

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Kirby E. Sutton (Part 2)

Education was a priority in the Josiah, Jr. (1835-1902) and Martha (Patsy) Hill Sutton (1831-1882) family. Of their four children, Kirby Edward Sutton (1866-1930) proved to be a star pupil and was one of the first Bucklesberrians to attend college in the late nineteenth-century.

The earliest known record of Kirby's grade school education is in 1881 when he was fifteen years of age and a student at the La Grange Academy. A private, tuition-paying school, the Academy offered a secondary curriculum of business and college preparation. Taught by Professor Joseph E. Kinsey, Kirby showed talent in oratory and was selected to deliver a recitation and a dialogue with other students at the closing school exercises in June.

He was an honor student at the Academy during the fall and spring terms the next school year in 1881-1882. Tapped as a marshal for his academic achievement at the May commencement exercises, Kirby also delivered an excellent speech, "Live for Something," according to *The Daily Journal*, New Bern.

Still a student at the Academy in 1882-1883, seventeen-year-old Kirby continued to perform at the top of his class academically and earned spots on honor rolls in English, advanced Latin, and history. Among enrolled students from four counties, Kirby was chosen again as one of two marshals representing Lenoir County at the May commencement exercises.

In the 1883-1884 school year, Kirby was enrolled at the La Grange Collegiate Institute (LCI), formerly located in the Institute community of La Grange. Offering a program that prepared students for "Colleges and the University [with] Modern Languages a Specialty" (*Goldsboro Messenger*, September 27, 1886), the LCI allowed Kirby to further excel academically. He made the honor roll in Greek during the fall term that year.

Kirby showed a growing knack for rhetoric in a debate at the LCI Christmas exercises that was reported by a local news outlet:

1883, December 31: "Messrs. H. F. Murphy and E. C. King defended the allied powers for banishing Napoleon to St. Helena. Messrs. J. R. Tingle and K[irby]. E. Sutton supported the cause of Napoleon. The debate was spirited and highly interesting, showing both originality and research. The young men have evidently profited by the advantages offered in the Institute library..." (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

In addition to delivering a declamation, "The South Loyal to her Duties," Kirby again participated in a debate at the annual LCI commencement exercises. Bucklesberrian and La Grange townsman, Samuel Ivey Sutton (1834-1904) reported on the event:

1884, June 1: "The Lee Society then read for debate. Resolved, That there be a national aid for education. Messrs. K[irby]. E. Sutton, Finley Murphy, affirmative; Eaton King and J. R. Tingle, negative. The matter was well discussed on both sides, and the speeches showed that thought and research had been employed....A vote of the audience decided the question in the negative..." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern).

In the fall of 1885, Kirby was a student at the University of North Carolina (UNC) Chapel Hill. But by the spring term of 1886, he and fellow student, A. S. Wooten had transferred to Eastman Business College in Ploughkeepsie, New York.

With a year of college under his belt and a keen mind for business, Kirby accepted a position with the newly-established Wooten and Wooten Company, La Grange in the fall of 1886. There is no available evidence that Kirby ever completed a college degree. Nonetheless, he left a legacy of academic excellence and was among the first Bucklesberrians to attend college.