

## **FIVE YEARS OF INTERVIEWS**

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1895, R.F. Jones interviewed Harriet Colvin near Dykes, Texas County, Missouri. She confirms her identity to Mr. Jones and states that she filed a claim for a pension, but that it was not allowed until April of 1894. Harriet testifies that she furnished the pension office with a copy of her marriage certificate to James HC Rodgers and that she was first married to John Harlan under the maiden name of Harriet J. Camlin in Clark County, Kentucky near the city of Perryville by a justice of the peace whose name she could not remember, that she was seventeen years old, but couldn't remember the exact date, and had no official record of the marriage. Harriet goes on to say that she lived with Harlan for about eighteen months and that he then shot a man by the name of Tom Pittman in Boyle County, Kentucky. She then states that Harlan was arrested and she immediately left Kentucky to go live with her mother in Scotland County, Missouri.

Harriet says she was in Scotland County for about three years before she married James HC Rodgers and that she never knew if John Harlan was dead or alive and never heard anything from him again. Harriet named several people who knew John Harlan and their locations at that time.

Harriet continues to describe her relationship with James HC and that he was married to Mary Ann Moore in Indiana and that he had four children with her, Nancy Jane, Robert, William Henry, and Sally. She states she believes that William Henry and Nancy still lived in Scotland County, Missouri, and confirms that William married a daughter of John Ray and that William lived at John Ray's place. Harriet finally gives the confirmation as well, of the old family story that John Ray's wife (Sallie Ann) was James HC Rodgers sister. I had been told for years by different members of our family that my great-great grandparents were first cousins. This was more proof.

Harriet speaks of the marriage of Nancy Jane Rodgers to Lewis Garrison and that the last time she heard from Robert Rodgers that he was living in Pratt County, Kansas. Harriet confirms that Sarah (Sally) Rodgers, James HC's youngest child with Mary Ann died around 1874. Harriet talks about her children with James HC then, naming John R., Demira, and Louisa E. Rodgers. Harriet states that Louisa died when she was nine years and three months old, that John R. was still alive, and that she didn't know where Demira was. She confirms their dates of birth for Mr. Jones.

When asked about Demira, Harriet explained that she left when she was just about eighteen years old and that Demira has never contacted her since. Harriet said that most people believed that Demira ran away with a married man named Shannon, but that even after writing her many times and trying to track her down she was not successful and she even tried to contact Shannon's family who lived in Randolph County, Illinois after hearing from Robert W. Rodgers, her step son, that he saw Demira on a steamboat on the Mississippi River and that Demira got off the boat in Randolph County.

This also was a confirmation of family stories given to me that Robert spent much of his early days on steamboats in the Mississippi. According to Cousin Volana Gleason and Great Uncle Bobby Lee Rodgers, Robert was a river boat gambler. Volana has also stated that Robert courted her grandmother at some point in time before her grandmother married her grandfather John Henry Ray. Harriet further states in her deposition that she thought Shannon's first name was William and that Robert Rodgers reported Demira had a child with her on the steamboat.

Harriet goes on to name a Jasper Fegley who knew the Shannon family in Illinois and that he should be contacted for more information. Harriet (incorrectly) states that James HC's land in Moultrie County, Illinois was sold to various people, even though she sold her interest to Robert. I would argue she was not being entirely honest. The

examiner seems very interested in Demira and Harriet gives a description of her saying she has dark hair, scars under both her right and left eye, and a (mole) on her right ear. Harriet states she can't give any more information on Demira and the tone of the deposition is that she is very bitter about it. The examiner then asks again about the children of James HC from his first marriage to Mary Ann Moore.<sup>1</sup>

Harriet concludes her testimony by confirming the ages of the children to Mr. Jones and states she sent a record of their births to the pension department when she made her first application and that James HC Rodgers wrote the dates in his own hand.<sup>2</sup> This record was in the pension file when I found it in Washington, DC.

(As I am transcribing these depositions right now, I am having some very powerful memories of the day I found all of these records in the National Archives in Washington, DC. My son Ehrich Rodgers and I had originally gone just to see if we could confirm where James HC Rodgers had died and perhaps where he was buried. Nothing concrete was known about James HC's life and times to any degree as of October 2006. We had some files from Scotland County, and some from Jennings County, but nothing—nothing could compare to what we found in Washington DC. I couldn't even figure out who Harriet Colvin was at that moment in time! The worker in the National Archives brought us a file that was five inches thick and contained over two hundred documents, the transcription of which you are reading now and that are scanned in their entirety to the CD.)

On the next day, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1895, Special Examiner R.F. Jones traveled to Plum Valley, Texas County, Missouri which is about five miles away from Dykes, Harriet's home. It would appear from the responses that John Rodgers, Harriet's son, was asked

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<sup>1</sup> [Harriet Colvin Deposition 7/16/1895](#)

<sup>2</sup> [James HC Rodgers' handwritten document #2](#)

basically the same questions as his mother and gives mostly the same responses; however he gives several more concrete details in his account.

The first was that his sister Louisa Elizabeth died on February 12<sup>th</sup>, and although he doesn't state the year, this was very important to tracking down the official record of the death. John also clarifies that he received letters from his half brother Robert talking about the time he saw Demira on the steamboat on the Mississippi and that Demira had sold her interest in James HC's land in Moultrie County to Robert and William Rodgers. John also states that he met someone who saw Demira in Moultrie County and that Demira stated William Shannon had died and that she had lived in Chester, Illinois close to the state prison. John stated that his step sister from Hiram Colvin's first marriage, Martha English, met Demira in Chester as well and confirmed these details.

John concludes his testimony by stating that "the Colvins" received pension that belonged to him and that his mother and step father never let him see any of the paperwork for it and spent the money on themselves. You can definitely tell he is not on good terms with his mother.<sup>3</sup> The special examiner would confirm this in his report.

It's so remarkable how these interviews were conducted and how it is assumed the interviewees are being completely honest. After each round of examinations the examiners would send a report on the interviews to their superiors in Washington, DC with suggestions on how to proceed.

Mr. Jones reported to his superiors on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1895. He explains that he was sent to Texas County, Missouri to ascertain whether James HC had any children under the age of sixteen (the limit of age for pension applications at that time) and the time Harriet was married to Hiram Colvin. He was also to confirm the whereabouts of these children if he could.

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<sup>3</sup> [John Ray Rodgers Deposition 7/17/1895](#)

Mr. Jones was very candid in his report on the claim of John R. Rodgers. He states that John R. Rodgers is “regarded as worthless, and his reputation...is far from good,” but that he believed the account John Ray Rodgers gave to him. Mr. Jones makes the same statement about Harriet and refers the reader to her deposition as proof, essentially calling her dishonest. Mr. Jones also puts forth the idea that had all the facts about Harriet been known originally to the Bureau that her claim for a pension would never have been allowed because he believes that Harriet was never the legal widow of James HC Rodgers because she was never divorced from John Harlan.

Mr. Jones then recounts the testimony of Harriet and names all the people Harriet counted in her testimony as possible witnesses in the case and that they should be contacted in Kentucky to be interviewed about her relationship with John Harlan. Mr. Jones also suggests the older children by James HC and Mary Ann Moore should be contacted as they may have some valuable information. Mr. Jones concludes his report by saying that John and Harriet are not on good terms because she “squandered” his inheritance. He finally states that John Rodgers’ claim for a pension is “unmeritorious.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [Special Examiner R.F. Jones 7/21/1895](#)