

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Cotton Comeback (Part 2)

Cotton's comeback as the chief cash crop after the Civil War was never more evident than in Bucklesberry. Farmers saw great success in their cotton crops in the late-1800s and well into the early twentieth century.

Although tobacco rivaled cotton as the top crop in North Carolina by the end of the 1920s, cotton remained big for many years. One tradition that signaled the beginning of the cotton season was the race to see which farmer produced the first cotton blooms. Online news blogs are quick to report this news even today. Local newspapers covered this story in Bucklesberry back in the day:

1881, June 30: "Cotton blooms are reported for last week as follows: W. H. Hardee and Noah Rouse the 20th, Thos. [Thomas] Sutton and Mrs. Lou Lassiter 22nd. The hands on W. M. Nettles' farm claim to have seen blooms the week before so I learn. Tell Mr. Parker to look out next year, for our township has some wide awake and go-ahead farmers. The crops through the Bucklesberry section, as a general thing, were never more promising..." (*Kinston Journal*)

1882, July 4: "The first cotton bloom heard of in the Bucklesberry section, was on John A. Sutton's farm, June 27th. Thos. [Thomas] Sutton had one June 30th." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1903, June 30: "Mr. A. [Albert] L. [Lemuel] Sutton, of Bucklesberry, sent THE FREE PRESS the first full blown cotton blossom of the season, taken from his field June 27th." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

1914, June 20: "Mr. Kirby E. Sutton, of La Grange, who, in addition to being one of the leading traveling salesmen on the road, stands at the front of the progressive farmers of the county, reports cotton blossoms on his splendid farm in the far-famed Bucklesberry section of the county on the 17th of June. Mr. Sutton has not yet heard from his friend and fellow knight of the grip, Mr. Thomas Harvey, of Kinston, who also owns a fine farm in Falling Creek township. It has not yet been definitely determined whether the cotton plant comes to maturity either in Moseley Hall or Falling Creek, although from the evidence before us it would seem that Moseley Hall at present may claim primacy." (*The Kinston Free Press*)

Like professionals in the corporate world, farmers have a competitive spirit when it comes to the quality of their crops. At the old country stores, they would gather to talk about the tallest corn, the largest tobacco leaves, and so on. In Bucklesberry, growing cotton could be pleasant sport. Outdoing another farmer or inviting a challenge was gameful fun:

1880, November 25: “Jerry [Jeremiah, Sr.] Sutton, Esq., was in town on Monday and tells it is a true tale about his having a stalk of cotton from last year’s growth that has on it 81 bolls of cotton—that he has banked up dirt well around its roots to try to keep it alive through another winter. He says Joe [Josiah, Jr.] Sutton’s reward of 50 cents (made in the JOURNAL a few weeks ago) is too small, that if he will put up a bag of cotton the 80-boll stalk will be forthcoming.” (*Kinston Journal*)

A third and final article to follow on the cotton comeback of yesteryear will discuss crop yields, low prices in cotton sales, and the uncertainty of planting cotton among Bucklesberry farmers.