

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region Project

Private William Dixon

Prelude

A number of questions have arisen during the research of Pte. William Dixon. It has taken some digging and assumptions to identify the appropriate William Dixon who is listed on the original Memorial Hall plaque.

The first issue is that the surname Dixon of that era was spelled 'Dixon' and 'Dickson' by folks recording the name and there were over 100 military records that were possible matches. So, I turned to a search of casualties listed in Ottawa papers to see if any were listed from Cobden area. A Pte. W. Dixon of Snake River with his regimental number was listed, so that got me to the appropriate military record. But who was this William?

On his attestation papers, his father was listed as Ben of Snake River. No mother's name was listed. The words 'Snake River' were crossed out and 'Montreal' written over top. 'Aunt Mary Burns' of Snake River was listed in his will. It turns out that I knew of a Mary Dixon married to Joseph Marshall Burns.

Well, I have been researching the Dixon/Dickson family for a number of years. The original Ben of Co. Carlow, Ireland, settled in St. Ambroise de Kildare, Berthier, Quebec but died in Renfrew County. He was buried in St. Patrick's Anglican Cemetery, Stafford Twp. His wife Jane Gass died in Kildare. The interest in this family stems from attempts to research a number of local families who listed Rawdon & Kildare (neighboring communities north of Montreal) as their birthplace. These families settled in the Snake River area and included Dickson (Dixon), Gass, Purcell, Burns, Coulter and Gray. There are large beautiful gravestones in Cobden Union Cemetery bearing these names.

The original Ben Dickson family had at least 6 children including a Benjamin and a James Benjamin. I knew I was in the right campsite as the Aunt Mary Burns was a sister of these two Benjamins. Pte. William Dixon's military service record did not give any more clues but the Commonwealth War Graves certificate listed his mother as Ellen McGowan Dixon.

So, Pte. Wm's parents were Benjamin Dixon and Ellen Charlotte McGowan. But wait, she died on Jan 3, 1882 and he lists his birthdate at Mar 17, 1888, age 28 years, on the Attestation Papers. I knew that his dad had remarried but not until 1901.

A William Dixon was listed as a son of Benjamin & Ellen's in Baptismal records for Rawdon however it states that he was born Feb 28, 1881 and he was baptized in August of 1881. Now often a family names their child by the same name if the first infant dies, however the mom died in Jan 1882 and I have not found a death of the first William or a birth of a second. In any event, if Ellen McGowan was his mother, that would have put his birthdate at the latest Jan 1882, not Mar 17, 1888. So, this is where the conjecture comes in.

William was not yet a year old when his mother died. I can't find him in the census for 1901 or 1911. His father in 1901 is living with his new wife and her child from a previous marriage. I'm assuming William was living with an aunt or other relative. I did not find him living with his Aunt Mary Burns of Snake River, but the fact that he left his worldly possessions to her in his Will, suggests a close bond with her. Perhaps the confusion about his age and birthdate could be explained by being shuffled around family who may not have kept track of his birthdate. Or perhaps he wanted to appear younger to enlist. The seven-year discrepancy in his age is still worrisome however the Commonwealth War Graves lists his age 36 at the time of his death

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(rather than 29 if one goes by his birthdate at enlistment) so somehow his mother's name and his correct age seems to have filtered down to them.

I'm hoping this example of this researcher's attempts to identify one soldier's identity will spark an urgency to supply even one tidbit of information that will assist us in documenting those who served. In this situation, the only information I had was the name "Pte. William Dixon" listed as one of the fifteen local casualties to whom the Memorial Hall was dedicated. Please send along your 'tidbits' however small as it might solve a mystery about another soldier.

My best guesstimate of the identity of Pte. William Dixon follows:

Pte. William Dixon was the son of **Benjamin Dixon** and **Ellen Charlotte McGOWAN**. He was born on Feb 28, 1881 in Rawdon, Montcalm, Quebec. His father & he himself were reported to have lived at Snake River at some point in time. There were certainly other relatives in the Snake River area as previously mentioned¹.

William enlisted into the 162nd Unit of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on Mar 4, 1916 at South River, Ontario, age 35 (rather than the age 28 listed). He was 5' 6 ½" tall, had blue eyes and brown hair. He listed his occupation as laborer in lumber woods².

In December 1916, Pte. William went to France serving with the 75th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry. Four months later, he sustained injuries which lead to his death.

"Killed in Action

During military operations in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge he was hit in the arm, shoulder, and neck by shrapnel on April 9, 1917. It was impossible to effect his removal from the shell hole in which he lay until the next day and he succumbed to his wounds in the Dressing Station."³

Pte. William Dixon died on April 10, 1917 at Vimy Ridge, Pas-de-Calais, France aged 36. He was buried in Villers Station Military Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France.^{4,5}

His name is one of the 15 names commemorated on the original Memorial Hall Plaque as local boys who lost their lives in WWI.

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In Memory Of
Private

WILLIAM DIXON

Service Number: 657126

75th Bn., Canadian Infantry who died on 10 April 1917 Age 36

Son of Benjamin and Ellen McGowen Dixon, of 332A, St. Antoine St., Montreal.

Remembered with Honour

VILLERS STATION CEMETERY, VILLERS-AU-BOIS

VI. J. 2.



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COMMONWEALTH
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|||||

COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH
WARGRAVES COMMISSION

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Sources:

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