

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Settler John Sutton

One of the oldest communities in Lenoir County, NC, Bucklesberry Pocosin was formerly part of old Dobbs County during eighteenth century Colonial America. Largely unsettled swamp land prior to the Revolutionary War, the nutrient-rich soil of Bucklesberry today produces some of the finest crops in the Southeast.

Located five miles south of the town of La Grange and nestled on the north side of the Neuse River, Bucklesberry was on the map long before La Grange. Incorporated in 1860, La Grange was an outgrowth of Moseley Hall township, settled soon after the War ended in 1783.

Among Bucklesberry's first settlers was John Sutton (ca. 1730-bef. 1773). Several documents in the Clellan Sutton Collection about Bucklesberry and its people include John's name or can be attributed to him. The earliest record is dated 1748. This impressive album of more than 320 records is the largest of its kind that speaks to the ancestry and origins of the Suttons and other families from Bucklesberry. Significantly, no other available pre-Revolutionary War documents pertaining to old Dobbs County and contemporary with the Clellan Sutton Collection reference the Sutton surname, thereby affirming John as the first known Sutton to arrive in the Bucklesberry Pocosin.

The late Martha Mewborn Marble (1944-2019)—genealogist, researcher, historian, and Bucklesberry Sutton descendant—believed John was born about 1730 and died before 1773. His whereabouts prior to arrival in Bucklesberry have been a mystery for generations. Speculations have ranged from New Jersey to New York, and from Virginia to northeastern North Carolina. Circumstantial evidence, including a will, a deed, and a bride, however, strongly suggests that John migrated to Bucklesberry from Bertie County, NC around 1750.

The will of Thomas Sutton, Sr. (1699-1750) of Bertie County, a province of Great Britain at the time, points to northeastern North Carolina as John's origins. Proved March 2, 1750, the will names John Sutton, believed to be one of Thomas, Sr.'s six sons. Married three times, he sired eleven children with his first two wives, Elizabeth Luerton Sutton (1705-1730) and Judith Hardison Sutton (1713-1748).

Thomas, Sr. bequeathed 150 to 200 acres of plantation land to each of his sons, except John. Oddly, although John received no land, he was not totally excluded from an inheritance. John was given one slave named Andrew, sixteen head of cattle, and house wares from his parents' estate.

Why Thomas, Sr. withheld a share of land from his son John is unknown for certain. One theory is he rationalized that John did not need anymore land. Per a December 22, 1745 deed, John had received 100 acres from the estate of this Aunt Mary Jones, sister of his mother Elizabeth. Thomas, Sr. prepared his will just a few years later in 1750 and would have been fully aware that John already had an inheritance of land.

This theory, however, cannot be reasonably supported, because John's brother Thomas, Jr. similarly received 180 acres of land from Aunt Mary's estate. Yet he inherited land from his father. Further, Aunt Mary awarded all of her cattle to John's brother George. Like Thomas, Jr., George also inherited land from his father.

Other theories that could explain why John did not receive land from his father will be shared in the next Bucklesberry article.