

Today in Columbus History: On Tuesday, May 16, 1854, a death notice for a little girl appeared in *The Weekly Times and Sentinel*. The child was Ann Matheson, about 7 years of age, who had died of brain fever. Ann was the daughter of William Matheson, a Scotsman who had come to Columbus in 1845 to take over his deceased uncle's business. His uncle was one George Smith, also a Scot, who had a thriving plastering business in Columbus in the 1830s - 40s. Smith was a very wealthy man; he died in 1841. The details of William Matheson's interesting story are attached.

Compiled by Callie McGinnis, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Our snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu>

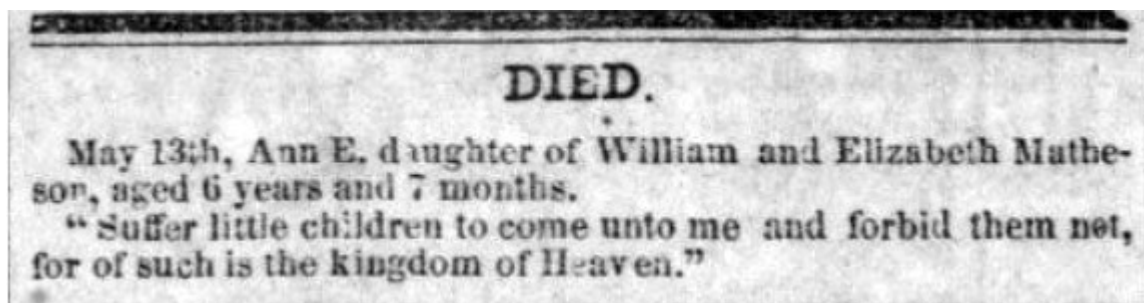


Photo from Findagrave.

The Curious Case of the Scottish Plasterers

By Callie B. McGinnis



In the Old Section of Historic Linwood Cemetery is a fairly large plot enclosed by restored brick coping and with three graves inside: a large upright monument, a child's small marker and an unmarked brick ledger (adult size). The threshold stone is inscribed "Atheson," but if you look closely you can see that the first letter is broken off. The name is actually "Matheson."

The large monument in the plot is that of a Scotsman, George Smith, who died Oct. 31, 1841 at the age of 47 (i.e., born around 1794). Smith was from the town of Forres, Scotland up on the north coast, about 25 miles east of Inverness.

A quick look into George's past reveals that he was a very wealthy man. He had his own business – he was a plasterer – and he had about seven people working with him (his slaves). When he died, his administrators had to sign a \$70,000 bond. So, who was this George Smith? Why have we never heard of him?

Part of the reason is that George left no descendants. He was not married; he had no children. And, he was from Scotland; all his family was across the pond. Well, at least until one of them ventured over from Scotland to claim George's fortune! William Matheson, George's nephew, was in Columbus by 1845. He took over his uncle's estate and his business.

This article appeared in Vol. 23, No.2 (Spring 2019) of "Linwood Legacy," the newsletter of the Historic Linwood Foundation.

William Matheson was married with a couple of young children. His wife was named Elizabeth; he had married her in Scotland. But then William died suddenly in 1856 – and what followed was a long court battle between William’s heirs and George’s sister and her family in Scotland over George’s estate..

William’s wife, Elizabeth, married Theodore Ewing a year after William’s death. Ewing represented Elizabeth in the court battle over George’s money. The Ewings moved to Cecil County, Maryland by 1870. (Theodore and Elizabeth died there in 1901 and 1902, respectively.)

The court case went on for years, but was finally settled in 1874 by the Georgia Supreme Court, which awarded the sister in Scotland a little over \$13,000. Sadly she had died before the case was settled. Incidentally, the attorney for the sister was Raphael J. Moses.

As for the other graves in the Matheson plot, the child’s is that of Annie, William’s daughter, who died in May of 1856 at the age of 6 ½ years. William Matheson’s grave is, no doubt, the unmarked brick ledger. He died around January 12, 1856, at the age of 32, of congestive chills.

After William’s death there were a few other plasterers in Columbus who carried on the trade. There was William’s business partner, Josiah Prangline, who was from England; Scottish-born William Thompson (probably Matheson’s nephew); and John English, a Scotsman with a personal estate worth \$15,000 in 1850.

The number of local plasterers increased over the next few decades. By 1910 there were 23 plasterers in Columbus. Then, with the invention of drywall in 1916, the plastering business started to suffer a decline. By 1940 Columbus had only 7 plasterers. Today, plastering companies have all but disappeared in Columbus. The D & J. Howard Plastering Company on Buena Vista Road does plaster wall repair. The owner of that business, an elderly gentleman, started his plastering career in Montgomery, but was lured to Columbus in the 1960s to work for C.W. Braswell Plastering, before starting his own business venture.

Before closing, it should be noted that there were other Mathesons in Columbus. William had a younger brother named Alexander Stewart Matheson, who was about four years his junior. At William’s bidding, Alexander came to Columbus in 1848. Alexander was NOT a plasterer! He took a job early on at the Eagle Mill. After the war, he became a supervisor at the Eagle and Phenix Mill, a position he held until around 1900. He died in 1904. According to his obituary in the June 25, 1904 *Columbus Daily Enquirer*:

It is probably that no other living man knew so much about the Eagle & Phenix Mills as did Mr. Matheson. He was familiar with every foot of ground and every piece of machinery, and there was not a corner of the plant with which he was not acquainted. He knew hundreds of the operatives personally—in fact, was acquainted with the majority of them—and was their real friend at all times.