Who Was J. R.?

By Matt Dodson

Who was J.R.? Where did he come from? What did he do? Where is he now? Although many people, I will venture to say even a majority, will contend that J.R. is a calloused oil tycoon named Ewing on the TV show “Dallas.”

This would be true in a fictitious sense; however this story is concerned with the identity of John R. Dodson who was the great-great-great-grandfather of this writer.

John R. Dodson was born December 22, 1792 in Wayne Co., Kentucky. His direct lineage was John Dodson shown by the annals of Virginia as a settler in the Jamestown colony in 1632; Charles Dodson, Sr., born in Richmond Co., Virginia approximately 1649 and died 1705; Thomas Dodson, born 1681 in Richmond County and died 1740; and George Dodson, Sr., born 1702, died in Pittsylvania County, Virginia; and George Dodson, Jr., born 1737, died 1825, who fought with the Pittsylvania County militia during the Revolutionary War and signed the Pittsylvania petition according to Gwathmey’s Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution. Thomas Dodson, born in 1767 in Patrick County, Virginia, and moved in 1791 to Wayne County, Kentucky was J.R.’s father. Thomas Dodson was a Baptist preacher, a miller and a blacksmith.

In 1812 when John R. was 20 and his brother George was 23, they enlisted with the famous Kentucky Riflemen who during the War of 1812 went to New Orleans where, with General Andrew Jackson, they proved to be such a living wall of fire to the British. The war continued into October 1813 when John R. fought in the Battle of the Thames with a company of Wayne County men under Capt. Micah Taul.

In Wayne County, Kentucky, August 25, 1916, J.R. married Sarah Burnett who traced her ancestry through the Mayo family to Pocahontas of Indian fame. Near Monticello, Kentucky their 11 sons and 1 daughter were born. They were James, 1817; Isham B., 1818; Simeon W., 1820; Thomas, 1823; George, 1825; Jemima, 1827; Obadiah, 1828; Marcus M., 1831; John Ezra, 1833; Job, 1836; Francis M., 1838; and Socrates R., 1840. Job Dodson was the great-great-grandfather of the writer.

Now it is not known for sure why J.R. moved his family to Missouri in 1841. But it was not because of Horace Greeley’s advice to “Go West, Young Man” as this advice wouldn’t be given for many years. Several of J.R.’s sons saw service during that war, some in the Union Army and some in the Rebel Army.

We can assume that since it was the custom in those days, J.R. may have received a land grant as a stipend for military service rendered. At any rate it is listed as several hundred acres with Adair County Abstract Co. and it was located south of Highway 11, west to and including some of Sugar Creek State Park and bordering Kirksville on the southwest corner. This included the farm house now occupied by Dr. and Mrs. J. S. Denslow’s Thousand Hills Farm.

J.R.’s father, Thomas, as we mentioned, was a preacher.
Eli B. Dodson, son of James and Matilda (Kanatsa) Dodson and grandson of J.R., was born November 6, 1858, on the old Dodson homestead one mile southwest of Kirkville. The farm owned by Eli consisted of 373 acres and joined the southwest corner of the corporation of Kirkville.

On May 11, 1890 he was married to Grace Lowther to whom two children were born: Roy B. born March 6, 1892, and Kenneth T. born June 30, 1899. This union produced one of the more colorful characters in the personage of Roy B. “Cap” Dodson who in 1924 started the first airport in the county just north of Kirkville and who continued to teach and fly for nearly 40 years. Roy held a membership in the Orville and Wilbur Wright Flying Club and was an instructor for pilots during World War II. Dr. Ed Bestman managed the airport from 1930 to 1933. Roy’s father Eli was born in the home where Dr. and Mrs. J. S. Denslow now reside. That home was purchased by Mrs. Denslow’s parents, the Laughlins, from the Dodson's.

Isham B. (Isom) Dodson was born in Wayne County, Kentucky, December 7, 1818, and died in Kirkville in 1879. He came to Kirkville in 1841 and soon rose to prominence. He was sheriff from 1847-1851 and was state senator at the time of the passing of the Drake constitution. He was a major in the 18th Missouri Cavalry and was married to Nancy Murphy. They had two children.

We have given an account of a son of J.R., Isham B. Dodson and a great grandson Roy B. Dodson who are involved in J.R.’s life. Many of the sons and grandsons moved on to other counties and states. Obadiah B. Dodson immigrated to Texas in 1852. John Ezra Dodson went to Texas also and Marcus Dodson moved to Colorado. It is not known whether either Obadiah or John Ezra founded Dodson, Texas, but there is that possibility. Another of J.R.’s sons we will mention is Job Dodson since he is direct lineage of the writer. Job Dodson moved to Sullivan County and had two sons and a daughter, John, Francis Marion, and Mary. Job Dodson was a first lieutenant in the 11th Missouri Cavalry and farmed in Putnam County until 1895. He is buried in the Green Castle cemetery.

J.R.’s descendents have made up nearly every occupation in a community. We know doctors and lawyers but no Indian chiefs. There was a captain in the U.S. Air Force, a scientist at Alamogordo, New Mexico, and a neuro-surgeon in Florida. We don’t know any butchers, bakers, or candlestick makers but surely there were some. There have been barbers, undertakers, lots of teachers, a postmaster, an employee with the U.S. Treasury Department, a mock-up engineer at McDonald-Douglas, and a printer.

Where is J.R. now? Most of the Dodsons of the past have been buried in the Highland Park and Forest-Llewellyn cemeteries. J.R.’s grave we have not seen: it is in a family cemetery, “The Dodson-McFerren” in the Northwest Cor., Sect. 28, Benton Township, located near the junction of First Street and Highway 11. The grave is at present unmarked.