

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Jeremiah Sutton, Sr. (Part 4)

Jeremiah Sutton, Sr. (1836-1900), known as Jerry, was an accomplished farmer who had business interests beyond tilling the land. He operated a fishing establishment on the Neuse River near Pine Bush landing with Bucklesberry neighbor, Dempsey Wood, Jr. (1847-1921). In his later years, he looked into producing bulk sausage.

Other than farming, making apple brandy may have been the enterprise for which Jerry was most widely known. He sold it locally and delivered it in barrels, according to news reports:

1879, September 4: "We learn that our old neighbor Jerry Sutton brought a barrel of brandy to Kinston and also brought one of his neighbors along for company: after disposing of his brandy, friend Sutton drove off home, forgetting his companion, who had to foot it home, about ten miles. He must have thought that he had brought two barrels of brandy down, instead of one barrel and a man. We don't know but that Kinston can furnish one or two men about equal to a barrel of brandy, or cider." (*Kinston Journal*)

Folks were fond of Jerry's liquor. Not surprisingly, they coined a cute label for his choice apple brandy, which apparently served more than one purpose, so to speak:

1884, January 24: "W[iley] W. Rouse [Jr.] says he has a fine lot of Jerry Sutton's best apple brandy. 'Jerry's best' is said to be very popular with those who never drink, but just want a little for cologne and medicine." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Attorney and author, Council Simmons Wooten (1840-1930) was an admirer of Bucklesberry and of Jerry's apple brandy. In an 1886 news article titled, *Bucklesberry: Some Interesting Notes from Lenoir County*, Mr. Wooten described an occasion when he was a guest in Jerry's home and savored some of Jerry's best:

1886, August 2: "I must now pay my respects to my good friend, Jeremiah Sutton, for I can't forget him when he treated me so royally when there. Recently at his request I went to his home to do some legal business for him. Before dinner he brought out some apple brandy three years old, made from the little wild black grape, which, by-the-way, makes the best wine in the world. It was made by taking three gallons of the grape juice and one gallon of brandy."

"Our older people will recollect that in the old times, this was the only way of making wine. As I gave my little girl some it was a real treat to see her sip it and smack her lips with all the airs of a

Connoisseur, and say “Pap, ain’t it good?” I certainly agreed with her. I was puzzled to tell which was best, for they were both so good that I would sip first one and then the other.”

“Now my prohibition friends must not censure me for giving the little girl some wine and toddy, for bless the dear little creature, I never saw one that did not love it and smack her lips and say it was good. It is cruel, puritanical and hard hearted not to let the little ones have some, when we grown people will step in at the back door and get behind screens to take a drink. Horace may sing of the good old mellow wines of Greece and Rome, but I will sing of the Bucklesberry wines made by Jeremiah Sutton for that is good enough for me.” (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Jerry's beverage operation was no small affair. To produce barrels of apple brandy, he needed more than a typical boiler pot, the kitchen wood stove and a bushel basket of apples from a local fruit stand. His business required large equipment and lots of fruit trees.

And that's exactly what he had. Jerry's grandson and current Bucklesberry resident, Jack Randall Sutton, remembers from his youth the twenty-one foot high gin screw that his grandfather used to press apples gathered from the three-acre orchard of fruit trees. Both were situated directly across Kennedy Home Road from Jack's and wife, Sue Sutton's residence. The still was in a contained area just behind the homeplace house that is no longer standing.

Jerry's distillery was not illegal. Jack says that his father, Charlie Andrew Sutton (1883-1945) relayed to him that Jerry had a federal license for making alcohol. North Carolina eventually passed a prohibition law in 1909, almost a decade after Jerry's death.