

Today Bee Tree Gut is a placid little stream neatly edged, near the highway, with a trim stone wall. But back in 1841 when James Pilling arrived along with his wife Sally and their four little girls, the meandering stream's power already had been harnessed with a waterwheel.

The presence of an abandoned sawmill on the bank of the Tuscarawas River on land he had bought at sheriff's sale at Steubenville afforded him a splendid opportunity to earn a living for his family. Lumber was in demand in the nearby village of Newcomerstown and within a relatively short time he had the primitive machinery in working order. Then, in the fashion of sawyers before him, he shouldered a gunny sack containing a jug of whiskey, made his way on foot up along the river and bartered drinks for sawlogs which thirsty squatters gladly cut and floated down the stream to his mill.

The Pilling family had moved from Redstone, Pa., and lived in the log cabin vacated by the previous owner. It was located on the river bank just east of the gut (a common name for small streams in the early days.) Sally Pilling's parents, Anthony and Anne Cunard, were quakers and in the years since James Pilling had arrived from England he had acquired the Quaker habits of speech.

In June 1847, after they had lost three children in infancy, the Pilling's first Ohio-born child to survive was named Maria. And three years later Jim finally had a long-hoped-for son whom he named Benton for his brother-in-law and partner, Thomas Benton. Pilling & Benton previously had operated the Amity Woolen Mill in western Pennsylvania and their decision to move west probably was triggered by other

members of the Cunard family's migration to Belmont and Guernsey Counties in Ohio.

Everyone in the Pilling family worked. In 1853 Sally Pilling had been laid to rest beside her mother in the Pioneer Cemetery down in the heart of the village. Anne, the eldest daughter, was married that summer and went to live near Port Washington. Housekeeping duties fell to the next daughter, Rebecca, while Ellen and Sabina were kept busy helping in the woolen mill which by then shared power from the waterwheel.

Even Maria and Benton worked. They stripped rough bark from dripping logs which their father then ran through the sawmill. The mill, unlike today's operation with it automated, whirling saw, was a primitive affair. A straight blade swished up and down slicing boards from the logs which rode against it on a moving carriage. The less bark the saw encountered, the longer its set would last.

Ages of the two children never seemed important when Maria told the story to us, her grandchildren, though probably she was around eight and Benton, five, the day this happened. They were so accustomed to seeing emigrants traveling west along the State Road that they scarcely glanced up when they heard heavy covered wagons rumbling across the short wooden bridge which spanned the mill-race.

Water flowed from a large mill-pond that lay on the north side of the road and was fed by Bee Tree Gut. The creek extended from the Ohio & Erie Canal wasteway on the north toward the river on the south which divided the mile-wide valley lying between the wooded hills. The State Road was so called because it led from Steubenville through Cadiz, Uhrichsville, Newcomers-town, Coshocton and Newark to the state's capital.

But on this particular day the father must have known something of great importance to his youngest children was afoot for when he saw a larger-than-usual cloud of dust approaching from the east he shouted to Benton and Maria, "Thee go up to the cabin and bring that basket of potatoes sitting by the well." Wondering but not pausing to inquire, they hurried to obey. Then, with still no explanation, he directed them to scatter the potatoes in the dusty road on the far side of the bridge over the mill-race.

Scarcely had they finished the task before the first of a long line of heavy wagons drawn ^{by} horses rather than by lumbering oxen began rattling over the bridge. Such a sight! One can imagine the awe-struck boy and girl standing close to the roadside pointing out to each other the strange contents of the wagons: barrels, trunks, poles, canvas, cages holding unusual animals, a couple of monkeys on chains cavorting over one of the loads. Men, dogs and ponies walked alongside and there was a gaudily painted coach in which several women rode. A circus! They had heard about them, but this was the first they ever had seen.

Everybody looked tired and cross and they paid the two bedazzled children no heed but went steadily on the way. No doubt they were eager to reach the ^{grove} ~~gave~~ of wild plum trees at the edge of the village where, it was reported, circuses were accustomed to stop and prepare for their grand entry into Newcomerstown.

But the children's private show had only begun. Bringing up the rear, shuffling along in the dust which was settling thickly on their gray wrinkled hides, came elephants. ~~Benton~~

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Benton and Maria could scarcely believe their eyes although they instantly recognized them from all the pictures they'd studied. But fear of their swinging, snake-like trunks prevented the two edging even closer for a better view.

But the real show hadn't begun. That came when the huge beasts approached the fragile looking bridge over the mill-race. There they balked. Despite their drovers' shouting, pushing and beating, they swayed on their tired legs refusing to budge. Almost instantly, however, they spied the mill-pond and trumpeting the elephant equivalent of "Last one in's a rotten egg!" splashed to the very middle of the sun dappled pool. There they sank to their knees in the cool refreshing water. Once rested, they began playing, showering themselves and each other, and no doubt even their desperate handlers with water drawn up in their trunks.

How long they remained is now forgotten, but finally they responded to their drovers' calls and climbed out onto the road beyond the hated bridge. But then they stopped again, for they had discovered the potatoes in the road. Meticulously they vacuumed the dust with their still dripping trunks and refused to move a step farther until the last morsel had been found.

To James Pilling, the surprise delaying tactic he'd planned for his children's delight may have seemed anti-climactic after the water carnival the elephants themselves had provided. But they loved every moment.

How many elephants were there? We children who had been treated to every circus within reach from Sun Brothers to Ringling's in the 1910-1920 era, always visualized a whole herd and so far as I remember, none of us ever asked.

And maybe that's just as well. For probably the answer would have been a disappointing two, at most.