

James H. Dixon Family in Manard, Idaho

This account, written by Dick Dixon, was extracted from "History of Manard, Idaho, The Pioneer Town That Used To Be," compiled by Clifton R. Dixon.

The James H. Dixon family moved to a farm located 2-1/4 miles southwest of Manard in the spring of 1916. They had previously lived at Fir Grove, Idaho, which is approximately 7 miles south of Manard. James Henry Dixon was born in southeastern Idaho in the town of Clifton on December 3, 1878. During the summer of 1885, when he was 7 years old, he moved with his family to Star Valley, Wyoming, where he lived until the year 1900. Then, as a young man, he moved again with his family to Hagerman, Idaho. The family soon moved to Fir Grove.

While living in Star Valley, James had known a young lady by the name of Sarah Elizabeth Hurd. They corresponded with each other after James moved to Hagerman. Sarah then traveled by train from Montpelier, Idaho, where they met and were married at Shoshone, Idaho on November 14, 1904. They made their first home at Fir Grove, but the family often spent the winters in Hagerman because of the severe winters at Fir Grove and the shortage of winter feed for their livestock.

Born to this union were:

- Lynn 12/21/05 Fir Grove
- Ressa 6/25/07 Fir Grove
- Ray 3/22/10 Fir Grove
- Louise 9/7/11 Fir Grove
- Verl 11/9/12 Fir Grove
- Ralph 9/18/14 Fir Grove
- Leah 4/4/16 Hagerman
- Gwen 1/16/20 Manard
- Dick 1/28/22 Manard
- Ken 3/22/24 Manard

At Manard, the family became part of a community that consisted of about 12 to 15 families located near the Malad River on the southern edge of Camas Prairie. When the family moved to Manard, a two story home was on the property that consisted of living room, kitchen, and one upstairs bedroom. An addition was made to this house that included one bedroom downstairs and one upstairs. A large fruit cellar was attached to the kitchen and Sarah regularly stocked this cellar with bottled fruits and vegetables. The home was heated with wood stoves and cooking was done on a large wood burning cook stove in the kitchen.

Ground water was available on the property at about 15 feet below the surface. Water was supplied to the house from a well and pitcher pump located in one corner

of the kitchen. This well had been constructed by attaching a special drill point to the end of a long, galvanized pipe that was approximately 1-1/4" in diameter. The drill point contained openings just behind the sharp point which allowed water to flow into the pipe after it was driven into the ground. These openings were filled with soap to prevent dirt from entering the pipe as it was driven into the ground. When the drill point was below the water level, a hand operated pitcher pump was affixed to the top end of the pipe. When the soap was dissolved from the openings in the drill point by the ground water, clear, cold, soft water could easily be pumped into the kitchen.

A porcelain sink was installed and water flowed from the pump into the sink. Waste water from the sink was drained through a pipe to the outside of the house.

This was the only plumbing in the house. Outbuildings were constructed near the house consisting of a barn that could accommodate a large number of cows and horses. In the top of the barn was a hayloft that was used to store hay and feed for the animals. Chicken coops, pig pens, fences and corrals were added as needed. A well with about a 10" metal casing was dug near the barn. A pitcher pump with a pipe extending down into the water was installed. Water was pumped by hand from this well into a large metal trough to water all of the farm animals.

A large granary was built that contained bins for grain storage and a hand turned cream separator was located in that building. A lean-to extension was added at the west of the granary and a lean-to garage was added at the south side of the granary. This garage later housed the first Model T Fords and a 1928 Chevrolet that were owned by the family. A small building was constructed in conspicuous place near the west end of the granary. The building contained the usual two hole outdoor toilet that was present on every home site during that era.

Manard was approximately 5,000 feet above sea level and winter temperatures were always cold and the snow very deep. Quilting frames were often present in the living room as Sarah made quilts for the cold winter nights.

The summer growing season was short. Life for the family was difficult and much the same as it had been for rural America before the turn of the century. There was no electricity and no modern appliances. Lighting of the home and farm buildings was accomplished by kerosene or gasoline lamps or lanterns. Clothes were washed with homemade soap in a tub with a scrubbing board. They were dried on a clothesline and ironed with flat irons that were heated on top of the wood burning cook stove. The first family radio was operated with large dry cell batteries. The economy relied almost exclusively on crops produced by horse drawn farm machinery and meat and dairy products obtained from farm animals. Transportation was usually by horse drawn wagon, buggy, sleigh, horseback or walking.

While at Manard, the Dixon family owned a large herd of Holstein milk cows. Often 20 cows or more were being milked by hand night and morning. It was one of the largest dairy herds in Camas County. The milk was usually put through the cream separator and the cream was placed in 10 gallon cans and sold to a creamery to make butter. The skim milk was normally fed to the pigs and to the small calves.

For a time, the family was involved in the production of cheese. Large tubs of milk were heated on top of the wood burning cook stove. Rennet was then added to curdle the milk and coloring added to achieve the proper color. The whey was removed and the curds wrapped in cheesecloth and placed in metal cylinders. These metal cylinders were open at both ends and had a diameter and length of about 10". The cylinders, with the curds, were placed vertically into a cheese press where a large threaded screw device was tightened down on a flat plate that entered the top of the cylinder. As this press was screwed down tighter and tighter, it applied hundreds of pounds of pressure to the curds in the cylinder. The cylinders were left in the press for a time, and then removed. Each cylinder would then contain a beautiful and delicious round cheese. The cheese press contained four pressing stations and four cheeses could be made at one time. The cheese was sold or traded for commodities and was an importance source of income for the family.

A large garden was usually grown just south of the house. Peas, string beans, beets, radishes, lettuce, potatoes, rhubarb, gooseberries, and other produce were grown in this garden. When Ray was about 19 or 20 years of age, he decided that he wanted to establish a well and water system for this garden. A location for the well was selected at the top of the garden and, in one day, Ray, using only a hand shovel, dug the 12 to 15 feet down to the water level. The sides of the well were lined with boards to prevent the dirt from caving in and a length of pipe and a rotary water pump were installed. A one cylinder gasoline engine drove the pump by a belt and water was pumped into the garden.

The family always owned a large herd of horses, sometimes exceeding 20 in number. Two or three of these horses were used for riding, but the remainder were draft animals used to pull farm machinery in the fields, or wagons and sleighs that were usually equipped with hay racks to haul feed to the livestock. Range conditions permitting, the horse herd was often turned loose to pasture in the hills just south of the farm.

The principal crops grown in the fields were wheat, barley, oats and alfalfa hay. The ground was plowed using a twin plow with eight horses attached. Sometimes two of these plows would be operating in the field at the same time. James occasionally would hook three more horses to a hand plow, sometimes known as a "foot burner," and go into the field and plow just to speed up the operation. After plowing, the ground was prepared with harrows, discs, or levelers as needed, and then planted by a grain drill pulled by four horses. The hay and some of the grain crops were irrigated by water from a canal that brought water from the Twin Lakes Reservoir.

Grain crops were harvested by a "binder" machine that cut the grain and bound it into bundles. These bundles were later thrown into a threshing machine that traveled from farm to farm throughout the community. Grain harvesting was later done by one of the early horse propelled traveling combines that cut and threshed the grain in one operation.

Harvested grains were usually stored in the bins of the granary near the home. Much of the wheat was sold as a cash crop, but some was used as feed for chickens, turkeys, pigs and other animals. All of the barley and oats were normally fed to the horses, pigs and other livestock.

The family owned a unique grain grinder that was sometimes used to grind grain before it was fed to the animals. This grinder consisted of two round grinding plates and a hopper at the top that fed grain to the plates. A pole about twelve feet in length provided power to the grinder as it was rotated through a 360 degree arc. One horse was attached to the outer end of this pole by single tree and tethered to walk in a circle around the grinder. As the horse walked in a circle, the grain was ground and it would fall from a spout at the bottom of the grinder into a waiting container.

The alfalfa hay was cut using the usual two horse mowing machine. The hay was raked into wind rows and later into shocks or individual, small piles. A two horse buck rake was used to push approximately six or eight of these small piles into a much larger pile. These larger piles were then pushed by the buck rake to a stacking location where they were deposited and secured on a chain net. The net and hay were then lifted with a team of horses using a pole derrick that was equipped with cables and pulleys. The hay was deposited at the top of what would eventually become a very large and well shaped stack of hay. The hay stacking crew consisted of a buck rake driver, a net tender, a derrick team driver and a hay stacker who worked on top of the stack forming and shaping it with a pitchfork. In the winter, hay was taken from these large stacks to fill the barn loft and to feed the cattle and horses.

The family recreation in the winter often included a small hand sleigh, snow skis, and sometimes ice skates for the children. Skating on a frozen pond or sliding down a nearby hill was great fun and 20 feet of rope attached to a saddle horse or a horse drawn sleigh always provided a great ride for a skier or a hand sleigh rider.

Swimming in the canal or river was a favorite pastime in the summer. Indoor activities often involved such games as Checkers or Rook and a large windup cabinet phonograph was in the home to play favorite records. Many records were available and family members recall the Tampa and William Tell overtures that were played hundreds of times on that machine. Community activities were centered in the very small town of Manard. When goods and services were not available in Manard, the family traveled to the town of Fairfield that was five miles north of the Dixon farm.

A two room school house was located in Manard and the Dixon children attended that school from the first through eighth grades. The children traveled to this school by horseback, wagon, sleigh, or any means of transportation available, but often walked the 2-1/4 miles each way. Some of the older children attended high school in Fairfield.

An LDS church building had been constructed in Manard in 1911 and this building was used not only for church activities, but for social activities including dancing and basketball. James Dixon served as Bishop of the Manard congregation for over 14 years.

The effects of the great national economic depression that started in 1929 were soon felt by the Dixon family at Manard. Prices for dairy products and all other items that the family normally produced and sold, fell to an unbelievably low level. By the year 1933, the situation was desperate and the family moved to a farm 4-1/2 miles west, northwest of Gooding, Idaho. Weather conditions were less severe at Gooding and it was hoped that a better life could be found at the location. They lived on the Gooding farm until 1953 when James retired and moved to a small home in the town of Gooding.

James died May 3, 1963, and Sarah died January 19, 1974. They are buried beside each other at the Elmwood Cemetery at Gooding.