

Family Group: DINEEN | DESMOND

Branch 2 of 4

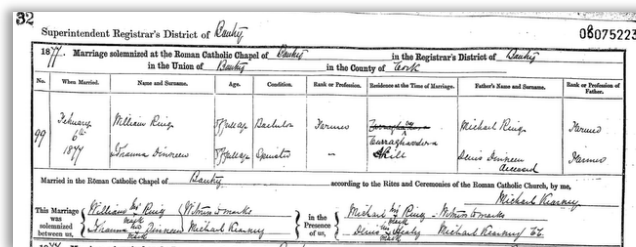
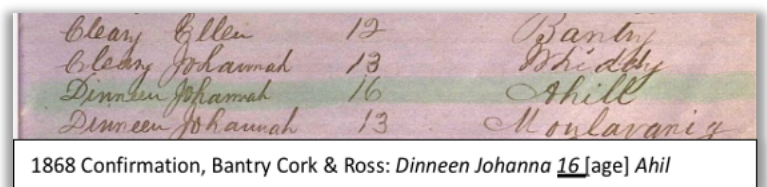
Joanna Dineen—Hannah

1850-1909

Great Grandaunt

Much of the research on the following ancestors was completed by Alethea Hunt, a direct descendant of Johanna "Hannah" Dineen Wren. I am grateful for Alethea's thorough work, generous sharing, and her reminder that genealogy is truly best as a team sport.

Denis and Johanna's only daughter and third child, Joanna "Hannah," was born into the crucible of the Great Hunger on April 29, 1850. She grew up on the family farm in Ahil Beg, learning the resilience that would define her life. At age 16, she stood in St. Finbarr's Church in Bantry to receive her Confirmation. The parish registry from that day reveals a poignant detail: another Johanna Dinneen, aged 13, was confirmed alongside her. This subtle record highlights just how tightly cousins and extended family were woven into the same rural neighborhoods.



Hannah was 26 years old when she married William Wren on February 6, 1877. In the civil registry, William's surname was recorded as "Ring." In County Cork, Wren was a common, shortened Anglicized form of the Irish surname Ó Rinn, which was also frequently translated as Ring. The ceremony was witnessed by Michael Ring and Denis Healy. William hailed from the townland of

Curraghavaddra, about twelve miles from Hannah's childhood home in Ahil Beg. As the first of her siblings to marry, Hannah's wedding marked a generational shift; the civil registry formally noted that her father, Denis, was already deceased.

The couple quickly began their family, welcoming Helen Agnes on New Year's Day in 1878, followed by William Joseph Jr. on August 8, 1880. By the time young William was born, however, his father was already an ocean away. Seeking a foothold in the New World, William Sr. had immigrated to America in 1879. The 1880 U.S. census found him living in Danbury, Connecticut, sharing a roof with his aunt, Mary Wren Duane, her four children, and his brother Timothy Wren. In 1881, Hannah made the brave Atlantic crossing alone with her two toddlers, both under the age of three, to reunite her family.

The Danbury that greeted Hannah was a booming, industrial marvel. By the 1880s, it was globally renowned as the "Hat City of the World," churning out an astonishing five million hats every year. Over thirty massive hat factories dominated the downtown landscape, employing thousands of hands. For an immigrant family, the sensory assault of Danbury was total: a bustling Main Street, the newly installed glow of electric lights, clattering horse-drawn trolleys, a melting pot of immigrant laborers, and vibrant, crowded churches that anchored daily community life.



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The toll of this industrial life was heavy. According to the 1900 U.S. census, Hannah gave birth to ten children, but the harsh realities of the era meant only five survived to adulthood: Helen Agnes Wren (1878–1922), William Joseph Wren (1880–1939), Michael Joseph Wren (1882–1967), John Edward Wren (1884–1968), Andrew Timothy Wren (1893–1968).



Hannah Dineen

The same census recorded that neither William nor Hannah had ever learned to read or write. William provided for his large family through grueling manual labor, yet through sheer grit, the couple managed to buy and own their Danbury home. While Hannah's brothers, Denis Lawrence and Patrick, also braved the migration to America, they settled further away in Pennsylvania and New York. Fortunately, Hannah was not entirely isolated; William's siblings and cousins lived nearby, offering a vital network of local support.

The dangers facing immigrant laborers struck the family with terrifying force on a workday in downtown Danbury. William was working alongside his brothers, John and Timothy, as laborers on a new construction project at the corner of Main and Liberty Streets when the building suddenly *"collapsed without the least warning."*

The disaster was catastrophic. A large section of the second floor gave way, plunging several workers sixty feet into the dark cellar below. William, who was working on the first floor at the moment of the cave-in, was buried under the falling debris. Rescuers pulled him from the wreckage unconscious. Newspaper accounts detailed his extensive injuries, reporting several broken ribs and deep, severe lacerations to his head and side. One early press dispatch even predicted that his internal injuries were so catastrophic that he would not survive.

Against the odds, William lived. His brothers survived as well, though the accident shattered the family's trajectory. William was left permanently altered, likely walking with a cane for the rest of his days. John remained in Danbury, eventually marrying and raising a family within arm's reach of William and Hannah.

Timothy's fate, however, took a darker turn. It is highly probable he suffered a traumatic brain injury in the sixty-foot fall, permanently impairing his cognitive health and ability to work. He vanished entirely from Danbury records between 1895 and 1896, seemingly estranged from his brothers. He drifted to Hartford, living under the assumed alias of "Ryan." Years later, a grim article in the Hartford

Courant revealed his tragic end: a homeless vagrant going by that name was burned to death in a devastating fire on Front Street around January 24, 1903.

Hannah's own journey came to a premature end at six o'clock on the evening of August 14, 1909. She succumbed to what medical records termed "Ostro-Sarcoma of the Scapula"—a painful bone



Hannah Dineen Wren (L) with her daughter Helen Agnes Wren Hunt (R) and her son Joseph Hunt circa 1909

TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.
Collapse of Part of a Building in Danbury—Four Men Buried in the Ruins—Taken Out Badly Injured.
DANBURY, June 2.—A terrible accident occurred in this city this afternoon. While a number of workmen were engaged in working on Hill & Rogers' new building at the corner of Main and Liberty streets it collapsed without the least warning, and the men were buried in the ruins. It was at first thought that the entire upper portion of the building had caved in, but when the dust had cleared away it was seen that only a section of the second floor had fallen. Several of the workmen jumped to save themselves, but four were carried down to the cellar, a distance of thirty feet, and buried beneath the ruins. Their cries could be heard for quite a distance, and all possible haste was made to rescue the unfortunate men. Standing on the first floor was William Wren. He was at work on a hoisting apparatus when the crash came. On the upper floor stood three men. They were John Wren, Timothy Wren and Bernard Neary. William Wren was the first of the men to be taken out. It was evident that he was terribly injured. He was unconscious and blood was oozing from a dozen wounds. Several of his ribs were broken and his head and side were terribly cut. It is also feared that he is hurt internally. All the others were badly hurt, Timothy having five ugly gashes in his head. Neary was the least injured of all. All were taken to the hospital.

June 2, 1890

Article c/o *The Morning Journal-Courier* (New Haven, CT)

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cancer of the shoulder blade. She was 59 years old. Her obituary in the Danbury Evening News captured the deep impact she left on her adopted home, noting that "her death will be the cause of sincere grief to her large circle of friends."

William, carrying the physical scars of the building collapse and the emotional weight of losing his partner, lived on for another nineteen years. He passed away on April 4, 1928, reunited at last with the girl from Ahil Beg.



William J. Wren, Sr. with son Michael J. Wren and daughter-in-law Edna R. Wren



The Next Generations: An overview of Branch 2...Descendants of Hannah and William.

1. Helen Agnes Wren—*Nellie*

1878-1922

1st cousin 2x removed

The first child of Hannah and William, Helen Agnes—known affectionately as "Nellie"—was born in Ireland on January 1, 1878. She was just three years old when she made the Atlantic crossing with her mother and baby brother, William, in 1881 to reunite with her father in Danbury.

As a young woman, Nellie entered domestic service, working as a maid in the grand home of Alfred Wildman, a wealthy Danbury bank president, and his wife, Ella. This work exposed her to the starkly different world of Danbury's upper class before she embarked on a family life of her own.



Helen Agnes Wren



Joseph Leo Hunt

On June 18, 1907, she married Joseph Leo Hunt (1880–1954). Joseph, whose parents were both Irish immigrants, initially followed his father Owen's footsteps into the local trade as a hatter, later transitioning into a career as an insurance agent.

The couple established their home at 14 Home Place in Danbury, which quickly filled with a family of seven sons. Tragically, it was the birth of her youngest child, Walter, that brought Nellie's journey to an untimely end. While recovering at home, her health deteriorated rapidly. On October 3, 1922, at just 44 years old, Nellie succumbed to phlebitis—a severe postpartum blood-clotting complication that proved fatal in an era before modern anticoagulants.

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Joseph Hunt (center) with his brother-in-law Mickey Wren (left) and his Hunt grandsons and furry family members members!

Her obituary in the Danbury Evening News on October 3, 1922, stated *"She was of a most estimable character and was a devoted wife and mother. She was a member of St. Peter's church. Mrs. Hunt is survived by her husband and seven children; the oldest 14 years and the youngest only two weeks old. Her father, William Wren, of Danbury, and four brothers also survive her."*

Following her death, Joseph faced the monumental task of raising the seven boys. He found vital support by moving into the bustling Wren family home. The 1920 census captures a lively, multi-generational household of ten people under one roof, including Joseph, his seven sons, his father-in-law William Wren, and two brothers-in-law, with ages ranging

from a 10-month-old infant to a 73-year-old patriarch. Joseph never remarried and passed away at the age of 84 on July 4, 1954, leaving a legacy of six surviving sons and fourteen grandchildren.

Helen Wren Hunt's seven sons...2nd cousins 1x removed

Despite the early loss of their mother, Nellie's seven sons grew into prominent, colorful figures in the Danbury community, with several serving heroically overseas during World War II before returning home to run the family business, the Hunt Plumbing Supply Company.

Joseph "Josh" Hunt (1908–1975): The eldest brother, Josh was a well-known local sports enthusiast. He dedicated his professional life to the family business, eventually retiring as the Vice President of the Hunt Plumbing Supply Company. He was married to Ethel Lockwood Hunt.

John Hunt (1910–1999): Possessing a sharp, analytical mind, John was an expert Bridge player and loved competitive games. He pursued a legal career, graduating from Fordham Law School in 1939 and practicing as an attorney in Danbury. He shared 55 years of marriage with Bessie Marie Reilly Hunt.



Helen Wren Hunt

William "Will" Hunt (1912–1993): Will operated the Hunt Plumbing Supply Company for many years alongside his brothers before transitioning into a career as a heating and sales engineer. In his youth, he was a talented athlete, playing baseball for several local and semi-professional teams from 1924 to 1942. He and his wife, Mae C. Orzech Hunt, raised four children: William, James, Joseph, and Helen.

Eugene "Spike" Hunt (1915–1954): Known for his vibrant personality and a beautiful, memorable tenor singing voice, Spike was the proud proprietor of the Hunt Club, a local tavern. He was married to Kathryn Joan Sherwood Hunt, and together they raised five children: Eugene, John "Jack," Richard, Sharon, and Michele.



Helen Wren Hunt
with two of her sons

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 **Andrew "Andy" Hunt (1917–2004):** Andy answered the call to duty during World War II, serving in the U.S. Army across the European Theatre. A lifelong, passionate New York Yankees fan, he spent his younger years playing and umpiring semi-professional baseball and eventually served as the president of the Connecticut Umpire's Association. He married Ann Zack Hunt and raised four sons: Roy, Terry, Tim, and Daniel.

 **Frank Hunt (1919–2004):** A highly decorated World War II U.S. Army veteran, Frank was awarded the Bronze Star with two oak leaf clusters for extreme bravery under fire.

"When a wire crew attempting to repair the communications line to Company K was pinned down by mortar, machine gun, and small arms fire, and their vehicle was bogged down, Private Hunt volunteered to take his vehicle through the enemy fire to rescue his comrades and repair the wire lines. Disregarding the intense concentrations, he drove his vehicle to the area, aided in repairing communications, and expeditiously retrieved the mired jeep. Private Hunt's outstanding courage and unswerving determination enabled the important communication line to be restored and saved his comrades from possible injury or death."

After the war, he worked as a quality control supervisor and was married to Ruth Scolpino Hunt.

 **Walter "Walt" Hunt (1922–2004):** The baby of the family, whose birth preceded his mother's death, Walt grew up to become a decorated Army Air Force veteran and a prisoner of war. Years later a gentleman outside a pizza shop asked Walt about the POW plate on his car:

"... he must have retold the story many times as his eyes lit up like it happened the day before. He said he pulled his warm boots off while still descending in his parachute and tossed them so the Germans couldn't recover the pair. He then landed in a field and jumped in a ditch when he saw the German patrol coming to capture him. One German fell in the mud and cursed him, while the second stopped his comrade from aiming a gun at him. He turned to the second German and said merci beaucoup!"

He survived nearly a year and a half in a POW camp and was awarded the Air Medal with an Oak Leaf Cluster. Returning to Danbury, he operated the plumbing supply business with his brothers and later worked for the Federal Corrections Institute. He married Dorothy "Dot" Zack Hunt and raised three children: Doreen, Cheryl, and Walter Jr.

2. William Wren

1880-1939

1st cousin 2x removed

William was the second child born to Hannah and William Wren. Born in Ireland, he was just an infant when he arrived in the United States in 1881 alongside his mother and older sister, Nellie. The young family settled in Danbury, Connecticut, finally reconnecting with his father, who had gone ahead to secure their future.

The 1900 U.S. census records a 20-year-old William living at the family home at 14 Home Place, earning his living as a stock clerk in a local hat shop. His life expanded beyond Danbury in 1908 when he married Bonnie Ball. The couple established a home roughly 50 miles southwest in Yonkers, New York. Their wedding was notable enough to make the local society pages, with The Yonkers Herald highlighting that *"many useful and valuable presents were received."*



William Wren & his pup

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Bonnie Ball Wren

Despite living in Yonkers, William maintained his deep professional ties to the "Hat City." He commuted or traveled back to Danbury for his career, working for years as a hatter and eventually earning a promotion to superintendent of the McKee Hat Company. William passed away at the age of 58 on March 12, 1939. He and Bonnie had no children. Bonnie eventually remarried and lived a long life, passing away at the age of 85 in 1971.

William and Mickey Wren
With their wives
Edna and Bonnie Wren



3. Michael Wren—Mickey—M.J.

1882-1967

1st cousin 2x removed

Michael—known to friends and family as Mickey—was the third child of Hannah and William and holds the distinction of being their first child born in the United States. Growing up in Danbury, Mickey was deeply involved in the civic life of the community. Between 1912 and 1915, he served as an active volunteer firefighter with the Beckerle Hose Company alongside at least two of his brothers.

Mickey worked as a hatter while living in his childhood home at 14 Home Place until a desire for new opportunities drew him west. Around 1917, he relocated to Mansfield, Ohio. On February 11, 1918, at the age of 38, he married Edna Rosa Emmer, who had grown up in Mansfield. Mickey took the expert trade skills he had



Edna and Mickey Wren with their pup in their
hat shop in Mansfield, OH

honed in the "Hat City" and carved out a highly successful niche in Ohio, proudly billing himself as the only "maker of men's hats in the city of Mansfield." He initially operated a prominent retail shop downtown before later transitioning the business directly into his home.

Though hundreds of miles away, Mickey remained close with his immediate and extended family

through letters. A surviving 1937 letter from his first cousin, Jo Deneen (daughter of his mother's younger brother, Patrick), extends a warm invitation from New York: *"If you folks go to Danbury this summer—sure hope you will stop & see us here [Corning, N.Y.] or in Buffalo..."*

Mickey and Edna had no children. Edna passed away on March 17, 1967, and Mickey followed her just a few months later on November 1, 1967, after a month-long illness.



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4. John Wren—Johnnie—Jack

1884-1968

1st cousin 2x removed

Born on January 26, 1884, John—affectionately called Johnnie or Jack—was the fourth child of Hannah and William. Unlike his brothers who moved away, Johnnie was deeply rooted in his upbringing. He lived his entire 84-year life in the family home at 14 Home Place.



By age 16, Johnnie was already working as a hat finisher. This was

the start of a legendary, 50-year career in the local factories, culminating in his retirement from the famous Mallory Hat Company in 1954. Like Mickey, he spent his young adult years serving his neighbors as a firefighter with the Beckerle Hose Company.

Johnnie's greatest legacy, however, was his devotion to family. When his sister Nellie tragically died two weeks after childbirth in 1922, Johnnie stepped into the breach to help his brother-in-law, Joseph Hunt, raise the seven motherless boys. His nephews adored him, forever calling him "Uncle Johnnie." A

poignant letter he wrote on December 23, 1923, to his aunt, Julia Keohane Deneen and his cousins in Corning, New York, provides a heartbreaking yet tender window into the grief and resilience inside 14 Home Place just a year after Nellie's passing:

"Dear Aunt & Cousins... Just a few lines hoping they will arrive before Xmas also hope they find you all enjoying the best of health and wishing ye all a very merry Xmas and Happy New year. Pa

[William Wren Sr.] is feeling much better than he did last winter.... Well this is a tough season, it is a hard job to make things merry for this bunch of good boys and be merry when the Merry is not here. Talk about taking the Merry out of Xmas... All the boys are in good health and that's half the battle... The Baby [infant Walter Hunt] is growing to be a big strong boy... He is not walking yet but stands up with the aid of a chair and has 14 teeth. Well Aunt & Cousins this is all for this time we all hope to hear the best of news from you all. With

Best Wishes from all to all."

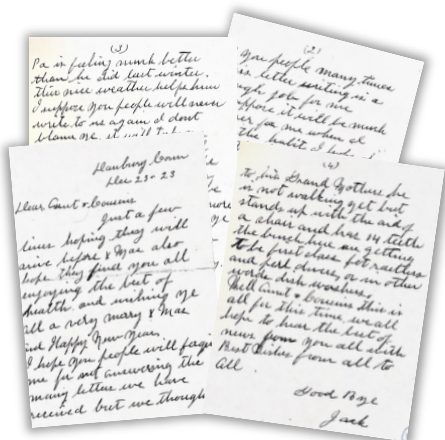
Johnnie spent his final year as a patient at the Glen Hill Convalescent Center, where he passed away at the age of 84 on October 28, 1968.



Circa 1910 – Beckerle Hose Company



John 'Jack' Edward Wren
Picture circa 1967



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5. Andrew Wren

1893-1968

1st cousin 2x removed

Andrew, the youngest child of Hannah and William, was born on May 28, 1893. His life took a significantly different path than his older siblings. In March 1917, like his brothers, he registered for the State of Connecticut military census. However, when the United States entered World War I just a month later, Andrew was the one called up to fight. He served honorably as a corporal in the 15th Company, 14th Training Battalion, 151st Brigade.



Mickey (L) and Andrew (R) Wren with their father William Wren (C)

Upon returning from military service, Andrew married Deal A. Kelley on June 14, 1922. Danbury city directories track Andrew's sharp versatility over the decades. He worked as a hatter, spent a brief stint as a local police officer in the early 1920s, and later built a successful career as an insurance broker and investment banker. When the economic devastation of the Great Depression hit, he pivoted once more, returning safely to the familiar stability of the hatting trade.

Andrew passed away at age 75 on July 17, 1968, six years after his beloved Deal died in 1962. Andrew's spelling of the family name shifted slightly to "Wrenn" for his children, a generation that broke new ground in education, business, and public service:

Elizabeth Helen Wren (1923–1982): A dedicated educator, Elizabeth began her career in 1944 as an elementary school teacher. By 1954, she was appointed principal, serving successfully in that role for nearly thirty years before being promoted to a leadership role under the Superintendent of West Hartford Public Schools. She was married to Dr. Charles O. Richter.

Mary Anne Wren (1923–2000): A trailblazing businesswoman, Mary Anne shattered corporate glass ceilings in the male-dominated world of Wall Street finance. In 1967, she was elected the first female Vice President of any worldwide investment firm, and in 1978, she became the first female Managing Director of Merrill Lynch Capital Markets. A magna cum laude graduate of Albertus Magnus College, she received an Honorary Doctor of Law from the institution in 1977 and held advanced graduate degrees in economics and finance from New York University.

William Andrew Wren (1926–1991): William balanced a successful corporate career, retiring from the Owen III Company of Milford after working for years as a grocery manager with the First National Food Store. He married Lillian T. Steele, and together they raised six children: Kevin, Christopher, Elizabeth, Catherine, Patricia, and Mary.

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Joan Dineen Wren (1929–1986): Proudly carrying her grandmother Hannah’s maiden name as her middle name, Joan was another pioneer in education, becoming the first female school principal in the history of Greenwich, Connecticut. She earned her BS from Western Connecticut State University, a master's in Elementary Education and School Guidance from Columbia University, and completed advanced administrative studies at Harvard. She retired after thirty years of visionary service to Greenwich schools.

