

Sources, Information, and Evidence

Name: Melanie Self

Part I: What was the identity of Leona Bigger’s father, who was also the brother of Minnie Blair and likely born in Michigan in the late 1800s?

Part II: Sources

Source 1 description: The Bigger Family History ¹	
Type of source: Authored Narrative	Reasoning: The Bigger Family History contains data compiled from multiple records covering years 1856-1996. Because the contents of the family history derived from a variety of sources, the record is considered a narrative. The author’s typed entry from 1996 noted “I would like to... thank all... that gathered information about our family. Thank You! To Vivian (Sis) Tobin who helped... by scanning hard copies. Thank you to Mom – Norma Bigger who spent many years calling and writing to people... and recording the information over two decades.” The author revealed that the information gathered relied somewhat on memories and hearsay, which are also characteristics of a narrative. The writer included information from informants that may not have been accurate. This is especially emphasized because it was written after the events occurred.
Source 2 description: Marriage Record for Minnie Blair ²	
Type of source: Derivative	Reasoning: The county clerk kept a register of all Shiawassee County marriages in order by date. The entry was not completed at the time of the event. All entries were in the same handwriting and signed by the county clerk attesting “I hereby certify that the above Return Of Marriages is a correct Transcript from the Records of this Office.” The source is considered a derivative because it is a transcription of the original record, recorded after the event, and written in the same hand as the rest of the entries.
Source 3 description: 1900 U.S. Census for Frank Blair ³	
Type of source: Original	Reasoning: A digitized image is as useful as the original when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The image shows the same information as would be discovered when directly examining the source.

¹ The Bigger Family History, p. 32; photocopy privately held by Melanie Self, 26411 222nd Pl SE, Maple Valley, WA, 2021. This record was supplied to Elliott Self in 2019. The creator was Toni [?], daughter of Norma Bigger and sister to Vivian Tobin in 1996, location unknown.

² Michigan Department of Community Health, Division of Vital Records and Health Statistics, vol. 5:94, Alexander Bigger-Minnie Blair, 25 December 1911; “Michigan, U.S., Marriage Records, 1867-1952,” online database with images, *Ancestry.com* (https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/9093/images/41326_342375-00560 : accessed 5 January 2021).

³ 1900 U.S. census, Bay County, Michigan, population schedule, Garfield Township, p. 83 (penned), dwelling 6, family 6, Frank Blair; “United States Census, 1900,” online database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-DYDF-91?cc=1325221&wc=9BQP-16F%3A1030554301%2C1032712101%2C1032794901> : accessed 13 January 2021); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 701.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The images are in their original sequence.⁴ <p>NARA census records meet these criteria.</p>
Source 4 description: 1930 U.S. Census for Henry Blair⁵	
Type of source: Original	Reasoning: The original census enumeration sheets were microfilmed by the Census Bureau in the 1940s; after which the original sheets were destroyed. The microfilmed census is available in rolls from the National Archives and Records Administration . ⁶ NARA microfilm is as close to the original census as possible, and therefore the digitized images created from microfilm are considered an original source.
Source 5 description: Inmate Case File for Henry Blair⁷	
Type of source: Original	Reasoning: The file includes images of the original papers held at the National Archives in Kansas City, Missouri. The 56-page file holds sentencing details, correspondence logs, telegrams, family composition, and intake/discharge notes. The papers, colored beige, pink or blue, were in various sizes and stages of distress. Boilerplate forms had typed inserts, with some words crossed out and replaced with words handwritten in red, blue, or black ink. Some forms had blue letterhead with original ink signatures. Correspondence was recorded on beige ledger paper with blue and red lines. The handwriting was not consistent, giving evidence that many people were handling these records and recording events in real time.

⁴ Thomas W. Jones, "Reasoning from Evidence," Elizabeth Shown Mills ed., *Professional Genealogy: Preparation, Practice & Standards* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2018), p 270.

⁵ 1930 U.S. census, Leavenworth County, Kansas, population schedule, Fort Leavenworth, p. 22A (penned), penitentiary inmate, Henry Blair; "United States Census, 1930," online database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9R4D-89F?cc=1810731&wc=QZF9-GVH%3A648806101%2C649975801%2C649988801%2C1589282389> : accessed 18 January 2021); citing NARA record group 129, Records of the Bureau of Prisons.

⁶ "1900 United States Census," digital images, *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1900_United_States_census&oldid=1026711836 : accessed June 18, 2021).

⁷ Henry Blair inmate no. 33127 (1929-1933), U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas; Records of the Bureau of Prisons, Record Group 129, Case Files, 1895-1952, National Archives Identifier: 571125; digitized reproduction provided by The National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, Missouri to Melanie Self, 26411 222nd PI SE, Maple Valley, WA, 98038, May 2021.

Source 1: The Bigger Family History

Information items from source	Informant	Information: primary, secondary, or undetermined?	Information Category Reasoning	Evidence: direct, indirect, or negative?	Evidence Category Reasoning
Leona Bigger was adopted	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but provides a clue when combined with other information.
Leona Bigger was the daughter of Minnie Blair's brother	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the question, but supplies the next logical step in research: Who was/were the brother(s) of Minnie Blair?
Leona Bigger was married on 25, August 1945	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but infers an age range and approximate birthdate for Leona Bigger that can be used in further research.

Source 2: Marriage Record for Minnie Blair

Information items from source	Informant	Information: primary, secondary, or undetermined?	Information Category Reasoning	Evidence: direct, indirect, or negative?	Evidence Category Reasoning
Minnie Blair, born 1892 in Kaw Kawlen Township, Bay County, Michigan, was age 19 at the time she was married	John E. Somers, minister	Secondary	The informant gathered information likely provided by Minnie, who heard about the circumstances of her birth through someone else. If an informant did not witness the event, it is considered secondary information. Technically, the informant is reporting secondary information based	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but does supply a timeframe and location for further research.

			on information already considered secondary.		
Minnie Blair married Alexander Bigger on 25 December, 1911 in Owasso, Michigan	John E. Somers, minister	Primary	The informant was an eyewitness to the event.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question. Alexander Bigger shared the same surname as adopted Leona. There is a possible link to explore.
Minnie Blair's parents were Frank Blair and Margaret Roark	John E. Somers, minister	Secondary	The informant most likely did not know the identities of Frank Blair or Margaret Roark, or their relationship to Minnie. He heard the information from someone else, making it secondary information.	Indirect	Provides a clue when combined with the statement "Leona Bigger was the daughter of Minnie Blair's brother" in The Bigger Family History. Knowing the parents' names provides direction for future research.
Marriage witnessed by Florence Blair and Alvin Bigger of Owasso, Michigan	John E. Somers, minister	Primary	The informant was an eyewitness to Florence and Alvin signing the certificate.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question, but the names add to Minnie's FAN network and could supply a clue.

Source 3: 1900 U.S. Census for Frank Blair

Information items from source	Informant	Information: primary, secondary, or undetermined?	Information Category Reasoning	Evidence: direct, indirect, or negative?	Evidence Category Reasoning
Household: Frank Blair - age 40, Maggie Blair - age 32, Robert H. Blair – age 12, Francis Blair – age 10, Minnie Blair – age 8, Lewis Blair – age 5, Flossie Blair – age 2	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but provides the names of three of Minnie's brothers. One of them could be Leona Bigger's father.
The family lived in District 49, Garfield,	William R. Stevens, enumerator	Primary	The informant had firsthand knowledge of the location being enumerated.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but does provide a timeframe

Bay County, Michigan in 1900					and location for further research.
Head of Household Frank Blair was born in Canada in 1860, his wife Maggie was born in Michigan in 1868, and all five children were born in Michigan between 1888-1897	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but is consistent with information found on Minnie Blair's marriage record.

Source 4: 1930 U.S. Census for Henry Blair

Information items from source	Informant	Information: primary, secondary, or undetermined?	Information Category Reasoning	Evidence: direct, indirect, or negative?	Evidence Category Reasoning
Location: Leavenworth Prison, Leavenworth, Kansas	Don E. Winterburg, enumerator	Primary	The informant had firsthand knowledge of the location being enumerated.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but could offer a possible explanation for adoption if Henry Blair was Leona's father.
Inmate: Henry Blair, 42-year-old white, married male	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but is consistent with the 1900 census.
Henry Blair's birthplace was in Michigan	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but is consistent with the 1900 census.
Henry Blair's father was born in Canada and his mother was born in Michigan	Unknown	Undetermined	The informant is unknown, making the information undetermined.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but correlates with information on the 1900 census.

Source 5: Inmate Case File for Henry Blair

Information items from source	Informant	Information: primary, secondary, or undetermined?	Information Category Reasoning	Evidence: direct, indirect, or negative?	Evidence Category Reasoning
Henry Blair's sentence began in 1929	[?] McCoulough, witness	Primary	The informant reported from eyewitness experience.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but could offer a possible explanation for adoption if Henry Blair was Leona's father.
Nativity of father: Canada Nativity of mother: Michigan	Henry Blair	Secondary	The informant was reporting information he had been told by someone else.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question but is consistent with the 1900 and 1930 censuses.
Henry Blair was Catholic	Henry Blair	Primary	The informant reported from his own experience.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question, but an answer could appear when combined with another information item.
Henry Blair's father Frank and mother Margaret lived in Clio, Michigan	Henry Blair	Primary	The informant was eyewitness to the identity and residence of his parents.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question, but the names, location and relationships correlate with information on the 1900 census.
Henry Blair was married in 1912 but separated from wife Bertena Blair. They had seven children aged 4-17: Robert Henry Jr, Bernice, Edith, Austin, Mildred, Adeline, and Leona	Henry Blair	Primary	The informant had firsthand knowledge of his wife and kids.	Direct	Directly answers the research question by naming Leona as one of Robert Henry Blair's children. Robert Henry Blair was one of Minnie Blair's brothers.
Son Robert Henry Blair Jr. died 11 February 1931	Mrs. M.A. Youmans	primary	The informant sent information via telegram immediately after Robert Henry Blair Jr. died of	Indirect	Does not answer the research question, but the names add to Robert Henry Blair's FAN

			tuberculosis in the hospital, indicating she was present for the event, or nearby.		network and could supply a clue.
Henry Blair deserted his wife and children two years prior to sentencing, and was a menace to society	Arthur J. Tuttle, United States District Judge	secondary	The informant based this information on testimony he heard.	Indirect	Does not answer the research question, but places Henry's separation from wife and children at about 1927.

Part III: Source Assessment

1900 U.S. Census for Frank Blair - Analysis of reliability:

The 1900 census was a one-of-a-kind document that captured circumstances at one moment in history. The questions focused on the structure and makeup of each individual family in a way earlier censuses had not.⁸ The original sheets for the enumeration of this census were microfilmed in the 1940s by the Census Bureau. When this was done, the bureau destroyed the original sheets. However, the information as it was recorded is still available on microfilm at genealogy research centers around the country, as well as at the National Archives.⁹ Since a paper copy no longer exists, the digital image of the census is considered an original.

Trained enumerators recorded census data on 19 ½" x 18 5/8" paper printed on two sides with space for 50 entries on each side. The Frank Blair household, recorded as dwelling six, family six on page one of 13, lived in District 49, Garfield Township, Bay County, Michigan as of June 1, 1900.

The enumerator presumably had no prior knowledge of the people being reported. It was unlikely there was any bias that would lead to misreporting. In addition, enumerators were closely supervised during the 1900 census. "Street books" were used to record work achieved on a daily basis. Enumerators used individual census slips for obtaining a correct return for any person absent at the time of the enumerator's visit. Additionally, "absent family" schedules were used for securing a complete record for any person living within the enumeration district, but temporarily absent.¹⁰

The census was timely, in good condition, and consistently penned by one individual that used legible and orderly handwriting to record entries in order of visitation. The 1900 census did not require the enumerator to identify the informant. Because the informant is unknown, there is no way of knowing if the reporter had first or secondhand knowledge of the information conveyed. The classification for the census information is undetermined. Undetermined information found in the census is still considered relevant evidence. The census is a reliable source, but not necessarily accurate.

⁸ Will Money maker, "The 1900 US Federal Census: A Closer Look," *Ancestral Findings* (<https://ancestralfindings.com/the-1900-us-federal-census-a-closer-look-2/> : accessed June 18, 2021).

⁹ Money maker, "The 1900 US Federal Census," *Ancestral Findings*.

¹⁰ Dennis Partridge, "Understanding the 1900 Census Questions," *Access Genealogy* (<https://accessgenealogy.com/america/understanding-the-1900-census-questions.htm> . : accessed June 18, 2021).

1900 U.S. Census for Frank Blair - Analysis of background context:

Garfield is one of 14 townships in Bay County, Michigan. Formed from parts of Midland, Saginaw, and Arenac Counties on 20 April 1857, it was known as the “sugar beet belt” of the U.S.¹¹ The allure of abundant natural resources brought many immigrants to Bay County in the late 19th century. Frank Blair - a white Canadian immigrant, worked the farmland he owned, consistent with other heads of household in Garfield Township. Canadians were the largest immigrant group in Michigan throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. They were usually Catholics of British or Irish descent.¹² Twenty-four percent of the 605 residents in Garfield were born outside of the U.S., but almost all (97%) spoke English. Very few attended school – of those, the highest level achieved was the eighth grade.¹³ This was a consistent demographic throughout the document. Frank Blair was reported to be uneducated but could read and write, like most others in the surrounding community.¹⁴

The three sons in the Blair household had vastly different opportunities than previous generations. As young Irish Americans, they were not exposed to “Irish Need Not Apply” sentiment prevalent throughout the last half of the 19th century. The beginning of the 20th century saw innovations meant to ease work and travel burdens. Unfortunately, some rural farmers did not have means to buy expensive machinery and “faced hard times as technology and increasing production led to more competition and falling prices for farm products.”¹⁵ Burgeoning manufacturing jobs enticed rural workers to leave farm life for jobs in metro areas. This was especially true in Michigan, where Olds, Ford and GM started automobile production.¹⁶ Other car manufacturers followed suit and a boom was on the horizon. Automobile assembly and associated manufacturing soon dominated Detroit, and the economy of Michigan.¹⁷

Frank’s two daughters had new opportunities as well. Michigan was at the forefront of a progressive movement. Females were leading initiatives to care for the rapidly growing population, specifically voter’s rights, sanitation, and housing. At the same time women-led suffrage and temperance movements were taking shape. As adults Minnie and Flossie Blair would be part of the first group of women to legally vote in U.S. elections.¹⁸

¹¹ Capt. Augustus Gansser, *History of Bay County Michigan and Representative Citizens* (Bay County, Michigan Genealogy Trails History Group, 1905), chapter 10; digital images, [Genealogy Trails \(http://genealogytrails.com/mich/bay/books/History_of_Bay_ch10.html\)](http://genealogytrails.com/mich/bay/books/History_of_Bay_ch10.html) : accessed June 20, 2021).

¹² “Migration to Southeast Michigan,” digital images, *Detroit Historical Society* (<https://detroithistorical.org/sites/default/files/lessonPlans/MIGRATION%20TO%20SOUTHEAST%20MICHIGAN.pdf>) : accessed June 20, 2021).

¹³ 1900 U.S. census, Bay Co., Michigan, pop. Sch., p. 83 (penned), dwell. 6, fam. 6, Frank Blair.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “American Life in the Late 19th Century,” digital images, *Legends of America* (<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/life-late-19th-century>) : accessed June 16, 2021).

¹⁶ “The History of Michigan’s Big Three Automakers,” digital images, *Around Michigan* (<https://aroundmichigan.com/travel-resources/history-michigans-big-three-automakers/>) : accessed June 16, 2021).

¹⁷ “History of Michigan,” digital images, *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Michigan&oldid=1026036741) : accessed May 31, 2021).

¹⁸ “Woman Suffrage in the Midwest,” digital images, *U.S. National Park Service* (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/woman-suffrage-in-the-midwest.htm>) : accessed June 23, 2021).

1900 U.S. Census for Frank Blair - Analysis of information relevance and soundness of presumptions:

What was the identity of Leona Bigger's father, who was also the brother of Minnie Blair and likely born in Michigan in the late 1800s?

Identifying Minnie Blair's family of origin was key to finding Leona Bigger's potential father. The 1900 census provided crucial information on Minnie's family makeup, especially when correlated with evidence found on Minnie's 1911 marriage record.

Minnie Blair was married at age 19 in 1911. Her marriage record noted that she was born in Kawkawlin Township, Bay County, Michigan in 1892. The document also listed Minnie's father as Frank Blair, born in Canada, and mother, Margaret Roark, born in Michigan.

Information gleaned from the 1911 marriage record was used to search for Minnie in the Frank Blair household in Bay County, Michigan. The 1900 census provided the correct period to show her as a child living with Frank and Margaret. Since Minnie was born in 1892, Frank and Margaret were thought to have been married at least eight or nine years prior to the 1900 census.

The 1900 census for Garfield Township in Bay County, Michigan included the household of Frank Blair. Garfield and Kawkawlin Townships were connected at the Southeast corner and Northwest corner, respectively.¹⁹ Frank, age 40 had been married to "Maggie" Blair, age 32 for 14 years, agreeing with evidence from Minnie's marriage record. The Margaret Roark on Minnie's marriage record likely was noted as Maggie Blair on the census. Maggie was a common nickname for Margaret, and she would have taken her husband's surname upon marriage.²⁰ The census recorded five children in the Blair household – three boys, aged 12, 10 and five; and two girls, aged eight and two. Minnie Blair – the eight-year-old daughter of Frank and Maggie Blair on the 1900 census correlated with the 19-year-old Minnie on the 1911 marriage record. Flossie Blair aged two on the census could be the Florence Blair who was witness to Minnie's marriage in 1911. Flossie was a popular nickname for Florence.²¹ However, Flossie was only 13 years old in 1911, disqualifying her from signing as a legal witness.²²

Leona Bigger's reported marriage date was 25 August, 1945. Using social and cultural norms of the era, Leona's date of birth may have been in the mid-late 1920s. This was substantiated by the 1900 census, showing the preceding generation's births between 1888-1898. All three sons listed on the census were of the correct age to be considered Leona's biological father. Robert Henry Blair, the eldest son, born in 1888, was 36-41 years of age as of Leona's predicted date of birth. Francis, the middle son, born in 1890, was 34-39 years of age as of Leona's predicted birth date. Lewis, the youngest son, born in 1895, was 29-34 years of age at the time of Leona's presumed birth date.

¹⁹ "CGI_COUNTY-V4_BAY_COUNTY_125033_7.Pdf," digital images, *Michigan.gov* (https://www.michigan.gov/documents/CGI_COUNTY-v4_BAY_COUNTY_125033_7.pdf : accessed June 23, 2021).

²⁰ "25 Creative Nicknames for Margaret," digital images, *FamilyEducation* (<https://www.familyeducation.com/25-creative-nicknames-for-margaret> : accessed June 21, 2021).

²¹ "Flossie: Name Meaning, Popularity, and Similar Names," digital images, *Nameberry* (<https://nameberry.com/>: accessed June 21, 2021).

²² "Marriage License (excerpt) Act 128 of 1887," Section 551.103, digital images, *Michigan Legislature* ([http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(v03lb5oka0xvp2jrfnqn0tma\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=GetObject&objectname=mcl-551-103](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(v03lb5oka0xvp2jrfnqn0tma))/mileg.aspx?page=GetObject&objectname=mcl-551-103) : accessed June 21, 2021).

Enough correlation existed between the 1900 census and the 1911 marriage record to support that one of Minnie Blair's three brothers listed on the census was Leona's potential father. The census provided indirect information relevant to the research question.

Valid Assumptions:

Minnie's parents were named correctly on the 1911 marriage record.

Minnie Blair lived with her parents as a child.

Frank and Margaret were married before Minnie was born in 1892.

Margaret Roark took her husband's surname upon marriage.

The enumerator included all people living in the household of Frank Blair in 1900.

Unsound Assumptions:

Minnie Blair was Leona Bigger's paternal aunt.

Minnie Blair does not have other siblings living outside of the household in 1900.

One of the Blair boys on the 1900 census was Leona's father.

Flossie on the census was the Florence who signed as a witness on marriage record.

Florence was too young to sign as a witness but did anyway.

Maggie on the census is the Margaret noted as Minnie's mother on her marriage record.

Leona Bigger's date of birth was in the 1920s.

1900 U.S. Census for Frank Blair - Analysis of evidence:

The 1900 census supplied indirect evidence that led to the answer to the research question. The credibility of the census information was bolstered when combined with Minnie Blair's 1911 marriage record.

For instance: Canadian born Frank Blair, father to 8-year-old Minnie Blair in Garfield, Bay County, Michigan on the 1900 census was not information that contributed directly to answering the research question. However, it was critical evidence when combined with Canadian born Frank Blair, father to 19-year-old Minnie Blair on the 1911 Shiawassee County, Michigan marriage record.

In addition, the identity of Minnie's mother, Maggie, born in Michigan on the 1900 census agreed with the Michigan born Margaret on the 1911 marriage record.

Flossie Blair, younger sister to Minnie on the 1900 census, and Florence Blair, witness on the 1911 marriage record provided evidence to be further explored.

The state of Michigan, noted as Minnie's place of birth on the 1900 census, was consistent with her birthplace of Kawkawlin Township, Bay County, Michigan on the 1911 marriage record.

The continuity between the two documents adds value to the remaining information on the census, specifically the list of Minnie's brothers. The identity, age and location offered enough data on the Blair boys to justify additional research on them individually.