

ALEXANDER FORBES - HIGHLANDER

By Richard Nickerson

"Alexander Forbes was my Great-Great Grandfather on Dad's side of the family and my Great-Great-Great Grandfather on Mum's side of the family. As a child I often heard people in conversation talking of "Old Alexander" and it was always interesting to me but I had no idea who he was.

I believe I was ten years old when Dad took me with him to pick blackberries. We went to a place that was unknown to me where we were surrounded by bushes and scrub trees. Finally our basket was full and Dad said we would go to see the "Old Cemetery". That puzzled me – but not for long.

It was just a few minutes until we stepped out into a clearing with tombstones. This cemetery was quite different than the one up the road where I went with Dad when he mowed the grass and we pulled weeds.

Dad led me to a tall tombstone and told me that this was where his Great- Grandfather Alexander was buried. He read the inscription to me and told me that Alexander came from Scotland. He then went on to tell me more about this man that I had never known. Hearing that his mother had died, and that he had run away from home as a teenager and joined the Army because he was no longer happy in his family, brought tears to my eyes. I turned away so Dad would not see.

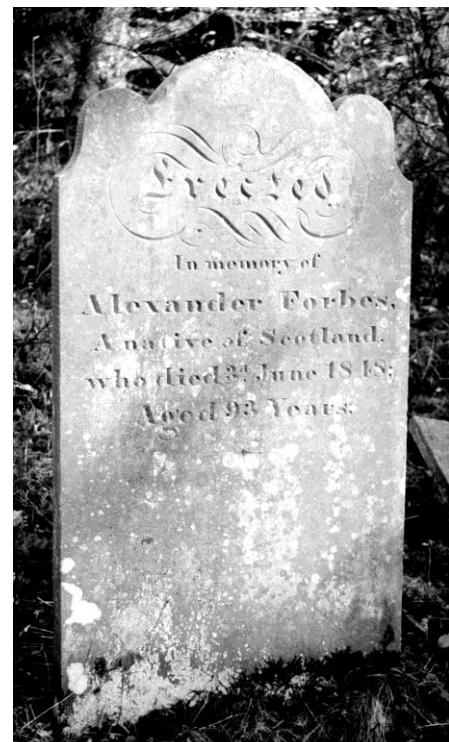
In a few minutes I looked around at Dad and found that his chin was quivering so I looked away and waited until he broke the silence by saying, "I guess we better get on home now or we'll be late for supper'."

ALEXANDER – LEAVING HOME

This childhood recollection of my mother's, one tiny link in the ages-old ritual of the passing-down of family history and family self-definition from generation to generation, took place about 1938, on a small hummock of land near the western shore of Woods Harbour, a small fishing community situated on the southwestern shore of Nova Scotia.

The inscription on the gravestone still reads:

"Erected
In memory of
Alexander Forbes,
A native of Scotland.
who died 3d. June 1848;
Aged 93 Years."



Alexander Forbes Gravestone Old Forbes Burial Ground

The poignant image of a bereft teenaged Highlander running away to enlist in the British Army, never again to see the home where he grew up, is the kernel of Alexander Forbes' memory as it has been treasured-up by his descendants ever since. And it still has the power to touch those of us with hearts and imaginations attuned to its simple and universal theme -- for, while the world has changed much since that day of departure some 230 years ago, human nature has not. Families still grieve separations. Armies still fight wars. Boys still strike out, be it with excitement or trepidation, to make their own independent life out in the wide world of the unknown.

So much for the universal theme. What further of our young Alex in particular?

Those parts of the tale of Alexander Forbes which have come down to us via tradition vary on a number of the specifics, depending on the storyteller. Such is the nature of oral history. Beginning first with Alexander Forbes' geographic origin within Scotland, there are various accounts preserved by his descendants. He has been said to have been from "the Highlands"; born "in Ross and Cromarty County"; born "at Culloden, near Aberdeen."

The names of Alexander Forbes' parents are nowhere recorded on this side of the Atlantic, it seems - although names of his siblings are. Genealogical research to date has proven inconclusive in the attempt to identify Alexander's parentage in Scotland; we his descendants therefore remain, in a certain sense, spiritual orphans.

Oral history about Alexander, which was written down, probably in the 1880's, by the amateur historian Arnold Doane, contain two accounts collected from Alexander's early descendants in Nova Scotia. One version states that Alexander's "mother was dead -- He was about 17 years old when he left." The other version collected by Doane states: "When he ran away from home he left his father & mother, a sister Isabel, and two brothers Robert & George. This was when he was 16" (DN E #66). Edwin Crowell, author of A History of Barrington Township, states "he ran away from home at 18" (CBT 481). Another thread of family tradition relates that Alexander was aged 21 when he left home. If we may trust Alexander's gravestone inscription, and the date of his first appearance in the army muster rolls, an age of 21 would seem about right.

Upon Alexander's enlistment in the army, we feel one more tug at our heartstrings: "His father went to Edinburg & tried to buy him out, but could not" (DN E #66).

ALEXANDER – RECRUIT

At this time (as it would long remain thereafter), Scotland was fertile recruiting territory for the British Army. After the 1745 Jacobite Rising, which culminated in defeat at Culloden in 1746, William Pitt's formation in 1757 of Highland Regiments in the King's service created a safety valve to redirect and co-opt the restive energies of young,

economically distressed Scots: "Clans took the Oath of Allegiance to fight for King George and with a Highlander an oath is a sacred thing, and binding." (LSH 1-3)

Britain's standing army was nevertheless a bare-bones operation between the end of the Seven Year's War in 1763, and the commencement of alarums in their American colonies in the 1770s. A re-expansion of the army took place between 1775 and 1781, as Britain became engaged in the struggle against the rebels, alias the Patriots, in the American Revolution.

The earliest contemporary document through which Alexander Forbes has been traced finds him already in America. The muster roll of His Majesty's 38th Regiment of Foot, for the period 25 Jun 1777 to 24 Dec 1777, dated New York, 26 Dec 1777, lists Alexander Forbes in Capt. Charles Norman's Company. He is noted as having "Join'd 17th Sept 1777", no indication from where (Public Record Office, Kew: WO12/5171).

ALEXANDER – SOLDIER

Before its move to North America, the 38th Regiment had been established on police duty in Cork, Ireland, and its Depot remained there during the war (VSSR19,24). "While the 38th were serving in North America, drafts and recruits were sent from Ireland to make up deficiencies and complete the establishment, Major Bruce, of the 38th, being appointed to superintend their embarkation and despatch from Cork ." (JSSR 13-14)

It is likely, but not proven, that Alexander Forbes followed this usual route as a reinforcement of the 38th. Two other soldiers are noted in the muster as having joined Capt. Norman's Company on the same date as Alexander Forbes.

Subsequent musters for Alexander Forbes:

25 Jun 1778 to 24 Dec 1778:
at Jamaica -- Long Island, NY still in Captain Norman's company

25 Dec 1778 to 24 Jun 1779:
in Captain Norman's company

25 Jun 1779 to 24 Dec 1779:
in Captain William Davis's company Jamaica, Long Island, NY

25 Dec 1779 to 24 Jun 1780:
in Captain Norman's company, the latter dying of his wounds 26th Jun 1780
Camp Valentine

25 Jun 1780 to 24 Dec 1780:
in Captain Magnine's company, Harlem Heights, NY
The company comprised Captain Lieutenant, Ensign, 3 Sergeants, 2 Corporals

2 Drummers, 32 Effective privates (a typical company)

25 Dec 1780 to 24 Jun 1781:
in Captain Davis's company Harlem Heights, NY

25 Jun 1781 to 24 Dec 1781:
in same company, Flushing

25 Dec 1781 to 24 Jun 1782:
Bedford Camp, Long Island, NY
Major General Robert Pigot in charge
The strength of this outfit about double that of the normal companies

25 Jun 1782 to 24 Dec 1782:
as previously, Fort Knyphausen, NY

25 Dec 1782 to 24 Jun 1783:
back with Captain Davis Flushing, Long Island, NY
having been transferred from Major General Pigot 23rd Apr 1783

25 Jun 1783 to 24 Dec 1783:
in Captain Davis's company -- Stafford,
Alexander Forbes discharged 24th Oct 1783

(PRO, Kew. WO12/5171 Muster Rolls -- 38th Regiment of Foot)

In all of this time there is no evidence of Alexander Forbes being sick, absent or unusual in any way.

The character of the 38th Regiment, with whom Alexander served, is indicated by the following. After the 38th arrived home in England after the war, "very much under strength", having lost those who chose to settle in Nova Scotia (at least 85 men, per the muster in Shelburne, 1784), "they were inspected at Stafford on the 5th June, 1784. The Regiment numbered 238 men, of whom 151 were English, 18 Scotch, 57 Irish, and 12 Foreigners; 112 of them had served for upwards of 10 years." (JSSR 14)

By 1778, shortly after Alex first appeared on the 38th's muster, the situation of the Revolutionary War had reached a sort of strategic balance, with the British army holding New York, loosely penned-in by the surrounding Americans. The British also held Newport, R.I. as a naval station. Neither side was actively pushing any major operations. "There was constant bickering and exchanging of posts around New York; in fact, there were some nasty little surprises, with British or American outposts and garrisons stormed and overrun, and often put to the bayonet, but nothing much was going to come of all that ..." (SHAR 196)

Alexander Forbes' personal combat experience is uncertain; "records of the 38th were lost ... lack of information from Regimental sources has made it difficult to follow all the 38th's part in the American War of Independence" (VSSR 19). The bulk of Alex's time would certainly have been spent in relatively uneventful garrison duty in the camps around the British-held enclave of New York, although he may well have participated in two more active operations; the defense of Newport, Rhode Island in 1778, and the raid on New London, Connecticut in 1781.

Before Alexander's appearance on its muster roll in Sep 1777, the 38th had been at Boston, and had fought at Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill in 1775 (the oral tradition that Alexander Forbes himself was at Bunker Hill, is, in this light, likeliest to have been sparked by his recounting of the fire-side stories of his longer-serving regimental comrades who had).

When Boston was evacuated in March 1776, the 38th had sailed for Halifax, reorganized, and then had participated in the assault and capture of New York, fighting on Long Island and Manhattan.

Elements of the 38th occupied Newport, R.I. After Alex Forbes had joined the regiment, Newport was the target of an American and French combined operation in 1778. Garrison commander Robert Pigot "was not the man to stand by and watch, and his troops made daring attacks on Providence to the north and New London to the southwest, thereby greatly hindering the American plan." In July 1778, the French fleet shelled Newport, but a combination of caution, the weather, and the intervention of the British fleet forestalled the landing of assault troops. "The American commander, Sullivan, decided not to press the siege and commenced to retire, to be immediately followed by his enterprising enemy. The 38th and 54th, Dorsets, moved against his left and severely mauled it, before the American rearguard, as usual well-handled, succeeded in getting it clear ..." (VSSR 23-24)

In 1779, the British withdrew from Newport, the garrison being evacuated to New York. "Here, mostly on Long Island, the 38th was to remain until the end of the war; it was stationed at Fort Washington."

In September 1781, the 38th was included in a raid against New London, Ct. "The Regiment with three American Loyalist units was directed on the town itself, but a detachment ... under command of Captain Millett, 38th, was sent to deal with Fort Trumbwell. Meanwhile the remainder of the force attacked another, stronger fort, Griswold. Millett's men forced Trumbwell with very slight loss and its garrison made for Griswold, which was also stormed. The main body of the 38th entered New London and together with the Loyalists burnt it, destroying valuable stores and guns. Having dealt a similar fate to the nearby town of Groton, the force returned to New York." (VSSR 23-24)

In the end, of course, the Americans gained their Independence. The last British enclave, New York, was to be evacuated in the fall of 1783. The soldiers in the British

army were given the choice of either returning to Britain with their units, or to be discharged to join the flood of civilian Loyalists who were to resettle in Britain's remaining North American Colonies. Alexander Forbes, aged about 28, chose to imagine a new life for himself in Nova Scotia.

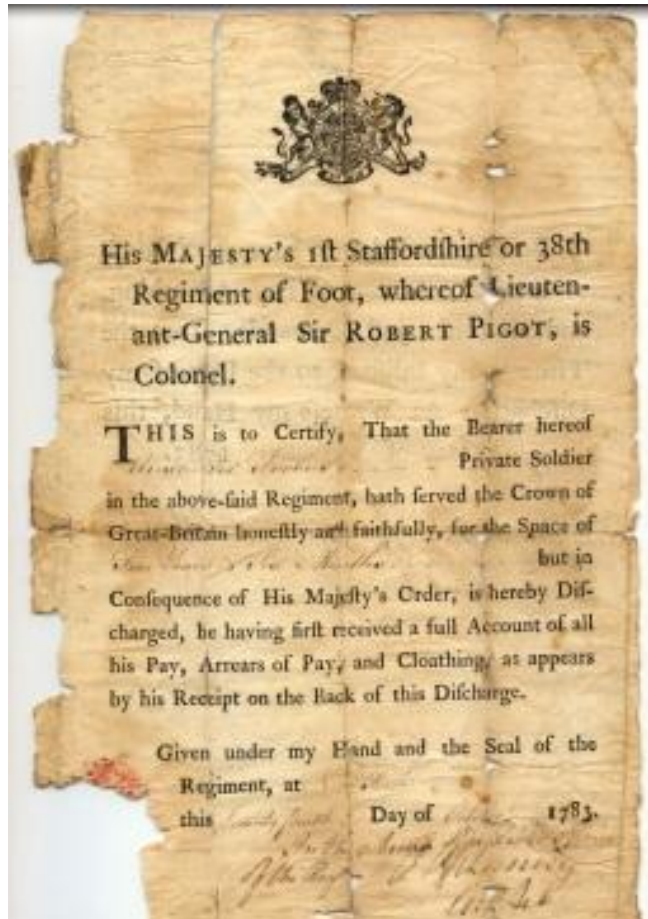
Alexander was discharged 24th Oct 1783 in New York. His discharge paper still exists - faded, worn, and tattered. Ritie Forbes, granddaughter of Alexander, was to find it folded up in an old coat pocket when she was cleaning out the Homestead - then called the "old house" - which had been uninhabited since the death of Alexander's son, John D. Forbes, in 1889.

The Certificate reads:

*"His Majesty's 1st
Staffordshire or 38th
Regiment of Foot, whereof
Lieutenant-General Sir Robert
Pigot, is Colonel.*

*This is to Certify, That the
Bearer hereof Alexander
Forbus Private Soldier in the
above-said Regiment, hath
served the Crown of Great-
Britain honestly and faithfully,
for the space of Five Years &
Six Months but in
Consequence of His Majesty's
Order, is hereby Discharged,
he having first received a full
Account of all his Pay, Arrears
of Pay, and Cloathing as
appears by his Receipt on the
Back of this Discharge.*

*Given under my Hand and the
Seal of the Regiment, at New
York this Twenty fourth Day of
October 1783.*



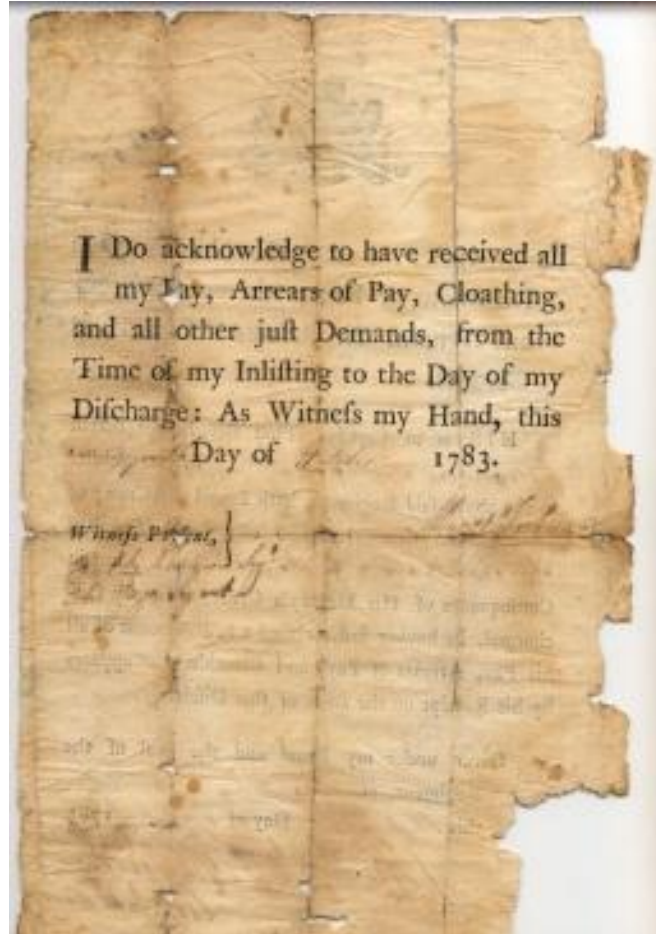
In the Absence of a [First?] officer
of the Regt Ol. DeLancey [?]
Adj. Gl. [?]

[back]

I Do acknowledge to have received all my Pay, Arrears of Pay, Cloathing, and all other just Demands, from the Time of my Inlisting to the Day of my Discharge: As Witness my Hand, this Twenty fourth Day of October 1783.

Alexr x [his mark] Forbus

*Witness Present,
Patk Larkin [?] Seg. [or Scy?]
John [?] [unreadable] Sergeant
[?]"*



Marion Robertson tells us:

"By September 29 most of the men of the British regiments had received their discharge and those going to Nova Scotia were ready to sail. Their accounts were settled and paid to October 24 and each man had been given two pairs of stockings, two pairs of mitts, a pair of shoes, extra clothing and an axe and a spade. On their arrival they were to be victualled on board the transports until the day of their landing from which time the King's allowance of one year's provisions was to commence...

"They were to remain in their regiments as a militia and their officers were to continue in their respective ranks and were to be obeyed as such until the governor of Nova Scotia made other arrangements. Many of the men of the regiments were allotted to transports bearing companies of Loyalists Men of the 38th [Alex Forbes'] Regiment came in the transports 'G.D. Russia' with John Minshull and his Loyalists and in the 'Charming Nancy' with John Huggefords company " (RKB 76-77)

The disbanded soldiers who, like Private Alex Forbes, had opted to settle in Nova Scotia rather than return to Great Britain, were among the last to evacuate New York. The civilian Loyalist refugees, who they had been protecting, had of course been shipped first. Therefore the soldiers found themselves well down the pecking-order for the allocation of land once they reached Shelburne in the fall of 1783. The Loyalists had been pouring onto the site of the new city since the first fleet of 3000 refugees had arrived on its wilderness shore from New York the previous May.

The Shelburne surveyors under Benjamin Marston laid out new Divisions to the south and north of the existing main town plot for the disbanded soldiers. On 22 November, 383 soldiers drew for their lots. It is not known whether Alexander Forbes drew his town lot at this time.

The "town" lot of Alexander Forbers in Shelburne was 2nd Block E, No. 14, Parr's Division (HEF 49), near the north-east corner of the town. Of course, in this context, the word "town" is, essentially, a euphemism for a collection of survey-stakes, laid out in the midst of the woods and the rocks. This lot may be where Alexander spent the winter of 1783-84, although the "38th and 40th Regiments huttred in the woods that winter", perhaps collectively (MTUS 21).

The following year, 1784, saw the combined Shelburne muster of Loyalists, Loyalist troops, and disbanded British troops at 2698 men, 1325 women, and 2284 children for a total of 6307 souls. There were men from 23 British regiments. The 38th Regiment was represented by 85 men, with 21 women and 22 children, total 128 (ES 196-197).

ALEXANDER – GRANTEE

Probably because of the general chaos of attempting to accomodate the needs of thousands of clamouring and displaced individuals without enough logistical resources, it appears that the soldiers in the Shelburne migration were not given top consideration in the allocation of land - or at least that was their perception.

The soldiers' "town" lots had been acceptable places for them to hunker-down in huts to ride out the icy winter of 1783-84; they'd no doubt endured much worse hardship during the lately-ended war than merely bivouacking amidst snow, woods, and stumps. But it was farm land the soldiers had been promised, and good farm land was what they needed as the foundation upon which to begin to build their new lives. The process for this crucially important next phase of the allotment of land was painfully slow, however.

One area that had been selected for the soldiers was in Clements, across the province from Shelburne near Annapolis. These "rock gardens" were not an unqualified success with their intended settlers, however. "It was soon evident to the officials that many had no intention of going on their land, even when surveyed ... A large number left Clements early. Almost all of the 38th and 40th regiments left before even drawing for their lots, and many others, drawing bad land, left soon after. The land was simply not worth working." (MTUS 21,171)

During the summer of 1784, the frustrating conditions in Shelburne heated to the boiling point. Without good farms on which to fulfill their own dreams; without women for the single soldiers to pursue as wives (the gender ratio in Shelburne was atrocious, and most of the women were already married anyway); with not enough paying jobs available in the meantime; and with the Black Loyalists perceived as undercutting their

labour-market wages, some disbanded soldiers rioted. They took out their frustrations on those who were even further down the pecking-order than were they:

"On the 26th of July Marston recorded 'Great Riot today,' the work of the still unpaid and largely unsettled veterans of the king's army. Reduced to poverty and humiliation, they had come to see the blacks as robbing them of work by accepting wages far lower than anything whites were prepared to settle for ... The white soldiers ... came as a gang, waving clubs, roaring that they would drive them from the town. Twenty houses belonging to blacks were torn down, their few possessions looted, the blacks themselves, women as well as men, forced to run for it ... The mayhem went on for ten days, and sporadic episodes of violence and intimidation were reported for at least a month." (SRC 233-239)

Surveyor Benjamin Marston, perceived (probably unjustly) of not allotting land in a fair and impartial manner, fled Shelburne in fear for his personal safety.

We do not know whether or not Alexander Forbes went with others of the 38th to Clements Township in the unsatisfactory land-hunting excursion, or whether or not he was in Shelburne at the time of the riots.

Alexander's name next appears on a plan of that autumn, dated 8 Sep 1784, of the 100-acre farm lots "laid out for Capt. Gaven Lyle and Company" on the Cape Negro River, about 20 km west of Shelburne. This plan shows Alexander Forbes on Lot 39. The Grant corresponding to this plan is undated, but was approved by S.S. Blowers, Nova Scotia Attorney General, 17 Mar 1785. This grant allotted 11,600 acres (116 lots) on the "Cape Negro River alias Clide" to a total of 84 grantees (Nova Scotia Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre, Shelburne County Portfolio, No. 40; NSARM, R.G. 20, Series A; William Thompson and Others).

Unfortunately, this granted land does not appear to have been worth the wait; it was not prime farm land either. Modern topographical maps classify most of the land on which Alexander Forbes' own Lot No.39 was located as "marsh or swamp".

Did Alexander ever actually live or work on the Cape Negro River? Possibly he did during the winter of 1784-85; maybe not. But the next year, 28 Sept 1785, finds "Alexander Forbes of the Town of Shelburne ... Yeoman" selling to "Robert McCoy of the Town ... aforesaid, Hatter ... in his actual possession now being a certain Plantation or Tract of Land situate lying and being on Cape Negro River (alias Clyde) containing One Hundred Acres, be the same more or less, which said Lot Plantation or Tract of Land is known and distinguished by being marked or Numbered No.39 Liles. Location, country Lands." The purchase price was £10 (Shelburne Co. Deeds, Book 2, pp.324-325). So much for Alexander and Clyde River.

Neil McCommiskey, one of Alexander Forbes' fellow grantees on the Cape Negro River (and later a fellow settler in Woods Harbour also), had sold his Lot No.55 two months earlier, on 12 July 1785, also for the apparently then- going- rate for swampland of £10-

the-hundred-acres. In McCommiskey's case, the buyer John Thompson is also noted in the deed as being in actual possession of the land, by virtue of a deal made "one whole year" earlier (Shelburne Co. Deeds, Book 2, pp.225-226). McCommiskey, it would seem, took just the one quick look at his lot when it was first laid out the previous summer -- and that was enough for him.

The conditions of the Cape Negro River grant were typical for this period. For every 50 acres received, the grantee was obligated, depending on the quality of the land, within 3 years, to either: clear and work 3 acres of plantable land; clear and drain 3 acres of swamp; or place 3 cattle on barren land. The land was permanently seated with the grantee upon the clearing of the 3 acres plantable land; if no such land existed on the grant, then the erection of a dwelling house of at least 20 by 16 feet was sufficient, together with the keeping of the 3 cattle. If the land was too poor even for cattle, then 3 man-years were to be spent excavating any "stone quarry" on the granted land. The grantee was also to pay to the Crown, on a yearly basis, two shillings per hundred acres. (NSARM, R.G.20, Series A; William Thompson and Others.)

Neither Robert McCoy nor John Thompson lived happily-ever-after on their 1785 purchases from Forbes and McCommiskey. These two lots were formally escheated in 1819, the Crown repossessing the land due to the conditions of the grant not being fulfilled. In fact, 63 of the 84 original 1785 grantees on the Clyde River are named in the 1819 escheatment, representing 8,500 of the 11,600 acres that had been granted 34 years earlier (GLLS 115-118). By 1819, the Cape Negro River would have been but a wisp of a memory for most of the defaulters. The majority had voted with its feet.

What Alexander's own feet were doing in the next five years, from 1785 to 1790, is thinly attested-to; he was likely an itinerant labourer. Nona Abbott (great-granddaughter of Alexander Forbes), in her History of Forbes Point, relates that "he continued along the shore, stopping for a time in the vicinity of Barrington, and working for one winter with 'Squire Smith' of Cape Sable Island." (Alexander would later name one of his sons "John Davis" Forbes, perhaps in honour of Barrington Township grantee John Davis, who died 26 Jan 1787 (Barrington Township Records, p.vii) from a fall on the ice; John Davis had First Division Lot No.78 on Cape Sable Island, near N.E. Point (CBT 471). This, unless the matching name is a coincidence, may be taken to suggest the presence of Alexander Forbes on Cape Sable Island by 1787).

ALEXANDER & PHOEBE – MARRIAGE

At some point prior to 1790, Alexander met his future wife, Phoebe Dennis. One account given in Doane's Notes states that he met her in Shelburne; the other, that he met her in Barrington. Nona Abbott relates that he met her in Doctor's Cove.

From Doane's Notes:

"Phebe Dennis of Virginia was Dutch Her father was an Englishman -- He wouldn't take up arms against the English. He was killed on board an English man of war. His wife died in a boat of exposure Their children were taken care of in the army with the women. Phebe Dennis was 8 years old when she went in the boat (had to go) with her mother who died there. They came to Barrington with a family by the name of Murray to whom she was bound when a girl, and it was there that Forbes met her." (DN E #66)

Crowell (CBT 481) refers to Phebe as "of Virginia, a soldier's orphan, who was living at Doctor's Cove with a Murray family."

Nona Abbott says of Phoebe:

"She had been one of a group of United Empire Loyalists, who had sailed, perhaps from Connecticut, to find a new home in Nova Scotia. Her mother died during the voyage but she continued under the guardianship of the doctor (Dr. Murray?) from whom the Cove took its name."

The reader is invited to cobble together a coherent story out of the foregoing accounts of Phoebe. Doane's Notes are cryptic; I leave it as an open question as to exactly when or where Phoebe's father and mother died, and when or where she was taken under guardianship or bondage. If Phoebe was indeed eight at the time of her mother's death, this would put the date as c.1781 (based on Phoebe's age as declared on her gravestone).

Alexander Murray was one of the Port Roseway Associates, the first group of Loyalists to apply for land in Port Roseway (renamed Shelburne in 1783). He was appointed Coroner in Shelburne in July 1783. (RKB 43,65)

Alexander Murray and his wife Betty can be tied to the Doctor's Cove area, since they sold Barrington First Division Lot No.65 in that vicinity (originally granted to Enoch Berry), "with the Dwelling House thereon standing", to John Sargent on 14 Jul 1785 (Shelburne Co. Deeds, Book 2, pp.257-258). Modern maps designate the cove lying between Doctor's Cove and Bear Point as "Murray Cove".

Alexander Murray died in 1789 (his name in Nova Scotia lived on through Phoebe's first-born son, Murray Alexander Forbes). Alexander Murray's widow Betty would soon return to Virginia. In such a circumstance, it is quite plausible for us to imagine Phoebe Dennis, then about 17 years old, perhaps with no desire to return to the States, taking action to instead find herself a good man to marry, and thereby remain in Nova Scotia.

That would be our Alex Forbes, about 35 years old. Time for the old soldier to settle down.

In December of 1790, the Barrington Stockmark Book records, among "Marriages at Barrington", that of "Alexander Forbis & Phoebe Dennes both of Barrington".

Doane's Notes state that the marriage took place on Cape Sable Island (which was a part of the Township of Barrington).

An old clipping from an unidentified newspaper claims that "For a while the couple lived at Doctor's Cove". Alexander, Doane's first informant tell us in his Notes, "lived a year or two on Cape Island after he was married"

ALEXANDER & PHOEBE – WOODS HARBOUR

Sometime in the early 1790's, Alexander and Phoebe moved southwest along the coast to Coquewit, alias Woods Harbour. This was possibly as early as 1792, depending on which raconteur's version of tradition we choose. They were definitely there by 1794, as a plan drawn by Andrew Collins, surveyor, under date of 13 Dec 1794, showed, among a list of eleven settlers, a lot laid out to "Forbush ... near the shore on the East side of the harbor, marked 'held by improvements' " (the plan is now lost, but was reported in CBT 383-384).

(The various spellings of his name on the records, such as "Forbus", "Forbis" and "Forbush", makes it evident that Alexander pronounced his name in the old Scots manner, with two syllables.)

Coquewit, at that time, was a sparsely settled and comparatively isolated harbour lying just beyond the western territorial bounds of Barrington Township, it falling within the extreme easterly region of the Township of Argyle. The next community beyond it, to the northwest, was Abuptik or Pubnico, home to Acadians who had returned, in the 1760s, to the same area they had occupied prior to the expulsion of the 1750s.

Twenty years earlier, in 1772, Rev. Samuel Wood, the minister at Barrington, for whose brief stay Coquewit would ultimately be renamed, had received a grant of about 1000 acres on the east side of the harbour, "possibly to induce him to attend quietly to his ministerial work without stirring up the people to revolution" (CBT 383; N.S. Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre, Lib. 2 Fol. 165; Bk 9, p.311; Bk 10, p.36).

Wood lived at Coquewit "six months but did not like it there and came back to Barrington". Due to his "sympathy with the American Revolution" Wood moved back to New England a few years later. "On June 27, 1775, he enlisted as chaplain in Capt. Smith's Company, in Col. David Waterman's Regiment of the Continental Army. He was taken prisoner at Fort Washington in the autumn of 1776 and died the next autumn in New York" on the ship *Asia*. Wood's selling price for his spurned Coquewit land is said to have been £10 (CBT 599; FLJS 40n).

After the temporary sojourn there of Samuel Wood, various names and dates have come down to us as suggestions for the honour of being the earliest permanent settlers at Coquewit.

For our purposes here, let us be content to say that by the time Alexander and Phoebe arrived in Woods Harbour, say 1792, it is likely that the following settlers, accounting for an estimated 27 souls, were already there, some possibly for several years:

Abner Nickerson, who bought the Woods Grant. By 1792, his enclave would have included himself, his wife, a daughter, 6 sons, a daughter-in-law, and 2 little grandsons.

John Nickerson (who was Abner's brother), his wife, 3 sons and 3 daughters.

One account of these two Nickerson brothers is that they "were Loyalists who got safely across the Bay ... about 1780" (CBT 530). John, however, was in Barrington by 1767. The two may have conducted most of their lives with one foot in Nova Scotia and the other in Harwich, Mass.

Thomas Chatwynd and his son William. Thomas, "a native of England, was a baker in the British army in America" (CBT 444). William would marry into the Nickerson clan.

Duncan Rankin, his wife and a little son. They would soon move away, to Argyle.

John Cameron, marital status unknown. He would soon move, probably to Barrington.

Duncan McNevin, then single.

In addition to the above, and arriving either contemporaneously with the Forbeses, or within a year or two either way, but certainly by 1794, were:

William Andrews and his wife. They would have no children. William Andrews was from Scotland. Jenny Andrews was a "woman of quality" and had a "dauntless spirit" (CBT 432), something no doubt to be admired - and Alexander and Phoebe Forbes would name their fourth daughter, born in 1796, Jenny Andrews Forbes.

John Lonsdale, his wife, and three little children. Lonsdale was said to have been "a disbanded English soldier, son of a soldier killed at Bunker's Hill" (CBT 515-516).

David Bowman, single. He would never marry.

Neil McCommiskey, his wife, and two little sons. He was another "old soldier" (DN D 8).

John Garron, his wife Lydia (Lacey), and two little daughters.

Thomas McGuire and his wife Elizabeth (Lacey).

And more arrivals, apparently soon after 1794:

Dennis Lyons; his wife Rebecca (Porch) (Lacey) - mother of Garron's and McGuire's wives - and their three Lyons youngsters. Young John Lyons would grow up to marry Alexander and Phoebe Forbes' daughter Nancy.

Dennis Connell, single. He would later marry a daughter of Dennis Lyons.

The four last listed men were a group of Irish from the LaHave area, well up the coast near Lunenburg. They were all "old soldiers", according to Doane (DN D 8; E #88¾) - although Dennis Connell, whose estate was administered in 1871, could hardly have been old enough to be a soldier in the Revolutionary War.

Including Alexander and Phoebe Forbes and their three little daughters, we can estimate that by 1796, the total population of Woods Harbour would have been approximately 65, with several actively-expanding young families.

ALEXANDER & PHOEBE – FORBES POINT

As we have seen, Alexander and Phoebe and their first youngster(s) arrived in Coquewit possibly by 1792 and certainly by 1794, settling on the east side of Woods Harbour. Of the foregoing list of those in Woods Harbour by that time, only Lonsdale with his small family, and the still-single McNevin were on the opposite, west side. The rest were either on the east side, or around the head, of the five km-deep, one km-wide harbour.

Alexander and Phoebe, however, soon made their final move - across to the west side of the harbour, tradition placing the date as 1798 (CBT 385). The small peninsula of land that was their destination, projecting five km into the Atlantic between Woods Harbour and Pubnico Harbour, was known for many years by the prosaic name of West Woods Harbour. But it was destined to be thoroughly stamped with the Forbes imprint. And when the post office was established there in June of 1885 (with John D. Forbes the first postmaster) the official postal-cancellation stamp would read "Forbes Point". Alexander and Phoebe had arrived at what would be their home for the rest of their lives.

John Lonsdale "and Duncan McNevin were living at Forbes Point when Alexander Forbes moved there. It was at that time that Lonsdale moved to Lower Woods Harbor" on the east side (CBT 515-516). Family tradition has it that Alexander and John Lonsdale exchanged properties with each other. This seems credible, although no registered property transaction has been found. At that time, 1798, most of the settlers at Woods Harbour held their land by virtue of having taken possession of it, living on it, and improving it. Confirmatory grants did not follow from the Crown until 1812, when the General Grant of Woods Harbour was issued (Nova Scotia Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre, Grant Book C, p.48).

Soon after Forbes joined McNevin on the west side, David Bowman and John Garron followed.

David Bowman was a single man, and never married (DN E #72). He lived with the Garrons, at least at first, while improving his land (Nova Scotia Crown Lands Record Centre, Shelburne Co. Portfolio, No.27).

Duncan McNevin would marry Elizabeth Peck. Tragically, "Duncan McNevin ... was out of his mind, and hanged himself -- His wife came home and found him in that condition" (DN E No.67). His widow and children, if any, moved away.

Which left only two young and expanding families in West Woods Harbour in the first decade of the 1800s - those of Alexander Forbes and John Garron. These families would have sustained themselves through farming and fishing, and would no doubt have been eagerly looking forward to the day when they had grown-up, brawny sons to help out with the heavy work. By the year 1800, these two families had produced nine children between them - five for Garron, four for Forbes. Enough for a full baseball team (or a full rounders side, as I suppose it would have been then). All girls. The gender imbalance righted itself thereafter for Forbes however; Alexander's last seven children were six boys and one girl. Not that we should in the least imagine that the Forbes daughters would have taken a back seat when it came to shouldering the family's work load in maintaining and expanding the Forbes establishment.

The early years, we may guess, were not easy (we may particularly think of 1816, "the year without a summer", caused by the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies). Nevertheless, the Forbes family, as far as we know, thrived.

The Nova Scotia Census provides us with a snapshot of the Forbes family in 1827 (Argyle, p.14). The oldest son, Alexander, had started his own young family by then, and the oldest daughter, Nancy, had been married to John Lyons for 17 years. Among the three households, totalling 23 people, they are recorded as having 15 acres of land under cultivation. Production in

Alexander Forbes Married to Feby December 16th 1790

<i>Nancy</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>January 5th</i>	<i>1792</i>
<i>Feby</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>December 3th</i>	<i>1794</i>
<i>Jane</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>April 19th</i>	<i>1796</i>
<i>Polly</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>September 26th</i>	<i>1798</i>
<i>Alexander</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>August 27th</i>	<i>1801</i>
<i>Thomas</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>January 1st</i>	<i>1804</i>
<i>Mercy</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>May 6th</i>	<i>1806</i>
<i>John</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>January 26th</i>	<i>1810</i>
<i>George</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>November 3th</i>	<i>1811</i>
<i>William</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>July 12th</i>	<i>1814</i>
<i>Hugh</i>	<i>born</i>	<i>April 17th</i>	<i>1817</i>

Alexander Forbes Argyle Township Book

the previous year included 15 bushels of grain, 22 tons of hay, 900 bushels of potatoes. They had 18 cattle, 45 sheep, and 12 swine. (The Argyle census-taker, William Robertson, grouchy appended a note to his return warning that the "ignorant classes" had formed an "unfavorable impression" of the government's motives behind this newfangled thing called a census, with the result that "The Returns of Produce and Stock are in Many Instances much short of the real Amount".)

Alexander would live to the age of 93. He was blessed, as far as we know, and in contrast to many of that era, to never have experienced the death of any of his children. Phoebe, who lived to the age of 85, that of only one. Their son Murray Alexander, called Alexander, died in 1855 at the age of 54 from a "short but severe illness of two weeks" (The Christian Messenger, Halifax, N.S., 12 Dec 1855).

Their son Thomas Forbes lived just down the road from his parents. A farmer and a mariner, Thomas was lost on the fishing banks in the gale of 22 Sep 1866 at the age of 62, with two of his sons, Charles (aged 25) and Alexander (15). Several vessels and a total of 38 men from an approximate ten km stretch of nearby coast were lost at that disastrous time (TLM 2 27).

Of the daughters, Nancy Forbes married John Lyons, and they settled on the western shore of Forbes Point, about one km from her parents' homestead. Her sister Mercy Forbes seems to have also lived with Nancy and John, as John provided for Mercy in his will (Barrington Original Estate Papers, Estate A68 John Lyons).

Daughter Mary was the third Forbes daughter who moved out. By the age of 18, she had become a domestic servant in the house of Louis Amirault in Lower East Pubnico, about eight km from her parents' house. She remained with the Amirault family, first Louis and then his son Leon, for the rest of her life. She was designated a godmother of three children in that French Catholic community, and was remembered by Louis Amirault in his will, equally with his own daughters (Yarmouth County Wills, Book 2, pp. 424-426).

The other two unmarried daughters, Phoebe Forbes and Jenny Forbes, remained in the "Old Homestead" for the remainder of their lives, first with their parents and siblings, then with their unmarried brother John D. (When Alexander and Phoebe moved to West Woods Harbour, they lived close to the shore, in what I assume would have previously been John Lonsdale's house. They then built a second house further away from the water. This second house was the so-called "old house". Its empty stone basement was still visible in the 1970s; it has since been filled in.)

The five Forbes daughters lived to the ages of 80 (Nancy); 79 (Phoebe); 90 (Jenny); 75 (Mary); and 78 (Mercy).

Of the four youngest sons, John D. lived to the age of 79, and farmed on the old homestead. He bought it from his siblings for £220 in 1860, after the death of their mother Phoebe in September 1858 (Shelburne Co. Deeds, Barrington District, Book C, p.119).

The youngest child, Hugh Forbes, was unmarried. He was spoken of as a little slow but a very good worker. He was employed for a while up the coast in Bridgewater, but then returned home to Forbes Point. He died at the age of 57.

The other two brothers, George Forbes and William Forbes, were shipwrights. "At Forbes Point, in 1853, the brig Advalorum was launched and the schooner Willing Maid was put off soon afterwards" (CBT 349-350).



John Davis Forbes, only photo of a child of Alexander Forbes

George was a fisherman and carpenter. Surviving ships' papers show he was a principal in sailing the schooners "Willing Maid" and "Bee" in the coastal trade during the period 1846-1855. Ownership and interest in these two vessels seem to have been shared among several of the Forbeses. Representative recorded activities include carrying potatoes and apples from Cornwallis to Halifax, and carrying wood from La Have to Boston. George and his family lived on the end of Forbes Point. He drowned at sea in 1881, aged 69.

William Forbes "was a skillful master builder and was employed also at the Crowell yard near Sherose Island" in Barrington (CBT 350). William and his family moved away from Forbes Point in the 1850s to be near his work. The Thomas Crowell shipyard built several square-riggers designed for the West Indies trade during this period (CBSS 73). William died in 1894, aged 79.

After around 20 years of shuffling-about by the early settlers at Woods Harbour, the official land grant was issued in 1812; 4000 acres to 21 individuals. It officially confirmed the Crown's recognition of the already existing facts on the ground (Nova Scotia Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre, Grant Book C, p.48).

A stretch of about three kilometres of the granted lands, running north from the southern tip of Forbes Point, approximately 1000 acres in total, was gradually entirely acquired by members of the Forbes family:

Lot 31 (100 acres) at the end of the Point was purchased by George Forbes from Obediah Wilson in 1842.

Lot 30 (64 acres) was purchased by Thomas Forbes from Watson Nickerson in 1837.

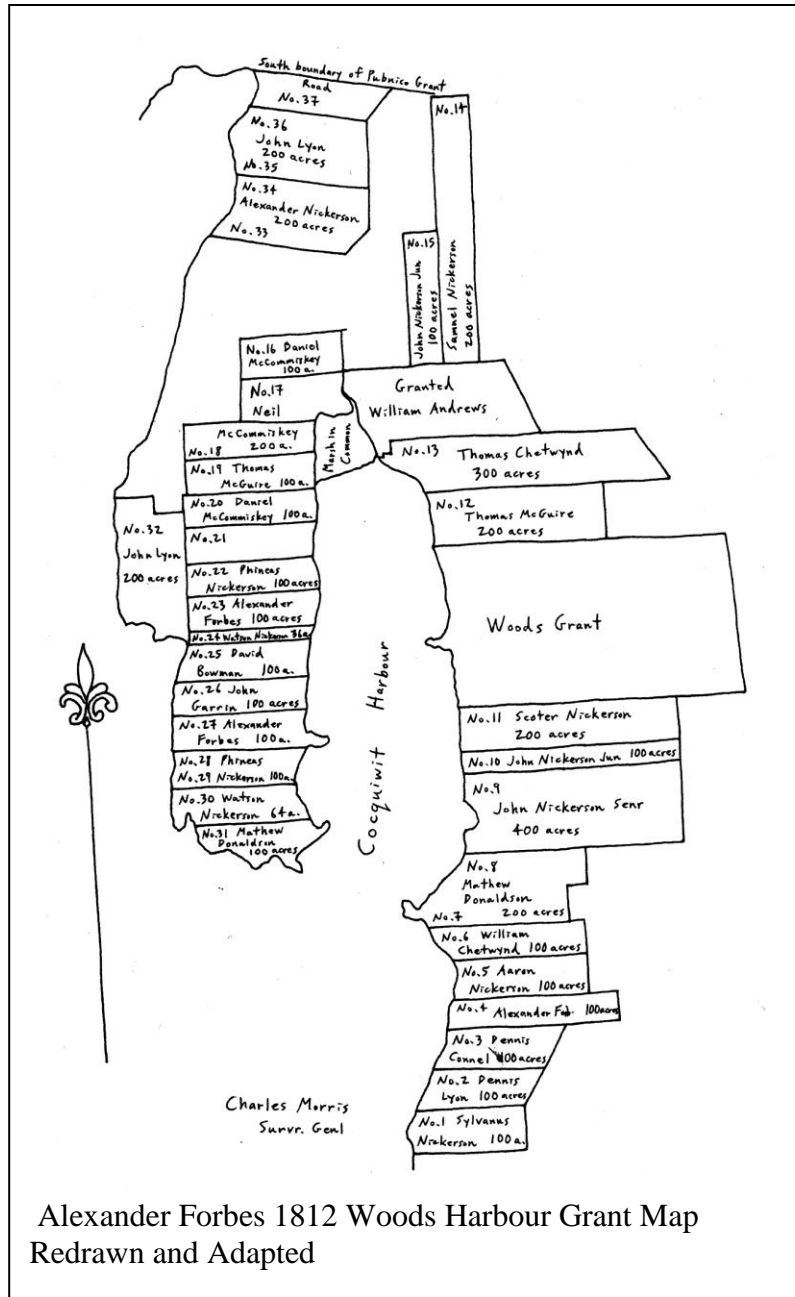
Lot 28-29 (100 acres) was purchased by Alexander Forbes from Phineas Nickerson in two portions, half in 1813 and half in 1821.

Lot 27 (100 acres) was granted to Alexander Forbes in 1812. This was the homestead property.

Lot 26 (100 acres): Alexander Forbes Jr. bought the northern portion from John Garron in 1831. John Lyons (husband of Nancy Forbes) bought the southern portion from Thomas Garron, also in 1831.

Lot 25 (100 acres) was granted to David Bowman in 1812. I have not found registered deeds of the conveyance, but at least the northern portion of this lot had passed into the possession of Alexander Forbes Jr by 1842, and the southern portion of the lot seems to have been part of the estate of Alexander Forbes Sr in 1859.

Lot 24 (36 acres) was purchased by John Lyons Jr (son of John and Nancy (Forbes) Lyons) from Watson Nickerson in 1842.



Lot 23 (100 acres) was granted to Alexander Forbes in 1812.

Lot 22 (100 acres) was granted to Phineas Nickerson in 1812. This was bought by Obediah Wilson in 1836, and seems to be part of the land included in John Lyons' estate, 1874.

Lot 32 (200 acres) on the west side of the Point where it abruptly widens (and contiguous to the back line of Lots 20 through 24), was granted to John Lyons in 1812.

From the foregoing, we may see that Alexander and Phoebe's chosen home had truly become "Forbes Point", in ownership as well as in familial connection, well before 1885, when the post office stamped it so.

TODAY

Today my cousin Alexander ("Sandy") Forbes, great-great-great-great-great grandson and namesake of "Old Alexander", still operates his fishing boat from the wharf at Forbes Point.

There are still descendants of Alexander Forbes and Phoebe Dennis living on "The Point", as well as descendants scattered throughout Canada and the United States. As far and as wide as the choices and leave-takings of each of their own histories have flung them, however, the passing-on of the old family stories through the generations binds them together. Two centuries later, the truths of the "Canadian Boat Song" endure:

"Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland".

Source abbreviations:

AHFP: Wenona Abbott, "History of Forbes Point", c. 1960's.

CBSS: Michael Christie, Barrington Seafarers and Shipbuilders, 2004.

CBT: Edwin Crowell, A History of Barrington Township and Vicinity, 1923.

DN: Arnold Doane, "Notes" (later used by Edwin Crowell for A History of Barrington Township), collected c.1870s through 1911. Cape Sable Historical Society.

ES: J. Plimsoll Edwards, "The Shelburne That Was and Is Not", in The Dalhousie Review, Vol. II, No. 2 (July, 1922).

FLJS: Bruce Fergusson, The Life of Jonathan Scott, Bulletin No.15, PANS, 1960.

HEF: Forbes, Herbert E. Forbes Family of Nova Scotia, 1980.

GLLS: Marion Gilroy, Loyalists and Land Settlement in Nova Scotia, 1937.

JSSR: James P. Jones, A History of the South Staffordshire Regiment, 1923.

LSH: G. Murray Logan, Scottish Highlanders and the American Revolution, 1976.

MTUS: Neil MacKinnon, This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1986.

PRO, Kew. WO12/5171 Muster Rolls -- 38th Regiment of Foot; research report on army record of Alexander Forbes by Leonard F. Gebbett, Jan 1988.

RKB: Marion Robertson, King's Bounty: A History of Early Shelburne, 1983.

SHAR: James L. Stokesbury, A Short History of the American Revolution, 1991.

SRC: Simon Schama, Rough Crossings, 2005.

TLM: Patricia Terry, Lost Mariners of Shelburne County, n.d.

VSSR: Col. W.L. Vale, History of the South Staffordshire Regiment, 1969.

"Canadian Boat Song" first appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 1829.