RETROSPECTION:
A MENTAL JOURNEY OVER COAL HILL, NOW MT. WASHINGTON, FIFTY YEARS AGO.*

By John M. Killin

I respectfully request the president and members of this association to go back with me on a mental journey fifty years ago. I will conduct you over the part of Coal Hill now known as Mount Washington with which I was so familiar in my boyhood that I can with possibly few exceptions, remember the location of every house and the name of its occupant.

We will start on the south side from the stone tavern on the point formed by the Birmingham Pike and the Washington road near the south end of the Monongahela bridge, and go up the latter. For about one hundred and fifty feet it is sufficiently wide for two teams to pass but from that point up to the turn at what is called "Blue Rocks" it is only wide enough to accommodate one team. The steep hill, out of which the road had been made, is composed of a soft slatey stone which the vehicles passing over for many years have worn its bed down until now it is from ten to twelve feet below the narrow foot-way, on the lower side, over which pedestrians can only pass in single file. This is the turn and the end of the narrow part road. That road winding around the hill, about seventy-five feet below us, was made by Jacob Beltzhoover and John D. McCord for the use of their coal teams which go up it to their coal pits located near the top of the hill. That frame cottage on the east side of the road is owned and occupied by Dr. Bausman, brother of Squire Bausman of Birmingham. One hundred yards above the two roads are separated by only twenty feet and we will go up the lower one to the coal platforms of Beltzhoover and McCord. When we reach them you will notice that they are in a nook surrounded on three sides by sloping hills, the opening being north toward the city, and we are surprised to see only three houses on all that space. The one on our extreme left is occupied by a miner whose name is Griffith.

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The one nearly in front of us is also occupied by a miner named Lewis and in that one on our right lives a teamster named Jeff Moss. You will observe that the main entries of the two pits enter the hill at right angles and as some of you probably do not understand what a main entry is, I will state that it has rooms on both sides like the hall in a large house. The teams do not go down the road; they come up because they can not turn around on the steep hillside. Consequently their owners were compelled to build another from their platforms to the Washington road, a distance of a quarter of a mile over which their teams returned to the city and we will resume our journey on it.

That long two story frame house on our right is occupied by an old miner named Hassell and his family, consisting of two grown sons named Job and Samson, and a son and daughter of his wife, by her first husband, whose names are William and Kitty Smagger. That large frame building on our left is the stable of John D. Miller and that frame house fronting on the Washington road is his residence. That frame house on the brow of the hill directly opposite the junction of the two roads is owned and occupied by a butcher named John Killin and that one also on the brow about two hundred feet further up is occupied by widow Jones. She is a midwife and is generally called "Granny Jones."

Back in my early boyhood I remember her telling me the location of the hollow stump in which she found me the night she gave me to my mother. I can also remember often visiting it, and, as I earnestly gazed into its cavity, how I got there was a problem my young mind was unable to solve.

Where we now stand is the highest part of the hill that fronts the river. That shed-roofed house on the level bench about a hundred feet below is occupied by Peter Byers and wife, their sons Jacob and Andrew, the wife of the former, and three daughters, Kate, Betsy and Rose. That house farther along the same bench is occupied by a colored coal miner named Jessee who is married to a
white woman. One hundred yards beyond Jessee's house is one occupied by James, oldest son of Granny Jones, who is also a coal miner. The large farm fronting on the brow of the river hill is owned by Mr. Cowan and leased by an eastern man named Syess. It begins at that fence which you will notice is about opposite the foot of Wood street and extends along the brow to a point opposite the foot of Liberty Street, and how far back beyond that line of woods, half mile distant, I do not know. Notwithstanding that large area of ground, that small log house fronting the Washington road occupied by Mr. Defvooe, the farmhouse occupied by Mr. Syees and the barn are the only buildings on it. We will now return to the Washington road and will strike it at the coal pit owned by Mr. Cowan and operated by John Doran. It has a reputation for "spooks" that causes hill residents to give it a wide berth on dark nights, hence, when the coal diggers go to work in the morning, they never miss any coal from their platforms. That is John D. Miller's house we are now passing and we will travel fully half a mile before we pass another on either side of the road. That one and half story frame we are approaching on our right is owned and occupied by a miner named Ben Graham, and that long two story frame which stands on the summit of the hill on the south side of Brownsville road at its junction with the Washington road is a tavern kept by John Dunn and that large building in its rear is his stable. That other large frame building on the same side about one hundred feet distant is the stable of John Doran, and is the best building on that side of the road for three fourths of a mile. That two-story frame on our right is the residence of John Doran, and the small one near it is occupied by a family named Dabney and in the large house resides a Welsh coal miner named Thomas Jones. About one hundred yards further down the road, that house standing back surrounded by fruit trees is the residence of James Moss. A short time ago a talented young physician named George S. Hays gained considerable credit for the courage displayed by his frequent visits to Mr. Moss and his skill in curing him of a bad attack of small pox.
We are now about midway between the house of Mr. Moss and that of William Dilworth and from this point we can see the only houses down in the hollow on our left. In that first one lives an old man named Jenkin Killin, an uncle of the butcher John Killin, and his aged wife. That old log house further down the bottom is the residence of Jonah Beers and family. We will now proceed on our journey. That elegant frame building on our right is the residence of William Dilworth in which he moved the day he was married in the year 1817, having previously built and furnished it. This lane we are entering divides the property of Dilworth and Boggs, and that fine frame house on the east side of the road belongs to Boggs, and is occupied by John Seidell, cashier of a bank in the city. Those two small houses at the foot of the lane are occupied respectively by John Cool and family and two brothers named Young, and their mother. That new frame building on the hill side about one hundred feet below is a schoolhouse and that large stump about midway between us and it is the rostrum from which the scholars are wont to spout their youthful eloquence. That schoolhouse was built one year ago by William Dilworth, and in order that I may give you a brief history of the reason which I think caused him to erect it, I shall have to go back two years.

At that time there were only two schoolhouses on the entire south side, of which I have knowledge; one being in a building known as "Barr's Pottery" in Birmingham and the other in a log building on the west side of Sawmill Run midway between Peter Cool's house, near the foot of the hill, and the Bogg's mill. There had been another sometime before in Beltzhoover's Farmyard of which Thomas Daft was teacher, but he moved over to Third Street. The name of the schoolmaster in Boggs schoolhouse was Sutherland and the homes of the scholars were spread over the country, some of them miles away. I attended that school and can remember a number of the pupils, among whom were John, Samuel, and Harriett Boggs, John, Fred, and Mary Cool, William, John S., and Samuel Dilworth, Ross and Jane Foster, William and
Kitty Swagger, John and William Graham, Daniel and Patrick Killin. The school house was small and delapidated, the distance a majority of the scholars had to travel to reach it was great, located as it was beyond the district which contained the largest number of inhabitants, and the river always overflowed its banks after a heavy rainfall, thereby causing parents much uneasiness for the safety of their children, all of which facts it is probable had been carefully noted by the intelligent mind of Mr. Dilworth. But in my judgment a desire to have his children educated near home by a teacher of his own selection was his strongest reason for building that schoolhouse at his own individual expense and paying the teacher out of his own money. The school was open but a short time when the one at the Sawmill Run was deserted, a large number of the pupils coming to this one. There are poor children in that school room who will always remember with the keenest sense of gratitude and cherish in their hearts the memory of William Dilworth even if their journey of life from the schoolroom to the grave should continue through four score years. He has earned their love by requesting their parents to send them to school free of tuition fees which he knew they were unable to pay and by furnishing the children with necessary books.

Our mental journey is now completed and I will conclude by giving a scrap from the after history of some of those whom I have introduced. Mrs. Bausman, after the Doctor’s death, married Jerry Knox, proprietor of the Knox farm, and lived many years subsequently. Granny Jones lived on Coal Hill until she was one hundred and three years old, and her son Alexander, her daughters Betsey and Sally, a daughter-in-law, widow of her son James, are now with one exception the oldest residents on Mount Washington. The exception is Mrs. Dilworth. She is in her eighty-fourth year and has occupied the house in which she now resides sixty-four years. Physically, she is not afflicted with the average number of infirmities that are usually brought in the human body by the lapse of so many years, and her mind seems to be comparatively untouched. Peter Cool, who lived on
the west bank of Sawmill Run is a well known citizen of Pittsburgh having been proprietor of what are still known as the Point Timber Wheels, now operated by his son John. He is eighty-seven years old and were he not nearly blind, he could attend to business. Mr. Sutherland taught school for many years in this county before his death which occurred only about ten years ago.

I can recall two of the teachers that taught in Dilworth schoolhouse. Daniel Miller (a brother of John D., the coal man) was one. I have a shadowy recollection of his personal appearance but a very vivid remembrance of his system of punishment which was very simple but so successful that it did not have to be repeated often. He was wont to continue striking very lightly a pupil's head with his switch, sometimes for five minutes, a punishment which was so keenly felt that few could bear it without shouting for mercy. Mr. Miller subsequently studied law and is now a prominent lawyer of Madison, Iowa and has represented that district in Congress. The other teacher, Mr. Thompson, governed the school by moral suasion and was very successful. He also studied law and is now an eminent lawyer at Indianapolis. The tunnels through the river and back hills now used by Castle Shannon Railroad Co., were the main entries of Beltzhoover's and Doran's pits. Mr. Cowan's farm-house is still in use. It is the two story house on the front of the hill near the east side of the church with no building between them. It is a log house but bears the appearance of a frame, having been weather-boarded years ago. I think it is fully seventy-five years old, as I slept in it often fifty five years ago.