

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Lillian Sutton Perry (Part 4)

Many children who lived in nineteenth century rural America were laborers on farms. Few had the privilege of attending school. The South, in particular, lagged behind other regions of the country in education. Steven Bstrup (1998) described the uneven access to schools in the 1800s:

"In New England...country schools became the rule rather than the exception by 1840 as parents began to realize that the changing nature of the economy demanded that their children acquire new skills and knowledge. In the rapidly growing Western states simple one-room schools appeared and attendance became common by 1850. In the most rural region of the country, the South, schools developed far more slowly. Schooling remained the expectation for the children of wealthy plantation owners, but poorer Southerners rarely experienced any sort of formal education. And African American children, whether free or enslaved, had even fewer opportunities for structured learning." (*American Eras 1815-1850*, pp. 151-152)

The 1860 Census named Rev. Louis (Lewis) Barkley Foss (1834-1908) as a school teacher in the Bear Creek area of Moseley Hall (La Grange), suggesting at least one school was operating in the Bucklesberry community prior to the Civil War. Soon after the War ended, efforts were made by Lenoir County families to make formal education more available to their children. Using a newspaper ad, Bucklesberrian, James Wood (1815-1875) led an effort to recruit a teacher for a local school:

1866, December 22: "Male Teacher Wanted. A single man thoroughly competent to teach the Latin and English Languages, and who can furnish satisfactory testimonials as to character, and qualification, can get a school in a good neighborhood by early application to the undersigned. A maimed Confederate officer or soldier would not be objected to, provided he can furnish the required testimonials. Address, James Wood, Mosely [sic.] Hall, Lenoir Co., N.C. or Thomas J. Kennedy, or James Wartens, Kinston, N.C." (*The Raleigh Sentinel*)

Reared on a farm in the Kinston area of Lenoir County, Lillian Sutton Perry (1864-1946) and her brother, William Franklin Sutton (1862-1913) were afforded an education. The 1870 Census indicated that William, eight years of age, was enrolled in school that year. Lillian, two years younger, was not yet school-age. By the writing of their grandfather, William (Old Billy) Sutton's (ca. 1796-1884) will in 1879, both Lillian and William were attending a boarding school:

"Item 4th. I give and devise to my Grandchildren Willie F. Sutton and Lillia[n] R. Sutton children of my dec'd son Noah H. Sutton the sum of One hundred and fifty dollars each upon the

following conditions that they are not to charge any rents from their Mother's, Bettie Sutton, land or their own land until they arrive to the age of twenty one years and in the event they do make any charge for said rents the hundred and fifty dollars each is to be null and void as their Board and Tuition will over balance the said rents." (*USGenWeb Archives*, Lenoir County, NC)

Old Billy's decision to bequeath funds for the education of his grandchildren was an unusual provision for typical wills of that time. It signaled his belief in the importance of education and his commitment to ensure that his grandchildren would continue to be properly educated. The condition that Lillian and William could not receive education funds and rent from their land simultaneously was probably intended to remove the temptation that excess money might have caused in deterring them from school.