Dinah Cohen Minis

Judith D. Straight

[November 17, 1993]

Scanned from The Savannah Biographies Volume 24.
Special Collections. Lane Library. Armstrong Atlantic State University. Savannah, GA 31419-1997
INDEX

ABSTRACT.........................1
BIRTH AND MARRIAGE.............2
HUSBAND AND CHILDREN.........3-4
LATER LIFE AND DEATH..........5
CONCLUSION......................6
ENDNOTES.......................7-8
BIBLIOGRAPHY...................9
ABSTRACT

Dinah Cohen was born in Georgetown, South Carolina on 21 April 1787, the eldest child of Solomon and Belle Gratz Cohen. She married Isaac Minis on 14 or 11 December 1803 in Charleston. They had thirteen children. Her oldest son, Philip, was in a duel in 1832. Another son, Abraham, was a prosperous businessman and politician in Savannah. Isaac, her husband, was a businessman and a leader of the Savannah and Jewish communities. Dinah was known to have supported the South during the Civil War and was pardoned in 1867. She died on 17 February 1874 at the age of 86.
Dinah (Divinah) Cohen was born in Georgetown, South Carolina on 21 April 1787.\textsuperscript{1} She was the oldest of the eleven children of Solomon and Belle Gratz (Moses) Cohen.\textsuperscript{2} Her grandfather, Moses Cohen, came to the United States from England around 1750.\textsuperscript{3} There was nothing to be found about her early childhood, which is assumed to have been spent in Georgetown.

On 11 December 1803, a marriage settlement was signed between Dinah and Isaac Minis.\textsuperscript{4} Dinah brought into the marriage $10,000 and five slaves including two Negroes and three mulattoes.\textsuperscript{5} Isaac Minis was born on 30 July 1780, the fourth child of Philip and Judith Minis. He was born in Charleston, South Carolina, but spent most of his life in Savannah.\textsuperscript{6} There were two dates found for the marriage of Isaac and Dinah. The marriage took place in Charleston either on 11 December\textsuperscript{7} or 14 December 1803.\textsuperscript{8} Their marriage announcement in the paper stated that they were married on the seventh of December, but that would have been before the marriage settlement was signed.\textsuperscript{9} At the time of the marriage, Isaac was twenty-three and Dinah was sixteen.

It may appear from a lack of evidence in available resources that Dinah Minis did not contribute much as far as getting involved with charities or community services, but she was indeed a very busy woman. From the time that she was almost 18 in
1805 until 1832, she had thirteen children. Oldest to youngest they are as follows: Philip in 1805; Henrietta in 1807; Eliza in 1809; Sarah Ann in 1811; a son in 1813; Emily in 1815; Philippa in 1818; Abraham in 1820; Frances in 1823; Theodore in 1825; Maria in 1828; Rebecca Gratz in 1830; and Cecilia in 1832. Of the thirteen children, only six outlived their father.

Even though Dinah does not appear very often in available resources, there was much information to be found on some of her children, mainly Philip and Abraham. Philip, her eldest, began practicing medicine at the age of nineteen. In 1832 Philip was involved in a duel with James Stark. Stark had apparently made an insulting remark about Philip's Jewish heritage and Philip called him out. Philip and Stark accidentally ran into each other before the date set for the duel to take place and an argument ensued. Philip pulled a gun on Stark and shot him in the chest. Philip was arrested and indicted, but he was eventually found not guilty. In 1836 he married Sarah Augusta Livingston and they had seven children. On 27 November 1855 he wrote his last will and testament and died that same day in Baltimore, Maryland.

Abraham Minis stayed in Savannah and got into the shipping business. In 1851 he married Lavinia Florance and had six children. Abraham would take his family on vacations to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he became a friend of Alexander Graham Bell. When Bell asked him to invest in his new invention of the telegraph machine, Abraham refused, claiming, "I cannot
invest in the hope of a solid wire being able to carry a voice." He became ill and died in New York on 6 November 1889.

Dinah's husband, Isaac, was a leading businessman in Savannah in the early to mid 1800's. At eighteen he started his own ship chandlery and grocery business. He was heavily involved in Savannah community projects. Not only was Isaac a successful businessman, he was also wise with his finances and real estate investments. In 1816 he bought 347 acres of land from Sarah Lamb for $860. The property which is near the Ogeechee River was known as Constitution Hill. Four years later he sold the property to Archibald McNeil for $2700.

It is thought by some that in 1812 Isaac Minis was one of the three founding fathers of the Irish Friendly Society which later became the Hibernian Society. However, the source of this information is not indicated. Later, in a book on the history of the Hibernian Society, Isaac is listed only as one of the first members who joined on 17 September 1812.

Isaac died on 15 November 1856 while visiting his daughters in Philadelphia. His death record lists his cause of death as cancer. He must have been had it for some time because in a letter dated 1 August 1849, from Dinah to Rebecca, he writes on the back that he is "very weak", but does not mention why.

After Isaac's death there is a little more to be found about Dinah Minis. She stayed in Savannah and lived at the family home on the corner of Hull and Barnard streets. According to the 1860 census she was a "Lady of leisure" and
lived with Fanny, Rebecca, and Cecilia, three of her daughters. 28

Dinah actively supported the South during the Civil War. In 1863 she gave a contribution to help fund the Georgia troops who were defending Charleston. 29 As were all Southerners who supported the South during the war, Dinah was accused of treason. She received a pardon signed by President Andrew Johnson dated 19 March 1867. 30 On 28 March 1867 she signed an oath swearing to uphold the Constitution of the United States. 31 On this oath Dinah is physically described as having "Fair complexion Grey hair, and Hazel eyes; is 5 feet 2 inches high, aged 80 years." 32

Before she died, Dinah divided her estate among her five remaining children and her deceased son's, Philip, wife. She gave each of them lots in the Jackson, Decker, and Franklin wards as well as shares in her Railroad stock left to her by her late husband. 33

According to her death record, Dinah died at her home on Hull Street of 17 February 1874 at the age of 86 of "general debility." 34 She was buried next to her husband in Laurel Grove Cemetery. On her tombstone inscription, instead of her name, it reads "Our Mother Beloved Wife of Isaac Minis." 35

In her will Dinah left five shares of her stock in the Central Railroad and Banking Company of Georgia to each of four of her grandchildren. The rest of her estate, which included household items and whatever money that was on hand, went to her three spinster daughters. 36
CONCLUSION

Through my research I found only bits and pieces of what Dinah Cohen Minis was really like. I can assume that she was a dedicated mother and loving wife. When I first began to research Dinah, I was very discouraged because I could not really find anything that Dinah had actually done that was outstanding or impressive. Then I realized that bearing and rearing thirteen children and rearing most of them was impressive enough. She must have felt much sadness in her life watching her husband and seven of her children die before she died, but I feel she put that aside and was able to move on with the help of her family.

Dinah and Isaac left a legacy through their son Abraham who stayed in Savannah. Living in Savannah is Dinah and Isaac's great-grandson, Abram Minis, Jr. and six great-great-great grandchildren.
ENDNOTES


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.


5. Ibid.


7. Ibid., 53.


9. *Columbia Museum*, 21 December 1803, p.3 c.5.


11. Philip Minis Family Papers #1505, 2:19. Originally from the diary of Dr. Richard Arnold, GHS.

12. Ibid.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 86-87.

17. Ibid., 90-91.

18. Ibid., 93.

20. Ibid., 52.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 1:11.
26. Office of Vital Records at Health Department on Eisenhower Dr. Death record of Isaac Minis.
29. Savannah Morning News, 3 August 1863, p.3 c.2.
30. Dinah Minis Family Papers #1505, Oversize.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., paper title "Partition for Estate of Mrs. D. Minis".
35. Tombstone of Dinah Minis. Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot #1369.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chatham County Courthouse, 113 Montgomery Street, Savannah, Georgia.

Columbia Museum. 25 December 1798, 21 December 1803.

Gamble, Thomas. Duels and Duelists (1733-1877).


Minis Family Papers. The Manuscript Collection #1505 at the Georgia Historical Society.


Office of Vital Records at Health Department on Eisenhower Drive.

Savannah Morning News. 17 November 1856.


