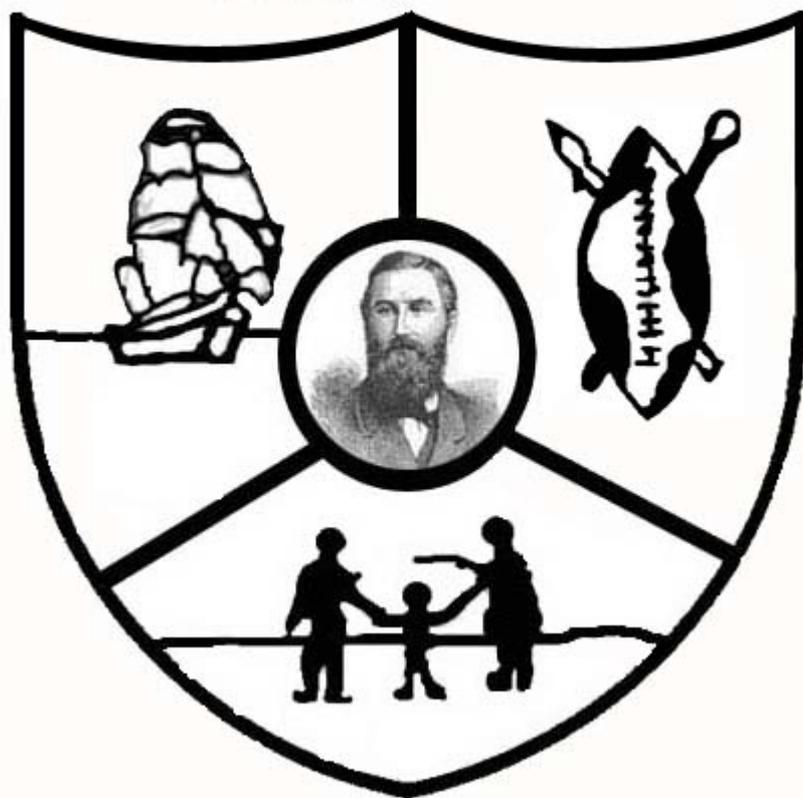


DUNN DESCENDANTS  
ASSOCIATION



# **John Robert Dunn**

## **A Brief Chronology – by Rosemary Dixon-Smith.**

### **1820**

Robert Newton Dunn, Englishman b 26 Feb. 1796 Ware, Hertfordshire. d 5 Sept. 1847. Came to South Africa with the Daniell Party on the Duke of Marlborough. This was an independent party from Devonshire.

Brother Hannibal Dunn b 1797 Ware Hertfordshire. d 1839 m Elizabeth b 1766 d 1846

### **1824**

Robert left England as an auctioneer, but soon set himself up as a merchant in Port Alfred. This year he married Ann Harold Biggar, daughter of Alexander Harvey Biggar. They had 5 children, four girls and a son John Robert Dunn. The family moved to Natal, where they purchased the farm “Seaview”. This is where John spent much of his youth.

### **1838**

The Piet Retief massacre by Dingaan. In April a Boer Commando left Durban to attack Dingaan: retribution was swift. Zulu impi ransacked the settlement. The Dunn family watch from on board the Comet. [Morris says that Dunn’s father had been killed on the beach.] John had been brought up by native nurses and played with native children, so spoke English and Zulu. Comet left on 11 May, Zulu impi retired beyond the Tugela. Later the refugees including the Dunn’s and the American missionaries returned back to Natal.

Robert Newton Dunn traded in ivory and dispensed medicine from his store on the Point. He took John on hunting and trading expeditions with him.

### **1847**

There are several stories as to how exactly Robert Newton Dunn died. One was that John saw his father trampled to death by an elephant. Another said that he died after a fall from his horse when surprised by elephants. Yet another was that he died in Congella drunk on the side of the trail. Supposedly from an apoplectic fit.

Several months later John shot his first elephant.

## **1851**

Ann Dunn died; she had returned with family to Port Elizabeth, the daughters married. She later returned to Port Natal with John.

## **1853**

With General Cato John killed the last elephant seen in Durban.

John at 18, large powerful youth quiet amiable and unambitious. Could read and write but largely uneducated. No skills beyond native command of the Zulu language and good with a rifle. Didn't mix easily, farming did not appeal to him. He guided hunting parties for officers stationed at Durban. He rode as a transport rider to Potchestroom for a local merchant. Merchant refused to pay him on his return, because he was too young according to Roman Dutch Law. No contract was binding with a minor. Dunn crossed the Tugela River and lived in Zululand for a year living off selling game to local kraals. With him went Catherine Pierce, 15-year-old daughter of his father's European assistant and Cape Malay mother.

## **1854**

John Dunn met Captain Joshua Walmsley who lived on the Nonoti River as border agent for the British on the border between Natal and Zululand. Dunn became his assistant; this gave John status in Zululand, where he was called Jantoni. Walmsley accepted John's relationship with Catherine, being of mixed race. John bought a team of trained oxen, traded it for two unbroken teams and trained them himself, repeating the process until he had some money. By now Catherine had given birth to John's first coloured children; though he might have put this liaison behind him and gone on to be a respectable trader.

## **1856**

Battle of Ndongakusuka. Walmsley gave John permission to accompany the iziGqoza impi (Mbulazi's force) who were to fight Cetshwayo's uSuthu warriors. John took a party of mounted natives who served Walmsley as a police force. John had no business in Zululand. Shepstone would not have permitted him to cross. He hardly had official status, but he was a European on Walmsley's pay and his presence with a few armed Natal Kaffirs who accompanied him, placed Natal squarely on the side of the iziGqoza. His force was too feeble to serve as peacemaker or to affect the outcome.

**Dec 1856** USuthu arrived. John Dunn urged Mbulazi to move his impi to avoid being pinned against the river. John rode forward to scout and watched as Cetshwayo's force arrived; John fired a few shots then retired through the ranks of the iziGqoza as the battle started. By the time he reached the river bank the fighting was over and the slaughter had started of everyone who stood between the uSuthu and the flooded river. John jumped into the river with his rifle and holding on to the horses' tail he had borrowed from Walmsley. A punt rescued him in midstream. Not a single survivor of the iziGqoza faction, including Mpande's sons. Cetshwayo withdrew victorious. Problem with the cattle abandoned by Waugh and Rathbone, which Cetshwayo had taken with him. Traders claimed that John's interference had caused the loss. Henry Francis Fynn now a Natal magistrate tried to recover them, and then John offered to see the Zulu King himself. Dunn's support of the iziGqoza made this a rash move, but he wanted the reward offered for the cattle. Unless he could make peace with Cetshwayo, Zululand would be closed to him forever. He went to see Mpande, who was grateful for his support at the battle. Then John went on to Cetshwayo's kraal and after 3 days left with the cattle and Cetshwayo's respect. Later the king invited him to settle in Zululand. The king needed an official advisor who could understand the Boers and the British. Someone to read and draft diplomatic messages. John Dunn was offered a large tract of land along the coast north of the Tugela with chieftainship rights. Dunn brought Catherine and the children and built a hut. Spent the first few years hunting and gradually acquired cattle and kraals. In 10 years he ruled over 10 000 Zulus. He began to accept chief's daughters into his harem. Catherine did not like the new arrangement with the added wives. She was instated as the head wife and had the right to see John without appointment and announcement. His 48 wives were settled in homesteads within his ruled land. John had influence at the Zulu court, maintained a small army with rifles. Drove expensive carriages, visited Natal staying at the Royal Hotel. Socially stigmatised by the colonials. Colenso despised him. Shepstone found him useful and used him as an informant.

## **1872**

John Dunn attended Cetshwayo's coronation.

John offered to convoy contract labour parties across Zululand to Natal for a salary of 300 pounds a year. Confirmed in this post, but Shepstone was uneasy about Dunn's influence and made it clear that he would never recognize Dunn as an independent power in Zululand.

## **1876**

The Transvaal annexation issue forced Shepstone to seek Dunn's advice as a go-between with Cetshwayo. Dunn believed Cetshwayo had no intention of making an attack on the Swazis or the Boers.

## **1878**

July the Sihayo (Sirayo) incident and other incidents occurred. Cetshwayo asked Dunn's advice on the matter. He suggested a fine. The king sent Bulwer 50 pounds, which Bulwer rejected.

Ultimatum was presented to Cetshwayo leading directly to the Zulu War in 1879.

John Dunn was amongst those who attended. There were copies of the documents in Zulu and in English, which Dunn, the only literate person to whom the Zulu king had ready access, retained. He was sent the import of the ultimatum to Ulundi by his own messengers. Dunn recognised the ultimatum for what it was. His position was critical, if he went in with the Zulus he would be a traitor, if he fought with the British, Zululand was over for him. His one chance was to stand aside. Half of the indunas already regarded him as a spy. 18 Dec Dunn sent Chelmsford a message from the King agreeing to certain terms. Frere announced that the government would not back down and that the troops would enter Zululand. Dunn saw Chelmsford and found that invasion was intended and that was not permitted to remain neutral. He returned to his homestead, rounded up 2 000 of his people, 3 000 cattle and brought them to the lower drift ferrying them across the Tugela. Chelmsford had promised to feed Dunn's people but he merely settled them south of the Tugela, disarming them and passing Dunn's rifles to the native police. Dunn had to kill his own cattle to feed his retainers, but sent wagons to Durban for grain. He also sold his cattle to the commissariat. (What an entrepreneur he was.)

21 Feb Dunn met Chelmsford by chance. Dunn aware the war could only have one outcome and hoped to return to Zululand when the fighting was over. He was trying to maintain neutrality. Chelmsford got Dunn to promise to raise scouts. When the troops entered Zululand (to relieve Eshowe) Dunn march at the head of 244-armed retainers officially the chief of intelligence. He took part in the relief of Eshowe. The British in error killed some of his scouts. No punishment was meted out for this.

April Dunn's main house was looted and burned, furniture, piano and tragically his written journals were destroyed.

## 1895

5 Aug died at the age of 61. Left 49 recorded wives, at least 117 children. Area north of the lower drift of the Tugela was populated by thousands of Zulus who owed him allegiance. Several of his daughters had married Europeans who settled in their father in law's domains. His own sons were not strong enough to replace him. His Zulu indunas continue to control the area.

## 1896

Rinderpest attacked herds holding his survivors together. His descendents scattered. A few returned to settle on the Dunn Reserve established by a land commission. The next generation was driven further apart by law. Some of Dunn's descendents reverted to native status.

## Questions according to Rosemary Dixon-Smith arising in the Dunn History

1. Parentage of Robert Newton Dunn. (What happened to Hannibal and Henry Dunn?)  
**a. Hannibal Dunn b. 1770 Hertford England d. 1839 Durban South Africa.**
2. Date and method (ships name) of arrival in Natal of Robert Newton Dunn?  
**a. Duke of Marlborough with the Daniell party in 1820.**
3. Morris states that Robert Newton Dunn died on the beach in Natal.  
**a. There seems to be three versions of what happened to Robert. i Trampled by elephants. ii died drunk with an apoplectic fit. iii fell off of his horse what frightened by elephants and died as a result of the fall.**
4. Morris (also Smail) says that an elephant trampled Robert Newton. Spencer quotes Natal Witness as "found dead near the edge of the bush" at Durban. Griffin says – Died at Congella of an apoplectic fit. Garden says – Died of drink.  
**a. see above.**
5. Whether Robert remained in Natal when the Comet left after the Zulu attack or whether he went with the family on the ship.  
**a. it seems that he might have stayed but I cannot find confirmation of this.**
6. Date of purchase of "Seaview" by Robert.  
**a. Some time between 1834 and 1838**
7. "Dunn's Grant" Map of Natal 1904 on the wall in Pmb archives. This was apparently land given to Mrs Dunn after 1849, 2644 acres between the Umhlatuzana and Umlazi rivers. (Adjoining Seaview) This was in full settlement of her husband's claims.