

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Country Crimes

Many honorable people of good character have grown up in Bucklesberry over the years. Not all who lived in this old farm community, however, were good scouts. Some struggled with misbehavior and, unfortunately, strayed outside the confines of the law.

Far from a high crime zone, Bucklesberry has seen its share of lawless characters who committed serious crimes, including murder, assault with a deadly weapon, and so on. The center of some of this criminal activity decades ago was none other than the Jenny Lind Store, a popular social spot. Between 1884 and 1915, newspapers as far away as Charlotte, New Bern, and Wilmington, along with neighboring, Kinston, published reports on acts of violence in Bucklesberry.

Locals want nothing more than for these shameful accounts simply to disappear from memory. That said, country crimes on the lighter side are the focus of this article, not major crimes that need to remain buried in Bucklesberry's past. Provided below are reprints of newspaper items about misdeeds that occurred a century or more ago, some with humorous undertones:

1875–September 20: “Strayed or Stolen! \$25 Reward! From my premises at Rockford, one dark bay mare MULE, about 3½ years old, of medium size. I will give twenty-five dollars reward for the delivery of said mule to me, at La Grange, N.C. Jno. W. (John William) Sutton.” (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

1880–November 18: “Mr. J. W. (John Willis) Sutton’s gin house, press, gin and some over three bales of cotton were burned at La Grange last Friday. Engine was saved. Insurance 555. Fire originated on second floor.” (*The Farmer and Mechanic*, Raleigh)

1882–November 22: “Thieves like a change of diet. The last raid in Bucklesberry was on Joe (Josiah) Sutton’s turkeys. Joe thought he ‘smelt a mouse,’ and was on the scout Saturday evening.” (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1882–December 7: “Another hog stolen last week, in this neighborhood, this time from Joe (Josiah) Sutton. Joe believes it to be the same thief who has been stealing from Thomas Sutton. The reckoning is ahead.” (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1882–December 7: “On Wednesday night, between 7 and 8 o’clock, the cotton house of Josiah Sutton, Jr., in Bucklesberry, was found to be on fire. The house contained over 20,000 pounds of seed cotton. Fortunately, the night was calm and by hard work, the house and most of the cotton was saved. Joe discovered tracks going to and from the house, which leads him to believe it the work of an incendiary.” (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1884–August 13: “A difficulty occurred in Bucklesberry last week between Jere (Jeremiah, Sr.) Sutton and Bryan Johnson in which Johnson was badly worsted. A judicious use of a hoe on the forehead felled Johnson, and in the fall his right leg was broken in two places. The difficulty occurred at Sutton’s house, the particulars of which I have not learned further that Johnson was pursuing Sutton with his knife when the blow was given. Johnson is said to be a dangerous man while Sutton is regarded as peaceable.” (*The Daily Journal, New Bern*)

1886–August 26: “Quite a sensation was caused, at La Grange on Tuesday, over the arrest of three...men for smoke-house robbing in Bucklesberry. They were bound over to answer the charge of burglary, [and] in default of bail were sent to jail. While in the lockup at La Grange, one of them, Simon Dawson, took strychnine and created a lively movement among doctors, stomach pumps, etc. Some say the taking of strychnine was a hoax.” (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

1903–June 2: “Mad dogs are very numerous in our neighborhood. Mr. Herman Sutton killed one recently, and Miss Bettie Sutton’s fine shepherd dog went mad and probably did some serious damage, as it bit Sylvester Wooten....We haven’t learned of further damage as yet. We hope no one else was bitten. The dog was killed.” (*The Daily Free Press, Kinston*)

1922–March 28: “Several raids were today reported to have been made in La Grange and Bucklesberry neighborhoods by La Grange policemen and prohibition enforcement officers. A 60-gallon plant was demolished in the vicinity of La Grange Sunday. At Bucklesberry, the raiders declared, the moonshiners had been warned and were on alert. Three hundred gallons of ‘beer’ were discovered there, however, and John Foss was arrested with two gallons of whiskey in his possession, according to the raiders. He was bound over to Federal Court at New Bern.” (*The Daily Free Press, Kinston*)

[Caption for accompanying photographs]



Jenny Lind Store circa 1940s (woman unidentified) versus how it looks today. It was the site of several murders in the late-1800s and early-1900s. Store is currently under restoration by Ray Foss, owner. Old photograph courtesy of Sandra Sutton Foss.