

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Settler John Sutton (Part 18)

Born and reared in coastal Bertie County, John Sutton (ca. 1730-bef. 1773) migrated inland to Bucklesberry by 1750. Like other colonists of that time period, he wanted to improve his life. In the unsettled backcountry of North Carolina, he found abundant land and the opportunity to join other like-minded family and friends, according to scholar Creston S. Long III, PhD:

"The availability of land...was not the only factor that motivated colonists...to migrate deep into the southern backcountry. When families decided to abandon their former communities, leaving behind land of varying size or no land at all, they often moved to an area where they could, to some extent, replicate their communities. To do this, families and individuals had to migrate to an area that had land enough not only to accommodate their own families, but to allow extended family and other associates to settle near them." (p. 143)

John Sutton joined other Bertie County associates in Bucklesberry who preceded him, for example, the Herrings. Court records confirm John Herring (ca. 1680-ca. 1760) was a resident of Bertie County who eventually moved to Johnston County (later old Dobbs County) the latter part of his life. Between 1738 and 1746, before John Sutton's arrival in Bucklesberry by 1750, John Herring was awarded land grants totaling 1,500 acres along Bear Creek, some on the south side where the Creek empties into the Neuse River in the heart of Bucklesberry. A 1763 land grant to John Sutton for a 75-acre tract adjoined land owned by Capt. Simon Herring (1709-1769), one of John Herring's sons. The Herrings, then, migrated to the backcountry a few years before John Sutton.

John's decision to move inland meant separation from his Sutton siblings who remained in Bertie County. One exception was his sister Mary Elizabeth Sutton (1740-1800) who married Lemuel (Lamb) Hardy Jr. (1730-1797). They also migrated to the backcountry, settling in the Snow Hill area north of La Grange, not far from Bucklesberry.

Although colonists bonded together for numerous reasons, they established new communities in the backcountry that were similar to the ones they lived in previously. Dr. Long explained further:

"Throughout the North Carolina backcountry in the mid-eighteenth century, there were dozens of networks of families and relatives living close to each other.... Various underlying factors pulled these groups of families together across the hundreds of miles which constituted the migration route. Chief among them were religion, culture, and ethnicity....[They] were able to replicate

many of their social networks...but they were able to do so where many of them could own more land than they had before. (p. 144)

A young man in his twenties in 1750, John faced limited opportunity to advance his life in Bertie County. He had been excluded from a share of the family land by his father who died that year. Within weeks of his father's death, he sold a tract of land he inherited from his Aunt Mary Jones. Therefore, the need for more land was probably John's primary motivation to leave Bertie County. In the backcountry, he found land aplenty, a conclusion Dr. Long reached in his research:

"When settlers left an area in which economic conditions were tightening and moved to an area where land was abundant....The amount of land a migrant could obtain in the backcountry dwarfed that of his former holdings. Indeed, it appears as though the question of motivation is readily answered: migrants moved on because they perceived better opportunity to advance themselves socially and economically." (p. 147)

John flourished in the backcountry. By the early 1800s, he and his descendants had amassed more than 4,000 acres of land in Bucklesberry.