

# The Alexander Ross Letter



# **The Alexander Ross Letter**

## **Dated June 27, 1882**

Transcribed by Ian Nisbet Ross  
March 2023

This 140-year-old letter in our family archives was written by my grandfather's grandfather, Alexander Ross. Alexander was born in 1819 in Altass in the Scottish Highlands to Donald and Janet Ross. Alexander became a master shoemaker at Dornoch and raised a family of nine children, including my great-grandfather George Ross, born in 1848.

Just a few years before his death in 1885, Alexander wrote this letter to his son who had emigrated to America and settled in Providence, RI. In it, he relates detailed information about his own ancestors, and in doing so provided his descendants with many wonderful insights.

In transcribing the letter, I have done my best to interpret Alexander's writing and have made small corrections to his spelling and punctuation to improve readability. Where I was stumped and unable to decipher his writing, I have inserted the placeholder [??].

At the end of this document I have added some background information and notes interpreting the family history Alexander relates.

Ian Ross,  
March 2023

Donoch my June 1882  
Scotland

Information about my forefathers  
as near as I can come to  
I Alexander Ross late of Altars  
Rosehall Scotland & Son of the late  
Donald Ross Merchant Altars  
Born in Altars 8 October 1719

to name a brother Ross

he was dark in complexion

My Grand Father was blind &  
& born blind, he was my Father's  
Father, he lived at Invercasly his house  
was near to the Road on the west side  
of the Row of the Houses on your left hand  
as you go on to Tipton Parvach Hole  
in that part of the walls standing  
he was a man of about 6 feet in height  
& stout in proportion, he had only  
two Sons only Father Donald who  
was the oldest & John, who died  
when I was in Milton

My Grand Father kept  
allway some Groceries bying it of the  
Fair Merchants, his wife My Grand Mother  
would be allways going to Fair with  
him they allways carried their Goods  
on their back There was no Road or  
Bridge or Rivers at that time or  
either Bonar Bridge <sup>was on there</sup>, when my Father  
came to the age of about 16 or 17 years  
he then was going with his Father  
to Fair to buy the Goods & carry them in the same  
way

Dornoch 27 June 1882

Sutherland

Information about my forefathers

As near as I can come to.

I, Alexander Ross late of Altass,  
Rosehall, Sutherland, and son of the late  
Donald Ross, Merchant Altass,  
Born in Altass 28 October 1819

His name Alexander Ross

He was dark in complexion

My grandfather was blind and  
born blind, he was my father's  
father, he lived at Invercassely. His house  
was near to the road on the west side  
of the rest of the houses on your left hand  
as you go out to Tuitum Tarvach. There  
is still part of the wall standing.

He was a man of about 6 feet in height  
and stout in proportion, he had only  
two sons, my father Donald who  
was the oldest and John, who died  
when I was in [??]

My grandfather kept  
always some groceries, buying it of the  
Tain Merchants, his wife my grandmother  
would be always going to Tain with  
him. They always carried their goods  
on their back. There was no road or  
bridges on rivers at that time or  
either Bonar Bridge was on then. When my father  
came to the age of about 16 or 17 years  
he then was going with his father  
to Tain to buy the goods and carry them in the same  
way.

My Father's complexion  
 was brown Hair  
 & had whiskers  
 height about 5 feet  
 6 inch very stout  
 Built in the  
 shoulders & very  
 strong for his  
 size  
 he was only 47  
 years of age  
 Died of consumption  
 Great cough caused  
 from his work  
 he was a great  
 generous would  
 almost do any  
 thing that was  
 cost many years  
 in place  
 he was going to  
 abandon to by  
 Goods & walked  
 the whole way a  
 distance of about  
 220 miles  
 of the ground  
 the firm was  
 the firm Robinson  
 & Company  
 he also had a good  
 Lot of Land & Cows  
 2 Horses &c he was  
 the best school  
 in that part of the  
 Country at the  
 time  
 Alexander Ross  
 son

she was to name  
 Grace had  
 was shortish in  
 complexion

My Father was for most in school to  
 the age of 20 years his Father died when  
 My Father would be about 20 years of age  
 something about 2 years after his Father's  
 Death My Father & Grand Mother & John  
 Left Providence & came to Altas where  
 he build a stone & Lime House &  
 a Shop at the end of the Canal & then  
 commenced business on a large scale  
 as his Father accumulated some money &  
 he added some to himself before he  
 left Providence, now he started in Altas  
 he got a Salmon Fishing boat & he went  
 to Fair took his Mother John with him  
 to work the boat from Altas to Seim  
 & took of all kinds of Goods Cloths &  
 Cottons Groceries Leather &c & kept the  
 shop going to 1836. Memorabilia of the  
 Shelving & counter & some webs of  
 yellow prints & Cold iron webs &  
 some Leather being in the shop

My Grand Mother was a Melocan  
 ordinary size of a slender woman, she  
 was of the Melocan that lived on the South  
 side of the River opposite Tipton and the  
 My Grand Mother would be about 5 feet  
 9 inch & had complexion like  
 would be about 20 when she died  
 This is all about my Father's People  
 Alexander Ross

My father's complexion was brown hair and red whiskers, height about 5 feet 6 inch very stout built in the shoulders and very strong for his size.

He was only 47 years of age, died of consumption great cough caused from heavy work he was a great generous [man who] would almost do any thing that was customary seen in the place He went twice to Aberdeen to buy goods and walked the whole way, a distance of about 220 miles. I mind of the ?? the firm was Kilgour Robertson and company Aberdeen. He also had a good lot of land, 3 cows 2 horses and etc. He was the best scholar in that part of the country at the time.

Alexander Ross  
Son

She was to name Grace McLeod Was reddish in complexion

My father was for most in school to the age of 20 years. His father died when my father would be about 22 years of age. Something about 2 years after his father's death my father and grandmother and John left Invercassely and came to Altass where he built a stone and lime house and a shop at the end of the house and then commenced business on a larger scale. As his father accumulated some money and he added some to it himself before he left Invercassley, now he started in Altass. He got a salmon fishing boat and he went To Tain , took his brother John with him to work the boat from Altass to Tain And took of all kinds of goods, clothes and cottons, groceries, leather, etc. and kept the shop going to 1826. I remember of the shelving and counter and some webs[?] of yellow prints and corduroy webs and some leather being in the shop.

My grandmother was a McLeod and ordinary size of a slender woman, she was if the Mcleods [of] Strath Oykel on the south side of the river opposite Tuitum and she... My Uncle John would be about 5 feet 9 inch and dark complexion. His age Would be about 80 when he died. This is all about my father's people.

Alexander Ross

+  
 of these and the Ross  
 to come  
 the dish comp-  
 -lection height  
 about 5 feet 9 inches  
 ordinary of height  
 very smart  
 in appearance  
 he would be  
 about 80 when  
 he died mind  
 of him was  
 enough working  
 in the Smithy  
 at the time of the Salome  
 fishing on the river he  
 used to be with gents at  
 the river making of old  
 -erring up books abt lies  
 of Ross

her name was  
 Elisabeth Ross  
 My Ma that was at  
 first about 10 years  
 some black &  
 very good looking  
 but she grew old  
 opp. name of woman  
 not open to  
 about 70  
 of Ross

Colonel John Ross  
 when he sold Gladfield  
 he had bought the state  
 of Maine black paper  
 by Dingwall he died  
 there, his son John  
 was an advocate  
 in London but I am  
 not sure what came  
 of him since

My Grand Father My Mother's Father was a  
 a Black Smith at Section Larrach and  
 where his Smithy was you have seen, he  
 was of Respectable Servants at a Place called  
 Tomack about one mile west of Section one  
 of that Family went to the army at the time  
 of the French war with England in the time  
 of Duke of Wellington & Bonaparte he got on to be  
 all over the people were well to do people

My Grand Mother My Mother's Mother  
 she was an ordinary size & was some  
 thing stout. She was of Robbes that were  
 Servants at a farm at Shath of 3 miles  
 west of Section they were Respectable good  
 big Servants Two of them went to the army  
 at the time of the French war in Wellington's  
 time one of them was John Ross to name  
 he got on to be Colonel, he married a daug-  
 -hter of one Mr Bethune that was a Minister in  
 Toronto, he bought the state of Gladfield  
 opposite to our mind when he sold Gladfield  
 to the Duke of Sutherland, I have seen the Colonel  
 a few days before he sold Gladfield. His other  
 Brother Walter came on to be Captain  
 he was My half Brother's Father My Step Mother's  
 name was Peter to name & it is after him  
 I called Peter My now son, Captain Walter  
 Ross married a Daughter of William Allan  
 Esq of Achaning he & his Family went to  
 America I think to the Cannons one of his sons

+ Alexander Ross  
to name.

Reddish complexion, height about 5 feet 9 inches ordinary build, very smart in appearance he would be about 80 when he died. I mind of him well enough working in the smithy at the time of the Salmon fishing on the rivers he used to be with gents at the river and making or dressing up the hooks as flies

A. Ross

Her name was  
Elizabeth Ross

My mother was a tall stout woman red haired and very good looking over the general appearance of women. Her age was about 78

A. Ross

Colonel John Ross when he sold Gladfield he then bought the estate of Garve Strathpeffer by Dingwall. He died there, his son John was an advocate in Edinburgh. I am not sure what came of him since.

My grandfather my mother's father was a black smith at Tuitum Tarvach and + where his smithy was, you have seen. He was of respectable Tennants at a place called Tornack about one mile west of Tuitum. One of that family went to the army at the time of the French war with England in the time of Duke of Wellington and Bonaparte. He got on to be Major. The people were well to do people.

My grandmother, my mother's mother, she was an ordinary size woman, some thing stout. She was of the Rosses that were tenants at Amat [?] at Strath Oykel, 3 miles west of Tuitum. They were respectable good big tenants. Two of them went to the army at the time of the French war in Wellington's time. One of them was John Ross to name.

He got onto be Colonel, he married a daughter of one Mr. Bethune that was a Minister in Dornoch, he bought the estate of Gladfield opposite Bonar. I mind where he sold Gladfield to the Duke of Sutherland. I have seen the Colonel a few days before he sold Gladfield. His other brother Walter came on to be Captain.

He was my half-brother's father. My stepbrother's name was Peter to name and it is after him I called Peter my own son. Captain Walter Ross married a daughter of William Munro Esquire of Achany. He and his family went to America I think to the Canada . One of his sons

My Mother had  
 Three Brothers  
 John Delect &  
 Alexander  
 John was a Tall  
 Stout Man about  
 6 Feet in height  
 & Dark complexion  
 you have seen  
 that in the war  
 not many in  
 Gironok of his  
 mould for stout  
 - years complexion  
 Read  
 abt a Tall  
 Man about 6  
 feet & stout in  
 proportion Read  
 complexion  
 here as one of the  
 finest looking  
 Men in that part  
 such fine  
 Clean skin  
 he married in  
 Cathinors &  
 Died there  
 do not know  
 what Family  
 he had  
 A. D. 1700  
 My Mother had  
 Three Sisters  
 Madan a Tall Dark  
 woman & Betty a little  
 Read & had warm  
 fine looking &  
 Anne girl mild  
 of her own self  
 A. N.

was Daddy to name Myself Brother Delect  
 Left at 15 years to the East Indies  
 to a son of Mendo of a Hammy his step Mother's  
 Brother very little ever we heard about him only  
 that he was on a Trading Ship between the  
 Indies & Liverpool I mind of him he was  
 educated at Lairy school & after that in  
 Latin Academy, he was a Road hair of shew  
 plenty People <sup>say</sup> that he was the Richest of Lairy  
 they ever have seen would be about 8 years  
 when he Left, There is none of My Father's People  
 now in Sutherland but Myself alone cly three  
 John's Daughter is married in Easter Ross & her  
 Brother Hugh is a Foreman at Womers juncy Gironok  
 & Alexander & his Family went to New Zealand  
 3 years ago, My Uncle John's Family My Mother's  
 Brother's Family only three Daughters of them being  
 the oldest Cathine an old Maid living at Lairy  
 Elizabeth is married at Lairy & has grown up  
 Family nearly that she is in service in the Sea  
 county & Grace is dead about 9 years Hector  
 that wrote you is her son, I heard from People in  
 attars when I was up that he is a very smart  
 & has picked up his Business well, you  
 mind of My Uncle Delect that was in Lairy in  
 Chate of Foreign Ships that came in with Sugar  
 he was counted one of the Cleverest Men in the  
 North there was not such a smart Man  
 doing Business on the Gironok way as him  
 Alex Ross

My mother had three brothers John, Hector, and Alexander. John was a tall stout man about 6 feet in height and dark complexion. You have seen Hector there was not many in Greenock of his mould for stoutness complexion read About a tall man about 6 feet and stout in proportion red complexion He was one of the finest looking men in the North Such fine clean skin. He married in Caithness and died there. I do not know what family he had A Ross My mother had three sisters Moran a tall dark woman and Betsy a little red haired woman fine looking and Ann you mind of her yourself. A.R.

Was Paddy to name. My step brother Petter left Altass at the age of 15 years to the East Indies to [with?] a son of Munro of Achany his stepmother's brother. Very little ever we heard about him only that he was on a trading ship between the Indies and Liverpool. I mind him he was educated at Lairg school and after that in Tain academy, he was red haired. I heard plenty of people say that he was the prettiest lad they ever have seen. I would be about 8 years when he left. There is none of my father's people now in Sutherland but myself alone. My Uncle John's daughter is married in Easter Ross and her brother Hugh is a foreman at Wemyss quarry Greenock and Alexander and his family went to New Zealand 3 years ago. My Uncle John's family my mother's brother's family - only three daughters of them living, the oldest Catherine an old maid living at Altass and Elizabeth is married at Lairg and has grown up family nearby. Margaret she is in the service in the [??] country and Grace is dead about 9 years. Hector that wrote you is her son. I heard from people in Altass when I was up that he is very smart and have picked up his business well. You mind of my Uncle Hector that was in Greenock in charge of foreign ships that came in with sugar. He was counted one of the cleverest men in the North. There was not such a smart man doing business on the Greenock quay as him.

Alex. Ross



## Notes:

### 1. **John Ross**, younger brother of Donald Ross

- From this letter: born after 1791, died at about age 80
- Possible match on Ancestry:
  - 1851 Census, age 56, born at Invercassley
    - Address: Mickle Altass
    - Occupation: Farmer of 4 acres
    - Has children Alexander 17, daughters Christy 12, Catherine 16.
  - 1861 Census: age 63, born Creich
    - Address: Mickle Altass
    - Occupation: Farmer of 4 acres
    - Has children Alexander 25, Catherine 20.
  - 1871 Census, a 74 year old, born Rosehall
    - Address Meikle Altass
    - living with son Alexander, 36, and family at Rosehall. Son Alexander has children named Catherine, John, George which are consistent with our branch
    - Occupation: Retired Labourer

Based on the information in the letter, this seems very likely to be Alexander's Uncle John, his father Donald's younger brother.

If so, John's wife may have been Christy or Catherine and they had these children:

- Alexander born abt 1834 (wife = Margaret)
- Catherine born abt 1835
- Christy born abt 1839

### 2. Tuitum and Tuitum Tarvach are spelled on old maps as Tuiteam Tarbhach, site of clan battle in 1406 between the Mackays and the MacLeods.

3. The half-brother/stepbrother discussion on Page 3 is confusing. Alexander states that “He was my half-brother’s father,” appearing to refer to Captain Walter Ross, one of the relations of his grandmother (Elizabeth Ross) that went into the army. (Though it could also be a reference to Colonel John Ross mentioned earlier). In the next sentence he refers to a stepbrother “Petter.” It is unclear whether he is using the terms half-brother and stepbrother interchangeably or whether Petter is a different person than his half-brother.

A half-brother would be a blood relation, apparently in this case a child of his mother with a different father. But both the men he mentions were married to other women and had families with them. If Walter or John were the father of Alexander’s half-brother, then one might conclude that his mother (Janet Ross) had a marriage or at least relations with one of them prior to marrying Alexander’s father on January 1, 1819. One would hope then that John and Walter were rather distant cousins of Janet Ross. Janet was born in 1791 and had Alexander at age 28, so she clearly could have come to her marriage with Donald with this child “Petter” from another father. In fact, Alexander notes he was 8 when Petter left for the East Indies at age 15, implying he was born around 1812 when Janet would have been 21. He also mentions that Petter’s stepmother was the daughter of William Munro Esq. of Achany, who married Walter Ross, confirming this connection.