

William Cripps – 7/23/1798 – 1884

By Janet Elizabeth Luther (nee Matheson) b. 5/24/1939 – written in May 2008

Note: **Red type** indicates my direct ancestors

Who was William Cripps? **My dad was Harry Matheson (nee Cummings); his mother was Janet Cummings (nee Matheson); her father was Frederick James Matheson; his mother was Elizabeth Matheson (nee Cripps); and her father was William Cripps.** So William is my great great great grandfather! We are incredibly lucky to have a copy (105 typed double-spaced pages!), apparently transcribed at some point from the handwritten original of “Memories of William Cripps written at the age of 84”, dated 7/12/1882. My dad, Harry, got this in 1966 from a cousin named Elizabeth Matheson, who was a potter and lived in New Zealand. She was Dad’s first cousin once removed; i.e., her father William B. Matheson and Dad’s grandfather Frederick James Matheson were brothers. We also have a photo of William Cripps dated November 1983 which calls him Henry; probably this was his middle name. Maybe he was called this to distinguish him from his uncle William (see below).

In 2018, I found this Memoir online at www.jstor.org as an article titled “The Memoir of a Nottingham Lace Merchant William Cripps, 1798-1884”, J. D. Chambers. It appeared in the *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jun., 1950), pp. 65-109, published by The President and Fellows of Harvard College. J. D. Chambers wrote an introduction to the Memoir in which he thanks Mrs. Isabel Gwyther, a granddaughter of William Cripps, for allowing him to prepare the original manuscript for publication. Isabel (nee Matheson) was an aunt of the Elizabeth Matheson who sent a copy to Harry.

Below are some biographical highlights from this work.

William’s grandfather Cripps was a brewer in Newport Pagnel, England.

Grandfather Cripps had 4 sons and at least 2 daughters: The eldest was (also) named William; he had inherited after Grandfather Cripps’ death, but squandered his fortune and so opened a boys’ day school. He and “our” William’s father were married to sisters. The two other brothers were George, who kept the “Neptune Inn” at Newport, and Thomas, who had a grocery shop and was also a cooper at Sherrington. Of Grandfather Cripps’ daughters we know only that one married Mr. Osborn, a woolstapler, and another married Mr. Jefferson, A feltmonger, both of Newport.

Our William’s father, whose name we never learn, was a “younger son” born in 1760 who died suddenly on 1/17/1827 from pleurisy (when William was 29). William’s father was apprenticed to a hatter in London, and then worked in a draper’s shop in Newport Pagnel. He was a good singer and strongly religious. In 1785 he opened his own draper’s shop. He became a churchwarden, but the clergyman was a man of dissolute habits, so William’s father, disillusioned, left the Church of England and joined the Independent Church in spite of everyone’s strong disapproval of his “forsaking the church”. He was shunned and also suffered from epilepsy and “nervous dejection”, of which he was later cured.

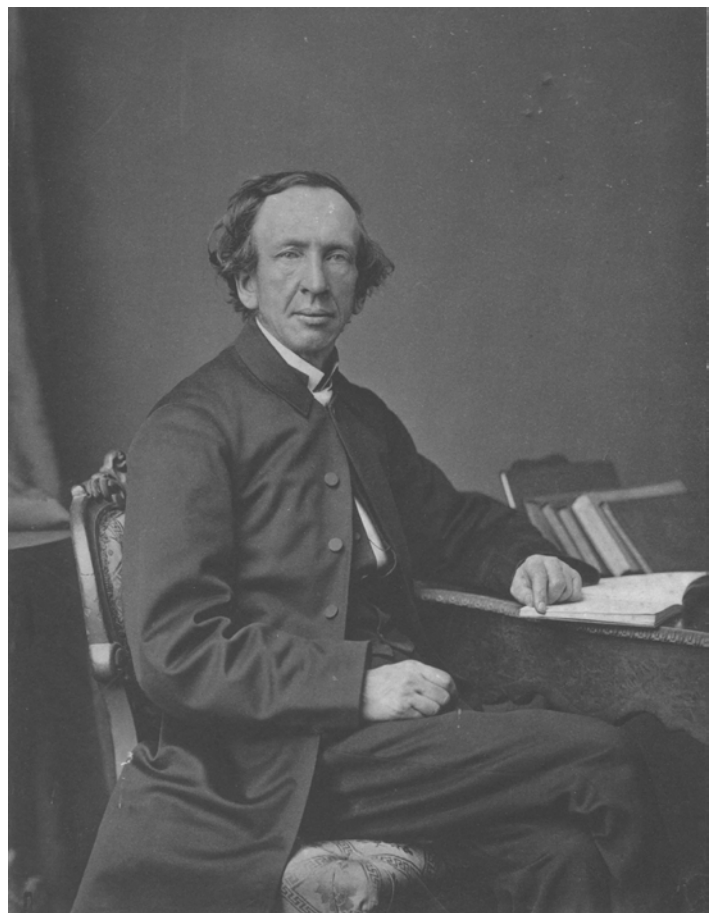
William's mother was born Sukey Rogers. Her father had a farm at Sherrington near Newport Pagnel. His mother had two brothers: John Rogers who had a farm at Sherrington and Thomas Rogers who was a doctor at Newport, and two sisters, one of whom married his Uncle William (see above) and another a farmer in Sherrington named Griggs.

William's parents had 11 children, of which six survived: Joseph (who died in May 1864), George, **William (7/23/1798-1884)**, Susan, another daughter, and Betsy. Only William and Betsy were living by 7/12/1882. Joseph got William started by lending him money and sending lace; George chose bad companions and seems to have failed at all his various employments. William eventually settled a yearly sum of \$600 on him and he settled with his wife in Greenport near Boston. One brother (I think probably Joseph) married a Miss Grundy on 8/6/1829.

William left school in 1812 at age 14 and learned his father's drapery business in Newport Pagnel but read a lot about America and decided to go there and became a lace merchant in New York. He sailed many times from England to America, each voyage taking at least 20 days. William also took several long walks in America, traveling as far as Niagara Falls and Canada.

By 1825 William was frequently crossing the Atlantic. In England he was often in Nottingham where the "bobinett" trade had blossomed. In 1829 he added "Scotch embroideries" to his stock of lace goods.

William married Elizabeth Heygate on 8/6/1828 when he was 30 and she 25 (so she was born in 1803). Elizabeth was one of the seven Heygate girls of Market Harborough: Elizabeth (the eldest), Mary Ann, Sophy, Martha, Kate, Louisa and Sarah. **William and Elizabeth had three daughters: Elizabeth born 6/12/1829, who was my dad's great grandmother;** Mary Ann born 8/24/1831; and Susan born 4/20/1834, who died in May 1864, ten days after the birth of her daughter Susan Buchanan; and a son William (Willie) born 12/21/1842, who died in October 1860 from a cold which attacked his lungs. (William calls his one unmarried daughter Polly. I think Elizabeth married the Rev. James Matheson and Susan died in childbirth, so Mary Ann must be his "Polly".)



*The Reverend James Matheson
taken in 1876*

William's daughter Elizabeth married a Congregationalist minister, The Reverend James Matheson, and lived in Nottingham, England. They apparently had a lot of children including: **Frederick James Matheson (born 2/2/?? – died 4/16/1936) who was my dad's grandfather**; Annie; Isabel, Katie, Willie and Harry. The Reverend James Matheson's family lived in England, but his children visited William in America: Katie was with William in NY from August 1873 until November 1874 – would she have been 20-ish then; ie born ~1853?

Isabel also came in August 1873 but stayed longer than Katie. Willie came in 1875 and Harry came to the Centennial Exhibition in 1876. **I suppose that Frederick named my dad Harry in honor of his brother Harry.** One of these daughters had a son, also named William, who went to New Zealand; his daughter was the Elizabeth Matheson who sent William Cripps's Memoir to Dad.

The Reverend James and Elizabeth's third son was Percy Ewing Matheson, M.B.E., born 1/23/1859, who was an Oxford don and died 5/11/1946 (he had married the Hon. Elizabeth (Liz) Fox Bruce in 1896 and she died in January 1935) – **I think this is the source of my brother James's middle name.** Percy wrote a lot to my dad, often sending him money or stamps (which Dad collected for awhile); we have several letters written 1928 to 1939.

In 1837 a widespread financial panic in NY nearly bankrupted William, but he was able to right things and pay off all his creditors by 1838. He and his family moved to Park Terrace in Nottingham, and he prepared to retire in August 1845 (at age 47) with a farewell tour to America with his brother Joseph and sister Betsy. They went to Boston, Albany and Lake George and on west to Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia and New York. William returned to Nottingham in November and had £35,000 on which to retire. He was made mayor of Nottingham in 1847.

William's family moved to Bramcote where they lived peacefully for some time.

As the result of bad investments and loans William again faced financial ruin and returned to New York, but could salvage nothing. Then William and his friends had a brilliant idea and raised \$200,000 to establish the Standard Fire Insurance Company on 3/28/1859. William was made President with a salary of \$3,000. In May of 1859 his wife Eliza and daughter Mary Ann joined him in Brooklyn, New York. They moved to a permanent residence at 470 Classon Avenue in Brooklyn in 1863. **William's wife Elizabeth Cripps died on 4/9/18/2 at age 69 after 44 years of marriage and is buried in the Fountain Hill section of Green-Wood Cemetery, 500 W. 25th St in Brooklyn (Lot 20420, Section 23).**

Oddly, William makes no mention of the Civil War in his Memoir. He retired at last in April 1879 with a pension from Standard Fire Insurance Company of \$2,500 and returned to England where he died in 1884 at age 86.