



# HIDDEN PAST UNEARTHED: A CASE STUDY - THE LONG DECEPTION OF BLODWIN ‘WINNIFRED’ DAVIS

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Unearthing ancestral skeletons may not always be a good thing! Genealogical researchers, particularly hired professionals, must take great care with releasing unearthed facts and clients, too, need to be prepared for the outcome of the findings. Our newly-found historical knowledge, along with the way that we report them, can be as cruel and painful now as they were when they were contemporary to the moment!

The case of **Blodwin ‘Winnifred’ Davis** is the story of a creative woman who fabricated the story of her life from an early age so well that, to this day, it has been extremely difficult to determine who she actually was and what become of her. She deceived those around her and, some might even suggest, succeeded so very well that in the end she had deceived herself to the point of believing her own stories.

The deception would unravel slowly later into her life, though it would not become fully exposed and apparent to others until long after her death. The family would come to learn the shocking truth about Grandma Winnie, as she was kindly referred to by her family, and her long-developed deception to the point that it would haunt them, leaving them to ask, “What is the truth about our ancestral past?”

## CLIENT OBJECTIVES

Our firm is involved with primarily forensic genealogical cases. The simplest definition I have found to describe *Forensic Genealogy*, comes from Heritage Forensics which defines it as, “*the use of science or technology [in addition to traditional genealogical records] by investigation through due diligence to establish facts or evidence in a court of law that pertains to a direct descendant; creating a record, pedigree, or lineage of a person, family, or group from an ancestor.*” Therefore, forensic genealogists look “beyond the records” to gather all available clues and often, but not always, such cases are initially court-driven. Though this type of work is the bulk of what my firm undertakes, back in May 2007, a young man came to us and encouraged us to take on his family history case. He was having great difficulty uncovering his mother’s maternal ancestry and needed assistance.

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After hearing his story, we were intrigued by the reported history of his maternal grandmother, who was the intended focus of the investigation. Little did we know at the time that it would lead us to a complex story of deception, the events of which would impact so many lives in so many negative ways.

The defined objectives were twofold:

- With a myriad of conflicting information already compiled by the client, we were asked to attempt to determine what became of the client's grandmother, known to them as, **Blodwin 'Winnifred' (Winnie) Bailey** (b. circa 1892, possibly in Virginia, USA and reportedly of Irish extraction), last known of Saskatchewan and Manitoba; and
- Develop a biographical accounting of Winnie's life, parents and siblings.

## CLIENT'S KNOWN FACTS

The birth certificate for our client's mother, **Greta Elizabeth Higgins** (b. 26<sup>th</sup> February 1924 at Healthwin Hospital in Winnipeg, MB), indicates that her mother, **Blodwin Bailey**, is of Irish origin and that the father is **Thomas Francis Higgins**, also Irish of Regina, Saskatchewan. The document reports that Blodwin was born in Richmond, Virginia 41 years earlier, and that she had "six children" however "three were now deceased," though "none stillborn."

On Blodwin's 1920 marriage record to **Thomas Francis Higgins**, she indicates that her name is **Winnie Rankin** and her age as 31. She lists her religion as Christian Science, although the couple were married by a Methodist clergyman. She states that she was born in Richmond, Virginia and that her father was **Joseph Bailey** (occupation - a physician) and mother was **Emily Williams**, both born in Ireland.

## CASE BACKGROUND

Never in our wildest dreams did we expect to eventually find such a wealth of information on **Blodwin (aka Winnie) Bailey** when we agreed to take on this case. Sadly, however, the search has still not come to a full conclusion and will likely continue to incur considerable amounts of time and expense yet to fully unravel.



Exhibit I - Blodwin Winnifred (aka Winnie) Davis (photo taken in ca. 1931)

Early research on Winnie documents that she was a “*very sweet and helpful individual,*” and this sentiment was expressed on several occasions by people that met her. Nevertheless, she clearly had some major personality flaws which became more and more obvious as time progressed: with her increasing socio pathic ways, she became an evermore hardened career criminal; she was a convicted bigamist; she increasingly confused the reporting of her past; and there was some suggestion in the source records found to date that she was using heavy doses of unstated medications (possibly for her ever-present ‘*nervous condition*’ and the ‘*frequent female pain*’), though the documents are not clear as to any possible addiction, something she succinctly denies any suggestion to on multiple occasions.<sup>1</sup>

Understanding her past a little better does suggest some quasi-rationale as to why her life possibly went in the direction that it did however. From what can be determined to-date, **Blodwin ‘Winnifred’ (Winnie) Bailey** (later more correctly acknowledged as rather, **Winnie Beeley**) was in fact born and baptized **Blodwin Josephine Davis**<sup>2</sup> (b. 26<sup>th</sup> December 1892 in Fairmont, Marion Co., West Virginia<sup>3,4</sup>) to Welsh parents **John**

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<sup>1</sup>Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, “Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)”; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

- she has used many names, only to list those known: Blodwin Davis, Blodwin Higgins, Blodwin Winnifred Davis, Winnifred Rankin, Winnie Lang, Winnie Higgins, Winnie Rankin, Faye Wright, Josephine Davis, Josephine Thelma Fuchs, Josephine Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Helen Margaret Garnett (suggests a possible marriage not yet accounted for);
- she has been convicted of numerous serious charges ranging from check fraud, violation of Immigration Laws, Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, violation of Section 75, title 18 USCA, impersonation of an FBI officer, but to name a few;
- family details enclosed (somewhat reliable!), along with a photograph of Josephine (Blodwin) Higgins and fingerprints;
- a host of other biographical details on the prisoner and examinations by the probation officer on her past and accounting for her claims.

<sup>2</sup>Second Judicial District Court Criminal File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, “Minnesota District County, Criminal Case Files - Ramsey County (1930-1952)”; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #13862; microfilm SAM 47, reel 5, cases 13835-13952. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The case file indicates that the court charges were at the City of St. Paul in January 1932 with the offenses in Minnesota occurring in and about June 1931. At the time she was incarcerated at the Ramsey County Jail awaiting sentencing.

<sup>3</sup>Birth Record for Unnamed Child - Blodwin Winnifred Davis; “General Register for Births in the State of West Virginia”; compiled by the West Virginia Registrar of Vital Statistics (1892), reg. 26<sup>th</sup> December 1892, p. 246, entry #300. Originals held by the West Virginia Archives and History (Charleston, WV, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>4</sup>Second Judicial District Court Criminal File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, “Minnesota District County, Criminal Case Files - Ramsey County (1930-1952)”; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #13862; microfilm SAM 47, reel 5, cases 13835-13952. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). . The case file indicates that the court charges were at the City of St. Paul in January 1932 with the offenses in Minnesota occurring in and about June 1931. At the time she was incarcerated at the Ramsey County Jail awaiting sentencing.

**E. (aka John Thomas<sup>5</sup>) Davis** (b. circa 1856 in Wales<sup>6</sup>; d. 1<sup>st</sup> May 1901 in Ingleside, Adams Co., Nebraska<sup>7</sup>) and **Emily Williams** (b. 19<sup>th</sup> August 1868 in Wales<sup>8,9</sup>; d. 12<sup>th</sup> November 1918 in Saint Charles, Saginaw Co.,

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<sup>5</sup> Death Record for Thomas John Davis; “General Register for Deaths in the State of Texas”; compiled by the Texas Department of Vital Statistics, reg. 5<sup>th</sup> February 1973, entry #06988; SSN 452-56-1699. Originals held by the Texas State Archives (Austin, TX, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Marriage Record for John Davis to Emily Williams; “General Register for Marriages in the State of West Virginia”; compiled by the West Virginia Registrar of Vital Statistics (1892), reg. 19<sup>th</sup> May 1892, p. 520. Originals held by the West Virginia Archives and History (Charleston, WV, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, “Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)”; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

- she has used many names, only to list those known: Blodwin Davis, Blodwin Higgins, Blodwin Winnifred Davis, Winnifred Rankin, Winnie Lang, Winnie Higgins, Winnie Rankin, Faye Wright, Josephine Davis, Josephine Thelma Fuchs, Josephine Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Helen Margaret Garnett (suggests a possible marriage not yet accounted for);
- she has been convicted of numerous serious charges ranging from check fraud, violation of Immigration Laws, Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, violation of Section 75, title 18 USCA, impersonation of an FBI officer, but to name a few;
- family details enclosed (somewhat reliable!), along with a photograph of Josephine (Blodwin) Higgins and fingerprints;
- a host of other biographical details on the prisoner and examinations by the probation officer on her past and accounting for her claims.

John E. Davis was committed to the Hastings State Hospital (Ingleside, Nebraska) on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1900 after being transferred from the Lincoln State Hospital (Hastings, Nebraska) where he was originally committed for manic depressive insanity on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1899. He is buried in the hospital cemetery.

<sup>8</sup> Death Record for Emily Beeley; “General Register for Deaths in the State of Michigan”; compiled by the Michigan Department of Vital Statistics, reg. 17<sup>th</sup> November 1918, entry #487. Originals held by the Archives of Michigan (Lansing, MI, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Emily died from chronic endocarditis and was interred in Section 2 of Riverside Cemetery at Saint Charles, MI on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Burial Record for Emily Beeley; *Find A Grave - Emily Williams-Beeley*; record added 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2012, memorial #97625137. Information extracted from *Find A Grave* <[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

Michigan<sup>10</sup>), d/o **William D. Williams** and **Rosina Jones**.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

Her parents, **John and Emily Davis**, married on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1892 in Ohio Co., West Virginia<sup>14</sup>. Winnie was the eldest of only three children<sup>15</sup> to this Welsh coal mining family, with the other two children being: **Thomas (Tom) John Davis**<sup>16</sup> (b. 8<sup>th</sup> September 1894 likely in Barton, Belmont Co., Ohio<sup>17</sup>, though other conflicting

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<sup>10</sup> Death Record for Emily Beeley; "General Register for Deaths in the State of Michigan"; compiled by the Michigan Department of Vital Statistics, reg. 17<sup>th</sup> November 1918, entry #487. Originals held by the Archives of Michigan (Lansing, MI, USA), though digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Emily died from chronic endocarditis and was interred in Section 2 of Riverside Cemetery at Saint Charles, MI on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1918.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Marriage Record for Joseph Beeley to Emily Davis; "General Register for Marriages in the State of Ohio"; compiled by the Ohio Registrar of Vital Statistics (1902), reg. 12<sup>th</sup> November 1902; Series 1899-1910, vol. 7, p. 265, image 162, entry #528, FHL microfilm #333251. Originals held by the Ohio State Archives (Columbus, OH, USA), though online digital copies extracted from the LDS Family History Library <<http://familysearch.org>> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>13</sup> As per the English and US Census, in 1861, William and Rosina Williams were just married and living in Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan, Wales (he born in Llanidloes, Monmouthshire, Wales and she in Gwernilwyn, Glamorgan, Wales), though by 1880 the family, including Emily Williams (later Davis-Beeley) who was the forth eldest child of six, were residing in Monroe, Carroll Co., Ohio.

<sup>14</sup> Marriage Record for John Davis to Emily Williams; "General Register for Marriages in the State of West Virginia"; compiled by the West Virginia Registrar of Vital Statistics (1892), reg. 19<sup>th</sup> May 1892, p. 520. Originals held by the West Virginia Archives and History (Charleston, WV, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Household of Emily Davis in 1900, US Federal Census Enumerations, Monroe Township (district #43), Carroll County, Ohio, LC microfilm #1241244, p. 12B. Digital online copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Death Record for Thomas John Davis; "General Register for Deaths in the State of Texas"; compiled by the Texas Department of Vital Statistics, reg. 5<sup>th</sup> February 1973, entry #06988; SSN 452-56-1699. Originals held by the Texas State Archives (Austin, TX, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Tom died from cardio-renal failure and prostate cancer and was interred in Section C/Row 34a of the Ochiltree County Cemetery at Perryton, Ochiltree Co., Texas on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 1973. Tom Davis was a Veterans Service Office and married divorcee **Lenore Dane Voorhis-Bowley** (1893-1961), on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1936 at Logan, Ohio, and the couple are not known to have had any children of their own. However, the death record suggests that possibly a niece provided the information as the informant is noted as a Mrs. Lora Davis (no relationship or address noted). This lineage has not been further investigated as of January 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Marriage Record for Thomas John Davis to Lenore van Voorhis-Bowley; "General Register for Marriages in the State of Ohio"; compiled by the Ohio Registrar of Vital Statistics (1936), reg. 26<sup>th</sup> October 1936; Series 1931-1938, vol. P, p. 464 image 268, entry #10474, FHL microfilm #534843. Originals held by the Ohio State Archives (Columbus, OH, USA), though online digital copies extracted from the LDS Family History Library <<http://familysearch.org>> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

information suggests that the event occurred in Saint Charles, Michigan<sup>18,19</sup>; d. 29<sup>th</sup> January 1973 in Wheeler, Wheeler Co., Texas<sup>20</sup>) and **Rosina Davis-Wright** (b. 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1897 in Sherville, Harrison Co., Ohio<sup>21</sup>; d. 12<sup>th</sup> April 1987 in Toledo, Lucas Co., Ohio<sup>22</sup>).

There is some evidence that her father, **John E. Davis**, was a coal mining inspector who died on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1901<sup>23, 24</sup>, from diabetes mellitus, in the State Lunatic Asylum (now, Hastings State Hospital) at Hastings, Nebraska, after earlier involuntarily separation from his wife and family in about 1898. He had been institutionalized here for 'manic depressive insanity' for a two-year period.<sup>25, 26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Burial Record for Thomas John Davis; *Find A Grave - Thomas John Davis*; record added 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009, memorial #43177397. Information extracted from *Find A Grave* <[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Death Record for Thomas John Davis; "General Register for Deaths in the State of Texas"; compiled by the Texas Department of Vital Statistics, reg. 5<sup>th</sup> February 1973, entry #06988; SSN 452-56-1699. Originals held by the Texas State Archives (Austin, TX, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Tom died from cardio-renal failure and prostate cancer and was interred in Section C/Row 34a of the Ochiltree County Cemetery at Perryton, Ochiltree Co., Texas on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 1973.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Birth Record for Rosena Davis; "Index to General Register for Births in the State of Ohio"; compiled by the Ohio Registrar of Vital Statistics (1897), reg. 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1897, LDS FHL microfilm #894642. Originals held by the Ohio State Archives (Columbus, OH, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *the LDS Family History Library* <<http://familysearch.org>> and *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Death Record for Rosina Wright; "General Register for Deaths in the State of Ohio; compiled by , Ohio Registrar of Vital Statistics (1987), cert. #029351, reg. 13 April 1987. Held by Ohio Department of Vital Statistics (Columbus, OH, USA), while indexed entry extracted from *Ancestry.com* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

- she has used many names, only to list those known: Blodwin Davis, Blodwin Higgins, Blodwin Winnifred Davis, Winnifred Rankin, Winnie Lang, Winnie Higgins, Winnie Rankin, Faye Wright, Josephine Davis, Josephine Thelma Fuchs, Josephine Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Helen Margaret Garnett (suggests a possible marriage not yet accounted for);
- she has been convicted of numerous serious charges ranging from check fraud, violation of Immigration Laws, Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, violation of Section 75, title 18 USCA, impersonation of an FBI officer, but to name a few;
- family details enclosed (somewhat reliable!), along with a photograph of Josephine (Blodwin) Higgins and fingerprints;
- a host of other biographical details on the prisoner and examinations by the probation officer on her past and accounting for her claims.

<sup>24</sup> Burial Record for John E. Davis; *Find A Grave - John E. Davis*; record added 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2010, memorial #59560788. Information extracted from *Find A Grave* <[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2014. This record does not totally corroborate with the known facts on our search subject, John E. Davis, though this is likely the same individual. This individual is buried in the Ingleside Cemetery in Adams Co., Nebraska.

<sup>25</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

**Emily Williams-Davis** remarried to widower **Joseph Beeley** (b. December 1865 in Kirkstall, York Co., England<sup>27,28</sup>; d. 1928 in Jackson, Jackson Co., Michigan<sup>29</sup>), s/o **James Beeley** and **Maria Hardy**<sup>30</sup>, on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1902 in Carroll Co., Ohio.<sup>31</sup> She had no further children with Mr. Beeley. Contrary to Winnie's earlier statements to her family, Joseph Beeley was not a physician, but was rather also a coal miner<sup>32</sup> and later a labourer<sup>33</sup>. The states of West Virginia, Michigan, and Ohio had large coal-mining communities that often inter-migrated among the three localities, and these family members were clear examples of that migration pattern.

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- she has used many names, only to list those known: Blodwin Davis, Blodwin Higgins, Blodwin Winnifred Davis, Winnifred Rankin, Winnie Lang, Winnie Higgins, Winnie Rankin, Faye Wright, Josephine Davis, Josephine Thelma Fuchs, Josephine Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Helen Margaret Garnett (suggests a possible marriage not yet accounted for);
  - she has been convicted of numerous serious charges ranging from check fraud, violation of Immigration Laws, Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, violation of Section 75, title 18 USCA, impersonation of an FBI officer, but to name a few;
  - family details enclosed (somewhat reliable!), along with a photograph of Josephine (Blodwin) Higgins and fingerprints;
  - a host of other biographical details on the prisoner and examinations by the probation officer on her past and accounting for her claims.

<sup>26</sup> Marriage Record for John Davis to Emily Williams; "General Register for Marriages in the State of West Virginia"; compiled by the West Virginia Registrar of Vital Statistics (1892), reg. 19<sup>th</sup> May 1892, p. 520. Originals held by the West Virginia Archives and History (Charleston, WV, USA), though digital copies extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013. To-date, we have been unable to conclusively locate our John E. Davis in any US census record between 1870 and 1890, though his West Virginia marriage record indicates that he was age 36, born in England (was really from Wales) and residing in Jefferson Co., Ohio in 1892.

<sup>27</sup> Birth Record for Joseph Beeley; "General Register of Births for England"; Yorkshire West; Kirkstall Registration District; 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 1865; vol 9b, p. 232. Held by the National Archives of England & Wales (London, England, UK), though online digital index entry extracted only from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Burial Record for Joseph Beeley; *Find A Grave - Joseph Beeley*; record added 28<sup>th</sup> September 2012, memorial #97936817. Information extracted from *Find A Grave* <[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2014. Joseph Beeley is interred in Section 2 of Riverside Cemetery at Saint Charles, MI. Death for Joseph Beeley had occurred in Jackson (MI) where he had been living with his brother and wife - Robert and Kate Beeley - since his own wife's death in 1918.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Marriage Record for Joseph Beeley to Emily Davis; "General Register for Marriages in the State of Ohio"; compiled by the Ohio Registrar of Vital Statistics (1902), reg. 12<sup>th</sup> November 1902; Series 1899-1910, vol. 7, p. 265, image 162, entry #528, FHL microfilm #333251. Originals held by the Ohio State Archives (Columbus, OH, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *the LDS Family History Library* <<http://familysearch.org>> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Household of Robert and Kate Beeley in 1920, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Jackson Ward B (district #29), Jackson County, Michigan, LC microfilm #T625-774, p. 7A. Copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

Details on Winnie's siblings, **Thomas (Tom) John Davis** and **Rosina Davis (Mrs. Clarence Wright)**, have been fully traced. Winnie may have had later contact with her siblings and their children, though it is felt highly unlikely.

Davis' son, **Thomas (Tom) John Davis** was last known in Augusta, Michigan in the early-1930's though is later found to have married divorcee **Lenore Dane Voorhis-Bowley** (1893-1961), on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1936 at Logan, Ohio<sup>34</sup>. The couple are not known to have had any children of their own.<sup>35</sup> This lineage, however, has not been further investigated as of January 2014. To do so, however, might provide further evidence of Winnie's later whereabouts, though it is believed at the moment that he had little contact with his sister Winnie after the 1930's.

Davis' daughter, **Rosina Davis** married a **Clarence A. Wright** (b. January 1898 in Howe, Perry Co., Pennsylvania<sup>36</sup>), s/o of **Clark W. and Christina A. Wright**, on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1917 at Detroit, Wayne Co., Michigan<sup>37</sup> and had four known children based solely upon subsequent federal US census enumerations: **Dolores Wright** (b. circa 1917 in Michigan)<sup>38</sup>, **Dorothea Zora Wright** (b. circa 1920 in Pennsylvania),<sup>39,40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Marriage Record for Thomas John Davis to Lenore van Voorhis-Bowley; "General Register for Marriages in the State of Ohio"; compiled by the Ohio Registrar of Vital Statistics (1936), reg. 26<sup>th</sup> October 1936; Series 1931-1938, vol. P, p. 464 image 268, entry #10474, FHL microfilm #534843. Originals held by the Ohio State Archives (Columbus, OH, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *the* LDS Family History Library <<http://familysearch.org>> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>35</sup>Burial Record for Lenore Dane Voorhis-Davis; *Find A Grave - Thomas John Davis*; record added 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009, memorial #43177382. Information extracted from *Find A Grave* <[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>36</sup>Household of Clarence W. and Christina A. Wright in 1900, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Howe Township (district #149), Perry County, Pennsylvania, LC microfilm #1241450, p. 8A. Digital copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

<sup>37</sup>Marriage Record for Clarence Wright to Rosina Davis; "General Register for Marriages in the State of Michigan"; compiled by the Michigan Registrar of Vital Statistics (1917), reg. 29<sup>th</sup> May 1917; Series 1868-1925, vol. 7, p. 488, image 98, entry #147843, FHL microfilm #2342724. Originals held by the Michigan State Archives (Lansing, MI, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *the* LDS Family History Library <<http://familysearch.org>> on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>38</sup>Household of Clarence and Rosina Wright in 1920, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Greenwood Township (district #138), Perry County, Pennsylvania, LC microfilm #T625-1613, p. 8B. Digital copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

<sup>39</sup>Household of Clarence and Rosina Wright in 1930, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Point Place, Washington Township (district #196), Lucas County, Ohio, LC microfilm #T1840, p. 12A. Digital copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007

<sup>40</sup>Household of Clarence and Rosina Wright in 1940, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Toledo, Lucas County (district #95-126), Lucas County, Ohio, LC microfilm #T627\_3261, p. 3B. Digital copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry.com* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 20107.



**Clarence A. Wright Jr.** (b. circa 1924 in Pennsylvania)<sup>41, 42</sup> and **Donald Richard Wright** (b. circa 1925 in Michigan).<sup>43</sup> Further details on their descendants have not been followed through as of yet on the off possibility that Winnie has contact with them though, at present, we do not believe that Winnie ever had further contact with either of her siblings or their children.<sup>44</sup>

It was apparent early in the research that **Blodwin Josephine Davis** (*aka Winnie Davis* or **Winnie Beeley**) had a difficult life. At a very young age, her natural father suffered from mental illness which obviously affected life in his adult home; her mother remarried a man who was abusive himself; and she lived in a highly migratory, booze-filled and dysfunctional coal-mining family that existed from paycheck to paycheck.

These factors and her own negative disposition toward ‘authority, resulted her being out on her own by choice and working by the age of 13 or 14 and travelling alone across America and into Canada employed in whatever vocations allowed her to survive. With little money to subsist, no otherwise economic and social support, along with her tendency to involve herself with men who soon took advantage of her sweet accommodating nature, she quickly succumbed to an ever-increasing criminal influence. All to just exist, this led her to committing petty crimes and eventually, more serious offenses such as bigamy, fraud, forgery, impersonation, and larceny.

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<sup>41</sup> Household of Clarence and Rosina Wright in 1930, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Point Place, Washington Township (district #196), Lucas County, Ohio, LC microfilm #T1840, p. 12A. Digital copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007

<sup>42</sup> Household of Clarence and Rosina Wright in 1940, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Toledo, Lucas County (district #95-126), Lucas County, Ohio, LC microfilm #T627\_3261, p. 3B. Digital copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry.com* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 20107.

<sup>43</sup> Household of Clarence and Rosina Wright in 1930, U.S. Federal Census Enumerations, Point Place, Washington Township (district #196), Lucas County, Ohio, LC microfilm #T1840, p. 12A. Digital copies held by and extracted from *Ancestry* <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Andrew D. Hill to Thomas F. Higgins in Higgins v. Higgins and Hill; “Kings Bench Docket (Regina Court District), 1931-1935”; Docket 88, Folio 124. Held by and examined at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina, SK, Canada). This file is available through the Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Catalogued as Saskatchewan Civil Court Records of the Court of King's Bench, Judicial District of Regina procedure books 1931-1953 and files 1932-1950. Film #2316536 (1932 files 57-88) and #2316537 (files 88 cont'd -113). Documents from Higgins v. Higgins court case - Statement of Claim, 16 March 1932; Statement of Claim, Writ Issued, 16 March 1932; Affidavit of Thomas Francis Higgins, 16 March 1932; Affidavit of Notary Public re service of summons on A. D. Hill, 28 March 1932; Decree Nisi-Dissolution of Marriage, 17 May 1932; Notice of Motion, 26 August 1932.; Picture of Josephine Higgins, 18 March 1932, taken by St. Paul Police; Copy of Marriage Certificate, Thomas Francis Higgins and Winnie Rankin, 26 July 1920; Letter from A. D. Hill to Thos. F. Higgins, 2 March 1932; Letter from T. F. Higgins to A. D. Hill, 9 March 1931 [sic]; Letter from A. D. Hill to T. F. Higgins, 8 March 1932; Letter to A. D. Hill from "Jo", 1 April 1932; Letter to Mr. Higgins from "W", undated. (court stamped 15 May 1932). In his Statement of Claim he named Winnie Rankin Higgins and A. D. Hill as defendants. The papers filed for his case include the usual court documents required for a divorce case, including the marriage certificate of Thomas Higgins and Winnie Rankin and the decree nisi issued 25 August 1932. The Statement of Claim charges Winnie Rankin Higgins with committing adultery with A. D. Hill. The divorce papers indicate that Winnie Rankin Higgins is resident in Shakopee, Minnesota and A. D. Hill resides in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. The divorce file also contains personal hand-written letters between Thomas Higgins and A. D. Hill. As of 2 March 1932 Winnie apparently was being held in prison in Minnesota and an undated letter written from the County Jail in St. Paul Minnesota appears to have been written by her, although she does not sign her full name. Andrew Hill indicates in 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1932 letter that he has “*been in touch with her (Winnie Rankin-Higgins) relatives but they don't seem to know very much more about her.*”

By mid-life she was a well-known and wanted career criminal in both Canada and the United States - at the state/provincial and national levels - for a multitude of criminal activity.

Her criminal involvement likely began during her teens in the US, though certainly grew in frequency while in Canada. Her illegal activities increased further after her return to America in the early-1930s. The majority of our primary findings to date centres around court and prison files from Saskatchewan and Minnesota, however there are likely similar files worth investigating in other locations such as Manitoba, Kansas, Texas, and Virginia, along with the federal collections of the RCMP and the FBI.

Information from the record is not clear on Winnie's life during her first marriage to **Ellis Rankin**, though it suggests that both parties had been partaking in minor crimes in the US. While in Canada, however, Winnie's illegal activities began to escalate and Winnie's second husband, **Frank Higgins**, saved her from the long arm of the law many times by paying her debts during the period of their relationship, though later even he refused providing further help for her. She had a history of failing to overcome the problems of marriage and at the first sign of difficulty would flee, change her name, settle in with yet another man, and then continue to play the same program, over and over. Hers was a history of self-abuse, lack of respect for authority, and feelings of

JOHN EDGAR HOOVER  
 Federal Bureau of Investigation  
 United States Department of Justice  
 Washington, D. C.  
 Form T-2  
 April 27, 1943 122 60

The following is the record of FBI number 551621 *J. E. Hoover*  
 Director.

CONTRIBUTOR OF FINGERPRINTS	NAME AND NUMBER	ARRESTED OR RECEIVED	CHARGE	DISPOSITION
PD, St. Paul, Minn.	Josephine T. Hill, #23142	12-11-31	check fraud	1-11-32, PG G.L., 2nd., 1-19-34, sen Women's Ref. acc. to law
USI and NS, San Antonio, Texas #2023/1563	Blodwin Davis Hill #D-34 USI and NS Dallas, Texas	12-26-31	vio. Imm. Laws	
USI and NS, Minneapolis, Minn. #--	Josephine Higgins #405 Shref. for Women, Shakopee, Minn.	1-20-32	G.L. 2nd. deg.	0-5 yrs.
Shref. for Women Shakopee, Minn.	Josephine Hill #405	1-20-32	G.L. 2nd. deg.	0-5 yrs. wref., 8-7-33, chg. 10 yrs.
UMI, Kansas City, Mo.	Helen M. Garnett #7224	1-5-43	vio. of Sec. 75 Title 18 USCA	
SO, Kansas City, Mo.	Helen Margaret Garnett, #12362	1-3-43 (prt rec 1-8-43)	S.K. Gov't.	
Fed. Ref. for Women Alderson, W. Va.	Helen M. Garnett #6049-X	3-10-43	impersonation - FBI Officer	2 yrs.

Exhibit II - FBI Abstract of Offenses for Helen Marjorie Garnett (aka Blodwin Winnifred Higgins-Hill) - as of April 1943

unworthiness.

Although she had some legal difficulties in Canada, Winnie was only seriously charged, found guilty, and convicted in the US after leaving Canada. Her crimes were primarily *'bigamy, false pretenses, and the writing of bad cheques.'* It is known that the RCMP was also interested in her for other fraud and forgery offenses. Later in life she served prison time in the states of Minnesota in the 1930s and West Virginia in the 1940s, and may have well served additional time in other localities later on not yet accounted for.

We have not yet determined much about Winnie's life prior to her arrival in Canada. It is believed that her life was on the fringe of legal society from an early age. It would seem that many of her actions were driven by her own family upbringing and her attempts to just survive life in a society that was male-dominated and with few options for unattached women.

## LIES AND DECEPTIONS

This search has been lengthy and what has complicated it, besides **Winnie Davis'** many liaisons and her flight to parts all over Canada and the US, is that Winnie changed her name so many times - by marriage and by choice - to try and stay ahead of the law. We still do not know all of the aliases that she used. We may never know all of them; however, the following table reports a number of them found to date.

- From 1897-1901 the Davis Family was in Carlton, Ohio and then in St. Charles, Michigan to 1903 where she was known as **Blodwin "Winnifred" Davis**.<sup>45</sup>
- From 1903-1907, she worked in Wadsworth, Ohio, as **Winnie Davis**, leaving home in 1906 and subsequently using the name of **Faye Wright**<sup>46</sup>, before migrating to Spokane, Washington

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<sup>45</sup>Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

- she has used many names, only to list those known: Blodwin Davis, Blodwin Higgins, Blodwin Winnifred Davis, Winnifred Rankin, Winnie Lang, Winnie Higgins, Winnie Rankin, Faye Wright, Josephine Davis, Josephine Thelma Fuchs, Josephine Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Helen Margaret Garnett (suggests a possible marriage not yet accounted for);
- she has been convicted of numerous serious charges ranging from check fraud, violation of Immigration Laws, Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, violation of Section 75, title 18 USCA, impersonation of an FBI officer, but to name a few;
- family details enclosed (somewhat reliable!), along with a photograph of Josephine (Blodwin) Higgins and fingerprints;
- a host of other biographical details on the prisoner and examinations by the probation officer on her past and accounting for her claims.

<sup>46</sup>Second Judicial District Court Criminal File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Minnesota District County, Criminal Case Files - Ramsey County (1930-1952)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #13862; microfilm SAM 47, reel 5, cases 13835-13952. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The case file indicates that the court charges were at the City of St. Paul in January

where she married for the first time, remaining there til 1912.<sup>47</sup>

- Here she marries **Ellis Gray (aka Roy Lang) Rankin** (b. 12<sup>th</sup> October 1864 in Middleville, Lanark Co., Ontario<sup>48</sup>; d. 20<sup>th</sup> February 1920 in Regina, Saskatchewan<sup>49, 50</sup>), s/o Archibald Rankin and Beatrice Ellis, in Spokane, Washington on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1911<sup>51, 52</sup> as **Winnifred**

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1932 with the offenses in Minnesota occurring in and about June 1931. At the time she was incarcerated at the Ramsey County Jail awaiting sentencing. She had been charged, plead guilty, and convicted of Grand Theft Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree and to be confined in the State Reformatory for Women at Shakopee, Minnesota for 5 years.

<sup>47</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

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- family details enclosed (somewhat reliable!), along with a photograph of Josephine (Blodwin) Higgins and fingerprints;
- a host of other biographical details on the prisoner and examinations by the probation officer on her past and accounting for her claims.

<sup>48</sup> World War I Draft Registration for Ellis Gray Rankin; *U.S. World War I Draft Registration Cards (1917-1918)*; State of Illinois, Cook County, Chicago; microfilm roll #1493512, Draft Board #18. Original records held by National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC), though online digital copies obtained from Ancestry <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> extracted on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Death Record for Ellis Gray Rankin; "General Register to Deaths in Saskatchewan"; reg. #1920-00595, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1920. Held by and extracted from the Saskatchewan Registrar of Vital Statistics (Regina, SK, Canada) on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2006. Ellis Rankin died of tuberculosis.

<sup>50</sup> Obituary Notice for Ellis G. Rankin, "News of Province: City and Country - *Ellis G. Rankin*" in the *Leader* (Regina, SK), 23 February 1920 (Mon.), p. 6, col. 5, SAB R1.618, reel 125. Held by and examined at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina, SK, Canada). Entry is transcribed as follows -

**"NEWS OF PROVINCE: CITY AND COUNTRY - ELLIS G. RANKIN -** *Ellis G. Rankin died Friday night at his home, 1356 Douglas Street, following a short illness. The funeral of Ellis G. Rankin will be held from J. A. Wright's funeral parlor this afternoon at one o'clock. Mr. Rankin leaves a wife, a child and three sisters. One sister, Mrs. James resides at Stoughton.*

<sup>51</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

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**Davis**. In 1912 and 1913, the couple relocate to Middleville, Ontario, where her husband, **Roy Lang**, was from before settling in Chicago in late-1913<sup>53</sup> and then moving to the Washington state where he was clerking for the US Post Office.<sup>54</sup>

- According to her 1931 Minnesota prison records, she immigrated into Canada in 1913, leaving on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1931 and has been in Hot Springs, Arkansas Community Hotel since that time (for the most part) where she was arrested. To date we have been unable to substantiate this claim.
- **Ellis Gray Rankin**, a railroad traffic manager, and his wife first appear in Regina in 1917, he working as a clerk and accountant at Northern Electric<sup>55</sup> with his wife listed as **Winnifred Rankin**. Rankin's first address was 2060 Rae Street, one block over from her later husband, the **Thomas “Francis” Higgins** residence at 2030 Retallack Street in Regina. She bore no biological children with **Ellis Rankin**. From 1914 to 1928, she remains primarily in the

The probation officer at the time had great difficulty in confirming many claims that she made about her family and personal names, dates and places. For certain, however, she did have the details on her parents mostly correct (it seems), she did have two siblings as she noted and their whereabouts have been partially confirmed, and she indicates clearly on several occasions that the two (and only) children that she had were both ‘adopted.’

<sup>52</sup> Marriage of Roy Lang Rankin to Winnifred Davis; “General Register to Marriages for the State of Washington”; reg. #1911-11534, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1911. Created by the Spokane County Auditor in series “Marriage Records (1880-2013)”. Originals held by the Washington State Archives (Cheney, WA, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Washington State Archives* <[www.digitalarchives.wa.gov](http://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov)> extracted on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, “Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)”; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

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<sup>54</sup> Marriage of Roy Lang Rankin to Winnifred Davis; “General Register to Marriages for the State of Washington”; reg. #1911-11534, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1911. Created by the Spokane County Auditor in series “Marriage Records (1880-2013)”. Originals held by the Washington State Archives (Cheney, WA, USA), though online digital copies extracted from *Washington State Archives* <[www.digitalarchives.wa.gov](http://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov)> extracted on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Directory Entry for Ellis G. Rankin, *City of Regina Henderson Directories*, (Winnipeg, MB: Henderson Directories Ltd, 1917-1921). Held by and examined at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina, SK, Canada).

Regina area<sup>56</sup> with a small stint in 1915, when she enlisted as a volunteer work for the St. John's Ambulance Corps and went overseas for short while, returning in 1918 when she continued nursing.<sup>57</sup> It is interesting to note that she leaves for overseas service despite her husband is stricken with advancing tuberculosis from which he later succumbs.

- By 1918 she is involved with **Thomas "Francis" (Frank) Higgins**, a salesman from Regina, and though they never bore any children of their own, the couple did adopt a child<sup>58</sup> in 1918 -

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<sup>56</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

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The probation officer at the time had great difficulty in confirming many claims that she made about her family and personal names, dates and places. For certain, however, she did have the details on her parents mostly correct (it seems), she did have two siblings as she noted and their whereabouts have been partially confirmed, and she indicates clearly on several occasions that the two (and only) children that she had were both 'adopted.'

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**Thomas (Tom) Francis Higgins Jr.** (b. 16<sup>th</sup> July 1917 at Regina, Saskatchewan<sup>59</sup>; d. 6<sup>th</sup> July 1979 in Salmon Arm, British Columbia<sup>60,61</sup>). The illegitimate child was a son of one of the mother's whom Winnie had nursed.<sup>62</sup>

- On the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1920 in Winnipeg, Manitoba<sup>63</sup>, Winnie eventually marries widower **Thomas Francis Higgins** (b. 29<sup>th</sup> February 1876 in Wroxeter, Ontario<sup>64</sup>; d. 11<sup>th</sup> June 1938 at the

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For certain, however, she did have the details on her parents mostly correct (it seems), she did have two siblings as she noted and their whereabouts have been partially confirmed, and she indicates clearly on several occasions that the two (and only) children that she had were both 'adopted.'

<sup>59</sup> Birth Record for Thomas Francis Higgins; "General Register to Births in Saskatchewan"; reg. #1917-07-008457, dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 1917. Held by and extracted from the Saskatchewan Registrar of Vital Statistics (Regina, SK, Canada).

<sup>60</sup> Death Record for Thomas Francis Higgins; "General Register to Deaths in British Columbia"; reg. #1979-09-010637, dated 10<sup>th</sup> July 1979. Held by and extracted from the Provincial Archives of British Columbia (Victoria, BC, Canada).

<sup>61</sup> Obituary Notice for Mrs. T. F. Higgins, "News of Province: City and Country - Mrs. T. F. Higgins Dead" in the *Leader* (Regina, SK), 11 August 1919 (mon.), p. 8, col. 2, SAB R1.618, reel 119. Held by and examined at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina, SK, Canada). Entry transcribed as follows -

**"NEWS OF PROVINCE: CITY AND COUNTRY - MRS. T. F. HIGGINS DEAD** - *After a lingering illness of almost seven years, Mrs. T. F. Higgins passed away at her home 2030 Retalack street on Sunday afternoon. Deceased came to the city with her husband seven years ago this month from Calgary, Alta., her former home, where burial will take place on Tuesday afternoon.*"

There does not appear to be any Higgins children who survive therefore Thomas Francis Higgins Jr. apparently is not his natural child from this marriage.

<sup>62</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

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<sup>63</sup> Marriage Record for Thomas Francis Higgins to Winnie Rankin; "General Registers to Marriages in Manitoba"; reg. #1920-08-037317, dated 26<sup>th</sup> July 1920. Held by and extracted from the Manitoba Registrar of Vital Statistics (Winnipeg, MB, Canada).

<sup>64</sup> Death Record for Thomas Francis Higgins; "General Register to Deaths in British Columbia"; reg. #1938-09-003223, dated 14<sup>th</sup> June 1938. Held by and extracted from the Provincial Archives of British Columbia (Victoria, BC, Canada).

Provincial Mental Hospital in Essondale, British Columbia<sup>65</sup>), s/o **Thomas Higgins** and **Margaret Taylor**. This marriage lasted only a few years with a temporary separation in about 1923, for he is listed for the most part living in Regina while she suddenly is noted living at Winnipeg in 1924 as the biological mother of **Greta Elizabeth Higgins** (born in Winnipeg at the Healthwin Hospital<sup>66</sup>). At this time Winnie was known to be nursing at the St. Boniface Hospital in the city.<sup>67</sup> Based upon later information, and though the actual birth does not suggest an adoption, we believe that the child was not biologically hers. One can infer, since we have not encountered any criminal proceedings in this regard toward Winnie, that she arranged for a private adoption<sup>68</sup> of this female child, however this is not proven and is only suggestive, though Winnie does also specifically claim this in her Minnesota prison record.<sup>69</sup> The couple were fully separated by July 1928 and Mr. Higgins clearly states in his *Statement of Claim* in their divorce proceedings that “*there was no issue of the said marriage.*”<sup>70</sup> The

<sup>65</sup> Death Record for Thomas Francis Higgins; “General Register to Deaths in British Columbia”; reg. #1938-09-003223, dated 14<sup>th</sup> June 1938. Held by and extracted from the Provincial Archives of British Columbia (Victoria, BC, Canada).

<sup>66</sup> Birth Record for Greta Elizabeth Higgins; “General Register to Births in Manitoba”; reg. #1924-09-009213, dated 7<sup>th</sup> March 1924. Held by and extracted from the Manitoba Registrar of Vital Statistics (Winnipeg, MB, Canada).

<sup>67</sup> Located a reference to a Winnie Higgins in 1920, she is listed as a nurse at the St. Boniface Hospital (this is nowhere near the Healthwin Hospital - different parts of the city - and the latter may have been a place for unwed mothers and mothers seeking to give up their babies for adoption).

<sup>68</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, “Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)”; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

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The probation officer at the time had great difficulty in confirming many claims that she made about her family and personal names, dates and places. For certain, however, she did have the details on her parents mostly correct (it seems), she did have two siblings as she noted and their whereabouts have been partially confirmed, and she indicates clearly on several occasions that the two (and only) children that she had were both ‘adopted.’

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Higgins v. Higgins and Hill; “Kings Bench Docket (Regina Court District), 1931-1935”; Docket 88, Folio 124. Held by and examined at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina, SK, Canada). This file is available through the Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Catalogued as Saskatchewan Civil Court Records of the Court of King's Bench, Judicial District of Regina procedure books 1931-1953 and files 1932-1950. Film #2316536 (1932 files 57-88) and #2316537 (files 88 contd. -113). Documents from Higgins v. Higgins court case - Statement of Claim, 16 March 1932; Statement of Claim, Writ Issued, 16 March 1932; Affidavit of Thomas Francis Higgins, 16 March 1932; Affidavit of Notary Public re service of summons on A. D. Hill, 28 March 1932; Decree Nisi-Dissolution of Marriage, 17 May 1932; Notice of Motion, 26 August 1932.;



*Regina City Directory* finds **Thomas F. Higgins** first appearing in Regina in 1913 as part-owner of Higgins-Parker Grocers on 13th Avenue.<sup>71</sup> He appears quite consistently over the years until 1927, always as a grocery owner. From 1928 to 1931 he does not appear in Regina but returns again for the period 1932-1935. Thomas does not reappear in Regina again after this period though is known to have died here in 1938.

- In the latter 1920s she is signing her name **Winnie Rankin** and **Josephine Higgins**.<sup>72</sup>
- After her split from Mr. Higgins and her later bigamous marriage to druggist **Andrew D. Hill** (circa 1874 - ?) on the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1930 at Portage La Prairie, Manitoba<sup>73</sup> she introduces herself to him and others as "**Josephine Thelma Fuchs** from Toronto." A legal divorce from **Thomas Higgins** does not ultimately occur until 7<sup>th</sup> September 1932, though first filed 16<sup>th</sup> March of that year.<sup>74</sup>

Picture of Josephine Higgins, 18 March 1932, taken by St. Paul Police; Copy of Marriage Certificate, Thomas Francis Higgins and Winnie Rankin, 26 July 1920; Letter from A. D. Hill to Thos. F. Higgins, 2 March 1932; Letter from T. F. Higgins to A. D. Hill, 9 March 1931 [sic]; Letter from A. D. Hill to T. F. Higgins, 8 March 1932; Letter to A. D. Hill from "Jo", 1 April 1932; Letter to Mr. Higgins from "W", undated. (court stamped 15 May 1932). In his Statement of Claim he named Winnie Rankin Higgins and A. D. Hill as defendants. The papers filed for his case include the usual court documents required for a divorce case, including the marriage certificate of Thomas Higgins and Winnie Rankin and the decree nisi issued 25 August 1932. The Statement of Claim charges Winnie Rankin Higgins with committing adultery with A. D. Hill. The divorce papers indicate that Winnie Rankin Higgins is resident in Shakopee, Minnesota and A. D. Hill resides in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. The divorce file also contains personal hand-written letters between Thomas Higgins and A. D. Hill. As of 2 March 1932 Winnie apparently was being held in prison in Minnesota and an undated letter written from the County Jail in St. Paul Minnesota appears to have been written by her, although she does not sign her full name.

<sup>71</sup> Directory Entry for Thomas F. Higgins, *City of Regina Henderson Directories*, (Winnipeg, MB: Henderson Directories Ltd, 1907-1938). Held by and examined at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina, SK, Canada).

<sup>72</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

- she has used many names, only to list those known: Blodwin Davis, Blodwin Higgins, Blodwin Winnifred Davis, Winnifred Rankin, Winnie Lang, Winnie Higgins, Winnie Rankin, Faye Wright, Josephine Davis, Josephine Thelma Fuchs, Josephine Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Helen Margaret Garnett (suggests a possible marriage not yet accounted for);
- she has been convicted of numerous serious charges ranging from check fraud, violation of Immigration Laws, Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, violation of Section 75, title 18 USCA, impersonation of an FBI officer, but to name a few;
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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Higgins v. Higgins and Hill; "Kings Bench Docket (Regina Court District), 1931-1935"; Docket 88, Folio 124. Held by and examined at the Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina, SK, Canada). This file is available through the Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Catalogued as Saskatchewan Civil Court Records of the Court of King's Bench, Judicial District of Regina procedure books 1931-1953 and files 1932-1950. Film #2316536 (1932 files 57-88) and #2316537 (files 88 contd. -113). Documents from Higgins v. Higgins court case - Statement of

- Later, Winnie is referring to herself as **Josephine Hill** while back in the US after fleeing her husband and Manitoba in 1928.<sup>75</sup>
- To date, she is last known in 1943 where she has been incarcerated in West Virginia for a host of things of the past including, and most notably, impersonating an FBI agent. She is being held serving two years for the crime.<sup>76</sup> By 1943 she is calling herself **Helen Margaret Garnett**.<sup>77</sup> There is history after 1943 which has still not been uncovered, including where

Claim, 16 March 1932; Statement of Claim, Writ Issued, 16 March 1932; Affidavit of Thomas Francis Higgins, 16 March 1932; Affidavit of Notary Public re service of summons on A. D. Hill, 28 March 1932; Decree Nisi-Dissolution of Marriage, 17 May 1932; Notice of Motion, 26 August 1932.; Picture of Josephine Higgins, 18 March 1932, taken by St. Paul Police; Copy of Marriage Certificate, Thomas Francis Higgins and Winnie Rankin, 26 July 1920; Letter from A. D. Hill to Thos. F. Higgins, 2 March 1932; Letter from T. F. Higgins to A. D. Hill, 9 March 1931 [sic]; Letter from A. D. Hill to T. F. Higgins, 8 March 1932; Letter to A. D. Hill from "Jo", 1 April 1932; Letter to Mr. Higgins from "W", undated. (court stamped 15 May 1932). In his Statement of Claim he named Winnie Rankin Higgins and A. D. Hill as defendants. The papers filed for his case include the usual court documents required for a divorce case, including the marriage certificate of Thomas Higgins and Winnie Rankin and the decree nisi issued 25 August 1932. The Statement of Claim charges Winnie Rankin Higgins with committing adultery with A. D. Hill. The divorce papers indicate that Winnie Rankin Higgins is resident in Shakopee, Minnesota and A. D. Hill resides in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. The divorce file also contains personal hand-written letters between Thomas Higgins and A. D. Hill. As of 2 March 1932 Winnie apparently was being held in prison in Minnesota and an undated letter written from the County Jail in St. Paul Minnesota appears to have been written by her, although she does not sign her full name.

<sup>75</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

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<sup>76</sup> We know from FBI records (#551621) of April 1943 (Exhibit III), she had a rap-sheet that extends from 1929 to March 1943 and there were likely other crime elements that extend before and after this. In 1929 she (Winnie Rankin-Higgins) is charged with writing cheques on accounts with insufficient funds in Manitoba; in 1930 she (Josephine Hill) is arrested in Hot Springs (AR) by US Immigration for overstaying six month time limit (they believed, and were let to believe, that she was a Canadian citizen); in December 1931 she is also charged with immigration law violations in Dallas (TX); in January 1932 she (Josephine T. Hill, aka Josephine Higgins) is charged and convicted St. Paul (MN), again for cheque fraud and Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree; eventually being released on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1933 to go to Toledo (OH) to help her sister who had several major operations and needed help to keep the home and care for four children. She (Helen Margaret Garnett) lies low for about a decade, it seems, and then is found violating Sec. 75, Title 18 of the US Code having to do with false statements in applications of a passport in January 1943 in Kansas City (M), and in March 1943, she spent 2 years in the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson (WV) for impersonation of an FBI officer.

<sup>77</sup> Prison Case File for Josephine Higgins-Hill, "Shakopee State Reformatory for Women, Inmate Case Files (1919-1974)"; re: Josephine Higgins, prisoner #405, FBI #551621; MHS acc. 117.H.16.7B, box B.. Held by and extracted at the Minnesota Historical Society Library (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA). The Prison file indicates that -

- she has used many names, only to list those known: Blodwin Davis, Blodwin Higgins, Blodwin Winnifred Davis, Winnifred

and when she actually dies. Are there other husbands yet unaccounted for after she leaves Andrew Hill? It is difficult to say, but very likely!

A couple of nice photographs of Winnie are enclosed in the prison and court documents (examples are Exhibits I and II). They also include some wonderful descriptions of her and her family, as well as her signature and copies of multiple letters. All the documents provide excellent biographical details which may help trace her post-1943 whereabouts.

To-date, we are uncertain, how many children Winnie had. She discusses only two adopted children, although has suggested in one document that she was pregnant six times with

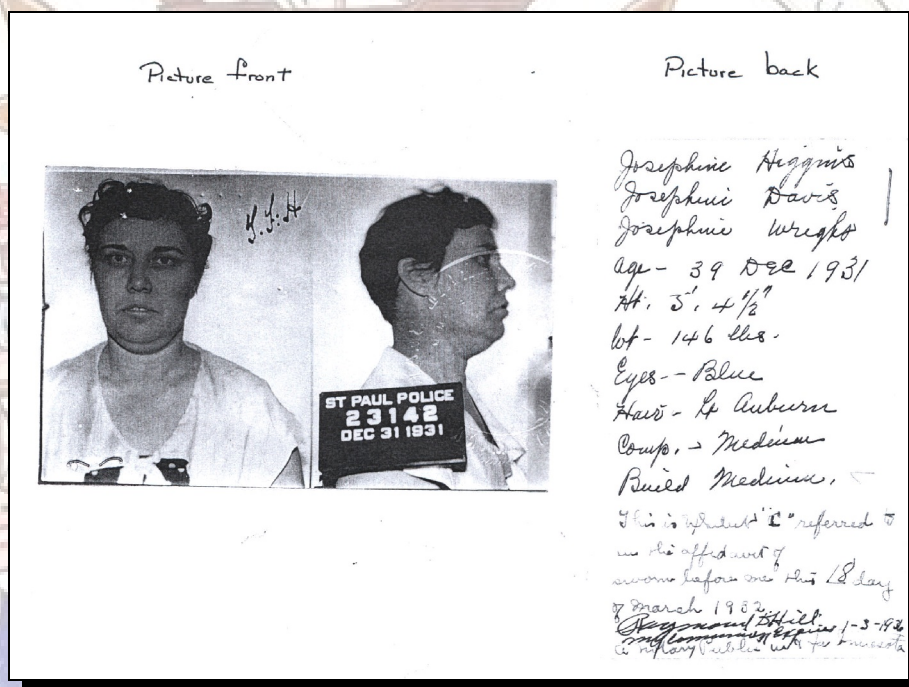


Exhibit III - Shakopee (Minnesota) Reformatory Photo (photo taken in 1932)

Rankin, Winnie Lang, Winnie Higgins, Winnie Rankin, Faye Wright, Josephine Davis, Josephine Thelma Fuchs, Josephine Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Helen Margaret Garnett (suggests a possible marriage not yet accounted for);

- she has been convicted of numerous serious charges ranging from check fraud, violation of Immigration Laws, Grand Larceny in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, violation of Section 75, title 18 USCA, impersonation of an FBI officer, but to name a few;
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three children surviving.<sup>78</sup> Two have been accounted for. Is there one child that precedes her involvement with **Ellis Rankin**? Regardless, Winnie appears to have had no natural biological children of her own, despite the client's evidence which suggests otherwise. Based upon Winnie's court testimony, she had three tubal pregnancies, prior to 1933, and suffered from chronic uterine adhesions during her life, which certainly may have complicated any further births after 1924.

Winnie, herself, in the various documents accounts for two children (those noted in this article) which she both clearly indicates are "*adopted*" and "*illegitimate*" children "*of two women that she nursed.*"<sup>79</sup> Actual birth names and natural parentage for both children are yet unknown, though it is highly likely that both children were never named at birth and given directly to Winnie for her adoption and registration.

Though the children's welfare and adoption programs began in New Brunswick as early as about 1873, in Manitoba in 1898, and in Saskatchewan in 1908, adoption in Canada was not really regulated by the provincial governments until about 1921/1922. Prior to that period adoptions were arranged privately, in most cases, and many children were placed with relatives or individuals arranged by churches. Therefore, the likelihood of surviving case files for Winnie's two adopted children here are very remote.

Despite the official looking birth certificates on both children, we feel that these were altered (and recreated) later for adoption purposes, which is normally the case. When you examine such documents today you will find nothing to suggest other than normal natural births and parentage. Certainly, however, one would need to try and confirm these claims through other sources before making any definitive claims in this regard. Given the good character of at least **Thomas Francis Higgins Sr.**, we personally feel that if the children were adopted that they were done so legally and thus there should be an official government record of both events, as limited as they may be. Accessing them would be difficult, if not near impossible, at present. Up to now the Saskatchewan government has not commented on this to our client regarding **Thomas Francis Higgins Jr.**, while the Manitoba government flatly asserts that **Greta Elizabeth Higgins** was not adopted, although a much earlier communication by the Manitoba government with the client suggests the contrary.

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<sup>78</sup> Both the court documents and the prison documents only discuss two children, both adopted, while the Manitoba birth certificate for one of her children, that for Greta Elizabeth Higgins (mother of client), indicates that ". . . *the mother had six children, three deceased and none stillborn*" which are the mother's reporting of the facts at the time. A further comment according to a prison physician examination of the Blodwin (aka, Josephine Hill), that ". . . *she does not appear to have ever delivered a child.* . . ." supports the mother's claim however, though she makes evidence in prison interviews that indicates she had several tubal pregnancies which never went to full term for various reasons. Blodwin had also problems with her health - chronic gallstones and bladder disease and related issues, problems with adhesions from previous surgeries, chronic bloody menstrual issues, problems with nerves, and suggestions that she was "on dope" which may not be correct though she was taking large quantities of medications probably to quell her pain and nervous condition (possibly from having always to look over her shoulder for the police or lies that had taken a life of their own!!).

<sup>79</sup> Actual birth names and parentage for both children are yet unknown and no attempt has been made to seek out the families to obtain any possibly available adoption documentation.

**Thomas Francis Higgins Sr. and Jr.** always refused to say anything about their wife/adopted mother after her departure, and Greta was always told that her *“mother had died when she was young.”* **Thomas F. Higgins Jr.** knew the truth, though never spoke of it, nor of his mother, after learning the facts from his adopted father in the 1930s. Winnie’s departure from their lives was a very wounding and painful moment for both of them, and after 1932 they knew nothing more of her whereabouts nor her ongoing nefarious activities!

### SUMMARY

It is important, when conducting extensive research on pedigrees such as this one, that all avenues are examined. Often many of them are not considered by the less-experienced genealogical researcher. It is imperative that researchers also consider the more obscure source record collections to shed more light on families and their individual interactions.

Here, in particular, it was important to examine the more unusual records and resources. Many of the following collections will help put further “meat on the bones” of search subjects and provide more pieces to the puzzle:

- mental hospital records;

LEAVE THIS SPACE BLANK				
Name <u>Josephine Hill</u>				
Alias <u>Blodwin Davis Hill, Thelma Josephine Hill, Class.</u>				
Faye Wright, Mrs. A. D. Hill, Mrs. Ellis Rankin, Mrs. Roy Lang				
No. <u>405</u> Color <u>White</u> Sex <u>Female</u> Ref. _____				
RIGHT HAND				
1. Thumb	2. Index Finger	3. Middle Finger	4. Ring Finger	5. Little Finger
LEFT HAND				
6. Thumb	7. Index Finger	8. Middle Finger	9. Ring Finger	10. Little Finger
Classified _____ Assembled _____		Note Amputations _____		Prisoner's Signature
Searched _____ Verified _____				
Inq. Card _____ Answered _____				
Four Fingers Taken Simultaneously		Four Fingers Taken Simultaneously		
Left Hand		L. Thumb	R. Thumb	Right Hand

**Exhibit IV - Fingerprints of Josephine Higgins-Hill (aka Blodwin Davis Hill, Blodwin, Winnifred Davis, Winnifred Higgins, Thelma Josephine Fuchs-Hill, Faye Wright, Josephine Wright, Mrs. A. D. Hill, Mrs. Ellis Rankin, Mrs. Roy Lang, Helen Margaret Garnett et al (Shakopee Reformatory, Minnesota)**

- police/criminal case files (local, state and national);
- court adoption and divorce records;
- jail and prison records when suspicious of bigamy, fraud, and deception or other crimes;
- immigration/migration record collections;
- newspaper accounts;
- multiple census records in multiple localities;
- all usual and lesser used record collections in the case of suspected multiple aliases.

Possible full reconstruction of several family groupings in an area, in an attempt to isolate the correct one using all available source record collections, may even be required to solve your search objectives.

The single most important break-thru on this case, at least in determining Winnie's origins, was the fact that she noted clearly "and truthfully" in several documents names of her mother and father; of which confirming documents were found much later during the investigation. Without those clear statements, it may have been very difficult to determine fully Winnie's ancestral origins with any degree of certainty.

We still do not know what finally became of **Winnie Davis**, and so the search continues! She was, and is, an enigma, though one thing is certain: she did not change her spots. Very likely, she continued to weave her stories about herself and her past to all she met. Most of her stories were false, deceptive and knowingly inaccurate. She lost the trust of her family, husbands and children alike. Hers was a life filled with years of deception! The family never did hear what became of Winnie and she never did, again, contact her children. The unknowing and the deception created a deep void, sense of loss and great sadness for all of the family. Though decades have passed, the surviving descendants continue to feel this way and wonder what became of **Blodwin Winnifred Davis**.

The research on her continues and this interesting saga slowly begins to unfold. In my forty-plus years of professional research, this case is truly one of those unique examples of how unearthing the genealogical past can sometimes be more painful than leaving the past buried. More often than not such difficult family stories are still worth being told; however researchers must be always cognizant of the impact on telling them. Nevertheless, the players are our family and we need to accept the times and the circumstances, being mindful that we as are not here to judge, only to tell the story!

Please also refer to a more capsulated version of this article of the same name in the "*Chinook*", quarterly journal of the **Alberta Family Histories Society**; Spring, April edition, 2014 (vol. 34, no. 3), pp. 9-15.

**\*Brian W. Hutchison - Chairman & C.E.O. of GEN-FIND Research Associates, Inc.** with over 40 years of related research & management experience. A forensic genealogist & heraldist, he is very active with many local/regional/international genealogical & heraldic bodies, for which he has served on numerous committees & board directorships in various capacities over two decades. He is a very active teacher, lecturer along with being author of numerous published scholarly papers and manuscripts on Canadian and British genealogical research issues over four decades. Though he has conducted research in almost every English-speaking country, as a specialist in genealogical research for Scotland, Ireland, Canada his interests are primarily in these areas with particular emphasis on advanced research methodologies for successful 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century investigations on complex family history pedigrees, and forensic investigations. Author of a myriad of publications — treatises on genealogical research issues, genealogical “how-to” manuals, tomes on established genealogical pedigrees - he is a past Irish Department Head for the National Institute for Genealogical Studies thru the University of Toronto. Long-established in his fields of research, Brian has lectured extensively at many local/regional/international genealogical seminars & conferences and is a well-known Canadian philanthropist & advocate for genealogical, health, and wildlife causes.

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