

# Murders of John and Clayton Dixon Cline

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## PROMINENT YOUNG FARMER AND WIFE BRUTALLY MURDERED WITH AN AXE

### MOST HORRIBLE CRIME IN OUR HISTORY

**Mr. John Dixon is Called From the House and Killed At The Barn, While His Young Wife has her Head Crushed in bed Beside Her Year Old Babe--Two Negro Suspects Arrested.**

A pretty little country home that was the scene of comfort and happiness, thrift and prosperity Tuesday is today a scene of the most horrible crime in the annals of Cleveland County. Mr. and Mrs. John Dixon were brutally and horribly murdered before daylight Wednesday morning in their new home ten miles above Shelby just off the main road between Fallston and Lawndale and Hack Ross and John Ross

two negro brothers, are held as suspects of the crime. A 1,000 or more people stood about the desolate home Wednesday as the coroner's inquest proceeded, hoping that evidence would place the guilt on some party so that they may avenge the crime. The sentiment is strong against Hack Ross and John Ross. Sentiment was at fever heat but the good citizens are determined to be sure of their move before they take the law in their hands.

They know Hack Ross made a threat that there "would be some body missing in the neighborhood" if they took his meat and Mr. Dixon had a mortgage on Ross' hog. Ross could not pay for the hog and brought it back to Mr. Dixon Monday, but the sentiment seems to be that this seemingly friendly feeling was feigned to cover up the awful crime he had planned. And, too, Ross lives about a quarter of a mile from Mr. Dixon's and tracks were found by Chief of Police Jetton and Deputy Nelson Lattimore that exactly corresponded to the shoes Ross was wearing because of the heavy tacks in the heel.

#### MOTHER OF YEAR OLD BABE

When neighbors reached the scene Wednesday morning young Mr. Dixon who is only about 30 years old was lying dead, face downward at the barn and his wife with her twelve month-old girl babe by her side was dead in a bloody bed in their sleeping room. Drs. S. S. Royster and E. A. Houser made the examination of the bodies and testified that the husband came to his death from a blow by a blunt instrument, supposed to be an axe in the left temple. His temple bone was crushed in and a stream of blood three feet long coursed from his body. Mrs. Dixon had a blow from a blount instrument in the middle of the forehead, a deep gash from the blade of the axe in the same place and a crushed temporal bone at her right eye. An axe covered with blood is the weapon used. Several human hairs corresponding to Mr. Dixon's hair were found on the poll of the axe showing that the fatal blows were made with it.

#### NEGROES TELL TALES

The only evidence bearing directly on the murder is that of Major Stroud and John Ross, two negro woodchoppers who passed by about daylight. The road runs close to the house and both testified that Mrs. Dixon beckoned for them to come to the window. They asked what

was the matter and she didn't know but with her head in her hands and a bleeding wound in her forehead, inquired where her husband was. She said two white men had called him out to help get a mule out of a ditch and he had not come back. Stroud did not say she spoke of the two white men calling her husband out, but this was Ross' tale exclusively. Stroud testified that he knew something bad was the matter because her eyes were blood-shot and she was nervous. She asked them to go for help, so John Ross started to Mr. Thomas D. Dixon's, the dead man's father's who lived about a half a mile away and Stroud started to Mr. Dennis Wright's and Fallston for the doctor. John Ross says he went through the barn which was on his way and a white man stepped out of the shuck stall and asked him where he was going. His reply was that he was going to cut wood. The strange man, rather port and stout and wearing a fur cap, asked where John Dixon was and he replied that he did not know. After that another strange man, rather tall, wearing a fur cap, came out and the two started off together through the woods. John Ross then delivered his message as quickly as possible. He says he did not see the dead body of Mr. Dixon in the barnyard, though he ran within nine yards of it and would have crossed exactly within nine yards of it and would have crossed exactly where it had he gone straight.

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#### NOT ROBBERY

Little faith is put in this story told by the negroes. Stroud, is a reliable colored man of advanced age, but Ross is suspicious and the impression is he knows more than he told. There is no cause why highwaymen should murder these two happy people as both are quiet and have no enemies. He is one of the most prominent farmers in the county and belongs to a leading family while Mrs. Dixon was Miss Clayton Cline daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose Cline. They were thrifty and prosperous and had a sweet little baby girl. The child was found beside its dead mother when Mr. Dennis Wright reached the scene with its mother's blood on its nightclothes. Some thought roobbery had prompted strange men to ransack the house and cover up all evidence by killing the husband and wife, but the \$40 Mr. Dixon had Tuesday was undisturbed. When Mr. Dennis Wright reached the house Mrs. Dixon was gasping for breath. She could not talk but died in a short while without giving a single clue.

#### HACK ROSS MADE THREATS

Hack Ross who threatened to kill Mr. Dixon if he took his meat was not at home Wednesday morning when officers went in search. He had gone with his wife to Mr. Mauney's near Cleveland Mills to work on the house and they followed after him. When placed under arrest he was intensely nervous and frightened but made no attempt to get away. A blood spot was on his overalls and when asked to explain to the jury he told them that he had trapped a muskrat on the creek

and got the blood on his pants Monday when he skinned it. When asked if he got up during the night he said he did about 2 o'clock to wait on the baby and that he did not retire again but helped his wife churn and get breakfast in order to get an early start. His step-son about 17 years old added to the suspicion of guilt by his testimony. The tracks that correspond to Ross's No. 10 shoes, freshly made in the ground between the two houses seems to be the strongest evidence. Ross is about 40 years old, has Indian blood in his veins and a character to make the suspicion strong-

#### FOUR IN JAIL

With no demonstration or threats on the part of the citizens. Sheriff Wilkins and his deputies brought Hack and John Ross and Hack's step-son to jail Wednesday night and put them in separate cells so they can not concoct a story for defense. The coroner's jury composed of Messrs. C. C. Stamey, J. A. Horn, J. Matt London, Decatur Elmore, P. Z. Carpenter and J. Frank Roberts did not return a verdict but asked that a more complete hearing be given the witnesses here today. The jury was empaneled by Squire Sylvanus Gardner and acting coroner John F. Schenck examined the witnesses. The blood on Hack's pants was cut out and taken to the hospital where it is being examined by Dr. Harlan Shoemaker who will determine whether it is human blood or not. Yesterday morning old Major Stroud who is reported to have told Mr. Ambrose Cline that John Ross knew more than he told, was arrested as a martial witness

and brought to jail. He is a negro of the old school and friend to the Cline family and it is thought he will throw more light on the mystery. It may implicate John only who could have come by on his way to sharpen the axe and committed the crime. It may be that John Ross and Major went back by the house and were called in. But was Mrs. Dixon able to go to the window with such deadly wounds as those on her head? There was no blood at the window to show that she did. When they started out to deliver the message they went in different directions so Major did not see the "two strange men." Did John Ross originate the two men story in his mind and go back and finish Mrs. Dixon to cover up the deed when he saw she was not dead?

#### THE FAMILY

Mr. John Dixon is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas D. Dixon. He has the following surviving brothers, Mr. William Dixon a full brother and Mr. Clemmie Dixon, half brother, sisters, Misses Ida and Ella Dixon, Mrs. J. H. Trott of Cherryville, Mrs. J. T. Buff of Casar, Mrs. Charles Stroup of Four Oaks, N. C. Mrs. Laura Warlick wife of Mr. O. V. Warlick, Mrs. Edith Green wife of Mr. Odis Green. Mrs. Dixon has one sister, Mrs. Donie Borders, wife of Mr. Mike Borders and two brothers, Messrs. Zeb and Augustus Cline.