

Felix Benedict Dixon, Texas Citizen

By Dwight Albert Sharpe

Dixon is a Northern English name, described as "patronymic from the personal name Dick.

Source: Patrick Hanks, Editor, Dictionary of American Family Names, Oxford University Press, New York, New York, 2003, Card #929.40973 D554 2003 V.1, Dallas Public Library, Genealogical Section, page 470.

Felix Benedict Dixon was born in Ohio in 1818, as indicated in the San Augustine County, Texas US Census of 1850. Residents were asked for the state where born. That same Census entry indicated that his unnamed parents were born in West Virginia. He could have been the Felix Dixon who appeared in 1840 in the US Census in Kentucky, indicated as a single man in a household. That would be compatible with the fact that his Tennessee born wife, Lovinia Shanks, was not born until 1828 and would have been only 12 in 1840. However, we have no way just yet of knowing whether the Kentucky man was our Felix.

Felix Benedict Dixon is my great, great grandfather, thus making me a fifth generation Texan.

The world of 1818 for Ohio when it was a fifteen year old state had a half million population, having grown in those 15 years from about 50,000. It was the year the United States and Canada agreed upon the 49th parallel as their border. It was just four years before Ulysses Grant was born in Ohio, the man destined to lead the United States military in the War Between the States, and later to become President. We do not know when Felix departed Ohio, but it was fast becoming crowded, apparently.

His initial appearance in Texas was San Augustine, San Augustine County. The Minutes of the Session of the Bethel (Old School) Presbyterian Church, organized in June 1838, reflects at the end of 1840 a list of 39 members who had been removed from the church roll or who had voluntarily left the church. One of them was F. B. Dixon. It seems unusual that he could be counted in the 1840 Census in Kentucky, migrated to Texas, join the church, then be removed or leave its membership by the end of the year. So, we still are uncertain about when he arrived in Texas and whether he was the man counted in the 1840 Kentucky Census or whether he is the 1840 Dixon listed by the church.

This part of East Texas and the Western end of the United States at that time (Louisiana) was rip roaring in the 1840's. The "Red Lander" San Augustine newspaper in its issue of May 19, 1842, page 2, reports on the fatal duel fought the day before at the Louisiana Race Course between Mr. R. C. Martin of Assumption Parish and Judge A. W. Pichot, Esq. The duel was fired at ten paces and the Judge ended up with a bad judgement! It turns out that Mr. Martin was the really big shot!

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I have certified evidence in my records is that Felix B. Dixon took an oath as an immigrant to the Republic of Texas in San Augustine County in May, 1841. This fact is gathered from the record of the 320 acre land grant for which he received a certificate of title on July 1, 1844. His arrival date in Texas is unknown, but claiming the land grant involved having taken an oath of emigration to become a citizen of the Republic of Texas, followed by continuous residence on the acres for three years. After that three years of demonstrated stability as a citizen, Texas General Land Office would issue the certification that finalized the title. The fact that he claimed 320 acres indicates his marital status was single, as married claimants would receive 640 acres.

This was obviously a pro-Sam Houston area of the new nation as evidenced by its 1844 election. The "Red Lander" (a newspaper in San Augustine, San Augustine County, Texas) on September 8, 1844, page 3, reported the county's vote results for President of Texas as 442 for Sam Houston and 48 for D. G. Eurpet (who ever heard of him by now?).

The interesting thing about these land grants was that the claimant was responsible to find the unoccupied land, hire a surveyor to plot a drawing legally acceptable to the Texas General Land Office, then submit it to the TGLO for processing. Felix settled and stayed in that locale till his 1896 death in San Augustine County ("The First Settlers of San Augustine County, Texas," by Gifford White, page. 50).

Felix Dixon's appearance in San Augustine County, Texas is further evidenced by his purchase of land in 1842, which is certified in my records by the San Augustine County Clerk's office. Therefore, he evidently came to Texas with certainty before he purchased this 25 acres in San Augustine County in December of 1842.

Felix was elected County Surveyor for the County of San Augustine, Republic of Texas in 1844, thus making him the only elected official in the Republic of Texas in my lineage. This signals the initial evidence we see of his propensity to be a man politic. Earlier in that year, there is certified record that Felix purchased 1,000 acres for \$300 from Joseph French, situated in San Augustine County, Republic of Texas, on the west side of the Brazos River. So, Felix is a man of some means, and not just a recent emigrant who was broke when he came to seek his fame and fortune.

Felix appeared on a list of practicing attorneys in San Augustine County, Texas in 1844 for the 5th District Court of the Republic of Texas. It would be easy to conjecture legal training may have been acquired prior to his 1841 immigration oath to Texas, and that such education may have been acquired at the University of Kentucky, if he is the man cited above in the 1840 Kentucky U.S. Census. However, it is my understanding that lawyers practicing in those times often were educated by being an apprentice to an existing attorney, rather than by formal education. It was not yet required to have a professional certification or bar membership to practice.

His profession as an attorney is further evidenced by the advertisement for his legal and counsellor services that is found on page 3 of the March 12, 1846 issue of the "Red Lander" San Augustine newspaper.

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We see his marriage to Lovinia Shanks in San Augustine County evidenced by a certified copy I have of a marriage license issued on January 7, 1846. The marriage ceremony was conducted by the County Judge on January 20 of that month.

Felix appeared on the San Augustine County property tax roll in 1846. We do not know whether Felix and Lovinia came together to San Augustine at the same time or whether his Tennessee born bride came there with others and they met in San Augustine. We see her named spelled two ways: Like we cite her in these records and we have seen her listed as "Lovina." The couple married when he was age 28 and she was 18. This is the year that Herman Melville published his first novel, "Typee." It's also the year that architect James Renwick designed the Smithsonian Institute building in Gothic Revival style.

[Source: Timetables of American History]

Another evidence of Felix's presence in the Republic of Texas is that 1846 Poll Lists were compiled at the beginning of Statehood of all who were citizens of the Republic, in order that they would be taxed in the new State's revenues. Two lists were compiled for each county. One list went to the Texas State Treasurer and the other to the County Sheriff, who was the tax collector. This list is the nearest thing to a census that exists for those who entered the Union from the Republic.

Source: "Republic of Texas Poll Lists For 1846," Compiled by Marion Day Mullins, Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, Maryland, 1974, pages 44 and the Forward.

Felix's entry in the US Census of San Augustine, San Augustine County, Texas of 1850 shows him to be an Ohio born man, age 32 with a wife named Lovina (possible misspelling by the Census taker), born in Tennessee, and with two daughters born in 1847 and 1849 in Texas. A third daughter was born in 1852, Elizabeth, and a fourth daughter was born in 1853, Martha Jane Dixon. She married into the Abney family and became my great grandmother. Felix and Lovina bore six children in all, every one a daughter. I have documentation that two of the births were in San Augustine, San Augustine County, Texas. However, since there is no evidence the family ever lived elsewhere, it is a likely assumption that all the children were born there.

Another fact about the 1850 Census for this family unit was that a Tennessee born 16 year female named Helen Shanks resided with them. Though we have no other evidence, it is logical that this is the younger sister of Tennessee born Lovinia Shanks Dixon, the wife in this household, who was age 22 at the time.

I have a court record of a certification about a legal matter that is signed and certified by Chief Justice Felix B. Dixon on October 14, 1846. Apparently he had achieved elected office by that time. What is interesting is that the title of Chief Justice was changed after statehood took over, and that head of county government was then called County Judge,

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as it is today. I can only suppose that the practice of using the Republic of Texas title was still in effect, even though the February 19, 1846 date had passed for official recognition of Statehood by the Congress of the United States.

Chief Justice Alfred Polk was elected to that office in 1845, a few short months before Texas statehood. Felix and Lovinia were among the earliest marriages that were conducted by Judge Polk. Harry Noble's book reports the marriage as January 20, 1846. (Harry P. Noble, Jr. Texas Trailblazers: San Augustine Pioneers, Best of East Texas Publishers, 515 South First Street, Box 1647, Lufkin, Texas 75901) The marriage licence has been identified and certified for me. It is recorded on page 61 of the register of marriages in the San Augustine County Clerk's office and dated January 7, 1846.

Judge Polk served some 15 years in that position. We see in Mr. Harry Noble's book on Texas Trailblazers (Page. 171) that at some point (the year is unidentified), Felix Dixon opposed him for election as County Judge. Apparently, it was an unsuccessful effort for Felix, as we read that Judge Polk was ultimately replaced by Judge Ransom Sowell in August of 1860 (Page 170 - Noble's book). However, that does not explain why I located a document signed by Felix in 1846 with the title of Chief Justice. Perhaps Felix won a term and Judge Polk was successful in being reelected again the following term.

I was privileged to meet Harry Noble when I visited the San Augustine County Historical Foundation center on March 24, 2004. It was located on the north side of the town square, across from the courthouse. I understand it is now housed in the courthouse. A grant from a foundation had enabled them to commit to retrievable computer records the entire inventory of public records from their county courthouse, as well as from local institutions that maintain orderly records, such as churches and business enterprises. They claim to be the first Texas County to have all of their records so accessible. Harry autographed one of his books for me, as there were several there he had written about the local history.

The Director of the San Augustine County Historical Foundation when I visited was Mr. Neal Murphy. He and his staff, particularly Missy, were very helpful to me in gathering much public record data about Felix and his family. Its mission is that of Records Preservation. Mr. Murphy wrote a letter for me that documents some of the material. He also directed me to the drug store a block away to try their Grapefruit Highball, which he said would be free to a first time out-of-town drinker. I tried that, and it worked! It is a delightful non-alcoholic grapefruit drink served in a glass cowboy boot.

"In the fall of the 1862 Captain Felix B. Dixon raised a company in San Augustine County which was assigned to the 25th Texas Infantry under Colonel Waterhouse in Walker's Division." (G. L. Crocket's book, page 337)

Another source is a General Index the Federal Government has online at:

www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/Personz_Detail.cfm

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It indicates that F. B. Dixon entered and departed the Confederate military with the rank of Captain. He is indicated as serving in the 19th Texas Infantry Regiment. It was organized about May 13, 1862. It also has Colonel Richard Waterhouse, Jr. serving as that Regiment's first Commander.

Strangely, Felix is not listed on the 1867 Registered Voters List for San Augustine County. Later his name did appear often on qualified juror lists for San Augustine County over the years, too numerous to be worth footnoting. Evidently he did become a registered voter, particularly since we have read that he competed against Judge Polk for election at least once for the County Judge position. We see he did win that office later.

I was interested, not only that Felix was a Presbyterian, as have I been for much of my life, but that his Bethel Old School Presbyterian Church was the very first mainline Presbyterian Church established in Texas. That establishment was June 2, 1838. In the book about the history of that church, Felix is cited as being a church member who served in the Confederate Army. So, he must have joined the church sometime before to 1862, the date cited by the pastor writing that history. We still have the situation where an F. B. Dixon was removed from the membership roll in late 1840. Also noted in that book is the citation that Judge Polk was a member of that church.

Citing it as the first mainline Presbyterian Church is a qualifying statement. Actually, just about a year earlier, at nearby Shiloh, a Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized, and over the years has finally become a member of today's Presbyterian Church USA denomination. However, back in its organizing days, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was an off-shoot from mainline Presbyterianism, splitting over the issue of whether the ordained clergy should be required to have a seminary education. That was a real issue in the early 1800's, as seminary education often meant a trip back to Europe, although Princeton University, established by the Presbyterians in 1746, was available. So, today there are two Presbyterian Churches that claim being the first Texas Presbyterian Church.

The Minutes of the Session of the Bethel Presbyterian Church include a confirmed listing of current church members in June, 1880. F. B. Dixon was listed. It is strange that the several times I observed that he appeared in records of that church, none of them give any references to other Dixon family members.

That church later changed name to that of the First Presbyterian Church, then later still, changed it to the Memorial Presbyterian Church, the name it uses today. It was the Rev. Mr. Hugh Wilson who was authorized by the Presbyterian Synod of Mississippi to establish a foreign outreach in the nation of Texas which was the San Augustine church. Mr. Wilson is an ancestor of Hilda Grace Cunningham (Tinker) Rautenberg. Tinker's father, the Rev. T. M. Cunningham, chronicled the life and ministry of the Rev. Wilson (who ultimately became Dr. Wilson) in his book, "Hugh Wilson: A Pioneer Saint." (Wilkinson Printing Company, Dallas, Texas, 1938) Tinker is a friend of mine and an Elder at Highland Park Presbyterian Church of Dallas, where I serve on staff. Tinker is a

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musician and, in her younger years, she sang with Vaughn Monroe's Big Band Orchestra known for those harmonious songs of the 1940's.

Another characteristic of this first Presbyterian Church in Texas interests me. In Mr. Cunningham's book about Dr. Wilson, as well as in the book at the San Augustine Public Library about that church's history, indicates that the original charter members in 1838 were 20 people, two families of which were Sharp. Though I realize the names cited are not in my direct lineage, my mind wonders to conjecture if further research someday would reveal a lateral relationship. One of those Sharps was listed as an Elder. In addition, a surprising fact was that the Sharp family owned two Negro slaves who also were listed as charter members in full standing of that church! That, in my mind, was really a forward thinking group of people for that day.

There is a Tabular Statement of attendance of children in 1861 (page 5) wherein Felix B. Dixon is listed as the parent with these children and attendances for that school year: Mary, 96 days; Sarah, 91 days; Bettie, 97 days; and Martha, 100 days. It also is interesting to see that the family listed next to Felix's family is one headed by a Francis (Frank) Dixon. He probably is not closely related, as it indicates his birthplace is Germany. However, he could have been the F. B. Dixon cited in the 1840 list of the church about removed members.

San Augustine was a rip roaring town in the 1800's, on up into the early 1900's. I've read accounts of the gun slinger wars and the rough sheriffs that gunned down bad men, and sheriffs that were killed. There were lots of saloons and places of gambling interests that flourished. Even though there definitely was a bad element that infected the community, it was written that the majority of the people were law-abiding and decent citizens. Certainly the Dixon family was a part of this majority.

Mr. William R. Brooks, an Elder Emeritus in the church on whose staff I was employed for 22 years, Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, lent me a book in 2004 about San Augustine entitled, "Gunsmoke in the Redlands." It's all about the wild and lawless nature of San Augustine in the late 1880's and early 1900's. Included are vivid descriptions of gun fights in the saloons, on the streets and in ambush. There was an ongoing battle between the bad guys (gamblers, saloon owners and crooks) and the good citizens of the town.

Bill's family came from there. I'm happy to say that his folks were from the good guys' side of town, as was my great, great grandfather Dixon. However, Bill's grandfather was one of three brothers who were making it hard on the bad guys. The book has the account about the young 24 year old brother of the recently gunned down crooked sheriff having a grudge against Bill's grandfather, Ben Brooks. Well, this young gun slinger was said to walk up behind Ben as Ben was entering the doorway of a saloon and 33 year old Ben was gunned down by five shots fired at his back, four of which hit their mark! Ben was armed, but never had a chance to draw his iron! Ben was killed on Saturday, June 2, 1900, out in the public, for his role of standing up for what was right in the town. Ben left behind 28 year old Laura, his wife, four year old Ara, his daughter, and two year

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old Ben, Jr. Bill tells me that the family hearsay is that Ben was walking into the doorway of a barber shop! Well, who knows? This must be why the Broocks family are such high caliber folks! This is just another story of wild Texas living and martyred citizens who were trying to make Texas a livable place to be in those early days.

Interestingly, a couple of years after Bill let me have a short use of the book, "Gunsmoke in the Redlands," I ran across its title in an inventory catalog of Texas lore antiques for sale. The Wright Collection of Waco, Texas said that the book was becoming pretty rare, and they had it for sale, priced at \$100!

Lufkin resident Mrs. W. Arch (Mary) Henderson gave me a Bible in 1988 belonging to one of Felix's daughters, Sarah Dixon. It was inscribed as being from "father." Mrs. Henderson said she recalled him only as "Judge Dixon from San Augustine." Sarah was her step grandmother, according to Mrs. Henderson's conversation with me at Lufkin in her home. Sarah married once. She was the second wife of Lufkin merchant Calvin Mantooth.

I do not have much information about Felix's second wife, Frances L. Davis. That second marriage also gave issue as early as 1874. They had three daughters and a son. So Felix fathered ten children between the two marriages, from 1847 to 1880, a span of 33 years. This was a long time to be making babies! His son, Frank, died at the age of 19. We have no record of Frank giving issue to any children, nor of his ever having a marriage. Therefore, we know of no male Dixon descendants following Felix. Felix's will simply left all of his estate to his wife, Frances.

Felix died in April 1896, just three months prior to the passing of American literary icon, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Felix had been a captain in the army that rebelled against a nation that had been stirred up, in part, by her writings illustrating the status of slavery in America. It was the year that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Plessy vs Ferguson that "separate but equal" facilities for whites and blacks was constitutional, a legal position that prevailed for 58 years before being reversed in Brown vs the Kansas City Board of Education. It was the year that John Phillips Sousa composed "The Stars and Stripes Forever." William McKinley was elected President, rural free mail service in America was established, and former baseball player Billy Sunday began his career as an evangelist. [Source: Timetables of American History, pages 258-261]

The month Felix died, the Vitascope system for projecting movies onto a screen was demonstrated in New York City.

Source:

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/20050423.html?th&emc=th>

The Dixon Family plots in the San Augustine City Cemetery form the very first fenced family section immediately on the left as one enters the main gate of the cemetery. I can't

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help but think that such a prime location may reflect something of the prominence of the Dixon family in those days.

Felix Benedict Dixon represents the beginning of Texas roots for me and my family. His enterprise, his church participation, his political propensity and his apparent significance in his community are all elements for which I am pleased and thankful to share in such a heritage.

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