

Clan Matheson New Zealand

Editor's corner

This is the 180th edition of the Clan Matheson New Zealand newsletter, and is part of a series dating back 36 years.

We produce the newsletter to foster an interest in Matheson heritage, and to help people find out more about their Matheson family history and family stories. The newsletter is also a way of forging links between people in New Zealand with Matheson heritage and between them and kinsfolk in other countries.

To begin with the newsletter was the only written communication channel for members of the clan in New Zealand. Now it is complemented by a Facebook group and website.

I'm really pleased to see the steadily growing interest in our newsletter. In the year to the end of June we saw a 34% increase in subscribers, which is very encouraging. We make the newsletter available free of charge so it reaches anyone who is interested in it.

More people are reading the newsletter, and more people are getting involved with it. Just in recent issues we've seen that:

- An article about members of the Schwartz family who changed their surname to Matheson (or Mathieson) during the First World War brought an update from a descendant and a copy of an 1837 birth certificate.
- An item on New Zealand Mathesons in the polar regions prompted a Norwegian Matheson to share information about her Matheson grandfather on a polar expedition.
- In response to the article in the June issue about a mystery Matheson mountaineer, an Otago Matheson has provided information about his grandfather. That has helped an update to the article in this issue and prompted me to do further research for an article in the next issue.

Please keep the ideas coming. We would appreciate hearing your responses to stories in the newsletter and getting further information about them. You might want to contribute an article, or at least suggest topics you'd like to see articles about. Get in touch — we'd love to hear from you.

Andrew Matheson,
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Newsletter of the
New Zealand branch of the
Clan Matheson Society

September 2025

Issue 180

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Graeme Matheson

A long-serving supporter of Clan Matheson in New Zealand, Graeme Matheson, has stepped down from formal positions as committee member, Chief's Deputy Lieutenant for New Zealand and a trustee of Clan Matheson New Zealand. We are very grateful for Graeme's hard work over a long time to foster interest in Matheson heritage in New Zealand.

Graeme was born in Christchurch and still lives there, though his professional career as a pharmacist saw him working and living in different parts of the South Island.

Graeme was appointed as a Chief's Deputy Lieutenant for New Zealand in 2011, elected to the committee of the New Zealand branch of the Clan Matheson Society in 2012, and served as a trustee of Clan Matheson New Zealand from the trust's formation in 2022.



Both Graeme and his wife Ellen McCrae have been involved in Scottish events in Canterbury and Clan Matheson international gatherings. Another of their interests is motorsport, particularly vehicle tours with their classic BMW and Saab cars.

Graeme will now be able to devote more time to family — Ellen, their children and 10 grandchildren (all of whom have Matheson as a surname or middle name). He may have stepped down from formal positions but will still be involved in Clan Matheson and things Scottish, particularly the Hororata Highland Games each November.

We thank Graeme for all his support, and wish him and Ellen the very best.



Clan Matheson New Zealand

www.clanmatheson.org.nz

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Clan Matheson New Zealand

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Matheson the mystery mountaineer ...

by Andrew Matheson

In the last issue I described how a chance discovery in an old mountaineering book by Malcolm Ross showed that a South Island farmer by the name of Matheson was active in exploring New Zealand's highest point, Mt Cook, and how he could almost have been in the first party to reach the summit in 1894.

Who was this person, went out the call for further information. We have two possible contenders — one as a result of information from a reader and the other from further research.

Dougald Matheson

Alister Matheson is a descendant of Murdo and Christina Matheson. Their story is told in our December 2023 [newsletter](#) and in the book *Matheson 1875–1975: an Otago family history* written by Elliot Hugh Matheson, Alister's father. This family history is available on our [website](#).

Alister kindly wrote in with information about his grandfather Dougald Matheson, suggesting it was possible that he could be the mystery mountaineer mentioned in the June newsletter.

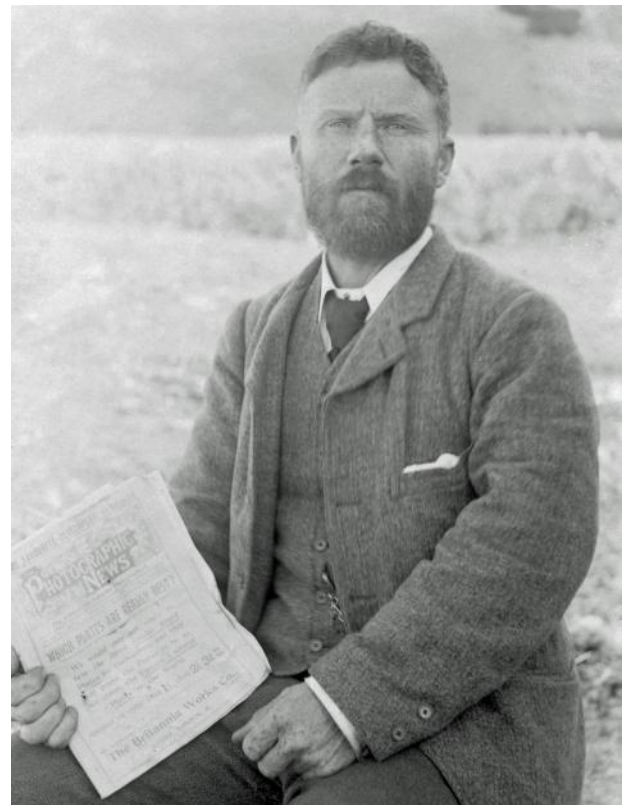
Dougald was the son of Murdo and Christina Matheson. In 1876, soon after arriving in New Zealand from Scotland aged in his early 20s, Dougald went to work at Cecil Peak, a high country station across Lake Wakatipu from Queenstown.

Elliot Matheson's book notes that "Dougald recalled the severity of the winters and the ever recurring task of snowraking, the fear of avalanches, and the terrible fatigue of work that was only for the physically strong". So Dougald was well used to working at higher altitudes and in difficult snowy conditions.

Dougald later worked in the Glenorchy area at the head of Lake Wakatipu, and after a spell working back in lower country he took over the Freehold Creek run above Lake Ohau in the Mackenzie Country. He farmed here for a period in the 1890s until a big snowstorm in 1895 killed most of his sheep flock.

Soon after that he married and moved to farm the family property Attadale near Middlemarch in Central Otago. Their son and grandsons continued on Attadale and nearby Stoneburn until the early 2000s.

While at Freehold Creek Dougald was active in exploring the Southern Alps in that area, a story that we'll tell in the next issue.



Dougald Matheson
(photo: Matheson family collection)

... Matheson the mystery mountaineer ...

PHOSPHORISED POLLARD POISON.

(TO THE EDITOR, L.W.M.)

DEAR SIR,—Having formerly lived for some years in your beautiful district, I have always felt a pleased interest in the welfare of its people, especially in respect of those connected with the sheep-farming industry.

In the hope of helping some of your many readers the better to deal with the rabbit pest, I send you (enclosed) a recipe for preparing phosphorized pollard poison for killing rabbits, which I may respectfully ask you to kindly insert in your valuable newspaper. This poison has been a signal success in this district; as a rabbit destroyer it is cheaper than the poisoned oats, can be used on large or small areas, seems to be equally deadly in summer as in winter, and is altogether the most effective means we have yet discovered for the destruction of rabbits. I am satisfied that should graziers and farmers be induced to use it generally in place of oats, the rabbits could be kept at bay with less trouble and with considerably less expense than was formerly possible under the old methods. Thanking you in anticipation.—I am, sir,

Your obedient servant,

DOUGALD MATHESON,
Ruhelder, Lake Ohan.

Freehold Creek, Damarama, June 21, 1895.

Dougald Matheson sharing his answer to rabbit infestation, Lake Wakatip Mail 28 June 1895



Lake Pukaki hotel in 1885, with Mt Cook at the head of the lake. The hillock to the right of the hotel is the edge of Simon's Pass station.

In his book Malcolm Ross describes overnighing at the hotel before his attempt on the mountain in which he was joined by the mystery Matheson along with the mountaineers Fyfe and Graham:

Lake Pukaki was our halting-place for the night. At sunset we sighted its waters. Far up the valley, rising from the Tasman Flats, towered the great mass of Mount Cook, its final peak gleaming in the sunlight, and its snows reflected in the lake at our feet

What about the other contender?

John Matheson arrived in New Zealand from Scotland just one year after Dougald Matheson and at about the same age. In 1878 he took up Simon's Pass station in the Mackenzie Country.

Simon's Pass station is to the west of the pass of that name, and sits at the foot of Lake Pukaki. It includes the current Lake Pukaki viewpoint on the Tekapo–Twizel road, from where you can look straight up the lake to Mt Cook.

It's easy to imagine that John Matheson was curious about the mountain and glaciers he could see every day as he went about working on his farm.

Getting to Mt Cook in the late 19th century was a multi-day affair, with frequent changes of horses and overnight stays. Simon's Pass station is adjacent to the Pukaki hotel where travellers rested on their journey to Mt Cook, still a day's journey away.



... Matheson the mystery mountaineer

It's quite likely that John Matheson visited the hotel that was his close neighbour — indeed John's son John S Matheson later married the publican's daughter — so it was very possible that John (senior) met itinerant climbing parties there and could have tagged along with Tom Fyfe and George Graham in 1894.

John had married Agnes Seay in 1884 and they had two sons and four daughters. In the early 20th century they built a town house in Timaru, but not as modest a building as that term suggests. They commissioned 'Tighnafeile' (Gaelic for 'House of welcome'), a grand Jacobean revival villa that reflects the wealth and social status of Canterbury runholders at that time.

Agnes and the family lived mostly in Timaru while the children attended school, and as he grew older John spent more time there. He died at their Timaru residence in 1914, and Agnes continued living there for another 20 years until her death.

John and Agnes's younger son John continued to farm Simon's Pass, and the story of their elder son Dugald George is told on our [website](#).

OBITUARY

MR JOHN MATHESON.

Mr John Matheson, one of the leading pastoralists of the Mackenzie Country, died on the 28th April at his residence, Timaru. The deceased was the owner of Simon's Pass station where he resided for many years. Throughout the Mackenzie Country he was honoured and respected by all classes of the community who came in contact with him. He had extensive experience relating to sheep station life since his arrival in the Dominion. A native of Argyllshire, he arrived in the Dominion in 1875, in company with his brother. A little later he purchased Simon's Pass station from the late George Gould, of Christchurch. Here he chiefly resided until of late years, when he spent a good deal of his time at his town residence in Wai-iti Road. He leaves a widow and six children, viz., Dr. Matheson, his eldest, J. S. Matheson, the younger of Simon's Pass, and four daughters.

Timaru Herald 7 May 1914

So what to make of these two?

Dougald Matheson of Freehold Creek on Lake Ohau. Well used to high country work and a proven explorer. His station is today 100 km by road from the Hermitage at Mt Cook. Would he have made that journey with his dog to join up with the climbers Fyfe and Graham (who were prominent alpinists of the day)?

John Matheson of Simons Pass on Lake Pukaki. No known experience in mountainous areas, though the Matheson in the story needed nails added to his boots which suggests a lack of experience. Simon's Pass Station looked up at Mt Cook and was adjacent to the hotel where travellers to the mountain stayed overnight.

They're both candidates for being the person described in Malcolm Ross's book. I tend to favour John, as he was likely to have met Fyfe and Graham when they stopped at Lake Pukaki hotel and gone, with his dog, up to the mountain for a bit of a look.

But we can't be certain. If you know any more about these two men and the Mt Cook story, please let us know at news@clanmatheson.org.nz.

As far as we know John Matheson of Lake Pukaki and Dougald Matheson of Freehold Creek weren't related, but in an amazing coincidence Dougald Matheson took over Freehold Creek in 1892 from Dougall George Matheson, John's brother.



Tighnafeile, Timaru

New trustees for Clan Matheson New Zealand ...

The trust that supports Clan Matheson in New Zealand has been strengthened for the future with the appointment of two new trustees.

The current trustees — Andrew Matheson and Blair Matheson — are very pleased to be joined by two younger volunteers who have a commitment to the organisation and understanding of it, as well as an impressive range of skills.

Clan Matheson in New Zealand is its people — volunteers who run the organisation and people who engage with it at events or through our newsletter, Facebook group and website.

Behind these people is a legal entity — a trust called Clan Matheson New Zealand — which is a registered charity. The trust was formed in 2022 to give the organisation a legal status at the time it moved away from a membership and subscription model. You can read about this development in the September 2022 [newsletter](#).

With the retirement from the trust of Graeme Matheson the two remaining trustees, Blair Matheson and Andrew Matheson, sought new blood on the trust and are delighted to announce the appointment of two additional trustees. Here is some background in their own words.

Lara Penman

I am the granddaughter of Gladys Matheson. I became interested in learning about my Matheson heritage when visiting Scotland with my mum (Isobel) and auntie (Lena), and wanted to visit the places our ancestors lived. I am very grateful to Andrew's book on our family line for giving me all the intel I needed to find the farms, houses and cemeteries in Scotland connected to my ancestors. That knowledge made me feel more connected to them and to Scotland.

I came back to New Zealand and helped the New Zealand clan by being on the committee and editing the newsletter for a few years. I am pleased to continue to support the clan by being a trustee.

By day I work as a manager in the public service in Wellington, and enjoy biking and hiking with my husband and our ever-enthusiastic dog. I have a Masters of Public Management, a degree in political science and a degree in physiotherapy.



Matheson descendants on a family history tour in Scotland — Lara Penman (centre) with her mother Isobel Murphy (L) and aunt Lena Orum (R). You can read about this trip in the first [newsletter](#) that Lara edited.

Kirk Matheson

I'm a grandson of Doug (poppa) and Anne Matheson and son of Blair. I grew up in Taupo and now live in Auckland with my wife, Arena, and two daughters, Shiloh (8) and Nina (7).

While I did not pick up my father's bagpipes, I have always had a keen interest in our family history which was fostered by poppa. I have also enjoyed the family stories in the clan newsletter and tales of the various family trips back to Scotland and Applecross.

Once the kids have a better grasp on history we will be making the pilgrimage — hopefully coinciding with the 2030 Clan Matheson international gathering.

... new trustees for Clan Matheson New Zealand

My background is in business — particularly data, analytics and AI (before the hype). This has given me the opportunity to work in a broad range of industries in consultancy and advisory roles.

It has also enabled me to volunteer with NGOs, which I have particularly enjoyed. Much of my work involves financial analysis, project management and other skills transferable to the trust.

When not working I'll be with the family helping them build blanket forts or Lego masterpieces. After a sports injury I've been reduced to 'light duties' and have recently picked up golf.



Kirk Matheson

Mathesons Bay

Mathesons Bay near Leigh is one of New Zealand's most well-known places with a Matheson place name. It takes its name from the brothers Angus and Duncan Matheson, who in 1857 arrived in New Zealand on the *Spray*, the fourth of the six ships associated with the Waipu migration. You can read more about this family on our [website](#).

In the March 2022 [newsletter](#) we reported on an excellent family history blog about the Leigh area, which has an [article](#) about early Matheson family houses in the area.

One of the blog's authors, Leigh resident Jo Evans, recently published a book on the early settlers of the area that was formerly known as Little Omaha: Leigh, Mathesons Bay, Goat Island and surrounds.

A trustee's role

Guardians

Trustees are the legal owners of Clan Matheson New Zealand's assets, and ensure that these assets are used lawfully and in accordance with the trust's aims and objectives.

Monitors

They also ensure that management and administration of the entity, which is delegated to a committee, is carried out lawfully and in accordance with the trust's aims and objectives.

Guidance

Trustees also support and guide the management of the organisation from a position outside its day-to-day administration and operation, to ensure its aims and objectives are achieved.

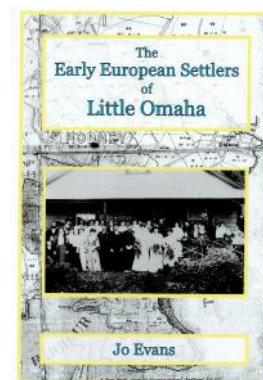
They work with the committee in two annual planning sessions to review progress and plan the organisation's future work programme.

Further information

Find out more about the trust on our [website](#).

Contact

If you have any suggestions for the trustees, please get in touch at trust@clanmatheson.org.nz.



It contains a chapter on the Mathesons of Mathesons Bay, along with a family tree. This self-published book is available for \$40 from the author at jo.hose.evans@gmail.com.

Family history research: censuses in other countries

Censuses are a powerful tool when researching your family history. In the September 2024 [issue](#) we looked at New Zealand and Scotland censuses, and in the December 2024 [issue](#) we looked at one case study of how successive census records from Scotland can show how a family grew and later dispersed over time.

But it's not just Scotland we need to look at in order to track down our ancestors and other relatives. In the 1800s and 1900s many Scots moved south of the border in search of jobs and better economic opportunities. You might find your direct ancestors in the England censuses.

Scots migrated to many countries, particularly in the English-speaking world, so you might find your ancestors' descendants in census records in other countries.

Here are some guidelines on how to go about tracking down these records.

England

Censuses from 1841 to 1921 are available online but generally only through commercial services, principally Ancestry and Findmypast. You can search free of charge but have to pay to see full results and digitised images, though remember that you can use these sites at many public libraries.

Some transcripts of census records are available free on the volunteer site [FreeCen](#).

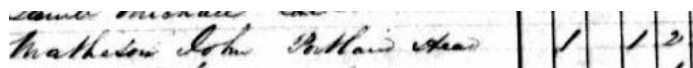
The National Archives has produced a useful [guide](#) to historical censuses in England, Wales, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands.

Census records are made available after 100 years so the 1921 census records came out recently, but don't hold your breath for the next release. All the 1931 records were destroyed by a fire in 1942, and there was no census in 1941 because of the Second World War.

Australia

National censuses have taken place every decade after Australia became a nation in 1901 but, as in New Zealand, individual returns were destroyed after statistical information was collated so there is very little of value for family historians.

There is very patchy coverage of state and territory censuses from 1811 to 1901. Some records have been digitised and available through commercial services such as Ancestry and Findmypast or free at FamilySearch. There is a guide to what's available [here](#).



John Matheson and his family lived at Portland Head in the Hawksbury River district of New South Wales in 1841

Canada

You're in luck if you're searching for Canadian relatives, as a wide range of censuses are available free of charge.

All British colonies, provinces and territories in North America were consolidated into one nation, Canada, in 1867. There have been national censuses every decade since 1871, and you can search these up to 1931. Sub-national censuses from before confederation and a few from prairie provinces after confederation are also available.

In 1891 Duncan Matheson, born in Inverness, was living at Prestwich in Lancashire as a widower with his widowed daughter. His business as a cotton merchant had made him wealthy, judging from the four servants also in the house.

Hillon Park (Aplandis)	1		Duncan Matheson	Head	Male	70	J. P. Cotton Merchant	X		Scotland Liverpool
			Alice Paddock	Wife	Female	68				Lancashire Manchester
			Mary Thom	Serv	Female	26	Cook Domestic Serv	X		Suffolk
			Elizabeth Potts	Serv	Female	18	Maid Domestic	X		Staffordshire
			Ellen Smith	Serv	Female	20	Housemaid Domestic	X		Sussex
			Mary Mounfort	Serv	Female	24	Widow Domestic	X		Staffordshire

... family history research: censuses in other countries

Canada (continued)

There's more information on Canadian censuses [here](#).

Matheson, Alexander	30	4	W. Cremona	Head	M	M	45	Scotland	Methodist	1900
Augusta	30	4	W. Cremona	wife	F	M	46	Alta Canada	Protestant	
Elizabeth	20	4	W. Cremona	daughter	F	S	10	Alta Canada	Protestant	
James	30	4	W. Cremona	daughter	F	S	6	Alta Canada	Protestant	

In 1916 Alexander and Augusta Matheson and their two daughters were living on a farm on the prairies near Cremona, Alberta

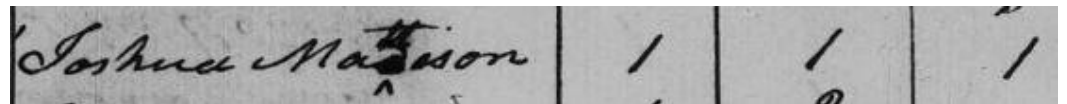
These two census entries, made 116 years apart, show how later censuses contained a lot more information.

1800 is very early for a census that names individuals (even if only the head of the household). The 1916 Alberta census provides information including age, birthplace, religion, year of immigration and family relationships.

USA

US federal censuses date back to 1790 and have been digitised up to 1950. Some are available through the National Archives catalogue but most have been digitised by other organisations. Some of these, such as Ancestry.com, require a subscription (though can often be accessed at public libraries), while others such as Familysearch.org are free to access.

[This](#) is the portal for US census results, and has links to where you can access census records and other helpful information.



Joshua Matheson (with his surname corrected) and family were living in Pownal, Bennington, Vermont in 1800

Scottish events in New Zealand

The Scottish banner is a global print and on-line magazine for expat Scots and people interested in Scottish culture and tradition. New Zealand is covered by a regional edition for this country and the one next door.

The magazine's [website](#) has an [events calendar](#) for New Zealand, so check it out for things happening in your area. If you're involved in an organisation planning events you can use this calendar to publicise them.



News and events

Look out for the Clan Matheson tent

You can catch up with Matheson kinsfolk at all these events over the coming summer. Enjoy the Highland games or the pipe band championships, find out more about what Clan Matheson does in New Zealand, and perhaps meet some long-lost or never-met cousins.

Canterbury

[Hororata Highland Games](#), Saturday 8 November 2025. As there are no gate sales for this event you'll have to buy tickets online in advance. The earlier you book the cheaper they are, and once the tickets are sold out that's it. Details [here](#).

Northland

The 152nd [Waipu Highland Games](#) will be held on New Year's Eve — Wednesday 31 December 2025 — rather than the traditional New Year's Day. You can buy a ticket on the day, but [advance purchase](#) will get you in the gate faster.

Manawatu–Whanganui

[Turakina Highland Games](#), Saturday 25 January 2026. Going strong since 1864, this is New Zealand's oldest festival of sports, music and dance.

Waikato

The [Paeroa Highland Games and Tattoo](#) will be held on Saturday 14 February 2026. No, the 'tattoo' isn't about getting some ink, but is the grand evening spectacle of music, marching and mass displays.

Taranaki

This year the New Zealand [national pipe band championships](#) will be at Inglewood on Friday 20 and Saturday 21 March 2026.

International Clan Matheson gathering

After a really successful international Clan Matheson gathering last year, plans are being made for another gathering in Scotland in July 2030. You'll be able to meet the Chief of Clan Matheson, Sir Alexander Matheson, and other Mathesons from all around the world.



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

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International Clan Matheson Society website

www.clanmatheson.org

Clan Matheson New Zealand trust

Trustees:

Andrew Matheson, Blair Matheson,
Kirk Matheson, Lara Penman

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Clan Matheson New Zealand committee

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

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