

# William Thomas Merchant

(1840 - 1896)



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## **William T. Merchant**

Born Feb. 3, 1840, William Thomas was Samuel and Sally's fourth child. William first married Eliza Lamson Wonson on December 18, 1862. Eliza was the daughter of John Fletcher Wonson and Ann Elizabeth Webber. She died on June 27, 1894. On Dec. 28, 1895 to Fannie Price (Wonson) Ramsey dau. Roger W. Wonson and Lucy Ann Wonson.

Being the child of a mariner, and have so many other relatives who were part of the Gloucester fishing industry, it is not surprising that William also ended up in a similar line of work.

Early in his career, he began working as a clerk with the firm of Addison and Samuel Merchant. When that firm broke up after the death of Samuel in 1860, William and his brother-in-law, James L. Shute, decide to open their own firm. It took them until 1862 to finally get their firm officially in business, and newspaper ads announced the establishment of Shute & Merchant at the beginning of that year. Notes created by George E. Merchant, the family historian, states that the firm handled \$300,000.00 of business a year. Initially Shute & Merchant had a small fleet of their own vessels, but eventually became just dealers of fish they purchased from other vessels.

William took great interest in public affairs, and though not a politician as the word is usually understood, he was on of the Board of Selectmen in 1870 and 1871, and represented Ward Six in the Common Council in 1876 and 1877, being the President of the Board in 1878. In 1878 he also served as the Alderman from the same Ward.

He was a member of the Tyrian Lodge of Masons, joining the lodge May 6, 1871. He was also a member of the Ocean Lodge of Odd Fellows, joining on Feb. 14, 1870, and had been raised to the chair of Noble Grand the following year, as well as the Gloucester Council, Royal Arcanum and Roger Conant Council, and American Legion of Honor. -- William was also a prominent member of the Independent Christian Church.

portions of this history came from  
**the House of Jabez -- Chronicles of the Merchant-Merchant Family by Frank R. Merchant**

The following came from a tribute to William T. Merchant at the time of his death published in the New England Grocer:

*Mr. Merchant was a man superior to the ordinary man in this respect; he was a man, full of brotherly love and good will, who always appeared before one with a smile which was a benediction, and made one think, in the words of the poet, that "every cloud has a silver lining". His very presence on an occasion, would bring sunshine; and those people who were fortunate enough to be in that atmosphere with him would say, "What a pleasure it is to have that man here". A man who commands the respect that he receive from his fellow men is more than the ordinary man, and is truly one of the noblest works of God. He was a good and kind neighbor, a law-abiding citizen, loyal and patriotic; and he was one of those men who trusted God and said He would make things right. "I very often think of my business relations with him," says one who knew him well in life, "and think what my clerks said: What a pleasure business would be if we could trade with men like him; because he was consistent and always used good judgment, and said they did the best they could under the circumstances, that all were human and perhaps might ere. He did not use others for personal gain and the words of a spiritual adviser, All know just how he stands and can use our judgment accordingly."*

### **The children of William T. and Eliza (Wonson) Merchant**

Effie Howard	1863 - 1951	William Thomas	1874-1897
Willie Frank	1865 - 1866	Grace Center	1876-1877
Nellie Wonson	1868 - 1868	Hattie Preston	1878-1941
Frederic Wonson	1869 - ____	Annie Bray	1878-1878
Cora Fitch	1872 - aft. 1930		

additional information about their children

Effie Howard married Otis Preston Wass, and they had the following children: Roland Merchant, Pauline, Louise Wass and Preston Otis

Frederic "Fred" ... there is no information but he was living at the time of his father's death

Cora Fitch married Alfred Jeffery Greene, and they had no children

William Thomas ... he had not married at the time of his death

Hattie Preston ... she did not marry



The person in the center of the photo above may be William T. Merchant, as it is a photo taken in 1892 for a special piece about Shute & Merchant in the "Official Programme" for the 250th Celebration of the Incorporation of Gloucester. No other photos of him are known to exist, but he did play an integral role in the founding and development of Shute & Merchant, and the three men appear to be the owners of the business based on the rest of the image.

