

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Death Diseases (Part 1)

Death is as common an occurrence as birth. Families in Bucklesberry have celebrated the births of many descendants over the generations since the mid-1700s. But death always followed.

By 1910, the US developed a standard death certificate. In addition to vitals such as birth and death dates, a special code on the certificate allowed verification of the cause of death. These codes are defined by the World Health Organization's International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD) and Related Health Problems.

The death certificates of seven Bucklesberry women revealed an important finding. Other than one case each of accidental burning, diarrhea, and influenza, the remaining four deaths reflected the same alarming disease. All of these women were born in the 1800s and died in the early-1900s. Summarized details from their death certificates follow:

Alice Sutton Harris (1878–1918). Age at death, 40. Death date, Nov. 7, 1918. Place of death, Greensboro, NC. Informant, L. D. Harris, husband. Cause of death, ICD code 167 Influenza. Physician's diagnosis, "Influenza Pneumonia." Physician, Dr. J. Meadows, MD, Greensboro. No other significant details noted.

Christiana Sutton (1850–1929). Age at death, 79. Death date, May 5, 1929. Place of death, Bucklesberry. Informant, Ashley Sutton, son. Cause of death, ICD code 90 Heart disease. Physician's diagnosis, "Heart disease." Duration of disease, several years. Disease contracted at place of death. Physician, Dr. J. W. P. Smithwick, MD, La Grange.

Mary Jane Uzzell Sutton (1833–1915). Age at death, 81. Death date, Dec. 11, 1915. Place of death, La Grange. Informant, Nannie E. Sutton, daughter. Cause of death, ICD code 167 Burns. Diagnosis noted, "Caught fire from open fireplace; burned so badly she died 5 hours later." No physician named. No other significant details noted.

Martha Patsy Sutton (1840–1914). Age at death, 74. Death date, June 13, 1914. Place of death, Bucklesberry. Informant, Lindsey Sutton, son. Cause of death, ICD code 189 Heart failure. Diagnosis noted, "No physician; Supposed to be heart failure as she dropped dead." No physician named. No other significant details noted.

Martha (Patsy) Sutton Parks Elmore (1829–1922). Age at death, 92. Death date, Mar. 4, 1922. Place of death, Bucklesberry. Informant, Jeremiah Onestrus Elmore, son. Cause of death, ICD code 90, Heart disease. Physician's diagnosis, "Valvular heart disease." Duration, several years.

Disease contracted at place of death. Test confirming diagnosis, physical. Physician, Dr. J. W. P. Smithwick, MD, La Grange.

Sally Hardy Sutton Fields (1841–1922). Age at death, 80. Death date, June 27, 1922. Place of death, La Grange. Informant, D. Leon Fields, son. Cause of death, IDC code 114 Other diseases included under diarrhea and enteritis. Physician's diagnosis, "Diarrhea." Duration of disease, 24 days. Disease contract at place of death. Test confirming diagnosis, symptoms, etc. Physician, Dr. J. W. P. Smithwick, MD, La Grange.

Sarah (Sallie) Mewborn Dawson Sutton (1855–1928). Age at death, 73. Death date, June 3, 1928. Place of death, Bucklesberry. Informant, Wesley Bryan Sutton, son. Cause of death, IDC code, 90 Pericarditis. Physician's diagnosis, "Valvular heart disease." Duration of disease, several years. Disease contracted at place of death. Physician, Dr. J. W. P. Smithwick, MD, La Grange.

More than half (4 out of 7) of these women died from heart disease. National statistics suggest these figures were not a happenstance. Beginning in 1910, and with the exception of only a couple of years, heart disease has remained the top killer in the US to the present day.