

Sutton, Maude Pennell Minish ^[1]



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by Daniel W. Patterson, 1994

1 Feb. 1890–18 July 1936

Maude Pennell Minish Sutton, teacher, folklorist, and journalist, was born in Lenoir, one of three children of Anna Pennell and Walter Lafayette Minish. Her father was a prominent local businessman, [Methodist](#) ^[2] layman, and [Democratic](#) ^[3] politician. A teacher at [Davenport College](#) ^[4] in Lenoir awakened Maude's interest in [folklore](#) ^[5], and she began in 1906 to fill a notebook with the song repertory of a mountain woman who worked for her family. For a decade after 1913 she herself taught school and found many opportunities to record folk songs, particularly while serving as a school supervisor in [Avery County](#) ^[6]. In 1922 she forwarded three notebooks of song texts to George Lyman Kittredge, at [Harvard University](#) ^[7], who encouraged her work. From that time until her death she was also active in the [North Carolina Folklore Society](#) ^[8], usually holding office and often speaking at its annual programs.

Her marriage to Dennis H. Sutton in 1924 and the birth of her daughters Sarah Elizabeth and Nancy Howard restricted her field work, but she began in 1926 to draw upon her collection for feature articles about folklore and for fictional sketches of mountain life. Some of these more than sixty pieces appeared locally. Others had simultaneous publication in the [Charlotte](#) ^[9], [Greensboro](#) ^[10], and [Raleigh](#) ^[11] newspapers. A few were printed in magazines such as the [Progressive Farmer](#) ^[12]. Mrs. Sutton's untimely death prevented her from gathering her writings. She was buried in Belleview Cemetery, Lenoir.

Professor Frank C. Brown, who regarded Maude Sutton as "the most loyal, and certainly his most highly valued co-worker," persuaded her to give her song collection to him for use in the projected publication of the Folklore Society. When *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* ^[13] finally began to appear in print years after her death, its form obscured the importance of her contributions. These consisted of 154 song texts and 112 tunes, and of entries in categories like beliefs and games as well. Equally valuable were her vignettes of singers, partially quoted in the editors' headnotes. Mrs. Sutton was virtually alone in her time in having a keen interest in singers and their view of the folk songs. Her vignettes and fictional sketches, while influenced by the local-color school, offered a humorous and realistic glimpse of mountain customs and attitudes, particularly as these bore on traditional song.

References:

Frank C. Brown Papers (Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham).

Lenoir *News-Topic*, 21 July 1936 (portrait).

Daniel W. Patterson, "A Woman of the Hills: The Work of Maude Minish Sutton," *Southern Exposure* 5 (1977).

Maude Minish Sutton Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

Additional Resources:

Maude Minish Sutton Papers, 1917-1935 (collection no. 02681-z). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/s/Sutton,Maude_Minish.html ^[14] (accessed August 12, 2013).

Making History: Crossnore School, Western Carolina University:

<http://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CraftRevival/story/crossnore.html> ^[15]

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Authors:

[Patterson, Daniel W.](#) ^[21]

Origin - location:

[Avery County](#) ^[22]

Caldwell County ^[23]

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[24]

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