



**THOMAS DIXON, MAN OF MANY TALENTS,** was born in this house January 11, 1864. It is located on Highway 18 toward Fallston, just south of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church. The house at the time of Tom's birth consisted of just two rooms and the front porch. Note the

several additions and numerous repairs that the dwelling has undergone through more than a century of occupancy. The building will soon be removed from its present site to make way for a housing development.

(Photo by Willis)

### Tom One Of State's Most Famous Sons

# Tom Dixon Birthplace Will Make Way For Progress Near Fallston

One of Cleveland County's oldest landmarks will soon give way to Progress. The birthplace of Thomas Dixon — novelist, playwright, actor, and preacher — will be torn down or moved from its present site on the Fallston road north of Shelby. There has been talk of preserving the birthplace as a site of historical importance, and it certainly is significant in the state's history.

The story of Thomas Dixon, one of the state's most brilliant and versatile men, is known by only a few people. His abilities and talents were felt in almost a dozen areas of American life, and his life touched and influenced some of the noted men of history, including President Woodrow Wilson, a classmate at Johns Hopkins University. Yet, few know his

story. She recalls hearing about the house being built. A Preacher Williams constructed the house and lived in it a short time, when Thomas Dixon Sr. acquired it. Mrs. Branton, who is 90 years of age, knows the dwelling is over a hundred years old, but how much older she is not sure. Alvin Queen lived in the house longer than anyone else, Costner believes. He moved about three months ago.

#### **OVER 100 YEARS**

Costner pointed out that the doors were hand made and fitted and that the weather boarding on the outside was hand dressed and matched. Floors, walls, and ceilings were

constructed with wide boarding — obviously choice lumber the days of its construction.

The original chimney stands. The lower portion is rock, chinked to level each rock. The upper two or three feet is made of brick. A second chimney on a room at the back appears almost as old as the first. The hearth on the first made of two rocks, hewn and fitted together. The house stands on rock pillars.

#### **BIRTHPLACE**

Windows are small and few in number. The upper "hairy story" is one big room that extends right up to the roof and in a cramped fashion. It has only three small windows on the floor level. Door sills in the house are worn thin and narrow in the center with many footfall.

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His birthplace on Highway 18, almost in sight of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, is more than a hundred years old. The years have not been kind to the tattered building, which has undergone several additions and numerous repairs. Vacant now, it has been occupied through the years by various families. It was occupied last only three weeks ago.

### **DEVELOPMENT**

Present plans ,according to Hoyle Costner, are that the house will be moved to a site near Costner's Upholstery business, about a mile from where the building now stands. It will be rented as a dwelling. But there is some doubt that the building can be moved because of its age. Fifty-four acres of land near the Dixon birthplace will be turned into a housing development.

According to Mrs. Theda Allen Branton, a distant relative and friend of the Dixon clan, the original house, before its many alterations, "was a short house with only two rooms with a chimney at one end and a half-story above and a small porch in front." That's the way the house appeared when Tom Dixon Jr. was born there.

Today there are three additional rooms and a porch at the back and another room at the front and a side porch. Helen C. A. Dixon, who wrote

# Dixon

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Thomas Dixon, the novelist's father, swapped the house for 175 acres of Cleveland Springs property, not long after he acquired it. He was, reportedly, a man who loved a trade of any kind. "He would swap a jack-knife, a mule, a horse, a farm or a house, at the wink of an eye."

Before the trade occurred, however, Thomas Jr. was born there, the only member of his family who was.

Mrs. Branton recalls that the novelist was a "big, tall fine-looking man." Although Preacher Dixon was a smart man, Tom reportedly "got his brightness, keenness from his mother," who was a McAfee—Amanda McAfee.

Mrs. Branton recalls that the elder Tom Dixon always said that Tom Jr. knew how to make money but did not know how to keep it. He was supposedly a millionaire twice during his lifetime but "died a pauper," with no clothes to be buried in.

Even as a small child he demonstrated superior gifts of intellect, in a day when schooling was hard to come by. But his father, very much aware of his own educational shortcomings, was determined that his children would be well educated.

After sound training in the traditional academics of Latin,