

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Jeremiah Sutton, Sr. (Part 7)

Provider and productive are qualities that describe Jeremiah Sutton, Sr. (1836-1900). Known as Jerry, his most important role in life was provider to his family. He was husband of three wives, two of whom left him a widower with twenty-one children to rear.

Jerry's lifetime of work proves he was productive. Farming was his primary occupation. He was widely recognized for success in growing cotton, wheat and hogs. Industrious and enterprising, he found time to operate a fishery and a distillery, which may have provided additional income he needed to care for his large family.

Jerry was also spiritually-minded. Around 1860, he helped establish Hickory Grove Church, the first local church in Bucklesberry. Jerry was joined by five other charter members: Levi Hill, Sr. (1830-1893); Benjamin Sutton, Jr. (1795-1864); Hardy Sutton (1803-1861); Josiah Sutton, Sr. (1810-1898); and Samuel Ivey Sutton (1834-1904).

Jerry faced hardships during his life, chief of which were the premature deaths of eight of his children. One final hardship was the physical suffering he experienced the last few years of his life:

1899, May 19: "Mr. Jerry Sutton, of Bucklesberry, who has been in poor health for sometime, is not expected to stand the strain on his system long." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Jerry's children were aware of his impending death. They paid last respects to their father at the home place just a few days before he died:

1900, May 24: "Mrs. Octavia B[eatrice Sutton] Herring [1874-1938] returned from a visit to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Sutton, of Bucklesberry, Sunday, accompanied by her sister, Miss Ava Sutton [Gardner, 1887-1922], who will spend some time before returning." (*The Goldsboro Headlight*)

Jerry's obituary acknowledged him as a highly respected family man with impeccable strength of character:

1900, June 5: "Mr. Jerry [Jeremiah, Sr.] Sutton died at his home, in Bucklesberry, Thursday morning at 4 o'clock. For three years his health had been very bad, and about a week ago he was taken worse. Mr. Sutton's standing among his fellow men was in every way most honorable. He was regarded as an upright citizen, an affectionate husband and father, a modest and worthy

gentleman, and a Christian whose religion had as its characteristics simplicity and reverential devotion to duty. Deceased was about 69 years of age, and leaves a grief-stricken widow, twelve children and a brother to mourn their great loss. Friday afternoon at 3 o'clock we laid his mortal remains to rest in the family burying ground near his home. The funeral services were conducted by Rev. Hollowell, at La Grange. May God comfort all the bereaved ones and bring them together at the end in His own kingdom of glory." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

The obituary was mistaken about Jerry's age at death. His birth date of May 9, 1836 places his age at 64 when he died, not 69. The obituary also indicated he passed away on Thursday, which would have been May 31, but his grave marker shows a death date of May 29, 1900.

Jerry's love and devotion to family may have been his greatest legacy. Thirteen years after his death, three generations of descendants gathered at the home place for a reunion:

1913, September 14: "Forty grandchildren, 10 children, and the widow of the late Jerre [Jeremiah, Sr.] Sutton, in his lifetime one of Lenoir County's best-known men, gathered at the ancestral home place in a family reunion which was in a way unique, from the fact that the aged widow [Sarah Allen Croom, 1854-1937] is stepmother of the Sutton children, and it was principally the desire to honor the stepmother that prompted the family to meet at the home of their father. The Suttons include many prominent people in their number, among them business men of Kinston and farmers of the County, and many public officials in the past and present. The dinner served at the reunion was elaborate. One great-grandchild was on hand, and divided interest with the white-haired hostess." (*The Charlotte Observer*)

Jeremiah Sutton, Sr. was indeed one of Bucklesberry's leading patriarchs. His many descendants and the greater Bucklesberry community rightly honor his memory.