



WILLIAM WILKINSON DIXON (1818-1891)

Ann Wilkinson Dixon, while serving as a maid in her husband's parent's home in Bothel, Cumberland, England, gave birth to a son on November 14, 1818. She and her husband, William named him William Wilkinson Dixon. Three weeks after his birth, his mother, Ann, left and he never saw her again.

Having endured a troubled childhood, William Wilkinson Dixon, at the age of 12, ran away from home. He spent several years as a cabin boy on a ship. The sailors, older than him, told him many times to, "Get busy kid or overboard you go." While on board the ship, among other chores, he darned sails and became so proficient at it, that years later he darned the stockings for his wife and children.

William eventually crossed the Atlantic Ocean and arrived in New York City. From there he went into the northern part of New York State and worked for a dairy. After a time, he made his way farther west, came in contact with the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and was converted.

In 1841, William met Sabra Lake at Ernestown, Upper Canada Ontario. He married Sabra, the eldest daughter of James Lake and Philomela Smith Lake. The couple lived near Sabra's family in Geneva, Scott County, Illinois, where Sabra gave birth to their first child, Henry Dixon (1 June 1843). The next year, the Dixon family and the James Lake family moved to Hancock county where they rented land and began to farm. On 12 September 1844, Harvey Dixon joined the family.

In the fall of 1844, William and Sabra moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, where William assisted in building the Nauvoo Temple. When the expulsion of the saints from Nauvoo took place in February 1846, the family crossed the frozen Mississippi river. They arrived in Council Bluffs, Iowa in the fall of 1846, where Sabra gave birth to Emma Jane (1 September 1846). They soon moved to Holt County, Missouri and added Lydia Ann (1848) and Mary Lucy (1850) to the family.

William prospered in herds and flocks, and prepared for the journey west. With pride in his family, joy and courage in his heart, he looked longingly ahead to the time when they might be established in a permanent home among the saints in Utah.

Cholera struck Sabra and threatened her life while the company was camped on the Platte River. Through the faith of William and the saints, the Lord spared her life so she could

continue in the migration with her husband and five children. Pleasant Green Taylor and his wife, Clara, Sabra's sister, were also in the company. William formed a close friendship with Pleasant Green, which continued throughout his life. They lived as neighbors after settling in Harrisville, Utah.

The company arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in September 1850. After resting a few days and attending the church's semi-annual conference, they traveled north to Ogden's Fort (Lorin Farr's Fort) where they located for the winter. In the spring of 1851, William drove back over the Mormon Trail and assisted other pioneers on their long journey west. Sabra welcomed the weary travelers as they arrived and shared her meager comforts with them.

In the summer of 1851, William moved his family five miles northwest of Ogden, and with other pioneer families established a home along the Four Mile Creek in what would become the Eighth District, and eventually the town of Harrisville. On 2 June 1852, Sabra gave birth to the first white girl born in Harrisville. They named her Electa Philomelia

For the first several years, the settlers had problems with the Native Americans. Because of these hostilities, Brigham Young instructed the families in the area to build a fort. In the fall of 1853, they started construction approximately two miles south of Harrisville. They named it Bingham's Fort. Most of the settlers in Harrisville took their log houses apart, moved them inside of the fort, and rebuilt them.

The Dixons lived in a home on the north side of the fort. One hundred and ten families lived within the fortified walls of Bingham's Fort. The men guarded their families and homes night and day. They farmed in their fields during the day, carrying guns for protection, and returned to the fort at night. Finally, in 1856, they returned to their homesteads and rebuilt their homes on their farms.

While living in the fort, Sabra gave birth to a daughter, Esther Ann Dixon (22 March 1854). Lydia Ann Dixon, the fourth child, died while in Bingham's Fort at the age of 5. William and Sabra added eight more children to their family during the next 13 years: William James (1856), Bailey (1859), Sara Ellen (1861), Dudley (1864), John Lake (1865), Riley George (1866), and Alfred (1869). Six children died during the same 13 years. William James Dixon, age 7 died in 1862. Three children died within a three week period during late November, early December 1865: Ester Ann, 11, Sabra Elizabeth 8, and Bailey 6. What heartache must have filled their home at this tragic loss. Dudley Dixon died at birth in January 1872. The pioneers faced many deaths as they settled the west.

After moving from Bingham's Fort, William and Sabra returned to their chosen home-site in Harrisville. They built a log house and a rock cellar on a beautiful spot among the poplar and cottonwood trees beside the stream (approximately 875 North Harrisville Road). Later, William built a frame house on an elevation a few rods to the west for the accommodation of his increasing family. Beside the kitchen door, William dug a well, which was known

throughout the valley as “the old Dixon.” The well’s deep rock wall and moss covered bucket invited many weary, thirsty travelers to stop for a drink and chat with “Father Dixon.”

William loved the soil. He and his sons planted an orchard just below the hill to the south. He loved to prune his trees, and found joy in their bud, bloom, and fruit. Between the rows of trees he planted various kinds of berries. Settlers in the valley commented on his choice raspberries and blackberries. He planted one row of an unusual variety of fruit called ground cherries, which grew on a low, rambling bush. It was a rare plant with delicious fruit. South of the orchard, William planted a garden, and beyond that stretched his fields of grain and rich, green meadows.

William found a deep and satisfying joy in his religion. He honored the priesthood which he held. To him, a principle was a law. He gave implicit obedience to morning and evening prayers.

A grandson, Harvey Dixon Jr., wrote:

“I know Grandfather William Wilkinson Dixon was a good man who taught his children the power of prayer. In his home prayers were never forgotten, the first thing in the morning and the last thing before retiring at night. The writer (Harvey Dixon Jr.) was there and knelt in family prayers many times, and I well remember the humble, impressive prayers that came from the lips of those who would lead.”

Dixon also took the payment of tithes and offerings, and attendance at church services seriously. He met his ward duties with integrity and dependability. He served in the district presidency in the LDS Church for several years. William and Sabra took their children to Salt Lake to attend the LDS general conference. He taught his children by example as well as by precept.

William had a keen interest in the affairs of the community of Harrisville. He also took an active role in education. He used his means and influence in building schools.

As age advanced, William Wilkinson Dixon suffered from a serious ailment. Calling his children together from Idaho and Utah, he and Sabra journeyed to Logan, with their children, to be sealed as a family in the Logan temple on 14 October 1890. William and Sabra had been sealed in the Endowment House in Salt Lake on 3 November 1855. Eight months after returning home from Logan, William became seriously ill. On 10 June 1891, at the age of 72, he passed away at his home surrounded by his devoted wife, family, and friends. He was buried in the Ogden City Cemetery. Sabra Lake Dixon died 2 July 1908, and was buried in the Ogden City Cemetery.

Friends considered William to be a “perfect” neighbor; thoughtful and considerate of the interests and rights of others. He was honest. Whenever he employed help, he gave the

laborer his daily wage as he bade him good night. William, though an exile in his youth, had at last found a home in Harrisville, surrounded by loved ones, friends, and neighbors. He cherished this haven of rest, and added his unique talents and work ethic to building a community.

SOURCE:

Dixon, Harvey, Jr. "Biography of William Wilkinson Dixon." Unpublished manuscript.

Jeffrey, Janet Franson. *History of the James Lake, Jr. Family*. Murray, Utah: Roylance Publishing, 1990. 184-190.

Bingham's Fort	Dixon, Lydia Ann
Carter, William	Dixon, Mary Lucy
Dixon Sara Ellen	Dixon, Riley George
Dixon Well	Dixon, William
Dixon, Alfred	Dixon, William James
Dixon, Ann Wilkinson	Lake James
Dixon, Bailey	Lake, Philomela Smith
Dixon, Dudley	Lake, Sabra
Dixon, Electa Philomelia	Lorin Farr's Fort
Dixon, Emma Jane	Ogden's Fort
Dixon, Esther Ann	Taylor, Clara Lake
Dixon, Harvey	Taylor, Pleasant Green
Dixon, John Lake	Young, Brigham