

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Kirby E. Sutton (Part 7)

By the turn of the twentieth century, Kirby Edward Sutton (1866-1930) had established himself as an accomplished merchant and traveling salesman. A sixth generation descendent from the farm community of Bucklesberry, Kirby could not escape his agricultural roots, however. He eventually accepted the mantle of his forefathers and became a highly successful farmer.

Although his business career continued well into the 1920s, Kirby began farming in earnest by the mid-1910s and amassed one of the largest farms in Lenoir County at the time. Situated on the west side of the current Jenny Lind Road, stretching farther westward beyond Bear Creek, and spanning northward to U.S. Highway 70, Kirby's farm was well equipped and had quality crop land:

1919, February 14: "The Kirby Sutton Farm....Splendid top soil with a good clay sub-soil that will produce especially good crops of tobacco, cotton, corn, in fact all crops grown in this section. This property is practically level and is well drained. One good twelve room house, one two story house, [many] tenant houses, all of which are in good condition, with all the necessary barns, stables, shelters, etc. Several tobacco barns, four new pack houses, one cotton gin. This farm is well watered with good water, such as over flow wells and artesian wells....one of the best farms in Lenoir County." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Kirby's farm drew the attention of inquiring minds from afar. James O. Guthrie of Raleigh, then-contributor to newspapers around the State, visited Kirby's farm in 1918, and wrote about his first-hand observations:

1918, June 30: "I have just traversed several of the eastern counties and been beholding the abundant crops that are in process of production....The finest farm we saw was that of Kirby Sutton of La Grange. Mr. Sutton is one of those great big-hearted, brainy and accommodating men who has nothing too good for his friends or his country. He has local, State, and national pride as evidenced by his acts. He has done as much to build up the business section of this town as any man in it. He buys as many war savings stamps and Liberty bonds as any man in this section of the State, and when it comes to farming he is second to none as the sequel will show." (*The Wilmington Morning Star*)

Continuing, Mr. Guthrie wrote: "He has 1,200 acres of land or more, in cultivation as follows: 500 acres of it in corn; 500 acres in cotton; 175 acres in tobacco; and about 40 acres in Irish potatoes. His usual crop is about 400 bales of cotton, 3,000 barrels of corn, and his tobacco last

year paid about \$30,000. He has good houses for his tenants—about 40 houses—of whom there are something over 200 [tenants]; good room for his stock, which is not only well housed but well fed also. There are 20 artesian wells on this farm. His crops look so good, that I said..., 'Do you reckon the kaiser knows what he is up against?'" (*The Wilmington Morning Star*)

Kirby viewed farming as a science. On one occasion, he advised area farmers to consider planting field peas to maximize meat production and to strengthen the soil:

1918, May 2: "A farmer cannot plant anything on his farm more valuable than field peas. One bushel of peas sowed on one acre of corn land the last plowing is worth \$10 to that acre the coming year for fertilizer. Any farmer who uses field peas liberally will have a rich farm, as nothing so much improves the soil as pea vines. The high prices of hay will compel farmers to raise their hay at home, and there is no better feed for horses than pea vine hay. Raise plenty of peas and you will raise plenty of meat, as peas are fine feed in the fall of the year for your hogs...." (*The Daily Free Press*)