

## DEMIRA W. RODGERS

Special Examiner Lewis O. Rogers (no relation to us), on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1897 interviews Martha Ann English in Macon County, Illinois who claims she is forty four years old and a step daughter of Harriet, saying that her father was Hiram Colvin by his first marriage. Martha claims complete ignorance to the situation, not knowing anything about Demira, claiming she hadn't seen her for nearly twenty years.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. English shed nothing on the subject as Mr. Rogers stated in his report, but he adds, "It is my opinion that Demira is her mother's own child, and practicing her traits living with men as their wives without legal rights is hiding somewhere unknown to her kin-folks. I believe (from reading all the reports) that Mrs. Rodgers No. 2 alias Harlan was the legal wife of James HC Rodgers (and) that it was her first marriage." Special Examiner Rogers was the first person in the timeline to state that the claims of the children who were still alive were entitled to pensions!<sup>2</sup>

At long last, nearly thirty three years after his death, the pension of James HC Rodgers was just about concluded. The Chief of the Special Examination Division is given a final report on the issue of whether or not Harriet J. Colvin was the legal widow of James HC Rodgers and whether or not her children and step-children are entitled to pension money. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1897, Mr. Frank E. Anderson reports very clearly that regardless of what Harriet may state, it is very clear that there was never a legal marriage between her and John Harlan. Mr. Anderson states that an exhaustive investigation by six Special Examiners, submitting nine reports, across two decades, from testimony from the family and relatives of Harlan and from respectable citizens who knew all concerned

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<sup>1</sup> [Martha Ann English 4/1/1897](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Special Examiner Lewis Rogers 4/2/1897](#)

and all the details. The facts show beyond a reasonable doubt, according to Mr. Anderson, that Harriet and John Harlan's relationship was concocted by Harlan so that he could keep Harriet to himself and to provide legitimacy for Harriet's birth of a son outside of marriage, and to conceal her notoriety as a prostitute. Mr. Anderson concludes: "The pensioner Harriet J. Rogers (sic) was the legal wife of the soldier, and was his lawful widow until the date of her remarriage to Colvin."<sup>3</sup> With one exception, the case was closed. The pension officers now had to calculate the pension money based upon three different Acts of Congress, and make a conclusion about the whereabouts of Demira H. Rodgers. It is amazing to me that the Demira issue would take three more years of investigations.

Although it is circumstantial evidence, it would appear that the next piece of the story was initiated by John Ray Rodgers, James HC's youngest son with second wife Harriet. I am assuming the pension office contacted him to say they had made the conclusion that he was entitled to pension money, but that it was being withheld because there was confusion about John's sister Demira's status. Based upon the fact that the next couple of "depositions" were not on the standard government pension office forms as ever single other one in the case file was, I believe John hired someone to take these to prove Demira was not alive.

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1898, Mr. Frank A. Marsteiner of Chester, Illinois gives a deposition on his knowledge of Demira's situation. This deposition was not done by a Special Examiner, but a notary public of Randolph County, Illinois. Mr. Marsteiner states that he was well acquainted with William H. and Demira Shannon, as well as their young son, William Edward Shannon, as he was their "next door neighbor."

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<sup>3</sup> [Chief Frank E. Anderson 4/15/1897](#)

Mr. Marsteiner says that he believed William H. Shannon died in about September of 1879 and he attended the funeral and that after William H.'s death Demira went to live with an "old lady name of Cedars, where (Demira) died about the autumn of 1880. Marsteiner states in a second deposition that he believed both William H. and Demira Shannon were buried in the Anderson Graveyard near Chester, Illinois. He concluded by saying that the son, William Edward Shannon, then went to live with a Catholic priest who arranged for one Lawancz Shmania, who Marsteiner described as a "Polander" to raise Demira's son. Finally, Mr. Marsteiner states that William Edward Shannon lived with Schmania until he was about eighteen years old and at the time in question lives about three miles from the city of Chester in Randolph County, Illinois.<sup>4</sup> The next deposition is of William Edward Shannon himself.

On January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1898, William Edward Shannon gave testimony to a notary public saying that he does not remember his parents, William H. and Demira (Rodgers) Shannon, but that he was always taught that they were his mother and father and that he "respect(s) their memory as such." He reiterated Mr. Marsteiner's testimony that his parents died when he was very young and that Lawancz Shmania raised him until about the year 1896 when he moved out to "work for (him)self."<sup>5</sup> William Edward Shannon's neighbor Mrs. Amanda Knapp<sup>6</sup> gives the next statement which is exactly the same as the first two. Although circumstantial I believe that John Ray Rodgers, Demira's brother, was given these three depositions and then sent them, along with a personal statement of his own stating this was his proof that Demira was dead, to the Pension Office in

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<sup>4</sup> [Frank A. Marsteiner 1/29/1898](#)

<sup>5</sup> [William Edward Shannon 1/31/1898](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Amanda Knapp 1/31/1898](#)

Washington, DC. The office stamped that they received the documents on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1898,<sup>7</sup> but the examiner was not taking John Ray Rodgers word at face value.

As sent to Mr. Coleman, Chief of Section, W. Berger states that he was not satisfied that Demira was indeed dead based upon conflicting information about the dates of her death in the depositions John Rodgers sent and the earlier reports of Special Examiners Jones and Paxton. Mr. Berger puts a hold on the case and says, “before we drop Demira’s name and divide her share between her brothers the case should be returned...to verify the alleged fact and date of death of Demira...”<sup>8</sup> It is significant to note that the newer pension laws now didn’t just erase a claim if a child had died, but would have divided the share amongst surviving children, giving them each more money.

It would seem from the next Special Examiner reports that the depositions sent by Frank Marsteiner, John Ray Rodgers, and William Edward Shannon were correct. The first Special Examiner E.E. Clark dispatched to Randolph County, Illinois interview a Jasper Phegley who had been previously named by Harriet Colvin in one of her depositions as someone who knew the circumstances surrounding Demira. He was interviewed on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1899, but states that he knew nothing about Demira and that Harriet had him confused him with his brother Merida Phegley who actually knew the family.<sup>9</sup> Special Examiner Clark in his report states this as well as the fact that he made very careful inquiries in Randolph County for the Shannon family and was unsuccessful.<sup>10</sup> He recommends that an examiner be dispatched to Scott County, Missouri to interview the Merida Phegley.

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<sup>7</sup> [John Ray Rodgers Affidavit 4/30/1898](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Chief W. Berger 3/15/1899](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Jasper Phegley 10/19/1899](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Special Examiner E.E. Clark 10/21/1899](#)

Merida Phegley was sixty-six years old when he was interviewed on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1899 and, in my opinion, did not have a very good memory. He stated in his deposition many very confusing facts about the situation, confusing James HC Rodgers with his son John Ray Rodgers, and otherwise had no information useful to Special Examiner J.R. Hanna except that he thought someone named William Harris, who lived in Howell County, Missouri had married one of James HC Rodgers' daughters. This, too, would be incorrect, but it allowed for another lead to be followed.<sup>11</sup>

On December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1899, Special Examiner F.W. Moore interviewed William H. Harris at his home in Howell County, MO. Mr. Harris states that he did indeed know the family, but that he had married a daughter of Hiram Colvin, Harriet's current husband and not one of James HC's daughters as Mr. Phegley had stated. He did give some further information about Demira, however.

Mr. Harris told Special Examiner Moore that Demira had run away with a married man named Shannon in 1878. Mr. Harris further states that he thought he had heard she appeared back in Moultrie County, Illinois a couple of years later to sell her share in the land James HC had left, and that she died shortly after that.<sup>12</sup> Special Examiner Moore makes the recommendation after relating this in his report that someone be sent back to Moultrie County to confirm Mr. Harris' testimony.<sup>13</sup>

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1900, nearly thirty five years after James HC Rodgers' probate record was filed in Moultrie County, Illinois, Special Examiner C. E. Hayward examined the documents with the Deputy Clerk C. W. Green and concluded that a Demira W. Rodgers is mentioned as an heir to James HC, but that there is no information as to her

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<sup>11</sup> [Merida Phegley 11/19/1899](#)

<sup>12</sup> [William H. Harris 12/29/1899](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Special Examiner F.W. Moore 12/30/1899](#)

current location or what she did with her share of James HC's estate.<sup>14</sup> Next, Mr. Hayward walked across the hall of that courthouse in Sullivan, Illinois and examined the title abstracts with the Abstractor of Titles, Mr. G.G. Martin and discovered a deed from Demira Shannon to a Catherine E. Latch dated November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1880 for Demira's interest in the forty acres of land she inherited from her father James HC.<sup>15</sup> Mr. Hayward would state in his final report that neither Demira's address nor Mrs. Latch's address were given. He further says that the land was completely owned and later sold by Demira's "half brother." (We now know that was Pa Bill.) Mr. Hayward concludes his report by saying "all sources of information appearing to have been exhausted I recommend that the papers be referred for the consideration of the Chief of Board of Review."<sup>16</sup> The investigation that had lasted thirty five years was over. The payment vouchers were sent to William Henry and John Ray Rodgers on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1900.

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<sup>14</sup> [Deputy Clerk, Moultrie County, IL Court C.W. Green 3/13/1900](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Abstractor of Titles Moultrie County, IL J.G. Martin 3/13/1900](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Special Examiner C.E. Hayward 3/14/1900](#)