

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Settler John Sutton (Part 20)

Among the families who preceded John Sutton (ca 1730-bef. 1773) by a few years in the backcountry of Bucklesberry were the Herrings. Both migrated from coastal Bertie County. Late eighteenth century documents in the Clellan Sutton Collection indicate the Suttons and Herrings did business together and owned adjoining land. Descendents of both families are still landowners and residents in Bucklesberry today.

In addition to the unsettled terrain, the backcountry presented other serious challenges, including native Indians who resisted encroaching European settlers. Although the Tuscarora War of 1711-1713 concluded with the battle at Fort Neoheroke in nearby Snow Hill, a remnant of Indians were likely still living in isolated villages along the Neuse River when the Suttons and Herrings arrived in Bucklesberry. Most of the Indian attacks ended by 1725. Settlers nonetheless remained on alert.

Preventing Indian assaults was a primary goal of the colonial militia, comprised of all free white men. The first alliance of the Suttons and the Herrings, then, may have been militia service. They were among 94 foot soldiers listed on the 1755 roster of the Johnston County Militia. Named were John Sutton, Anthony Herring, Frederick Herring, Jacob Herring, James Herring, John Herring, and Joseph Herring. The unit was commanded by Capt. Simon Herring (1709-1769).

Formed one year after the start of the French and Indian War of 1754-1763, the Johnston County Militia was ill-equipped to defend local settlers, let alone to contribute to the cause of the War. Inscribed at the bottom of the 1755 roster, Capt. Herring wrote:

"To the Honourable Col. Lewis Dorassett to lett you know the full Curcumstance that my Company is in we have Collours and has Sent for A Drum and as for Other Armes but Very poorly fixed but few guns and no Amerntion nor none to be had of Any Consequine. So as your honour or his Excellency is Desirous to know from your Inferor so Comd. Octobr 17th 1755. Simn. Herring" (State Archives, Raleigh)

Capt. Herring's assessment was painfully accurate. In his 1919 book, *History of North Carolina*, author and first U.S. national Archivist Robert D. W. Connor described the plight of the militia in 1754:

"On paper the [N.C.] militia numbered more than 15,000 infantry and 400 cavalry, but long neglect had destroyed its organization....One of the first acts of Governor [Arthur] Dobbs upon

assuming the administration in 1754 was to call for a militia return. The result was alarming. There were twenty-two counties each of which was supposed to have a fully organized regiment. The returns showed that in most of them there were organizations in name only, and in many not even that....The disorganization was bad, the equipment worse. Governor Dobbs stated that the militia were 'not half armed' and that such arms as they had were 'very bad'....The militia of Johnston County were 'indifferently armed,' and without ammunition..." (Ch. 15, Colonial Wars, paras. 19-20)

The colonial militia was the basis and starting point of the U.S. military. Intended primarily to protect local settlements, the militia served alongside the Continental Army in a number of Revolutionary War battles. John Sutton was deceased before the Revolution, although two of his sons, John Jr. (ca. 1758-bef. 1830) and Benjamin Sr. (ca. 1752-1837), were proven Patriots.

To their credit, John Sutton and the local Herring men of Bucklesberry bravely volunteered to serve in the militia. They did so first for protection. The hope of liberty and the dream of a free and independent nation to come, though, was probably more than a forethought with them.