

Black Mountain is a part of the Cumberland Mountain Range that runs along the border of Wise County, Virginia and Harlan and Letcher Counties in Kentucky. It reaches its peak on the Kentucky side not far from Highway 160 at an elevation of 4,149 feet, making it the highest peak in that state. Today most of the mountain is owned by the Penn-Virginia Coal Company, the latest in a succession of coal operators that have mined much of the precious mineral during this century. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, one thousand acres on Black Mountain were owned by a remarkable freedman named Daniel Richmond who lived on the top of the mountain in an area that still bears tribute to him, the “Dan Fields”.

In the summer of 1992, my neighbor Vernon “Ikke” Church and I went camping with our sons just below the crest on the Kentucky side of the mountain. Church was born in the early 1950s when some families still leased company owned houses on the mountain. Church told me the top of the mountains was called the “Dan Fields” so named for a runaway slave called “nigger Dan”. He stated there was a cemetery located “somewhere in the woods” although he was not sure if he could find it now. With my curiosity whetted, I asked him more questions about Dan, but he stated he knew little else, but that his cousin Harvey knew more about the man.

Harvey Sturgill is a diminutive man who grew up at the foot of Black Mountain in the Kentucky community of Eolia, a lovely rural community nestled between the Black and Pine Mountain ranges, named for a Cherokee word which means “Valley of the Winds”. When he was a young boy, his grandmother had told him the story of a black man whom the local white populace called, with a strange degree of affection, “Nigger Dan”. Sturgill grew up with a

rheumatic heart and did not attend school, instead becoming a self taught man deeply interested in the oral history surrounding him. Sturgill is a craftsman, who fashions mountain toys cut from the various timber on the mountain ranges. He also is a storyteller who spins his oral yarns at various festivals and at schools throughout the Central Appalachian area. One of the many stories he tells is the one his grandmother told him of a runaway slave named Dan. The following is his tale.

Dan was the slave of General Jonathan Richmond from Tennessee. Years before the Civil War, Dan went to Kentucky with his master who was going to purchase land on the Black Mountain. Dan thought then that this (the mountain) would be a good place to hide for a slave. When he went back home he stored food and supplies in a corn crib, then slipped away at night to travel to the mountain. It was on this mountain that he hid and farmed a small parcel of land. One time a white neighbor saw him and sought him out. He assured Dan that no one owned any slaves on the mountain and that he would be safe. After that time, Dan was able to increase his farm.

When the war ended, he sent for his wife Sarah, and other family members and friends to come to this mountain. With the war over, Dan filed for and received title to this land under the Homestead Act of 1862. Near the turn of the century the coal barons came to the mountain and offered to buy Dan's land. Dan said he would trade his land, acre for acre, for land back in his home of Tennessee. When these terms were met, Dan moved his family and other members to Hawkins County, Tennessee where he died.

This was the story as told by Sturgill in September of 1993. I wondered how much of this oral tale was history and how much was just a fanciful tale? How much significance did this freedman have on an essentially white community on both sides of the mountain? What made him decide to leave his mountain home and return to Tennessee? These were just some of the questions raised by Harvey Sturgill's tale as told to him by his grandmother some fifty years ago. I did not have a last name to this man named Dan, only this story and the mountain and the

graveyard. My research took me to four courthouses in three states, countless libraries, census records, a couple of history books, graveyards, and interviews with people who knew a smattering of information regarding Dan.

The “Dan Fields” can be reached via an unpaved road off of Kentucky state route 806, about a mile past the Letcher County community of Eolia. Climbing the mountain by truck in late April, one is struck by the dense undergrowth and the water streaming over the rocks splashing into the ditch line. There are hillsides covered with trillium, both painted and white. As one nears the crest, the nakedness of the trees is exposed and the trillium beds give way to fields of “ramps.” Like almost all the mountain lands in the coalfields, the big timber has been taken, but there is still an assortment of hard woods, predominately maples, oaks, and hickories. After a rough, winding six mile ride, one reaches the crest, some 3,300 feet above sea level, and about 1,500 feet above Eolia. There are no signs signifying one is entering Virginia, but the line straddles the crest of the mountain. This is the Big Bluff spur of Black Mountain. The mountain gets its name from its rich black soil, dirt that is still prized by the natives, who dig the earth to fill their flower boxes, and tomato plots. Less than a quarter of a mile from the road is a cemetery, consisting of sixteen rough cut limestones spaced approximately eight feet apart in staggered rows. In 1899 Dan Richmond sold his one hundred acres on the Virginia side of the mountain to the Virginia Coal and Iron Company. Much of this deed of sale concerns itself with the protection of the graveyard from the coal company.

It is further understood that neither the said Daniel Richmond nor his heirs or assigns shall ever at any time make, or permit anyone else to make any use whatever of the said graveyard except for graveyard purposes, and that the exception of

the said graveyard from this conveyance shall continue operative only so long as the said Richmond and his heirs and assigns make no use, and do not permit any one else to make use, thereof except for grave yard purposes, and in case the said Richmond or his heirs or assigns should at any time make any use thereof, or permit any one else to make any other use thereof, the all right, title and interest of the said Richmond, his heirs and assigns, in and to said grave yard shall forthwith cease and determine,

and the same shall thenceforth forever be the property of the second part.

Today the grave yard rests underneath a large maple tree and several saplings. Some of the stones are almost two feet high and a foot wide, and it appears that something had been carved into these stones years ago, although none is legible today after years of seasonal weathering. One wonders who these people were that are buried on this mountain, and more importantly who was Dan Richmond who came to possess and sell this acreage to the Virginia Coal and Iron Company?

Daniel Richmond was born a slave in North Carolina in October of 1823 or 1827, the son of London Richmond, a slave born in South Carolina. According to the Virginia census of 1870, Daniel gives his age as 42, the census of 1880 lists 52 as his age, while the Tennessee census of 1900 gives his age as 76. In the slave census of 1850 there does appear a twenty-two year old male slave belonging to Jonathan Richmond, who was probably Dan.

Daniel was the slave of Jonathan Richmond, a prominent planter in the Turkey Cove section in eastern Lee County, the most western county in the commonwealth of Virginia. Jonathan Richmond was the son of Isaac Richmond, the great-grandson of Abraham Richmond who had come to Virginia from England and settled in Richmond, Virginia. In 1827, Jonathan

took Mary Dickenson of Russell County as his bride, and after the birth of their fifth child, the family moved to Turkey Cove in 1835, purchasing over one hundred acres from William Huff. Two years after coming to the county, Richmond purchased one thousand acres of land on Black Mountain from John Flanary, the original owner, who had received title to the land in 1819. One hundred acres of the land was on the Virginia side of the mountain in Wise County, with the remaining acreage on the Kentucky side in Letcher County.

Jonathan Richmond became a prosperous planter in Lee County. In 1850 he owned 21 slaves, including a twenty-two year old male who probably was Dan. By 1860 he had increased his acreage, owning land from Turkey Cove east to the Wise County line and south to Stone Mountain. On the eve of the Civil War, his number of slaves had increased to thirty-four, which included thirteen males and twenty-one females. In this agrarian antebellum society where wealth was measured by the number of slaves one owned, Jonathan Richmond was the second wealthiest man in Lee County. In addition to his increase in acreage and slaves came an expanded family. He and Mary had eight more children, the last John W., was born in 1853, giving the Richmond couple a total of thirteen children.

During the Civil War Jonathan Richmond joined the rebel forces, and eventually reached the rank of general in the Virginia Militia. After the war, Richmond returned to his plantation in Turkey Cove, still a prosperous man. According to the census of 1870, his land was valued at \$20,000 and his personal property at \$4,000. Many of his former slaves continued to live on the farm, including an ex-slave named Daniel, who took the freedman surname of his former master.

Daniel had “married” (slave marriages were not recognized as such) a slave woman named Mary who was born in 1835, and their union had produced four children while in bondage. Their first child, Rachel was born in 1856, followed by two more girls, Francis (nicknamed Fanny) born in 1858, and Joanna in 1860. Their first son, James Madison was born in 1862. Also residing at Dan Richmond’s residence in 1870 were Peter Davis, his wife Edy, and their small children Anderson and Amanda. Dan appeared to be not only a dutiful servant to Jonathan and his family, as evidenced by his staying on the plantation, but also prosperous in his own right. The census of 1870 listed the value of his assets at \$300 despite not owning his own land. In February 1871, Jonathan Richmond died at the age of sixty-five, leaving his estate with his wife Mary. She survived him by almost nine years, passing on in January of 1880. They are buried in a family cemetery approximately a quarter of a mile from the old home place.

By the time that Mary Richmond died, Dan and at least four other households had moved to the land on Black Mountain that their previous master had purchased in 1837. By 1880, Dan and Mary had sired at least four additional children. Franklin was born in 1873, followed by Samuel in 1875, Mary the same year, and George in 1876. The Wise County, Virginia census of 1880 lists Martha as Dan and Mary’s one year old granddaughter, yet twenty-five years later in his will, Dan grants \$400 to the children of his deceased daughter Martha. Also in the census, it lists Anderson as an eleven year old grandson, Amanda a six year old granddaughter, and Daniel a five year old grandson. Yet in his will he does not mention these children by name, whereas he does mention other grandchildren. These are some of the problems in comparing the census records of 1870, 1880, and 1900.

One can only imagine that Dan, with his former master's family's blessings, left Turkey Cove and moved to Black Mountain sometime shortly after Jonathan's death. Garnett Gilliam a local historian from Big Stone Gap, Virginia, tells the story that upon Jonathan Richmond's death each of the freedmen received fifty acres of the property on Black Mountain. If that is true there are no records that show a transfer of the property to the freedmen. This leads one to believe that the freedmen settled on the mountain without any legal paperwork, but rather armed with the word of their former master. Another problem with this oral tale is that Dan nor any other slaves went to the mountain after the war, but instead waited until Jonathan Richmond had died. There is no evidence in the census of 1870 that anyone was living on Black Mountain, certainly not the families of John Flanary, Dan Richmond, or John Richmond. However it does appear that Dan and the other families did have the blessings of the Richmond family to homestead on the mountain. When Dan needed to perfect the deeds years later the Jonathan Richmond heirs sold Dan their part of the mountain. Dan Richmond appears then to have been a dutiful slave who remained loyal to his former master by taking his surname and continuing to live on Jonathan Richmond's land until the general's death.

Therefore, sometime between 1871 and 1879, Dan and the other families made the trek to Black Mountain. If, as the oral tale states, Dan did accompany Jonathan Richmond to Black Mountain in 1837, he would have been a mere boy of nine years, and there were no boys near that age listed in the slave census of Jonathan Richmond in 1840. It would seem that Dan and others might have made the trip to the mountain either as slaves or freedmen, for the trip from Turkey Cove to the top of Black Mountain is only approximately twenty-five miles. Therefore it appears plausible that the freedmen were aware of the land on the mountain.

When the census was taken in 1880, the census taker listed five houses on the mountain in Virginia. Dan and Mary were by this time 52 and 47 years of age respectively. Three children were living at home, Madison, Franklin, and Samuel, and the four grandchildren previously cited. What happened to young Mary I do not know. Next to Dan's house lived James Tarter, a twenty-two year old mulatto (as the census notes) who had married Dan's daughter Joanna, and were the parents of three month old Ulysses Grant. On the other side of Dan's home lived John Richmond and his wife Louisa. They had six children ranging from eighteen year old Charles to a six month old daughter Elisa. Next to John lived Dan's twenty-one year old daughter Fanny and her husband Jackson a year her senior. They counted a seven month old daughter Dora in their household. Finally there was the home of Joseph Flanary a thirty-nine year old former slave of Thomas Flanary, a Lee County slave owner. He had married Martha Richmond in Lee County in June of 1869. They had five children ranging from Mary, a sixteen year old daughter, to Rebecca a three year old girl. There may have been more people living on the mountain. There are death certificates for two people, Fluenda Richmond and London Richmond that were reported to the authorities in Wise during the decade from 1880-1890, and yet they do not show up in the census records of 1880. In 1880 the "Dan Fields" then boasted a population of at least thirty, mostly youthful, freedmen, a group tied together by family lines and by the sense of newfound freedom. The land, however, legally remained with the Jonathan Richmond family.

In 1885, however, negotiations began between the general's heirs and Daniel. A deed dated August 28, 1885 granted Daniel 825 acres of land on the Kentucky side of the mountain

for the sum of \$200. Marian D. Richmond, the general's oldest living son, negotiated the deed with Daniel for the family. Signing the deed along with Marian were his wife Saluda, his brother Frank, and his wife Angeline, his brother H.C.T. and his wife Mary, and his sister Hettie Edmond and her husband W.F. Edmonds. Thus, despite other heads of households living on the "Dan Fields," Daniel Richmond held clear title to the 825 acres of land on the Kentucky side of the mountain.

Like almost all folks prior to the invasion of the coal industry, the families lived by farming. Today one can find rocks gathered and piled so the gardens would be mostly devoid of them. North of the graveyard there still blooms an apple orchard in late May, trees planted over a hundred years ago. The people on Black Mountain were on top of the world at 4,000 feet and perhaps close to God, but far from other settlements. On the Virginia side of the mountain, the town of Appalachia was ten miles to the east, and the county seat of Wise another fifteen miles north. On the Kentucky side it was six miles to settlements on the Cumberland River, and another ten miles north across Pine Mountain to the community of Cowan, and an additional five miles to the Letcher County courthouse at Whitesburg. Although isolated, the colony was known by people on both sides of the state line.

W.A. Johnson, who published the first written history of Wise County in 1938, recounts walking from his home in Lee County to Rockhouse Creek, Kentucky as a thirteen year old youth in 1879. On the first evening of his journey, he came across Dan Richmond's house, which he described as "crudely built". Since dusk was at hand, Johnson asked Richmond if he could stay the night, to which Dan replied that he could. Johnson noted that by suppertime there

was a “wife, two or three boys and two or three girls” that joined Dan and young Johnson at the supper table. Conversation at the table centered around the wildlife ranging in the Black Mountain, which included bear, panther, wolf, wildcat, catamount, raccoon, wild turkey and wild geese.

After supper, Dan led a worship service, which included a scripture lesson as well as two or three hymns. It was Johnson who stated that Dan had chosen to move to Black Mountain after the war because he “may have thought the move to the high mountain top would bring him nearer to and in closer communion with his Savior.”

Dan Richmond was known throughout the mountains as a religious man. Marie Day Frazier notes in her book *Kingdom Come: Fact or Fantasy* that Dan Richmond would travel across Pine Mountain to Cowan each year on a red stallion to service horses as well as lead the local populace in worship. Dan Richmond’s story is told in a song entitled “Hey Dan” by Cowan native and Marie Day Frazier’s nephew Dock Frazier. The Dock Frazier and Clyde Stanley Band produced an album in 1996 entitled “Stonega Run” that sings of mountain tales and legends in the Central Appalachian Mountains. In the song “Hey Dan”, Frazier recounts the fanciful account of Dan running away from slavery to “Kentucky because he had a mind to be free.” Whereas the song is incorrect in that Dan did not run away, but quite the contrary remained a dutiful servant, and that he legally settled not on the Kentucky side of the mountain but the Virginia side, Frazier does get to the religious persona of Dan. In the song Frazier seeks spiritual guidance from Richmond when he sings, “sitting here in the same room where you (on visits to Cowan) sat a hundred times before. Rain pouring down weighs heavy on my soul. Hey

Dan can you hear me now, can you help me understand, how it is that we all fit in His plans?"

The population of Eastern Kentucky has always had a very small African American population before the Civil War and afterwards. The idea that a freedman would travel across Pine Mountain to preach to an altogether white community speaks volumes about the personality of Dan Richmond and his ability to preach and reach across the high color barriers that existed throughout the South, particularly in the more isolated mountain communities.

Dan Richmond and his colony of freedmen lived on the mountain until 1899 when he sold all 925 acres and moved to Rogersville, Tennessee. Dan's son Frank married a woman named Martha, and they began their family on the mountain, siring four children. Three boys were born, Henry in 1892, Garfield in 1894, Albert in 1896, before a girl Ida was born in 1898. Fanny and Frank Richmond had three more children in addition to Dora. They included George born in 1883, Joanna born in 1885, and Sallie whose birth date I failed to uncover. Joanna and her husband James Tartar had a young son Daniel die at ten months of age on February 11, 1883 of the croup, and another child born in April of 1884, in which Joanna died in childbirth. One can imagine the grief Dan shouldered as he made the trek to Wise to report first the death of his grandson, then fourteen months later the death of his daughter. Thus by the time of the move to Tennessee, the settlement contained perhaps as many as thirty-five people.

In addition to Daniel and Joanna, during those years on the mountain a number of others died. Dan Richmond is on the death certificates as reporting these deaths to the authorities in Wise. In 1884, Fluerenda Richmond, Dan's mother-in-law died at the age of 84. She was from North Carolina, and although she was probably a slave, she was not the property of Jonathan Richmond, who had no slaves older than Dan. On January 12, 1886 Dan's father London died

at the age of 70. Like his son Daniel, London was born in South Carolina. On August 28, 1892, Dan's wife Mary died from heart disease. Although her age is listed at sixty on the death certificate, she is listed as 35 in the census of 1870 and as 45 in the census that followed. Given that she had a son Samuel born in 1875 it is likely that she was 57 or 58 at the time of her death rather than the age listed on the certificate. She had come to Virginia from North Carolina, and like her husband she had been the slave of Jonathan Richmond. When Dan sold out and moved to Tennessee, he paid \$1,000 to have his wife's body removed from the mountain and interned in Rogersville. A year after Mary Richmond's death, Nathaniel Hill, the infant son of Mary Richmond Hill (daughter of John and Louisa Richmond) and Albert Hill died a day after his birth. The preceding names account for seven of the sixteen tombstones on the mountain. The other stones might be infants and even stillborn births.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century northern agents for coal companies began to filter into the central and southern Appalachians to negotiate for the land or mineral rights from the natives. Alfred Pardee of Philadelphia created a corporation in the state of Virginia organized as the Virginia Coal and Iron Company, and negotiated with Dan for his land over a period of time from 1899-1905. The first transaction was on October 23, 1899, when for the sum of \$2,000 the Virginia Coal and Iron Company bought one hundred acres of land from Daniel Richmond. Much of the deed's language protects the graveyard as long as Dan or his heirs use it for graveyard purposes and for no other reason. If that ever occurred, then the land would have reverted to the Virginia Iron and Coke Company.

Sometime after that, the colony must have left the mountain and moved to Rogersville in

Hawkins County, Tennessee. Hawkins County lies south of Lee County across the Clinch Mountain. Why Daniel Richmond moved to Rogersville is unclear, but there are several possible reasons.

During the days after the Civil War it appears that Hawkins County, and especially Rogersville was as tolerant if not more so than any of the freedman population than other parts. A black man, Joseph Brice was a policeman in Rogersville in the early twentieth century. There is also a well kept black cemetery town, Mitchell-Brice Cemetery which has over 150 graves of people who lived and died in Rogersville, including a distant cousin Eloise Richmond, and Clarence Tarter, perhaps a relative of James Tarter.

Also in Rogersville there was a co-educational black college, Swift Memorial College, which started as a junior college in 1893, founded by the Presbyterian Church. The Reverend W.H. Franklin, Maryville College's first black graduate, and a graduate of Lane Theological Seminary came to Rogersville as the president of Swift. When the Tennessee legislature closed Maryville College to blacks, they transferred some \$25,000 to Swift, enabling the school to become a four year institution in 1904. It would seem that an industrious man like Dan would have been impressed at the educational opportunity Swift might give his grandchildren, and opportunity that had been denied to him and his children.

There could have been family reasons for the move to Rogersville. Frank Richmond had married a woman named Martha who, according to the census of 1900 was from Tennessee. Perhaps she was from Rogersville. Also one of Jonathan Richmond's granddaughters (Marian D. Richmond's daughter) Virginia Richmond had married a man from Rogersville, William

Kirby Armstrong and perhaps this was a link for Dan and his relatives. Six years after arriving at Rogersville on December 5, 1906, Dan had his will and testament dictated, and named W.K. Armstrong to be the executor of his estate. This is yet another piece of evidence to refute the “runaway” legend and suggest the close, paternalistic ties that Dan had to his former master’s family. Perhaps all these reasons had something to do with the move to the Tennessee side of the mountain, approximately an equal distance from Turkey Cove that his home on Black Mountain had been.

By the time of the census of 1900, June 14, Dan had moved to Rogersville, living in the tenth civil district about a mile and a half southwest of the town. For a price of \$950 he purchased two additional tracts adjacent to his property. On January 4, 1900 he bought a house and one acre of land for \$55. In this house lived his daughter Mary Carr, the last of his and Mary’s children, born on the mountain in 1875, and her children Alice, age 8, Maggie age 4, and an infant girl, Edna, less than a year old. Another grandson William Richmond, age 13, also resided in the home. Frank had followed his father to Rogersville with his wife Martha and their children. In the census of 1910 the family was still together in Rogersville, along with Maggie, Dan’s granddaughter, now 15 years old.

Today much of this land is owned by a lumber company and First Union Bank. Tennessee State Highway #66 bisects the land going south toward Morristown, and north toward the Virginia line, some twenty miles away. No one has lived on the land since the early 1950s when Jack Richmond and his brother Jess lived in a small rambling house on land which is now ringed by blackberry bushes, loblolly pine trees, and mimosa trees. A road leads up a knoll that

overlooks the shopping center where the bank resides with a Kentucky Fried Chicken Restaurant, a grocery store and several small shops. At the top of the knoll there are three modern houses probably built in the last twenty years, but no sign of the small house that Dan had purchased and lived in for the last few years of his life.

In December 1906 Dan Richmond had crafted a will, and named W.K. Armstrong and George Smith of Rogersville to be its executors. In the will he requests that after payment of debts and funeral expenses, with “suitable stone to my grave,” that his personal property be turned into money except his household goods which would pass to his grandchildren Alice and Maggie Carr, children of his deceased daughter Mary. He divided his land in equal proportions among these two grandchildren and to his daughter-in-law, Martha Richmond. He willed \$400 apiece to his sons Madison and George, and \$400 to the children of his deceased daughters Martha Barnes and Fanny Richmond. He gave various sums of money totaling \$300 to other grandchildren,(including \$100 to Ulysses) but only one dollar to his son George, “which shall be his full share of my estate, he to take nothing more under any clause of my will.”

Dan Richmond died in May of 1907. Where he is buried is a mystery. Despite the number of children and grandchildren left behind, no one in Rogersville I interviewed had heard of him. I spent a lot of time in Graveltown and Guntown the two major black residential districts in Rogersville and no one heard of any Richmond except the aforementioned brothers Jack and Jess.

Despite this lack of knowledge regarding the latter years of his life in Rogersville and not being able to contact any descendants, Dan Richmond is an important local figure. He was a

freedman who attained a measure of wealth by owning over 900 acres of mountain land, worth hundreds times the approximate \$10,000 he received for the land. On top of what remains a relative pristine area of the mountains he established a community of freedmen that was recognized and respected by those in Wise and Letcher counties as evidenced by the records of Marie Frazier Day and W.A. Johnston. Today people in the towns of Appalachia, Virginia and in Eolia, Kentucky know about the “Dan Fields.” They know the life of a distinguished, reverent man who made a life for himself, his family, and his community atop a formidable mountain.

As one looks at the records of the life of Dan Richmond, one can see the truth in the oral tale told by Harvey Sturgill and celebrated in song by Dock Frazier. Yes, Dan was a former slave who left to come to the top of Black Mountain and lived there with his family. Indeed, Dan did sell the land and move to Tennessee. It appears also that Dan was a religious man despite his illiteracy. However there are several discrepancies in the oral tales and in the historical truth. First of all, and what would be surprising to his Kentucky folk tellers, Dan did not come to Kentucky. The houses were on the Virginia side of the mountain, and it was Wise, not Whitesburg that Dan reported deaths, filed live births, and recorded marriage ceremonies. Secondly, Dan did not run away to his freedom. Ironically it was his loyalty that allowed him to come to the top of Black Mountain, live there in peace, and eventually sell it for what at that time seemed a great deal of money. Yet if not in theory, surely in spirit, Dan Richmond gained his freedom on the top of Black Mountain. He was the lord of the manor, where he could hunt wild game, farm his own food, and nurture his spirit in what is still one of the most beautiful places on earth, a place that bears his name-the “Dan Fields”.

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