

# NICOL FINLAYSON'S LETTERS

## to HIS SON JOHN

### NOTE:

Our photocopies of these letters were received from the Archives of Ontario in April 1988, and corroborate other information regarding our family tree. After their arrival, I wrote re their copyright status, and have been given permission by Archivist LS WarmSKI to send copies to family members, and Hudson's Bay Archives in Winnipeg.

The handwriting is partially illegible, since by this time, Nicol was getting to be an elderly man, troubled with rheumatism.

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### Letter 1

Nairn, Scotland

May 17, 1858 (1)

My Dear John,

I have been somehow or other prevented from writing you by the Spring, but I now sit down to say that I am in pretty good health, & sincerely hope that you & your wife and family are well, & living in peace & plenty & that you made as good a trade as it is possible to do surrounded with opposition as you are. the last winter in this country was very mild & the summer so far is not very hot. ----- the winter in Canada was very ----, colder than it has been known for years, & that there was much privation in some places, particularly in the County of Bruce (2). With us food was abundant, but every thing is dear. I would have been glad if I had a barrel of your Lake Superior trout. I had a letter from Sir George (3) in the Spring informing me that he was to abandon the old Canoe route & go by Minnesota & St Paul to Red River; it appears they intend getting their supplies for Red River in waggons by the plains from St



Pauls. This if it succeed will greatly lower the number of tripmen in the York River. I had not a line from Hector (4) last fall, but ... (Jas./Jos.-James or Joseph?) (5) informs me that he has become a farmer in Red River, but I fear he will not make a living by it - he would do better by boatbuilding. Your sister & her husband now ..... when she wrote in the Fall it appears the poor (tear in paper top of pg 2- ...)

NarciFs (NARCISSE) is still in (tear...) he does not trap (?) (tear- ...) that you mean (tear...) (7) mean to leave the service as you hinted in your last it was your intention to do. at least it would be prudent to not give up your present situation until you are sure of a better - you have a good claim upon the Company for your long and faithful service which you would not have by engaging with another party. & you would abandon that Claim by leaving the service without sufficient cause - Your sister Mary got married to a young gentleman last summer at Nairn who is a Banker & Lawyer and they are very happy; she presented him with a daughter last April & both Mother & baby are doing well, she is to be named after her grandmother Elizabeth. There is nothing talked of in the country just now but war, rumours of war & commotions, men, hearts failing them for fear, and God knows what is to be the end - I fear it is but the beginning of the end, let me hear from you & let me know what you intend doing. I could put in a good word for you with Sir George if I know what could be done for you. I know that for my sake he would do what he could consistently with the rules of the Service - I must conclude; may God who is infinite in Mercy & loving Kindness towards his sinful Creatures bless & preserve you & family from every danger and (S)

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inc  
NA

I am,

My dear Son John

... your affectionate Father

Nicol Finlayson

Mr. John Finlayson 2 }

P.S. Give kind respects to Mr MacIntyre

End of 1st of 6 ltrs.

**Letter 2**

Nairn, North Britain

20th May, 1863

My Dear John,



I intended writing you by the Spring ExpreFs (9) but was prevented doing so, but it was as well I did not do so as all the letters by that ship, the Anglo Saxon were lost together with all the cargo on board & more than half the passengers, the goods were intended for the Northern Districts and I fear there will be much put out for want of the goods, for it will be hardly possible to get a fresh supply in time. I was glad to learn by your last letter that you & your family were then well, I hope you have passed the past winter in comfort and abundance and that your trade will be better than last year; I think from what I know of Long lake in my young days (10) I would not yet be afraid of keeping myself and men in plenty of good white fish and rabbits, I suppose now you will have potatoes to eat with your fish & if you get cattle then the children can have milk & butter with their bread. I took two calves from Albany one year, and then --- we had plenty milk & butter. I hope now that your Cousin Mr. McKenzie is in charge of the Lake Superior Districts that he will be kind to you. I have had letters from Hector and Nancy who appeared to be pretty well, Narcif's does not appear to have got his farm in good order yet; it is feared that there will be trouble on the Plains this summer for the Saisoux are not subdued and it is feared the Sauteaux of Red lake may be troublesome, both are taking courage from the troubles of the Yankees - who have not troops enough to protect the people on the border states - I hope however there will be no disturbance, if it is true that gold is found in the Peace River, Saskatchewan, Pembina & other parts of the North, furs will be allowed to multiply & everone go to the diggings if they can procure provisions for fortunes will be easier made in that way that by rat-catching (?) but this will help many who be scorned (?) in their endeavours to make speedy fortunes - If Mr Laronde is still at Nipagon, remember me kindly to him & let me know if he has now married the widow yet - Is Charles Begg still at? the Pic how long is he to remain there & is his wife gone to Red River yet & what is Mr Macntyre doing with the bonded/no-entry (?) he bought at Fort William, is he bringing it into Cultivation - you will have a chance of seeing the new Governor this summer, as I hear he is to hold a council at Moosefactory; he was here for some four months before he left for Canada, and I think himself and his wife any pleasant people - your Sister Mary, her husband and three children are quite well, their names are Elizabeth Kennedy, James Alexander, and Isobel Finlayson Lamb, very nice children they are, am staying with them except occasional trips I make to England & Germany in the summers for the benefit of my health which was much shattered by my seven years

Sister  
and  
Narcif



transportation to that cursed place Niagara. now I should have come to the end of my tether and should be wishing you good bye for the time. should be happy to hear good accounts of you and your family and with my (msgs?) for the happiness of yourself and family here and hereafter

I remain

My Dear John

Your affectionate Father

Nicol Finlayson

Mr. John Finlayson Lake Superior District Louis Louis Lower Louise  
End of 2nd of 6 ltrs

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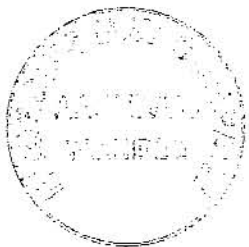
**LETTER 3**

Nairn

9th April 1866

My Dear John,

Your welcome letter of the 20th Jany last from Long lake arrived in due time & I was glad to learn from it that you and your family were then well; I felt concerned about you in not hearing from you by the ship of last fall and as I have no correspondents on Lake Superior now but yourself I could not hear anything about you - I am glad that you are living pretty well now you can get good whitefish at the foot of the lake, I dare say you have nets there non (-?) & the Long lake white fish in my time was excellent; you plant potatoes I suppose and you hinted once in your letter that you were going to take on two calves - I have enjoyed pretty good health this winter but have kept pretty much to the house, but propose to go more about in the ensuing sumr (11) I do not suppose the Company would (?) be willing to let you retire on a pension as you are not disabled in any way & besides you are comparatively young man yet. I have no doubt if there was a cule (?) on your services as a Master Cooper, you could live as comfortably, as you do now, but you would have harder work, but I am sure the Company would be sorry to part with you as an Indian Trader - I would not advise you to send your boy to this Country to school as few Native, educated in this country can turn out well; I have been at much expense on the education of your brother in this Country & I sent him to Columbia in the Service of the Company which he left of his own accord & is doing nothing now but working upon a farm in Victoria Vancouver Island, he has vexed me so much that I do not write him if



there be Missionaries (Wesleyan, at the Pic you could not send him the boy to a better school where he would be taught useful information - I hope there is nothing so locally wrong with you to oblige you to consult a doctor; In all human probability it is very likely that we may never see each other in this world for I am getting an old man unable to take long journies, but may God grant that we may meet in Heaven where there is no separation of friends & where sighing and sorrow is not known - Tell Mr. Laronde with my Kind regard that if I was in the Country I would soon get him a wife - is his daughter married, she who was throwing her cap at you, one of his boys I hear he sent to School to Canada - the old widow Mrs McKenzie is too old for him, he ought marry a younger - I got a long letter last fall from Hector he was building boats for the Company & afterwards assisting in building a schooner for Lake Winnipeg & expected to be employed in building a steamer for the same lake, provisions were dearer on account of the ravages of the locusts last summer & I fear that his family and Nancy would be badly off. Narcifs was employed trading for the Company - Joseph is at Fort Pelly Swan River District - Mary unites with me in love to yourself wife and children and

I remain  
My Dear John  
Your affectionate Father  
Nicol Finlayson

Mr John Finlayson

P.S. On thinking after closing my letter about your boy Nicol. I think the best you can do for him is to place him in a School in the Country; if the Wesleyans have a Station at the Pic and if the Missionary has a family the boy could not be better placed in order to acquire useful knowledge & a little education than with him, and I would gladly for a few years allow you Lbs 20 a year for this purpose which I could do by placing that sum with the Company which you could draw once a year & the sooner you send him to School the better, putting him to School in this Country or Canada would cost you more than you could afford & both you & his mother would rather have the boy near you than far off

I remain  
My Dear John  
Your affectionate Father  
Nicol Finlayson

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Mr John Finlayson }  
End of 3rd of 6 ltrs



**REMARKS**

This is an interesting contradiction of reported fact. Rundel says that Hector Finlayson, "brother of Joseph," (both were at Fort Edmonton in the mid-1840s), died of measles in 1846. (Did Hector live on, and his son, with perhaps the same name, die?) More references to Hector in ltrs 4 & 5.

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**LETTER 4**

National Bank of Scotland Nairn  
22nd Augt 1870

My Dear John\_

Your welcome letter of 30th Jun from Pic I received on the 17th Inst & Am sorry to learn that you have lost the power of your arm, but I hope it is nothing more serious than rheumatism. In your last letter you complained of an affection of the hip joint, which is a very serious complaint, but I hope it is all right now. I am surprised that you complain of my not writing to you, my letter must have miscarried, I am always glad to hear how you are getting on: I am glad to learn that you brot out a good trade from Long lake. I fear from the present circumstances of the Company that you will be succesful in procuring a pension, but I hope they will feel it their interest to engage you again & send you into Long Lake. I am sorry for the accident that happened to your boy, guns are put too early into native boy's hands & it's not surprising that accidents do sometimes happen. The curiosities you kindly are sending home will be acceptable & I hope will arrive safely. I am going to write to Mr Smith to put Lbs 20, to your Credit for that is the amount of my balance in their hands & when I am dead & gone you or your heirs will receive Lbs 100 from my Executor, which is all I can do for you\_ Write me always at least once a year. We are all here blessed by God in our usual way, but I am getting old and shaky & my hand is getting very unsteady & I find it a hard task to write a letter but if ever I am unable to write I shall get your sister Mary to write for me. I fear poor Hector is not very well of(f) on account of the troubled state of Red River, but af-fair will calm down when the Expedition gets in which I hope they will do in safety - Affectionate regards to the good wife & all bairns and with our united good wishes to you

I remain



My dear Busduth  
Your very affectionate Father  
Mis-quiKiweninne  
Nicol Finlayson

\* this was my Indian name in Long lake  
End of 4th of 6 ltrs

LETTER 5

National Bank Nairn  
5th Jany 1871

My Dear John,

I was disappointed at not hearing from you by the ship of the season, I sincerely hope you are recovering from the attack on your left side & been able to again take charge of Long lake even if they were to allow a person to do your work for I fear in the present low state of the trade the Company will not feel inclined to to give you a pension, tho you richly deserve ne; if however you thought proper to retire, I shall assist you as much as I can by writing to the Secretary to place Lbs 100 to your Credit to any balance you may have in the Company's hands. Your presents of curiosities came safe to hand & was highly prized, the shoes particularly. We are here in our usual way, but I am getting frail & old & go not anywhere in the winter from the house, Hector and his family are in their usual way, he was in Inverness the other day with your shoe, in galoshes, It was hard frosty weather & therefore the shoes kept him all right. Hoping to hear from you soon that you are recovering your health and wishing you & Mrs F and Children are happy and plentiful new year

I am  
My Dear John  
Your affectionate Father  
Nicol Finlayson

Mr John Finlayson }  
End of 5th of 6 ltrs

LETTER 6

Nairn  
25th Nov 1871  
My Dear John,



I received your letter of the 3rd Oct & was glad to see it dated Long lake & that your daughter was appointed your Clerk, which does you & her much Credit so that she's able to keep your books, I am also glad to learn that your general health is pretty good. No doubt some of your friends on the Long lake & Eskickanacak were glad to see you. I hope you will be able to pass a plentiful season & to make a good trade, I wish I had a few hundreds of the Long lake hung whitefish, for they are very good. I am glad you have gone back again to your old quarters, at least till you hear whether the Company will give you a small pension or not, I think they will continue you there so long as your daughter remains your clerk, but whether they do or not it is my purpose to give you one hundred pounds which is all I can do, for I am not rich. I suppose it will do to place it in the hands of the Company for I suppose you will have a little money in their hands; (the concerns taxes?) of the Company are greatly changed now but the Factors Chief Traders & Clerks will be pretty well off according to the rumours about the new Deed poll, so that I would advise you to stick to the Concern as long as you can. I am getting an old man being now in my 78 year & I would be reckoned a Kurhayinninnis, did my great age allow it I would have great pleasure in passing a winter with you & family at Long lake & I think I know enough of Indian to enable me to be of some help to you & the Concern, perhaps I would see children & grandchildren of friends of mine who lived there during my apprenticeship. If Wandebuggessu is alive tell him I have not forgotten him, & if Kuchemookamen & Nawithecapon are alive tell them I remember them still. Your sister Mrs Lamb has a large family & they are pretty well, but I am a Martyr to rheumatism but considering my age have no cause to complain, when you (see) Mr Peter Bell (Peter Warren Bell) (12) remember me kindly to him. Kiss your daughter and Wife for me if I saw her I would have pleasure in doing that myself write me & tell me all your doings and with affectionate regards to your wife & children,

I remain

My Dear Busdubh

Your Affectionate Father

Nicol Finlayson

Mr John Finlayson }

End of last of 6 letters from Nicol to son John.

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**TEXT NOTES**

- 1 - The date, probably 1858, is hard to read. [possibly 1859]
- 2 - County of Bruce. This could be a passing reference to the BELL family. His son Joseph married Flora BELL, daughter of John BELL. (1860-01 Jun BELL John: retired. Settled Saugeen, Bruce County, Ontario - farming there)
- 3 - SIMPSON's well-documented friendliness to the FINLAYSONs possibly predates the time when he talked both into joining the H.B. Co in 1815.
- 4 - To WHICH Hector is he referring?
- 5 - This is probably a reference to Joseph, my Gt. Grandfather.
- 6 - German-styled internal double 'SS', which he transcribes as 'Ps'.
- 7 - This letter is the most damaged of the six, with a tear at the top of p2..
- 8 - Many writers of the day finished their letters with this type of flourish, a carryover of Victorian Biblical sentiment. Additionally, there were family reports of Joseph 'always' being in church.
- 9 - Again, the German double S, which habit he may have picked up in visiting Germany. Many writers of the time made their SS's alike, and many people went touring to Germany, for the 'waters' and their general health.
- 10 - He refers to the time 1817 - 1821, immediately prior to the merging of the NWCo and the HBCo, during which time his master Train died.
- 11 - Nicol's spelling is generally inconsistent, but probably in keeping with the times, when careful spelling was infrequent. Modern spelling requirements are more severe..
- 12 - Peter Warren Bell remained in charge at Michipicoten for twenty years, from outfit 1866-67 until outfit 1885-86.20 (H.B.C. Arch. B.134/g/41-60). He received his appointment as Factor in 1872.

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