

UNCLE BOB

I am not sure why Robert W. Rodgers' (Uncle Bob's) deposition is so incredible to me. Perhaps it is because he was remembered by several of my living relatives as quite a character in his youth and these stories have been passed down through the generations. It could also be that Robert's deposition is the easiest to read and gives the most information, in the clearest fashion, about my family's early history. Again, I was surprised that over seven months had passed in the deposition timeline.

On March 17th, 1897 at Augusta, Woods County, the Territory of Oklahoma (Oklahoma did not become the 46th state until 1907), H.M. Burfield deposed and interviews Robert W. Rodgers who states he was born March 19th, 1852 and is the oldest son of James HC and Mary Ann Rodgers.

Robert states that his father enlisted "the last time" in the 18th Illinois Infantry, Company H, and that he remembers his father well. Robert says, "My father and mother had separated before the war and I lived with father. All of the children, but Sally lived with father. She lived with my mother. My mother and father were divorced before the war and mother married a man named Love, and she died on Nov. 26, 1893 at Crawford Station, Scotland County, MO....The children born to my father and mother were Nancy Jane (now Garrison), myself, Wm. H. Rodgers, and Sarah (Sally) Ann Rodgers. Nancy Jane is about two years older than I. Wm. H. is about two years younger. I don't remember much about Sally Ann as she was the baby and mother kept her. She died about 20 years ago, I understood. I always understood that my father and mother were married near Scipio, Jennings Co, Ind. and they were divorced in Scotland Co., Mo. I can remember the trial but was too young to comprehend the meaning. I lived with my Uncle Dave Pruitt (this would a great uncle who was married to Robert's grandmother Elizabeth Wilkerson Rodgers' sister Polly) between the time of father and mother's

separation and their divorce, near Memphis, Scotland County, Mo. I remember when my father brought my stepmother Harriet J. Rodgers home. After they were married we moved from Scotland County, Mo. to Jennings County, Ind. My half sister Demira was born before we moved. My half brother John R. was born near Scipio, Jennings County, Ind. and at that time my father was in the army. I think the three month service, for I remember I went to the doctor to attend my stepmother. We next moved to Lovington, Moultrie Co. Ills., and Elizabeth was born there. So the children of the half blood were Demira, John, and Elizabeth. While we lived near Lovington, Ill., my father enlisted in the 18 Ill. Inf. and I took him to the station when he went away and while he was in the Army I kept my home with my step mother though I worked out a good deal.”

Robert continues, “Soon after we heard of father’s death we moved back to Scotland Co., Mo. I think in the fall of 1865. The next spring I remember Hiram Colvin and my stepmother left Mo. together and went back to near Lovington, Moultrie Co. Ills to the farm left by father (40 acres). My brother Wm H. went with them. It was the talk that Colvin and Harriet were not married when they went away and that they lived together in Ills until they were compelled to marry.”¹

I remember the first time I read this testimony of Robert in the National Archives in Washington, DC. It was phenomenal! All of the questions I had been looking for answers to were there in a simple couple of pages, clean and clear as day. Robert’s testimony would allow me to conduct probate research in Illinois and in Little Rock, Arkansas to finally confirm where precisely James HC had died and what became of his body. Ultimately, it is Robert’s deposition that would allow me to make the final claim to the government on behalf of my family and James HC Rodgers for the creation of a grave marker that was erected on August 22nd, 2007. I am getting ahead of myself a little

¹ [Robert W. Rodgers 3/17/1897](#)

bit however. Robert's testimony would also confirm for the special examiners the fate of his sisters and half sisters and that would just about close the case.

Mr. Burfield asks Robert about Harriet next and Robert tells Mr. Burfield that Harriet told him that she was married to a Harlan in Kentucky and had a child by him who drowned in a well. Robert told Mr. Burfiend that Harriet said her husband had killed a man in Kentucky and was sent to prison for life so she came to Missouri. Robert was then asked about his half sister Demira.

Robert told Mr. Burfield that in the summer of either 1877 or 1878 he got on a steamboat at Cairo, IL to go to St. Louis when he ran into Demira by accident. Robert says Demira was with a man named Shannon who she said was her husband and that she had a small child with her so young that (he) couldn't walk yet. Demira told Robert that she was going to live in Chester, IL for awhile and then return to the farm their father left. Robert says he has never seen or heard of Demira since. Robert was then asked if he had a birth record of all of his family.

Robert told Mr. Burfield he had no record of the births and deaths of his family, but that the "paper" Burfield showed him looked like the record he use to see in the family bible and that he thought it was correct. He also stated he had an uncle named Wilkerson Rodgers who loved near Scipio, IN and that Wilkerson was older than James HC. Robert further states that his mother's maiden name was Moore and that she had a brother named Bob. In beautiful cursive, Robert W. Rodgers concluded his testimony and signed his name. Again, thanks to Uncle Bob, I was able to conclude my investigations with visits to Moultrie County, IL and once again returning to Jennings County, IN in the summer of 2007.

Mr. Burfield's report to the Pension Office was short and shed but little more light on the situation, but he does put it right on the line saying, "There is scarcely a

probability that the widow (Harriet) was ever married to John Harlan as she alleges. She was a woman of easy virtue as shown by her living with Hiram Colvin between two and three years as his wife prior to their marriage on May 9, 1868.” Burfield further makes the suggestion that a special examiner be dispatched to Illinois to discover the current whereabouts of Demira.²

² [Special Examiner H.M Burfield 3/20/1897](#)