

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Clellan Sutton Interview (Part 8)

The current network of highways in North Carolina was at least a century in the making. Although one can travel today from the mountains to the coast on good roads with relative ease, travel was slow and difficult through the 1800s.

Since bridges were few, traversing the many rivers and streams across the State was a real challenge and could only be done by fords or by ferry. Cile Sutton Beaman of Bucklesberry owns a map of the Frog Point and Hardy Bridge area hand-drawn by William Arthur in 1866 that identifies Maple Ford used by locals at the time.

Walter Turner, staff historian with the NC Transportation Museum, is an expert on roads and highways. Interviewed by Brian Sims in 2014, Mr. Turner characterized early roads in the State as "little better than wagon trails—dusty, sandy, muddy, rocky, devoid of signs, rife with risk. After a drenching rain, the roads turned to mush. Cars sank to their fenders in the ooze. Mules and horses often had to haul them out." (*Our State* magazine, July 16, 2014).

By 1922, the quality of roads in Bucklesberry were far from ideal. The Rev. R. E. Pittman conducted a revival at Hickory Grove Church during the fall of that year. Conveying the Reverend's concerns about the roads in Bucklesberry, *The Daily Free Press* of Kinston wrote:

"A number of cars were stuck either on their way to [Rev. Pittman's] meetings or from them, and that it was necessary for assistance to be called for in order to get out of the mud. He commends some of the men in the community who took off their shoes, rolled up their pants legs and went regularly at the job of helping those who became stuck in the mud. At the beginning of the meeting he says a number of the members worked on one of the roads, and he thinks that the people of the section are entitled to better roads." (August 30, 1922)

Local genealogist and historian, Glenn Fields interviewed the late Clellan Sutton (1909–1999) in 1994. They discussed how roads in Bucklesberry were developed in the early 1900s:

Glenn: "There are all kinds of questions rolling around in my mind. You mentioned this road out here [Pine Bush Road] being the [Neuse] River road awhile ago. On that old map that I've got, it doesn't show that road at all going down in there. There's a road going down to Hardy Bridge, but there's nothing going across there like [the current Pine Bush Road by] James Rouse's and Jack's [Herring] and on out that way. Do you remember about what time that road was built and those roads down in that way were built?"

Clellan: "Well, they didn't even straighten out [the roads], you know, until along about the 1930s, I think."

Glenn: "The 1930s. I know they show on that 1948 old photograph pretty much like they are now, but they didn't show on that map. Of course, that map was like, 90 years before. That's a long time. But, for so many of the old roads, you can look at that aerial photograph and tell where they were going through the woods and stuff."

Clellan: "Well, some of them now are using part of it [the old roads] and straightening them out. There's a difference, a difference there somewhere along then."

Glenn: "Right, I know they used to zigzag, sure enough, and I reckon they were going around wet spots and maybe going around hills, too, and maybe cutting across there at somebody's house, and then going by somebody else's house. Some roads on the map aren't really crooked. They are zigzagging, and they were going [Glenn pauses]."

Clellan: "Well now, this road right out here going this way [pointing to Kennedy Home Road], that's a good example of that going by people's houses, from here out to the highway, And they wouldn't change it. [inaudible] They agreed to pave it out that way, but they were going to let it stay like it was, to go by everybody's house. Now, you got to go to this corner, that corner, and that corner [pointing]."

Glenn: "Yeah, I hadn't ever thought about that, but that is [inaudible]."

Clellan: "You couldn't change anybody about a lot of things. Now this road through here [pointing to Kennedy Home Road] is fairly straight on down to Falling Creek out that way."

Clellan's recollection of the 1930s as the time when roads began to improve in Bucklesberry was correct. According to Mr. Turner, wrote Brian Sims, "The significant beginning was 1921. But it took the whole decade. By 1930 we had an excellent system [of roads]....That's what made us have the reputation as the 'Good Roads State.'"