



CORNER OF THIRD AND SPRUCE STREETS, PHILADELPHIA, 1800

DANIEL JOSEPH DESMOND OF PHILADELPHIA, CA.1794 TO 1849, CONSUL GENERAL  
TO POPE PIUS IX, AND THE MYSTERY OF THE VANISHED DESMOND FAMILY  
BY WILLIAM DESMOND  
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DANIEL JOSEPH DESMOND, a prominent Philadelphia attorney, was born in Philadelphia in about 1794, the son of Timothy and Anna Desmond, who had arrived in that city from Ireland shortly before his birth. For many years, the family resided in a large house at 99 Spruce Street, and the adults were charter members of St. Augustine Church--the first Roman Catholic church in Philadelphia, founded by Fathers Matthew Carr and John Rosseter in 1796. Both Daniel and his brother James, who was about a year younger than he, attended the St. Augustine Academy on Crown Street in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> The Academy, which was also founded by Father Carr, provided instruction in Latin, Greek, French, and Spanish, and had the largest theological library in the city.<sup>2</sup> The origins of Villanova University can be traced back to this humble beginning. Both brothers attended from the academy from the start of the first term on December 9, 1811 to June 18, 1815, for a tuition fee of \$12 to \$16 per quarter--a substantial amount in those days.

After completing his studies, Daniel was admitted to the Philadelphia Bar on February 9, 1818 and began to practice law--the profession he was to keep for the remainder of his life.<sup>3</sup> The Philadelphia city directory for that year lists him as "Daniel Desmond, attorney-at-law" with an office at 122 S. Fourth Street.<sup>4</sup> For the next ten years he prospered as an attorney. During this time he became involved, in the controversy surrounding Bishop Henry Conwell's excommunication of Father William Hogan, a charismatic Irish priest, who had been assigned to St. Mary's parish in Philadelphia. Many of Hogan's parishioners were staunch supporters of him, and this issue divided the congregation for some time. Daniel was one of the attorneys who defended Hogan against the "trumped up" charges of assault and battery brought against him by Mary Connell, one of his parishioners.<sup>5</sup> It took the jury only five minutes to acquit Hogan of all charges.

On June 23, 1829, Daniel married Pink H, Blyden, the daughter of John Blyden, who had arrived in Philadelphia with his family from the island of San Martin in the Caribbean in 1826. Their first child, a daughter, Mary Louise, was born in 1831.<sup>6</sup> Despite the rigors of starting a family, in the early 1830's, Daniel was able to use his skill as a linguist to publish two books: the first, a translation from the French of Lebeaud's *The Principles of the Art of Modern Horsemanship for Ladies and Gentlemen*; and the second, a translation of the twelfth century Italian novel *Folchetto Malaspina* by Varesse Carlo.<sup>7</sup> He also managed to perform duties as Secretary of the Association of Friends of Ireland in Philadelphia and to keep a busy lecture schedule--all while maintaining his legal practice. Unfortunately, these busy years were, also, the beginning of a succession

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<sup>1</sup> *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: *The Society*, 1887), Vol. I, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XXI, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *The Philadelphia Bar, a Complete Catalogue of Members from 1776 to 1868* (Philadelphia: Review Printing House, 1868) p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> John Adams Paxton, ed., *The Philadelphia Register and Directory for 1819* (Philadelphia: The Editor [n.d.]), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society, op. cit.*, Vol. XXV p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> A descendency chart for the family is appended to this article.

<sup>7</sup> *The Principles of the Art of Modern Horsemanship for Ladies and Gentlemen* by M. Lebeaud, translated from the French by Daniel J. Desmond ( Philadelphia : *E. L. Carey & A. Hart*, 1833.) and *Folchetto Malaspina an Historical Romance of the Twelfth Century* [by Varesse Carlo], translated from the Italian by Daniel J. Desmond, [Philadelphia,]1834.

of personal tragedies for Daniel and his wife involving the deaths of their children. Of the nine children born to them, by the late 1840s only four had survived the waves of yellow fever, typhoid, and cholera that periodically swept through the city of Philadelphia.

Daniel had always been deeply involved in church affairs, and in 1841, he was appointed by President John Tyler as Consul General to His Holiness Pope Pius IX, and by 1844 had become not only Consul General for the Pope, but Vice Consul for Sardinia and Consul for Austria, Portugal, and Tuscany, as well.<sup>8</sup> But alas, his tenure in these offices was brief, for in the late 1840s another epidemic of cholera ravaged the residents of Philadelphia, and in 1849 Daniel fell prey to the disease and died on July 25<sup>th</sup>. He was buried in Philadelphia's St. Mary's Cemetery.<sup>9</sup> The notice of his death published in the Philadelphia *North American and United States Gazette* reads as follows:

Daniel J. Desmond, Esq.--We regret to report the sudden death yesterday, by cholera, of Daniel J. Desmond, Esq., one of our valuable citizens. Mr. Desmond was bred to the Bar, and came to his duties not only with an exact and extended knowledge of his profession, but with the benefit of a polished education. As a linguist, he had few superiors. For a number of years he has held the post, and discharged with ability, the duties of Consul General of Rome, Consul of Sardinia, the two Sicillies (*sic*) &c &c; but these offices and his professional cares did not forbid his taking a lively interest in other affairs. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has cause to regret that, in him, it has lost a zealous friend and ardent supporter. Mr. Desmond was in perfect health on Wednesday evening at ten o'clock, and died early yesterday morning.<sup>10</sup>

When he died, Daniel and his family were still living in the old family home at 99 Spruce Street in Philadelphia. His widow, Pink Blyden Desmond, was left alone there with the four surviving children--Mary, Henry, Pink, and Edward. It has been claimed by some, as we shall see, that the house at 99 Spruce Street was either sold or rented out the following year and that the whereabouts of Daniel's wife and children was not known. But, this is not true. We know that they were all in Philadelphia living in the old house at 99 Spruce Street in December of 1863 because Pink Maria Desmond died there of "consumption" on December 18th:

DESMOND.--On the 18th inst., Pink Blyden, daughter of Pink Blyden and the late Daniel J. Desmond. The relatives and friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, from the residence of Mrs. Sturdivant, northwest corner of Eighth and Spruce streets, on Monday morning, at 10 o'clock <sup>11</sup>

Sometime after this, probably in late 1864, Daniel's widow left Philadelphia with her three remaining children and her sister-in-law Clementina Desmond, the widow of Daniel's brother James, for New York. Clementina's son Charles, who had never married died in New York of consumption on October 29, 1864.<sup>12</sup> Henry Desmond, the eldest son, died in the same place on August 26, 1866, and his mother followed him on

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<sup>8</sup> *Genealogy, A Journal of American Ancestry*, vols. 1 & 2, 1912, Lyman Horace Weeks, ed. (New York: William M. Clemens), p. 165.

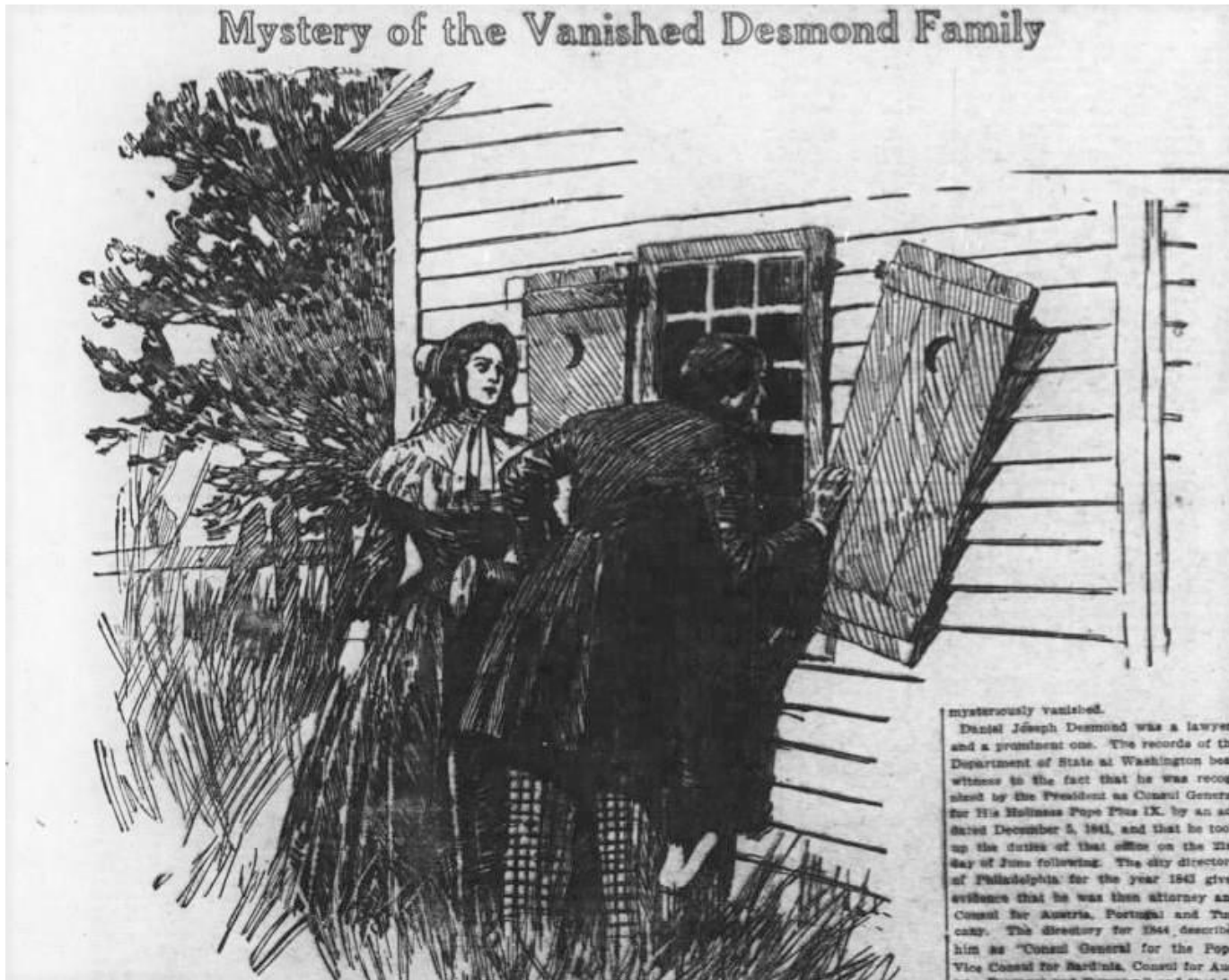
<sup>9</sup> "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>10</sup> *The North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, Pa.) Jul. 27 1849, n.p.

<sup>11</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, Pa., Dec. 19, 1863, p. 9. "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>12</sup> "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>.

## Mystery of the Vanished Desmond Family



*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, Cincinnati, Ohio, Sunday, December 14, 1913

January 18, 1868. Edward Desmond enlisted in the U.S. Army and following his discharge in 1868 married Miss Henrietta Clay of Marion, Virginia and their descendants are living in Virginia to this day. It is not known what became of Mary Desmond, the eldest daughter.

Nearly all of this was known in 1912, when a short biographical sketch of Daniel Joseph Desmond was published in *Genealogy, A Journal of American Ancestry*.<sup>13</sup> But, the following year, newspapers across the U.S. began publishing a lengthy story claiming that the attorneys handling Daniel's estate had been desperately trying to locate his heirs for years concerning \$20,000 of his estate that had, supposedly, never been settled.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE MYSTERY OF THE VANISHED DESMOND FAMILY

The Mystery of the Vanished Desmond Family" cannot be appreciated without reading the original newspaper story. The following is a word-for-word transcription:

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SEVEN MEMBERS OF ONE FAMILY--a mother, her five children and her niece is, to say the least, something out of the ordinary. Individuals disappear so often that cases of the kind have come to be looked upon as commonplace, but the case of the vanished Desmond family cannot be so described.

The mystery may be said to date back to 1835, in which year two brothers, Daniel Joseph and James T. Desmond, were sharing an office at No. 99 Spruce street, Philadelphia. James was a struggling merchant and died poor. That is all that need be said about him here, for he has hardly any further bearing on this story. Daniel is of more concern, because he left when he died an estate valued at \$20,000 and to this day it remains unsettled because his daughter Mary and the widow and five children of his brother seem to have completely and mysteriously vanished.

Daniel Joseph Desmond was a lawyer, and a prominent one. The records of the Department of State at Washington bear witness to the fact that he was recognized by the President as Consul General for His Holiness Pope Pius IX. by an act dated December 5, 1841, and that he took up the duties of that office on the 21st day of June following. The city directory of Philadelphia for the year 1843 gives evidence that he was then attorney and Consul for Austria, Portugal and Tuscany. The directory for 1844 describes him as "Consul General for the Pope, Vice Consul for Sardinia, Consul for Austria, Portugal and Tuscany," and that for 1845 shows him registered as "Consul General for the Pontiff States." Only in one more Philadelphia directory does his name appear, that for the year 1848, for during the epidemic of cholera, which swept the Quaker City in 1849 and 1850 he fell a victim to the disease and died.

Years previously he had married a Miss Pink Blyden. She was the daughter of Governor General Blyden, of the West Indies. Eight children were born to the couple, but five of these died in infancy. Daniel Desmond was survived by his wife and the remaining three children--Mary, Edward, and Henry. They and their mother continued to reside in Philadelphia until the year 1864, and then removed to New York, but with the exception of Edward, definite trace of all of them is lost from that date on.

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<sup>13</sup> *Genealogy, A Journal of American Ancestry, op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Some of the newspapers publishing the story were: *The El Paso Herald*, El Paso, Tx., Dec. 13, 1913, p.20; *The Enquirer*, Cincinnati, Oh., Dec. 14, 1913, p. 5; *The Washington Post*, Washington, D.C., Dec. 14, 1913, p.2; and *The World News*, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 15, 1913, n.p.

Unconfirmed reports has [sic] it that the mother died in one of the hospitals in New York in 1868, and that the son Henry had died the year before. In the light of what is known now it is safe to accept this report as fact, and so they are not included among the "missing." Traces of Edward's whereabouts were found by pure luck. Without anything to back up their suspicions the attorneys who have been trying to bring about a final settlement of the estate turned to the records of the War Department, in the hope that they would find a clew [sic] in regard to Edward. They were rewarded for their pains. The records show that he enlisted in the regular army of the United States on November 16, 1865, and that when his term of enlistment ended in 1868 he reentered the ranks. He died at one of the Western posts. During the entire time that he was in the service he was stationed in the West, and so he was not present when either his mother or his brother Henry died. But it is known that at times he made attempts to get in touch with his sister Mary, and was not successful.

While one misfortune after another was thus visiting the family of Daniel Desmond the family of his brother James was having troubles, too. It is not quite certain just when the migration took place, but it is certain that they were in the metropolis at the time Mrs. Pink Blyden Desmond died, for her daughter made their home with them after the death of her mother.

It was most important that Mary be traced, because she had in her possession her father's will. But in attempting to follow her up those conducting the search ran against an amazing discovery--not only she, but her aunt and five cousins, seem to have vanished without leaving the slightest trace.

The house in which this branch of the Desmonds had lived became a place of mystery, and neighbors found unending interest in peering through the windows as though expecting to find some solution to the mystery inside.

It hardly seems possible that seven people could disappear so completely. Mary, it is said, taught school in New York for a number of years previous to her mother's death, but a careful search of the records of the Board of Education fails to show that she was a teacher in employ of the board at any time. Acting under the presupposition that she had been a teacher in a parochial school--her father's connections with the Papacy prompted this--the attorneys went through the records of these, too, and they likewise yielded nothing. Her name does not even appear in any of the New York City Directories. For that matter, neither do those of her mother, brother, aunt or five cousins.

The search has revealed that none of these Desmonds ever owned real estate in New York or Brooklyn, and the records of the Surrogate's office do not show that any of them left wills that were filed. Scores of persons bearing the name of Desmond and living in New York or any of its suburbs, from Perth Amboy to Tarrytown, have been personally questioned at one time or another, but none of them can give any information concerning the missing Desmond family. Five hundred Desmond families living in the United States and Canada have been questioned by letter, and though replies have been received from members of all of them, the results have been equally unsatisfactory. None of the missing seven died in New York or Brooklyn, if the files of the Board of health are reliable, and none of them was at any time a patient in the public hospitals or an inmate of any of the city prisons or other institutions.

As a matter of fact, none of the above mentioned records shows that Mrs. Pink Blyden Desmond or her son Henry ever lived in New York, but as has been stated above, they are not counted in the missing seven, because the fact that Mary went to live with the other Desmonds in 1868 shows that some sort of change had taken place in her old home: in all probability the others had died.

Many theories have been advanced in attempting to solve this mystery. Mrs. James T. Desmond might have married again and trace of her is lost perhaps through a consequent change of name, and with that as a premise it can be deduced that her children took their stepfather's name and also are untraceable. But what of Mary? She could have no reason for taking that man's name. Of course, she may have married and thus may have taken another name herself, but that still leaves the mystery concerning the other six. Both of these theories are probably wrong, because they all dropped out of sight together.

They may all have perished in some marine or railway accident. Attempts have been made to trace them by going through the lists of railway and steamship accidents that have occurred since 1868, but this is manifestly a task that can never be satisfactorily accomplished. It may be that they are all removed to some remote part of the country or that they left the United States altogether.

Mary Desmond was born in 1833, and if living, is therefore a woman 80 years old. If she died and left children who are still living, they would by now be middle aged. And inasmuch as her cousins were all about her own age, their heirs, too, would be in middle life. But that is mere speculation.

What became of Mrs. James T. Desmond, of her daughter Mary L., her son Joseph, her son Charles, her son James, her son Clement and her niece Mary?<sup>15</sup>

#### THE MYSTERY OF THE MYSTERY

Who can have written such a story? Unfortunately, no authorship is attributed in any of the versions published in the newspapers in 1913. Later versions were published up to 1941 that do have a name attached, but these are shorter versions obviously derived from the 1913 version. However, of one thing we may be certain--whoever wrote the original version was someone who had an intimate knowledge of the family of Daniel Joseph Desmond. It is impossible otherwise to account for all of the details of the family members that the story contains. On the other hand, the story does contain some crucial errors that seem to indicate that, perhaps, this knowledge of details was not acquired first-hand.

To begin with, there is an error at the very beginning of the story when it is said that the \*two brothers, Daniel Joseph and James T. Desmond, were sharing an office at No. 99 Spruce street, Philadelphia." "No. 99 Spruce Street" was the address of the Desmond family residence and had been so since at least 1804 when the name "Timothy Desmond," who was the father of Daniel and James, first appears in the Philadelphia directories.<sup>16</sup> The two brothers and their families lived with their parents Timothy and Anna Desmond until after both had died. In the 1935 directory "99 Spruce" is shown as their dwelling place--not as an office.<sup>17</sup> This would seem to rule out anyone of the generation of Daniel and James who was a family member or close personal friend as having written or contributed to the story.

There is a sentence in the next paragraph that is quite telling, "The records of the Department of State at Washington bear witness to the fact that he [Daniel Joseph Desmond] was recognized by the President as Consul General for His Holiness Pope Pius IX. by an act dated December 5, 1841, and that he took up the duties of that office on the 21st day of June following." This is taken nearly verbatim from the biographical sketch mentioned earlier that was published in 1912:

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<sup>15</sup> *The Enquirer*, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> *The Philadelphia Directory for 1804* (Philadelphia: James Robinson, 1805), n.p.

<sup>17</sup> *Desilver's Philadelphia Stranger's Guide and Directory for 1835 & 36* (Philadelphia: Robert Desilver, 1835, p.59.

Daniel Joseph Desmond, a native of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., was a prominent lawyer, and from June 21, 1841, until about January 1, 1850, was consul general in Philadelphia of his holiness Pope Pius IX. *The records of the state department show that he was appointed consul general June 21, 1841, and that the president recognized him as such by an act issued December 15, 1841.* He married Pink Blyden, a daughter of Governor General Blyden of the West Indies. They had eight children, five of whom died in infancy. The three surviving children were: Mary Desmond, born September, 1833, in Philadelphia; Henry Desmond, correct birth date not known, died single, of pneumonia, in New York city in 1867; Edward Joseph Desmond, born November 12, 1846.

Daniel Joseph Desmond died in Philadelphia of cholera during the early fifties. Mrs. Pink (Blyden) Desmond died in New York city in October, 1868. Edward Joseph Desmond, youngest son of Daniel Joseph Desmond, enlisted in the United States regular army November 16, 1865, and re-enlisted on November 16, 1868. He died January 3, 1908. His widow is still living in Virginia. B. P. D.<sup>18</sup>

Whether the President recognized Daniel on December 5, 1841 and he took up his duties June 21, 1842 or he was appointed on June 21, 1841 and the President recognized him on December 15, 1841 is irrelevant. The writer of the biographical sketch actually says that he was Consul General until about January 1, 1850, when he had died the previous July. Both writers, also, fail to give the correct date of Daniel's death. The writer of "The Mystery" remarks that he last appears in the city directory for 1848 and that "during the epidemic of cholera, which swept the Quaker City in 1849 and 1850 he fell a victim to the disease and died," and the writer of the biographical sketch says he "died in Philadelphia of cholera during the early fifties." Both the biographical sketch and the author of "The Mystery" say that Pink Blyden, Daniel's wife was the daughter of "Governor General Blyden of the West Indies," but in fact, she was the daughter of John Blyden who was born on the island of San Martin in the Caribbean, which is not part of the West Indies, and who was never "Governor General" of anything.

From all of this, we may conclude that whoever wrote "The Mystery" was either the person who wrote the biographical sketch, who is identified only as "B. P. D.," or someone who had read the biographical sketch. In either case, the writer would have been fully aware that Edward Desmond had not died at some Army outpost in the West and that his descendents were living in Virginia. It is no coincidence that the biographical sketch was published in 1912 and that the story of "The Mystery of the Vanished Desmonds" appeared the next year.

That "The Mystery" was a hoax may be further seen from the fact that there is no evidence that a search was conducted for a missing Desmond family in New York City between 1864 and 1913. There are no requests for information on missing Desmond families in the newspapers in New York or Philadelphia during this time period. There is, also, no evidence that the investigators ever checked the New York City directories. The "missing" family can be easily located by consulting these. From 1866 to 1867, they were residing at 563 W. 52nd Street, listed under "Henry A. Desmond."<sup>19</sup> There is no evidence that they checked the New York newspapers for persons who had died. A death notice for Henry A. Desmond was published in *the New York Daily Herald*, on August 3, 1866, that gives his mother's address as West 52nd Street.<sup>20</sup> Finally, there is no evidence that the New York City Health Department was ever checked, as claimed, to see whether any of the missing

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<sup>18</sup> *Genealogy, A Journal of American Ancestry*, *op. cit.* Italics added.

<sup>19</sup> *Trow's New York City Directory for the Year Ending May 1, 1867* (New York: John F. Trow, 1868), p. 258.

<sup>20</sup> *The New York Daily Herald* (New York, N.Y.), Aug. 3 1866, p.3



Desmonds had died. A death certificate for Pink Blyden, Daniels's widow, shows that she died on January 18, 1868 in Manhattan.<sup>21</sup> In short, there is no evidence that an investigation was ever conducted. The real mystery of "The Mystery of the Vanished Desmonds" is who was the perpetrator of this hoax?

### Who Was Really Missing?

Before proceeding further, let us consider briefly who among the members of the families of Daniel Desmond and his brother James was really missing and cannot be accounted for after they left Philadelphia in about 1864. The writer of "The Mystery" begins by setting the number of missing at seven: "a mother, her five children and her niece." These would be Mrs. James T. Desmond, whose given name was "Clementina"--of which the writer is, apparently unaware--her five children and her niece Mary Desmond--Daniel's daughter, who was, presumably, living with her mother and brother Henry at 563 W. 52nd Street in New York City in 1867, a thirty-four year old spinster. After the deaths of her mother and brother, she may have resided with her aunt. The others are accounted for--Henry and his mother died in New York and Edward allegedly died at some Army post in the West, although we know that in fact Edward and his family were living in Virginia.

Of the family of James T. Desmond, we cannot be sure that anyone other than his wife Clementina was ever unaccounted for. Little is known about this family, but we do know that James and Clementina Floyd Thompson married June 12, 1821, in Trenton, New Jersey. Clementina was born about 1802 in New Jersey and was the daughter of Lucretia Thompson of Trenton.<sup>22</sup> How many children James and Clementina had is uncertain. The 1840 U.S. census, which gives only the names of heads of household, shows James with three male children, residing in North Mulberry Ward, Philadelphia. Clementina and any female children are not listed. Since James and Daniel and their families were living at the old family residence at 99 Spruce Street with their parents Timothy and Anna in 1830, it is possible that the census enumerator may have confused the members of the households. James and Clementina are not found in the censuses again until 1860 when the only family members listed are James, Clementina, and their son Charles, who was born Aug 4, 1826 in Philadelphia and died there on October 29, 1864, apparently without ever having married. Joseph T. Desmond, who was a younger son of James and Clementina, is found in the Philadelphia directories from 1851 to 1856. It is believed that he died about 1857. It is not known whether he ever married and had a family. Yet, the writer of "The Mystery" claims that five children went with Clementina to New York--her daughter Mary L. and her sons Joseph, Charles, James, and Clement.

### The "Mystery" Solved

On December 19, 1913, a letter was sent to the *World News* in Roanoke, Virginia, which had published "The Mystery of the Vanished Desmonds" story December 15th, just four days earlier. The letter runs as follows:

The Desmond Family  
Tom's Creek, Va. Dec. 19, 1913

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<sup>21</sup> "New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>22</sup> "New Jersey, Marriages, 1670-1980," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org> "Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Marriages" *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie>

Editor World News, Roanoke, Va.:

In your paper dated Monday afternoon, Dec. 15th, on page 18, there is an article headed as follows: "Mystery of the Vanished Desmond Family."

As I am a son of Edward Desmond, and a grandson of Daniel Joseph Desmond of Philadelphia, Pa., who in this article is supposed to have left an estate of \$20,000 and as I have for the past five years since my father's death in Richmond, Va. Jan. 3, 1908, been trying to locate his sister Mary, my aunt, I am anxious to get into communication with the person who wrote this article. It seems that the person who has been tracing up my father's family came to the conclusion that he died at one of the western posts. This I presume was due to the fact that when my father was mustered out on Nov. 17th, 1871, the war department did not know what became of him. He was mustered out at Fort Richardson, Texas, and left there and came to Marion, Smith county, Va., and married Miss Henrietta Wilmore (my mother) and has resided there ever since with the exception of one month while he was in the hospital in Richmond. My father was the youngest child of Daniel Joseph Desmond of Philadelphia, and when my grandfather died in the early fifties my father was only four years old. His sister Mary was the eldest child of my grandfather and was thirteen years older than my father and she, my father, my grandmother (Mrs. Pink Blyden Desmond, Uncle Henry were all living in New York with Mrs. James T. Desmond when my father enlisted with Company I, 11th Regiment, U.S. Infantry at the age of nineteen years. His company moved from New York to Washington, thence to Norfolk, from Norfolk to Marion, from Marion to Shelbyville, Tenn., and from Shelbyville, Tenn. to Fort Richardson, Tex; where his enlistment expired, and he was mustered out. The \$20,000 is supposed to have been money my grandfather loaned while consul general to Pope Pius IX to the Church of Rome as the finances of the church were at a low ebb when this loan was made. We never knew whether it was paid back or not to my grandfather's estate. My mother, Mrs. Henrietta Desmond, who still resides at Marion, Smith county, Va., has been in fact drawing a pension as the widow of Edward Desmond.

Trusting that you can give me the information as to who wrote the article in question and thanking you in advance for your kindness in this matter.

Yours very truly,  
William E. Desmond

[Editor's Note:]

The above letter was not sent to the World-News with a request for publication. We publish it in the hope that some of our readers may be able to give Mr. Desmond a clue to the information he seeks.<sup>23</sup>

There can be little doubt that the writer of this letter is who he claims to be. His letter, however, repeats some of the same errors made in the biographical sketch. This may, perhaps, be accounted for if the writer of the letter was also the source for the information in the biographical sketch, which had been published just a year before the letter. We must, also, take into account the fact that all of information in the letter comes "second-

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<sup>23</sup> *The World News*, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 22, 1913, p. 4.

hand" from Edward's son, as told to him by his father, about events that happened thirty to forty years earlier, when Edward himself was much younger:

"Daniel Joseph Desmond died in Philadelphia of cholera during the early fifties."

"When my grandfather died in the early fifties my father was only four years old."

Edward Desmond was born November 12, 1846 and was just *two years old* when his father, Daniel, died on July 25, 1849.

"Edward Joseph Desmond, youngest son of Daniel Joseph Desmond, enlisted in the United States regular army November 16, 1865, and re-enlisted on November 16, 1868."

"My father enlisted with Company I, 11th Regiment, U.S. Infantry at the age of nineteen years. His company moved from New York to Washington, thence to Norfolk, from Norfolk to Marion, from Marion to Shelbyville, Tenn., and from Shelbyville, Tenn. to Fort Richardson, Tex; where his enlistment expired, and he was mustered out "

The military records show that Edward Desmond, enlisted December 5, 1866 in New York, age 21, and was discharged on 5 Oct 5, 1869 at Fort Reynard, New Mexico. It is significant, as well, that the writer of the letter does not mention any children of Mrs. James T. Desmond residing with them in New York.

"She [Edward's older sister, Mary], my father, my grandmother (Mrs. Pink Blyden Desmond, Uncle Henry were all living in New York with Mrs. James T. Desmond."

Presumably, this was at 563 W. 52nd Street, New York, N.Y. where Henry is listed as residing in *Trow's New York City Directory for the Year Ending May 1, 1867*.<sup>24</sup> This shows that none of Mrs. James T. (Clementina) Desmond's alleged five children went with her to New York. This reduces the number of "vanishing Desmonds" claimed in "The Mystery" to just two--Mrs. James T. Desmond and Mary, eldest surviving daughter of Daniel and Pink Blyden Desmond. Anyone who took the time to look Henry up in the directory and visited the residence might have found all of this out for themselves in 1868 when the directory was published.

What became known as "The Mystery of the Vanished Desmond Family"--claimed to be one of the most perplexing missing person cases of the nineteenth century-- was, in fact, one of the great hoaxes perpetrated by the newspapers on their readers in the early Twentieth Century.

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<sup>24</sup> H. Wilson, Comp., (New York: John F. Trow, [1868]), p. 258.

THE DESCENDANTS OF TIMOTHY AND ANNA DESMOND  
THE FAMILY OF DANIEL JOSEPH AND JAMES T. DESMOND OF PHILADELPHIA

- 1.01 TIMOTHY DESMOND, b. abt. 1768, Ireland, d. 21 Jul 1833, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur. Saint Mary's Catholic Churchyard Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.<sup>25</sup>
- + 1.02 ANNA (UNKNOWN), d. 2 Nov 1835, Ireland, bur. Saint Mary's Catholic Churchyard Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>26</sup>
- 2.01 Marlon Desmond, b. abt. 1784, Ireland, d. November 1811, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur.
- 2.01 DANIEL JOSEPH DESMOND, b. abt. 1794 Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d. 25 Jul 1849. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur. St. Mary's Cemetery, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>27</sup>
- + 2.02 PENENA (PINK) H, BLYDEN, b. abt. 1810, Saint Martin Island, d. 18 Jan 1868, Manhattan, New York, N.Y.<sup>28</sup>
- 3.01 MARIA LOUISA DESMOND, b. 21 Nov 1831, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d. 17 Apr 1833, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>29</sup>
- 3.02 MARY DESMOND, b. 14 Sep 1833, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>30</sup>
- 3.03 DANIEL BLYDEN DESMOND, b. abt. 1833, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>31</sup>
- 3.04 DANIEL BLYDEN DESMOND, b. 2 Jul 1836, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d. 24 Feb 1846, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur. St. Mary's Cemetery, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>32</sup>
- 3.05 PINK MARIA DESMOND, b. abt. 1843, d.s.p. 18 Dec 1863, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur. Old Cathedral Cemetery, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>33</sup>
- 3.06 CLARA ISIDORE DESMOND, b. abt. 1841, bap. 9 Jul 1844, Old St. Mary's Parish, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co, Pa., d. 7 Mar 1846, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur. St. Mary's Cemetery, Philadelphia Pa.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/82416654/timothy-desmond>

<sup>26</sup> "DIED. Last evening, Mrs. Ann Desmond, relict of the late Timothy. The friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend her funeral from her late residence, No. 99 Spruce st., on Wednesday afternoon at 3 o'clock (*The National Gazette*, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., Nov. 3, 1835, p. 2). *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/82416675/ann-desmond>

<sup>27</sup> "Daniel J. Desmond, Esq. a member of the Philadelphia Bar, and formerly consul for the Pope, Vice Consul for Portugal, &c, died on Thursday of cholera. He had been complaining of the premonitory symptoms for some days. (*The Brooklyn Eagle*, Brooklyn, N.Y., Jul 31, 1849, p. 7). *Genealogy, a Journal of American Ancestry*, vols. 1 & 2, 1912, Lyman Horace Weeks, ed. (New York: *William M. Clemens*), p. 165. "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>28</sup> Daughter of John Blyden ("Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Passenger Lists, 1800-1882," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>). Married 23 Jun 1829, Old St. Joseph's Parish, Philadelphia, Pa. ("Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Marriages," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie>). "New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>29</sup> "On the 17th instant, Maria Louisa, aged 17 months, daughter of Daniel J. Desmond. The friends of the family are requested to attend her funeral, from her Grand-father's dwelling, No. 99 Spruce street, this afternoon, at 4 o'clock (*The National Gazette*, Philadelphia, Pa., Apr. 18, 1833, p. 2). "Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie> She appears to have d. bef. Sep. 1833.

<sup>30</sup> "Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie>

<sup>31</sup> "Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie> He appears to have d. bef. 1840. *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95144224/daniel-desmond>

<sup>32</sup> "Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95144224/daniel-desmond>

<sup>33</sup> DESMOND.--On the 18th inst., Pink Blyden, daughter of Pink Blyden and the late Daniel J. Desmond. The relatives and friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, from the residence of Mrs. Sturdivant, northwest corner of Eighth and Spruce streets, on Monday morning, at 10 o'clock (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, Pa., Dec. 19, 1863, p. 9). "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95401426>

<sup>34</sup> "Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95144450/clara-desmond>

- 3.07 HENRY AUGUSTE DESMOND, b. 20 Feb 1844, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d.s.p. 2 Aug 1866, Manhattan, New York, N.Y.<sup>35</sup>
- 3.08 CLARA ISIDORE DESMOND, b. abt. 1845, bap. 2 Feb 1947, Old St. Mary's Parish, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d. 31 Mar 1847, Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pa.<sup>36</sup>
- 3.09 EDWARD JOSEPH DESMOND, b. 12 Nov 1846, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d. 3 Jan 1908, Smyth Co., Va., bur. Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>37</sup>
- + 3.05 HENRIETTA CLAY, b. abt. 1844, Virginia, d. 1925, bur. Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>38</sup>
- 4.01 DANIEL JOSEPH DESMOND, b. 14 Sep 1877, Marion, Smyth Co., Virginia.<sup>39</sup>
- 4.02 WILLIAM EDWARD DESMOND, b. 20 Jan 1879, Marion, Smyth Co., Va., d. 26 Apr 1959, bur. Coeburn Cemetery, Wise, Wise Co., Va.<sup>40</sup>
- + 4.03 THERESA PRICEY LEE THOMPSON, b. abt, 1879, Knoxville, Knox Co., Tenn., d. 1904, Marion, Smyth Co., Va., bur. Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>41</sup>
- 5.01 WILLIAM EDWARD DESMOND, JR., b. 6 Jan 1901, W. Va. d. 28 Mar 1973, Saint Paul, Wise Co., Va., bur. Evergreen Burial Park, Roanoke, Roanoke Co., Virginia.<sup>42</sup>
- + 5.02 ERIE D. BLOUNT, b. 4 Aug 1900, Franklin Co., Va., d. 24 Feb 1999, bur. Evergreen Burial Park, Roanoke, Roanoke Co., Va..<sup>43</sup>
- 6.01 DOROTHY JANE DESMOND.<sup>44</sup>
- + 6.02 (UNKNOWN) HELFRICH, Richmond, Va.
- 5.03 ELFRIDE B. DESMOND, b. 8 Aug 1902, Kessel, Hardy Co., W.Va.<sup>45</sup>
- 5.04 HARRY LEE DESMOND, b. 1904, d.s.p. 1904, bur. Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>46</sup>
- + 4.03 CAROLINE G. CARICO, b. 23 Feb 1880, Wise Co., Va., d. 11 Mar 1960, bur. Coeburn Cemetery, Wise, Wise Co., Va.<sup>47</sup>
- 5.01 JOSEPH DESMOND, b. abt. 1907, Va., res. Winchester, Ky.
- + 5.02 MARY (UNKNOWN), b. abt. 1907, Va.
- 6.03 JO NELL DESMOND, b. abt, 1931, Va.
- 6.04 BILLY DON DESMOND, b. abt. 1934, Va.

<sup>35</sup> "DESMOND.--At his mother's residence, West Fifty-second. Henry Auguste, eldest son of Pink and D. J. Desmond, late Consul General of the Pontifical State, and grandson of Governor Heyliger, S.Z., Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and Knight of the Golden Cross. Philadelphia, Charleston, S.C., Kinston, N.C., and New Orleans papers please copy" (The New York Daily Herald, New York, N.Y., Aug. 3 1866, p.3). "New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>36</sup> Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie>

<sup>37</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67788666/edward-j-desmond>

<sup>38</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67790026/henrietta-desmond>

<sup>39</sup> "Virginia Births and Christenings, 1584-1917," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>40</sup> "Virginia Births and Christenings, 1584-1917," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/119115487/william-e.-desmond>

<sup>41</sup> Married 22 Mar 1900 Smyth Co., Va., dau. of N. N. Thompson ("Virginia Marriages, 1785-1940," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>). *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67788692/pricie-lee-desmond>

<sup>42</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80060519/william-e-desmond>

<sup>43</sup> Daughter of Robert C. Blount and Sallie F. Barnard (*Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80060477/erie-d-desmond>).

<sup>44</sup> A retired teacher (*Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80060477/erie-d-desmond>).

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<sup>46</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67790101/harry-lee-desmond>

<sup>47</sup> Married 7 Dec 1905, Wise Co., Va., widowed, dau. of W. H. Carico ("Virginia Marriages, 1785-1940," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org> Dau. by previous marriage, Lucy M. Honeycutt, b. abt. 1901, Va., stepdaughter of William E. Desmond. *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/119115490/carolyne-g.-desmond>

- 5.03 JAMES PHELAN DESMOND, b. 18 Mar 1908. d. 16 Jun 1909, bur. Coeburn Cemetery, Wise, Wise Co., Va.<sup>48</sup>
- 5.04 HAROLD A. DESMOND, b. abt. 1913, Va., d. 19 Feb 1953, Coeburn, Wise Co., Va., bur. Coeburn Cemetery, Wise, Wise Co., Va.<sup>49</sup>
- 5.05 JULIA F. DESMOND, b. abt. 1914, Va..
- 5.06 SARAH H. DESMOND, b. 25 May 1915, Va., d. 25 May 1915, bur. Coeburn Cemetery, Wise, Wise Co., Va.<sup>50</sup>
- 5.07 Robert W. Desmond, b. 16 Jun 1918, d. 16 Aug 1918, bur. Coeburn Cemetery, Wise, Wise Co., Va.<sup>51</sup>
- 5.08 WILLIAM DESMOND, res. St. Paul, Va.
- 5.09 A DAUGHTER.
- 4.04 PINK BLYDEN DESMOND, b. abt. 1888, Marion, Smyth Co., Va., d. 1920, Smyth Co., Va., bur. Mt. Carmel United Methodist Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>52</sup>
- + 4.05 GORDON ADAM SNAVELY, b. 26 Oct 1877, Atkins, Smyth Co., Va., d. 23 Sep 1954, bur. Mt. Carmel United Methodist Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>53</sup>
- 4.06 MARY CELESTE DESMOND, b. 5 Nov 1882, Marion, Smyth, Va.<sup>54</sup>
- 4.07 HENRIETTA DESMOND, b. 11 Mar 1884, Marion, Smith Co., Va. d. 1896, bur. Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>55</sup>
- 4.08 JOSEPHINE DESMOND, b. 12 Mar 1885, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>56</sup>
- 4.09 CLARA DESMOND, b. 1887, d. 1887, bur. Round Hill Cemetery, Marion, Smyth Co., Va.<sup>57</sup>
- 4.09 ANNA L. DESMOND, b. abt. 1888, Va.
- 2.01 JAMES T. DESMOND, b. abt. 1795, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d. 24 Aug 1860, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur. Old Cathedral Cemetery, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.
- + 2.02 CLEMENTINA LLOYD THOMPSON, b. abt. 1802, N. J., d. 25 Feb 1875, Trenton, Mercer Co., N.J., bur. Mercer Cemetery, Trenton, Mercer Co., N.J. <sup>58</sup>
- 3.06 CHARLES FRANCIS DESMOND, b. 4 Aug 1826, bap. 11 Feb 1827, Old St. Joseph Parish, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pennsylvania, d.s.p. 29 Oct 1864, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., bur. Old Cathedral Cemetery, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/118839839/james-phelan-desmond>

<sup>49</sup> HAROLD A. DESMOND. Coeburn, Va. (Spl.)--Funeral services for Harold A. Desmond, 41, will be held Saturday at 4 p.m. at his home here, with the Rev. George A. Naff, Jr., officiating. Burial will be in Coeburn Cemetery. Desmond, a former semi-pro baseball star and Coeburn High School football standout, died of a heart ailment late Thursday night. He was employed by the town of Coeburn at the time of his death. Surviving are: his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Desmond of Coeburn; three sisters, Mrs. Kenneth Herndon of McClure, Mrs. H. R. Gravely of Bonnie Blue, and Mrs. B. C. Sexton of Long Island, N.Y.; two brothers, Bill Desmond of St. Paul, Va., and Joe Desmond of Winchester, Ky." (*The Kingsport News*, Kingsport, Tenn., Feb. 21, 1953, p. 10).

<sup>50</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/119115511/sarah-catron>

<sup>51</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/118839844/robert-w.-desmond>

<sup>52</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/134922492/pink-blyden-snavely>

<sup>53</sup> Married 11 Dec 1900, Smyth Co. Va., son of A. B. and Molley E. Snavely ("Virginia Marriages, 1785-1940," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>). "United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/69131207/gordon-adam-snavely>

<sup>54</sup> "Virginia Births and Christenings, 1584-1917," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>55</sup> "Virginia Births and Christenings, 1584-1917," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67790089/etta-desmond>

<sup>56</sup> "Virginia Births and Christenings, 1584-1917," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>

<sup>57</sup> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67790079/clara-desmond>

<sup>58</sup> Married 12 Jun 1821, Trenton, N.J. (New Jersey, Marriages, 1670-1980," *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>). Daughter of Lucretia Thompson of Trenton, N.J. "New Jersey, Deaths, 1670-1988," *FamilySearch*, <https://FamilySearch.org> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/64161746>

<sup>59</sup> "Philadelphia Roman Catholic Parish Baptisms," *find my past*, <https://www.findmypast.ie> *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95394847/charles-l-desmond>

3.08 JOSEPH T. DESMOND, b. abt. 1830, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa., d. abt. 1854, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Co., Pa.  
3.09 JAMES DESMOND.  
3.10 CLEMENT DESMOND.