

Family history research

Free and freemium websites

In the last issue we looked at subscription family history databases, of which [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](#), 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](#). 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](#) 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](#) or OPC.

You can search for wills from England and Wales on a government [site](#), 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](#), which lists more than 32 million records. You might also want to access the national archives or libraries of [Scotland](#), [Ireland](#), [Northern Ireland](#) or [Wales](#).

The [Gazette](#) 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.

DISSOLUTION OF COPARTNERY.

NOTICE is hereby given that the Copartnery carried on under the Firm of JOHN MATHESON & COMPANY, Farmers and Distillers at Glenmorangie, near Tain, in the County of Ross, has been DISSOLVED by mutual consent of the Subscribers, the sole Partners thereof.

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