

LITTLE DRY RUN  
by Marie Dickore

The keen eyes of the great hunter and Indian scout, Aquilla Durham, would sparkle with approval were he to return today to the headwaters of the Little Dry Run, eastern tributary of the Little Miami River, and see well-kept rolling acres and wooded hills he wrested from the wilderness in 1804. His approving glance would rest with pleasure on the horses in the paddock at "Dry Run Estate" but his pride might be hurt a bit when he saw the Guernsey and Jersey cows in the pasture. "At least there should be some of our famous Durham cattle here, even if these cows give good milk", he might muse.

The beautiful trails through the wooded hills, crossing and recrossing Little Dry Run, might puzzle Aquilla somewhat. Indian trails were common in his days, but not such as these. Recalling the horses in the paddock he might chuckle to himself, "Pleasure riding as in the days of my forbears in England, oh well these moderns have more time for that. They travel through the country faster than we did nearly a century and a half ago. Well those were the days. What a tale I could tell!"

THREE-DAY TRIP

And so he could. The owner of the charming "Dry Run Estate" in the eastern upland county dashes to business in Cincinnati in about 20 minutes. Aquilla spent three days going to and coming from market in the young town of Cincinnati where he sold his farm products. But he was of pioneer stock and the Durhams always adventured, crossing the seas and mountains, conquering the obstacles of wilderness and tyrants.

The first record of Durhams that has come down to us is of the Saxon tribe which settled on the northeast coast of England in the sixth century. The city of Durham is named for one of the chieftains who ruled in 925 A.D. There was a Durham among the barons who forced King John to sign the Magna Charta on June 15, 1214, thereby giving liberty to the English people.

Again tyranny, this time threatening religious freedom, drove Samuel Durham in 1722 to America, where he settled in Maryland, near Baltimore. His son, Joshua, finding the promises of the newly-opened western lands something to investigate, left for the Ohio country with his family, arriving by flatboat at the mouth of the Little Miami on May 13, 1796. A significant day for it was the seventeenth birthday of his youngest son, Aquilla.

The Durhams stopped temporarily at the mouth of Clough Creek while Samuel and his sons spied out the country. They had land warrants for the Virginia Military District and soon found a location to their at the headwaters of Little Dry Run, whose chattering waters ran through beautiful country that had, besides stately forest trees, some open spaces good for grazing, and a soil that promised well for the future. Crystal clear springs decided the home site and the elevation of 900 feet gave the patriotic Durhams a feeling of liberty and freedom. Here he and his sons hewed young walnut, ash and oak trees for the log cabin to which the family moved, and which became the hub of a busy life. An older son, Daniel, explored farther up the ridge and settled on an even higher point in Clermont County.

#### HARRIET THOMPSON'S ULTIMATUM

Aquilla remained with his parents and the other children, learning the ways of the Indian and the wild life of the forest and streams until his fame as a hunter and scout became so noted that in 1804, when he was but 25 years old, Lewis and Clark, preparing for their historic exploration of the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase, approached him with an invitation to join the expedition as scout.

However, lovely Harriet Thompson issued her ultimatum. She would have nothing of a bridegroom who adventured into the unknown wilderness. She wanted her man at home and so Aquilla, the eagle-eyed, remained in the Little Miami Valley, bought acres of rich uplands adjacent those of his father and settled down to the exciting life of a farmer.

#### COFFEE GRINDER FOR WHEAT

To grind his corn for meal or to make whisky he had to take it down to the mouth of Clough Creek where the first mill, Wickerham's, merely two flatboats with a wheel turned by the swift current, was the only one on either side of the Ohio. But this crude method was better than what his brother, Daniel, used for grinding his wheat – he raised the first wheat crop in the region. He ground a few handfuls at a time in the coffee grinder. Aquilla took his farm produce to the Cincinnati market on pack horses, later by wagon and the first covered wagon in the valley. Called a "house on wheels", it created a sensation all along the way.

But his hunting prowess grew space and it is told that one day he shot 13 deer, skinned them and brought the meat home on an improvised sled. His six-foot flintlock was as tall as he, and he was a dead shot.

### PROVISIONS HARRISONS ARMY

In 1811 Gen. William Henry Harrison engaged him to guide his army in the expedition against Vincennes. The army needed food. Aquilla returned home swiftly and brought from his neighbors their surplus cattle, hogs and sheep, drove them single-handed with but one trusted Indian guide through the wilderness and sold them to Harrison's commissary department. Many tales of Aquilla's adventures are still told by his grandson, Sam Durham of Newtown, who was 17 years old when Aquilla died at the age of 91 years.

Ten children were born to Aquilla Durham and his wife, Harriet Thompson. There is scarcely a family in the valley that does not "belong into the tribe". Little Dry Run was his highway to where it reaches the road built in 1790 from Columbia to Mercersburgh (now Newtown) and extended in 1793 on beyond to Big Dry Run's deep-cleft valley. Today Hunley Road follows the charming valley of Little Dry Run, and beautiful vistas surprise you at every turn in the road. You see glimpses of the Miami's lush corn fields and the hills beyond. A turn and you see the Ohio's stately course framed by Kentucky's hills! There are fine meadows, small creeks and the close green of forest trees. Here and there you glimpse an old house, perhaps of 1830-1840 brick, or of earlier broad timber construction, and a ruin or two tell of stories now wiped out.

### DRY RUN ESTATE

The Durham trails have been made into beautiful roads that wind over the lands. Their acres are put in good order and tilled. We find the hospitality at "Dry Run Estate" just as cordial as it was in the days of the pioneer settlers. The genial host, W. Mack Johnson, himself of pioneer family that settled in Adams County, and his charming wife, are keenly interested in showing us over the lands and bending a willing ear to tales of the original owners of his acres. The droning airplane affords a panoramic picture of these hills to the east of Newtown. Over all there is the blue sky, the brilliant sunlight flooding the expanse of a country loved by the pioneer who sought for and found the freedom which he strove to maintain.