

## Sketch: An Account of the Mathews Family

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General Vincent Mathews.  
An Interesting Biographical Sketch

*Thomas M Howell, Esq, of this village, during his recent visit with friends in Niagara Falls, came across the following interesting biographical sketch, and through his kindness we have obtained a copy for publication. The original sketch was dictated by General Mathews himself, a short time before his death, to his pastor and is now in the possession of Vincent Matthews Porter, of Niagara Falls. The accompanying note in regard to General Woodhull is furnished by Mr Howell.*

Vincent Mathews was born June 29, 1766. The family is of Irish descent. His great grandfather, Peter Mathews, was a commissioned officer in the British army, and served as Lieutenant and Captain of one of the companies of troops brought from England to garrison the forts at Albany and New York, under the command of Colonel Benjamin Fletcher, who was his guardian, and became Governor of the Province in 1692. In public affairs, both military and civil, Peter Mathews took a prominent part, until his death in 1719. The Rev Mr Ellison informed General Mathews that his coat of arms, probably a funeral escutcheon, was in the old St Peters Church in Albany, of which Peter Mathews was one of the founders. This was removed before the General's recollection. His grandfather, Vincent Mathews, went into Orange county in its earliest settlement, and bought, back of Newburgh, or rather New Windsor, seven hundred acres of very fine land. It was called Mathewsfield, which name it long retained.

The grandfather exercised important influence in the county, and by royal patent was made Clerk of the County. His removal to Orange county was in the year 1720, and at that time they had no mill nearer than Fishkill. After the British evacuated the city he went down with his daughter, Mrs Theophilus Beekman, and there died at the mature age of eighty-four. His remains were brought up by the father of General Mathews and interred at Mathewsfield. The family left by this patriarch consisted of three sons – Fletcher, David and James. Fletcher lived in Orange county, an attorney-at-law, and the owner of a large farm. David, also an attorney, was mayor of New York city during the Revolution, and was of course a royalist. He left for Nova Scotia after the evacuation of that city by the British, and became President of the Council and Attorney-General. He died in New Brunswick. James, the father of General Mathews, lived on the farm with his parents. Besides his three sons, he had two daughters. Bridget married a Mr Jones, the father of John and Thomas Jones, both surgeons in the army. The former was distinguished and became Surgeon General. One son died in Washington, having been Chief Clerk of the Treasury under General Hamilton, remaining in office under Gallatin, and after until his death. Elizabeth married Theophilus Beekman, an alderman of New York. Vincent, the General's grandfather, married twice. His first wife was Catharine, daughter of John Abeel, mayor of Albany in 1694; merchant in New York city, 1696, afterwards returned to Albany, where he died, 1711. His second wife was a Mrs Wildman. Elizabeth (Mrs Beekman)

was the only child, and inherited from her a good property. The wife of DeWitt Clinton was a member of the Matthews family.

General Mathews' father died at the age of seventy-four in Elmira, Tioga county. His mother's name was Hannah, daughter of Selah Strong of the Long Island family of that name. Her mother was a sister of General Nathaniel Woodhull Howell, who died at the village of Canandaigua in 1851.\* The General himself was one of twelve children, equally divided between sons and daughters. The names of the sons were Selah, Vincent, Peter, Fletcher, James, and Nathaniel. The eldest removed with the father to Tioga and died there. The youngest died at the age of nineteen, while studying law in the General's office. The daughters, six in number, were as follows: Catharine married Mr Carpenter, Clerk of Tioga county, and died in 1840. She was the mother of the late Hon Matt. Carpenter, US Senator from Wisconsin. Hannah became Mrs Tubbs, Julia married Judge Hammond, of Hammondsport. Elizabeth married Mr J Christopher, of venerable memory. Sarah married General Haight, and Gov Fletcher Haight of California, was her son. Bridget married Mr Low, and Cadet Vincent M Low, accidentally killed at West Point in 1817, his monument still standing there, was her son.

This sketch of ancestry comprises a list of well known and honorable names, connecting the General with many worthy men who preceded him, with many families still remaining with great respectability in New York and other parts of the State. In addition to characters of political influence and moral worth, they appear to have been marked by longevity. The General's father lost all his landed estate in Orange county, and being, during the war, a sub contractor for the supply of troops at West Point, the failure of the principal deprived him of all he possessed besides, and threw his affairs into long and serious embarrassment. One of the first acts of the General after his settlement in practice was to purchase a farm in the neighborhood of Elmira, . . . family except Mrs Carpenter, who by marriage had become provided with a home of her own. This was in 1793. He gave the farm to his eldest brother, and the widow still resides upon it.

In this mode the history of the family becomes transferred from Orange county to the southern part of our broad State, and there we must trace the early history of the early manhood of our revered friend.

Up to the fall of 1781, Vince (the General) remained at home with his father on the ancestral property in Matthewsfield. At this period he left home for a school at Goshen, the academy at which place was then kept by the celebrated Noah Webster. This academy he left in 1784 for that at Hackensack, NJ which was then under the charge of Peter Wilson, afterwards so extensively known as Dr Wilson, Professor of Languages in Columbia College. In 1786, the spring of that year, the General went to New York to study law with Col Robert Troup, and after spending four years in this preparation was admitted to practice as attorney in the Supreme Court in 1790. After being licensed, the General went to Orange county and spent a year. In the winter of '91, Tioga, Herkimer, and Ontario, were set off and courts organized in them. A friend of his was appointed Clerk and removed to Tioga, offering an inducement to

the General to emigrate also. His circumstances at this time were very poor. He had literally nothing, being compelled to borrow money for his expenses and credit for a horse in order to reach his new home. Through his studies the same depression in pecuniary matters must have existed, for he paid his board at Hackensack, accruing while at the academy, out of his subsequent earning by professional labor. The journey at that time could only be performed on horseback, and the party pursued an Indian path for most of the way. The General settled in Tioga about three miles below Elmira, in which village at that time there were only three or four log houses, and in one of these the court was held. He boarded with a farmer and always spoke of the period as the happiest of his life. The expense of board was \$1.00 a week for himself and horse. He soon obtained a large share of the business which was relatively very lucrative. The fees were small, but living as stated exceedingly cheap. The General at this time laid down for himself a rule, which was if he found himself deceived by his client to have the case settled out of court. He would never argue against his own convictions or the real facts of the case as known to himself. This gained him the confidence of the Court and he found in its results was a plan of the best policy for his own interest.

Elmira was at this period like most newly settled places, extremely dissipated. It was destitute of the state ordinances of religion. The Sunday was a day of drunkenness and amusement, only occasionally intermitted by visits from unlicensed and generally uneducated preachers. The father and grandfather of the General had been Episcopalians, attending church three miles from Matthewsfield, where at that time the Rev Mr Sears preached. By this gentleman the General himself was baptized in infancy. His predilections were in consequence very strongly in favor of the Episcopal Church, but as the majority of those about him were attached to other modes of worship, and it was then very difficult to procure the services of a clergyman of the Episcopal Church, he freely exerted himself in behalf of denominations differing from his own predilections. The first minister who came into the neighborhood as a missionary, The General took to his own house, and from that commenced the first regular religious worship in that place. In prosecution of the same generous purpose, in 1795 he gave a minister his board in his own family for two years, and on another occasion paid his salary and gave him his board for four months. The clergymen first thus aided and the churches in consequence established were Presbyterian. The General continued himself an Episcopalian, but was deprived of worship in the forms of that church until his removal to Rochester. The Revolution destroyed the Episcopal Church in Orange county.

The General at this period attended the other county courts adjacent, and was the only lawyer at the first court in the county of Ontario in 1791. In the spring of '93 he was elected to the Assembly, George Clinton being Governor, and in the ensuing year '94, he was re-elected. Judge Spencer and Judge Radcliff were in the same Legislature, and Thos Morris, afterwards Marshal of New York, General Worth, of Duanesburgh, and Jas Watson of New York. Mr Verplank was Speaker. In '96 he was elected for the Western District to the Senate. This included all west of Otsego, inclusive, and there were eight members in each district. Thomas Morris went with him in the same Senate from the same district. Under the new census the elected members drew for their terms. The General drew in this lot for three years, he was then

re-elected, making the whole compliment seven years. Mr Jay was Governor, and the following venerated names were associated with him, General Schuyler, Jas Watson, of New York' Matthew L Clarkson, Judge Spencer, Judge Strong, of Long Island, &c.

August 11, 1791, the General married Juliana Strong in Blooming-grove, Orange county, a short distance from Matthewsfield. This lady was the daughter of Major Nathaniel Strong, holding only a militia commission, but who was exceedingly active against the Tories in the Highlands, in intercepting parties from Albany on their way to New York. The Major was Assassinated in his own house by a band of marauders from New York, headed by one Claudius Smith, who was afterwards tried, convicted, and executed.

While in the Senate in '98, the General was appointed one of the important commission to settle the titles of the Ouondaga lands. The appointment was made by the Legislature and the General was chosen without his having used any influence to effect it.

In 1809 the General was elected to Congress and served through one term. From '12 to '17 he was District Attorney for Tioga, Broome, Seneca, Steuben, and Alleghany. During the interval to 1816 he continued in the successful practice of the law at Elmira, and accumulated a considerable property . . . for two miles back from the village and a considerable portion of the village itself is now on that tract. About the beginning of the War of 1812, the General was persuaded by a friend to join him in trade at Elmira. This he did to his own ruin. His partner was considerably in debt, and at the peace a large stock of goods on hand fell greatly in value from the large importations, and the result of the disastrous attempt was the relinquishment of all his property. On this event, in 1816, the General moved to Bath, in Steuben county, where he pursued his profession until 1821, when he came to this city, Rochester. He had formed a business connection with the late Judge Rochester, who came to Rochester to make arrangements for their joint removal. He provided for the General by renting the house on the Hill which he always afterwards occupied, but abandoned the project for himself. The General finding himself thus committed determined to come, notwithstanding the change of partnership plans. When in Steuben country he was for two years Supreme Court Commissioner. The military career from which the title was derived, which we have given to his honored name, as that most familiar, commenced by his appointment as 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant of Cavalry of which Thos Morris commanded as Major. This was in '94, too late to have any connection with Revolutionary days. From this he was successively appointed Major, Colonel, and brigadier-General. His brigade extended to Otsego, including all the western country. In Rochester he has been at different times District Attorney for about ten years. In 1826 he took a seat in the Legislature for one year.

Notes – General Vincent Mathews died at the city of Rochester, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1846, in the eighty-first year of his age. His daughter, wife of Albert H Porter, whose golden wedding was celebrated three years since, resides at Niagara Falls, in the old family mansion erected by Augustus Porter, deceased, before the war of 1812, who once resided in this village, and about the year 1794 erected the house now occupied by EG Tyler, which formerly stood directly in

front of the Greig mansion, about twenty feet from the street on which Albert H Porter was born. General Mathews and NW Howell were own cousins.

\*General Nathaniel Woodhull was born at Mastie, LI, December 30, 1722. He entered the army in 1758, during the war between Great Britain and France, which commenced in 1754 and terminated in 1760. He was engaged in the attack upon Fort Ticonderoga, made by the army commanded by General Abercrombie. In 1760 he served as Colonel, under General Amherst, who commanded the army that effected the final reduction of Canada. He was elected Member of Assembly from the County of Suffolk in the year 1769. He was a member of the convention which met in the city of New York, April 10, 1775, to choose delegates to the Continental Congress. About the 22d of August, 1775, he was appointed General. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, 1775, he was elected president of the provincial Congress, which office he held in the body that succeeded it in 1776. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, 1776, he was chosen president of the Congress that assembled on that day at White Plains, which adopted the Declaration of Independence. He was in command of a portion of the troops, near Jamaica, where he was taken prisoner and was cowardly and cruelly assaulted and wounded, and died therefrom on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, 1776, in the fifty-fourth year of his age.

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Peter Mathews \(1665-1719\) in database](#)

[Link to Vincent Mathews \(1695-1784\) in database](#)

[Link to James Mathews \(1742-1816\) in database](#)

[Link to Vincent Mathews \(1766-1846\) in database](#)

**Sketch: An Account of the Mathews Family; transcribed and compiled by Pamela Hutchison Garrett for Markham of Chesterfield website; 2018.**