

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Settler John Sutton (Part 17)

Colonists who migrated inland from coastal North Carolina during the 1700s sometimes followed family and friends, all of whom were looking to improve their lives. For others, acquisition of land explained their exodus from the settled counties in the northeast part of the State into the unsettled backcountry.

This was likely the primary motive of John Sutton (ca. 1730-bef. 1773) who migrated to the Bucklesberry Pocosin by 1750. He had reason to leave his homeland of Bertie County, NC. Each of his four brothers inherited family land from their father Thomas Sutton Sr. (1699-1750). For reasons unknown, Thomas withheld a share of land from his son John. Within a matter of weeks after his father's will was proved in March 1750, John sold the 100 acres of land he inherited from his Aunt Mary Jones, all that he owned there.

An abundance of land awaited John upon his arrival in Bucklesberry, then part of the backcountry of Johnston County which had been formed from Craven County in 1746. The eastern section of Johnston County where Bucklesberry was located became Dobbs County in 1758, from which Lenoir County was later established.

The backcountry of eighteenth century North Carolina was researched by Dr. Creston S. Long, III, PhD in his 2002 doctoral dissertation. He described it as expansive and appealing to colonists willing to accept the challenges and risks of settling unknown territory:

"The widespread belief that it was easy to acquire land in North Carolina and the growing opportunities in the backcountry made the area attractive to many colonial settlers. Reports throughout the colonies suggested the great magnitude of the settlers...were pouring into the backcountry of North Carolina throughout the 1750s and 1760s...." (p. 138)

"The opportunity to acquire land in the North Carolina backcountry was greater than virtually anywhere else in the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. Between the late 1740s and the early 1760s, migrants entered the western portion of the colony and purchased large tracts for very little money. Unpatented land in the southern portion of the backcountry, the area comprising Anson, Cumberland, Johnston, and later Mecklenburg counties, remained under the administration of the English crown through the royal government of the colony. There recently-arrived immigrants from Britain or from elsewhere in the colonies could achieve a title to 640 acres of land—one square mile—for about £30..." (p. 140)

"Settlement in backcountry North Carolina proceeded along the tributaries of the major rivers that drained the region....Immigrants patented land or purchased tracts along approximately twelve creeks that emptied into the Yadkin River. Settlers who took up land in this area did not live in closely-knit neighborhoods. Instead the arrangement of the tracts entailed neighborhoods that were dispersed over miles of land....Although this settlement pattern indicates that families and associates were often divided by substantial distances, it does not signify that backcountry settlers gave up their social connections. Instead families often took up land near or adjacent to other relatives and associates. As they sought out land, they did their best to secure tracts that allowed them to build secure lives and maintain their networks of family and associates." (p. 141)