

**Research Paper 3:**  
**A LOOK THROUGH TIME AT A VASHON-MAURY ISLAND FIRST SETTLEMENT**  
**FAMILY**  
**MATTHEW BRIDGES 1870-1940**

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper has been prepared as an example of the type of information that can be researched from documents available through The Census Project. The document pulls out Census information concerning Vashon pioneer Matthew Bridges and his family from 1870 through 1940. The following characteristics, as provided in Census Enumerator notes, are detailed: name, age, race, birth place, marital status and profession.*

**BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

Utilizing the information available from The Census Project, it is possible to trace the presence of individuals living on Vashon-Maury Island (VMI) from 1880 through 1940. This type of research allows for tracking of changes within an individual's life as well as following additions and subtractions from their household unit.

The information in this paper was obtained by running the name of a single individual, and for later years, his grandson, through the Census year tables available from 1880 through 1940 on The Census Project website. This included both Federal Decennial Censuses and Washington Territorial Censuses. Matthew Bridges was chosen for this example as he was the first permanent Euro-American settler on VMI, and it was known that Mr. Bridges and his family lived on the Island for a considerable period of time.

To help complete the picture of this individual's life and residence on VMI, additional data searches were conducted utilizing the private resource "Amazon.com." This resource provided documentation for the first mention of Mr. Bridges prior to his presence in Washington State, and to follow his grandson Mark after Mr. Bridges death.

Basic characteristics information were recorded from each Census following the chronology from 1870 through 1940 noting data for every Bridges family member. The information tracked included: Census Precinct location, survey year, age, race, family relationship, birth place, marital status, and profession. "Table 1, Chronology of Life Events for Matthew Bridges and Family" details all of this information.

**FINDINGS**

Documentation for Matthew Bridges begins with the 1870 Census, prior to his listing on VMI. At this time Mr. Bridges is shown in Eastport Maine and appears to be the eldest son living with his mother, father and four other brothers. He was 36 at the time and was involved in the fishing business. Maine is the state in which Mr. Bridges was born.

The 1879 Washington Territorial Census marks the first notice of Mr. Bridges in King County. It might be assumed from other information that his location at that time was on VMI; however, the 1879 Washington Territorial Census does not provide specific place information other than to note the Census took place in King County. Although this is the first VMI Census listing for Mr. Bridges, he appears to have been on the Island as early as 1865. Three of the early historical books published about VMI each refer to Matthew Bridges as arriving on VMI in that earlier year (Cary, 1976; Cary, 1985; Van Olinda, 1935). His obituary in the *Vashon-Maury Island News Record* reiterates this claim (*Vashon-Maury Island News Record*; 1926).

By 1879, Mr. Bridges was married to a woman named Mary, and had two children: George and Matthew. The race for Mary and the children is Chinese, and all were born in Washington (which would have then been Washington Territory). Matthew (father) Bridges' profession is noted as "lumberman." His age is listed as 49.

It appears there was a King County Washington Territorial Census taken in either 1880 or 1881. Reference to this document was noted through a search by individual name in the source Ancestry.com. This record does not appear in a search through Ancestry.com of Census resources. (Note: as of April, 2014, researchers attached to The Census Project are looking for more information on and possible images of Enumerator records from this 1880 or 1881 Territorial Census.)

The King County Washington Territorial Census for 1880 (1881?) indicates the Bridges family has another son named Luke. Mary Bridges and all of the children are identified as "white." Matthew (father) Bridges' profession is still related to logging. It is interesting to note that Mr. Bridges' birth year has changed to 1838, eight years later than 1830, what was provided in the previous Census. His age is listed as 42.

The 1880 Federal Census indicates similar information to the 1880 (1881?) King County Washington Territorial Census with some differences in the children's ages. Mary and the children are all identified as "Indian" in this Census.

In the 1885 Washington Territorial Census, Mr. Bridges occupation has changed to "farmer." Mary and the children are still identified as "Indian." Also of interest, Mary's marital status is listed as "single" although Matthew is "married." In the 1887 Washington Territorial Census none of the family member's race is indicated other than for Mr. Bridges, who continues to be identified as "white." He is still engaged in farming as a profession.

In the 1889 Washington Territorial Census, Mary's race is listed as "Indian"; however, all the children are noted as being "white." Mr. Bridges' profession continues to be that of "farmer." In the 1892 Washington Territorial Census, Mr. Bridges is listed as age 64 although three years earlier his age was written as 53. Mary's age, 54 is similarly different than what was noted in the earlier 1889 Census (32). In this Census, Mr. Bridges is noted as returning to the profession of "logger."

There is no listing for any member of the Matthew Bridges family on VMI in the 1900 Federal Census. A search of Ancestry.com for the location of these individuals found Matthew (son) listed as a patient in the Marine Hospital in San Francisco, California.

George (son) is listed twice in the 1900 Federal Census, both locations in Tacoma Washington. For each of these references, his father is noted as being born in Maine so there is some assurance this individual is indeed the son of Matthew Bridges. In one 1900 Census listing, George is noted as a boarder. In the other Census record, his profession is "servant." No 1900 Census listings are found for Mary or Luke (son).

The 1910 Federal Census shows Mr. Bridges living alone in the Burton Precinct of VMI. His marital status is "widowed." He is age 83 in this document and for "profession" the record indicates he is on his "own income." A further search finds no references in any location in the 1910 Census for Mary, Matthew (son), or Luke. George is noted as living on an Indian Reservation in Pierce County.

A listing for Mr. Bridges similar to 1910 is seen in the 1920 Federal Census, although his location this time is in the VMI Island Precinct. He is indicated as the head of his single-person household with "profession" noted as "none."

The Census listing in the household after Mr. Bridges, is for a family headed by "Mark Bridges." It is assumed that Mark is a grandson of Mr. Bridges, probably watching out for his now 94 year old grandfather. This is the first reference to Mark Bridges in any Federal Census document, so it is not clear which son of Mr. Bridges, if any, is his father. Mark Bridges is married to a woman named "Mary" and have three children, the eldest of whom is named "Matthew." All of the members of Mark Bridges' family are classified by race as "white." Mark is employed as a "stationary engineer."

There is no reference to any member of the Bridges family on VMI in the 1930 Federal Census. Mark Bridges and his family are listed as residing in Wollachet Precinct in Pierce County, where Mark is employed as a laborer in a saw mill. The household has now increased to five children. Mark and all of his family members are indicated to be of "Indian" race.

The 1940 Census again lists Mark Bridges and his family as residing on VMI in the Quartermaster Precinct. Another child has been added to the household, and Mark is still employed as a lumber mill laborer. In this Census, Mark and all of his family members are listed as "white" race.

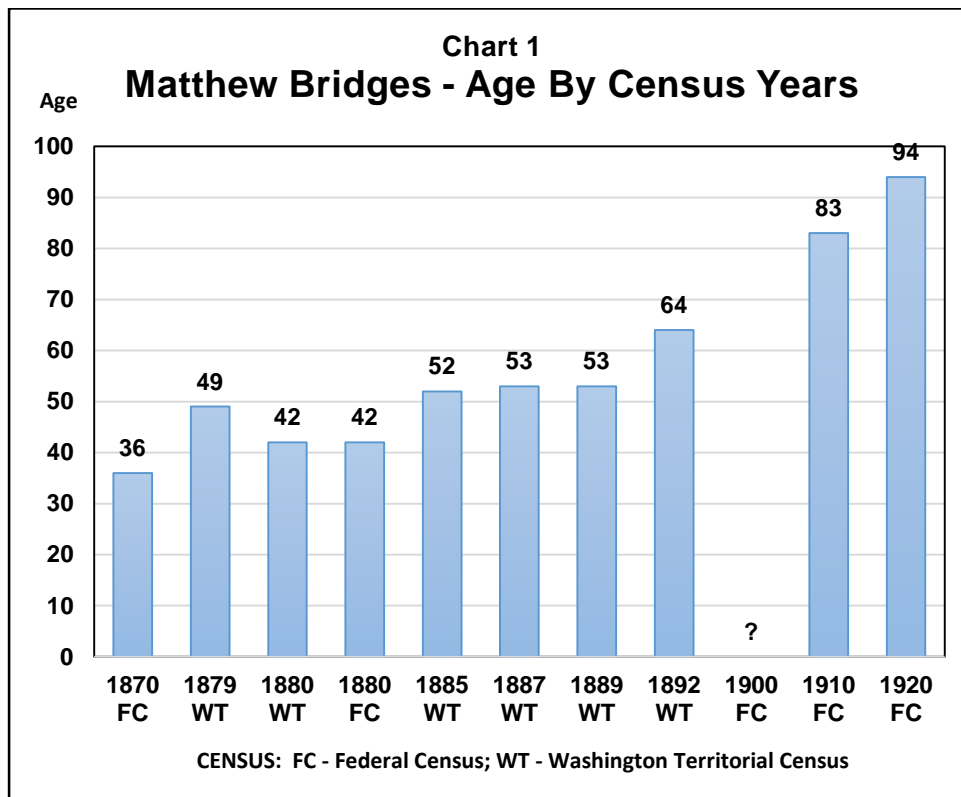
### **ANALYSIS**

The story of Matthew Bridges, VMI settler seems to be rather straightforward as viewed through these Census documents. He was born in Maine and for some reason decided to move to Vashon Island by 1879. He married later in life (after age 36), and had three children. His wife Mary was Native American, and one of his sons eventually moved to an Indian Reservation in Pierce County. Mr. Bridges primarily worked in the logging business, although he had a short stint working in fishing and at farming (the former profession before coming to VMI). He lived quite a while, at least until age 94, all of it on VMI, and it appears in his later years, his grandson lived next door watching out for him.

Looking at this one nuclear family through the eyes of seven decades of Federal and Washington Territorial Census data, it is interesting to examine the changes in family

make-up and occupation as well as the differences in descriptive characteristics. Age, race and even marital status flux through the years for these family members in a manner that questions accuracy or may be a reflection of the standards for the time.

**Age:** The ages of family members noted in these Census documents does not necessarily mesh with the passage of time. Charts 1 and 2 show the ages listed for Matthew Bridges and for Mary Bridges in chronological order according to Census year. It would be expected that their ages would show the same rate of increase as Census timeframes. This is not the case.



The first note of Matthew Bridges' age, 36, is in the 1870 Federal Census. Nine years later, in the 1879 Washington Territorial Census, he is listed as age 49, an increase of 13 years. Although the next two Censuses (one Washington Territorial and the other Federal) were taken in 1880, the next year, Matthew's age is given as 42, decreasing 7 years from the previous year's Census. He ages 10 years in the next Washington Territorial Census, taken five years later in 1885, and from the 1889 to the 1892 Washington Territorial Censuses (a period of 4 years), his age increases 11 years, going from age 53 to 64.

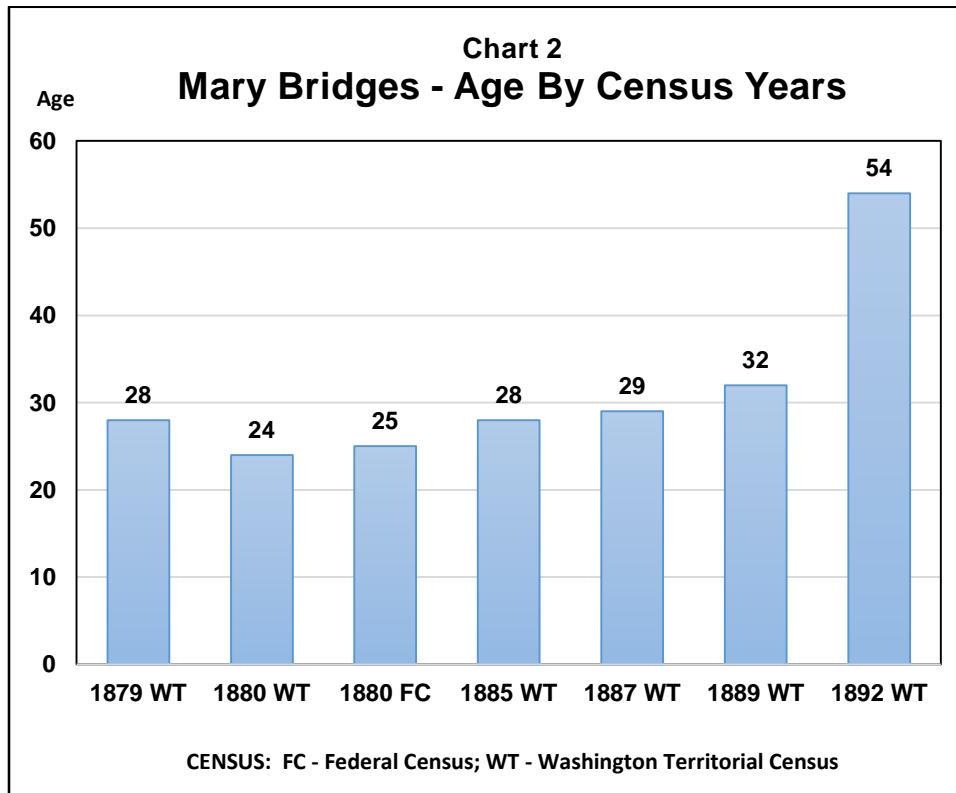
Just looking at the Federal Censuses taken every ten years (excluding the 1890 Federal Census data which are not available), the following can be seen:

**MATTHEW BRIDGES - AGE CHANGE**  
**FEDERAL CENSUS ONLY**

Federal Census Year	Age	Age Increase From Previous Census
1870	36	
1880	42	6 years (from 1870)
1890	unavailable	
1900	unavailable	
1910	83	41 years (from 1880)
1920	94	11 years (from 1910)

Matthew ages 6 years in the decade from 1870 to 1880, and, according to Federal Census documentation, he ages 41 years in the 30 years from 1880 to 1910. If he was indeed 36 in 1870, he should have been 86 years of age 50 years later, not 94 as he is listed in the 1920 Federal Census.

Looking at the ages recorded for Mary Bridges through the 13 years between the 1879 and 1892 Washington Territorial Censuses, what is recorded shows her age increasing and decreasing unrelated to the years.



At first record in 1879, her age is indicated as 28. A year later, her age decreased by 4 years to 24. From 1889, where the Washington Territorial Census notes her age as 32, to the 1892 Territorial Census 4 years later, she has aged 22 years (listed as age 54).

**Race:** The indication of race through these various Census documents appears to be quite changeable for everyone in the family who is not clearly identified as “white,” a designation that only applies to Matthew Bridges. The following indicates the nature of these changes for each of the family members.

**BRIDGES FAMILY MEMBERS - LISTING FOR RACE**  
**FEDERAL AND WASHINGTON TERRITORIAL CENSUSES**

Census Year and Type*	Bridges Family Members				
	Mary Wife	George Son	Matthew Son	Luke Son	Mark Grandson
1879 WT	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	[not born]	[not born]
1880 WT	no info	no info	no info	no info	[not born]
1880 FC	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Indian</b>	[not born]
1885 WT	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Indian</b>	[not born]
1887 WT	no info	no info	no info	no info	[not born]
1889 WT	no info	no info	no info	no info	[not born]
1892 WT	<b>Indian</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>White</b>	[not born]
1900 FC	no info	no info	no info	no info	no info
1910 FC	no info	no info	no info	no info	no info
1920 FC	no info	no info	no info	no info	<b>White</b>
1930 FC	no info	no info	no info	no info	<b>Indian</b>
1940 FC	no info	no info	no info	no info	<b>White</b>

\* FC - Federal Census; WT - Washington Territorial Census

The first listing for the family members in the 1879 Washington Territorial Census, describes Mary and the children as “Chinese.” That designation changes in the 1880 Federal Census to “Indian.” This continues through the 1885 Washington Territorial Census until the 1892 Washington Territorial Census when only Mary keeps the designation of “Indian,” but the children are described as “White.” Information for Mark (the grandson) and his family is first noted in the 1920 Federal Census, where the race designation for all family members is “White.” In the 1930 Federal Census, when Mark and his family were not living on VMI, they are all described as “Indian.” For the 1940 Census, when the family was back on the Island, their race again became “White.”

In truth, Mary was a full-blooded Native American, and the children of Matthew and Mark would have been half White and half Native American. The race of Mark’s mother is unknown, but he would be at least one-fourth Native American, possibly more.

It could be that Census Enumerators through the years simply made a mistake in their designation of race, or it might be the case that the listing of race for each non-white or mixed-blood family member was a reflection of the social “standards” of the time. It is not clear in recording any of this Census data whether the Enumerator asked the respondent his or her race or whether the Enumerator guessed. If asked, it could be that the respondent was the one who changed his/her answer to this question over time.

It is interesting to look at the Mark Bridges family from 1920-1940 and note that when they were living on VMI, they were identified as “White,” but when they were living in Tacoma, the Census record shows their race as “Indian.”

**Other Characteristics:** The one Census listing where Mary is noted as being “single” while Matthew (her husband) is described as “married” (1885 Washington Territorial Census) is very curious. This might have been a “checked the wrong box” mistake on the part of the Census Enumerator, as the two are indicated as being married in every other Census document, or may have been a deliberate marking as Matthew and Marry were of different races (although this appeared in other Census documentation as well).

The repeat of first names through the generations is also of interest. Mr. Bridges gave two of his sons the same names as his brothers, George and Luke. The third son (first born), he named after himself. Mark, his grandson, married a woman with the same name as his grandmother, “Mary.” He called one of his sons “Matthew,” probably after his grandfather, the first Mr. Bridges, or perhaps his father, who could have been Mr. Bridges’ son Matthew (it is unknown which one of Mr. Bridges sons was Mark’s father).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Using the information provided on The Census Project website, it is possible to track generations of Vashon-Maury Islanders through time. Doing so can provide a picture of how families grow and change. However, there appears to be some propensity for error in the recording of this information by Census Enumerators through the years. The user should, if possible, cross-check the accuracy of what is recorded. That said, it might be of interest to further research how respondent race was determined and whether or not what was recorded might have been a reflection of the current social standards.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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