

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Thanksgiving 1883

Recognized annually on the fourth Thursday in November, Congress established Thanksgiving as a federal holiday in 1941. In today's society, it can be an elaborate, even protracted celebration. When combined with time off from work, the Thanksgiving holiday can morph into a vacation for some. Factor in hype and commercialism, and the original purpose of Thanksgiving has the potential to be completely compromised.

In nineteenth century America, Thanksgiving was generally a one-day event recognized by Presidential proclamation. All work ceased for the day. Folks converged in houses of worship to thank God for His manifold blessings, and the traditional turkey meal followed. Although it was a much simpler time in history, Thanksgiving back then did not have the hoopla that it has today.

Journalist, Samuel Ivey (S. I.) Sutton (1834-1904) wrote about happenings in his native community of Bucklesberry and greater La Grange in the 1880s. Reprinted here, the first of three reports posted during the two-week period around Thanksgiving Day, 1883 (November 29) focused on news and concerns of the day with no reference at all to Thanksgiving:

1883, November 21: "Cotton sold in this market last Saturday at 9 1/2 for the best....Joe Williams...lost a child last Saturday night. It was buried on Sunday. Taylor, Britt & Co. have opened a store at the stand purchased by them from E[dwards] & M[urchison]....Major Davis [of the Davis Military Academy] has organized a Sunday School at barracks, exclusively for the cadets. This made the number at the Methodist Sunday School quite small last Sunday....Shade Wooten, of the firm of J[ames] S[terling] Wooten & Bro., while at his farm in Greene County last Friday, accidentally fell on his gin and had his left arm entirely out off, just below the elbow. This is the second time Mr. Wooten has been seriously cut in a gin. His condition at last accounts was easy. Someone took James Fields' mare from his lot last Tuesday night. The mare returned Wednesday morning seriously damaged from overriding the night before. Mr. Fields claims to know the guilty one, and brought an action, which resulted in binding Andrew Rouse to next Superior Court. John Creech, near Lenoir Institute, had some houses burned last Sunday. The houses were occupied by Henry Locus, who with his wife, had gone to church, leaving two small children alone, and it is supposed that the fire occurred by their playing in it. Locus' loss was about 1800 pounds of seed cotton, all his corn and meat, household and kitchen furniture, and one of the children came near being burned to death. A few days ago an old resident who had been absent for some time returned to this village [La Grange]....A place of seclusion, the Baptist cemetery, was sought, and the body was laid at full length in the ground. John Rouse, who believes in preparing in life for death, came alone and seeing the situation dug his grave and

went for assistance to bury him, but on his return found that the body had escaped. This is the first record of resurrection before burial. The present outlook for farmers indicates that next year will be one of the hardest for many. The short cotton crop, the low price received and the heretofore behind condition of many is bound to bring about this result. For this the farmers themselves are to a very great extent responsible. A large number undertake...what they are unable to perform...to cultivate a farm without means. The first thing necessary with these is to mortgage for supplies, manures, etc. The next thing is (as they think) to plant cotton to meet their obligations, to the neglect of raising supplies. The crop of cotton is exhausted and many times the supply and manure bill is not paid, no supplies have been made, and the 'last state of that man is worse than the first.' Learn a lesson, or stern necessity will teach you. Don't attempt to cultivate without means, give no mortgage, and raise your supplies. Unless this, or some feasible plan is adopted by this important class of citizens, bankruptcy and ruin is bound to follow, which will extend to every branch of industry. (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

The other two reports written by S. I. Sutton will be presented in the next Bucklesberry article.