

# Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

## Kirby E. Sutton (Part 5)

One of the most prominent farmers in early twentieth century Bucklesberry, Kirby Edward Sutton (1866-1930) spent much of his adult life advancing his career in the mercantile trade, not agriculture.

After a term of study at Eastman Business College in Ploughkeepsie, NY in the spring of 1886, Kirby accepted his first job with the Wooten and Wooten firm in La Grange, which was probably the Shade Wooten and Brother general store and grocery that was operating in La Grange by the mid-1890s.

Over the next ten years, Kirby gained experience in the mercantile business by partnering with several local merchants. In 1895, he established the K. E. Sutton and Company general store in La Grange, named in the 1896 edition of *Branson's Business Directory* for Lenoir County. But by the spring of 1896, Kirby's business career took him out-of-state:

1896, May 21: "Mr. K. E. Sutton has accepted a position on the road with W. T. Beidle & Co., of Baltimore." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

An in-depth search could not identify a company in Baltimore, MD by the name, W. T. Beidle, or any company with the Beidle name in business during this time period, which suggests a journalistic mistake. Another company, however, W. T. Bridle, spelled virtually the same, was located in Rochester, NY. Mr. Bridle was an auctioneer and a merchant. His store specialized in clothing and other department store merchandise of that time period. Perhaps this was the company with whom Kirby was actually employed in 1896.

Over the next several years, Kirby commuted back-and-forth from Bucklesberry to Baltimore, MD and beyond to conduct business:

1899, November 21: "Mess. Thos. Harvey and K. E. Sutton have returned from the Philadelphia export exposition." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

1899, December 29: "Mess. K. E. Sutton and W. H. Taylor spent the holidays here [La Grange]. Mr. Sutton left today, to resume his spring trip, in the snow." (*The Daily Free Press*)

1900, March 13: "Mr. K. E. Sutton will leave today for Baltimore to wait on his trade in the city." (*The Daily Free Press*)

1900, March 9: "Mr. K. E. Sutton went to Tarboro today. Kirby is having a large business in his line (clothing) this season." (*The Daily Free Press*)

In the 1900 Census for Lenoir County, Kirby's formal occupation was listed as "drummer," a working title for commercial travelers or traveling sales representatives.

By 1908, Kirby's business success catapulted him to employment with L. Grief and Brothers, Inc. in Baltimore. Recognized for its historic role in the needle trade and manufacturing of men's apparel, in particular, L. Grief and Bros. was the second largest men's clothing company in the nation for a time. The factory operated out of a three-story brick and steel building that occupied an entire city block. It is now recognized by the National Register of Historic Places.

In the 1910 Census, Kirby's occupation continued to be listed as a "commercial traveler; clothing house." Available records indicate, though, that his business career may have peaked in the mid- to late-1910s. By 1920, the Census listed Kirby's primary occupation as farmer.