

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Match Made in Heaven

Laurah Wood (1856-1934) married Rev. William Ellis Swain (1856-1923) on December 23, 1890 in La Grange. A match made in heaven, as it were, they shared a number of similarities in their lives and in their deaths.

Both were born in 1856 only a few months apart. Laurah, in March; William, in July. Both were reared on farms near small towns in rural North Carolina, some one hundred miles apart. She, in the Bucklesberry community of La Grange, Lenoir County; he, close to the Albemarle Sound near Creswell, Washington County.

Both were well educated and enjoyed honorable professions that required well-honed communication skills. Laurah, a teacher; William, a preacher. Lane Sebring (2018), a preaching coach, suggested, "The difference between preaching and teaching is that preaching is primarily geared toward life-change while teaching is primarily aimed at transferring knowledge," (para. 2, preachingdonkey.com). Not all agree with this view, however. Teacher educators have long maintained that the chief end of education is change. In a sense, Laurah and William shared the same goal of ministering to people.

Both also died with the same disease. Their death certificates documented cerebral hemorrhage as the primary cause of death, although Laurah outlived William by more than a decade. Cerebral hemorrhage is a stroke caused by a burst artery and bleeding in the brain that destroys brain cells. With the exception of pneumonia and tuberculosis as the leading causes of death several years in the early 1900s, the top two causes of death worldwide for more than a century have been heart disease and stroke.

Despite Laurah's and William's similarities, one stark difference in their backgrounds was the economic status of their families. Laurah's parents, Dempsey Wood Sr. (1816-1882) and Elizabeth Sutton Wood (1827-1894) of Bucklesberry, were an affluent family of considerable means. The 1860 Census valued their personal and real property at \$40,000.00. This unassuming figure translates to a staggering purchasing power of \$1.43 million today.

Dempsey's and Elizabeth's homeplace was located in the heart of Bucklesberry, directly off Pine Bush Road. Their house, construction of which occurred in the 1840s, still stands today. The sizeable two-story, white-framed house with several outbuildings was the former home of the late Marcus Alton Sutton (1911-2005) and Bettie Lorena Sutton (1914-2001). Their son Charles Marcus Sutton and wife Gibby Creech Sutton are current owners.

Far from affluent, William's parents, James N. Swain (ca. 1825-bef. 1900) and Nancy Spruill Swain (1830-bef. 1900), were people of meager means. In his essay titled, "From Good to Better," published in the book *College Men Without Money* by Carl B. Riddle (1914), William recounted his disadvantaged home life:

"I was born and reared on a little farm in Washington County, N.C., near the present site of Creswell. My father was poor. Four years of service and suffering in the Confederate Army [Civil War] so wrecked his health that he was able to do but little after it was all over." (pp. 142-145)

More on the marriage of Laurah Wood and Rev. William Ellis Swain will be shared in a future Bucklesberry article.