] West property, and making a double playgrounds of them...on the west of the railroad for small children, and that on the east for athletics and sports. The idea predominant is for the parking of both places, with equipment for the amusement of the little folks and a baseball and football grounds, tennis courts and swimming pool for older children and adults..."
(The Daily Free Press, Kinston)

Managing real property owned by the family became demanding and complex for Lillian at times. She found herself in court in 1916 with the Norfolk Southern Railroad, who alleged she was squatting on part of their property. More in the next Bucklesberry article.