

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Chair's corner

Greetings to all with an interest in Matheson heritage.

First I extend my thoughts and best wishes as we Kiwi Mathesons face difficult times in 2022 as a result of another variant in the pandemic virus. I hope your friends and whānau will find that the special Matheson connections in our newsletters show the value we place on our heritage and our family connections. Please keep sharing the [link](#) to this newsletter.

Our newsletter is now going out to 30% more people than when it was available only on subscription. This increase is very good news. One of the reasons for the change to a more open way Clan Matheson operates in New Zealand was to make our excellent newsletters available to all who are interested.

The Clan Matheson New Zealand committee continues to meet virtually by Zoom. We carry out the usual tasks of newsletter planning, financial updates and planning our clan activities.

Our main goal is to increase interest and involvement in Clan Matheson in 2022, and we are considering when best to hold an annual gathering for this unusual year. As well, the committee is considering a range of activities that could be included for people with an interest in their Matheson heritage. If you have suggestions for our annual gathering, please send them to me at chair@clanmatheson.org.nz.

The committee will report in the next newsletter about our other significant goal, to set Clan Matheson New Zealand on a secure footing as a legal entity. So far we have been meeting to consider draft documents and have been taking advantage of legal advice.

I see that in December I welcomed 'new beginnings' for this year. I think this is an example of 'be careful what you wish for'. So I will conclude by wishing you all the best that can be in the next few months.

Lena Orum
Chair, Clan Matheson Society New Zealand branch
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Newsletter of the
New Zealand branch of the
Clan Matheson Society

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Issue 166

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Connecting people with Matheson heritage



Matheson or Mathieson?

You don't have to go far in your family history research to find out that names were often recorded differently throughout a person's life. The March 2020 [newsletter](#) contained an article about how Scottish surnames originated, why they varied, and that people didn't worry much about how their own surname was spelled.

What does this mean for your family history research? You should bear in mind that spelling variants of Matheson include Mathieson, Mathison and Matherson. Clan members in Europe might use spellings such as Matthiason. Look widely when trying to locate records about your ancestors.

The name Matheson comes from the Gaelic MacMhathain or MacMathan, which means 'son of the bear'. It is not to be confused with the English name Mathewson, which is simply 'son of Mathew'. Although Mathewson has a completely different origin, you might need to include this name in searches as it may be how your ancestors' name was (mis) recorded.

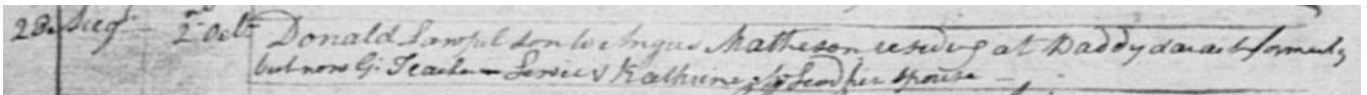
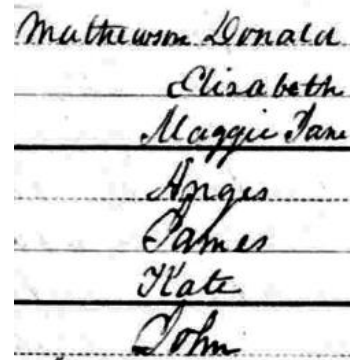
Take Donald Matheson, for example. That's how his surname was recorded when his birth was registered in Scotland in 1827.

His marriage was registered under Mathison, and the births (and early deaths, sadly) of his children as either Matheson or Mathison.

The family migrated to Australia, where the spelling Matheson was used pretty consistently.



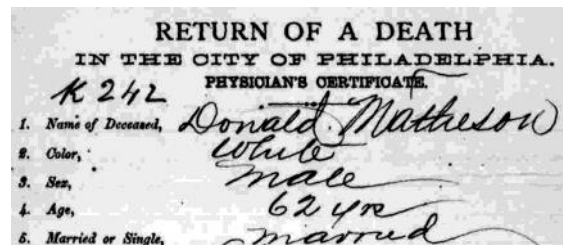
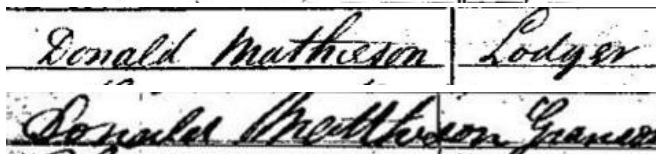
Later, when settled in the USA, in the first census (1880) the family was documented as Mathewson — not a true variant of Matheson at all. The spelling settled down to Matheson after that.



[Born] 28 Sept [baptised] 2 Oct Donald Lawful son to Angus Matheson residing at Baddydarroch formerly ... but now G[aelic] Teacher in Service & Katherine McLeod his spouse

In the Scottish censuses of 1841, 1851 and 1861 he was recorded respectively as Matheson, Mathieson and Mathison (possibly, it's hard to read).

Angus Matheson	45	
Catherine do		35
Donald do	14	



Though the clan is named Matheson, there are variants of the name.

Names are often recorded inconsistently, even in official documents, so keep an open mind when researching your family origins.

Mystery in the Mangapurua Valley

by Andrew Matheson

This summer I fulfilled a long-held ambition and visited the evocatively-named Bridge to Nowhere. Nestled in regenerating bush in the Mangapurua Valley, which feeds into the Whanganui River, this concrete structure is the most significant, and certainly most famous, remnant of a failed land settlement scheme.

The story is both heroic and sad. After the First World War returned soldiers could enter a ballot for land, and if granted a lease they would clear the land and develop it for farming. The Mangapurua Soldiers' Settlement, as it was known, was the last of the large back country development schemes.

The land was rough and remote. Access was very limited. Serious erosion followed the bush clearance. The Depression hit and commodity prices fell. After years of relentless toil most settlers walked off the land, and the remaining three families had to leave in the 1940s when the road was severed by bad weather and not repaired.

The now-famous bridge had been built only a few years before the settlement had to be abandoned, both to replace a timber swing bridge that was rotting and as part of a planned link to Taranaki that was never completed.

After 1944 the valley fell silent, but ironically this isolated spot is now one of the most-visited places in Whanganui National Park.

The names of long-gone settlers are recalled on signs along the old road. Near the Mangapurua landing on the Whanganui River I saw a board with the name Mathieson. The list of settler families at the bridge itself lists the 'Matheson brothers'. Which is correct, and what is the story behind these names?



... mystery in the Mangapurua Valley

Posing these questions in the Clan Matheson New Zealand [Facebook group](#) quickly brought the answer from Kara Matheson. She happens to be the general manager of Forgotten World Adventures, a great company whose tour options include the Bridge to Nowhere.

Kara posted information from a book about the settlers in the Mangapurua Valley. Here were the answers to my questions.

It turns out that neither sign in the valley is correct. The section near the river was farmed by the Mathewson brothers, Eric and Gordon. Gordon went to the valley in 1919 with a mate from the army, but when his elder brother Eric arrived a year later the Mathewson brothers took over Section 1, block IX.

Together they worked this riverside block of some 1,200 acres (490 ha) for five years. It was steep and access was particularly difficult.

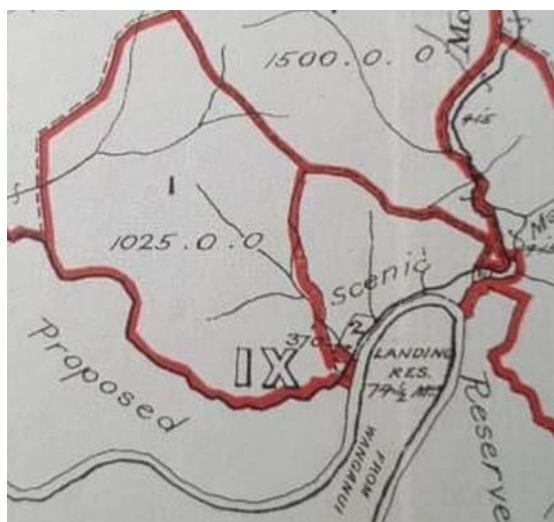
Despite having cleared and grassed a large area and built a house, the land was so challenging that when they left the valley no-one else applied to take over the lease. The bush has swallowed up their efforts, though Kara says that some of the pine trees they planted are still visible from the river.

So, not a Matheson story at all, but an interesting one nevertheless, and one with some lessons for family history research.

Crowdsourcing your family history questions can be effective in finding answers. You also get to connect with helpful people, and share discoveries more widely.

Names are often recorded inconsistently.

In family history research, check and double check your findings.



Section 1, block IX, near the Mangapurua landing. The black and white plan records the lessee as Eric (EMJ) Matheson (not Mathewson)



DECEASED	
No. <u>27929</u> Rank: <u>PL2</u>	<u>26-11-66</u>
Name: <u>ERIC MURRAY JAMES MATHEWSON.</u>	
Address: <u>266 Ricketts Quay Wellington</u>	
<u>Mangapurua Landing, Above Pipiriki</u>	
Periods of Service.	Theatres of Operation.
In New Zealand: years <u>139</u> days	Australasian <u>Wanganui River</u>

Eric Mathewson's army file updated with his new address: Mangapurua Landing, Above Pipiriki, Wanganui River.

No RAPID numbers or postcodes in those days!

Family history research

Free and freemium websites

In the last issue we looked at subscription family history databases, of which [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) is the most well known. Fortunately you don't have to shell out a lot of money to make real progress in your quest for information about family origins.

Up there with the large commercial databases is the major free site [Familysearch](https://www.familysearch.org), which is run by the Mormon (LDS) church. It's always worth looking here, and not relying only on commercial databases. Long ago you had to visit Mormon genealogy centres and scroll through microfilm to look at the church's records, but everything (or almost everything) from their extensive records is now available on line.

Name	Events
James Garfield Matheson Principal Alaska Naturalization Records, 1884-1991	Birth 2 February 1881 Earlton, Colchester, Nova Scotia, Canada Naturalization 22 October 1919 Alaska, United States

The premier website for Scottish records is the excellent [ScotlandsPeople](https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). It is free to search but you have pay per record that you download: £1.50 for the most common records. You can search all birth records that are over 100 years old, marriage records over 75 and death records over 50. Newly-available records are released at the beginning of each year. For people with Scottish ancestors (and who reading this article doesn't?), this site is invaluable.

Surname	Forename	Spouse Surname	Spouse Forename	Year	Ref	RD Name
MATHESON	MARGARET	WALKER	DONALD	1904	052/9	Kildonan

There are other free sites worth checking out, many run by hard-working volunteers and others that give access to public records.

[Free UK Genealogy](https://www.freeukgenealogy.com) is a long-running volunteer project to transcribe government and church records. They have made available an incredible

285 million birth, death and marriage records, 42 million census records and 53 million records from parish registers.

Person or persons	Record type	Event date	County	Place : Church : Register type
Helen MATHESON William MOWAT	Marriage		Caithness	Canisbay : Church of Scotland : Unspecified

Other parish records are available on websites or sometimes on CDs or books for purchase. This is done by a network of volunteers called [Online Parish Clerks](https://www.onlineparishclerks.org) or OPC.

You can search for wills from England and Wales on a government [site](https://www.gov.uk), though have to pay £1.50 to obtain a copy of the will.

National archives are also a trove of material, some of which you can download. There are often charges for this, but while in-person access to the UK National Archive is limited because of covid restrictions, some downloads are free.

The portal for finding records in the National Archive and other archives across the UK is [Discovery](https://www.discovery.com), which lists more than 32 million records. You might also want to access the national archives or libraries of [Scotland](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/scotland), [Ireland](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ireland), [Northern Ireland](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/northernireland) or [Wales](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/wales).

The [Gazette](https://www.thegazette.co.uk) is the UK's official record, and you may well find information about your ancestors here. Content includes wills and probate, awards and decorations, company documents, insolvency and WW1 military records.

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ANN MATHESON.

ALEX. MACKAY, Accountant, Commercial Bank, Tain, Witness.

WM. A. ROSS, Clerk, Commercial Bank, Tain, Witness.

JOHN MATHESON.

P. B. MACGREGOR, Writer, of 13 Bank Street, Edinburgh, Witness.

JAS. COSSAR, Writer, of 13 Bank Street, Edinburgh, Witness.

... family history research

New Zealand historical birth, death and marriage records can be searched [on line](#) at no cost: births at least 100 years ago (stillbirths 50 years), marriages at least 80 years ago and deaths at least 50 years ago or if the deceased was at least 80 years old. Remember the year given is the year the event was registered, not the year it took place. These are generally the same, but may be different for events registered early in a year. More recent death records have exact birth dates noted.

Registration Number	Family Name	Given Name(s)	Mother's Given Name(s)	Father's Given Name(s)
1916/27700	Matheson	Farquhar Duncan	Norah	Farquhar

Registration Number	Bride's Given Name(s)	Bride's Family Name	Groom's Given Name(s)	Groom's Family Name
1920/11199	Jessie	Matheson	Arnold Alfred	Rouse

Registration Number	Family Name	Given Name(s)	Date of Birth/ Age at Death
2003/22939	Faulkner	June Marie	2 June 1932
1999/14130	Mackenzie	Mary Ann	30 July 1914
1935/13823	Matheson	Alexander	75Y

If a search for 'Matheson' lists people with other surnames, it's likely that their maiden name was Matheson. This can be very helpful.

Archives New Zealand holds official New Zealand government records, encompassing people's interaction with officialdom. Through its new [search function](#) you can find coroner's inquests, government department personnel files, divorce cases, land transactions, probates and much more. Much of the material is not available on line, so has to be viewed or copied at the national office in Wellington or a regional office.

From: J R Matheson, Riverhead, Auckland Received: 9 August 1890 Subject: Complains of action of Police in arresting him for lunacy in November 1888 and September 1889 etc

New Zealand probate records (wills) from 1843 have been digitised and indexed by the site [FamilySearch](#). The index is complete up to 1998, but images for probates issued in the past 50 years may not be viewed.

The Archives New Zealand [website](#) has advice about how to locate other probate records.

Probates give information on how a person's estate was administered after their death, and most probates include information on both the deceased and their family. If the deceased's will was submitted to the courts, it will be included in their probate file.

Apart from being fascinating reading, wills can provide a lot of information about a person's relatives, including daughters' married names. Later wills are typed, but earlier ones are lovely examples of calligraphy.

This is the Last Will and Testament of me Angus Matheson of Omaha in the Provincial District of Auckland and Colony of New Zealand Master Mariner I direct the payment of my just debts funeral and testamentary expenses by my Executors hereinafter named I give devise and bequeath all the real and personal estate of which I shall be possessed or to which I shall be entitled at the time of my decease unto my wife Jessie Matheson absolutely And I appoint the said Jessie Matheson sole Executrix of this my Will

Volunteers photographing and transcribing cemetery headstones provide a valuable service to family historians. The two leading sites are [BillionGraves](#) and [FindaGrave](#), both with world-wide coverage.



Matheson headstone in the Glasgow necropolis, from Find a Grave

Kiwi Mathesons

by Lena Orum

For parents, grandparents, aunties and uncles

Stories about the past: Matheson heritage and Anzac Day

Being able to tell a story about our Matheson ancestors requires our children to be able to think critically about the past and make connections to the present. To write or tell a story involves the ability to sequence events and changes that have happened.

Anzac Day commemorates all New Zealanders killed in war, and honours returned servicemen and women. Kiwis with Matheson heritage served in New Zealand services in wartime, worked on the home front and were conscientious objectors to war.



Adults in our families can support younger Mathesons to understand history and develop their thinking and interpreting skills.

- Start with a member of your Matheson family and share any photos and other historical artefacts you have
- Talk about this person going to war, or what they did on the home front

Anzac Day is a time to share important stories about New Zealand's history, and to remember stories about our own Matheson family members

This day is a time to share some important stories about New Zealand's history, and to remember the stories about our own Matheson family members.



Brothers Leslie (left) and Angus Matheson from New Zealand in army uniform in London just after the end of the First World War.

Some of their descendants will be reading this newsletter.

- Check if a recent serviceperson is happy to be interviewed
- Think about the impact wartime experience had on your family and what might be shared with younger Mathesons.
- Help gather information. The Online Cenotaph may include a person's wartime experience, and links to service records (personnel files) of those who served in WW1.
- For later service records contact NZDF (note the delay).

For young people and children

Talk to your parents, aunties, uncles and grandparents.

- Find out about your family's experiences in the wars that New Zealand has been involved in.

- Who of your Matheson ancestors were involved? Where did they go? Europe, Afghanistan, peacekeeping?
- Look at any medals, letters, diaries and uniforms that show the history of your ancestors.
- Who were your family members who stayed on the home front? What was their life like during wartime?
- Who can you talk to in your family who remembers wartime?

Tell the story to your family or school class on Anzac Day, or write your story and perhaps include it on the Online Cenotaph

You can find out more information at:

- Clan Matheson New Zealand: [WW1](#) and [WW2](#)
- [WW1 centenary programme](#)
- [Vietnam war](#)
- [Online Cenotaph](#)
- [New Zealand Defence Force records](#)



Scottish history

Want to learn more about Scottish history, but don't want to wade through large and possibly dry books? Dreadlocked historian Bruce Fumme breaks it down into bite-sized chunks on his [YouTube channel](#).

For something more formal, consider taking a MOOC — a massive open online course: massive for wide participation, and open meaning free of charge. You get the benefits of curated course material, usually from a university, and flexibility to study at home at your own pace.

Courses are usually available for only a limited time, so you may need to keep searching to find something suitable. Not all online courses are MOOCs (free).

1921 British censuses

The 1921 census of England and Wales has been digitised and was made publically available at the beginning of this year under the 100-year restriction on release. The National Archive has partnered with [Findmypast](#) to do this, and you have to pay to see results.

Indexed images from the 1921 census of Scotland will be available on [ScotlandsPeople](#) later this year.

If you're trying to locate distant cousins — the descendants of your direct ancestors' siblings — these more recent censuses will take you another step closer to locating their families.

1950 US census

This will be released on 1 April, and will be made available by the US national archives as well as several family history databases. Details [here](#).

This is very useful for locating descendants of Matheson relatives who migrated to the USA.

Newsletters available online

Don't forget that back issues of this newsletter are available from our [website](#), starting from the change to A4 format in 2018.

We've also produced an index to articles in those copies, so you can identify and find articles of interest. The index is [here](#).

Matheson Bay houses

This delightful area near Leigh, northeast of Warkworth, is named after two brothers who were part of the migration from Nova Scotia to Waipu.

Angus Matheson owned a half-share in the *Spray*, the fourth and the smallest ship of the migration. He and his family, and his brother Duncan, sister Christina and mother Isabella, all made the six-month journey on the *Spray* to New Zealand in 1857.

Two years later Angus and Duncan built houses on either side of the stream that flows into the bay that now bears their name. They resumed the shipbuilding business they had operated in Nova Scotia.

There is more about this intrepid family on our [website](#).

An excellent family history blog has recently posted the [story](#) of the Matheson houses at Matheson Bay: those of the two brothers, and of other family members in the area.



Mapping Mathesons

Showing how families moved within Great Britain helps to illustrate the massive social changes of the 19th and 20th centuries.

A new body of research links to both historical census information and recent consumer databases, and maps how family groups have moved within the country over the past 170 years.

In 1851 Mathesons were concentrated in a swathe across the Highlands, and on the Isle of Lewis. Migration to the large urban areas of Edinburgh and Glasgow had already begun. Mathesons start to feature in London a decade later.

By the end of the 20th century, concentration in urban areas was almost complete.



Distribution of Mathesons in 1851 (left) and 1998 (right)

Mathesons were concentrated in urban areas much earlier.



Distribution of Mathiesons in 1851

The site also maps trends in forenames, and identifies the parishes and local government areas where surnames are concentrated. You can check it out [here](#).

How to connect with us

Clan Matheson Society New Zealand Branch

Our objectives are to:

- foster an interest in Matheson heritage
- forge links between people in New Zealand with Matheson heritage, and between them and kinsfolk in other countries
- help people with Matheson heritage find out more about their family history and family stories



New Zealand branch website

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

International clan website

www.clanmatheson.org

Newsletter

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Website

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Clan Matheson New Zealand committee 2021 – 2022

Lena Orum (Chair and secretary)	Auckland
Doug Hayr (treasurer)	Auckland
Andrew Matheson (news editor)	Wellington
Graeme Matheson	Christchurch
Rodger Matheson	Auckland
Wayne Matheson	Queenstown

Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand

Andrew Matheson

Chief's Deputy Lieutenants for New Zealand

Blair Matheson

Graeme Matheson

Support our work

The New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society has moved away from a formal membership model. You don't have to pay a subscription to receive the newsletter, or to share your interest in Matheson heritage with others.

We welcome any support you can provide, whether a one-off donation or a regular payment just as you used to support us with an annual subscription.

Bank account:

Clan Matheson Society New Zealand branch

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