

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Alexander Richard Sutton (Part 6)

From the pre-Revolutionary period through the mid-1900s, most residents in Bucklesberry and greater La Grange were farmers. So it was with Alexander Richard Sutton (1860-1928). What distinguished him, though, were his broad vocational interests and his ability to manage multiple jobs.

Alex continued the farming tradition of his ancestors throughout his life. But he also operated several cotton gins and grist mills for many years. In addition, he and others managed a tobacco warehouse at one time. Finally, he operated a general merchandise store and was an agent for the Mullet Line Railroad.

Alex's cotton gin operation, in particular, spanned more than twenty-five years. He owned and operated two gins, both with business associate John Daniel Walters (1858-1933). The first gin was purchased in the early 1880s. The property was sold in 1886 after an 1883 fire.

They bought a second gin in 1885 from Capt. A. James McIntyre (1831-1903) of La Grange. That gin was reportedly productive:

1889, September: "The first bale of cotton to arrive in this city [New Bern] came down on the train last night from La Grange. It was shipped by J. D. Walters." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

A fire temporarily interrupted gin operation in 1903. With funds from an insurance claim, Alex and John rebuilt the gin house and equipped it with modern, up-to-date machinery. But it took more than a half-year to resume operation:

1903, January 10: "The gin house of Alex Sutton was burned at 4 o'clock this morning [January 9]. No fire had been in the building for two days, and it seems that it was the work of an incendiary. Insurance \$300. The machinery had been rebuilt this season. A small quantity of lint cotton was burned." (*The News and Observer*, Raleigh)

1903, April 28: "Mr. Alex Sutton is hauling lumber preparatory to building a gin house to replace the one destroyed by fire in January. This will be equipped with all the modern conveniences for handling cotton." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

1903, August 5: "The cotton gin of Mr. Alex Sutton, which was burned last spring, has been rebuilt and furnished with new and improved machinery." (*The News and Observer*, Raleigh)

Yet another fire tragically occurred in 1907. Absent reports indicating they rebuilt it, Alex and John may have permanently suspended gin operation that year:

1907, November 10: "Mr. Alex Sutton's cotton gin was totally destroyed by fire yesterday afternoon. The fire was due either to criminal intent or carelessness of unknown parties, as the gin was not in operation at the time. Twenty-five or thirty bales of cotton, belonging to different parties, were badly damaged. This is Mr. Sutton's second loss of the kind in the last three or four years, and the machinery was practically new. There was no insurance." (*The News and Observer*, Raleigh)

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