

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Alexander Richard Sutton (Part 5)

Typical workers change jobs every five to six years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). About five out of every one hundred (4.8%) hold multiple jobs.

These statistics would not have accurately represented workers who lived during the lifetime of Alexander Richard Sutton (1860-1928). In the rural farm community of Bucklesberry and greater La Grange where he lived, considerably fewer jobs were available. People kept a job much longer, many times never changing jobs. Moreover, holding multiple jobs back then was a rarity.

Alex's employment history, however, was exceptional. Public records indicate he had varied vocational interests. With the necessary financial wherewithal, he skillfully managed multiple lines of work over his career.

A fifth generation Bucklesberrian by lineage, the 1880 and 1900 Censuses indicate his principal occupation was farming. Although he continued to farm, Alex began operating a cotton gin with business associate John Daniel Walters (1858-1933) sometime in the early 1880s.

The gin experienced a fire in 1883. Subsequently, they sold the gin property in 1886 to Col. Adam Clark Davis, Jr. (1858-1952), headmaster of La Grange's Davis (Military) School.

Like Alex, John was also a farmer in the La Grange area. Industrious by nature, the two men renewed and expanded their business partnership in 1885 by purchasing another cotton gin along with a gristmill:

1885, April 14: "Capt. A. J[ames] McIntyre has sold his mill and gin property in town [La Grange] to J. D. Walters and Alex. Sutton for the sum of two thousand dollars. We learn that he contemplates a country life in the future." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

The cotton gin and gristmill were believed to have been located on the east side of Falling Creek. Available documents support this claim. A U.S. Department of Agriculture soil map dated 1900 has "Sutton's Grist Mill" plotted geographically on the corner of the current U.S. Highway 70 and Banks School Road near the present Trinity United Methodist Church.

The map shows Falling Creek with a significantly larger area of water than it has today. Because of its close proximity to Falling Creek, the gristmill would have been powered by swift flowing

and falling water. Other grist mills in Lenoir County such as the old Davis Mill in the Strabane vicinity were also water-powered.

The cotton gin was probably situated near the gristmill on the east side of Falling Creek but possibly closer to the railroad. In a published letter, the founding pastor of Trinity Church, Rev. William Walter Rose (1858-1913) referenced the gin. He reported, "In 1886, I commenced preaching in an old gin house near where the church is located..." (*Raleigh Christian Advocate*, August 22, 1888). The letter confirmed the original wood structure for Trinity Church was constructed in 1888.

More about the life of Alexander Richard Sutton will be shared in an upcoming Bucklesberry article.