

Historical Letter From Dickson Descendant Tells Of City's Birth

Editors Note: The following letter is from the only living person who is a descendant of the original Dickson family:

Your letter came today inquiring about the history of the Dickson family, who founded Dixon. I think perhaps I am the only living person who really knows much about them, as I lived with them all my life, until they were all gone.

My great grandfather, Thomas Dickson, was born in 1800 in Pennsylvania. His people were Scotch, from Aberdeen and Dundee. He was a minister, and a school teacher, but most of all, a pioneer. Grandmother Jane Parker Hood was born in Tennessee in 1813. The Hoods were German; they came to America in the late 1600's — in 1679, I think. Two brothers were Eric and Carl Heinrich Hood from whom my family descended. They established the first bank in Philadelphia, a building made of logs.

Carl had many children, who, when they were old enough, went to other places to take up land. On egrandson, Carl Heinrich, III, took up land in Tennessee. He married, had nine children, and then his wife died. He re-married and there were nine more. Grandmother Dickson was of the second "crop." Her father changed his name legally to Charles Henry Hood. I have an old account book which tells this, and it says "He fought in the Rebellion." When Jane was 16 she went to Philadelphia to visit her relatives there, and "learn the ways of the city." While there she met grandfather Thomas Dickson. They were married in 1830, got into a covered wagon and pioneered to Illinois — took up land and established a home. There Elizabeth (Mrs. Dudley) and my uncle William were born. Then land was thrown open in Iowa, so away they went and took up land in Iowa, somewhere near Monticello, I believe, a place called "Bowens Prairie." There my grandmother Martha

(Duffield), was born Jan. 2, 1840 — then Uncle Henry, Uncle Nathan, and Uncle James. They had a very nice place for those times — a two story house, all plastered inside! The Van Sant family lived "down the lane."

When everything was just lovely — came California!! Grandfather had to go, so although there was another baby expected, they sold their place, bought three wagons, 12 head of oxen, some horses, and two or three cows, and started for the promised land. On the margin of an old Bible is written, "Jane Dickson gave birth to a girl, Evaline Dickson, 12 o'clock noon, July 12, 1853, presumably Wyoming." The old diary says "July 13 traveled 12 miles, water and feed for the cattle scarce."

They had left Iowa April 19, 1853; arrived in Hangtown, Calif., Oct. 13, 1853, "Journey's end." They rented a place at Diamond Springs. For how long, I do not know. They then moved to Silveyville. Whether they had land or rented a house, I do not know.

My grandmother, Martha, was then 14. She had an Indian pony she used to ride over the plains. Where Dixon is now, the wild oats could be crossed over the pony's back. When she told her father, he went to see for himself. Then he told his neighbors he was moving to that place to take up his land. They said, "You'll starve out there," but he said, "Where oats grows like that, nobody need starve." So that's how Dixon came to be settled.

A funny thing no one knows about now — before they could turn the soil, they had to clear the land of elk horns — great piles of them, bleached white with age, were raked up and had to be burned. Not even the oldest Spaniard or Indian could remember when there were elk anywhere around. There must have been a great herd of them in Dixon at one time.

When there was talk of a rail-

road to connect San Francisco and Sacramento, the survey showed that it would come near "Dicksonville," as it was called then. The Dicksons, Van Sants and McFaddens had taken up land, had a general store and a post office. Grandfather Dickson offered to give land to the RR. When it became a certainty that the railroad was to come through Dicksonville, Silveyville moved to Dicksonville. That was, I think, in 1865. The railroad was built in 1867 and, I think, the first train came through in 1868. After a little while the superintendent in San Francisco said, "Put a sign on that last new station: call it 'Dickson.'" He didn't say how to spell it, so the man spelled it "Dixon." It was several months more before the superintendent made a trip of inspection of the railroad to Sacramento, and when he saw the sign, he was disappointed, but by then the literature, timetables, etc., were printed — all the trainmen knew it by that name and Grandfather Dickson said to let it stand. So that's how Dixon got its name — a mistake in spelling.

The little girl who was born on the plains married Dan Huff, one of the superintendents of the railroad, in 1869. She was then 16 years old. He built the large house for her near the Garnet house, not far from the Methodist church. He died in 1879 and J. M. Dudley, who had married Elizabeth in 1855 or '56, bought it off Aunt Evaline who went home. After that the house was known as the Dudley house. After Mrs. Dudley died in 1911, her son Delmar moved it out to the Dudley ranch, which is now owned, I believe, by a Mr. Brown.

Uncle William, whom the kids called "Old Bill Dickson" when he was 83, was a very fine person. When Elizabeth was three years old in Illinois, and William was three weeks old, grandmother Dickson went out

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to the barn to see why grandfather was gone so long. It was winter and very cold. Uncle William was asleep in a chair on a pillow, by the fireplace. She told Elizabeth to sit still and not awaken the baby. Elizabeth thought she would hold

him and rock him, but she tripped over his long dress and he fell on the stones of the fireplace and injured his hip. It was weeks before they could get to a doctor. By then the hip had knitted and he was afraid to do anything with it because the baby was so small. So that's why he was lame.

Grandma told me that when he was a young man it was scarcely noticeable.

The family took up land in Shasta County, in beautiful Fall River Valley in the early 70's or late 60's. He, William, wasn't a farmer, so was for 20 years in the office of the Sheriff of Shasta County as Deputy Sheriff, then Sheriff. He apparently had time on his hands so he studied Greek. I have some of his books. I was in Fall River Mills, near the Dickson place, in 1964 and met some people who knew him, and he was very much respected there.

Uncle Henry was a deaf mute. He was not born that way. When he was four years old, in 1847 in Iowa, he had typhus fever, again in the middle of winter. When he recovered he had lost his hearing, and by the time he was six he had forgotten how to talk. By the time he was eight he could tell them anything about anyone they knew, by drawing pictures of them, like an animated cartoon, I guess. He was nine when they came to California, and when he was 10 he could paint. His father went to "San Francisco Town" and bought artists' paints and brushes for him. When he

ill and had pneumonia. He was very delicate, and when he recovered he had "shaking palsy" and couldn't paint anymore, but he had a photograph gallery for years in Dixon. I have several of his European pictures. Until World War I he took French and German newspapers. As far back as I can remember, in my childhood, he mended all our shoes.

There are several amusing stories of the great crossing which grandma told me, which have nothing to do with the founding of Dixon, except that the Dicksons were enroute. One more thing which few know now were the deep ditches that used to be on each side of the road. There was little timber for fences, so the settlers dug these "ditch fences" around their land. Later the government offered \$100 to anyone who would plant trees around their land. That's why there were so many osage orange hedges everywhere. The ditch fences remained, however, and the wild ducks and geese made nests in them, and when the eggs hatched the babies couldn't get out, so the parents flew on and the ducks and geese were domesticated, and everyone had a flock of them in their chicken