

Dixon Hamlin Greer

By William N. Greer



Dixon Hamlin Greer was born April 16, 1834, in Chambers Co, AL, the 8th child of Nathaniel Hunt Greer and Nancy Ann Terry Roberts. He came of age in Texas and turned 21 while driving the family herd along the Shawnee Trail to Kansas during the migration to Utah. Several wagons were loaded with goods to start a store when the family reached their destination. They also had a large herd of cattle and horses that they hoped to take to their new home. Later he recalled how he foraged for food and wood for his family and how the children often gathered buffalo chips for fuel to cook their meager meals. The Greers reached Salt Lake City on September 10, 1855.

As planned by Nathaniel Hunt Greer and his business partner Seth Blair, the Greer boys opened a store at First South and Main Street. Soon Dixon met and fell in love with Harriet Diannah Camp whose sister Catherine Ellen had wed Dixon's brother, Thomas Lacy, not long after the Greers had arrived in the city.

Harriet had been born in Dresden Co, TN, on January 9, 1842, one of 14 children of Williams Washington Camp and Diannah Greer, a suspected cousin of Nathaniel Hunt Greer — although no direct relationship has ever been established. Her parents were very religious, reading the Bible often. Her father was a blacksmith who made many tools to help pioneer farmers.

The Camps endured terrific hardships, losing eight children in infancy and childhood. The family lived in Dresden for 13 years where they first heard Mormon missionaries and were baptized as a family group. They endured the hardships in common with other Mormons with whom they traveled for the next six years. Eight of the Camp children died during infancy and childhood. By the time Harriet was eight, they had settled in Nauvoo, Illinois. When authorities of the Mormon church sent a call to her father asking for fifty head of horses and mules to help with the evacuation from Nauvoo, willingly the Camps complied and sent the oldest son James to help. Most of their faithful slaves were left with Harriet's grandfather James Greer. However, three came to Utah with the Camps, who arrived in the valley in October 1850. The youngest daughter Emma, six years old, died on the trek.

In Utah, Harriet grew into the beautiful and talented woman shown on the right. She had a lovely singing voice, was quite accomplished on the piano. She sketched portraits and painted some water colors. Her girlhood was spent in Salt Lake City, and the family home was located on South Temple just east of State Street. Dixon and Harriet planned to marry after a courtship of a few years. "Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest of these — it might have been" were part of their story. Because of a "foolish lover's quarrel", they parted and each married someone else.



Dixon lived in Salt Lake City for about four years, during which time tension with the United States grew — as did hostility toward the Saints. The tolerance which the Mormons knew under President Millard Fillmore was replaced by intolerance under his successor, President James Buchanan. In 1857 U.S. forces were sent to quell the perceived "rebellion" in what was known as the "Utah War." Dixon served for three months in the Mormon militia at Echo Canyon, helping to impede the advance of General Johnston's army. The delaying ploy worked and eventually a compromise was reached — and the dispute with the federal government was settled with a minimum of violence.

On February 9, 1858, Dixon married Mary Vernesia Sprouse (no photograph is known to exist) and a year later they had a son, Dixon Nathaniel. In 1861 Dixon and Mary were in Denver, on their way to visit his relatives in Texas, when Mary gave birth to a little daughter Catherine. Both mother and child died, and her distraught husband returned to Utah with his small son.

On December 16, 1860, Harriet had married Mark Murphy and on September 23, 1861, had a daughter Nellie. But on December 19, 1862, Mark died. After a grieving period, Harriet, now a young widow, was once more receptive to suitors. Dixon did not delay.

Harriet and Dixon were reunited and wed February 25, 1864 — and soon they made their home in the county of Wasatch, UT. Tragedy hit in 1868 when their second child died, and again in 1875 when one twin was born dead and the other so sickly that he lived only to the age of six. During one week in 1880, two girls died of diphtheria — then a son in 1890.

Dixon and Harriet were both very religious, holding many responsible positions in their church. He was always helpful to family and neighbors, and was very industrious — rising each day before dawn. He followed many and varied occupations in his life, including mail carrier, merchant, farmer, cattleman, and school teacher.

In 1862 Dixon taught school in Heber and in 1864 in Wallsburg where he was the first school trustee — and there he helped build the first schoolhouse. He was widely renowned for his spelling and vocabulary. Dixon and Harriet were both well educated and had a large cupboard full of precious books. Each child was given the opportunity for a good education.

The contentious relations between the Mormons and the United States probably curtailed Dixon's involvement in the Civil War. But in 1865, Indian troubles forced the Greers to leave their home and crops, resulting in much family suffering. This caused Dixon to enter the military for two years, ably defending his community during the Black Hawk War.

In 1875, his church sent him to Texas on a mission, but because of illness he came home after only 7 months. While in Texas, he baptized some of his relatives.

His grandchildren remembered him as a jolly man who always had a story to tell. He wore a goatee in his later years. He loved to dance, and was a very good cook. Dixon was especially "famous" for his delicious apple cider.

Life was not always easy for Dixon and Harriet. Their daughter Diana had rheumatic fever, and in her later years, Harriet suffered from diabetes. One of her greatest attributes was her unfailing kindness to and understanding of children, all of whom — her own and others — seemed to adore her. She desired always to improve her mind and was an avid reader especially interested in history. She received many family inheritances and always used the money to improve her home — once buying a beautiful piano (the only one in Wallsburg for many years) which she shared with many family and friends.

In 1900, Dixon and Harriet moved to Provo, where they spent their remaining years. There she died July 14, 1908. Dixon lived with daughter Grace and spent some time in Santa Monica, California with another daughter Alice. He died in Provo on July 29, 1918, and was buried beside his wife Harriet in the Provo City Cemetery.