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Back to the Past: A column highlighting the natural history of the Watershed

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Reviewing *The History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania*, I ran across a description of Durham, written by the notable ornithologist, naturalist and illustrator, Alexander Wilson. Wilson was born in 1766 and died in 1813, and during his relatively short life participated in many interesting endeavors concerning the study of birds. He is regarded as the greatest American ornithologist prior to Audubon. In 1801, he accepted a teaching position in what is now South Philadelphia (then called Gray's Ferry) and met the famous naturalist William Bartrum, who developed Wilson's interest in the study of birds. In 1802, Wilson decided to publish a book illustrating all the North American birds; and began to travel widely, watching and painting birds and trying to get support for the publishing of his book. It was during the early part of his travels that he wandered through the Durham Valley on his way to Niagara from Philadelphia.

The following passage is taken from *The History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania*.

THE HISTORY OF BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, 1743 from the discovery of the Delaware to the present time by W. W. H. Davis, A.M., 1876 and 1905* editions. End of Chapter XLI, or Chapter XI of 1905 edition. The surface of Durham is rolling, in some places the swells rising into the dignity of hills - but nevertheless it is fertile, and good crops repay the labor of the farmer. In the valley of Durham there are many fine farms, and the sloping hillsides are cultivated to their summit.(35) (35) Mr. Alexander Wilson, the American ornithologist, in his pedestrian tour to Niagara, 1804, alluded in "The Foresters," to the valley of the Durham creek in the following terms: "Light beat hearts with changing prospect gay, As down through Durham's vale we held our way, And pause, its furnace curious to explore, Where flames and bellows lately wont to roar, Now waste and roofless, as the walls we pass The massive shells lie rusting in the grass. There let them rust, fell messengers of death! Till injured Liberty be roused to wrath, In whose right may they, though hosts oppose, Be blasting thunderbolts to all her foes."

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Transcriber's note: Liberty has been taken with numbering footnotes so as to include all footnotes from both the 1876 and 1905 editions, plus any additional text and pictures in the 1905 edition. All 1905 material will be noted with an asterisk. Note: Where names differ, the 1905 edition spelling is applied.