

Dutton's Cave

In the days a generation ago when livery teams and human legs still were recognized means of transportation for persons bent on brief outings for recreation, Dutton's Cave, three miles and a half northeast of West Union, was a favorite picnic spot. Seldom a day went by without one or more picnic parties visiting the place, and on Sundays the cave premises often drew a large number of groups to total a hundred or more persons, building their campfires and preparing their picnic meals.

The cave, with a front sixty feet in height, is generally considered the most impressive piece of scenery in the West Union locality, and has shared with Falling Spring, five and a half miles northwest, the chief popularity as a picnic place, though Falling Spring has the advantage of easier climbs to reach the picnic grounds.

Dutton's Cave got its name from its discoverer, Lorenzo Dutton, who found it the first year he lived in Fayette County, in 1848. Although Mr. Dutton was not the first settler in what afterward became Union Township of Fayette County, he was the second. The first settler was Thomas J.

Smith, who built a cabin in August, 1848, about a mile northeast of the present courthouse square in West Union. Smith moved on soon, leaving no historic trace, and so, for something like sixty-six years, until his death in 1914, Mr. Dutton was rated "the oldest inhabitant" of the West Union community.

Lorenzo Dutton, who, in July, 1848, came from Meredith, Delaware County, New York, selected a cabin site about a mile and a half northeast of Smith's place. He went back to New York and when he returned in September he was accompanied by Henry Jones, Charles Jones, William H. Blanchard, and William W. Bailey. These men built a dwelling. It consisted of four upright corner poles, some other poles laid horizontally as a basis for a roof, while all the rest of the structure, sides and roof, consisted of prairie hay. They had a cook stove; they gathered abundant wild honey in the woods; and, as they claimed, "lived like princes" on slapjacks and wild honey. But within a month a prairie fire swept over the country and burned their happy home. They then put up a log cabin, which served them through the winter.

Mr. Dutton's first experience in log-cabin building occurred at the home of a neighbor, a mile and a half north of the Dutton farm, soon after he

arrived. When the "log raising" was finished, the pioneer settler got dinner for the crowd. His coffee pot had been burned up accidentally, and he had only one kettle to cook in. So he cooked beans in the kettle; then turned them out and boiled pork and potatoes in the same kettle; and finally turned out the pork and potatoes, and made coffee in it. Wooden chips were used for plates, and the seven men took turns drinking coffee from two tin cups.

One day in the fall of 1848 when Lorenzo Dutton and William Bailey were out hunting bees they heard the rattle of a snake. Having located the rattler, Bailey threw a stone at it. Curiously enough, the stone by fortunate chance rolled along till it reached the mouth of the rattlesnake den, stopped there, and blocked the hole. A home run thus became impossible for the whole rattlesnake family, who were out sunning themselves. So Dutton and Bailey kept on gathering stones, and had a field day at snake killing, disposing of eighteen reptiles, some of them large. One had twenty-one rattles.

It was on this occasion that Mr. Dutton discovered the cave which bears his name. His farm did not embrace the cave property, which was about half a mile from his home, though his land extended within a few rods of it. From the rocky

front of the cave a spring-fed stream of almost icy cold water led down between high hills, and thence along a pleasant, well timbered glade near a sugar bush for some two miles northeasterly to join the Turkey River. At that time it was possible to go back into the cave for three hundred feet, where a small lake existed. Tradition says that someone built a small boat and rowed around on this lake, but for thirty or forty years past the cave has been so silted up that going into its recesses has been almost impossible, very inconvenient, and possibly dangerous.

The chief historical interest which is still attached locally to the Dutton name comes from the fact that the farm on which he settled in 1848 and later bought from the government is still held in ownership by his descendant, G. L. Hackett of West Union, and never has been out of the family ownership in ninety-six years. In respect to continuous ownership by one family this farm holds the record for Fayette County. The farm of 125 acres, was left by Mr. Dutton in his will in 1914 to his only children, two daughters, Mrs. Carrie Hackett and Mrs. Lillie Helmer. Mrs. Hackett bought Mrs. Helmer's interest in 1921. Upon Mrs. Hackett's death on February 8, 1929, the farm was left to her five children. Her son, G. L. Hackett, bought out the other heirs one at

a time, until he had finally acquired full title in 1942.

After Mr. Dutton retired from the farm to West Union in 1896 the place was occupied by his daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. W. L. Hackett; then after their deaths by their daughter, Cora Hackett, and their son, Gordon Hackett, and his family. Gordon Hackett moved off a few years ago, and Cora Hackett moved to West Union in 1942, that being the first time in ninety-four years that the Dutton family occupancy had lapsed, except for one year about 1908 when the Hackett family spent a year at Hornell, New York. In respect to occupancy by one family line, also, this farm holds the record for Fayette County.

Lorenzo Dutton was a respected and beloved citizen of West Union. He had a great store of reminiscences and a quizzical humor; he was a reader and thinker, a good visitor, who delighted to meet and talk with his fellow men. In the later years of his life, for what he was and for what he represented, he lent much pleasure to the lives of those men along the street who enjoy "meeting the fellows" every day to talk things over.

WALTER H. BEALL