

**Bio: Matilda Martha Mathews**  
Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2018

Matilda Martha Mathews was probably born near the middle of the long list of children of David Mathews and Sarah Seymour. She was likely born at the family home in Flatbush, New York between the years 1765-1770. She was probably in her teens when, in 1784, her loyalist family fled from New York City, to the town of Halifax in Nova Scotia. Shortly thereafter, the family moved on to the "new" colony at Cape Breton.

There is disagreement about her given name - Is it Matilda or Martha? Mathews' family genealogies call her Matilda Mathews, but contemporary records refer to her as Matilda, Martha and "Matty". The possibility remains that David Mathews and Sarah Seymour had a daughter Matilda, and another daughter Martha.

Matilda (Martha) Mathews may be the "Matty" named in a 1785 letter written by Penelope Winslow at Halifax Nova Scotia to her cousin Ward Chipman. In speaking of the social life within the loyalist community at Halifax, Winslow describes:

*Your other friends are all well, pursuing pleasure with ardour. Feasting, card playing and dancing is the great business of life at Halifax, one eternal round. The votaries of pleasure complain of being fatigued and want variety of amusements. The new imported ladies continue to be the belles. The Princes, Taylors and Haliburtons are totally eclipsed by the Millers. Betsy and Matty Matthews are the admiration of all the beaux.*

Matilda (Martha) Mathews married William Wylly on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1785, at Halifax in Nova Scotia. Wylly was serving as the registrar of the court of vice-admiralty in New Brunswick, at the time of the marriage. A short two years after their marriage, the Wylly family removed to the Bahamas, where Wylly served in a number of prominent British government offices. William Wylly's story is an interesting one, and much has been written about him. A few links for further reading are provided below.

The Wylly's primary estate in the Bahamas was Clifton Plantation. It is intriguing to learn that the ruins of this property have been turned into a park and major historical and archeological site for the Bahamian people.

A richly informative article was published in the College of the Bahamas Alumini Magazine; Spring Summer 2008. Written by Maelynn Seymour-Major, and titled Clifton Living Museum, it would be of interest to all Mathews family descendants. A

section of the article is given below, but readers are encouraged to seek out the full article.

*[referring to Clifton Plantation] . . . After changing hands a few times more, ownership passed to William Wylly. He was made Attorney General of the Bahamas in 1797. It is recorded that his governance and implementation of the law contrasted significantly from that of the US and the Bahamas of the day. Wylly was known for his progressive views and reputation as a benevolent slaver owner; he demonstrated his desire to improve conditions for slaves through his role as Attorney General. He was a considerable land owner in both New Providence plantations Waterloo, Tusculum and Deans. Wylly employed some of his slaves to build a wall between his property and that of William Moss. Parts of this were reported to still be intact as late as 2000. Wylly died in 1828 and the estate went to his daughter and to a son Vincent. Interestingly, Wylly's former foreman, James Rutherford, a free black, later successfully sued his estate and won an amount of 801 pounds.*

*James Reid came to own the Clifton Plantation in 1830 and was a fierce protector of the property having placed public ads warning against trespass. After his death he left all of his property to Ann Davis, a free coloured woman. Davis sold Clifton to Thomas Martin Matthews in 1847. Matthews is thought to have been related to the late William Wylly's wife. He was known as "the premier lawyer of the 19th century in the Bahamas" and owned thousands of acres adjoining the Clifton Plantation. He was a farmer, and as historical references related to the sale of Clifton produce attest, is presumed to have managed the plantation with success. However, it was during the time that Matthews owned the estate that the great Clifton residence burned to the ground . . .*

*The development of the Clifton site into a national park where Bahamians can share their history with each other and with visitors to the country presents an opportunity to preserve the past for future generations. Until the recent move to protect and preserve these ruins, they were primarily neglected and left to the slow decay of time. Now, the site is undergoing an unprecedented restoration so that we may form a more accurate picture of what was once there. The remains of ten slave houses, the stables and the 'Great House' are currently under restoration . . .*

Mathews family genealogies usually identify eight children for William Wylly and Matilda (Martha) Mathews - Alexander Campbell Wylly, Elizabeth Harriett Wylly Beresford, Margaret Wylly Stafford, Mary Ann Cameron Wylly Bayly, Matilda Wylly Chambers, Thomas Brown Wylly, Vincent Mathews Wylly, and William Cunningham Wylly. Some of their children remained in the Bahamas for a time, but several married

and lived out their adult lives in England and Australia. Descendants have spread out around the globe.

It is not known when or where Matilda (Martha) Mathews Wylly died. William Wylly continued in service to the British government almost until his death at the age of seventy. About 1820 he removed from his beloved home at Clifton to the island of St Vincent, and toward the very end of his life he may have returned to England, for he was buried in the county of Devonshire. His memorial at All Saints Church, East Budleigh, in Devonshire reads: *William Wylly, esq., Chief Justice of the Island of . . . Attorney General of the Bahama Islands, who departed this life . . . Jan. 1828. a. 70.* His remains are interred under this tomb erected by his son Vincent Mathews Wylly. [source] All Saints Church East Budleigh (Devonshire England) Memorials.

On the ninth of February 1821, Harriet Mathews Green placed a "petition" in The American, a New York City newspaper. She was seeking members of her near family who would be involved in the division of property that had been bequeathed by her grandfather, Vincent Mathews in his 1784 Will. The petition mentions her sister **Martha** Wylly, deceased, and eight Wylly children. In this database see the sketch titled, Petition of 1821, David Mathews' Descendants.

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Matilda Martha Mathews in database](#)

[Link to William Wylly in database](#)

[Sketch: Petition of 1821, David Mathews' Descendants](#)

Further Reading:

[Clifton Living Museum](#); Maelynn Seymour-Major; The College of the Bahamas Alumni Magazine; Spring Summer 2008.

[Clifton Heritage National Park website](#)

Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahama Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period; Sandra Riley, Thelma B. Peters; 2000.

**Biography of Matilda Martha Mathews; written by Pamela Hutchison Garrett for Markham of Chesterfield website; 2018.**