

Alonzo and William: The Locally Infamous Cushing Boys  
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2015

Alonzo Hereford **Cushing** was named after his uncle Alonzo **Cushing** (1810 – 1877) and his Uncle Alonzo's wife Margaret Hereford **Cushing** (1805 – 1888). William Barker **Cushing** was named after his uncle William **Barker** (1786 – 1858), who was married to the boys' aunt Lucinda **Cushing** (1794 – 1868). Uncle Alonzo and Aunt Lucinda were two of the seven siblings and four half-siblings of the boys' father Milton Buckingham **Cushing**. Milton and his siblings and half-siblings were children of Fredonia's Zattu **Cushing**.

After the death of their father, the boys, their mother, and their full siblings were in Fredonia (Chautauqua County) NY about ten years, from 1847 to 1857. The earliest account of the boys during their time in Fredonia was written by Eliza M. **Hatch** (also known as E. M. H. **Edwards**) (1835-1914), the second wife of Congressman Francis S. **Edwards** (1817-1899). According to **Hatch**, it was Congressman **Edwards** who helped get Alonzo into West Point and William into the Naval Academy. The anecdotes are found in her biography *Commander William Barker Cushing of the United States Navy* (New York, 1898).

The book contains a prefatory note by the boys' sister, Isabel **Cushing Bouton**, dated Chicago, 17 November 1898: "As the only surviving member of the family, I write to testify to the fact that your history of my brother is perfectly authentic and could only have been written by one who knew him personally and loved him."

**Hatch** herself wrote, "The writer had personal acquaintance with Commander **Cushing** and with his mother, his brothers, sister, wife and daughters and other relatives and intimate friends." Other sources named by **Hatch** in passing were letters from William to his cousin Mary Buel **Edwards**, letters to **Hatch's** stepdaughter, and anecdotes from the boys' sister Isabel.

**Hatch** also commented about Alonzo's and William's father Milton and about Milton's abolitionist sentiments. **Hatch** said, "He was a conscientious and active anti-slavery man and gave liberally of his money, and his time, and thought to assist in bringing freedom to the colored man." **Hatch's** own husband had been elected to Congress as a "Know-Nothing," the party that railed against "foreigners" and "Catholics." Although an abolitionist herself, the boys' mother Mary apparently shared the "Know-Nothing" view, unaware of its conflicting prejudices.

The next account of the boys' time in Fredonia was Theron W. **Haight's** *Three Wisconsin Cushings* (Madison WI, 1910), which included some details about the young **Cushings** before their father's death, and also included information following their move to Fredonia. **Haight** also included information about the boys' brother Howard **Cushing**, who worked in the *Censor* printing office, then in Boston, then in the office of *The Farmer's Advocate* in Chicago, all before enlisting in an Illinois artillery regiment in 1862. However, at least one of **Haight's** anecdotes about William came from **Hatch's** book.

The next account of the boys' time in Fredonia was David B. **Parker's** *A Chautauqua Boy in '61* (Cambridge, 1912), which was primarily about **Parker's** own experiences in the Civil War. However, it also included anecdotes about Alonzo and William from the days when **Parker**

knew them as “a boy of ten or twelve years of age.” Since **Parker** was born on 25 December 1842, he was most likely writing about events between 1852 and 1854.

The modern biographer Kent M. **Brown's** *Cushing of Gettysburg* (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 1993) provided a summary of the major events in the lives of Alonzo and William **Cushing** during their ten years in Fredonia. **Brown** was informed not only by the accounts by **Hatch, Parker, and Haight**, but also by primary sources found in various repositories in scattered locations.

All accounts indicate that William was full of mischief as a child, but according to **Brown**, Alonzo was “almost a model child.” Although **Brown's** sources are not always clear, he said that Alonzo “was attentive and worked hard from the start; if he was ever in trouble with his mother or anyone else, it was rarely. Lon grew up looking after the interests of his mother. He became, as well, a kind of father figure to his younger brother and sister even as a very young child.

**Brown** continued, “Lon worried about his brother. He fretted about his [brother's] pranks and his punishments. The older he grew, the more his concern became evident. Lon never wanted Will to do anything but what made his mother proud. Often he would lecture his brother in an effort to get him to behave, but to no avail.”

Julian R. **McQuiston's** *William B. Cushing in the Far East* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson NC, 2013) utilized the personal papers of the **Cushing** family to summarize William **Cushing's** life after the Civil War. Additionally, **McQuiston** provided a wealth of interesting details about William's often aberrant behavior as a grown man, actions that were reminiscent of the pattern of William's childhood pranks.

In fact, William's escapades were mentioned as early as the **Hatch** book. She wrote, “The following incidents of Commander [William B.] **Cushing's** childhood, which are related by his sister, who obtained some of them from her mother, are illustrative of his adventurous spirit and his utter ignorance of fear at an early age.”

Then follow several stories, the first about William at age 3 in Chicago, when he put on his father's top hat, made his way to Lake Michigan, and walked in. To a sailor who had rescued him, William said his name was “Bill **Coon**,” a nickname given him by his older half-brother Edward. His older half-sister Rowena finally found him after 36 anxious hours of searching.

On New Year's Day a year, later William decided to shoe one of his father's unbroken colts. He was knocked unconscious and lost all his front teeth. In Fredonia when he was ten, he was made the captain of the “Muss Company,” a group of most of the small boys in the village. He attended Miss Julia **Moore's** select school but had developed an animus toward her, so he had his band trained to rush out of school whenever he gave the signal.

At one point he was given money to visit his aunt Fanny **Cushing** in Silver Creek. He spent the money for his fare on a gift. During the train ride he sweet-talked a man into paying for his ticket.

When his pal and neighbor Hartwell **Dickenson** had smallpox, fearless William kept sneaking visits every day. The 1860 census does verify that Hartwell was a son of the blacksmith **Rasselas Dickenson**, who lived next door to the Mary **Cushing** family. By 1860, when the **Cushing** boys were away from Fredonia, Hartwell himself was listed as a corset maker.

Also according to **Hatch**, William's sister wrote, "Will was the ringleader in all the berrying, nutting and fishing frolics." When sent by "Cousin George **White**" to take a horse to Arkwright, William harnessed it to an old wagon and had a number of local children ride along to go berrying in Arkwright.

He loved playing jokes on his older brothers. When Alonzo took Julia **Greenleaf** on a rowing excursion at the mill pond, William got there first and set the boat adrift. At another time one of his brothers invited Julia to a Methodist prayer meeting, and she accepted, spurning William's offer of his own company. In revenge, he seated himself behind the pair and shouted "very personal remarks" to the tune of the hymn.

Further antics of William were described by **Parker**, who wrote, "William was the same age as myself, and we were fast friends and playmates, sitting together at the district school. He was very active, full of mischief and humor, but studious. He led and I followed, and we had many escapades. One I remember:

"We had committed some prank in the schoolroom that attracted the attention of the teacher, and he ordered us to remain after school, but we ran out, and the teacher quickly ordered some of the older boys to catch us and bring us back. We ran for the board fence, and by jumping upon it and striking on the breast, had a way of going over head first and landing on our feet.

"**Cushing**, however, was not satisfied to escape. The nearest boy was close upon us, and **Cushing** hesitated a moment so that he could kick him with both feet before going over, which however, spoiled **Cushing's** fall and he fell upon his hands, breaking one arm. The arm swung limp and he was very pale, but we went on to Dr. **White**, a relative of his, who set it.

"**Cushing** was very pugnacious, good-natured generally, but very quick to resent an insult, and he would fight any boy or man without the slightest hesitation. On one occasion in front of a grocery store, we came upon a man who had had some difficulties with **Cushing** and who turned upon us and said, 'I've got you now and I'll give you a good spanking.' Will jumped up on a raised platform in front of the store where there was a barrel containing axe helves, hoe handles, and other things of that sort, and seized an axe helve and struck the man a heavy blow on the side of the head, felling him to the ground.

"He was not a bully, but he was perfectly fearless, and yet had very few accidents, not as many as boys usually. His dash and audacity were coupled with such good judgment in his movements that he seldom broke or hurt anything or injured himself."

Zattu Cushing: the Locally Infamous Grandfather

The earliest biographical sketch of Zattu **Cushing** (1771-1839) appeared in a memoir by O. W. **Johnson**, which was read before the Fredonia Historical Association on 8 January 1864, and then printed in the *Fredonia Censor* a week later. **Johnson** had never met **Cushing**, but knew at least one of his sons. **Johnson's** account was later reprinted in his *Addresses, Essays, and Miscellanies* (Fredonia NY, 1890), and some of it found its way into the *Centennial History of the Fredonia Baptist Church* in 1908 and into many other local histories.

According to **Johnson**, and other sources, **Cushing's** parents were Nathaniel **Cushing** (1724 – 1788) and Nathaniel's third wife Lydia **Cooke Cushing** (1736 - 1790). According to a letter of 12 April 1846 from Sarah **Buckingham Sprague** of Pomfret (Chautauqua County) NY to her nephew Benjamin H. **Buckingham** of Zanesville OH, Zattu was born in Plymouth MA.

Zattu's half-siblings by his father's first wife Jemima **Ford** (1729-1755) were Sarah **Cushing** (1748-1763), Stephen **Cushing** (1749-1825), and Jemima Ford **Cushing** (1751-1832), who married Jonathan **Sprague** (1744-1841), son of James **Sprague** (1715 – 1759) and Patience **Ford** (1723- 1800).

Zattu's half-siblings by his father's second wife Anna **Turner** (b.1735) were Nathaniel **Cushing** (1752-1824) and Hannah **Cushing** (1759-1837), who married John **Spooner** (b. 1745).

Zattu's full siblings were Margaret **Cushing** (b.1759), who married Constant **Viall** or **Vails** (b. 1759), John **Cushing** (b.1761), Sarah **Cushing** (1764-1837), Molly **Cushing** (1766-1804), another Zattu **Cushing** (1768-1771), Elisha Stetson **Cushing** (b.1773), and Joseph **Cushing** (b.1775).

According to **Johnson**, Zattu was apprenticed to a ship-builder in Boston Harbor, then moved to Saratoga County (NY) to do farming. He was reputedly ill for several months, and then walked to Paris or Paris Hill (Oneida County) NY, where he and someone called "Mr. **Cowan**" worked a large farm in the wilderness for two years. **Johnson** said that in 1795 at Ballston NY, Zattu married Rachel **Buckingham** (1773 - 1816), whom he had met while in Saratoga County.

However, the 1846 letter from Sarah **Buckingham Sprague** said that Zattu and Rachel were married at Ballston NY in 1792, and that they then moved from Ballston to Paris NY, "40 miles east of Otsego." Both **Sprague** and **Johnson** agree that in 1805, Zattu moved to today's Town of Dunkirk (Chautauqua County) NY, which was then known as part of the Town of Chautauque (Genesee County) NY.

According to **Johnson**, Zattu lived and worked in today's Erie PA before moving to western NY, and the *Judah Colt Daybook, Greenfield, 1798 - 1799* transcribed by Beth **Simmons** verifies that Zattu was in fact in Erie PA from 1798 through at least 20 May 1799.

According to **Johnson**, Zattu had been hired to build a boat at the Erie harbor, but the *Daybook* suggests that he may also have been farming. **Johnson's** account indicates that Zattu was alone in Erie, but the *Daybook* suggests that at least part of his family may have been there with him, because one of his regular purchases was flour. **Johnson** stated that Zattu was traveling "home"

from Erie when he discovered the area along today's Canadaway Creek that he decided to purchase.

In fact, evidence indicates that at some time, Zattu must have gone home to Central NY from Erie, with any members of his immediate family who may have been with him in Erie. Holland Land Company correspondence on file at Reed Library in Fredonia indicates that Zattu rode to the company office in Batavia in 1804, then traveled back through today's Chautauqua County, staying for a time with early settler Thomas **McClintock** (1768 - 1838).

Because he was ill, **McClintock** could only describe some of the locality to Zattu, instead of escorting him around as was the custom. On 28 September 1804, **Zattu** left for his return trip to Batavia, carrying with him a letter from **McClintock** to the Holland Land Company's agent Joseph **Ellicott**. In **Ellicott's** land office, Zattu took a land contract for property in today's Dunkirk, and also took an option on a mill site in today's Laona NY, which was then known as Cascade.

According to Holland Land Company records, Zattu then handed **McClintock's** letter to **Ellicott** and left. As soon as Zattu was gone, **Ellicott** read **McClintock's** letter and discovered that **McClintock** had wanted the Laona mill site. In a letter dated 1 October 1804, **Ellicott** wrote to **McClintock**, as follows:

“Mr. **Cushing** having contracted for the refusal of the Cascade Mill place...previous to his handing me your letter, which was at the instant he left the office, it is out of my power....There is something in this transaction a little mysterious to me, otherwise I should have supposed that he would have presented your letter on his arrival. However, under present circumstances you will easily see I am unable to do anything in the business.”

**Johnson** said that in early 1805, **Cushing** sold his farm in central NY, packed up his household goods and four cows, and left with his wife and their five children in two sleds drawn by oxen. With them came two men Zattu had hired to help in chopping at the new home in Dunkirk. Also, **Seth Cole** (1750-1810) and his family accompanied Zattu's party.

After three weeks they reached Buffalo NY, and from there drove out on the ice and encountered a terrible storm. According to **Johnson**, Zattu blew on a dinner horn to summon help. About one in the morning, two men heard the call, brought lanterns to the shore and guided Zattu's party onto land near Eighteen Mile Creek, several miles south of Buffalo.

Nothing ever came of Zattu's mill site in Laona, and he eventually relinquished it.

**Johnson's** account and the Holland Land Company records both indicate that Zattu farmed in Dunkirk a couple of years, and then in 1807, around and near today's 171 Eagle Street in Fredonia NY, Zattu purchased 550 acres of land and built a log cabin. The Eagle Street property was located near a ford on the Old Erie Road, and had been relinquished previously by **McClintock** back to the Holland Land Company.

Hezekiah **Barker**, later the father-in-law of Zattu's daughter Lucinda, owned the farm containing the ford itself. Reputedly, Zattu lived in a cabin above the ford, at the intersection of the Old Erie

Road with today's Eagle Street, which was then a major north/south trail or highway through today's Chautauqua County. Zattu lived there about five years, then about 1812, built a frame house next door, part of which may be part of the home at today's 171 Eagle Street. In 1818, he expanded the home to more closely resemble today's appearance.

**Johnson's** memoir and early records of the Fredonia Baptist Church indicate that Zattu and a handful of other families founded that church in 1808. The congregation originally met in Zattu's barn. According to **Johnson** and according to Andrew W. **Young's** *History of Chautauqua County* (Buffalo NY, 1875), Zattu was appointed the first "First Judge" of the county when it was organized in 1811.

According to **Johnson**, Zattu served in the War of 1812 "as a private in the battle at Buffalo." He had prepared a large supply of provisions, which he took with him when he rode into the city for battle. The provisions were not needed after all, so when Zattu returned home and found a starving family who had fled from Buffalo, he handed them a large sack of doughnuts and went on his way. The Mosely W. **Abell** family, who had been saved by the gift, settled in Fredonia and re-told the story many times.

In 1817, New York State passed legislation encouraging agriculture and requiring that any agricultural society should be organized at the Court House of the particular county. A group at the county seat in Mayville NY called a meeting to establish a society under that law. Zattu along with **Abell's** brother Thomas made their way with a few others to Mayville on the day before the meeting. However, they had secretly recruited many others to appear at the last minute.

At the meeting, their superior numbers meant that the Chautauque County Agricultural Society was established with Zattu as its President, and that the first County Fair was held in Fredonia instead of Mayville. This was some retribution for Zattu, since Mayville had earlier become the county seat in spite of lobbying by Fredonia.

After the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, Zattu designed a canal boat and built it on his farm with the help of Joseph **Sprague**. **Johnson** said they named it *The Fredonia Enterprise* and towed it to Dunkirk using a hundred yoke of oxen. There it was filled with "**Todd & Douglas**" flour, towed to Buffalo, and launched onto the canal. Reputedly, that was the first wheat ever sent from Chautauqua County to the New York City market.

In 1829, Zattu was involved in a serious division in the Fredonia Baptist Church related to Freemasonry. At a meeting of 24 June 1829, both Zattu **Cushing** and longtime church member Loring **Crosby** were admonished and questioned. The upshot was that the church "withdrew the hand of fellowship" from the two men, meaning that they were expelled. It was not until 1837 that Cushing was readmitted to the church. When he died in 1839, he was referenced in the church records as "Hon. Father **Cushing**."

Zattu's children of record are Lucinda **Cushing** (1794 – 1868), who married William **Barker** (1786 – 1858), son of Fredonia's early settlers Hezekiah **Barker** (1757 - 1834) and Sarah **Wood Barker** (1764 - 1851); Walter Bradley **Cushing** (1796 – 1856), who married Eloise **Ransom** (born 1797) and died in WI; Lydia **Cushing** (1798 – 1886), who married Fredonia's Douglas

**Houghton** (1788 – 1825) and then Fredonia's Squire **White** (1785 - 1857); Milton Buckingham **Cushing** (1800 – 1847), who married Abigail B. **Tupper** (1804 - 1833) and then Mary **Barker Smith**, mother of Alonzo and William; Zattu **Cushing, Jr.** (1802 – 1869), who married Mary A. **Cushing** (1805 - 1840) and then Ann **White Smith** (1818 – 1894); Catherine Putnam **Cushing** (1808 – 1887), who married Fredonia's Philo Hull **Stevens** (1803 – 1865); Alonzo **Cushing** (1810 – 1877), who married Margaret M. **Hereford** (1805 – 1888); Rachel **Cushing** (1813 – 1854), who died in OH and may not have married; Judson Elderkin **Cushing** (b. 1818), who may have died in CO; Addison Cary **Cushing** (1820 – 1891), who married Elizabeth **King** (1824 – 1848) and Ellen **Cumming** (1832 – 1884) and Esther **Pritchard** (1841 – 1929); Sarah Margaret **Cushing** (1821 – 1824); and Frank **Cushing** (1825 – 1858), who died in Fredonia.