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NAME Dryden, William G. (deceased September 10, 1869)

PUBLIC OFFICES HELD

(DATE)

CITY:

Council Secretary (City Clerk) Nov. 6, 1850-May 9, 1860  
Nov. 27, 1866-Sept 9, 1869  
City Attorney May 7, 1851-May 4, 1852

~~COUNTY:~~

Board of Education (School Commissioner appointed 1859-  
62-63-64-65-66-68)  
Election Inspector, appointed 10 or more times

COUNTY

STATE

County Judge 1856-1869

FEDERAL:

CIVIC ACTIVITIES:

**BUSINESS OR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:**

Lawyer  
Justice of the peace; police judge  
County Judge  
City official

**PORTRAIT:**

**ATTACHED OR ENCLOSED IN ENVELOPE: none**

**PORTRAITS APPEARING ELSEWHERE (DATES)**

## ANECDOTES AND PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS:

Court decorum, even the lawyers and officialdom in general, were unconventional and suited the habits of the people and locality when Judge Dryden sat upon the bench in Los Angeles.

He arrived in the community at the time California began official transition from Mexican to American court procedure. His judicial services paralleled the years of violence and lawlessness when Los Angeles earned its reputation of being the toughest frontier town in the West.

Frontier law and justice, much of it unwritten, was known and understood; all of the early jurists commonly made use of it.

An informally voluble, genial, and very profane man, Dryden conducted his courts pretty much after his own personality traits.

Lawyers and jurymen appeared coatless, and wearing firearms, if they so desired. Solemnity was lacking. Inkstands, canes, chairs, and jackknives were hurled at opponents during altercations. Judge and attorneys engaged in violent disputes. Dryden himself often was guilty of blasphemy from the bench. Gun play was not unusual.

One classic anecdote found in numerous memoirs and histories of the bench and bar of that day concerns a scene in Judge Dryden's court. The story runs that two angry attorneys having exhausted invective and all available projectiles on each other drew their six-shooters, notwithstanding the marshal's repeated attempts to restore order. One version says that in the midst of the melee Dryden "filtered" into his chambers, and another claims he got down behind his bench. All accounts agree, however, that after he got out of range of the blazing guns he angrily yelled at the disputants: "Shoot away damn you! and to hell with all of you!"

**SOURCES OF INFORMATION:**

**BOOKS:**

See other page

**NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS:**

**PERSONAL INTERVIEW:** none

**INTERVIEWED BY:**

**DATE OF INTERVIEW**

Written by: **Clare Wallace**

**November 15, 1938**

The Los Angeles Public Library  
Local History Collection  
Biography

R 92  
D 799  
VF

NAME Dryden, William G. (deceased September 10,  
1869)

Occupation Lawyer

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Birth (Date and Place) About 1799

FATHER

Birth (Date and Place) \_\_\_\_\_

If Deceased, When \_\_\_\_\_

MOTHER

Birth (Date and Place) \_\_\_\_\_

If Deceased, When \_\_\_\_\_

IF MARRIED, TO WHOM 1st, Dolores Nieto  
2nd, Anita Dominguez

Birth of Same (Date and Place) 1st, California  
2nd, California

If Deceased, When \_\_\_\_\_

When Married 1st, November 30, 1851, Los Angeles  
2nd, September 30, 1868, Los Angeles

CHILDREN (Married Names of Daughters)

# TITLES OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, MUSIC, OR OTHER CREATIVE WORK

(In the case of printed matter, please give date and publisher; of periodical publications also name of magazine and date.)

## REVIEWS, CRITICISMS, AND OTHER BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES

(Please note printed matter concerning yourself or your work. We would appreciate any such material you may send, clippings, reviews, portrait.)

---

Bell, *Reminiscences of a Ranger*

---

Warner, Hayes, Widney, *Historical Sketch of Los Angeles County*

---

Wilson, *History of Los Angeles County*

---

Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California*

---

Workman, *City That Grew*

---

McGroarty, *Los Angeles From the Mountains to the Sea, vol 1*

---

Spalding, *History and Reminiscences of Los Angeles City and County, vol 1*

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Layne, *Annals of Los Angeles, pp 53, 74, 77*

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Rodman, *History of Bench and Bar of Southern California, 1909*

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## SKETCH

(Please make this as full as possible, giving business affiliations, positions of honor or trust with dates if possible.)

William G. Dryden, a unique figure in early Los Angeles history, was forty-nine or fifty years of age when he arrived in the pueblo some time during 1850.

The city and county governments were in the process of being organized about that same time, and it was but a matter of a few months before he was active in public affairs of every description.

The first City Council secretary was Vincente del Campo, appointed immediately after the councilmen themselves were elected. The Council then deciding a man of legal training was imperative for the position, del Campo resigned after a few months and Dryden was appointed to fill the vacancy. He was in reality the first City Clerk and served the city many years in that capacity.

While doing so he was both appointed and elected to other city and county offices, and served (according to the records) successfully and concurrently in all of them.

Some time in 1853 Dryden was appointed police justice and remained in this office until succeeding Judge Dimmick as County Judge, in 1856.

It was a known fact that Judge Dryden's knowledge of law and legal procedure was very limited, but his courage and opposition to the criminal element were equally as well known, and the application of common law from the bench was accepted by most parties concerned in pioneer times.

Besides the magistracy, sessions, and jurisdiction over probate matters, the county court exercised limited jurisdiction in criminal cases, although not so provided by the constitution.

One of Judge Dryden's earliest recorded acts (1853) was a request for a franchise to supply drinking water to the town, which got its supply from the zanja or open ditch. The townspeople bathed themselves, washed clothes, threw refuse into the ditches and used them also for their sole supply of water for domestic purposes. Recognizing the need for uncontaminated water, as the city was

continued



perpetually ravaged by smallpox and such malignant epidemics as "putrid sore throat," the Council after long delay granted him a franchise.

Building the first water wheel here Dryden pumped the water from springs located on his property in the upper part of town, through a flume and stored it for distribution in a brick reservoir in the Plaza. The earliest known photograph of Los Angeles shows this little brick reservoir, about 10 X 30 feet, squatting in a treeless, vineless plain; which was then the Plaza.

After it had been repeatedly damaged by floods, Dryden wearied eventually of being the owner of the city's first water system and sold his franchise to a company including Prudent Beaudry and Solomon Lazard.

Instead of lessening, Judge Dryden's services on various city bodies increased with his years. "The ubiquitous William G. Dryden" one historian calls him, because it would seem he had something to do with all of the city's official affairs. Changes in the city's basic laws, also amendments to the California court laws, make it now impossible for an individual to occupy such a multiplicity of official positions simultaneously. Dryden's record therefore remains unique. He died September 10, 1869, in the midst of a very active career.

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WILLIAM G. DRYDEN

(Additional research by Clare Wallace, May 16, 1939)

Dryden's second wife Anita, was born about 1832 on the rancho San Pedro of her parents, Manuel Dominguez and his wife Maria Engracia de Cota. Christened Ana Josefa, she married Dryden when about 37 years old, he being <sup>about</sup> 69 years. Francis Mora, Catholic Bishop of the diocese of Monterey and Los Angeles performed the ceremony. She was the eldest surviving child of her parents at the time of their deaths, 1882 and 1883 respectively. After the death of Dryden she resided on the rancho near Compton.

SOURCE:

Probate records of Manuel and Maria E. de Dominguez  
Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, 1889

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Found no record of either birth or death of Dryden offspring by either wife.

(Probate records from 1850 to date, are those of Frances E.; Jane A.; Josephine M.; and John Dryden. None of them is the relative of William G. Dryden or of either wife.)

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(ADDITIONAL RECORDS SEARCHED)

Los Angeles Times files and portrait index, nothing.  
Los Angeles Probate Records, 1850-1883, nothing.  
Los Angeles County Birth Records, 1867-1881, nothing.  
Los Angeles County Death Records, (first) 1873-1882.  
Los Angeles City and County Marriage Records, (first) 1851-1876.  
City Death Records begin 1879.  
City Birth Records begin 1879.  
(All of the early records are inconclusive.)

Los Angeles County Law Library has nothing. Made a fairly good research in the "High Brow" room of the library. Attendant there said a research of Dryden was made some time ago at the request of a local judge and resulted in findings considerably less than contained in the Municipal Reference Library files.

William G. Dryden  
(further research by Clare Wallace, June 21, 1939)

Church records of Nuestra Senora Reina de Los Angeles (Plaza Church) show that William G. Dryden was Catholic, married, died, and buried with full Catholic rites.

The first mention of his name occurs upon his first marriage as William Alexander de J. Dryden. Alexander doubtless was the name of his God-father, it being a Spanish-California custom to assume the name of the convert's sponser at the time of baptism and entrance into the Catholic faith. It and the "de J." appear but this once, all entries thereafter reading William G. Dryden.

Dryden married:

1st Dolores Nieto  
November 30, 1851

2nd Ana Josefa (Anita) Dominguez  
September 30, 1868

His four children were:

By Dolores Nieto

Guadalupe Lucia, Born January 6, 1854

Maria Margarita (Mary) Born November 4, 1857  
Married April 11, 1878, to Rocah Lobracca

Julia, Born April 29, 1860  
Married September 28, 1878 to Bernardo A. Yorba

By Soledad Nieto (sister of Dolores)

Guillermo (William) born June 8, 1867

There is no record of a marriage between Dryden and Soledad Nieto. She was alive at the time of Dryden's marriage to Anita Dominguez in 1868. Los Angeles County Marriage Records state that she (Soledad Nieto de Dryden) married ~~Hixix~~ Fielding Bacon in Los Angeles September 25, 1887. Her descendants are said to live in Santa Margarita, California.

(more)

Ana B. de Packman, secretary of the Historical Society of Southern California, says that according to a story told to her by her mother, there was no marriage between Dryden and Soledad. Guillermo was born out of wedlock. The church annals read "Guillermo, the Legitimate offspring of William G. Dryden and Soledad Nieto...."

Mrs. de Packman says she has a vague remembrance of family gossip to the effect that Guillermo died young.

The marriage dates of the Dryden daughters are from the Los Angeles County Marriage Records. No doubt their marriages and the baptismal records of any offspring resulting from the marriages, are in the Plaza Church archives, but have not as yet had time for further research there. The same thing applies to the affairs of Soledad Nieto.

I personally studied old deeds of the Title Insurance & Trust Company (433 S. Spring St.) containing the name of Dryden. The deeds themselves are old copies of official and historical documents from the county archives. Dryden's name appears throughout as W.G. or William G. Dryden.

I have also seen Dryden's own signature numerous times. It is usually " W.G.Dryden."

There is an excellent chance <sup>for</sup> further research of both the county and Plaza Church -or even the Cathedral - records will disclose names of direct descendants of Dryden's daughters. Have not had time for such a research yet.

Also- descendants of old Spanish-California families, of whom I know a number (telephonically) might recall such descendants when reminded of the family names, circumstances, etc. I have not done this either.