

OUR DORNOCH ROSSES

AND WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THEM

By William N. Ross June 23, 1999

Updated by Ian N. Ross April 2023

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Ross was born in Altass, in the Rosehall Parish of Creich, Sutherlandshire, on 28 October 1819. His father, Donald Ross (1791-1838) was a merchant, and he had a younger brother named John. He was named after his grandfathers, both who were named Alexander Ross. He became a shoemaker by trade, operating a shop for a time in Clashmore (2 miles from Dornoch). Alexander and Barbara Murray were married on the 17th of July 1844 at Dornoch, Scotland. He died on 23 September 1885 and is buried in a family plot that is enclosed by an iron fence in the Dornoch Free Church Cemetery located off Golf Road.

Alexander's wife Barbara Murray was born 26 January 1826 in Dornoch, the daughter of George and Barbara McKay Murray. George was a tailor in the town. Barbara died on 5 February 1901 in Dornoch. Her death certificate in the county records office in Brora lists, as cause of death: "Unknown, died suddenly, (syncope)" ,

Alexander and Barbara had nine children between 1845 and 1871, the last one, a son they named Alexander, coming when Barbara was 45 years old. All the children survived until adulthood. No records (letters or otherwise) have been found with information on the family-raising years, except that the birth places of the children indicate they moved at least three times during this period. In the 1851 Scotland Census, Alexander and his young family are listed in the parish of Dornoch, living at a place named Rosebank or Rose Bank. In 1861 and after, they are still in Dornoch with no address specified. In 1881, Alexander is listed as "Shoemaker (Master)."



Alexander Ross (1819-1885) in a photo taken at Dornoch in July 1872. He was a Master Shoemaker who lived in a house near the cathedral then called "Ivy Cottage," later "Tornaver," and recently "Cathedral Cottage."



Ian Nisbet Ross, great great grandson of Alexander Ross at the family plot in Dornoch. In addition to Alexander and Barbara, the headstone lists their nine children. The last three inscriptions were added by William Nisbet Ross in the late 1990's.



The house in Dornoch where the Alexander Ross family lived, then known as Ivy Cottage.



Envelope that contained an 1882 letter from Alexander Ross to his son George. In it, Alexander wrote extensively about his ancestors. The letter has been preserved in the family archives and is transcribed in a separate document.

The Children of Alexander Ross and Barbara Murray

Donald (1845-1874)

George (1848-1902)

John (1850-1902)

Betsy (1852-1895)

William (1854-1906)

Jessie (1857-1923)

Robert (1859-1889)

Peter Murray (1864-1930)

Alexander (1871-1906)

In the following pages, one chapter is dedicated to each child.

CHAPTER 1

Donald Ross

22 November 1845 - 3 December 1874

Donald, the oldest, was born at Bonar Bridge, Sutherlandshire, Scotland, about 10 miles from Dornoch. Why the family was at Bonar Bridge at this time is unknown, but we know Alexander had already established his trade as a shoemaker then at age 26. Following Scottish naming traditions, Donald was named after his paternal grandfather, Donald Ross (1791-1838), who is buried at Tuiteam (spelled variously as Tutum, Tuitum) Burial Ground, Rosehall, near Strath Oykel. In the 1871 census young Donald is listed as a 25-year-old apprentice tailor, living with his parents.

Death information on Donald was gleaned from the county records at Brora as follows:

Occupation: Journeyman Tailor

Cause of Death: TB of the lungs & bowels - ill 6 months.

Age at death: 47 years

Buried: Ross plot in the Golf Road Cemetery, Dornoch.

Since Donald was the first of the children to die and predeceased his parents, we assume the Ross cemetery plot was acquired at that time. Note that Donald's maternal grandfather George Murray was a tailor in Dornoch, and it may be that he followed his grandfather's profession.

Some other things to try to find out about Donald might be:

- Is there a town directory that could indicate if he had a shop?
- Are there newspaper records that might have an obituary?
- Are there any church records that might indicate if he married or not? (we presume that he did not as there was no reference to spouse in the death records).
- Would be interesting to check cemetery plot purchase records

CHAPTER 2

George Ross

14 March 1848 - 3 Feb 1902

George was born in Clashmore, Scotland and emigrated to the United States in May of 1872 at the age of 26. We have a fragment of a document in his handwriting which gives the marriage date of his parents and the birth dates of his siblings and then at the bottom says:

"Geo. Ross left Glasgow for Providence America 24 Apr 1872.

Arrived 15 May 1872. Commenced work 16 May 1872.

New York 4 Sept 1873

St. Johns N.B. 22 Apr 1874

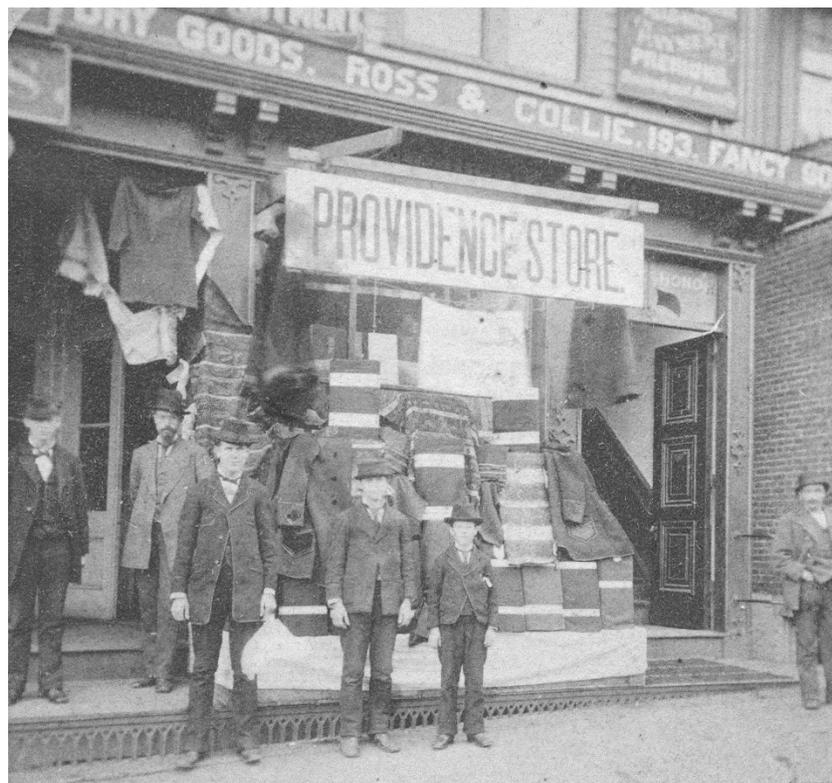
Left St. Johns Sept 1875 - Providence Octr 76"

We have not been able to find any passenger ship arrival for Providence that comes close to the above date. In addition, we checked all New York ship arrivals from Glasgow for a month each side of 15 May 1872 without success.

Based on documents found among those inherited by Ian, George spent some time as a young man at Stornaway in the Western Isles (Outer Hebrides) of Scotland. Upon his departure, he was presented with a copy of "The Waverly Novels" along with a purse containing six guineas "By the members of the Stornaway Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association and other wellwishers as a token of their regard for him, on the occasion of his leaving Stornaway, 22nd April 1870." Two small notebooks kept by George document his presentations as this debate society, and the earliest date noted is 30 January 1867. This indicates George was a resident of Stornaway for at least three years, from age 19 to 22. It is unknown what his profession was, but childhood school notebooks and his later writing indicate he was a well-educated and thoughtful young man.



Photographs of George Ross taken just before he emigrated to the United States in 1872



**The Ross & Collie Dry Goods Store In Providence, RI. 1886
George Ross is second from the left.**

After eight years in North America, and having settled in Providence in late 1876, George married Helen Nicol Nisbet, daughter of William Nisbet at the Nisbet house, 80 Pitman St., Providence, RI on 29 April 1880. They had six children in the eight years between 24 February 1881 (Catherine Nisbet Ross) and 13 May 1889 (Robert Murray Ross).

George was in a partnership operating a department store in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, a booming industrial town at the time with the emphasis on hardware manufacture. It must have been a successful business as the Rosses lived in a large concrete octagon house. This style of house was not all that unusual having been introduced by Orson S. Fowler in the 1850's and it became quite popular, particularly in the Northeast. It is doubtful that the house was built for the Rosses as the back of the print one picture notes the name of the owner. One faded print of the house in my archives identified on the back in Uncle Al's printing:

*1890 - Bernon & Grove St., Woon. R.I.
Birthplace of all Ross's[sic] except Kate.*



The octagon house in Woonsocket, RI. It was apparently rented by the Ross family in the 1880-90s.

Sometime, presumably during the 1890's, George sold his interest in the department store and purchased a tract of land known as "The Old Coe farm" in Woonsocket. This was a substantial piece of property lying in a bend, but not on the banks of, the Blackstone River. He then platted most of it into city lots (a hundred or more by the looks of the maps). The remainder, being in a more rugged area of ledge and swamp, was broken into pieces of several acres each in size. The sale of these lots over the next fifty years provided a flow of income for the family. By the time of the great depression of the 1930's and '40's most of the small lots were sold and the titles to the remainder had passed to the surviving children of George and Helen. Tax liens began to accumulate during these dire times and eventually all but one small piece on Jillson Avenue was sold to the city for taxes. The Jillson Avenue piece was given to Bill Ross by his Aunt Kate about 1965 and he eventually sold it to a Julian Carpentier who was picking up parcels from time-to-time from the city for the back taxes.

About 1890 George developed a brain tumor and was admitted to Butler Hospital where he lingered for 13 years until he died on 3 February 1902. The death certificate lists "Pulmonary Tuberculosis and Terminal Demenüa" as the cause of death, and his age as "53 years, 10 months, 19 days." The funeral services were held at the family residence, 14 Rhode Island Avenue, February 5th at 12 O'clock. He was buried in the family lot which he had selected himself at Oak Hill Cemetery, Woonsocket R.I. (as written by Helen Nisbet Ross on page 41 of her genealogy notebook). This family lot was apparently selected upon the death of little George Murray Ross on 20 Sept 1888 at the age of 14 months and 6 days. Later, when another son, William Nisbet Ross, died (18 January 1916) he was buried at Swan Point Cemetery in Providence and then, on 8 April 1916, the bodies of George Ross and George Murray Ross were exhumed and moved from Woonsocket to Swan Point by Gilbert and Drabble Undertakers.

Aunt Kate told nephew Bill Ross that she remembers as a child during that long period when her father was in Butler Hospital, her mother would say "the hospital must be paid first" before any other expenses were incurred. Helen Nisbet Ross's brothers administered the sale of the Coe Farm properties which supported the family through the child-rearing years. When

George went into Butler Hospital (known as Butler Asylum then), Helen had a house built at No. 14 Rhode Island Ave. so she could be close to her husband. This house was also adjacent to the house of her brother William Douglas Nisbet and his wife Isabella Hogg. William D. Nisbet died suddenly at age 43 on 20 August 1894 which must have been about the time that the Rosses moved into what became known simply as "14". Several of the Ross children lived at 14 the remainder of their lives. It was eventually sold in 1975 after the death of Catherine's husband Arthur Gardiner.

There is much that can never be known about George Ross, but some things that would help understand him and his life could be uncovered by diligent document research. The things that come to mind are:

- The ship and place of arrival and were his brothers Robert and William on the same ship?
- Was he naturalized and if so, what information can be found from the naturalization papers?
- Are there any records of Butler Hospital still around that could say when he was admitted? Butler Asylum closed in 1920. It reopened later, but the current Butler Hospital has no records from prior to the reopening. Brown University Archives have some records from the 1800s, but no medical records for George's time period.
- One line of investigation relative to the ship he embarked on might be a survey of the old newspapers of Glasgow to see if there were any ship sailings listed for the day he mentioned (24 April 1872). This was done at the British Library Newspaper Archives at Colindale, London in May 1999 but without success. Glasgow newspapers listed ship arrivals, not sailings.
- It would be interesting to see if George left any tracks while in Stornaway 1867-70. Maybe see if any old newspapers have been preserved. The minutes of the Stornaway Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society have been preserved at the national archives, but they begin in 1871, after George apparently departed Stornaway.

CHAPTER 3

John Ross

6 April 1850 - 22 November 1903

Very little is known about the third son, John. From the genealogy notebook of Helen Nisbet Ross we see that he was born in Clashmore, died in Edinburgh in 1902 and was buried in Dornoch. The memorial stone in Dornoch, however clearly shows a date of death in 1903 as does his death certificate, so that appears correct.

He apparently never married nor had any offspring. In the 1871 Dornoch census he is listed as a 20-year-old journeyman shoemaker, presumably working with his father.

Anne Garven, a professional genealogist in Edinburgh, researched his death certificate for Bill Ross in May 1999 and gave the following information:

- Died 22 November 1903 at Royal Infirmary, St. Giles Edinburgh. “usual residence” listed as Dornoch
- Cause of death was Cirrhosis of Liver, 2 years; Abscess on Chest, 7 months, as certified by William Humne M.B.
- He was shown to be single and a Commercial Traveller (salesman?)
- The informant of his death was P.M. (Peter Murray) Ross, Brother, (Present), 57 Deodar Road, Putney, London, SW.

CHAPTER 4

Betsy Ross

29 July 1852 - 3 March 1895

Betsy was also born at Clashmore, the fourth child of Alexander and Barbara Ross. Like John, very little is known about her other than what was obtained off the death records at Brora in the summer of 1994. She was shown as single, and her occupation listed as "domestic servant". Her cause of death being shown as: "phthisis, after months of illness". She was buried in the family plot in the Cemetery on Golf Road.

CHAPTER 5

William Ross

14 September 1854 - 9 January 1906

William, the fourth child, was also born in Clashmore.

Sometime before 1886 he emigrated to the U.S and was settled by then in San Francisco, working as General Passenger and Ticket Agent, SP Co., residence 216 Powell St. On 8 June 1886 he married Alice Kate Maguire and by 1891 the city directory showed him as Clerk, SP Co. and living at 3024 Clay Street. This is the house that was kept in the family until the late 1960's when their only child, Margaret and her husband, Charles D.Y. Ostrom moved to the Sequoias Apartments.

Margaret Barbara Ross was born 8 June 1889. She married Charles Douglas Yerrington Ostrom, an officer in the US Army on 22 September 1917. It was following his retirement as a Brigadier General that they sold the Clay house and moved into the apartment.

We have the following note from Barbara Ostrom, daughter of Margaret:

“William Ross , a native of Scotland, was naturalized before Judge A. A. Sanderson of the Superior Court of San Francisco on June 2, 1892. Witnesses were Wm. E. Benedict, 17 Webster St. and J. F. Larkin, Berkeley”.

We have not followed up on this but intend to with the hope of finding when he emigrated and whether or not his other two brothers who came to the U.S. did so at the same time.

William died on January 9, 1906, of pneumonia and was attended by a Dr. Allen. He is buried in Section I, Lot 13 of Cypress Gardens Cemetery, Colma, California. This lot was purchased by the McGuire company according to the cemetery records.

Bill Ross noted in 1999: “It seems that his grandchildren and great grandchildren know no more than I do about their grandfather; my inquiries to Tom Ostrom and to his daughter Barbara have not produced any family stories or documentation other than the naturalization information.”

Sometime during his work with the SP Co. he sold his brother George, in Providence, a section of land in Antelope Valley, California. Bill Ross found the deed in his Uncle Al's desk shortly before his death and asked about it. Al said that it was a time payment sale with a little down and so much a month, but the payments were never completed. After Al's death, Aunt Kate burned along with all of Al's papers, giving Bill the reason later: "Only Al would know what they are about".

Thomas Ross Ostrom, one of two sons of Margaret Barbara Ross Ostrom, died in 2008, leaving two daughters, Barbara Katherine (b.1956) and Carol Patricia (b.1958). Both are apparently unmarried and living in Virginia. The older son, Charles D.Y. Ostrom died in 2008, leaving two surviving children, Michael Thomas Ostrom (b.1954) and Margaret Ann Ostrom (b.1957). Michael has two children, Meghann and Ross; Margaret Ann married Joseph Duarte and they have four children, Cristina, Isabel, Alexander, and Helena.



The headstone of William Ross and his wife Alice Kate Maquire at Cypress Gardens Cemetery in Colma, California.

CHAPTER 6

Jessie Ross

8 March 1857 - 24 February 1923

Jessie, the sixth child, was also born at Clashmore and never married. She lived her life in Dornoch in "Ivy Cottage" (later called "Tornaver") and in "Woodlands", the latter being Peter Murray Ross's house built in 1905. Peter apparently did not spend much time in his house as, Bill Ross was told, his wife did not like Dornoch, so he had Jessie act as housekeeper in the big place. It must have been a lonely existence, particularly in her later years, as it is located in the woods above Dornoch and walks to town would have entailed negotiating a fairly steep hill by either street or trail.

She corresponded with Aunt Kate (Catherine Ross Gardiner) from time to time until her death on 24 February 1923. One of these letters survives, written Nov 5, 1922, and tells of her heart giving out and dropsy so bad that she can hardly get out of bed. The next letter was from her brother, Peter, on 28 February 1923 telling of her death on the 24th and subsequent burial in the family plot in Dornoch on the 27th. Peter remarked: "Jessie's death severs the last link with the old Home, it will never be the same again."

In 1994 some research by Bill Ross turned up the fact that the house (Ivy Cottage) was sold by the Earl of Sutherland in 1923 to a schoolteacher known as "Bubbles" McKay. This would indicate that the Rosses never owned the house but likely rented it from the Earl from before August 1883 (the date on a picture by P.M. Ross) until Jessie's death.

In September 1996 Marie and Bill Ross rented Tornaver, now a "self-catering cottage," from its then owner, Mr. Steve Foster of London, and spent a delightful two weeks as citizens of Dornoch. Tornaver has since been sold several times and the latest owner has named it "Cathedral Cottage."

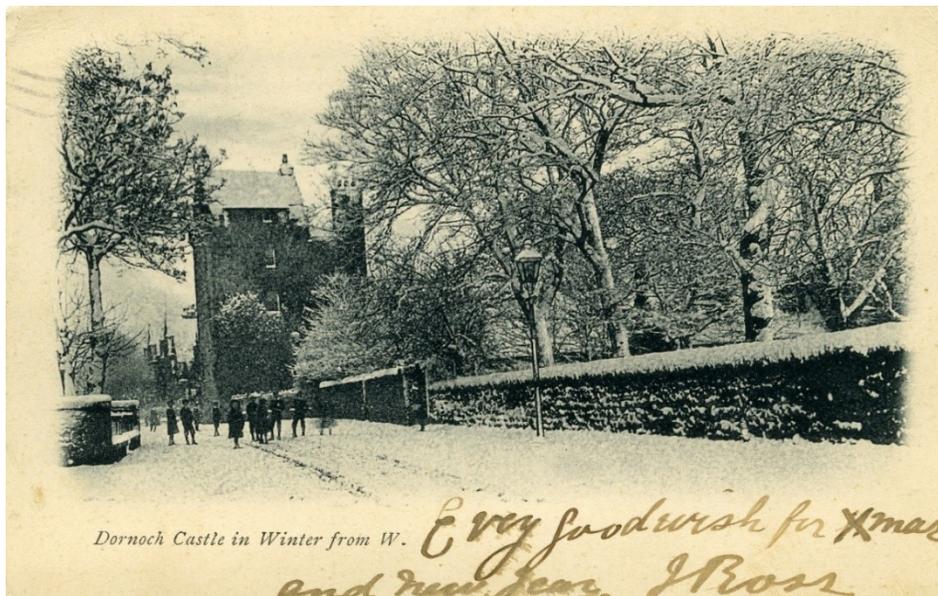
They met a Mr. and Mrs Peter Grant who lived on the street behind the house, (Bridge Street), a vigorous couple in their 80's. Mrs. Grant (Seona) remembered that her mother was a close friend of Jessie's, and

they had weekly card parties in the library nearby. She found a portrait of Jessie taken at about age 55, which she gave to Bill, along with a picture of Ivy Cottage.

The information on Jessie's death records at Brora corroborated the ailments she had described in her letter: "Cardiac failure - Enlargement of the heart."



Jessie Ross and a postcard sent to niece Catherine Nisbet Ross in Providence in 1902



CHAPTER 7

Robert Ross

20 December 1859 - 28 December 1889

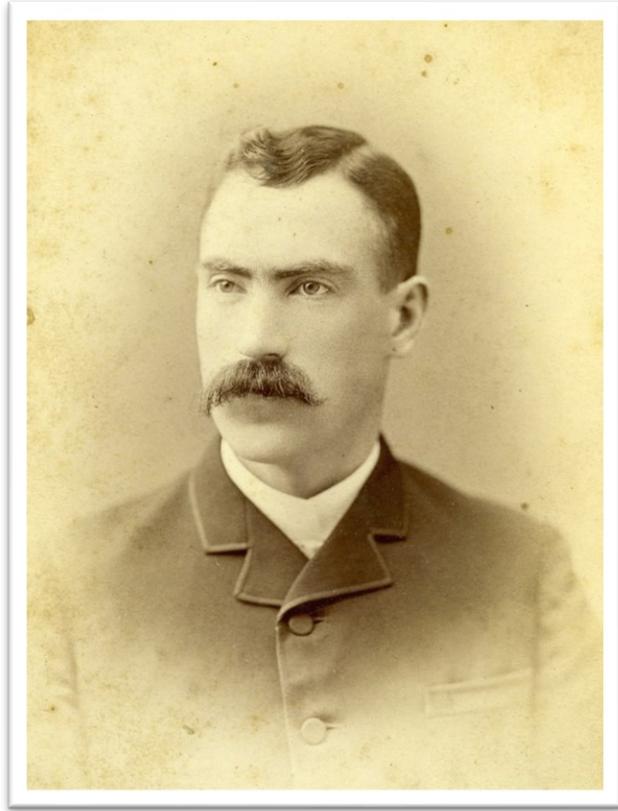
Robert, the seventh child, was born in Dornoch, which may indicate that the Rosses were in Ivy Cottage as early as 1859. Robert was one of the three boys that emigrated to the United States. In his case, it was for health reasons, as he had developed tuberculosis and Albuquerque, New Mexico was at that time reputed to have a healthful atmosphere for respiratory diseases. Unfortunately, none of the surviving Ross records show when he left Dornoch, his occupation or any other information about him. Margaret Ostrom's records did give his place of burial as Fairview Cemetery, Section D. According to Find-A-Grave, his exact grave location is unknown and there is no headstone. His location of death is indicated as Sylster House on Silver Avenue and his occupation as merchant. His age is given as 27, but it appears he was 30 based on parish birth records.

While he was living in Albuquerque, he would send gifts to his brother George's children in Providence, some of which were still around when Bill Ross was growing up. One of the more remarkable was a model house which was covered with specimens of New Mexico minerals; turquoise, petrified wood, jasper, obsidian, small fossils, etc. As he remembers it, which must have been about 1937, the stones were falling off and he kept a few for his collection.

In 1975, when 14 Rhode Island Ave. was cleaned out and sold, there was no sign of the little stone house. There were, however, some other of his gifts: Two pair of beaded Indian moccasins, an Indian bow with some steel tipped and eagle feather fletching, and an Indian basket.

We have no record of Robert having ever married and the small obituary from a Providence newspaper, pinned in Helen Ross's notebook makes no mention of spouse or survivors. It merely says:

"THE EVENING REPORTER. THURSDAY, JAN. 2, 1890 DIED - ROSS - In Albuquerque, New Mexico, Dec.28, Robert Ross, formerly of this city. A native of Dornoch, Sutherlandshire, Scotland."



Robert Ross, 1859-1889

Some avenues of research to pursue would be:

- 1) Get a copy of the death certificate.
- 2) Check to see if he was naturalized and if so follow up to find when he left Dornoch.
- 3) Check church papers in Dornoch to see if there is a record of his leaving.

CHAPTER 8

Peter Murray Ross

2 June 1864 - 1 January 1930

Peter Murray was the eighth child, also born at Dornoch, and survived his siblings by seven years. He was a wholesale furrier and accumulated quite a bit of money by the turn of the century. He married Edith Kate Sansom on 7 January 1897 at St. Barnabus Church, Addison Rd., London. At the time he wrote his will on 10 July 1928 he gave an address of 7 and 8 Bread St. London; presumably his place of business as Bread Street is in a commercial district. A year and a half later when he died, he was at Hurstdown, Gloucester Rd. New Barnet, London. We have some pictures of this last house given to Bill Ross in 1998 by a gentleman that lives in the neighborhood. The house has long since passed out of the family (if it was ever owned by Peter).

Peter and Edith had four children as listed by Helen Nisbet Ross in her notebook. There is a small chance there may also be a fifth (Barbara) as a letter to Bill's father telling of Peter's death is signed by a Barbara and a similar one to his Aunt Kate was signed "Cousin Barbara". A more likely possibility than a fifth child is that Barbara was a cousin by marriage as she spelled Aunt Kate's name incorrectly "Kathleen" rather than "Catherine", a mistake unlikely to be made by a first cousin. In 1998 Bill obtained a copy of Peter's will from Somerset House in London hoping that it would list all his children -- it didn't. It essentially said: "pay my debts and give what is left over to my wife."

We have an undated photograph of Peter and his family in their backyard which shows a boy of about 12 (Allister Murray born 18 January 1898); a girl slightly younger holding a doll (Vera Edith born 24 October 1899); a boy of about 6 (George William Norman born 23 April 1903); and a girl of about 3 (Muriel Jessie born 19 June 1906). This would make the picture date likely the summer of 1909.

Only three of the nine Dornoch Ross children have descendants alive today, and Peter Murray Ross is one of them. His firstborn son Allister had two children. The eldest, Ian Murray Ross, was an RAF pilot killed in action in WWII, shortly after he had married a 16-year-old Canadian girl.

The other child, a daughter named Sheila, married John Alan Rae. They had a son Peter Alan Rae (1955-2015) and two other children, but details are scarce on them, as well as further generations.

As noted above, Peter's daughter Vera Ross married Charles Montague Weekly in 1930 and they had two children: Ian Ross Weekley (1932-2005) and Julia (1935-2021). Ian Weekley married Anthea Wynne Ionides, and they had three children 1958-1962, Joanna Frances Ionides (married Richard John Terry 1 June 1985), Cressida Jane (married Garth Lewis Dec 1985), and Alexander Charles (married Christine Pierce), and all three survive today. From their marriages, there are at least nine children in the next generation, with the surnames Terry, Lewis, Ionides and Weekley. There is no record that Julia Weekley had any descendants when she died in 2021.

George William Norman Ross married a woman named Dorothy, but no record of children has been found. Census records indicate they were hotel proprietors.

Muriel Jessie Ross died in 1979 after marrying a man named George Rowland Jackman in 1936 and giving birth to a daughter Pamela in 1937. Pamela Jackman married a man named Ronald F. Bull in 1971 and then married Gilbert Gauntlett in 1980. She died in 2018; her obituary mentions stepchildren but no children of her own.



Photos of Peter Murray Ross and his family



CHAPTER 9

Alexander Ross

22 March 1871 - 8 February 1906

Alexander, the last of the children, was born in Dornoch when his mother was 45 years old. Helen Ross's notebook, page 82, notes his death in London on 8 February 1906. Barbara Ostrom's notes give his burial as 15 February 1906 in Putney Vale Cemetery.

In May of 1999, on a visit to London, Bill Ross ordered his death certificate. This rather depressing document gave the following information:

- Died of "Organic Brain Disease, Chronic Pulmonary Tuberculosis -- indefinite". P.M. certified by James M. Moody MDCS(?)
- Occupation given as Draper formerly of Newington Workhouse.
- Informant was James M. Moody, Superintendent, London County Lunatic Asylum, Coulsdon.
- Registered Seventeenth February 1906 by Jesse E. Whitlow, Registrar.

Previous to his trip, Bill had written Putney Vale Cemetery, London, and they were able to direct him to Grave 88, Group C2 as the location of his burial. A visit there revealed that the plot purchased by brother Peter Murray Ross was a 5-person grave but Alexander was the only one ever buried there. (He was buried 12 feet deep so four subsequent burials could be placed over him). No stone was ever erected, so Bill and Marie took a picture of a blank plot in a beautiful, peaceful, cemetery.

It is interesting to note that Alexander died of a brain disease and tuberculosis that had landed him in an asylum – the same exact maladies that earlier had befallen his older brother George in Providence. George suffered for 13 years and died at age 53. The length of Alexander's illness is unknown; he was 34 when he died.

Current Ross Cousins Descended from Alexander Ross (1819-1885)

As of 2023, the precise number of living descendants of Alexander and Barbara Murray Ross is unknown, but they are relatively few given there were nine children in the family. We know that only George, William and Peter Murray had any children, the other four sons and two daughters apparently died without issue. This is what is known of the subsequent generations from the three sons who had children:

- a. Only the youngest of George's six children, Robert Murray Ross, had children, and he had only two, William and Helen. From those two, there were seven in the 5th Generation and 11 (plus two adopted) in the 6th Generation as measured down from Alexander. So far, there are four in the 7th Generation. Surnames of living descendants include Ross, Ross-Morton, Edelman, Tisdell, Pollock, and Bump.
- b. William had only one child, Margaret, and she had two sons with the surname Ostrom. There are five Ostroms in the 5th Generation, and there are six in the 6th Generation, named Ostrom and Duarte. The 7th Generation in this line is unknown but is likely a growing number.
- c. Peter Murray had four children, two of which appear to have living descendants. There are six known in the 5th Generation and nine in the 6^h Generation, with surnames of Terry, Lewis, Ionides, and Weekley. The 7^h Generation in this line is also unknown.

Thus, it appears there are eighteen Ross cousins in the 5th Generation down from Alexander and Barbara of Dornoch, with fifteen surviving at this date. Those 15 would all consider Alexander their great great grandfather. Many of them are now grandparents to the 7th Generation!

Ian Nisbet Ross

Updated April 2023

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
Sutherland

Information about my forefathers
as near as I can come to
I Alexander Ross late of Altara
Rosehall Sutherland & Son of the late
Donald Ross Melchert Altara
Born in Altara 8 October 1819

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 Invercauld his house
was near to the Road on the west side
of the Rest of the Houses on your left hand
as you go on to Taitum Farvach 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 Melton

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
Bridges or Rivers at that time or
either Bonar Bridge ^{was on there}, when my Father
came to the age of about 16 or 17 years
he then was going with his Father
to Fair to by 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 of my
 strong for his
 size
 he was only 47
 years of age
 Died of consumption
 Great cough caused
 from his own work
 he was a great
 generous would
 almost do any
 thing that was
 consistent near
 in place
 he was going to
 abandon to by
 Goods + walked
 the whole way a
 distance of about
 220 miles of the
 firm was
 the good abolition
 + Company obdure
 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 house + 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
 ship going to 1826. Memorial of the
 Shelving + counter + some webs of
 yellow prints + Cold iron webs +
 some Leather being in the shop

My Grand Mother was a Meloc an
 ordinary size of a slender woman, she
 was of the blue old that by Hall on the south
 side of the River opposite Fectum and the
 My Grand John would be about 5 feet
 9 inch + dark complexion his age
 would be about 20 when he 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 height
 very smart
 in appearance
 he would be
 about 80 when
 he died
 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 a
 fine stout woman
 some 5 feet 6 inches
 &
 very good looking
 but she generatly
 opp. name of woman
 not open to
 about 70
 of Ross

Colonel John Ross
 when he sold Gladfield
 he had bought the estate
 of George Smith popper
 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 Farvach 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
 Forwick, he bought the estate of Gladfield
 opposite to our mind when he sold Gladfield
 to the Duke of Leithland, 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 Petter to name & it is after him
 called Petter My now son, Captain Walter
 Ross married a Daughter of William Skinn
 Esq of Achaning he & his Family went to
 America I think to the Cannas 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 some
 fine looking &
 Anne girl mind
 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 ^{say} 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
 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 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.