



'Loch Garra'



# The Davidson Chronicles

## Chapter 1 No 1

The history of the 'Eden Whaling Davidson' family in Australia is fascinating. I commenced my research into my family after a visit to Eden where it all began about 160 years ago. Fortunately a lot of good work had already been done by other Davidsons. The late Rene William Davidson who passed away in early 2008, his wife Fay and also the late Donald Davidson and his work 'Davidson of Kiah'.

I have managed to track the Davidson's back in Scotland for quite a few generations. What I have found has changed a few of my views on what I thought was so. I always believed that Alexander Walker Davidson and his wife Jane Simpson, my second great grandparents, had always been staunch Presbyterians. The reality turned out to be that Alexander Walker Davidson had been christened in the Catholic Church. He was christened on 2 September 1806 by the Rev John Walker of Ireland in Aberdeen, Scotland. His elder brother John was christened by the Rev Gordon, Roman Catholic priest on 4 July 1800 again in Aberdeen, Scotland. I am continuing to research other possible siblings. Alexander Walker Davidson and Jane Simpson were married by the Reverend Charles Gordon, Catholic clergyman, on 25th January 1829 in Aberdeen, Scotland and Alexander and Jane's children who were born in Scotland were also christened by Catholic clergymen. Why Alexander had been so strong a Presbyterian when he arrived in Australia requires further research but I suspect that it had something to do with the Reformation that split the church in Scotland.

Jane Simpson christened 17 July 1809 in Aberdeen, Scotland was actually born in Portsoy, Banffshire, Scotland in June 1808. She was the daughter of John Simpson and Elspet Adams (known as Elsy). Jane had a younger brother James christened 20 August 1814 in Portsoy, Banffshire, Scotland.

When Alexander and Jane left Scotland for Australia with their children the only parent who was still alive was

Jane's mother Elspet Adams. Both Alexander's parents were deceased as was Jane's father John Simpson a mariner.

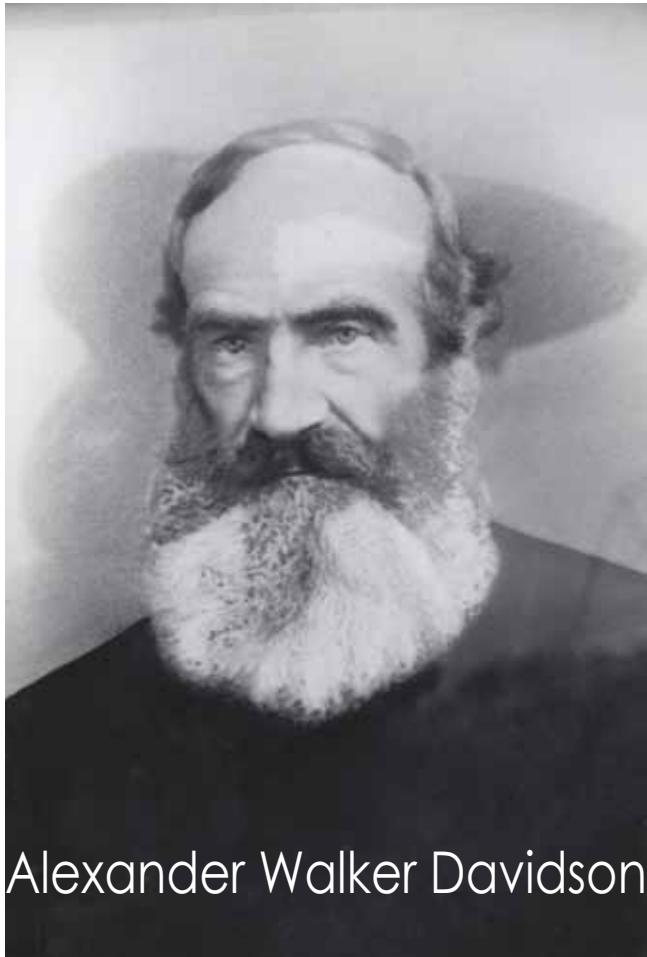
On the 1841 census I can find Elspet Adams living with her older sister Marjory Adams (who appears never to have married) and the Leslie family all living together in Elgin, Moray, Scotland. Further investigation of the Leslie family revealed that the wife, Margaret Helen Leslie (nee Simpson), was the daughter of John Simpson a seaman who died in Aberdeen. Margaret Helen Simpson was christened on 19 November 1809 in Fordyce, Banffshire so Margaret Helen Simpson is our Jane Simpson's sister and the daughter of Elspet Adams. The marriage certificate of James Dunbar Leslie and Margaret Helen Simpson indicates that Alexander Davidson was a witness at the wedding. Elspet Adams and her sister Marjory Adams both died on the same day in Elgin, Moray. That day being 5th April 1845.

The Leslie family were still in Moray, Scotland on the 1851 census. However, they are nowhere to be found after that, disappearing completely. Much to my surprise they turn up in the Eden area of New South Wales some time after Alexander and Jane moved to Eden. So the long standing idea that I had formed that no other Scottish relatives came to Australia is simply not so. One of the Leslie children married in Eden in 1860. They arrived in Australia on 6 May 1853 on the 'Prince Arthur'. They landed at Melbourne. Many of the Leslies lived in Bombala and Eden and the descendant surnames include Downey, Dent and Brownlie amongst others. More about the Leslies later.

Alexander Walker Davidson was the son of John Davidson and Ann Sinclair. John Davidson is listed as a weaver on the christening records of both his sons but we also know that he was a carpenter and passed the trade on to his son Alexander Walker Davidson. Alexander owned a carpenter's shop at 1 Charlotte Street, Aberdeen and is listed in the Aberdeen Trade Directory as a house carpenter at that address. Later Alexander and Jane move to Banchory Ternan in Kincardineshire where Alexander is working as a butler. Alexander's brother John died unmarried on 1 March 1839 and is buried in the St. Fittick's Kirkyard in Nigg, Kincardineshire aged just 39. He had owned the printing business Davidson & Co.

Alexander Walker Davidson and Jane Simpson had the following children in Scotland: Margaret Helen (or Ellen) in 1830 in Aberdeen. Margaret's middle name is Helen on her tombstone in the Eden Cemetery so I suspect that Helen is correct. I am still looking for her christening record. She is probably named after Jane's sister.

Next was Elsy Adams Davidson born 1831 in Aberdeen. Named after Jane's mother. Third was John Simpson christened 28th December 1832 in Aberdeen. I hold christening records for him. He was named after Jane's father John Simpson. Next was Jane Davidson born 1 May 1834, christened 13 May 1834 in Banchory Ternan, Kincardineshire followed by Alexander Davidson born 1836 in Aberdeen. The next born was Archer Boswell Christie Davidson christened 1 May 1838 at St Nicholas Church, Union St, Aberdeen. Lastly, Isabella Collie Davidson christened 2 November 1840 in Aberdeen. Isabella was named after Alexander Walker Davidson's grandmother Isabella Collie mother of his father John Davidson. Alexander and Jane had another son George Dunbar Davidson named after Alexander's friend and not so close relative George Dunbar who was living on Alexander's aunt's property in Fetteresso, Kincardineshire. He was born at The Rocks in Sydney on 16 September 1842.



Alexander Walker Davidson



Jane Simpson

Alexander Walker Davidson and Jane Simpson left Dundee in Scotland on 16 May 1841 and arrived at Port Jackson on 30th January 1842. They had travelled on the 'Mathesis'. A fire broke out on the ship and it had to be repaired in Rio de Janeiro. Alexander testified at an inquiry after the ship docked in Sydney. Refer to the 'Reports by Immigration Board on Complaints of Migrants, 25/08/1838 to 18/04/1842 Pages 333-375' at the State Archives. The Court of Inquiry at the Trial at which Alexander Davidson and William Goodwin amongst others gave evidence ruled that the bounties were not payable by the immigrants to the ships owners. The infant Isabella Collie Davidson died on the voyage and was buried at sea.

William Goodwin, on board with his family, had come from Ireland and became good friends with the Davidsons and their families would later be joined by a marriage between a pair of grandchildren.

Alexander Walker Davidson and his wife Jane and the children lived in Millers Point, Sydney for about a year while Alexander worked as a carpenter around the area known today as 'The Rocks' and 'Circular Quay'. Alexander then took up employment with Ben Boyd at Boyd Town where he worked as a cabinet maker, a trade at which he was particularly skilful. Alexander built a cottage on the Kiah Inlet and lived there for some time with his family later buying the property, lot 9 on 1 March 1852 and Lot 10 on 21 July 1854. These lots were later renumbered as lots 3 and 4.

In 1855 Alexander acquired from Solomon the license of the hotel at Bunyan known as 'The Squatters' Arms'. Bunyan had been previously known as 'Reids Flats'. This he held till 1857, when no renewal was granted after he indicated that he would be returning to Kiah. Of his sons, John, Alexander and Archer became Master Whalers, and have their names associated for all time with the stories of whaling that are attached to Twofold Bay. George, his youngest son, a noted sportsman, eventually went to Cooma, for a time in the employ of Sturgeon Bros., Storekeepers. In later life he was better known as a Livery Stable Keeper. Alexander Walker Davidson built the doors of the 'Sea Horse Inn' and the door of 'Merton Cottage'. The latter is presently in the Eden Killer Whale Museum.

Alexander Walker Davidson also built the pulpit at what was the new Presbyterian Church in Eden. It is now the Uniting Church. The pulpit is still there today and I visit there each time I return to Eden. The first church pew on the right hand side facing the pulpit bears the name 'A. Davidson' on the rear and the pew behind it bears the name 'B. Russell' the Bourn Russell pew. These are the only named pews in the church.

Bourn Russell was the Harbour Master of Eden in the time of Alexander Walker Davidson. He was married to my second great grandmother Eleanor Celia Stephens who was the mother of Annie Alice Lane from her first husband Nicholas Lane. Annie Alice Lane married Archer Boswell Christie Davidson. So the former Eden Presbyterian Church is a significant part of our family's history in Eden. The church was officially opened on 24th May 1866 by the Reverend James Dunmore Lang. After the ceremony Jane Russell, their daughter, was baptised.

Lured by the goldrush Alexander Walker Davidson packed up his three sons John, Alexander and Archer and left for the Kiandra Goldfields. John Simpson Davidson concerned for his wife and new daughter born back in Kiah, returned home. He was later to return to the others. With harsh conditions and limited success the Davidsons left Kiandra to return to Kiah. Alexander was to try gold mining again albeit, not very successfully.

Back in Kiah Alexander purchased several whaleboats from John Barclay and turned his focus more to whaling. This was to become the new way of life for the Davidson family and would see the commencement of a unique partnership between man and the 'Killer Whales' of the sea. The Davidsons also had a good relationship with the local Aboriginals and employed many in their whaling activities.

Whaling was a hard way of life. The isolation of the 'Kiah' site presented some challenges. It was a long way to Eden by horse and cart with most travel to Eden being undertaken by boat. When chasing whales they were often required to be in their whaling boats for long hours in adverse weather conditions with a lot of heavy manual work being necessary if they were to catch their whale. The men could be out for days at a time. When the chase had ended there was still more hard work in getting the carcass to the 'Tryworks' and processing the whale for oil. It was far from clean, pleasant work and if the wind was not favourable the smell could be quite strong. Still this is what they did as their main source of income supplemented at times by other activities. Alexander kept traditional farm animals and grew vegetables and some fruit trees at Kiah. The location of their enterprise meant that fishing also supplemented the family's food.

The Davidson whalers were the longest operating 'shore based' whaling operation in Twofold Bay which lasted up until 1930 and spanned several generations of Davidsons. This was also the year that 'Old Tom' the last of the 'Killer Whale' pack died and was found floating in Twofold Bay. The skeleton of 'Old Tom' can be found in the 'Eden Killer Whale Museum' in Eden.





Alexander Walker Davidson and his sons built his family home 'Kiah House' with timber salvaged from the shipwreck of the 'Lawrence Frost'. This was the family home for many years but it unfortunately burnt down in terrible bush fires in the late 1920's. Some good photographs still survive.





Alexander Walker Davidson died on 8th July 1897 and is buried in the Eden Cemetery on Aslings Beach with his wife Jane Simpson who died on 27 June 1892. They were survived by all their children except baby Isabella Collie Davidson and Margaret Helen Davidson. Their son Alexander is in the adjoining grave.

In the next chapter I will outline the family of Alexander and Jane's family in Scotland and a little about the Leslies. In future chapters, the children of Alexander and Jane and the 'Eden Whalers'.

The cover photo is of 'Loch Garra' the home of George Davidson and his wife Sarah Ellen Galli and is situated at the 'Davidson Whaling Station' at Kiah. The house is still there today and gives some insight into the life of the 'Eden Whalers'.

