

# Chapter 17

## 113 in 1928? Validation of Delina Filkins as the First “Second-Century Teenager”



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### 17.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the early American claim of Delina Filkins (see Fig. 17.1) to be 113 years old in 1928 (Star-Gazette 1928a). This case is particularly important as a milestone on the map of the documented human lifespan. Filkins’s case, if accepted as validated, marks the first person in demographic history to have attained the ages of 111, 112, and 113. Her age mark of 113 years, 214 days would not be surpassed until 1980. Given the importance of such a case, it is necessary to review the evidence that may establish whether or not this case is validated according to the modern scientific standards set for age validation. While this case has been previously accepted by some authorities, until now a scientific layout of the case investigation has not been published in a book or major scientific journal. This book chapter intends to fill that void, examining the Delina Filkins case utilizing documentary evidence old and new.

Delina Filkins’ life history is fairly mundane, until very late in life. Most of her life was spent on the family farm, and later with relatives in extreme old age. Delina remembered being taken to the opening of the Erie Canal (1825) by her dad at age 10 (Lincoln Star 1928). She attended school until age 11 (Herkimer Web, online) before starting work at home, which was to spin flax into yarn. Having attended local dance balls as a teen, Delina met her husband at one, and she married John Filkins in February 1834, age 18 (see Document B, which includes the marriage entry). Thereafter, Delina was a homemaker and raised six children (a seventh apparently died in infancy). Delina was known for her hard work and self-reliant philosophy. When asked what her secret to long life was, her answers parallel those given by many self-directed individuals: “quiet living and working hard, with no excitement” (Ithaca Journal 1924) and “work, not worry” (Ithaca Journal 1925). A

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**Fig. 17.1** Delina Filkins  
(source: <http://www.grg.org/images/DFilkins101.png>) accessed Nov. 24, 2017



woman of habit, Delina got up every day at 5:30 A.M. (Press and Sun-Bulletin 1926) and went to bed every day at 7 pm (Democrat and Chronicle 1927). Delina refused to be confined to bed even in extreme old age, still getting up at age 112. Delina walked with a cane (Press and Sun Bulletin 1927) and read the newspaper and Bible with glasses. Only in her last year was she confined mostly to a day chair.

Delina was in good health well past age 100, able to walk, carry a conversation, and read. She was known for her tough personality and self-sufficiency. Even at 111, Delina still got up out of bed and made her own breakfast (St. Louis Post-Dispatch 1926). She survived two operations at age 107 and 110<sup>1</sup> (Press and Bulletin 1926; Star-Gazette 1928a, b) remarkably well and rode in an automobile for her 112th birthday (Democrat and Chronicle 1927). While Delina was a woman of her time, she changed with the times, notably updating her wardrobe even past age 105 (St. Louis Post-Dispatch 1926). Delina began to attract local notice for her age when she turned 100, and national coverage at age 109 and above. Even famed aviator Charles Lindbergh wrote her a letter (Star-Gazette 1928a, b). When Delina passed away in December 1928 at age 113 years and 7 months, her death was widely reported, even on the AP wire (Baltimore Sun 1928).

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<sup>1</sup>The operation at age 107 is described as a “hernia” operation, according to the Star-Gazette article. No cause was given for the operation at age 110, other than to say that Delina was confined to bed for only a short period of time.

Below is an excerpt from Dr. A. Ross Eckler’s article on Delina Filkins, published in *the Leatherstocking Journal* in 1980 (Eckler 1980):

Delina Filkins, Who Really Did Live to Be 113

Delina Filkins was born in Stark township, Herkimer County, New York, on May 4, 1815, and died in Richfield Springs, New York, on December 4, 1928, at the age of 113 years and 7 months. Her age at death seems beyond dispute, for it is correctly given in eleven different State and Federal censuses in Herkimer County Courthouse from 1850 through 1925.

The daughter of William and Susanna (Harwick) Ecker, Delina married John Filkins in 1834 and they settled on a farm in the township of Stark (on the south side of Bush road, a short distance east of the Aney Road intersection) for the next 89 years. There she raised a family of six - Joseph, Cornelia, William, Alonzo, Barney, and Frank. After her husband’s death in 1890, she continued to live on the farm with her youngest son Frank and his family. In 1923 they moved to the township of Warren, and two months before her death she came to Richfield Springs.

Today, five great-granddaughters and one great-grandson survive: Mabel Harter, Hilda Royce, Hazel King, and Gordon Filkins of Jordanville; Mildred Kitts of Richfield Springs; and Evelyn Smith of East Winfield. They remember well how “Old Grandma” used to fall asleep in her rocking chair next to the wood stove, ending up leaning against its hot surface. She wore a long dark dress topped with a long white apron; to press the apron she would fold it carefully and place it under the cushion of her chair. At Christmas, the old lady loved to receive candy but wouldn’t share it with the others; instead, she hoarded it in her dresser.

Although slightly deaf, Delina was in good health until shortly before her death, getting around with a cane and even making her own bed. She remembered clearly the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 when she was a 10-year-old girl. She remembered how the smoky glare from a twisted rag in a grease-filled saucer gave way to candles, to kerosene lamps, and to Mr. Edison’s electric light. She remembered the Indians who still lived in the neighborhood when she was a young housewife, and how she baked pies for them when they “came up from the swamps” so they would leave her boys alone.

As Delina grew older, birthdays became community events. She received greetings from Presidents Harding and Coolidge and from Governor Smith of New York, and visitors from miles around. One photograph from the 1920’s shows car after car lined up outside her house. When she reached 113, Owen D. Young commissioned artist Leona Bell Jacobs to do her portrait; one painting is in the Canajoharie Library and Art Gallery (though not always on display) and the other is in the Owen D. Young Central School.

When asked the inevitable question, she replied, “Well, I don’t know exactly. I always worked hard and I think that had a lot to do with it. I have not been sick much, and the only medicine I ever took was steeped herbs.” She might have added heredity; her father lived to be 97.

It’s clear from the above description that Delina was very much well-situated in her life, well-known, surrounded by family and community [industrialist Owen D. Young founded Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and lived in the area] and active in society even in late life: even at age 113, Delina stated that she intended to vote for Herbert Hoover for US President (Evening News 1928), all the more remarkable when one considers that in the USA, women were not allowed to vote for President until 1920, when Delina was 105.

## 17.2 The Validation of Delina (Ecker) Filkins

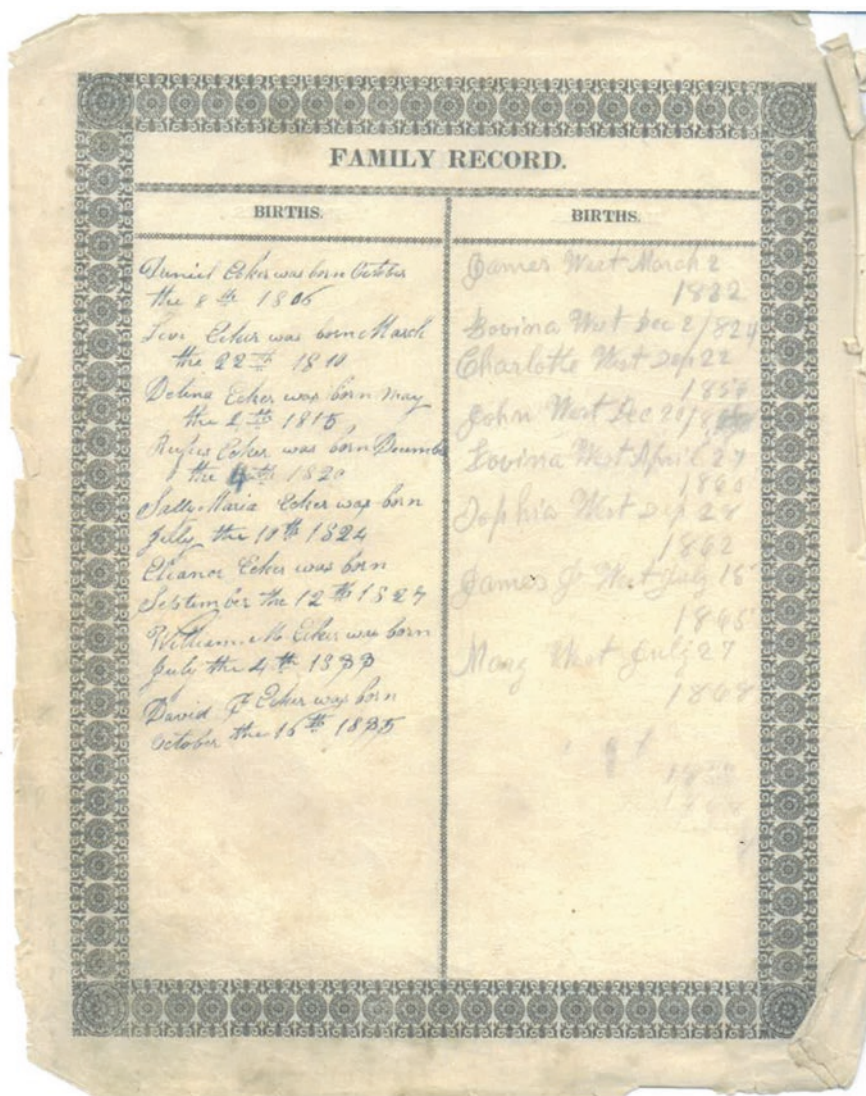
The Delina Filkins case is rather unique: it is the only claim to age 113+ before 1950 to be generally accepted as “validated” by early authorities such as actuaries (Bowerman 1939, 1950). Her case nonetheless needs to be scientifically validated (Poulain 2010). Often, the biggest issue with attempting to validate a claim to age 110+ is the lack of records. The Delina Filkins case fits into a transitional period of American history. At the time of her birth, there were no state birth, marriage, or death records (New York state began statewide birth registration decades later, in 1881). However, US Census records began in 1790 and, moreover, private family records still exist. Delina was part of what may be described as a “landed gentry” Old Dutch/German colonial family in upstate New York, where abundant records exist; lived her entire life in the same small-town area; and was well-known within her family and community. Born in Stark, Herkimer County, New York, a small town of less than 2000 residents in the Mohawk valley, Delina lived nearly her entire life in the same place, only moving in the last two months to Richfield Springs, a town not far to the west. Even then, she went to live with a relative, grandson Berton, so the evidence trail of her life within the family context remained solid.

One must also investigate motivation for the age claim. Many of the age-misrepresented claims debunked by Thoms in his 1873 work (Thoms 1873) were cases that began with oral history tales, not facts, and often came to light in the community beginning with folktales of fantastical ages (indeed, Thoms is also credited with coining the term “folklore” in 1846). The USA was not immune to this local extreme-longevity mythology, with unverified claims sometimes to 120+ being heard of.

With Delina Filkins, her case is different. A check of numerous census and other documents throughout her life course firmly and consistently establish her age over a documentation period in excess of 90 years, suggesting that there was no late-life identity switching or age inflation with the Filkins case. Only the issue of early-life documentation remains an area of uncertainty, one we will take a look at more closely below.

## 17.3 Close Examination of Records for Delina (Ecker) Filkins

Delina Ecker was born May 4, 1815 in Stark, Herkimer County, New York, to parents William (1782–1879) and Susanna (1787–1863) Ecker. Delina was one of at least seven siblings: Daniel (1805–1846), Levi (1810–1869), Delina (1815–1928), Rufus (1820–1914), Sally Maria (1824–1910), Eleanor (1829–fl. 1830?), and William M. (1833–1864/5), all of whose births are listed in the Ecker family bible (see Fig. 17.2). An eighth person listed in the Filkins family bible, David F. Ecker (1835–1923), was presumed to be William and Susanna’s child (according to



**Fig. 17.2** 1815 Family Bible birth entry for Delina Ecker

several family trees and the 1850 census) but is later listed in the 1855 New York state census as the grandchild of William and Susanna (and son of Daniel). David's father, Daniel, passed away in 1846 and William and Susanna must have assumed "parenting": the 1850 US census lists David as their child, then age 19. But it's clear that this was an assumed parental relationship: the New York state 1875 census lists William, 92, as the "grandfather" living with David F. Ecker.



Delina married John Filkins in February 1834 (age 18) and had at least six (likely seven) children: Joseph (1836–1891), Cornelia (1837–1900), William (1839–1909), Alonzo (1841–1929), Barney (1848–1928), and Frank (1854–1932) (some Filkins family trees add a seventh child, Evelyn, born 1850—who likely died as an infant). Delina’s husband John died in 1890 and afterwards Delina lived with her son, Frank, and grandson Berton. Delina outlived all of her children except Alonzo and Frank. Barney died just two months before Delina.

In 2017, in my building of a family tree for Delina (Ecker) Filkins, I looked for unique identifiers, such as the names of parents, siblings, spouse(s), children, location, et cetera to establish whether the document is the correct match or not. I decided to go with [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), where I was able to (re)locate many records for the family tree of Delina (Ecker) Filkins, including census matches, Dutch reformed church records, burial records (including the tombstone and cemetery), death records (for some), and news reports on Delina Filkins herself.

Below is Table 17.1, a short run-down of Delina Filkins’s genealogical life history, as established by documented records:

Analyzing the above data in Table 17.1 to check for claimed age, the Delina Filkins case, unlike many, is near-perfect in its consistency. Table 17.2, below, specifically focuses on Delina Filkins and her recorded age.

While there are some names-misspelled issues (for example, “Delana” Filkins in the 1850 census; “Delaney” in 1910), **all** of the ages given in every census document either supports, or accords with, the age claimed (which is quite unusual in its level of consistency). This case passes the 100th birthday test (age 100 in 1915), which is used to eliminate late-life age inflation (which is often due to family mythology). There is no gap larger than 10 years.

Note that the 1840, 1830, and 1820 censuses provided only “age ranges” for wives and children in the family, but these are among the most important records. The range of “20–30” in 1840 is consistent with a birth from 1811–1820; the range of “15–20” in 1830 is consistent with 1815–1819; and the range of “0–10” in 1820 is consistent with 1811–1819. The 1840 census matches up well with what was expected: husband John Filkins (age 30); wife Delina (age 25); and children Joseph (5–10—4 according to family trees); Cornelia (3); and William (1). With the 1830 census, Delina would be in the age range of “15–20”, which is listed under father, William Ecker. This is among the strongest records, as there are NO females age 10–15 listed. This document helps to remove doubt, as it suggests that the youngest age Delina could have been in 1830 was 15. Given June 1 1830 minus May 4 1815=15, there’s almost no margin for error here. Note the age ranges of the relatives listed nearly match up with what’s expected: the male 40–50 could be the father, William Ecker; the female 40–50 could be her mother, Susanna; sons 20–30 could be Daniel and Levi; son 10–15 could be Rufus; daughter 5–10 could be Sally; daughter 0–5 could be Eleanor. The only mystery listing is a female 20–30, but given that Daniel would have been 25 at the time, he likely had a young wife. Finally, the oldest census record thus far located that accords with an 1815 birth for Delina Ecker is the 1820 census. The male age 26–44 is clearly her father William Ecker, age 37. The female age 26–44 is likely mother Susanna. The male age 10–15

**Table 17.1** Timeline of documents recording Delina Filkins with family

| Timeline of Life Events |                          |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Year                    | Name, Age                | Event                   | Unique Identifiers   |
| 1820                    | Not stated               | Federal census (Aug 7)  | R: Danube, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>Head of household: William Ecker (free white male 26–44), (father)<br>Free white female 26–44: 1 (Susanna Ecker?, mother)<br>Free white female 45+: 1 (could be grandparent)<br>Free white males 10–15: 1 (Daniel)?<br>Free white males 0–10: 2 (Levi, unknown)<br><b>Free white female: 1 in 0–10 age range</b> |
| 1830                    | Not stated               | Federal census (June 1) | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>Head of household: William Ecker (40–50)<br>Females 40–50: 1 (Susanna?, mother)<br>Males 20–30: 2 (Daniel, Levi)<br>Males 10–15: 1 (Rufus)<br>Females 20–30: 1 (unknown)<br><b>Females 15–20: 1 (Delina?)</b><br>Females 5–10: 1 (Sally?)<br>Females under 5: 1 (Eleanor?);                                       |
| 1840                    | Not stated               | Federal census (June 1) | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>Head of household: John Filkins (30–40)<br><b>Females 20–30: 1 (Delina?)</b><br>Males 5–10: 1 (Joseph?)<br>Females under 5: 1 (Cornelia?)<br>Males under 5: 1 (William?)  |
| 1850                    | <b>Delana Filkins 35</b> | Federal census (June 1) | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>S: John Filkins<br>BP: New York<br>Children: Joseph, Cornelia, William L., Alonzo, Barnard  |

(continued)

**Table 17.1** (continued)

| Timeline of Life Events |   |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| Year                    | Name, Age   | Event                   | Unique Identifiers  |
| 1855                    | <b>Delina Filkins 40</b>                                | State census            | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>S: John Filkins<br>BP: New York<br>Children: Joseph, Cornelia, William L., Alonzo, Barnard |
| 1860                    | <b>Delina Filkins 45</b>                                | Federal census (June 1) | R: Town of stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>S: John Filkins<br>BP: New York<br>Children: Joseph, Cornelia, Alonzo, Barnard     |
| 1865                    | <b>Delina Filkins 50</b>                                | State census            | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>S: John Filkins<br>BP: New York<br>Children: Joseph, Cornelia, Alonzo, Byron, Franklin     |
| 1870                    | <b>Delina Filkins 55</b>                                | Federal census (June 1) | R: New York, United States<br>S: John Filkins<br>BP: New York<br>Children: Joseph, Cornelia, Barney, frank                                |
| 1875                    | <b>Delina Filkins 60</b>                                | State census            | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>S: John Filkins<br>Children: Joseph, Cornelia, Barney, frank                               |
| 1880                    | <b>Delina Filkins 65</b>                                | Federal census (June 1) | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>S: John Filkins<br>BP: New York<br>Children: Joseph, Cornelia                              |
| 1892                    | <b>Delina Filkens 77</b>                                | State census            | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States   |
| 1900                    | <b>Delina Filkins 85 (also listed as born May 1815)</b> | Federal census (June 1) | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States<br>BP: New York<br>Son: Frank Filkins   |
| 1905                    | <b>Delina Filkins 90</b>                                | State census            | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States   |

(continued)



**Table 17.1** (continued)

| Timeline of Life Events |                           |                         |  |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Year                    | Name, Age                 | Event                   | Unique Identifiers   |
| 1910                    | <b>Delaney Filkins 95</b> | Federal census (Apr 15) | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States                    |
|                         |                           |                         | BP: New York   |
|                         |                           |                         | Son: Frank Filkins   |
| 1915                    | <b>Delina Filkins 100</b> | State census            | R: Stark, A.D. 01, E.D. 01, Herkimer, New York, United States  |
|                         |                           |                         | Son: Frank Filkins   |
| 1920                    | <b>Delina Filkins 104</b> | Federal census (Jan 1)  | R: Stark, Herkimer, New York, United States                    |
|                         |                           |                         | BP: New York   |
|                         |                           |                         | Son: Franklin Filkins  |
| 1925                    | <b>Delina Filkins 110</b> | State census            | R: Warren, A.D. 01, E.D. 01, Herkimer, New York, United States |
|                         |                           |                         | Son: Franklin Filkins  |
| 1928                    | <b>Delina Filkins 113</b> | Death                   | Father: William ecker  |
|                         |                           |                         | Spouse: John Filkins   |
|                         |                           |                         | Sons: Alonzo, frank  |
|                         |                           |                         | R: Herkimer County, New York, USA                              |

*R* residence, *BP* birthplace

**Table 17.2** Age validation check for Delina Filkins case

| Time        | Sort of document  | Documented age/date of birth | Record accords with |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1820        | US Federal census | 0–10 (age range given)       | May 4, 1815         |
| 1830        | US Federal census | 15–20 (age range given)      | May 4, 1815         |
| 1840        | US Federal census | 20–30 (age range given)      | May 4, 1815         |
| 1850        | US Federal census | 35                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1855        | New York census   | 40                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1860        | US Federal census | 45                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1865        | New York census   | 50                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1870        | US Federal census | 55                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1875        | New York census   | 60                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1880        | US Federal census | 65                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1892        | New York census   | 77                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1900        | US Federal census | 85; “May 1815”               | May 4, 1815         |
| 1905        | New York census   | 90                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1910 (Apr.) | US Federal census | 95                           | May 4, 1815         |
| 1915        | New York census   | 100                          | May 4, 1815         |
| 1920 (Jan.) | US Federal census | 104                          | May 4, 1815         |
| 1925        | New York census   | 110                          | May 4, 1815         |
| 1928        | Obituaries        | 113; May 4, 1815             | May 4, 1815         |

is likely Daniel; 2 males under 10 could include Levi and an unknown child (unless Rufus, 4 months before his alleged birth from the family Bible, was already born); one female age 0–10 likely was Delina. A female aged 45+ could be her grandmother.

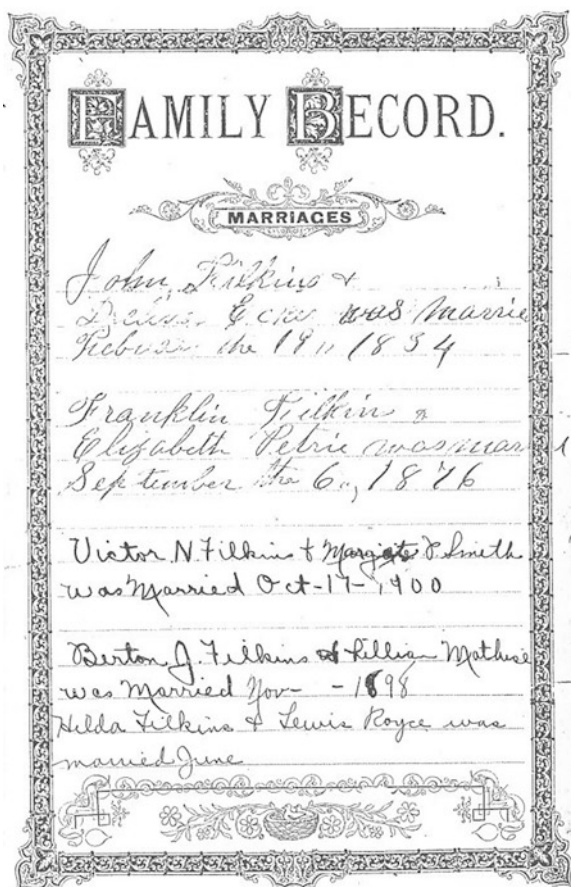
With numerous news reports from 1924 to 1928 covering Delina's 109th–113th birthdays, followed by multiple published obituaries, there can be no doubt that Delina Filkins passed away December 4, 1928, and that her claimed date of birth of May 4, 1815 firmly stretches back over more than a century of records (1928–1820 = 108 years). Located census records (including 1820, 1830, and 1840) include 10 Federal census matches, 7 state census matches, the two family Bible entries, and the death reports: a total of 20 documented data points that all agree with the claim that Delina Filkins was born May 4, 1815 (the April 15, 1910 census arguably supports 1814, but given it was just 19 days to her 95th birthday, her age was very likely rounded, and in any case, that still supports 113+).

If the first observation is that the ages in the census documents all match the age claimed, the second that can be said is that the identity of Delina (Ecker) Filkins located in the context of her family strongly matches the census records. We have the correct husband (John) and almost the correct sibling names: Joseph, Cornelia, William, Alonzo, Barnard/"Barney"/Byron, and Frank. We also have even the correct names of additional relatives, such as grandson Berton [mentioned in the news reports, the family Bible (marriage in 1898), and also some of the census matches]. The oldest census record, from 1820, strongly implies the existence of Delina, as William Ecker had one daughter under age 10.

But what about family records? The Filkins family Bible (see Figs. 17.2 and 17.3) fortunately still exists. We can make out from the cursive handwriting on the old, yellowed parchment that "Delina Ecker was born May the 4th, 1815". We can also see birth entries for older brothers Daniel ("born Oct the 8th 1805"), Levi ("born March the 22nd, 1810") and younger brother Rufus ("born December the 4th, 1820"). Note: the early family Bible years of birth: 1805, 1810, 1815, 1820 may be said by skeptics to resemble "age heaping", but the exact months and dates of birth (Oct 8 1805; Mar 22 1810; May 4 1815; Dec 4 1820) don't fit "age-heaped" expectations. Neither do the birth years of 1824, 1827, 1833, and 1835 for the younger relatives listed.

Did longevity run in Delina's family? Her father, William Ecker, died in 1879, age 96/97 (William Ecker died either the day before or four days after turning 97—sources differ by five days on his date of birth), and her brother, Rufus Ecker, died in 1914 at age 93. A grandson, Earl, lived to age 94. I could not find anyone other than Delina age 100+ in the family. One thing to note is that Delina's mother, Susanna, born Nov 21 1787, gave birth to her last child, William M., in October 1833, age 45 (David F., born October 15/16, 1835, although listed as her child in the 1850 census, is apparently her grandchild, as per the 1855 New York state census). Births to natural mothers older than 37 often correlate with exceptional longevity. Yet, it's also clear that environmental impacts played a role in shortening the lives of others: for example, Delina's brother William M. Eckler appears to have died in the US Civil War, age just 31.

**Fig. 17.3** 1834 Delina Filkins marriage to John Filkins in the Family Bible



It's also clear that infant and child mortality was a typical problem even for this “long-lived” family in the 1800s: Eleanor and Evelyn apparently died as infants or children. Experts, in reviewing family tree records, look for potential cases of “sibling switching”, whereby the birth of an older sibling is conflated with the death of a younger, as in the case of Damiana and Diminia Sette of Italy (Poulain 2010). Searching the Filkins case, the context clues do not support a “sibling-switching” scenario. First and foremost, there are no known candidates for a potential younger sibling to switch with (Sally and Eleanor are far too young to be candidates for this). The family Bible has no later marks indicating potential later additions. Delina's age at marriage, 18, is already relatively young, making it less likely that she was “even younger”. Perhaps the strongest clue is that the 1830 census “age range” is for a female aged 15–20:  $1830 - 1815 = \text{age } 15$ . Had Delina been born in 1816 or later, she would not have fit in the age range. And while the 1830 census hints at an older female in the “20–30” age range, if this were Delina, she would have been older than 118 ... not at all likely. It possibly could be a wife of older brother Daniel, who was then 25 years old.

What's remarkable about the above set of documents is its depth (20 or more documents for an age validation) and consistency: all documents support Delina being born in 1815, with the possible exception of the (April) 1910 census having her as "95 in April 1910", which would technically support a birth in 1814, but more likely Delina's age was rounded off. Note, also, that the 1850 census lists Delina's son, Joseph, as age "14", suggesting that the "35"-year-old Delina gave birth at age 21, circa 1835–1936 (and about a year after her 1834 marriage to John Filkins). Indeed, the 1840 census indicates that Delina's oldest child was age 5–9. In short, every record check done on this case either supports or accords with the conclusion that Delina Filkins was at least 113 years of age.

The number of documents (20) in support of Delina Filkins being 113 in 1928 would be sufficient to meet the standards of most researchers regarding whether this case is "validated". Proof of death was more than sufficient (including the New York Death Index and multiple news reports) and proof of identity through the life course of this remarkable woman was well more than sufficient. The only weak area is that the earliest certainly dated document is from 1850 (listing Delina as "35"); the 1840, 1830, and 1820 censuses give an "age range", and the marriage and birth records, though placed solidly in the context of a longstanding family Bible heirloom, with older and younger relatives in proper order, does not give a date of recording. Due to these issues, the Filkins case would not attain the highest standards of age validation, an "original proof of birth only" standard that would exclude not just the Filkins case but also notable cases such as Sarah Knauss (Young 2010).

However, if we are to accept Knauss based on the proxy proof of birth method using the 20-year rule, we may also conclude that there is sufficient evidence to deem the Delina Filkins case "validated" according to similar standards. A woman who married in 1834 and gave birth in 1835/1836 fits well with a birth year of "1815", and the claim to birth in 1815, recorded in the family Bible and certainly confirmed by the 1850 census, far predates any potential later motivations which in many instances lead to age inflation, including pension fraud claims, seeking attention, local village elder, et cetera (Young et al., 2010).

## 17.4 Conclusion

Of all early (pre-1950) claims to age 113, the Filkins case represents the only validated case. Unlike the claim of Pierre Joubert to age 113 in 1814 (debunked by Charbonneau in 1990), the Filkins case appears to be genuine. Being socially well-known for many years helps to minimize identity fraud, sibling switching, and the like. That Filkins's age never deviated before her extreme old age (or at all) rules out pension fraud, attention seeking, or age misreporting due to faulty memory.

Nevertheless, there are some concerns about this case. There is no original proof of birth or baptism (only a family Bible entry—See Fig. 17.2). The marriage record is a recording in a Bible, not an official document (see Fig. 17.3). And while the death record likely exists, it has not been publicly located (however, I have located

Delina Filkins in the New York Death Index ... name, date of death, and place of death are given, though not age). Also, the lack of a “date of recording” of the family Bible entries leads to questions as to just when this material was added.

Since the introduction of the rules for the concept of the age validation of centenarians in the 1870s by William Thoms, there has been a heavy divide between the emphasis among skeptics for the importance of age validation and checking and the tendency for longevity mythology to be accepted by the mainstream media (and sometimes non-demographic scientists), often without sufficient proof of age. Twenty documents available for Delina Filkins, the context of family-tree information, and the fact that the documents tightly fit together all support the age claim of Delina Filkins to be 113 in 1928. This case meets most modern standards of age validation used by authorities such as the International Database on Longevity (IDL) and the Gerontology Research Group (GRG). The fact that the oldest document currently known was a family Bible entry written close to the time of birth, and that even the marriage entry for when Delina was 18, makes her case similar to the Sarah Knauss case, who also is missing original proof of birth, but for whom the concept of a “20-year-rule” for proxy census substitution was proposed in 1998 by Jean-Marie Robine (Vaupel and Robine 2002) and subsequently accepted and instituted by the Gerontology Research Group, the International Database on Longevity, and the US Social Security Administration study of supercentenarians. Using the test methods in place for the Sarah Knauss case, the Delina Filkins case passes the same standards.

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## Appendix

Figures 17.2 and 17.3, copies of the original Filkins family Bible, were supplied by Dr. Eckler.

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