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Old School Museum: The Old School Museum is located next to Parker Hall at 111 West Houston St. in Dayton and is open Saturdays from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M.

Dayton Historical Society: The Society has reconvened its monthly meetings effective June 28, 2021 at Parker Hall at 6 P.M. (the last Monday of each month) for a historical program presented by guest speaker(s). The program is preceded by a Society business meeting and followed by refreshments.

Dayton History News

William Lewis Duncan – Pioneer (1786-1836)

Just before one crosses the Trinity River headed east, the year 1831 is boldly proclaimed on a welcome marker. The year refers to when Mexican Land Commissioner Jose Francisco Madero issued a variety of land grants on both sides of the river.

Of the 30 titles issued, only 7 were for land owners east of the Trinity (i.e., Dayton – aka West Liberty). One of those few West Liberty land owners was William Lewis Duncan.

His property bordered the Trinity River to the east, the property of widow Elizabeth Everett-Munson to the north and the property of W. D. Smith to the south and was about 20 miles north of Trinity Bay.

The current Liberty County Appraisal District records show County Road 470 as the border between “Abstract 28, Survey Duncan W.” and “Abstract 88, Survey Munson E.”

Having won its independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico was offering appealing land incentives to new settlers to secure its northeastern region from intrusion by the French.

Although initially headed for either the San Marcos or Guadalupe Rivers to claim land with a letter from empresario Green DeWitt to empresario Stephen F. Austin, Duncan chose instead to settle in the lower Trinity River area.

Under Mexican law, a land owner could take preliminary possession of the allocated land under the condition that they would develop it prior to later being issued title to the property.

Many of the initial land allocations were 4,428.40 acres (aka a ‘league’) and were referred to as plantations.

Duncan’s plantation was named “Auborne” which is where he raised cattle, cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, indigo, grains and vegetables in addition to harvesting timber and operating a sawmill.

Born in South Carolina about 1786, Duncan arrived in Liberty in 1824. With him was his 2nd wife Jane Oden age 28 whom he had met and married in St. Mary’s Parish, Louisiana following the death of his first wife Nancy Granger there.

By 1826, the Duncan family were part of 331 permanent residents of Mexico’s Atascosito District.

W. L. Duncan died on 3 April 1836, four weeks after Mexican troops under General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna breached the walls at the Battle of the Alamo in San Antonio.

In the meantime, his 18-year-old son William Berry Duncan had been drafted into the Texas army where he served 3 months active duty before being discharged and taking ownership of the plantation on behalf of his deceased father.

William Berry Duncan – Moss Bluff Rebel (1818-1867)

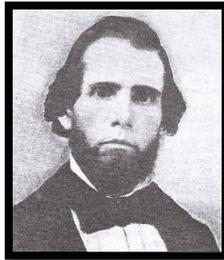
While the father, William Lewis Duncan, is the subject of a biography written by Robert Wooster and published by the Texas State Historical Association (TSHA) on their website, his son William Berry Duncan has an entire book devoted to him. It is entitled *“Moss Bluff Rebel, A Texas Pioneer in the Civil War”* written by author and historian Philip Caudill.

The backstory behind Caudill’s decision to write the book began with his being alerted by a librarian about the discovery of a box containing 20 years of diaries written by Duncan beginning in 1847.

While reviewing the diaries, Caudill came across a comment by Duncan stating that while he was being sworn into the Confederate army, he felt “I was not willing but finally agreed”. This struggle became Caudill’s inspiration for writing the book.

Another insight came from a diary entry in May 1865 in which W. B. Duncan had written ““Great many persons, both officers and men, have completely given up hope.” ... “I am in the lowest spirits possible at the state of feeling exhibited by the men. They seem determined to give up the cause.”

In reality, the war had already ended on April 9, 1865 but news just hadn’t reached Duncan and the soldiers under his command.



**William Berry
Duncan
(1818-1867)**



**Julia Celima
DeBlanc-Duncan
(1833-1925)**

The younger William Duncan was the subject of a Dayton Historical Society meeting in March 2018 presented by local historian and Sam Houston Center librarian Darlene Mott who dressed in time period attire.

She shared content from personal letters exchanged between William Berry Duncan and his 2nd wife Celima Julia DeBlanc-Duncan while he was serving during the Civil War.

Both William and Celima were born in Saint Martinville, Louisiana – William on 2 March 1818 and Celima on 7 July 1833.

They were the parents of 3 daughters who were all born in Liberty County: Emma Cassandra Duncan-Dugat (1849-1918), Celima Katherine Duncan-Brown (1855-1931) and Julia Duncan-Welder (1863-1954).

Sadly, W. B. Duncan only survived 2 more years after the war – having accidentally cut his thumb while butchering meat. It caused an infection that led to his death a month later.

Gillard-Duncan House Sam Houston Regional Library

One of several historically significant buildings located on the grounds of the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center is the Gillard-Duncan House built in 1848 by Dr. Edward J. Gillard.

The Gillards and Duncans are connected as a result of Gillard’s daughter Eliza having married William Berry Duncan in 1848. After her death in 1856, Duncan subsequently married Dr. Gillard’s niece, Celima, in 1858.

The house was consistently occupied by Gillard’s family and his descendants until 1954 when W. B. Duncan’s daughter, Julia Duncan-Welder, died.

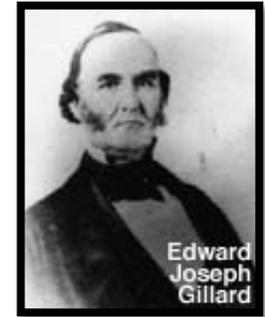
Elizabeth Gay-Bennett, Julia’s granddaughter, inherited the home and subsequently donated it to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) in 1976.

It was 1980 when the home was relocated to the grounds of the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center along with the family’s original furnishings.

Thanks to generous donations by a variety of family members, the home was fully restored and is maintained by the Atascosito Historical Society.

It was allocated a Texas State Historical Marker in 1984.

The home is currently listed on the center’s website as being “temporarily closed to the public while renovations are completed”.



While William Duncan Sr. arrived in Liberty County in 1824, the Gillards didn’t arrive until 21 years later – in December 1845.

They were part of the Creole immigration of 8 families from the Red River Valley of Louisiana – direct descendants of the French nobleman and explorer Louis Juchereau de St. Denis.

The home was originally located near Ames, was made of native pine and cypress trees, and designed with a Creole style of architecture.

The family had their own sawmill nearby where they cut the wood to build the home.

It included an upstairs school room where their children and those of neighbors were taught.

