There is some circumstantial evidence indicating William Frederick Hansell is a son of Thomas Hansell and Mary Stiner. That would make William Frederick Hansell a brother of James Stiner Hansell (father of Ella Hansell Lippincott, great grandmother to Bob and Lida).

But circumstantial evidence doesn’t cut it in genealogy circles, so the search goes on for corroborative evidence.

William Frederick Hansell (1813-1881) was a silk and wool dyer with his factory/home at 24 N. 5th Street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

William Frederick Hansell had two children. The first, Thomas, had a short career as a druggist and a shorter marriage. Thomas married Johanna Taylor on May 29, 1863 and died the next day, age 22, of consumption.

The second child, William, married Annie Clear in 1870, at which time the census listed his occupation as a printer. Annie’s father was Uriah Clear, a dyer in West Philadelphia (a newspaper reported he was a foreman at Hunter’s Mills). Annie’s brothers, Samuel and Edgar, were printers and she had two sisters, Mary and Bertha.

Lots of dyers and printers here. In this time period, I believe the occupation printer means a printer of cloth.

One day while searching Google Books, up pops “Proprietary Capitalism, The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800-1885” by Philip Scranton (Cambridge University Press 1983) with a reference to William F. Hansell, dyer. One inter-library loan later, I learned, among many other things, the importance of family networks in the textile industry in Philadelphia. So I went back to 1870 marriage of William Hansell and Annie Clear to see if the Uriah Clear family connection could, in any way, lead me to more information about William Frederick Hansell.

At this point, investigations took a 180 degree turn from the scholarly work of Scranton to the yellow press of the 1880s.
THE DIME MUSEUM

“The northwest corner of Philadelphia’s Ninth and Arch Streets originally was the home of Colonel Joseph H. Wood’s Museum, which opened in 1869. The collection contained many curious objects as well as a menagerie. But Wood’s museum was known primarily for its splendid dramatic productions, performed in its large auditorium. On September 3, 1883, the museum was bought by two showmen, W.D. Hagar and W.T. Campbell who transformed it into a more distinctively Barnumesque institution, called Hagar and Campbell’s New Dime Museum. But Hagar and Campbell’s efforts were short-lived and in 1885 the museum passed into the hands of Charles A. Brandenburg and Company, and became the famous Ninth and Arch Museum.

The first floor was similar to the modern notion of a penny arcade, the second floor housed the menagerie, and the third floor exhibited the human anomalies. Performances were presented in the Theatorium.”

“Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America” by Andrea Stulman Dennett.
Wood's old Museum, northwest corner Ninth and Arch streets, has passed from the hands of the Barnum syndicate into those of Hagar Campbell, who have controlled the side show privileges with Barnum's Circo for some years. They are altering and improving the interior, to open September 3 a dime museum.

By September 1, 1883, the Museum was ready to open. The following advertisement was found in the Philadelphia Inquirer.

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Engle relatives note advertisement for Engleside Hotel!

Everyone note The Living Skeleton among the Countless Curiosities at the Dime Museum.
The Dime Museum,

Increasing popularity attends the new Dime Museum enterprise at Ninth and Arch streets. The special attractions this week are the Ulms, the melodious Tyrolean Warblers, who are always listened to with delight; Prof. Logrando, who exemplifies the Black Art in a style worthy of Cagliostro; and Master Harry Black, whose wooden family are considered the most intelligent and amusing blockheads going.

The exhibition is intended expressly to please the ladies and children, and is free from anything that can offend the most fastidious taste. The stage attractions are all first class, and the Chinese Dwarf, White Moor, Giant Boy and Cupid (fam) Fan Child, with the views and curiosities, not forgetting the monkeys and happy family, must be seen to be appreciated.

9-11-1883 Philadelphia Inquirer
Things are off to a good start at the Dime Museum, but a doomed love affair was evolving on the third floor. Bertha Clear, youngest child of Uriah Clear, marries the Living Skeleton.

Married a Skeleton.

PHILADELPHIA, Pa., Jan. 16.—On Monday, at the residence of the groom, No. 909 Arch street, J. D. Garrison was married to Bertha E. Clear, of Haddonfield. The man is a living skeleton, one of the most famous of American monstrosities, and the bride a girl of 17. Ever since Garrison has been exhibiting his pipestem arms and legs before Philadelphia audiences it has been noticed that one of the regular visitors to the museum was a young woman with rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes, and a Gainsborough hat. She would have attracted no attention, possibly, had she not invariably ignored all the other attractions and walked directly over to where the skeleton sat on a high platform. There she would stand and gaze from 1 o’clock until 5, and nothing seemed to please her more than to hear people remark on the exceeding thinness of Mr. Garrison’s arms and the total absence of anything like calves to his legs. As to the living skeleton himself, his bone-intrenched heart throbbed wildly against the wall of ribs every time the young woman appeared. Their courtship has lasted four weeks. The skeleton is worth about $50,000.

On the same day, the news was reported on the west coast:

The daily museum celebrity known as “The Living Skeleton,” on Monday, married, at Philadelphia, a beautiful and accomplished young lady, who unaccountably fell in love with him. Her friends, who are wealthy, are of course indignant.

The Daily Alta, California
A Living Skeleton

I could not find a photo of James B. Garrison, but here is information about a fellow called The Original Living Skeleton found at humanmarvels.com:

Isaac W. Sprague was born on May 21, 1841 in East Bridgewater, Massachusetts. According to one of his early cabinet cards, he was a normal and active child until the age of twelve – when he began to rapidly lose weight.

His concerned parents, alarmed by his weight lost, forbade young Isaac from high energy activities. Despite this, the boy continued to loose weight and his now terrified parents took Isaac to the best doctors they could find. Unfortunately the doctors were also baffled and Isaac continued to wither away despite a healthy appetite.

As an adult, Isaac apprenticed under his father as a cobbler and later worked as a grocer. However, as his emaciation continued, Isaac found his energy depleted. It soon became too difficult for Isaac to continue working – it was then that the world of sideshow came calling.

In 1865, during a visit to a local carnival a promoter spotted Isaac and offered him a job. At first, the young man refused. But he soon realized that he could earn a good living by capitalizing on his looks. He began touring as ‘The Living Skeleton’ and quickly rose in popularity. In less than a year he auditioned for P. T. Barnum and was hired on a salary of $80 a week.

His career with Barnum was brief as Barnum’s American Museum burned down for the second time in 1868. The skeletal Isaac barely managed to escape the museum alive – following his escape, he left sideshow for awhile.

During his premature retirement, he met and married a Miss Tamar Moore and had three healthy sons. In dire straights due to poor financial decisions, he resumed touring with Barnum and others. His financial problems, and perhaps a gambling addiction, continued and ultimately resulted in Isaac W. Sprague dying in poverty on January 5, 1887 in Chicago.

While his weight varied over his career, an official measurement was taken by a physician when Isaac was forty-four. At a height of five feet and six inches, Isaac weighed only forty-three pounds.

Despite numerous medical exams during his lifetime, his condition was never officially identified. He was labeled as having ‘an extreme case of progressive muscular atrophy’. As a result Isaac was required to eat constantly. In fact, he was well known to carry a flask of sweetened dairy milk around his neck – drinking from it to from time to time to keep himself alive and conscious.

Believe it or not, the ‘Living Skeleton’ came to be a fairly common sideshow attraction. In fact, it was not uncommon, in a feat of inspired promotion, for a sideshow Skeleton Man to marry the local Fat Lady in an extravagant ceremony. The local press was, of course, always invited to attend.

Image: cabinet card from Sprague’s stint with Barnum, circa 1868.
Uriah Clear starts proceedings for Bertha’s divorce

Philadephia, Jan. 18.—Bertha Clear, the girl who married Garrison, the living skeleton at the Museum on Monday, is now a matron in her parents’ house in West Philadelphia, and her recovery is doubtful. The day after the marriage she became very nervous and excitable, and at last requested leave to go to her father’s to get her clothes. The skeleton demurred at first, but at length allowed her to go. On the way she met a relative who had read of the marriage in the newspapers and was seeking her. She was kindly received by her parents, but soon became delirious, and could be heard screaming: “Oh, take him away; take him out of my sight.” She is attended by skillful physicians, who pronounce her condition critical. Her father expresses himself as horrified at what has happened, and will begin proceedings for a divorce, alleging that Bertha has been of unsound mind at periods for several months.

Bertha’s Brothers, Samuel and Edgar, rumored to seek revenge

Philadelphia Inquirer 1-21-1884

The Skeleton’s Bride

Philadelphia Inquirer 1-21-1884
THE "LIVING SKELETON" WANTS HIS BRIDE.

HE PROPOSES LEGAL MEASURES TO SECURE POSSESSION OF HER.

PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 28.—As an offset to the divorce and equity proceedings to have the marriage of Bertha A. Clear, otherwise Garrison, and J. B. Garrison, the skeleton at the Dime Museum, declared null and void, James H. Heverin, counsel for the husband, proposes to file a petition for a writ of habeas corpus in order to obtain possession of his wife. The allegations are that their marriage was a love match; that the courtship was witnessed by the fat woman and the Cicas- sian girl, all of whom counsel proposes to produce in court as witnesses when the writ shall be allowed and a return made of it.

The skeleton bridegroom also declares that his wife is desirous of living with him; that they were married on Monday, and that his wife on Tuesday morning went to visit her family, and returned and told him that her mother was very much annoyed at it, and asked him what he should do, and he told her to return and see her mother, and since that time he has seen nothing of his wife; that he is satisfied that the story of his wife’s insanity has been set forth simply to cover the action of the parents in restraining his wife and preventing her from returning to him, and that she is willing and desirous of living with him.

THE SKELETON AND HIS BRIDE.

PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 30.—On the application of counsel for J. B. Garrison, the so-called "living skeleton," Judge Thayer to-day granted a writ of habeas corpus, commanding Uriah Clear, the father of Mrs. Bertha Garrison, to produce his son-in-law’s bride in court, the allegations being that she is desirous of returning to her husband and that she is being restrained of her liberty.
The Skeleton's Bride

Fat Woman and Circassian Girl Witness Marriage

We all know about the fat lady, but I had to research the Circassian woman:

“Barnum put his first Circassian Beauty, Zalumma Agra (Star of the East) on display in 1865 and promoted her as an example of racial purity. As in many of his exhibits, Barnum publicized Zalumma Agra's story and mixed scientific theories of the origins of the Caucasian race with titillating suggestions of harem life and a heroic rescue from certain slavery. More likely Barnum hired a local actress to play the part of a Circassian woman and Zalumma Agra was followed a series of such performers.”

“The Circassian Girl was a self-made freak. Circassians were introduced as an exhibition in the early 1860's and by the late 1870's every sideshow and dime museum had one to exhibit. John Greenwood, Jr., an employee of P.T. Barnum has been given credit for "discovering" The Circassian Beauty, on one of his freak expeditions. This act consisted of a beautiful woman in Middle Eastern style clothing, with frizzy hair and an exotic name. Zaluma Agra fit the bill and was exhibited at Barnum's Museum for years. This poster has been created from the cover of an 1873 pamphlet sold by Zaluma Agra at Barnum's Museum and has been hand silk-screened in four colors on heavy cover stock.”

Source: Kunhardt Collection

See end of this story for newspaper report of the demise of a Fat Woman in Philadelphia.
THE LIVING SKELETON.

THE WIFE OF THE AFFLICTED CURiosity REFUSES TO RETURN TO HIM.

PHILADELPHIA, Penn., Feb. 1.—Mrs. Bettie E. Garrison, the wife of the “Living Skeleton,” left her bony partner a few weeks ago and returned to her father’s house. The skeleton sued out a writ of habeas corpus for the possession of his wife, and the case came up before Judge Biddle in the old court-house this morning. As early as 9 o’clock the court-house was surrounded by a crowd of people clamorous for admission. The court officers and policemen let the women in first. Nearly 200 girls and women were in the seats when the masculine spectators were permitted to enter the room. In five minutes the place was jammed with people and still the crowd outside increased in size. Mrs. Garrison and her father sat in a corner near the bench. She is young and pretty. Her head, however, was so covered in the folds of a green veil that her features could not be seen. Two carriages were hauled into the yard. The lightning calculator, a dwarf, jumped nimbly out of one carriage and was swallowed up in the crowd. While the police were trying to make way for the dwarf, a stout young man carried what appeared to be a bundle of overcoats into the court-room and placed it in a chair. It was the skeleton. The wraps were taken off him, and he sat up smiling. He used his left knee as a peg upon which to hang his silk hat.

Mrs. Garrison’s lawyer told Judge Biddle that his client wished to state that she was not restrained by her parents, but was living with them voluntarily and did not wish to rejoin the skeleton. This being the state of affairs the writ was discharged. When the skeleton was told that his wife did not want to return to him he said: “Well, it can’t be helped, but I’m certain she would come around all right if her people would let her alone.”

The New York Times
Published: February 2, 1884
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NOT DEPRIV ED OF HER LIBERTY

Garrison, the Skeleton, Renounced in Court by His Bride

Long before the opening of the old court house yesterday a crowd had collected in the street and in the
court yard in anticipation of witnessing the habeas corpus proceedings brought by J B Garrison, the 54-
 pound skeleton of the Dime Museum against his father in law, Uriah Clear, to determine the question
whether Bertha Garrison, the skeleton’s bride, was being restrained of her liberty by the respondent.

A number of ladies were permitted to enter the court room before the arrival of the Judge, and shortly be-
fore ten o’clock the doors were open to the lawyers, suitors in other cases and a “select number of sight-
seers.” Of the Dime Museum party the lightning calculator, a dwarfish individual, was the first to arrive.
When the ordinary business of the court was being heard a carriage drove up to the Sixth street entrance
and the skeleton was carried tenderly into the court room by an attendant and placed in one of the Tip-
stave’s high chairs. In the meanwhile Counsellor Shields had entered the court room by the other door,
followed by Uriah Clear and his daughter, who was heavily veiled.

When the Fat Woman and the Circassian Beauty drove up and alighted it was with difficulty that ingress
was made for the “mountain of flesh” and her companion.

“Handsome Jack” a tipstave, however, saw them safely handed within the temple of justice and gave the
Fat Lady a bench all to herself. While the Lightning Calculator was calculating how many people were
present the counsel in the case suggested that the case be disposed of as soon as possible in order to
scatter the crowd on outside.

Mr. Shields then said “I have a return to the writ if your Honor please,” and then read as follows “Uriah
Clear, the defendant in the within writ, respectfully submits to your Honor Bertha E. Clear, named in the
writ Bertha E. Garrison, is an infant, aged eighteen years, and the daughter of the defendant, that the said
Bertha is not restrained of her liberty, nor imprisoned by the defendant, but she now and has heretofore
been cared for and supported by the defendant at his home, without illegal or improper restraint or du-
ress. Nevertheless the said Uriah Clear has here, before your Honor, the body of the said Bertha E.
Clear.”

“I will state to your Honor,” resumed the counsellor, “that the daughter stated to me that she is not re-
strained of her liberty and that she is prepared to say so to the court.”

“If the counsel says that,” replied Mr. Heverin, who represented the complainant, “I suppose that ends the
case.”

“Are you satisfied that she says so or do you wish her sworn,” inquired Judge Biddle.

“Your Honor can readily understand the surroundings in this case,” said Mr. Shields, “and in order to save
the young woman’s feelings I suggest that she be questioned privately.” The young woman was then
brought to the side bar and was questioned by his Honor and the counsel in the case. She said that she
was not restrained of her liberty and that she desired to go with her father and not with Garrison. An entry
to this effect was made upon the records and all parties in the suit left the court house. While the pro-
ceedings were going on the skeleton was apparently an uninterested spectator. Afterward when Mr.
Shields was asked why the young lady had married Garrison, he said that there was no doubt that she
was crazy.
EPILOGUE
The Living Skeleton Dies Four Months After Marriage

Died from Grief

Lowell Massachusetts Courier 5-14-1884

Died from Pulmonary Condition

Philadelphia Inquirer 5-10-1884
I don't know if this is the Fat Woman who witnessed the marriage of Bertha and the Living Skeleton.
The Dime Museum Evolved to the famous ninth and arch museum

The Dime Museum continued on, though in 1885 it was taken over by Charles A. Brandenburg and Company and became the famous Ninth and Arch Museum.

[Image of Mr. C. A. Bradenburg's letterhead]

Philadelphia Inquirer 2-12-1885

Sporting and Theatrical Journal 3-22-1884
circushistory.org/publications
Uriah Clear died, a few years after this episode, on June 28, 1885, of kidney disease. His wife, Ann Eliza, a dressmaker, passed on January 15, 1907. Uriah Clear was the enumerator for his neighborhood in the 1880 census. His sheets are beautifully handwritten and he made note of the time it took to make his visits.

The brothers Samuel and Edgar left their printing occupations and took up other work. Samuel married, worked as a clerk with US Customs, had two children, William E. and Mary Gertrude, and died in 1904. Edgar became a detective with the Philadelphia Police Department. Edgar won fame by capturing the kidnapper of little Freddie Muth (young child kidnapped by an embezzler in need of money). Edgar married Elizabeth and had a daughter Henrietta (Edna) and possibly a son named Edgar. Edgar Clear dropped dead of a heart attack on the sidewalk in front of his house in 1913.

The sister Mary married James Bates, a carpenter; they had three children, only one living to adulthood.

The oldest sister Sarah (who called herself Annie after she left home) is the wife of William Hansell, son of William Frederick Hansell.

And Bertha? We know indirectly that she was alive in 1900. Bertha’s mother, Ann Eliza Clear, reported on the census five children, with four living. Annie, William Hansell’s wife, is the deceased child having died at age 36 in 1894. I searched every which way but could not find marriage or death certificates or any other evidence of Bertha’s life after her marriage to the Living Skeleton.

And did any of this get me closer to knowing if William Frederick Hansell is the son of Thomas Hansell? No.

Nancy Ettensperger
January 2011