

The complaint for William A. Nixon's divorce from Bridget Degnan/Dagnal Nixon states the following:

William Nixon

Vs

Bridget Nixon

Territory of Minn county of Ramsey, First Judicial District

To the Honorable District court in and for the county of Ramsey, Territory of Minnesota.

The complaint of William Nixon, plaintiff in this action respectfully shows to the court that he is thirty-seven years of age and was married to Bridget Nixon, the defendant in this action, in the year A.D. 1834 in Liverpool, England- that the said defendant is now forty-nine years of age, and a resident of this county and Territory-that in the year A. D. 1848 the said plaintiff and defendant removed from England to the United States of America, with their family. That there are 5 children of the said plaintiff & defendant now living, the oldest being 18 years of age, and the youngest four years of age-that for more than a year last past, to wit since the 10th day of June A. D. 1852, the said plaintiff has resided in the said county of Ramsey, Territory of Minnesota. This plaintiff further complains and alleges that since Bridget Nixon his wife, is now, and has for 3 years immediately preceding the filing of this complaint, been a habitual drunkard. Wherefore the said plaintiff asks the court to adjudge and decree a divorce and separation from said nuptial ties, or bonds of matrimony, heretofore uniting this plaintiff and with the said Bridget Nixon and also that the care custody & maintenance of since minor children shall be entrusted to the plaintiff.

Territory of Minnesota

county of Ramsey Emmitt A. Moss, Atty for plaintiff William Nixon

Being sworn, says he is the plaintiff mentioned in the foregoing complaint and the same is true of his own knowledge, except as those therein stated on his information or belief and so to those matter he believes it to be true.

Sworn ascribed to before me this 12th Day of December A. D. 1853

Signed William Nixon

Herman Smith

Justice of the Peace

A copy was served 14th day of Dec 1853 George F. Britt, Sheriff by Deputy Warren Bristol.

In 1854 M Sherburne, Judge granted a divorce to William and he was given the control of the infant children.

Hannah Illingworth testified as follows:

I am acquainted with the parties to this suit and have known them over 3 years and a half. I am the wife of William Illingworth who has just testified.

I first became acquainted with them in Cleveland, Ohio, we lived on the opposite side of the street to them and have had an opportunity of knowing what the conduct of Mrs. Nixon (the defendant) was in her family-they lived opposite to us about 2 years & during that time whenever Mr. Nixon used to give her money to go and get things in the market she would get drunk with it and afterwards I used sometimes to do the marketing for them, and would sometimes find her down in the streets, drunk. I have known the defendant to be drunk for a week at a time, and

when her youngest child had the measles I was obliged to go over and take care of it myself, for its mother was drunk all of the time.

Since I have known her I have not known her to be sober for one week at a time and always gets drunk whenever she can get liquor-her habits here are the same as they were in Cleveland. I never saw Mr. Nixon intoxicated, he is a sober industrious man-I am not related in any way to either of the parties.

William Illingworth's testimony

William Illingworth being duly sworn testified as follows:

I am acquainted with the complainant and defendant in this action, have known them something of 3 years- I first became acquainted with them in Cleveland, Ohio. I very seldom saw Mrs. Nixon come home sober. I have seen her very frequently drunk, known her to come home so drunk as to be unable to get into the house, have seen her fall over in the streets and a crowd of boys around her. I lived opposite to them in Cleveland, have seen her come home drunk as often as 2 or 3 times a week, sometimes 2 or 3 times a day-since she has lived in St. Paul I have seen her frequently and never more than once when I saw her was she perfectly sober and frequently drunk. I have put her out of my place several times when she came here drunk. I think she is the most habituated drunkard I ever saw in my life, I never did see such a drunkard-and she has been so ever since I have known her. I have lived here about one year and a half and I saw the complainant-Nixon when I first got here-he was the first man with whom I was acquainted that I met in St. Paul and has lived here ever since.

I am not related to either of the parties to this action in any way. I never knew anything against the character of the complainant Nixon, he is a sober man and attentive to his business and the only drawback upon him is this woman. I never knew him to get intoxicated. I do not think that there is any collusion between the parties to this action in order to procure a divorce. The defendant-Mrs. Nixon said in my presence the other day "Let him get a divorce, I will smash his windows."

They have 5 children between the ages of about 5 and 18 years-there are three girls and 2 boys-or them the oldest and one next to the youngest are boys.

The Mother is a very unsuitable person to have charge of the children, in fact she takes no care of them whatever, lets them go in dirt and rags. I think the father is a proper person to have charge of the children-he has had to take charge of them on account of her conduct- or take and put them out where they could be taken care of. I think it would be much better for the children to be removed entirely from the influence of the woman (their mother) She is not fit to take care of anything not even herself. The complainant though a poor man could, I should think from his habits of industry maintain and support and educate the children provided the mother would let him alone and he would do it- I do not think that he could do more than support and provide for the children. I think the defendant could easily maintain herself if she would.

This divorce complaint was copied for Loretta Nixon by Mrs. Richard G. Johnson (Shirley), 1815 Tatum, St. Paul, Minnesota. On May 15, 1964, Loretta Nixon wrote the Ramsey County Clerk for a copy of the complaint and was told that the only information they had was the date of the divorce. It was through a contact of Effie Dean Rich that Shirley Johnson was contacted and she personally located and copied the complaint. The original complaint papers were later sought by other members of the family, and the court was unable to locate them. All that we

have is the hand copied record of Shirley Johnson, copied in 1964.