

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Settler John Sutton (Part 16)

After leaving his homeland of coastal Bertie County, NC, settler John Sutton arrived in Bucklesberry Pocosin by 1750. At the time, Bucklesberry was unsettled swamp land situated on the north side of the Neuse River, today a mere five miles from La Grange. Not yet on the map, La Grange was first established as Moseley Hall in the late 1700s and still more than a half-century away from incorporation as a town.

Bucklesberry was part of the 'backcountry' of North Carolina, then one of the thirteen British colonies. Described by historian-author Lindley S. Butler, PhD,

"'Backcountry' was the term used during the early settlement and colonial periods for the vast interior of North Carolina, located away from the coastline and including both the modern day Piedmont and Mountain regions. The backcountry was first explored by John Lederer [German physician] in 1670 and was penetrated gradually by Virginia Indian traders. Not until the mid-eighteenth century did large numbers of Scotch-Irish and Germans begin to spread across the region, following the 'Great Wagon Road' from Pennsylvania down through the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The interior population rapidly swelled to become 40 percent of the colony's total..." (ncpedia.org)

Creston S. Long, III, PhD researched backcountry extensively in his 2002 doctoral dissertation titled, 'Southern Routes: Family Migration and the Eighteenth-Century South Backcountry.' He concluded that colonists were motivated to move inland for various reasons:

"For those who sought to improve their situations...or to join family in other backcountry areas," wrote Dr. Long, "heading south a hundred or so miles seemed to be a manageable risk to take..." (p. 137). Interestingly, the distance between Bertie County where John Sutton was reared to Bucklesberry of current Lenoir County where he migrated is about one hundred miles.

Associated with a better life, Dr. Long explained that an abundance of land was the major attraction of the backcountry. Further,

"The North Carolina backcountry in the 1740s and 1750s provided migrants and recent settlers limited opportunities, but economic conditions there rapidly evolved in subsequent decades. The economy of backcountry North Carolina developed along several lines. While farmers constituted the greatest part of the population of Rowan and Anson counties, a large number of more specialized tradespeople and artisans quickly populated the regions. At first farmers

participated mostly in subsistence agriculture; but because they were unable to produce all that was necessary to live from their own efforts, they quickly sought to establish trading ties beyond their localities. By the mid-eighteenth century, a handful of roads linked the growing western settlements on the Yadkin River with the trading towns in the central portion of the colony, which in turn connected to the coastal trade centers in North Carolina....These roads were essential to the growing mercantile trade within the backcountry which increasingly enhanced the number opportunities for artisans, small merchants, and farmers." (pp. 137-138)

More on the backcountry of North Carolina that John Sutton helped to settle will be shared in the next Bucklesberry article.