

**Antoinette Sterling and Other Celebrities**  
**By Malcolm Sterling MacKinlay**

1906

A Synopsis of His Mother's Life and Career

By Lady Mary Sinner-Hendrickson

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Jane Antoinette Sterling, daughter of James Sterling and Annis Coleman, was born in Sterlingville, Jefferson County, New York, in 1841. There are reports stating her birth year as 1850 or `51; however, my personal inspection of federal census reveals the true year was 1841. Antoinette was an accomplished contralto opera and ballad singer in America and England and was very much loved by all she came in contact.

I am in the process of writing biographies, which will be included in book form, of James, Antoinette, her husband John and their children, Malcolm, Jean, and Kenneth. Included in the book will be biographies of Malcolm's daughter Leila and Jean's husband (stage and screen actor) Harcourt Williams. These ancestors definitely led interesting lives!

Here I will write a synopsis chapter by chapter highlighting what characteristics these progenitors possessed and what their lives were like, family and career.

I have discovered some discrepancies in Malcolm's book during my research. Even though there are variations, or inaccuracies, this is still a very interesting and informative tome, which I believe should be read by every descendant of James and Hannah May-Stirling of Cornwall, Connecticut. By the way, James and Hannah were Antoinette's great grandparents. She was my great grandaunt. Now it is time to share from chapter 1, and my personal research.



**There are 17 chapters in this book:**

- The Childhood of Antoinette Sterling
- Career In America
- First Years In England
- At Her Zenith

- Her Songs And Singing
- Love For Scotland
- Her Philanthropic Interests
- The Garcia Family
- Manuel Garcia And His Pupils
- Lessons With A Nonagenarian
- The St. James's Hall Ballad Concerts
- More Musicians
- Leighton And His Contemporaries
- The Academy
- The Lyceum Theatre
- Theatrical Thoughts
- Some Writers And Clerics

Owning a copy of this tome is priceless to a Stirling descendant. Chapter 1 reveals some of the reasons for Antoinette's strong character. Her father James did not allow playing cards in the household because he believed "anyone who took part in such sinful games would be condemned to eternal damnation." After moving to England, Antoinette played cards for recreation, but never for money. She very much enjoyed the games Bezique, and Whist.

Wine, beer, any alcohol, for that matter, was never on the table at James's home. Although a "little brandy was kept in the house, the inmates were never permitted to make use of it, save for medicinal purpose, and even then only in cases of the strictest necessity. It was hidden safe under lock and key in a dark cupboard which was regarded by the children with a mysterious dread, as though it contained some evil spirit, ready to jump out and destroy them if they ever ventured to unlock the door without permission." Antoinette was involved, in her adult years, with the Temperance movement, finally affixing her signature to paper, pledging total abstinence from alcohol. Is it any wonder?

This chapter mentions Antoinette's two grandmothers living with the family when she was a child. I do not know who one of the grandmothers was, since James' mother, Mary Bradford had died in 1828, some 13 (thirteen) years before Antoinette's birth. In 1850, Annis' mother, Mary Slater/Slaughter was living with the family, and by 1860, she had moved to another location, or possibly died. Who this second grandmother was, in addition to Annis' mother, I do not know. Perhaps she was a sister of one of the grandmothers. This will require more research.

One of the grandmothers was described as "short of stature, mild and retiring in disposition. She never scolded her grandchildren. If they disobeyed her, she would say "Ah well; some day I shall be gone." Understandably, the offending family member would be brought to "bitter tears." When she became very angry, she would have someone take her for a ride, and order them to "drive like the wind."

The other grandmother was the extreme opposite. "Tall and strong, scarcely knowing what it was to be ill, if she went out for a drive, she would take the reins herself. A splendid

horsewoman, she would ride with legs astride like a man. Above all things, she hated the English. She delighted in filling the heads of her grandchildren with the stories of the glorious War of Independence, the “Pilgrim Fathers,” and “The Mayflower.””

From the above description of this grandmother, I would believe she was descended from one of the Mayflower Pilgrims, and if James’s mother were still alive when his children were at home, I would have believed this grandmother to be Mary Bradford married to Daniel Sterling. As I said, I am at a total loss as to which this grandmother was. It is a shame Antoinette did not record her two grandmothers’ names.

Within Antoinette, this outspoken grandmother apparently instilled unnecessary negative ideas about the English. Antoinette’s very strong aversion to tea was encouraged by the town cobbler, whom Antoinette would have discussions with, as a child. He told her of the “Boston Tea Party,” and until the day she died, she never had a drop of tea. In England, and America, she would attend `tea parties’. If the hostess knew of her disgust for tea, she would bring hot cocoa for Antoinette. If the hostess was a new acquaintance, and Antoinette was offered tea, she would simply decline, and ask for a cup of hot water. This was not rude, as there was a time when having a cup of hot water was quite the fashion.

Antoinette began her piano training at 5 years old, and at age 7, her sister, Mary, gave Antoinette her first singing lesson. At age 12, she attended Clinton Seminary, New York, and studied music training under Anna Sykes. Her singing voice range was E flat to B flat above the treble stave, and a music note; she could “hold it on for almost any length of time.” As for the power of her voice, men from a college a half mile away, reported they could hear her practicing

While attending seminary, Antoinette wrote many articles for the school’s weekly paper. According to her son, Malcolm, she “would write most harrowing tales of adventure for this periodical and in them did her best to rival Jules Vern. One of her stories was a girlish cross between “Gulliver’s Travels” and “From the Earth to the Moon.” It related how a small but select party went up in a balloon, and somehow reached Mars, after which a wonderfully detailed description was given of what they saw there.”

Antoinette had a humorous side to her, not unlike her giant of a father. One night, she wound up, and hid a music box in a cupboard under the stairs. The tune of “Home, Sweet Home!” wafted through the halls, which “annoyed the head mistress.” The head mistress began searching for the music box to silence it. However, before it was found, the tune switched from “Home, Sweet Home!” to “Oh, Where, Tell Me Where!” I imagine that head mistress was pleased when Antoinette finally departed from her care!

This is a brief sketch for chapter 1 of the book. The most prominent people in Antoinette’s life were her father and grandmothers. In subsequent chapters, I will briefly discuss Antoinette’s character, music career, marriage, civic, and family life. She was one special lady.

Stay tuned...