



Myths to Live By: *Uncovering the Veiled Past of Actress/Artist Minnie Ashley*

*"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
when first we practice to deceive!"*

—Walter Scott

Well known actress, model, author, sculptor and philanthropist, Minnie Ashley began her career in Boston, Massachusetts during the last half of the American Gilded Age. Aside from the numerous articles written about Minnie's rise to fame near the end of the 19th century, there are only a few extant works that contain credible evidence regarding her family's lineage.

Photo circa 1898 by Benjamin Falk By comparing details from recently discovered records to details from past reviews that covered Minnie's rise to stardom, there unfolds a disturbing picture of a broken family seeking a chance for a new beginning by allowing the light of a talented young girl to shine in a culturally diverse city on the brink of modernism.

It is this author's belief that some of these recent documents reveal a number of details that were either manipulated or omitted in order to conceal specific challenges that surrounded Minnie's family during her childhood. These hard choices may have been essential for Minnie's decision to pursue a career in artistic expression and as a human rights activist.

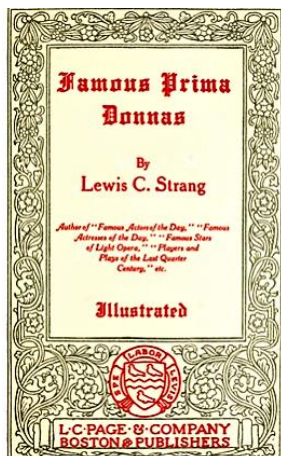
Contrary to old newspaper clippings, chapbooks and modern internet articles that give Minnie Ashley's place of birth as either in Fall River, MA, or Charlottesville, VA, the actual place of her birth was in Dartmouth, MA in Bristol County. The variety of dates given for her birth by the above-listed groups have ranged anywhere from May 7, 1874 to May 7, 1884. While that 10-year span of dates may seem somewhat of a reach, the month and day of May 7 appears to be consistent by the accounts from these varied authors. From the birth records registered in the town of Dartmouth, MA for the year 1880, on May 7, Minnie W. Collins was born out of wedlock ("illegitimate") to Eliza Collins. It is curious that entertainment writer Lewis C. Strang wrote in his

May 7, 1880	Ida De Lane's Breakout	Illegitimate	Dartmouth	Thomas A. Mary (Gret)	Dartmouth	Farmers
May 7, 1880	Minnie W. Collins	Illegitimate	Dartmouth	Eliza Collins	Dartmouth	Farmers
May 7, 1880	Minnie W. Collins	Illegitimate	Dartmouth	Eliza Collins (Washer)	Dartmouth	Farmers

Births Registered in The Town of Dartmouth, Massachusetts for the year 1880

popular book of short biographies (*Famous Prima Donnas*, 1900) that "Minnie Ashley was born in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1875. Her family name was Whitehead. Her father and mother separated, her mother going to Boston and taking Minnie with her..." In truth, Minnie Ashley's mother, "Widow" Eliza Collins, had been living in Fall River up until the time of Minnie's birth in

1880. Yet it was true there were a number of men with the *Whitehead* surname who lived in Fall River when Widow Eliza Collins resided there. Most were brothers who immigrated from England mid-19th Century, whose parents were Joshua and Margaret (Holland) Whitehead. Furthermore, there is no “evidence” that Eliza (Elizabeth) Collins (Lyons/Tully) was ever married to a Whitehead.



Rhode Island Town Marriages Index, 1639-1916	
Reference ID	64
Digital Folder Number	004250537
Image Number	00131
Name	George William Collins
Event Type	Marriage
Event Date	29 Jul 1872
Event Place	Tiverton, Newport, Rhode Island, United States
Gender	Male
Age	21
Birth Year (Estimated)	1851
Father's Name	Thomas Collins
Mother's Name	Mary Baker
Spouse's Name	Eliza Tully
Spouse's Gender	Female
Spouse's Age	18
Spouse's Birth Year (Estimated)	1854
Spouse's Father's Name	Michael Tully

What author Lewis Strang omitted from his “Prima Donna” book was that Minnie Ashley’s mother was previously *married* to George William Collins of Tiverton, RI and had two children from that marriage -- John Edward (b. 1872) and George Thomas Collins born 1874, a few months after his father’s death. The widow, Eliza Collins was twenty-two years old at the time her husband died and she never remarried.

Deaths Registered in the City of Fall River 1874

Minnie Ashley was the name given to Minnie W. Collins by her mother Eliza Collins, a few years after Minnie’s birth when Eliza moved to Boston with her then boyfriend George W. Ashley, a Dartmouth, MA butcher born in Vermont (1845).

Name	Events
George W Ashley Vermont Vital Records, 1760-1954	birth: 19 February 1845 Vermont, United States

When George W. Ashley met the widow Eliza Collins, he was married to Azuba H. Collins (Eliza’s deceased husband’s cousin) who was born in Taunton, MA in 1846. In 1880, the year of Minnie’s birth George W. Ashley was listed with his wife in the US Census for Dartmouth MA.

US Census 1880 Dartmouth, Massachusetts

When and where George W. Ashley first met Eliza Collins is unknown, except that he was a Dartmouth butcher and probably had done business in Fall River at Whitehead's meat market that was located a few doors down from Eliza's residence.

In 1874, after the birth of her second son (George Thomas Collins), Eliza Collins was still in grieving over her recently deceased husband. Alone, unemployed, and a single parent of two boys, Eliza Collins eventually sought the assistance of her mother Bridget (Lyons/Tully) and stepfather John Campbell who lived on Columbia Street, not far from her apartment on South Main Street in Fall River.

This can be verified by the 1880 Federal Census for Fall River, MA (right). Note that "Grandson" John Edward Collins was listed in the same residence, along with Eliza's stepsisters, Sarah Jane and Maggie (Campbell). Yet there is no listing for her second-born son, George Thomas Collins. It is not certain whether Eliza had been living with her parents during this time.

Household	Role	Sex	Age	Birthplace
John Campbell	Self	Male	61	England
Bridget Campbell	Wife	Female	50	Ireland
Sarah Jane Campbell	Daughter	Female	19	Massachusetts, United States
Maggie Campbell	Daughter	Female	15	Massachusetts, United States
John Edward Collins	Grandson	Male	7	Massachusetts, United States

Although Eliza had found a temporary sanctuary with her parents, she also felt the need to seek an alternative to her dependent, single parent lifestyle. As soon as Eliza recovered her strength and son George Thomas Collins had learned to walk, Eliza took young George Thomas Collins to Tiverton, RI to be raised by his paternal grandparents, Captain George Thomas Collins and his wife Mary (Baker) Collins. Once again, Widow Eliza, the conflicted young mother, would attempt to open a new door to a brighter, more stable future with her companion, George W. Ashley.

Name	Relationship	Age	Sex	Birthplace
Mary B.	Wife	51	F	R.I.
William	Husband	50	M	R.I.
Mary B.	Daughter	16	F	R.I.
Robert	Son	12	M	R.I.
George T.	Grandson	6	M	R.I.

US Census 1880 for Tiverton, RI. Note on the last line of the census that the age of "grandson" George "T" was six years old, which corroborates his 1874 unrecorded birthdate.

In the 1870 RI marriage registration to George William Collins, Eliza's maiden name was listed as "Tully" and both her mother, Bridget (Lyons) and father Michael Tully, were Irish immigrants who were said to have resided in Fall River, MA at the time of Eliza's birth in 1854. To date, there is no evidence to prove the couple's residence in 1854, nor has there been found documentation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that proves a marriage between Bridget (Lyons) and Michael Tully. Equally strange is that there is no record of birth for Eliza Tully matching this date and profile in Massachusetts or elsewhere.

Eliza's mother, Bridget Lyons was 17 years old at the time of her arrival in 1845 in Boston, MA, and was traveling alone when she arrived. This establishes her birth year to 1828.

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familysearch.org

Bridget Lyons
Massachusetts, Boston Passenger Lists, 1820-1891

Name:	Bridget Lyons
Event Type:	Immigration
Event Date:	1845
Event Place:	Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States
Gender:	Female
Age:	17
Nationality:	Ireland
Birth Year (Estimated):	1828
Birth Country:	Ireland
Page:	815

Bridget Lyons
United States Census, 1850

Name:	Bridget Lyons
Event Type:	Census
Event Year:	1850
Event Place:	Fall River, Bristol, Massachusetts, United States
Gender:	Female
Age:	22
Race:	White

The Federal Census for Fall River, MA of 1850 shows that Bridget Lyons had moved to Fall River and became a single resident in that city at the age of 22. It is unclear as to when and where Michael Tully entered the United States.

Based on anecdotal evidence from gossip from the within Collins family (after George William's death), there was talk that Michael Tully had died young from an illness in New York

City. His birthdate birth date was said to be 1818. Not much more was known about his demise.

While there are no records of Michael Tully's death in Massachusetts, a recently found document from New York City does list the death of a Michael Tully b. 1818 who resided at 20/21 Trinity Place, in Manhattan in 1857.

Tully James, painter, 225 Av. 1
TULLY MARCUS C. physician, 146 Broome
Broome
Tully Martin, paver, 141 E. 16th
Tully Matthew, tailor, 5 Hester
Tully Michael, waiter, r. 21 Trinity pl
Tully Patrick, coachman, r. 40 W. 3th
Tully Walter, shoemaker, 70 Bank

Michl Tully
New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1891

Name:	Michl Tully
Event Type:	Immigration
Event Date:	1845
Event Place:	New York City, New York, United States
Gender:	Male
Age:	27
Birth Year (Estimated):	1818
Ship Name:	Tarotinta

Michael Tully
New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949

Name:	Michael Tully
Event Type:	Death
Event Date:	26 Feb 1857
Event Place:	Manhattan, New York, New York, United States
Address:	20 Trinity Place
Gender:	Male
Age:	39
Marital Status:	Unknown
Occupation:	Porter
Birth Year (Estimated):	1818
Birthplace:	Ireland
Cemetery:	Calvary

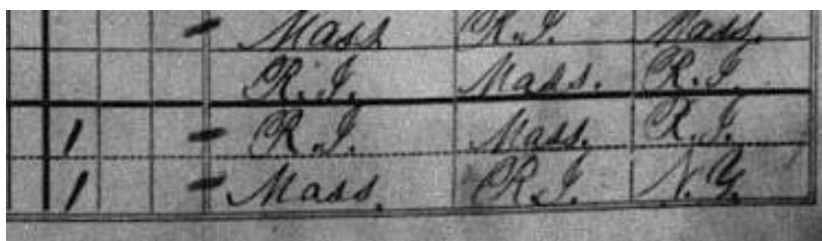
While this prima facie evidence may appear far-fetched, additional documents located from both New York City street guides

(1854-1859) and a passenger list from 1845 were located that not only validate his NYC residence but, strangely enough, also lists the name of one Widow Bridget Tully, wife of Michael that appears one year after Michael Tully's death in 1857. Widow Bridget Tully's name again appears in the same NYC street directory in 1858, and 1859 but at a different address, 145 E. 11th Street. After 1859, Widow Bridget Tully's name disappears from the NYC Street Directory.

Search in this text Find

TULLY ALEXANDER, express, h. 101 Troy
Tully Alexander, express, h. 101 Troy
Tully Bridget, wid. Michael, washing, h. 145 E. 11th
Tully Edward, tailor, h. 526 Pearl

Oddly enough, in 1861 Widow Bridget Tully resurfaces back in Fall River, Massachusetts, this time she was living with her new husband, John Campbell on Columbia Street. Maybe the old Collins rumor of Michael Tully and New York may not have been a rumor at all. The disappearance of Bridget Lyons and her “marriage” (no record) to Michael Tully, and even the birth of their daughter Eliza (1854) falls within that missing window of time between 1851 and 1860.

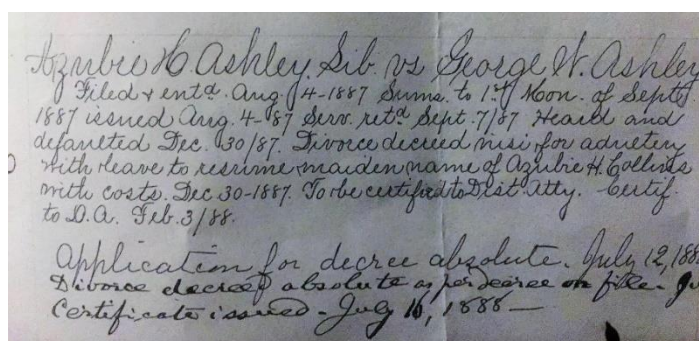


There is one more piece of extant evidence that attests to this NY-Tully rumor by the Collins family. This occurred as simple notation in an 1880 Federal Census for Tiverton, Rhode Island where Eliza (Tully) Collins’ six-year old son George “T” (Thomas) resided with his grandparents, Captain George Thomas and Mary Collins. On the very last line where George T’s name is listed, the place of birth listed for his mother (Eliza) is in NY (New York).

John Campbell Massachusetts Marriages, 1841-1915	
Name:	John Campbell
Event Type:	Marriage
Event Date:	27 Mar 1861
Event Place:	Fall River, Bristol, Massachusetts, United States
Gender:	Male
Age:	40
Birth Year (Estimated):	1821
Father's Name:	John
Mother's Name:	Margaret Fogg
Spouse's Name:	Bridget L. Lyon Tully
Spouse's Gender:	Female
Spouse's Age:	31
Spouse's Birth Year (Estimated):	1830
Spouse's Father's Name:	William Lyon

There is also no way of knowing just how clandestine the affair was between George W. Ashley and the widow Eliza Collins during their first few years together. Considering that Eliza had recently been through a series of emotional events that rendered her being near to depletion, then birthing a child (Minnie) for the third time, logic would dictate that both Eliza and Minnie were temporarily boarding with the Campbell household in Fall River, MA. But what of the “Whitehead” relation that Lewis Strang mentioned in his “Prima Donna” book? Was this Whitehead fellow really the father of baby Minnie and were both Minnie and her mother, Eliza were residing with him?

There is no definite indication as to where Eliza Collins and George W. Ashley were living until six years after Minnie’s birth when George Ashley and his new family we found living in Boston, MA. And just how long did George W. Ashley’s wife, Azuba (Collins) Ashley, know about the affair her husband was having behind her back? In 1887, not long after husband George W. Ashley became established in Boston, Azuba filed for divorce against him in Dartmouth, MA on the charge of adultery. The divorce was granted and was finalized in 1888, two months *after* George W. Ashley died. Azuba’s request to resume her maiden name of Azuba H. Collins was also granted.



It is also not clear if Eliza had been using the Ashley surname, since though George Ashley was still legally married to Azuba in 1886, when the Ashley’s were living on Tremont Street in Boston, MA.

The first residence for George Ashley in 1885 was at 404 Tremont Street, not far from Harvard Street (then called Castle St.) This Tremont address is based on an article about Minnie Ashley in the *Boston Globe* Sept. 7, 1886.

Note in the same news article (left) that Minnie Ashley was 6 years old when that incident occurred. This age thus confirms the same year Minnie (Collins) Ashley was born in 1880. Since most city street directories across

the recipients of several flags.

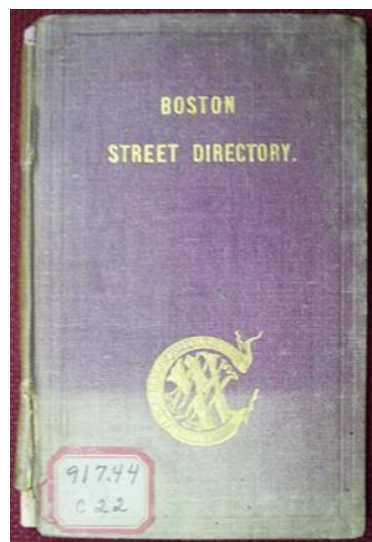
BURNED, BRUISED, BROKEN.

Injuries Recorded at the Police Stations and Hospitals.

Minnie Ashley, 6 years old, living at 404 Tremont street, while playing on the roof of the house next to her own yesterday afternoon, fell through the skylight to landing below, a distance of fifteen feet. She received serious internal injuries.

John McDonald, 24 years old and living at 7 Florence street, while alighting from a horse-car at the corner of Washington and Worcester streets, was knocked down by a car coming from the opposite direction, and received a bad cut over the right eye, also several bruises.

Mabel Wetmore, 3 years old, living at



America at this time listed only the names of heads of household at each residence, it would be difficult to know for certain. There were four additional residences where George Ashley (butcher) had lived in Boston from 1886 to 1888 (taken mainly from the *Boston City Directory* Sampson & Murdock publisher). After George Ashley died in May of 1888 a new street listing appears with the head of household's name, Eliza F. Ashley, widow of George W. So clearly, there was not doubt that Eliza and Minnie had previously been living either with or near George W. Ashley during the past four years. It is in the 1889 listing that Eliza is referenced as George Ashley's "widow". No record of marriage exists between the time of George Ashley's divorce and death in 1888 and 1889. Both Eliza and daughter Minnie legally retained the Collins surname.

1886

Ashley Alfred, wharfinger, Cunard wharf, Belmont sq.
 " Edward H. h. 37 Worcester
 " Edwin M. h. 33 Cambridge, Chsn.
 " George, carpenter, h. 112 W. Sixth
 " George W. butcher, h. 10 Hotel Helen

1888

Ashley Alfred, supt. Cunard whf. h. 187 Webster,
 " Edward H. h. 37 Worcester
 " Edwin M. h. 33 Cambridge, Chsn.
 " George, removed to Blackstone
 " George W. butcher, h. 82 Harrison av.
 " Homer, cashier American Express Co. 43

1887

Ashley Alfred, supt. Cunard whf. h. 187 Webster,
 " Edward H. h. 37 Worcester
 " Edwin M. h. 33 Cambridge, Chsn.
 " George, removed to Blackstone
 " George W. butcher, h. 82 Harrison av.
 " Homer, cashier American Express Co. 43

1889

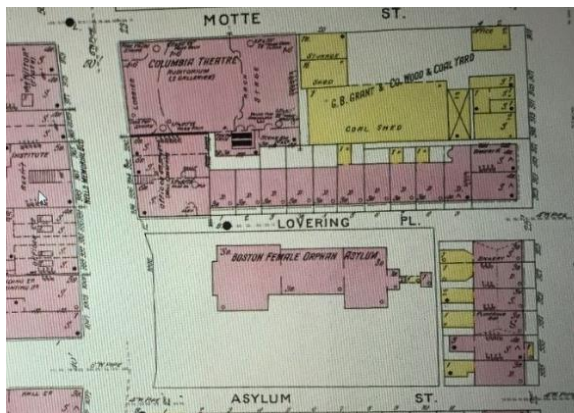
Ashley Alfred, supt. Cunard whf. h. 187 Webster
 " Charles A. 63 Summer, bds. 240 W. Canton
 " Edward H. h. 37 Worcester
 " Edwin M. upholsterer, 57 Harvard, Chsn. h.
 33 Cambridge, do. [pl.
 " Eliza F. widow of George W. h. 1 Lovering

It is not known how long the Ashley family lived on Tremont Street prior to moving later that year to Hotel Helen at 10 Castle Street at the corner of Harrison Avenue. In 1887 the Ashley family relocated to a tenement on 82 Harrison Avenue in Chinatown and by 1888 they moved into a flat next door at number 70 Harrison Avenue. After George W. Ashley died in May of 1888, Eliza and Minnie moved to 1 Lovering Place, less than half a mile south of Kneeland Street, at the corner of Washington Street, just below Castle Street (now Herald Street).



1905 post card of Harrison Avenue looking north from Kneeland St. Note: the third and fourth buildings on the right were the buildings the Ashley family lived in from 1887-1888

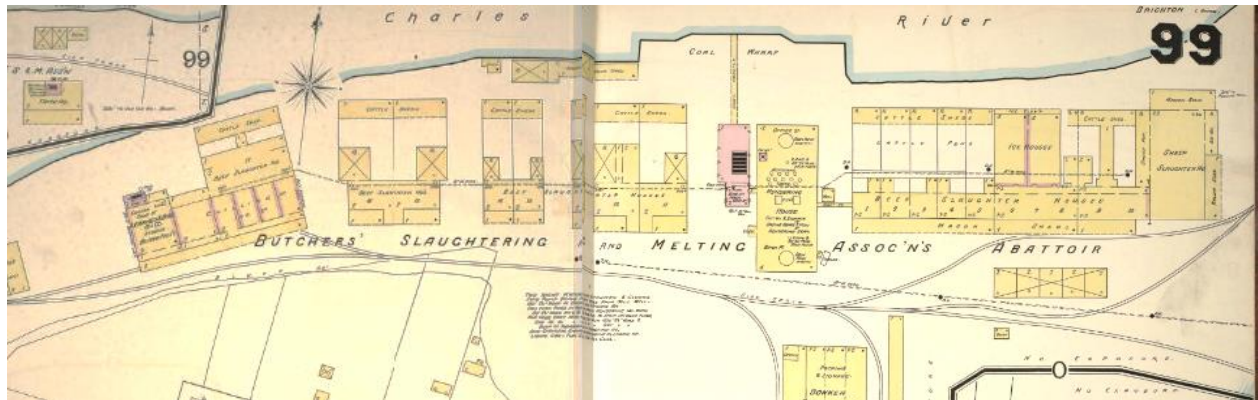
The 1883 Map of Boston (right) outlines the basic neighborhood where the Ashley family resided from 1886-1890. Lovering Place, the last known residence where Eliza and Minnie Ashley lived is marked by an orange dot. Lovering Place was a tiny cross street between Washington Street and Harrison Avenue and frequently ignored by map makers of that time.



However in an 1895 Fire Insurance Map Lovering Place was listed and details the location where Eliza and Minnie Ashley lived in 1889. Just above the black dot to the left of the word "Lovering" is the number 1 which is the dwelling where the Ashley's lived. To the left, on the corner of Washington St. is an office building attached to the Columbia Theatre whose front faced Motte St.

The locations of the various residences where George W. Ashley and family lived from 1886-1889 were heavily traveled with roads crisscrossed by horse drawn carriages and train tracks. Local and interstate rail depots and steamboat services to Providence, Fall River and New York was available.

Although the main streets were frequently congested with traffic it was relatively easy getting around town. The city of Boston at that time had designated a market area for butchers and meat packing businesses located on the periphery of the North End and Back Bay area next to the banks of the Charles River.



It is likely that George W. Ashley, whose profession was a butcher, would have found employment in this area while living in Boston with his family. The commute from any street from the various places where the Ashley family had resided, to the butcher's market would have been only a short distance by streetcar.

In 1886 when George Ashley and his family were first listed as Boston residents, Minnie would have been six years old and would have been in the second grade at a public school in district 8, Boston Proper. Based on their former Harrison Avenue address in Chinatown, their choice of Grammar schools could have been either the Warren Grammar School on Summer Street in Chinatown, or the Shurtleff Grammar School, located one street over on Tyler Street. The more elite Winthrop Grammar (girls only) was located a few streets west of Harrison Avenue and around the corner at 246 Tremont Street near the Boston Common. This however has not been verified.

After their move to the lower Washington Street neighborhood, Minnie's age would have been approximately 8 years old. In an article from the Boston Sunday Globe dated January 10, 1904, (p. 52) titled *Miss Minnie Ashley-Mrs. William Astor Chanler*, the author stated that "the little girl never went to the public schools, but received instruction at the Barnes' Memorial, which was then connected to the Warrenton St. Church." How long this continued is also unknown.

It is unlikely that Minnie attended secondary school during this time as she was fully immersed in the world of dance and theater. How and when Minnie became involved in the theater arts during this time is left to speculation. Local news articles and reports from entertainment circles in Boston during the late 1800's revealed that Minnie Ashley's singing ability and acting in public began with other schoolmates at children's festivals in the old Music Hall in Boston.

This popular and stately venue for classical music and theater was at the top of Harrison Avenue near Tremont Street by the Boston Common. Participation in these children's festivals lasted for a couple of years until Minnie's talent as a solo performer gained the attention of personal dance instructor, Isabelle Florence who tutored Minnie for free and eventually helped to shape Minnie's ability to perform at a professional level. Minnie Ashley's determination to become a



Boston Music Hall, Hamilton Place Entrance, photo circa 1896

professional performer soon became firmly resolved and she continued her dance and acting lessons which eventually resulted in the opportunity to perform at summer resorts in the White Mountains and elsewhere in metropolitan Boston.

DEATHS REGISTERED in the City of Boston for the Year eighteen hundred and eighty-eight												
DATE OF DEATH.	DATE OF RECORD.	NAME AND SURNAME OF THE DECEASED.	SEX.	CONDITION (whether natural, violent, or accidental).	AGE.	DISEASE, OR CAUSE OF DEATH.	RESIDENCE, AND PLACE OF DEATH, and Burial (if elsewhere).	OCCUPATION.	PLACE OF BIRTH.	NAMES AND BIRTHPLACES OF PARENTS.		
May 11		Ellis O. Flynn	F	S	1 1	Diphtheria	150 Saline St.		Boston	James O. Flynn	Irish	
		Charles F. Millock	F	S	7 4 1		13 Frederick St.			James J. Millock	Boston	
		Unknown	M		50	Found Drowned	House Samuel St.	Mariner				
		Lilly M. Sanford	F	S	20	Pneumonia	121 1/2 W. Concord St.		Boston	Frederick Sanford	English	
		George W. Ashley	M	M	42	Convulsions	70 Harrison St.	Cutcher	Rutland Vt.	George Ashley	Rutland	
						Violent diarrhoea						

It was around this time when Minnie was eight years old that Widow Eliza's boyfriend, George W. Ashley, succumbed to a disease and died in a hospital on May 11, 1888 in Westfield, MA. Note on his death register (above) that the line specified for the birthplaces for his parents was left blank.

Research on burials in the 1800's for the unclaimed deceased in Westfield, MA would have been interred either at the Pinehill Cemetery or the Mechanics Cemetery. Since Azuba (Collins) Ashley was still the wife of record at the time of George W. Ashley's death it most likely would have presented a legal challenge for Widow Eliza (Collins-Ashley) to make the claim. Not to mention Eliza's inadequate financial means and the logistics of transporting his body back to Boston. In addition, there are no records for George Ashley's burial either in his birthplace of Rutland, VT area or in Dartmouth, MA where most of his ancestors were buried.

Shortly after the death of George W. Ashley a curious and somewhat defiant change was noticed in Minnie Ashley's behavior. There were two newspaper articles that account two separate instances where her rebellious behavior was shown apparent.

The first in 1890, at the age of ten when apparently she boarded a passenger ship alone from Lewis' Wharf in Boston to Halifax Nova, Scotia to be featured in a play with the Reeves Colored Company.

Once discovered the members of the dramatic company were jailed and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children took charge of Minnie and sent her back to Boston.

The second incident took place in Boston, in 1895 while Minnie was at the old Boston Museum preparing for a debut role in the play called the Chorus Girl when a local sheriff entered the theater who she thought was seeking her arrest as an underaged actress. By disguising herself in a theater costume she was able to thwart the arresting officer and escape the building. The following day she took a train to New York where she had the good fortune of winning a place in a theater group managed by the Augustin Daly.

A year later Minnie made her first Broadway appearance in the play "Little Christopher". In 1896, when producer De Wolf Hopper brought out the production of "El Capitan" at the Tremont Theater in Boston, Minnie was chosen for a role in the chorus while working as an understudy to Hopper's wife, actress Edna Wallace Hopper. It was in October of 1896 when the rising starlet married New York actor William (Jones) Sheldon in Baltimore. Minnie was sixteen years old and continued to use the Ashley name when not on stage.

There is not much known about Minnie Ashley's first husband, William Sheldon; born William Jones in Ohio, 1876. William's older brother was Walter Jones (1875-1922), also an actor, well-known as the comic "Tramp" in early theatrical performances (Walter had previously worked alongside Minnie Ashley in the 1894 performance of "1492"). Their father was the respected Ohio doctor, Isaac Newton Jones (1840-1901) and their mother, actress Harriet Sheldon, born 1854 in New York.

~~ORIGINAL PAGE~~

REEVES COLORED COMPANY JAILED.

[Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald.]

HALIFAX, N. S., Dec. 10, 1890. The Reeves Colored Dramatic Company came here from Boston last week. Their season was a failure, and they were jailed for their hotel bill. Today a 10-year-old girl named Minnie Ashley arrived from Boston under an engagement to play with the Reeves company through the province at \$10 a week. All but two members of the company returned to Boston today. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children took charge of the child and refused to allow her to play with the two men, and will send her back to Boston.

NATIONAL BOARD OF CONTROL.

It is not clear if *Sheldon* was Harriet's true surname or simply her stage name, but off-stage Harriet frequently used the *Jones* surname even though she and Dr. Jones lived apart for most of their lives and there is no record of a marriage between them. According to the Federal Census of 1900 for the State of *Ohio* Dr. Isaac Jones reported that he had been "married since 1880" and his wife was from New York. The wife's name was not recorded. From the Federal Census of *New York* for the same year (1900) Harriet Jones, the *actress* was living as "head of household" with her two adult sons, actors, Walter and William Jones at West 36th Street, NYC. (see below):

William Jones	Head	72	7	Jan	1852	46	2nd
Harriet Jones	Wife	44	7	Jan	1856	44	2nd
Walter Jones	Son	17	7	Jan	1883	17	2nd
William Jones	Son	15	7	Jan	1885	15	2nd

William (Jones) Sheldon's marriage to Minnie Ashley was brief and they separated when Minnie and her mother moved to Great Neck, New York in 1899.

Prior to this move Minnie Ashley, along with members of the *Museum Company* performed in a musical comedy called "The Chorus Girl" and other popular plays such as "The Geisha", "The Circus Girl" and "Prince Pro Tem." Her growing recognition as an actress and a beauty queen kept her in the Boston limelight.

In late 1899, when the play "The Greek Slave" opened in New York, Minnie Ashley became an overnight sensation for her part as *Iris* in that production. Her move to New York had proven successful both with her acting, singing career as well as her modeling stint for the then popular "cabinet card" industry.

These "cabinet cards" were small yet handsome photo portraits attached to heavy stock paper board that were meant to stand alone in or on top of furniture cabinets. Their commercial success however was short-lived.

When Minnie's New York City schedule became too busy to commute back home to Long Island she would regularly stay overnight at the Hotel Hatfield on East 29th Street. It was during this time when Minnie began to experience serious eye problems due to the prolonged exposure while on stage under heated theatrical lime lights.



Cabinet Card (Smithsonian Institute)

From 1900 to 1901, at the height of her career Minnie Ashley's eyesight worsened and she was unable to perform with the grace and confidence she had prior to her eye problems. At this time Minnie had been courted by William A. Chanler, a world explorer, soldier and former politician who was an affluent great grandson of John Jacob Astor II, one of the richest men in America. With their relationship growing more endearing and with William Chanler's support, Minnie's decision to

discontinue the passion for acting was made final. This decision came late in 1902 at the end of last performance of "The Country Girl" at Daly's Theater in New York City. The talk of a marriage between Minnie and William A. Chanler came next. That could only be made possible by getting Minnie's estranged husband, William (Sheldon) Jones to agree to a divorce. Without much convincing, William (Sheldon) Jones agreed to the divorce and the pleading was slated to be heard in Cincinnati, Ohio for November 19, 1903.

On December 3, 1903, two weeks after Minnie Ashley's divorce from William (Sheldon) Jones had been finalized, Minnie changed her name to Beatrice Winthrop Ashley and married William A. Chanler at Saint George's Rectory in New York City.

Soon after the marriage, two sons were born to Mr. and Mrs. William A. Chanler; William Astor Jr. (1904-2002) and Sidney Ashley (1907-1994). During this time Beatrice Chanler's mother, Eliza Ashley had moved to West 67th Street into a studio apartment in New York City.

By 1908, according to *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, Beatrice Chanler's family was listed as one of America's top Mutli-Millionaires. After being married for seven years, Beatrice and William Chanler separated amicably in 1909 and William moved to Europe to pursue both business and personal endeavors.

Beatrice's creative energy began to resurface as her children grew older. With her vision somewhat stable, she made the decision to become a sculptor, an artist working with 3-dimensional forms in a medium whose tactile nature was more suited to her limited vision. A short apprenticeship followed with noted sculptress Malvina Hoffman. Soon thereafter Beatrice opened a studio at 141 East 19th Street.

Beatrice Chanler's brother-in-law, Robert Chanler, was an acclaimed American artist who owned a townhouse on the same block, 3 doors down at No. 147 E. 19th Street. "The House of Fantasy" as his studio was known to the modern art world in New York served as a gallery for Robert Chanler's fantastic and somewhat surreal murals and stained glasswork. The gallery also served as a social center for New York City's progressive art community to which Beatrice was an active participant. By around 1912, Beatrice Chanler's brother, John "Edward" Collins, then a 36-year old art dealer, made the decision to move with their mother Eliza Ashley to this bustling modern art community on East 19th Street. Their apartment was located one city block from Beatrice's art studio at 207, East 19th Street.

Assembly District No. 12, County New York

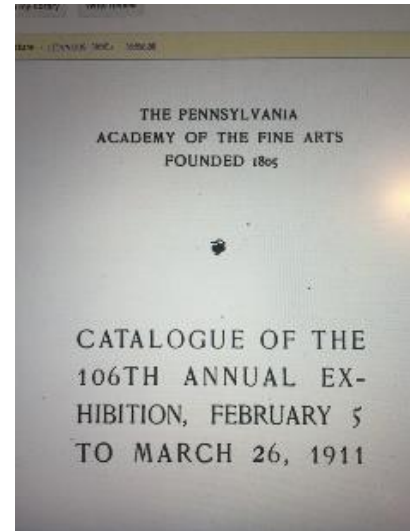
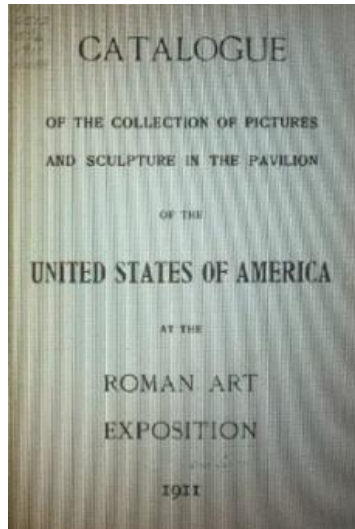
NAME	RELATION	COLOR, SEX AND AGE		NATIVITY
		Color	Sex	
Price Mary A	Head	W	F 60	US
Price Sarah	Sister	W	F 58	US
Daly John J	Head	W	M 34	Ireland
Daly Marie M	Wife	W	F 31	"
Hogan Annie	Sister in law	W	F 21	"
Ashley Elizabeth	Head	W	F 55	US
Collins Edward F	Son	W	M 39	US
Olbrich Charles	Head	W	M 49	Austria
Olbrich Michaela	Wife	W	F 49	"
Shaghal Francis	Niece	W	F 19	"
Wallace Hugh	Head	W	M 59	US
Wallace Katharine	Sister	W	F 61	US
Kopf Frederick H	Head	W	M 49	US
Kopf Rose	Wife	W	F 37	US
Kopf William A	daughter	W	F 17	US
Ahnelt Augusta	Head	W	F 79	Germany

1915 New York State Census

How this family reunion came to be at such a late period in their lives was perhaps a bit more than John Edward's chance to invest in Modern Art. It was also to assist his aging mother who had

recently been injured in a car accident and was previously living alone. Eliza and her son John “Edward” lived at the same address until their deaths.

As a sculptor, Beatrice Chanler became increasingly more competent. In 1911 Beatrice Ashley Chanler exhibited in the USA Pavilion at the Roman Art Exposition and was included in the 106th Annual Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. At both venues Beatrice



displayed her art alongside the most popular visual artists in America, such as Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, and next-door neighbor, painter George Bellows.

Beatrice’s greatest achievement as an artist was realized a few years later when she was commissioned to create a forty-foot bas-relief frieze for the Vanderbilt Hotel on Park Ave. and 34th Street. The only evidence of this work is from an old photograph that depicted a portion of the frieze on the wall behind the tiled column (above the window). The frieze was destroyed when the hotel was renovated.



In 1913 Beatrice visited her estranged husband in France for a short time while he was recuperating from a serious leg injury (the affected leg was amputated 2 years later). Three years after WW I broke out, Beatrice returned to France and became active in World relief organizations. She served as president of the American Committee of the French Heroes Fund and was a member of the National Allied Relief Committee.

Both committees were established to aid French wounded soldiers and their families and to publicize the experiences of the Allied nations in war. To enable these projects to be realized, Beatrice and husband William A. Chanler negotiated the purchase of the childhood home of the Marquis de Lafayette. This building was converted into a school for orphans and refugee children, as well as a medical facility and later a museum.

Passenger application records for Beatrice Chanler during this time reveal several inconsistencies regarding both her age and birthplace. The reasons why were not so clear. Her applications from 1915, 1916, 1919, and 1920 list a Charlottesville, VA birthplace. The 1915 application also listed her birthdate as May 7, 1883; and the 1916, 1919 and 1920 applications all listed her birthdates of May 7, 1884.

To reiterate; Beatrice Chanler was born Minnie Collins on May 7, 1880 in Dartmouth, MA. The Charlottesville, VA birthplace, was a ruse that began just prior to Minnie changing her name to

Beatrice close to her wedding date then fed to the New York Times in their published article of Minnie Ashley's marriage to William A. Chanler on December 4, 1903. That same fake Virginia birthplace was listed on their marriage certificate as well.

Was this inaccurate information unintentional, or was it an attempt to conceal the sordid background of a family not so well off as the Chanler pedigree? Whatever the reasons for all the name and date changes made in Beatrice's life, it couldn't hide her true artistic talent nor her valor in raising funds for international aid projects during the first World War. Her selfless devotion to humanitarian aid and philanthropic programs during the war period had, in effect, given Beatrice little time for her artistic endeavors. Most of that free time was taken over by writing. In 1934 she published *Cleopatra's Daughter: Queen of Mauritania*. It was the same year in which her husband William A. Chanler died in Menton, Alpes-Maritimes, France.

In 1939 Beatrice Chanler moved into the Fred F. French building on East 54th Street in New York City. The building was an architectural marvel shared by such notables as the Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keefe, Thomas C. Eastman, and Peggy Skinner.

Other information in the record of Edward F. Collins from New York, New York City Municipal Deaths	
Name:	Edward F. Collins
Event Type:	Death
Event Date:	14 Mar 1940
Event Place:	Manhattan, New York, New York, United States
Address:	207 E. 19th St.
Residence Place:	Manhattan
Gender;	Male
Age:	65
Marital Status:	Single
Race:	White
Occupation:	Salesman Art Gallery
Birth Year (Estimated):	1875
Birthplace:	U.S.A.
Burial Date:	16 Mar 1940
Cemetery:	Fresh Pond Crematory
Father's Name:	George
Father's Birthplace:	U.S.A.
Mother's Name:	Eliza Tully
Mother's Birthplace:	U.S.A.

Later that year, Beatrice's mother, Elizabeth Ashley died on September 5. Her body was shipped to Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River, MA and buried in the same plot with her first husband George William Collins (see below).

Robert T. D. Collins - Santa M. Collins to Geo. A. Collins - 6/14/67	
Age	Lot Number 3245
INTERMENT	
1 Thos. C. Collins 10,586	40+ wife. ORDER TAKEN 7/1/76
2 Mary E. Collins 10,587	55+ BY TOM EATON
3 Chas. D. Collins 10,588	17+
4 Geo. W. Collins 10,589	22+
5 Helen G. Collins 10,590	23+
6 Edgar B. Collins 10,591	24 days 80
7 Harriet J. Collins 10,592	24 days 80
8 Eliz. Ashley 30,947	84
9 George T. Collins 39,503	87
10 Sarah E. Collins 42,078	77
11 George A. Collins 42,468	74
12 ERNEST T. COLLINS 45,193	67
13 George A. Collins 50,294	ACHES
14 MARGARET C. COLLINS 52,120 95 45142	

One year after Eliza Ashley's death, Beatrice's brother, John "Edward" Collins died in his apartment on 19th Street in New York City.

From his Record of Death from New York City 1940, John Edward Collins' mother's name was reported as Eliza "Tully" and his father's name listed only as "George".

Why was his mother not named Eliza Ashley, as it was listed in the 1915 New York Census when she and son John "Edward" Collins were first recorded as New York City residents? "Tully" was his mother's maiden name prior to her marriage to George William Collins.

In a family photograph, circa 1925, Eliza Ashley is depicted seated (top left) with her son George T. Collins (seated top right) on the front porch of his home on Metacomet Avenue, in Swansea, MA. George T. Collins' son (George Anthony) is seated top center and at the bottom is Eliza's great-grandson George Anthony Collins Jr.



On June 19, 1946 Beatrice "Minnie" Ashley Chanler died on a train enroute from New York to Portland Maine. She was buried at the Trinity Church Cemetery in Manhattan, NY in the Chanler family plot.

ADDRESS 207 E 19th St	RELATION Son	Address 700 W. 168th St, N.Y.
PLACE OF BURIAL & CREMATION Oak Grove Cem. Fall River Mass.	DATE OF BURIAL OR CREMATION September 8th, 1938	
FUNERAL DIRECTOR <i>W. A. Sullivan</i>	ADDRESS 341 Second Avenue	PERMIT NUMBER 176
HEAD OF RECORDS	DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH	CITY OF NEW YORK

Minnie Ashley Timeline



Washington Street, Boston 1897. Image courtesy City of Boston Archives

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1821 | John Campbell born in England |
| 1818 (abt.) | Michael (Mick) Tully born in Ireland |
| 1828 | Bridget Lyons born in Ireland |
| 1845 | Bridget Lyons arrives in Boston, MA |
| 1845 | Irish Potato Famine Begins. Irish citizens immigrate to USA |
| 1845 | George W. Ashley born in Rutland, VT |
| 1845 (abt.) | Michael Tully arrives in New York City, NY |
| 1851 | George Williams Collins is born in Tiverton, RI |
| 1852 (abt.) | Michael Tully Marries Bridget Lyons (unknown location) |
| 1854 | Eliza Tully is born in Fall River, MA |
| 1857 (abt.) | Michael Tully dies of illness in New York City |
| 1861 | Bridget Lyons Tully Marries John Campbell in Fall River, MA |

t

- 1864 George W. Ashley Marries Azuba Collins in Taunton, MA
- 1872 Eliza Tully Marries George William Collins in Tiverton, RI
- 1872 John “Edward” Collins is born in Fall River, MA
- 1874 George William Collins dies of Cholera in Fall River, MA
- 1874 George Thomas Collins is born in Fall River, MA
- 1880 American Vaudeville Begins
- 1880 Minnie W. Collins is born in Dartmouth, MA
- 1880 Wabash, Indiana becomes the first electrically lit city in the USA
- 1880 Widowed Eliza Collins moves with Minnie and John “Edward” Collins into the Campbell Home in Fall River, MA
- 1885 Eliza Collins places first son John “Edward Collins with her parents in Fall River, MA then places second son George Thomas Collins with his grandparents in Tiverton, RI
- 1885 United States President Chester A. Arthur dedicates the Washington Monument
Statue of Liberty arrives in New York Harbor
- 1885 George W. Ashley abandons wife Azuba and moves with Eliza and Minnie Collins to Tremont Street in Boston, MA
- 1884 (abt.) Eliza and Minnie Collins change their last name to Ashley
- 1885 Minnie Ashley gains attention in Boston for her singing and acting ability while being tutored by a local dance instructor
- 1886 The “Ashley Family” relocates to the Chinatown district in Boston.
- 1888 George W. Ashley dies of disease in Westfield Hospital, MA
- 1889 Eliza and Minnie Ashley move to Boston’s South End near the Roxbury Line.
- 1889 Benjamin Harrison is sworn in as the 23rd President of the USA
- 1890 Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh moves to Auver-sur-Oise near Paris
- 1892 Lizzie Borden accused of ax murder of her mother and father in Fall River, MA
- 1895 Minnie Ashley sings in the chorus of the play “1492”
- 1895 Jack Dempsey, American heavyweight boxer is born.
- 1896 Minnie joins the Museum Company of Boston and lands a second chorus role in “El Capitan” working as understudy to Edna Wallace Hopper.
- 1896 Minnie Ashley marries NYC actor William H. Sheldon (Jones) in Baltimore, Maryland
- 1899 Minnie Ashley Sheldon takes lead role in the “Greek Slave” that is performed in New York and

becomes an overnight sensation.

- 1899 Minnie and William Sheldon (Jones) separate and Minnie moves with her mother Eliza Ashley to Great Neck, NY
- 1900 Modern Art begins to take root in USA
- 1900 Minnie Ashley Sheldon begins to experience eye problems from repeated exposure to heated lime lights while on stage
- 1901 Minnie Sheldon uses the name Minnie Ashley only for stage performances
- 1901 Minnie Sheldon frequently rooms at the Hotel Hatfield while working in NYC
- 1902 During "A Country Girl" performance in NY Minnie (Sheldon) Ashley meets William A. Chanler
- 1903 Minnie Sheldon divorces William Sheldon and changes her name to Beatrice Winthrop Ashley then marries William A. Chanler
- 1903 Beatrice Chanler moves into the Chanler residence in Great Neck, New York
- 1904 Eliza Ashley moves into studio apartment on West 67th in Manhattan, NY
- 1904 Beatrice Chanler gives birth to a son, William, Jr.
- 1905 Theodore Roosevelt is sworn in as President of the USA
- 1907 Beatrice Chanler gives birth to second son Sidney
- 1909 Eliza Ashley gets injured in automobile accident. Her chauffeur is found at fault and charged
- 1909 Beatrice and William Chanler agree to an amicable separation of marriage.
- 1909 Beatrice Chanler becomes apprentice to sculptor George B. Barnard
- 1910 Beatrice Chanler rents studio space for her sculpting at 141 East 19th Street, Manhattan
- 1910 First filmed version of Mary Shelly's Frankenstein is published
- 1911 Beatrice Chanler exhibits in the Roman Art Exposition and at the 106th Annual Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
- 1912 Vanderbilt Hotel commissioned a 40-foot bas relief frieze by Beatrice Chanler for lobby
- 1913 Beatrice Chanler visits estranged husband William in France while he is recovering from gunshot wound to his leg.
- 1914 World War One begins
- 1914 (abt.) John "Edward" Collins and mother Eliza Ashley move together into an apartment on 207 East 19th Street, Manhattan
- 1915 William A. Chanler has injured leg amputated and fights addiction
- 1915 Charlie Chaplin's film The Tramp is released

1917	Beatrice Chanler became active in World Relief organizations in France
1920	Jazz Era begins in USA
1922	Novel written about prosperous Long Islanders of 1922, <i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald
1934	William A. Chanler dies in France
1934	Beatrice Chanler publishes <i>Cleopatra's Daughter: Queen of Mauritania</i> .
1938	Beatrice Chanler moves into Fred F. French Building on East 54 th Street, Manhattan
1938	Germany invades Poland. World War Two begins
1939	Eliza Ashley dies in New York Neurological Institute in New York City. Buried at Oak Grove Cemetery Fall River, MA
1940	John "Edward" Collins, Beatrice Chanler's half-brother dies in his apartment on 207 East 19 th Street, Manhattan, NY
1941	Japanese attack US Navy at Pearl Harbor. US enters war.
1945	Japan surrenders to US General Douglas MacArthur and the Allies.
1946	Beatrice (Minnie) Chanler dies aboard train in route from New York to Portland Maine. Buried at Trinity Church Cemetery in New York

