

The Dawkinses of Union Parish



Louisiana's legal legacy is deep-rooted in every corner of the state. Over the course of 300-plus years of history, the legal profession in the state has been peopled by patriots and scholars, by activists and visionaries. Inspired by the New Orleans' Tricentennial, the *Louisiana Bar Journal* began a new series to commemorate and recognize the state's legal legends, including "legends in their own time."

For this issue, we focus on the Dawkinses of Union Parish.

Book Author's Note: *I did my best to identify all the lawyers in Duncan Dekalb Dawkins's line, but after the book was published, another descendant provided the names of five more lawyers. Those names have been added to the excerpt below. I am almost certain there are more lawyer descendants because there are branches of the family whose locations we have not found who have a legacy of lawyers. I am still trying to find more but no luck yet.*



Beth Dawkins Bassett.

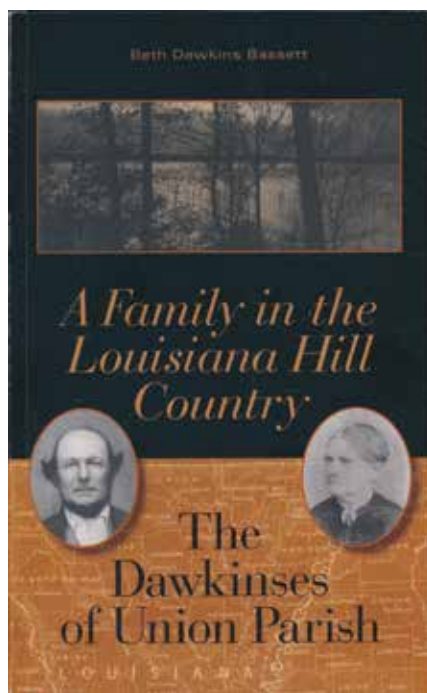
An Excerpt from the Book:
*A Family in the
Louisiana Hill Country:
The Dawkinses of Union Parish*

By Beth Dawkins Bassett

The first descendants of Duncan Dawkins to take up the practice of law were two sons born to his second wife, Margaret Brooks Thompson Dawkins: Robert Brooks Dawkins and Oliver Cromwell Dawkins. Robert subsequently was elected to a judgeship. In each of the four generations since, several descendants of Duncan Dawkins and his first two wives, Alpha Nan Cochran and Margaret Brooks Thompson, have become lawyers, twenty-two in all. Four became judges.



Duncan Dekalb Dawkins.
Photo courtesy of Dawkins
Family.



Book cover designed by Michael Hooten.

Oliver Cromwell Dawkins
b.1859 d.1928

Oliver C. Dawkins grew up in Union Parish, Louisiana. He attended the public schools of the parish and then the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, for three years. He returned to Union Parish, where he taught school while reading law. He was admitted to the Louisiana bar in 1886 and practiced with his elder brother Robert Brooks Dawkins in Farmerville. In 1883, an article in the *Ouachita Telegraph* called him editor of *The Farmerville Appeal* newspaper. He later was an editor of *The Farmerville Gazette*, still in existence. In 1896, Oliver and his family moved to Monroe and bought *The Monroe Evening News*. He both practiced law and ran the newspaper until 1906, when he sold the paper and returned full time to his practice. In 1918, his son Joseph Brooks Dawkins joined his practice. As a newspaperman, Oliver became interested and active in politics, advocating the gold standard and white primaries and opposing the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. He ran for the United States Congress twice from the Fifth Congressional District of Louisiana, in 1902 and in 1912, but was narrowly defeated each time. He was widely known as an after-dinner speaker. He continued to practice law until his death.

**Grandsons of
Duncan Dawkins**

Judge Benjamin Cornwell Dawkins
b.1881 d.1966

Judge Ben C. Dawkins was educated at Louisiana Industrial Institute and the Tulane School of Law, where he received the LL.B. degree in 1906. He was admitted to the Louisiana bar that year. He did not complete his degree at LII, but found work as a law secretary and court reporter and read law at night from 1902 until 1905, when he entered law school. Following his admission to the bar, he joined the firm of Lamkin, Millsap & Dawkins in Monroe, and in 1909, became a partner in Mulholland & Dawkins. In 1912, at age thirty-one, he was elected judge of the judicial district comprising Ouachita and Morehouse parishes and was reelected without opposition four years later. In 1918, at age thirty-seven, he took his seat as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, having been elected to that position. In 1924, he resigned as Senior Associate Justice of the Supreme Court to accept an appointment by Pres. Calvin Coolidge as United States District Judge of the United States District Court for the Western Judicial District of Louisiana. This appointment of a traditional Democrat, made by the then-Republican administration, was based only on merit.

Judge Dawkins served as a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1921 by appointment of Louisiana Gov. John M. Parker and was part of the Judiciary Committee that helped write the provisions that now govern the judicial system of the state of Louisiana. As a member of the Committee on Coordination, he helped revise and harmonize all the ordinances that became part of the Louisiana Constitution.

Judge Dawkins retired in 1953, but continued to preside over federal courts that included the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, and those in several other states, until he was well over eighty years of age. After his death, his peers compared him to famous jurists in history and contended that he should have been appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States.

Sons of Duncan Dawkins

Judge Robert Brooks Dawkins
b.1857 d.1923

Judge Robert B. Dawkins was born in Union Parish, Louisiana, and educated in the public schools of the parish and at Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, from which he graduated in 1879 with the A.B. degree. Returning to Union Parish, he served as the superintendent of education and read law at the same time. He was admitted to the Louisiana bar in 1886.

He was elected to the Louisiana Senate in 1896 from the district composed of Union, Lincoln, Morehouse, and West Carroll parishes. In 1898, he was a member of the Constitutional Convention. In 1900, he was elected Judge of the Louisiana Fourth Judicial District, composed of Lincoln and Union parishes, and there he served fourteen years. In 1916, he was elected to the Louisiana Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, comprising the parishes of Bienville, Claiborne, Jackson, Bossier, Webster, Catahoula, Winn, Grant, Union, and Lincoln. He was a judge on the Court of Appeals at the time of his death.

Former Louisiana Gov. Sam Jones, one of the speakers at the Memorial Service held for Judge Dawkins in 1967 at the Federal Court Room at Alexandria, Louisiana, said the following: "Judge Dawkins was a man of lofty ideals He gave no recognition to prominence, wealth or high office. In fact, he presided over the trial of a former Governor of Louisiana and imposed a substantial sentence (10 years) upon the latter's conviction His court held the uniform and universal respect of the people. This perhaps is his greatest contribution."

Herbert Elmer Dawkins
b.1882 d.1929

Herbert E. Dawkins attended the public schools of Union Parish, Louisiana, and, after teaching school for one year, entered Louisiana Industrial Institute, now Louisiana Tech University. There he earned the Bachelor of Industry degree in 1905 and served as class orator for the graduation ceremony. While at LII, he represented the Agatheridan Literary Society in a debate and was presented with a medal, and he served as literary editor of the school annual, *Lagniappe*.

He taught school one year and then entered the Louisiana State University School of Law in 1906, and, in 1909, received dual degrees, the B.A. degree in literature and the LL.B. degree. At LSU, he served as editor of the annual, *The Gumbo*, during his senior year. He had paid his way through LII by working in the cafeteria, and he supplemented the money he had earned teaching by working in the cafeteria at LSU to pay his way through law school. He was admitted to the Louisiana bar in 1909 and went into partnerships in Farmerville, first with H.C. Fields and then with Everett, Elder, Hodge & Dawkins. In 1911, he became a sole practitioner. He was a member of the Missionary Baptist Church.

Bruton Thompson Dawkins
b.1887 d.1933

Bruton T. Dawkins was born in Union Parish, Louisiana. He graduated from the Louisiana State University School of Law in 1909 and was admitted to the Louisiana bar before his twenty-second year of age. For one year, he practiced law in Monroe,

Louisiana. From 1911 until his death, he practiced in Alexandria, Louisiana. He was a member of the Episcopal Church, a Knight Templar, a Mason, an Elk, a Democrat, and a member of the parish Democratic Executive Committee.

Joseph Brooks Dawkins
b.1890 d.1972

Joseph B. Dawkins was educated in the Ouachita Parish and Monroe City school systems, and at Washington and Lee University and the Louisiana State University School of Law. He was admitted to the Louisiana bar in 1914 and worked in the Louisiana Attorney General's Office through 1916. He enlisted in the United States Army during World War I and served in France in the Coast Artillery Corps, which included field artillery and heavy artillery. In 1918, he joined the Monroe law firm of his father, Oliver C. Dawkins. From 1924 to 1936, he was Attorney for the Supervisor of Public Accounts for the Fifth Congressional District of Louisiana. He practiced law for fifty-seven years.

In his manuscript *The Dawkins and Norris Families*, Joseph Brooks Dawkins, Jr. wrote of his father: "He loved the practice of law and in particular where it was of benefit to the common man. At his death, his office ledgers reflected many small fees of which some had been paid off at the rate of a dollar or two per week and others which had never been collected. During the depression years from 1932 until the 1940s, he took in fees which ranged from collard greens and opossums to a 1928 Hupmobile, and he loved every minute of it. Life to him was so fascinating and so extremely interesting that one never heard him complain. Many times, regardless of how bad things were or how bad things might likely turn out to be, he has said, 'it will certainly be interesting to see what happens.'"

Robert Brooks Dawkins, Jr.
b.1897 d.1959

Robert B. Dawkins, Jr. grew up in Ruston, Louisiana. In 1915, he went to Washington, D.C., as secretary to Louisiana Representative Riley Wilson. He enlisted in World War I in 1917, in the United States Army Air Service, and saw

duty in France as a pilot.

After WWI, he earned the law degree at Georgetown University and was law clerk to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia for a year. In 1929, he joined the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) as an anti-trust specialist. He served in various legal positions and argued the Cement Institute Case and the Rigid Steel Conduit Case before the Supreme Court of the United States. He was appointed Assistant General Counsel for the FTC and placed in charge of the staff of special legal assistants.

After World War II, he was a member of the joint United States State Department and War Department Commission on Japanese Combines. This commission prepared and recommended plans for the decartelization of Japanese industry and laid the foundation for the first anti-trust statute in Japan. After his retirement, he was an adviser to the Small Business Committee of the United States House of Representatives.

Mr. Dawkins died at age sixty-two, in McLean, Virginia, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Judge James Robert Dawkins
b.1901 d.1974

Judge James Robert Dawkins was born in Union Parish, Louisiana, and attended the public schools of Farmerville. In 1919, he entered Louisiana State University and attended two years. He subsequently entered the Atlanta College of Pharmacy and, after graduation, practiced this profession for several years. In 1925, he reentered LSU and, in 1928, graduated with the Bachelor of Laws degree as valedictorian of his class. He practiced law in Monroe, Louisiana, and then in Farmerville as a sole practitioner.

In 1953, at age fifty-two, he was elected Judge of the Third Judicial District of Louisiana, comprising Union and Lincoln parishes, and served three six-year terms. Prior to his election to the bench, he served one term as mayor of Farmerville and as attorney for all the municipalities in the parish. He was a member and deacon of the First Baptist Church of Farmerville and Temple Baptist Church in Ruston. He served as a member of the Board of Trustees of Louisiana College

and the Judicial Council of the Louisiana Supreme Court. By special assignment by the Louisiana Supreme Court, he sat on the bench on several occasions in other judicial districts, including the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal in New Orleans.

Wilbur Dawkins Atkins, Sr.
b.1905 d.1992

Wilbur Dawkins Atkins, Sr. studied law for three years under attorneys and passed the Bar in 1936. He practiced in Baton Rouge and Lafayette.

Col. Woodrow Wilson Atkins
b.1917 d.2010

Col. Woodrow Wilson Atkins was granted an early law degree in December 1941, just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He served for twenty years in the Judge Advocate Division of the Army in the United States, Germany, and Korea.

Ben Edgar Atkins
b.1922 d.1998

Ben Edgar Atkins graduated from LSU Law School. He practiced in East Baton Rouge Parish.

**Great-Grandsons of
Duncan Dawkins**

**Judge Benjamin Cornwell
Dawkins, Jr.**
b.1911 d.1984

Judge Benjamin C. Dawkins, Jr. was born in Monroe, Louisiana, and lived there until 1918 when his father was elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court, based in New Orleans. He graduated from Tulane University and from the Louisiana State University School of Law with the LL.B. He played varsity football at Tulane and went to the Rose Bowl in 1932. After receiving his law degree, he practiced in Monroe one year as a solo practitioner. The following year, he joined the Shreveport firm of Blanchard, Goldstein, Walker & O'Quin. During World War II, he joined the United States Navy and received a 2nd Lt. Commission. He served as a naval aviator and flew some seventy-two Pacific Ocean crossings from San Francisco to Honolulu, Hawaii, and other islands in the Pacific theater, bringing blood for battle-

field transfusions and ferrying wounded U.S. soldiers and Japanese prisoners of war back to the United States.

After the war, he resumed his law practice, and, in 1953, he was appointed by Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower to succeed his father as United States District Judge of the United States District Court for the Western Judicial District of Louisiana. He was responsible for issuing desegregation orders to twenty-one school boards in twenty Louisiana parishes and in the Monroe City Schools, and he ruled that Monroe and Shreveport change their then-forms of government to more representative constructs. He served as a federal judge for twenty-six years, retiring in 1979.

Oral interviews conducted with Judge Dawkins are on file in the archives of the library of Louisiana State University in Shreveport. The emphasis is the Federal Court's involvement in the Civil Rights revolution.

Samuel Duncan Dawkins, Jr.
b.1926 d.2004

Samuel D. Dawkins Jr. was born in Port Arthur, Texas, and attended schools there. After graduating from the University of Texas at Austin in 1950, he was commissioned as an ensign in the United States Navy. He served two terms in the regular Navy and then entered the Naval Reserve, retiring as a full Captain in 1985. In 1956, he earned the law degree from the University of Texas. He practiced civil law in Dallas and Houston.

Wilbur Dawkins Atkins, Jr.
b.1942 d.2008

Wilbur D. Atkins, Jr. graduated from LSU Law School and practiced in Baton Rouge and Lafayette.

Jerome Ersel Dawkins
b.1935

Jerome E. Dawkins grew up in Port Arthur, Texas, and attended schools there. He graduated from Baylor Law School in Waco, Texas. He practiced law as a corporate attorney for Mobil Oil in Dallas, Texas, and New York, N.Y., until his retirement.

A Family in the Louisiana Hill Country: The Dawkinses of Union Parish may be purchased at the **Union Museum of History and Art**, 116 N. Main St., Farmerville, LA 71241, or ordered from **Beth Dawkins Bassett, P.O. Box 57, Winder, GA 30680**. 206 pp., soft cover, \$25.

Sarah Elizabeth (Beth) Dawkins Bassett, a descendant of Duncan Dekalb Dawkins, was born in Farmerville, La., and attended Union Parish public schools and Louisiana Tech University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in music in 1957. Later that year, she attended Indiana University as a voice major. She taught public school music in Orlando, Fla., and, subsequently, performed as a professional church soloist in Atlanta, Ga., where her husband, the late Harold Lane Bassett, was on the engineering faculty at Georgia Tech. In 1979, she received a master's degree in education from Georgia State University in Atlanta. Before completing her degree, she began work as writer for the magazine *Brown's Guide to Georgia*. In 1980, she began work as associate editor and principal writer for *Emory Magazine* and assistant director of the Office of Periodicals at Emory University. She left the university in 1993 to begin freelancing. She has written seven non-fiction books and edited five. Bassett's photo was taken by photographer Billy Howard. (sedbassett@comcast.net; P.O. Box 57, Winder, GA 30680)

Robert Glen Dawkins
b.1935

Robert G. Dawkins grew up in Farmerville, Louisiana. He attended the Farmerville public schools, Louisiana Polytechnic Institute (now Louisiana Tech University), and Louisiana State University. In 1959, he graduated from the LSU School of Law. He first practiced law in the firm of Rabun & Dawkins in Farmerville and now is a sole practitioner in Ruston, Louisiana.

While at LSU, he became a member of Phi Gamma Mu National Social Science Honor Society and Phi Delta Phi legal fraternity. In Farmerville, he held offices in

several local civic organizations and was voted Man of the Year in 1960 by the local chapter of the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce. He is a member of Temple Baptist Church in Ruston, a trustee of Louisiana College, a mason, and a founder of Cedar Creek School in Ruston.

In 1999, he was elected to the Council of the Louisiana State Law Institute, a body created by the Legislature in 1938 as an official law advisory agency. The thirty-one-member Institute consists of faculty members of the law schools of LSU, Tulane University, Loyola University, and Southern University; and nineteen practicing attorneys. In 2013, he was appointed a senior officer and member of the Executive Committee of that body. "These positions are bestowed impartially," wrote former State Supreme Court Justice Edward J. Bleich, "because of hard work, contribution and ability. These are qualities clearly possessed by Robert Dawkins."

Great-Great-Grandsons and Great-Great-Granddaughter of Duncan Dawkins

Albert Bartholamew Dawkins b.1923 d.2013

Albert B. Dawkins was born in New Orleans but moved with his family to Denver, Colorado, at age seven and attended schools there. In 1941, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and served in the Pacific Theater for three years, rising to the rank of Sergeant. He saw action in several crucial battles, including the Battle of Midway. He entered the University of Denver and graduated from the University

of Denver Law School in 1950. He practiced law in Denver for forty-one years, retiring in 1991. "Lawyers are the first line of defense against authoritarianism," he wrote in 2010.

Franklin White Dawkins b.1948

Franklin White Dawkins earned the B.B.A. degree in accounting from Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, in 1970; the J.D. degree from Louisiana State University Law Center, Baton Rouge, in 1974; and the LL.M. degree in health law from the University of Houston Law Center, Houston, Texas, in 2007.

He served as Senior Law Clerk to the Chief United States District Judge, Middle District of Louisiana, from 1974-1976. In 1976, he joined the McGlinchey Stafford firm in New Orleans. In 1978, he served as contract officer to the County Counsel's Office, Lane County, Eugene, Oregon, and, in 1979, he was appointed Assistant United States Attorney for the Western District of Louisiana. As assistant United States attorney, he represented the United States Department of Justice in a case that went before the United States Supreme Court, *U.S. v. Villamonte-Marques*. In 1982, he joined the Lafayette, Louisiana, law firm Roy, Carmouche, Bivins, Judice, Henke & Breaud as a partner, and, in 1989, he opened a solo practice. Since 2008, he has practiced health law and federal criminal defense law.

He is founder and director of the Louisiana High School Hockey Association; master, American Inns of Court of Acadiana; a past member of the boards for Faith House, Lafayette Juvenile

& Young Adult Program, Lafayette Parish Bar Association, and Southwest Louisiana Hockey Officials Association; and a present member of the American Red Cross, Acadiana Chapter.

Cindy Atkins Bethea b.1952

Cindy Atkins Bethea graduated from Southern University Law School. She practices in Denham Springs, Louisiana.

Great-Great-Great Granddaughter and Great-Great-Great Grandsons of Duncan Dawkins

Mary Elizabeth Dawkins b.1956

The first female lawyer among Duncan Dawkins's descendants was born in Denver, Colorado. She first attended Colorado University, Denver, and graduated as a paralegal. Some three years later, she enrolled in Denver University Law School. She passed the Colorado bar in 1992.

Eugene Donnaud Briere Dates Unknown

According to Judge Ben C. Dawkins, Eugene Donnaud Briere practiced law in New Orleans, Louisiana.

John Donnaud Dates Unknown

According to Judge Ben C. Dawkins, John Donnaud practiced law in New Orleans, Louisiana, and then in Washington, D.C.

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and evaluation process, the required filing fee(s) and the pertinent Rules are available online at: <http://www.lsba.org/members/LawyerAdvertising.aspx>.

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