

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Alexander Richard Sutton (Part 9)

In an 1810 letter, former Kinston Commissioner John Washington (1767-1837) reported that Lenoir County had "16 or 17 grist mills, most of which have saws attached to them, and five or six cotton gins that go by horses and perhaps some few by water." By the late 1800s and early 1900s when Alexander Richard Sutton (1860-1928) was in the milling business, there were probably more grist mills in the area.

With the population growth in Lenoir County during the decades after Washington's letter, the need for basic food staples like flour and corn meal produced by grist mills was greater than ever. Alex's work in milling, then, was necessary for the community.

One of two mills that he owned and operated was located about a mile and half south of the town of La Grange where Bear Creek straddles U.S. Highway 903. He purchased it in 1903 from Lucy Jane Lassiter Joyner (1828-1913). Although the mill was eventually associated with Alex's name, the Bear Creek mill had an established and rich history long before he took ownership of it.

The Lassiter family were the original owners and operators. The 1840 Census identified first owner Jesse Lassiter, Sr. (1800-1866) as a resident of Kinston Township. Sometime between 1840 and 1860, the Census year his residence was recorded in the Bear Creek area of Bucklesberry, Jesse began operating a grist mill. His son and second owner Stephen Lassiter (1832-1872) inherited the mill and continued running it.

Lassiter's Mill experienced a fire in late 1868, two years after Stephen gained ownership. Testimony in a court hearing the next year made a compelling case that the source of the fire was arson. The mill was eventually rebuilt. Upon Stephen's passing, the mill was acquired by his sister Lucy Jane Lassiter (1828-1913), which kept the mill in the family line.

Little was reported about the mill during Stephen's time of ownership. Within a few years after Lucy acquired it, the tragic death of a child occurred at the mill pond:

1874, February 12: "A very sad accident occurred at Lassiter's Mill, in Lenoir County, on Tuesday evening of last week. Mr. and Mrs. Isaiah Thomas had occasion to visit the mill late in the evening, and were accompanied by their little three-year old girl. The mother seated the child for a moment to assist Mr. Thomas in arranging some matter about the mill, and while so engaged the little girl escaped her attention and fell into the mill pond. The current was very strong at the time and the little one was quickly sucked through the gate. All efforts to rescue it

alive were fruitless, and not until the following morning was the corpse recovered." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Lucy married Moses Joyner (1824-1887). Lassiter's Mill then became known as Joyner's Mill. It continued to bear that name well into Alex's years of ownership.

Joyner's Mill was more than a grist mill. Powered by swift running water from Bear Creak, the nearby mill pond was a place of gatherings and events during the late 1800s.

More will be shared about Joyner's Mill in an upcoming Bucklesberry article.