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Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Social Scuffle: Easter 1881

The twenty-first century world is saturated with social media. Smart phones make it easy to communicate savory, sometimes tasteless, information. The possibilities for idle talk and blather, of course, are endless. Back in the day, aside from mail and the telegraph, social news was typically disseminated through newspapers.

Bucklesberrian, Samuel Ivey (S. I.) Sutton (1834-1904), was a gifted news reporter for several local news outlets in the 1880s. Referred to as an *itemizer*, S. I. was also a farmer, educator, postmaster, Justice of the Peace, politician, townsman, and railroad agent.

During Easter week of 1881, S. I. found himself in a social news scuffle over an entry he wrote for the *La Grange Items* section of a local newspaper:

1881, March 24: "A piece of woodland was to be burned on Monday evening in which was secreted, (so says Old Man John), 2000 rabbits. Several of the sportsmen of town [La Grange] left fully equipped, some with guns, others with bottles, etc, for the fray. Not a hare was seen, and they returned wiser if not better men." (*Kinston Journal*)

Published the next month by another news source, S. I.'s news piece drew an immediate, sharp response from unnamed critic, Rabbit Hunter:

1881, April 21: "Several weeks ago there appeared an article in the *Kinston Journal* in regard to the rabbit hunters of La Grange. One of the hunters replied to the article and the Editor of the *Journal* promised to publish it but failed to do so."

"I will give the writer of the 'LaGrange Items' a wee bit of advice, viz: 'Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones,'....The writer of the article alluded to stated that we started out on the hunt fully armed and equipped with guns, bottles, etc If there were any "bottles, etc.," along I did not see them though I think a little of the ardent would have been quite refreshing to the inner man after our hot and sultry walk over the burnt woods; in fact, it would have been as refreshing as a shower of rain would have been to the Myrtle and the Ivey that was fired by the Woods in the Bucklesberry section some years ago—though it is said to have taken quite a shower of water to get the Sut-on the Ivey [pun] off after the Woods fired."

"I think the writer of the article referred will have quite an arduous undertaking to keep even with the La Grange sportsmen, for they are as competent to play jokes, kill rabbits, and shoot on the run, as the Bucklesberry sportsmen."

"This voluminous writer for the *Journal* wields a mighty pen, criticizes his neighbors and sets himself up as a public Censor....The Bucklesberry "Judge"...is rumored...to be seen almost daily perambulating the streets of La Grange armed and equipped, not with 'guns, bottles, etc,' but with a little box similar to that used by the boot-blacks of our cities....I suppose the box is his insignia of office. The ancient Romans never wore the Toga with an air of more importance than that with which the Judge 'totes his box'..."

"To see him strutting along after having one of his magnificent articles published in the *Journal*, one would think he felt himself of more importance than did Julius Caesar when he wrote his famous letter to the Roman Senate—'*Yeni, Vidi, Vici.*' I hope that my friend, the writer of the 'La Grange Items' may retire from his *journalistic* career a *wiser* and *better* man. Rabbit Hunter" (*Goldsboro Messenger*)

Whether S. I. Sutton and Rabbit Hunter had a difference of opinion or a disagreement of facts is unclear. Readers at the time may have perceived it as a journalist dispute, possibly banter, or maybe just a good-hearted scuffle. Nonetheless, the matter apparently faded away, like some of the stuff on social media today. Enter Snapchat®.