

# Clan Matheson New Zealand

## Chair's corner

Beannachdan dhuibh

It's a quieter time now for your Clan Matheson committee after a wonderfully busy year with the visit from Sir Alexander and Lady Matheson. In his Chief's corner article in the March newsletter, Sir Alexander reflected on the friendliness of all and the strength of feeling we have for our Scottish heritage. We Kiwi Mathesons enjoyed the visit too — meeting together and discussing our Matheson families and their history in New Zealand and Scotland.

Mid-winter and Matariki are a time for your committee to plan for the year ahead. We started by looking back on the success of the Chief's visit, and included how we can help Mathesons strengthen links with kinfolk and find out more about our shared Matheson heritage.

Committee members and trustees have had great discussions in our planning meetings about possible activities for the future. We have drawn up plans and would welcome your suggestions and comments on the 2025–2026 annual plan and longer-term strategic plan [here](#). Please send these to me to take to the committee. Below are two, among many, of the topics we have considered for the year ahead.

Mathesons we meet at Scottish events always have information and comments about the history of their family in the local area. The committee has some ideas for sharing and using your answers to questions such as: Are there significant historical sites for your Matheson family? Where did families live through the generations? What stories do you, or perhaps [PapersPast](#), have about your family's activities in the area?

Perhaps the clan could help you at Scottish events in your area where Mathesons gather. You might like the clan banner and resources to support your family at a Matheson 'table' or area to add to the occasion.

Lena Orum  
Chair, Clan Matheson New Zealand branch  
[chair@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:chair@clanmatheson.org.nz)

Newsletter of the  
New Zealand branch of the  
Clan Matheson Society

June 2025

Issue 179

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# Elaine Rankin

by Ian Rankin

We were sad to hear of the death of Elaine Rankin, an enthusiastic and long-term supporter of Clan Matheson in New Zealand. Thanks to her son Ian Rankin for these reflections.

Sadly, Elaine Rankin passed away on 5 April this year aged 94. She was always a keen and dedicated member of Clan Matheson and all things Scottish.

Elaine was an inaugural member of the New Zealand committee of Clan Matheson in the 1980s, and spent many years in that role. She and her late husband Rae hosted the 27th Clan Chief – Sir Fergus Matheson – and his wife Jean when they visited New Zealand in 1994.

Elaine was a regular attendee at many clan events. These included dinners, kirking of the tartan, plus several very enjoyable clan picnics on Matheson family land at Matheson Road Paparimu and other venues. Elaine seldom missed the annual general meetings where she provided constructive input on clan activities, and always contributed generously from her home baking.

Elaine was a wealth of information regarding the clan and her Scottish heritage. She thoroughly enjoyed hearing the pipes played, and generally joined in with 'whoops' of laughter and glee. Her presence and knowledge will be sadly missed.



*Rae and Elaine Rankin with Sir Fergus and Jean, Lady Matheson*



*Atop Mt Eden in Auckland, 1994*

# The Matheson saga

by Wayne Matheson

In the 1980s I assisted my great-aunt, Alice C McKenzie, lead the preservation of this record of our direct Matheson line.

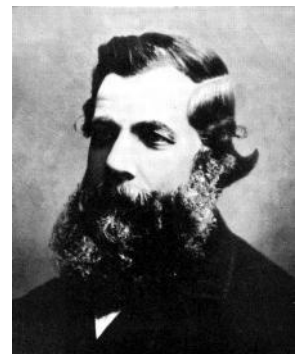
As so often happens when families leave their homeland for new lands, during the space of 100 years family connections are lost or become too far removed with the result that oncoming generations are left with only a hazy hearsay of the people they are descended from. The family record in this book is to serve as a reminder to following Matheson generations in this family line of their ancestry.

The first record in our family Bible is a marriage in 1756 between Donald Matheson (Mathewson) and Sophia Gall. The surname problems start from here, as you will most probably find in your own family lines that confuse your research leads.

Jumping forward by three generations my great-great-grandparents, Captain James Matheson and Christina, started a new family line from 1850. James was from a long line of seafarers and had his future cast in the same mould. His ancestors succumbed to the perils of the sea, which was so often the case in those times.

Our [website](#) now hosts another privately-published story of a New Zealand Matheson family, and we appreciate Wayne Matheson of Invercargill making it available. Here Wayne outlines the story of *The Matheson saga: a family history of foresight courage and endeavour*.

That knowledge and skill proved to be vital and a reason I and all other members of our family entered life. Five days out from Port Louis enroute to Adelaide, Captain James was stricken with malarial fever and the mate met with an accident breaking a leg.



*Christina and James Matheson*

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**The family record in this book is to serve as a reminder to following Matheson generations in this family line of their ancestry.**

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Getting to New Zealand was quite an adventure. As a master mariner, James was appointed as master and shareholder of the *Yarra*, a 120-ton schooner. Leaving their three-year-old son with his grandmother at Peterhead, James and Christina set sail for Port Louis in Mauritius in 1858. Imagine the distress, but fortitude, Christina would have had at leaving her son and experiencing the unfamiliar life of a working ship. While in Port Louis my great-grandfather John was born.

The loneliness of the long voyages presented an opportunity for Christina to learn the skills necessary to safely navigate the ship.

Faced with this emergency and nursing the three-week-old John, Christina set to command the ship and plotted a course to Adelaide — no mean feat for any 28 year old. On arriving in Adelaide the entire crew deserted for the goldfields.

Their story and tales of more serious challenging voyages are told in *The Matheson saga*. The book also follows James and Christina's descendants from Port Chalmers and Kakanui in New Zealand, which include the Alexander, Inglis, Brockett and Nimmo families. Their families extended to the McKenzie, Campbell, Hegan, Henry, Sherbourne and Stewart families.

# Nova Scotian pioneers' monument, Waipu ...

by Andrew Matheson

During the Chief's visit to New Zealand in February we were very pleased to hold a Clan Matheson gathering in Waipu, a Northland town with a proud Scottish heritage.

Since then I have discovered in my family papers an invitation to celebrations on 30 December 1914 marking the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the first settlers at Waipu. The invitation is now in the Waipu Scottish Migration Museum.

This was no ordinary anniversary, as the centre-piece was the formal unveiling of the granite monument to the Nova Scotian settlers that still dominates the main street of Waipu.

The invitation was addressed, in the style of the time, to Mr & Mrs Norman Matheson. My great-grandfather Norman Matheson arrived in Waipu in about 1866. In 1867 he married Ann McDonald, who had arrived at Waipu with her parents — Ann McKenzie and Hector McDonald — and siblings in 1856.

Ann McDonald's mother Ann McKenzie was the daughter of John 'The Smuggler' McKenzie, who died in Nova Scotia, and Ann McKenzie, who travelled from Nova Scotia to Australia with her sons Duncan 'The Prince' McKenzie and Murdoch 'The Captain' McKenzie on their ship the *Highland Lassie*, and on to New Zealand on Murdoch's ship the *Gazelle*.

Norman taught at North River School at Waipu for about 10 years in the 1860s and 1870s before the family moved to the Waikato as Norman sought promotion as a teacher.

However, Norman died just a year before the 1914 Waipu commemoration. So, unless the records of the Nova Scotian Reunion Committee were out of date, the invitation was addressed to Norman's son Norman and his wife Sarita.

The family connections to Waipu continued, with Norman and Sarita's youngest son Roy Matheson (my father) and his wife Joan attending the Waipu centennial celebrations in January 1953.

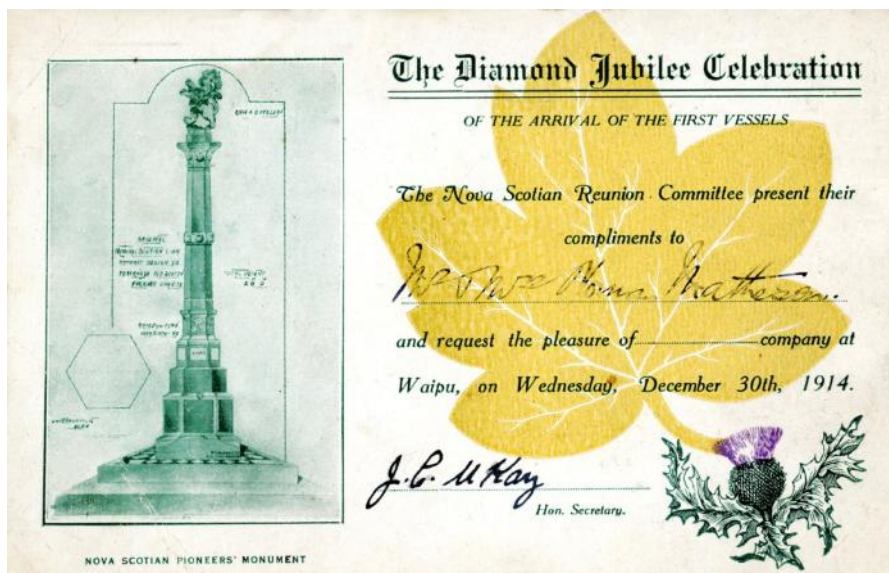
## NOVA SCOTIAN MEMORIAL.

### UNVEILING AT WAIPU.

#### DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATION.

The Diamond Jubilee celebration of the arrival of the first vessels at Waipu bearing the Nova Scotian pioneers of 1851, and the unveiling of a memorial to the whole of the pioneers from Nova Scotia, which took place at Waipu on December 30, were truly memorable. Almost 1000 people from all parts of the Dominion were present.

The feature of the day was the unveiling of a noble plinth erected to the memory of the brave Nova Scotian pioneers, by their justly-proud descendants. The memorial takes the form of a stately granite column surmounted by a beautifully ornate cupola, on the top of which stands the national Scottish Lion rampant. The column is hexagonal in section and the base is composed of two wide slabs forming steps, the upper one of which bears a fine tiled pattern. About midway of the column is a circular scroll on which are carved the emblems of Scotland, Canada and New Zealand. Noble in conception, chaste in decoration, and magnificently wrought from the famous Peterhead red Scotch polished granite, the monument worthily commemorates the arrival of the founders of the Nova Scotian community in New Zealand.



Northern Advocate  
7 January 1915

## ... Nova Scotian pioneers' monument, Waipu ...

The Waipu monument has featured in a special series of photos in the collection of a Matheson family with strong Northland connections. Our thanks to Melvyn Matheson and his brother Ross and sister-in-law Jo Matheson for sharing these photos with us.

Ross and Melvyn Matheson are great-grandsons of Kenneth Matheson (born in Sutherlandshire in Scotland) and Flora McKenzie, who arrived in New Zealand with their family from Nova Scotia on the *Ellen Lewis*, the sixth and last vessel to sail from Cape Breton Island for the southern hemisphere. It reached Auckland in May 1860, from where the passengers moved on quickly to join their kith and kin at Waipu.

Kenneth and Flora lived first at Waipu, then at Maunu near Whangarei and finally at Hikurangi just north of Whangarei. They cleared a bush-covered block in Valley Road, built a large home-stead and created a dairy farm. Kenneth also had a sawmill at Hikurangi.

Melvyn and Ross's grandfather was Kenneth and Flora's youngest son Donald Munro Matheson, known as Dan. He was born in Nova Scotia and was nine years old when the family migrated to New Zealand. Dan married Antonie Heyber, whose family hailed from Breslau in Prussia (now Wrocław in Poland). They took up land at Whakapara just north of Hikurangi, where Matheson Road indicates the location of their property.



*Matheson Road Whakapara  
with Danny Matheson (L) and his sons,  
descendants of Dan and Antonie Matheson*

Dan and Antonie's eldest son Kenneth Murdoch Matheson was killed in the first Battle of the Somme in 1916. You can read more about him on our [website](#).

Dan and Antonie's second-youngest son Alexander (Alec) Matheson was the father of Ross and Melvyn. Ross and Jo Matheson are still farming the land their great-uncle Kenneth Murdoch Matheson bought in 1906, 10 years before his death on a European battlefield.

Which brings us back to the Waipu monument.

In 1994 the Chief of Clan Matheson Sir Fergus Matheson and his wife Jean, Lady Matheson, visited New Zealand. The Waipu monument was chosen as a suitable backdrop for a family photo.



*Ross and his wife Jo, Melvyn, their mother Lily, Jean,  
Lady Matheson and Sir Fergus Matheson in 1994*

## ... Nova Scotian pioneers' monument, Waipu

In 2008 Alexander Matheson, son of Sir Fergus (who was still chief at the time) and Lady Matheson, and his wife Katharine visited Waipu during their first visit to New Zealand. Melvyn and Ross took the opportunity for another family photo.



*Alexander, Melvyn, Katharine and Ross Matheson in 2008*

Fast forward to 2025, and it was time for another photo when the current chief, Sir Alexander Matheson, and Lady Matheson visited. At the last minute, unfortunately Melvyn was unable to attend this gathering.

The Nova Scotian pioneers' monument is listed as a category 2 historic place by Heritage New Zealand. The grey obelisk behind it is the Waipu war memorial (photo: Heritage New Zealand).



*Sir Alexander Matheson (R), Lady Matheson (3rd from left) with Ross and Jo Matheson (between them) and their second son Colin and his partner Gael in 2025*



UNVEILING OF A MONUMENT ERECTED TO COMMEMORATE THE JUBILEE OF WAIPU, NORTH AUCKLAND: THE CEREMONY IN PROGRESS ON DECEMBER 30.

*Auckland Weekly News 7 January 1915*

# Matheson the mystery mountaineer

Do you know of a man named Matheson who was a runholder in the Mount Cook area in the 1890s, probably in the Pukaki Valley? Some brief references in an old book give a tantalising glimpse of his almost accidental role in exploration that led to the first ascent of New Zealand's highest mountain.

If you know more about this person, please feel free to share it in our [family history forum](#) or [Facebook group](#).

In his 1914 book *A climber in New Zealand*, Malcolm Ross describes early climbing activities on Mt Cook (also known then as Aorangi) in 1894 — a landmark year for early alpine exploration in New Zealand.

Malcolm Ross, his brother Kenneth and another climber, Marmaduke Dixon, were on the slopes of the mountain trying to find a way to the summit, which had never been reached. While the three were sheltering in Ball Hut one November night they were awoken by three late arrivals.

Matheson's first climbing job was to go out with several others in bad weather to look, unsuccessfully, for the packs ("swags") some of the party had lost before reaching the hut.

On the way back to the hut "Matheson knocked over a kea [an alpine parrot] with his ice-axe, simply stunning it and subsequently catching it alive. We afterwards caught another ...". Whether this was as pets or for the pot is not recorded.

Malcolm Ross had to abandon any attempt to summit the mountain because his planned holiday had come to an end.

"Matheson accompanied me on my 14-mile tramp in the driving rain down to the Hermitage". The glacier streams they had to cross were treacherous: "blocks of ice were coming down by the score in the ever increasing and rapidly flowing current.

"In the evening we drove [by horse and cart] another 14 miles to Glentanner station, which was reached with difficulty as the mountain torrents that crossed the road had torn up their channels so that there were no good fords ..."

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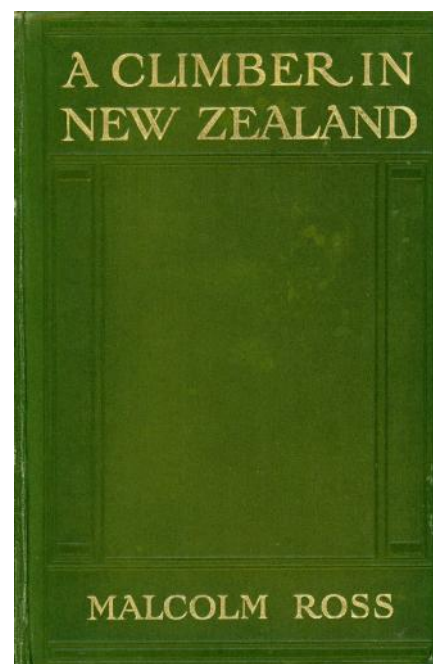
**"Matheson, our newly formed acquaintance, was ready ... to go with us to the summit if need be"**

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They proved to be Tom Fyfe and George Graham (members of the New Zealand Alpine Club) and "Matheson (a runholder who had come up to see something of the Great Tasman Glacier)".

Matheson, accompanied by his dog, joined the party and according to Malcolm Ross's account was made "baker-in-chief" while the group was confined to the hut by bad weather.

This new arrival wasn't just along for the ride. Ross recounts that "Matheson, our newly formed acquaintance, was ready to join us, and to go with us to the summit if need be; so Dixon nailed up his boots with hobs and clinkers for the ice-work". No high-tech equipment in those days!



## ... Matheson the mystery mountaineer



*Marmaduke Dixon driving the climbing team up the Pukaki Valley to The Hermitage*

Malcolm Ross just missed out on being part of the first successful climb of the mountain: "While Matheson and myself were proceeding down the Tasman Valley in the rain the others stayed on at the hut, hoping for fine weather to enable them to renew the attack on Aorangi".

Kenneth Ross, Dixon, Fyfe and Graham continued to probe the upper reaches of the mountain, and after Ross and Dixon retired from the quest Fyfe and Graham continued in the company of another climber, Jack Clarke. On Christmas day 1894 these three were the first to reach the summit of New Zealand's highest mountain.



*The first photo taken on the top of Mt Cook (also now known as Aoraki)*

Perhaps if Malcolm Ross had had more annual leave, both he and Matheson with the improvised boots might have joined them at the top!

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## You can help

Clan Matheson New Zealand is run by volunteers for the benefit of those interested in Matheson heritage. We moved away from a subscription model several years ago, and now rely on donations to fund our activities and sustain the organisation.

In the financial year to 30 June 2025, 10 generous people between them donated \$2,865. We are very grateful to those people.

Donations enable us to cover operating expenses such as maintaining a website, producing a brochure and developing other promotional material for clan events. All time and other costs are donated by committed individuals.

You can help support Clan Matheson in New Zealand by making a donation, either one-off or on a regular basis.

Because Clan Matheson New Zealand is a registered charity, you get back one-third of everything you donate.

It's easy to make a donation. See the last page of this newsletter for details.



# News and events

## Next international Clan Matheson gathering

Mathesons from around the world will congregate in Scotland for another international gathering in 2030. That may sound like a long time away, but it's never too early to plan an overseas trip.

There was a highly successful clan gathering last year, which you can read about in the September 2024 [issue](#) of our newsletter. The gathering was a lot of fun — short on pomp and clan formalities and strong on meeting and doing things together with fine people from different countries who share a common bond and interest, all in a beautiful part of Scotland.

The Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson, has just announced that the 2030 gathering will follow a similar format — four days of events coinciding with the Lochcarron Highland Games in late July.

We will have further details in this newsletter as plans are firmed up.

## Clan Matheson branches around the world

Clan Matheson New Zealand is the New Zealand branch of the international Clan Matheson Society. There are other branches in the UK and Europe, Australia, Canada and USA — all places with a strong heritage of Scottish migration.

The branches share news through an annual international newsletter. As well as reports on branch activities, this year individuals are encouraged to contribute articles relevant to Clan Matheson. These should be short — say 750 words with a couple of photos.

If you have an idea for a contribution, please contact Andrew Matheson, Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand, by 30 August at [news@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:news@clanmatheson.org.nz).

## Clan Matheson Canada

The Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson, will be in Ontario in August, at the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games on 8 to 10 August. Stop by if this fits in with your travel plans.



# How to connect with us

## Clan Matheson New Zealand

We are the New Zealand branch of the international Clan Matheson Society. 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

## Clan Matheson New Zealand

New Zealand Business Number  
9429050807970

Registered charity CC60849

[www.clanmatheson.org.nz](http://www.clanmatheson.org.nz)

[www.facebook.com/groups/  
ClanMathesonNewZealand](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ClanMathesonNewZealand)

**International Clan Matheson  
Society website**

[www.clanmatheson.org](http://www.clanmatheson.org)

## Clan Matheson New Zealand trust

Trustees:  
Andrew Matheson, Blair Matheson

Contact:  
[trust@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:trust@clanmatheson.org.nz)

News	<a href="mailto:news@clanmatheson.org.nz">news@clanmatheson.org.nz</a>
Family history	<a href="mailto:web@clanmatheson.org.nz">web@clanmatheson.org.nz</a>
Website	<a href="http://www.clanmatheson.org.nz">web@clanmatheson.org.nz</a>
Secretary	<a href="mailto:secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz">secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz</a>
Chair	<a href="mailto:chair@clanmatheson.org.nz">chair@clanmatheson.org.nz</a>

## Clan Matheson New Zealand committee

Lena Orum (chair and secretary)	Auckland
Rodger Matheson (treasurer)	Auckland
Andrew Matheson (news editor)	Wellington
Wayne Matheson	Invercargill

## Chief's Lieutenant for New Zealand

Andrew Matheson

## Chief's Deputy Lieutenant for New Zealand

Blair Matheson

## Support our work

We welcome any support you can provide, whether a one-off donation or a regular payment.

Make your donation to:

Clan Matheson New Zealand  
03 1559 0103339 00

Clan Matheson New Zealand is a registered charity (number CC60849), and donations of \$5 or more qualify for a tax credit of 33.33 cents in every dollar donated. To get a receipt for tax purposes include the following information in the fields indicated:

Particulars	Your name
Code	Donation
Reference	Your phone number

The secretary will contact you to get an email or postal address and send you a receipt.

For any questions contact:  
[secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz](mailto:secretary@clanmatheson.org.nz)