

mean and all the rest of my fr[iends] believe me dear [] you
aff[ectionate brother] [Signed] Alexander Robb

P.S. The whole of us are in health and as the accounts from ... are very
good of course we are [in] good spirits.

[10 August 1862, Nicola Lake, BC; to his father]

I suppose you will be thinking by this time that I am either dead or
have forgotten all about home else I would have written long ago.
I can assure you however that this is not the case for I am as well as
ever I was and as for the forgetting part it will be a very long time
indeed before that time comes.

You will most likely have heard from some of the other boys what
kind of a trip we had up to Cariboo. For fear you should not I will
give you a slight sketch of it. We left Victoria in Vancouver's Island
about the 1st May and after about six hours sailing landed in New
Westminster a small town about twenty or thirty miles up the Frazer
River. When there we learned that it was quite too soon to go up to
the mines and we stopped a week there. From thence we proceeded
to a town called Fort Yale about sixty miles farther up the river. The
current, was so strong in the river that it took us two days to go this
distance. From Fort Yale all communication by water ceases and the
rest of the distance has to be done on foot. I wish you had seen the
thirteen of us starting our packs, we all pretty heavy and the trail
none of the best so you may be sure for the first few days we did not
make very big work. The trail after the first 15 miles was awful up
one mountain and down nother for sixty or seventy miles until we got
to a town called Lytton after which it improved. At Lytton we met
Alexander McWha. He keeps a small store about three miles from a
place called Van Winkle Bar and I believe is doing very well. We
stopped there one day or two I forget which and then started again.
Our next halting place was to be Quesnel City a town situated at the
headquarters of the Frazer River and about 200 miles from Lytton.
The trail however is pretty good. It took us 13 days to accomplish
this distance but our packs were very heavy at starting as we had
bought as many provisions at Lytton as we calculated would carry

us through. When at Quesnel we learned that there was no use going
to the mines without carrying plenty of provisions with us so we invested
all our money in flour, beans, picks, shovels etc. Then came the tug
of war. I started with ninety pounds on my back and over such a
trail it is only about 50 miles long but what it wants in length it makes
up in quality up one mountain and down another precipice sometimes
up to your knee in water at other times wading through snow from
two to six or eight feet deep. I will live a long time before I forget
that journey. This brought us to Antler Creek the first part of the
Cariboo mines. The distance you see we have walked was about 400
miles.

When there the very wisest course we could have pursued would
have been to have sold our provisions and have turned right back
again but like blind fools we were we did not do so although it was
then the first week in June. I do not believe there was more than six
claims in all Cariboo working at all and these were only making
preparations to take out gold of course then there was no chance to
get any work and as for prospecting to get a claim for oneself that was
out of the question. The snow was melting on the top of the mountains
and the water was so high that you could not work more than a few
feet any place until you were 'choked' out of it with water. The rest
of the boys all went away one party after another first Henry Stewart,
William McDowell, J. Greenfield and the two Pattons left. Then John
Dempsey, P. Moore, W. Boyd, John Robb and the two McCreery
boys went away until at last there were none of us there except
Robert McCance and myself. I heard before I left that he had went
down also but whether he did or not I cannot tell as he was in a
different part of the mines from where I was. I hung on for six weeks
like a drowning man catching at straws always hoping that something
would turn up that I might make a living at and perhaps make a little
money.

I am sure that brother John will think it cowardly in me to give it
up but in fact I could do nothing else. It came to be a question to
either go down or starve. Just fancy the price of provisions when I
came away. Flour when you could get it was selling at 5s. a pound,
beans about the same, pork 6s., salt, sugar and everything else a little
dearer. A single meal in a boarding house costs 10s. and for a small
cup of bad coffee without any milk I paid 2s. Had I not got a little
work occasionally and half starved myself all the time I could not

have lived there so long for at the lowest calculation it cost one pound per day to live there.

I came with Mr Wightman's son. You may suppose that I was greatly surprised to see him in such a place. He only stopped a few days and then came down. I parted two weeks ago. He was going to San Francisco [as the winter is so severe*] and I to get work where I could. I have been fortunate to get work here on the road about 50 miles above Lytton. I am engaged for three months at £8 per month. I just got the work in time as I had only about two pounds of flour and one sixpence left. When my time is expired I think I will go down to San Francisco as the winter is so severe here that nothing can be done. Whether I will ever go up to Cariboo I do not know. I do not think I will.

There are three great objections to that country. In the first place provisions are and must continue to be too dear. In the second place the season is too short. One can only work three months and then unless you want to be frozen to death down you must come and the third reason is it takes a small fortune to open a claim there. Had I time and room I could tell you the reason of this but this is my last sheet of paper so I must be saving of it. I must now finish and it may be a very long time before I have another opportunity of writing. The nearest post office from this is 50 miles off and it is by a mere chance I can get this one sent. I would [have] liked to have sent a longer letter than this but as I have neither pen nor ink and as [I] am writing in a tent with eight or ten men talking round me and nothing but the floor to write on this will do at present. In the meantime do not be uneasy about me. There is always some way I can make a living and all the world is not so bad as Cariboo. As a specimen of what it cost to open a claim in Cariboo I may mention that Bill McWha and 8 other men had been working 8 weeks at his claim before I came away and it would take at least 3 more to open it. You may fancy how much money it will take to do this where living is so dear. In the meantime dear father keep writing to the care of Mr Kyle. Tell me how the farm is getting on and in fact everything. Nothing will be uninteresting. Give my love to all brothers, sisters, friends and believe me dear father your loving son [Signed] Sandy Robb.

[*Phrase deleted]

[15 February 1863, New Westminster, BC; to Susanna Robb]

My dear little Sister,

I don't know that this is a proper address for a young lady of seventeen but somehow I can hardly think of you as anybody else than the dear little girl who used to climb on my knee and comb my whiskers. Indeed I believe I would have continued in this state of blissful ignorance for I don't know how long had I not received your letter. The moment I read that my dream was dispelled for I at once knew that no little girl with short petticoats could write such a beautiful letter. Never make any excuses about letter writing any more for I declare to you that it is a very long time indeed since I received a letter either better written or better expressed. Remembering that I expect you to correspond with me regularly after this and I will never forgive you if you neglect to do so. You gave me also a great deal of news that was very interesting to me and which I could not expect Father to think about. You may be sure that I was glad to hear that Nellie and Lizzie were so well and so happy. May God bless and prosper them both. I think they have been blessed in choosing good kind husbands and that is everything for a woman more perhaps than even a good wife is to a man. For my part I hardly ever expect to be blessed by a wife but that can not lessen my preference for the married state in preference to any other and my greatest wish is that if I ever reach home I may see my brothers and sisters filling that station which God and nature has pointed out as the proper one for all human beings.

You wish to know you dear little simpleton if I get my washing and mending done for me comfortably. Of course I do and my cooking into the bargain and all by the one person. I mean myself. Of course it is all well done especially the mending. 'Tis true the stitches are sometimes long and not very even but what is that where there are no women to criticize one's appearances. As for baking I think I can beat any woman in the Parish of Dundonald giving us both the same materials. I mean flour and water. With these I can make bread that would make Barry Hughs hide his diminished head and blush for very shame. I find though that I am getting into a regular [ragmarsh]

so I must draw to a close promising you to write you a decent letter the next time. So with Love to Mary, Andrew, Sam and Frank.

I remain dear Sister
Your affect brother
Alexander Robb

[15 February 1863, New Westminster, BC; to his father]

Dear Father,

At last I have received your letter. You can have no idea how anxiously I have been looking for them and how sick at heart I have been when mail after mail has come in without bringing me any word from home. I mentioned in my last letter that I had written to Mr. Kyle to have them forward to me here. My letter to him must have been detained as it was two months after I wrote until I got an answer. At last however they did come and I believe they were all the more welcome from being so long coming. I was very sorry to hear that you had such an awful summer as you describe. I can just imagine what an amount of trouble you must have had. In this respect if in no other I had the advantage of you. British Columbia (or at least the part of it that I was in) enjoys perhaps one of the finest if not the *very* finest Climates in the world. It is warm without being oppressively hot and from the first of May until the middle December only a few slight showers fell. The sky too is blue all the time and the atmosphere is so clear that mountains that only look two or three miles from you are probably twenty or thirty miles distant. This does not refer to the district of Cariboo in which blessed region rain thunder and lightning seems to have established their head quarters. As regards the rest of the Country I believe a better healthier climate cannot be found. However, as there is no rose without its thorn so even this country is not without its drawbacks. I do not refer to the wild animals although, bears, wolves and [?] are pretty plenty [?] to the reptiles though rattlesnakes are plentier than five dollar pieces. These you can avoid or kill but there is another thing that you cannot avoid and where you kill one, one thousand arises to avenge his death. I mean the musquitoe – This is decidedly *the* pest of British Columbia. I cannot

describe to you the horrible torments they inflict upon one. They creep up ones arms they crawl round your neck they settle in hundreds upon your face and in fact wherever there is a bare spot of flesh upon you these pests make it their business to leave a blister. About the middle of August the nights commence to get a little chilly and then the mosquito begins to loose part of his fierceness and shortly after dies away all together. He leaves as is successor a little black gnat that though not so large is quite as bad as the other. Each has it own peculiarities. Mr. Mosquitoe is a spanish gentleman of rather dissipated habits. He loves to get up early in the morning (about two or three oclock) and as he no doubt thinks this is a virtue that ought to be shared by all creation he takes particular pains that you should not sleep either. When the sun gets warm he gets drowsy and goes to sleep until about four oclock in the afternoon when out he rushes with renewed energy and continues his orgies until about twelve oclock at night when too drunk even to fly he reels under a blade of grass and no doubt dreams of his *nip* in the morning. The gnat on the contrary is rather a lazy kind of fellow. He wont get up until the sun is high in the heavens and goes to bed exactly at sunset. To do him justice however he improves his time most wisely and judiciously while awake. Unlike the mosquito who is not particular where he lets your blood flow Mr. Gnat is a dainty fellow and his most dainty morsel is extracted from the corner of your eye where they settle in clusters and there they will stay do you best. This is an overdrawn picture for there are places in this Colony where strong horses have been killed dead in the night by the mosquitoes. I have seen men from the Canadian swamps from the Mississippi plains from Australia and in fact from every part of the world and all agree that British Columbia beats them all hollow. It is said that they are not so bad on one after the first year and I am sure I hope so for nothing but a young Irishman strong and healthy *could* have gone through such a course of surgery as I have suffered this year. I have been rather prosy on this subject as I have little to write about and when I did commence about these things my feelings got the better of me –

Dear Father I have but little news to tell you. I am in my usual good health. Tell Eleanor that I am sorry I cannot send her my likeness as there is no artist in this town. I believe however that I am stronger, stouter and I flatter myself looks better than ever I did in my life before. I have got all the money I wrought for and am able with some little

work I do to pass the winter very comfortably. There is no cold line and in fact this is just

[Rest of letter missing]

[4 June 1863, New Westminster, BC; to Eleanor Robb]

My dear Sister,

I received your letter dated March about three weeks ago. I could not answer it any earlier for the simple reason that where I was then I could neither get pens ink or papers. I was then working on Burrows Inlet an arm of the sea that comes in about 8 miles from here. Three other parties and I took the contract of cutting a water ditch for a saw mill about eleven weeks ago and we only got it finished last week. We made pretty well of it averaging nearly 12 shillings per day and board which is considered good wages in this part of the country. I just wish you could see what kind of a place we had to run it through. Of course it was all through the woods 'and such woods'. You may remember a little song that commenced 'Some love to roam through the dark sea foam Where the wild winds whistle free But a chosen land on the mountain land And a life in the woods for me Now Eleanor you may just put it down for a dead certainty that the fellow who wrote that song was either a fool or had never saw any more woods than is contained in a gentlemen's park. You can have no possible idea what a forest is in its primitive state. In the first place the trees grow almost as thick as they can stand, and such trees. Why the largest I ever saw at home were mere walking sticks in comparison. They run from three to five, ten, and very often 15 and sixteen feet in diameter and from two to three hundred feet in length. I think it is Sam Slick who says that it is impossible to look at the falls of Niagara without thinking of a cotton mill and I am sure I cannot look at one of those monsters without thinking of David Grainger. Then fancy that those fellows have been tumbling down for centuries and are lying in every stage of rottenness someplaces three and four deep add to this a thick growth of underbrush and you can just fancy

what pleasure one would have with 'a chosen land' in such a place. Why three miles walk is enough to tire one thoroughly for two days. You may guess its pretty bad when A.R. cares, even Canadians who I sometimes think are born with an axe in their hands [?].

I think it very singular that you have not had a letter from me before you wrote as I wrote to you immediately after I came down country. The week before Christmas I think it was and also once since that. I had a letter from John the day before I started for the Inlet. it was the first intimation I had of the death of poor James it also told me of Uncle Whites death. I meant to have written to John immediately after I went there but could get not an opportunity. John will think it very ungrateful of me and I would not like to have him think so as he is a man whom I esteem and admire as much for a friend as I love him as a brother. You can just tell him that I will write to him in about three weeks from now. I also mean to write to Frank McRoberts at the same time. Tell Frank I expected a letter from him before this and if he has not written to do so immediately on pain of my heaviest displeasure. The same mail that brought your last letter also brought one from E. Murdock enclosing one from Alex Robb. I was very glad to get them especially Ellen's. I write to her by this mail. Dear Sister I don't think that I will go up country this summer as I am afraid I will not have enough money to do so with any prospect of success. The four of us however who are in company are thinking of sending up two of the party to prospect a claim for next season. The two that remains below to give an equal quantity of money and work down here and try and make as much as will keep the others next winter in case they should come down broke. Two of the party are Californian miners and very decent steady men so of course it will be them will be sent. Whether this arrangement will stand good or not I cannot tell but I think it will. In the meantime I am going out to the Inlet to work for a month or two and then I mean to cut hay plenty of which grows on the banks of the Frazer and for which a good market can be had in Victoria. I don't know that I have anything more to say although I am almost ashamed of my short letters after getting your fine long ones. Give my best love to Father. Tell him I expect a letter from him in your next. To Lizzie, Mary, Susanna, Andrew, John, Martha and the rest of them at home. Give my love to Aunt Ellen and tell her I would sometimes like to spend

a Saturday night with her. To all my old friends I need not mention their names for you know them.

And believe me dear Eleanor
Your affect brother
Alex Robb

[10 May 1868, Nicola Lake, BC; to Susanna Robb]

For a long time my conscience has been telling me that it was time for me to write home and when I got your dear kind letter it's voice got too strong to be any longer disregarded. You cannot tell how much your letter interested me containing as it did so much news of things and people whom I am still very much interested in. You are perfectly right in your conjecture that I never received the letter containing poor Lizzie's likeness. I am going to send down to New Westminster for it. In future if you would simply direct your letters to Lytton British Columbia I would be sure to receive them. By directing them to New Westminster Lytton they are just as likely to stop at one place as some to the other and the two places are about 150 miles apart.

Would you believe it, the first intimation I had that John and Martha had a little daughter was by the mere accident of her being sick and you mentioning it. I never before heard that ... there was such a being in existence as Jennie Robb.

I am very sorry that I cannot comply with your request about the likeness. I think though, that when you hear my reasons you will be satisfied that [it] is not my fault if I don't send it to you. In the first place, I don't think there is a single photographic artist in this colony or at least there is none nearer than Victoria, and that is nearly 300 miles from here, and in the second how far do you think I would have to go by the most direct road to visit my nearest white neighbour. You would never guess, so I will just tell you. I would have to travel as nearly as I can judge (for the track has never been measured) between 45 and 50 miles. I have heard indeed that two men have settled about eight or ten miles from here, but I have never seen them.

And now I think I hear you say 'What on earth can you be doing in such a place'? Well I am just starting a ranch or farm for a friend

of mine who wishes to commence farming and stock raising here and I will most likely stop here a year at least if not longer. I have never seen a place in my life so admirably adapted for both pursuits as this is. There is a valley here about seven miles long and from one to two [miles] wide, mostly of the very best kind of prairie land. It requires neither draining, clearing or any other improvement to grow the best kind of wheat barley oats or vegetables of all kinds for years to come. What would they think at home of land that would grow wheat or oats ten or twelve years in succession and the last crop be as good as the first, and yet I have seen within this last month thousands of acres of such land.

According to the land laws of this country any British subject may take up 160 acres of land in any place in the country by merely paying the registration fees which is only ten shillings and settling on it. After he has done a certain quantity of work on it you get what is called a 'certificate of improvement' which is in face neither more nor less than a government title to the land. This you may sell or otherwise dispose of as if it were your own land. In fact it is so only that when the land comes to be surveyed (which may not be for years) you or your successor have to pay government one dollar per acre for it. There is a wonderful difference between this and paying twenty pounds or so per acre for leave to farm a patch of hungry land from which one may be turned out by the mere caprice of a landlord.

But this is not the only advantage connected with this valley. On each side of it, for I don't know how many miles, rise a succession of gently rising hills. These, though unfit for agriculture, afford in summer the best run for stock I ever saw. They are covered with a kind of grass which I think is peculiar to this part of the world. It is called bunch grass from its growing in tufts or bunches. These tufts are sometimes two or three feet apart while in other places they grow quite close to one another, the spaces between the bunches being quite bare. It grows from about 4 inches to 2 feet in height, and I saw anything in the world that appears to agree with animals so well as it does. In one month after it commences to grow in the spring cattle or horses which can scarcely walk will be rolling fat. As a general thing animals do very well in the winter by what they can pick up over the hills, but it is safer to make a little provision for them in case a very deep snow should come and last a long time.

It is true that there is no market nearer this than 50 miles, but in a very few years all this valley will be settled up and a good road made

to it. Until that time most of a farmers' dependence will be in his stock which he can drive any place but there is a sure fortune to be made out of them by any one who has capital enough to buy enough of them to get a start with.

I forgot to mention that there is a young man along with me here a partner of the person for whom I am making the farm. However uninteresting these things may be to you my dear sister I mention them because in the first place I have no news to tell you and in the next I want to show you that I am not half so much to be pitied as from the way you and Eleanor writes you appear to think I should be. No person is to be pitied in a new country who has got good health and knows how to work. The only thing that I regret about leaving home is the leaving those that I love behind me and could I only see them once more (which I hope yet to do) I would be perfectly satisfied to end my days in this country.

Give my best love to father. Tell him I will write to him in a short time, to Andrew Mary and all the rest, and believe me dear Sukie [Susanna] your loving brother [Signed] Alexander Robb.

p.s. When you are writing to Eleanor tell her I received her letter and will answer it shortly. [Signed] Sandy.

[14 December 1868, Nicola Lake, BC; to his father]

Dear father, I have been reproaching myself for some time for not answering your last kind letter which I received in the latter end of October. 'Tis true that I have been very very busy, but still I might very well have spared enough time to write to you.

When I last wrote I told you that I had come up here and that I was much pleased with the looks of the country. In fact it would be impossible to be otherwise than pleased with it for it is beyond comparison by far the best part of British Columbia I have yet seen. It lies in what is called the dry belt of British Columbia, and indeed it may be well called so for a shower is rather a rare occurrence. In summer it is warm and dry and in winter it is cold and dry. Of course it would be impossible to grow any kind of crop without artificial watering so when any one is looking out for a farm he has got to look out for a place near a creek where the water can be easily got on the land one

wants to cultivate. The irrigation of the land is done by making small water furrows about three feet apart after the land is harrowed and rolled. Into these furrows the water is conducted by a large ditch or drain and allowed to run until the land is pretty well saturated which generally takes from twelve to twenty four hours according to the nature of the soil. The operation has to be repeated three or four times during the season and altogether it is a very tedious job requiring a great deal of patience in the person who conducts it. There is this advantage in it that one can generally control a crop and there is always beautiful harvest weather.

I think I told you in my last letter that a young Englishman and I were the two first white men who came to this district. When we came here our nearest neighbour was from 40 to 50 miles from us. Since then quite a number of settlers have located in the valley making it much more pleasant and safe to live in.

I do not think that there was any real danger at any time and the Indians have been very quiet and civil, but still one feels a little more secure from having a few neighbours around. I think that I am a little of a favourite with the redskins. I have managed to pick up enough of their language so that I can understand what they say, and when I promise anything to them I always keep my word and these two things go far to get one in the good graces of the savages.

Most of the Indians round here are well off, nearly all of them owning more or less horses, some of them cattle. One man (a chief) has nearly 200 horses and 20 or 30 cows. As a general thing the more wealth an Indian has the more wives he keeps. One old fellow who is the grand chief of the district has no less than seven wives and thirty five children living besides twelve children and I don't know how many wives dead. He is not more than 50 years old yet and if he only keeps on he bids fair to rival Brigham Young.

I don't know whether this yarn about Indians will interest you very much. If I thought it did, I could write you enough about them. Perhaps you would rather hear of what I am doing myself. As I told you in my last letter I came here to work for a friend of mine who wished to start farming here. I wrought for him until a month ago when I quit and took up a place about 7 miles farther up the lake. I have gone into partnership with another man a Canadian named Frank Mickle, I believe an honest decent man. We took up our 320 acres of land and I think that if you only saw it, it would please you. It is nearly all quite as level as the levellest part of your holms without

a solitary stick on it. Neither is there on the whole lot a stone as large as a hen egg. The soil is a deep black loam and I will be greatly disappointed if it does not in time make one of the finest, if not the very best farms, in British Columbia. As for grass there are thousands of acres of it of the very best quality on the rising ground adjoining the flat on which we are located. We have also got 40 head of cattle and 5 yoke of work oxen. These last we intend to sell as soon as we get through our spring work.

You need not think, dear father, that I had money enough to buy these cattle and what implements we require besides food for a year without going into debt. So anxious however was my partner that I should go in with him (he being a blacksmith and not knowing much about farming) that he lent me money enough to pay my share and promises to wait for it until I can pay him. It is the first time I ever have owed a dollar in this country and I hate the idea of it as bad as I hate poison but I am so heartily sick and weary of working for other people that I am willing to take my chance however desperate so that I may get quit of it. I would not be a bit afraid but that I could soon make enough to put me out of debt if there was either a road or a market here but there is neither one or other and it costs as much to pack produce on horses or mules to where there is a market as it is worth when it gets there. However I hope for the best and at any rate I can do no worse than I have done these last six or seven years besides having a great deal more comfort. A man with a small amount of capital saved from £500 to £1,000 could make himself independent in a very few years by raising stock for which this country is peculiarly adapted.

The winter for so far has been mild and pleasant and I think is likely to continue so. Last winter was the coldest ever known in the colony. For six weeks in Lytton the thermometer was from 15 to 28 degrees below zero and a little way further up the mercury froze. You cannot imagine anything like such weather.

Tell Susanna that I sent to Westminster and got the letter with poor Lizzie's likeness but there was none of hers as she said there was. If she does not wish me to be very angry she had better sit down and write to me and enclose her likeness just as soon as this reaches you. Give my best love to her and all the rest and to John Martha and the little ones, and believe me dear father ever your affectionate son [Signed] Alexander Robb.

P.S. When writing direct to Nicola Lake, Spence's Bridge, British Columbia.

[8 December 1869, Lytton, BC; to Susanna Robb]

My dear sister, I take the opportunity of Mr Alexander McWha's going home to Ireland of writing to you. I would have done so long ago but that I have not been at home all summer. You know that what I call home is a place called Nicola Lake, but unfortunately our crop this year was a failure owing to the scarcity of water. As soon as I saw that we were going to have little or no crop I left my partner to take care of the stock and place and started for Cariboo. There I stopped all summer and have only been down here about three weeks. I did not make a great deal up in Cariboo but still I done much better than by stopping down below and am very well satisfied that I went there.

Cariboo is much changed since I was there last in 1864. Everything is much cheaper than they were then and although perhaps fewer men accumulate large fortunes still the majority of miners live much better and are a great deal more comfortable than they were at that time. Mr McWha will be able to tell you all about the mines much better than I can as he has been up there for over six years so I will leave him to tell you anything you wish to know of them.

I hardly think that I will be likely to go up there again for some time but it is just possible I may do so next spring. In fact it all depends on what word I may have from there during the winter. I would like better to stop at the farm during the summer and attend to the ranch as it would pay me better in the long run. We have now about twenty five cows that we can milk and if I can only manage to make butter I can do very well. I could find a ready sale for all the butter I could make at two shillings per pound and as the feed of the cows costs nothing I think or rather I know that there is plenty of money to be made by the business.

The only trouble is whether I can make the butter good or not but I rather think I can. Do not you know of some decent girl whom you could send out to help me If you know of such a one just send her along as I think that a good wife would be the making of me just

now. She may be of any age from twenty to forty, long or short, fair or dark, money or no money, but I would like her to be industrious, decent, tolerably intelligent and at least middling good looking. Seriously if I had only the means I would come home and get married but at present my circumstances will not permit me doing so. So if you know of any girl who will answer the above description and who wants to get married very badly tell her to come along and she will find a tolerably good husband in your big brother. I believe Mr A. McWha is going to bring his niece with him to this country and my intended can come along for company.

A good many of my acquaintances have left this country lately on visits to their friends in Canada and Europe. Amongst them is one who will be likely to pay you a visit. His name is Mr John Clapperton of Queens County, Ireland. He and I have been acquainted for over 7 years and during that time I have received many kindnesses from him. Any kindness you can show him I will consider as a personal favour, and I can confidently recommend him to your acquaintance. You will find him a cultivated man and a gentleman in every respect.

I am likely to stop here a month or six weeks before I go to Nicola Lake. William McWha is not in very good health and wishes me to attend to his business while he goes down to Victoria for a change of air. Bill has been a very good friend of mine and I cannot very well refuse to do this much for him although I would much rather be at home.

I have been in very good health this last year and feel better and stronger than I have done for some years previously. I do not know that I have anything more to add. Give my love to father. Tell Sam I got his letter ... and was very glad to hear from him. When writing to Eleanor tell her I also received her letter and that I am going to write to her before long. Love to all the rest and believe me, my dear sister your affectionate brother [Signed] Alexander Robb. P.S. Mr McWha has promised to bring me out any photographs you may send. Be sure and send yours and Mary's and the boys if possible. [Signed] Sandy.

[17 September 1870, Nicola Lake, BC; to Susanna Robb]

I received your letter with the likenesses you sent out by Alex[ander] McWha about four weeks ago and it has taken me all the time since

then to make myself sure that you have not been imposing someone else's likeness on me for yours and Sam's. Mary's I would have known very well. What a stupid ass I have been to be always calling you my little sister and my *little pet*. Why you are a woman now and although my reason told me long ago that you must be one still I had to see your likeness to convince me fully that you were anything else than the little girl I remember so well and I do not think it will make you too vain my darling (you see I cannot avoid pet names when I think of you) when I say that I think that you are a very nice little girl too and so thinks everyone to whom I have shown your likenesses but that is not many for it is not everyone in this country I would show my sister's likeness to. I can assure you that I am not a little proud of my sisters. I like Sam's likeness too. He has got a fine open honest look about him. I do not think that such a face could belong to a person who would be guilty of a mean action.

Many thanks my dear sister for the socks you so thoughtfully sent me. They will be a comfort to my soul or soles this winter. Socks are a thing it is very difficult to get good in this country. I pay from three to four shillings per pair for them and the average length of time they last is from two to three days without holes.

Tell Sam that I am much obliged to him for the knife he sent. It is almost a chest of tools in itself. Your last letter I received two or three days ago. It contained Aunt Ellen's likeness but I suppose you concluded not to send Frank's until next time. Be sure and do not forget and if you have got a spare one of Andrew's send it also. I want to have the whole family.

I need scarcely say how much I have been grieved and disappointed that neither you nor father could see the propriety of sending out some young lady for a wife for your hopeful brother. Surely among so many female friends as you have got you might find *one* who for your sake if not for mine would be willing to travel eight or ten thousand miles to find a husband in the person of your brother. As I told you before I am not particular to a *shade* one way or another so I think that the young lady you mention under the head of No. 3 would suit me to a nicety.

My partner got back from Canada in the beginning of summer and brought a wife with him. She appears to be quite a nice woman and I have been more comfortable since she came here than I have been before for a long time. We all live together for the present and most probably will do so all winter and I can assure you that it [is] quite a relief to me to get rid of cooking.

Mostly on account of my partner being so long in getting back from Canada but partly for other (?) reasons I could not get to Cariboo (?) this summer in time to represent my claim. On account of the severity of the winter all claims are laid over from the 1st November until the 1st May. Of course as I was not there at the latter time the ground was open for anyone. Well according to my usual luck my claim (that is the one I had last fall) has turned out to be one of the most likely ones for a big thing that has been in the Cariboo country for years and although not one dollar has yet come out of it nor will likely for months yet, four thousand dollars has been offered and refused for a half interest in it.

Mr Clapperton that I wrote to you about has returned to this country. He had not time to go north as he intended to do. I do not think that you would have thought him quite so nice as you did Jim Allen but I am sure you would have liked him very much. I liked Jim better than any stranger I have ever met. I think that he is not only nice but good. If any of you are writing to him give him my best respects. I am very glad to hear that Frank has got such a good situation. It is much better than emigration and if he only tries hard to do his duty and studies his business thoroughly he will not only come to like it but his employers will like him.

Give my best love to father and all the rest and believe me dear sister yours [Signed] Sandy Robb.

P.S. Whoever directs my letters in future will please not put Esq. to my name. It appears to be so very ridiculous [Signed] Sandy.

[23 May 1871, Nicola Lake, BC; to Susanna Robb]

My dear sister, Your very welcome letter came to hand about three weeks ago and as I am going to start for Lytton (our Post Office) today I will take the opportunity of answering it. Just fancy, it will take me 3 days to go down and as many more to come back and yet this is the only way unless by a chance that we have of communicating with the outside world. We did expect to have a direct mail of our own before this time and the legislative assembly actually granted us funds for carrying mail, but it appears that the governor vetoed the vote as he had no money to spare for that purpose.

You may possibly have herd that by a vote of the parliaments of Canada and this country we now belong to the Dominion of Canada or will be as soon as the home government gives its assent to the bill which we expect will be about the month of June or July. Great benefits are expected by some people from the change, and although I am not so sanguine as some are, still I have no manner of doubt but that it will do some good. Among other benefits we expect to derive from the confederation is that of having the full management of our own local affairs, of which we are in a great measure deprived under the present form of government. You see that our present assembly or parliament is composed of only one third of what we call popular members that is those who are appointed by the people, while the remaining two thirds are what is called official members and are appointed by the governor and are totally irresponsible to the people at large. It is very easy to see to what abuses such a system is likely to give rise. Of course where people have the voting of their own salaries it is only likely that they will have good ones and the officials certainly do rate their services at a very high figure considering what they have to do while it is scarcely possible for any measure, however necessary it may be for the good of the country to pass through the assembly if it interferes in any way with the interests of these gentlemen. Under confederation we expect these abuses will be done away with. *All* the members of the legislature will be elected by the people and it will be our own faults if we do not get laws to suit ourselves.

Another benefit which we are to derive from joining ourselves to Canada is that in the terms of confederation the government of Canada binds itself to commence a railroad from Canada to the Pacific Coast within two years and finish it inside of ten. Most people think that the road will be completed in a little over half that time and I understand that a party of surveyors have arrived already from Canada to look out for the best route for the proposed line. It is just possible that they may bring the road through this valley and at any rate it cannot miss us by more than fifty miles and we think nothing of that distance in this country. Go where it will, it will be of immense benefit to everyone as the very money which will be spent in it's construction will be a big item among such a small population as this colony has got while the stimulus it will give to industry of all kinds will be of incalculable value to us.

I am very sensible, my dear sister, that this must appear to be a very strange kind of letter to write to you but I really have not got anything

to say that I think would interest you. I am and have been in good health and with ordinary good luck I think that in two or three years more I will be not indeed rich or anything like it but at least out of debt and independent and you may be sure that the first use I will make of the first money I can get a hold of will be to take me where I can eat my Christmas dinner with you.

Poor Andrew appears to have had a narrow escape of it. I cannot tell you how thankful I am that he has got better. It would have been such a blow on father and all of you had anything serious happened to him. How is John The last letter I had from him he appeared to be very poorly but I think that some of you would have let me know had he not been any better. In your next letter be sure and let me know how he is. Many thanks for Frank's 'carte'. What a big fellow he has got to be. It makes me think myself quite old to look at him. I hope he is doing well and giving satisfaction in his present situation.

My object in going to Lytton now is to take down some butter and get things from the store. It is a very unpleasant trip at this season, as the snow is melting on the mountains and the creeks and rivers are very high. Fortunately there is now a bridge across the worst and largest river. Last year I had to ride my horse and make him swim across it and I do not care about taking such risks oftener than is necessary as it is both a wide and rapid river larger, I should think, than the Shannon (that is at this season; at other times it is quite easy to cross almost anywhere). Give my love to father and all at home also to all my friends and believe me my dear sister your loving brother
[Signed] Alexander Robb.

[24 February 1872, Nicola Lake, BC; to Eleanor Robb]

My dear sister, I received your long and very welcome letter three days ago and the same mail brought me one from Sam dated nearly two months later. Now Eleanor dear, if I could find in my heart to scold you I would certainly do so. What on earth could put into your head, if only for one moment, that I had forgotten you. It is very true that I have been very remiss about writing but I may well accuse you all of the same fault for from all the friends I have at home I do not believe I get on an average more than one letter in six months. You little know, my dear sister, what it is to be alone in the world or you

would certainly never think of accusing me of forgetfulness. Don't you know Eleanor that one must love someone and what have I got to love but my father yourself and my friends at home. It is true that I have got lots of friends, as the world calls them, and I believe I may say without any vanity that I am generally regarded as not a bad sort of a fellow but I do thoroughly believe that there is not within some thousands of miles of where I sit tonight one solitary individual who would care too straws if I were dead and buried tomorrow. Do you think then that I am likely to forget those whom I know do care for me.

It now only wants three days of being ten years since I left home and I can safely say that during that time there has not been one day nor scarcely a waking hour I have not thought of home. Not that I am what is called homesick but as I said before one must love something. But enough on this subject.

I was extremely glad to hear such good accounts of all the young folks as you gave me (you see I am beginning to put myself on the old list, though *you* may possibly object to it). What a comfort it must be to father to see them all doing so well and keeping themselves so respectable. I myself feel almost as proud of them as if they were my own boys. You most likely have heard that I wrote to Sam asking him what his idea was about coming to this country. I believed and indeed was about satisfied that I could find him a situation, much better as far as salary was concerned than the one he is now in. However since the folks at home were unwilling that he should come I consider he did quite right in staying where he is. He is certainly much happier than he would likely be here and that after all is everything. I believe after all it was as much selfishness in my part as interest in Sam's welfare that induced me to write to him for I do long so to see someone of my own kindred.

I think I hear you say 'then why don't you come home and see them' But I am afraid that I must deny myself that gratification for some time to come. I am just now beginning to get my head a little above water and I am afraid if I were to take such a plunge as a visit to home would be, I would drown altogether. I am in hopes though that if God spares me I will before many years be able to see you all once more.

You can scarcely expect to receive such long letters from me as you are able to write to me, I have so very little to write about. I am well in health as indeed I always am. As to my worldly prospects why I am

getting along about as well as I expected that is to say slowly but I believe steadily. You may be a long time in getting this letter as communication is very uncertain at this time of the year. I am going to write to Dundonald by this mail. Give my best love to John and the children. Do not let it be so long again before you write as it was the last time and with warmest love believe me dear sister your loving brother [Signed] Alexander Robb.

P.S. When writing direct to Nicola Lake, Lytton, British Columbia. New Westminster is 200 miles from here and I think your last letter must have been detained there. [Signed] Sandy.

[24 February 1872, Nicola Lake, BC; to Susanna Robb]

What can be the matter with you that I have not heard from you for so long. I had been waiting nearly all winter for a letter from you, always expecting one, and always being disappointed, and since I have heard that you are or have been so delicate I am and will be seriously uneasy unless I hear regularly from yourself. How I wish I could transplant you here for the next six months or as much longer as I could prevail on you to stop. Besides the comfort it would be to me to have you near me, I am satisfied that a few months in this high altitude and dry climate would completely restore your health, diseases of the chest being a thing almost unknown here. And what a comfort it would be to me to have you visit me if for ever so short a time! For I am afraid I am going to be very lonely now.

I may perhaps have mentioned to you that for these last eighteen months or so a brother of my former partner and his wife have been living with me. I have lately bought his farm and in a short time he and his wife will be moving to a place about twenty miles from here so I expect to be entirely alone. It is true that my old partner and his wife live only a little over a mile from here but I am afraid I will feel the want of company in the house. I will be very sorry too to part with Mrs Mickle (the woman who lives in the house with me). She has been as kind to me as if I had been her brother and I have come to like her almost as well as if she were my own sister. Her husband is gone now to put up a house on his new place and meanwhile his wife and a little girl are stopping here. I expect they will all leave for good in about two weeks.

This district is getting to be quite settled up. Three years and one half ago there was not one white settler within forty miles. Now there are twenty five within less than half that distance and we expect a further influx next summer. A good many too of the settlers have got wives and young families which gives the place something of a home look.

We have had a very severe winter here this year. It set in nearly a month earlier than usual and we have had more snow and more cold than I have seen for these last three years. On Christmas day the thermometer was down to 31 degrees below zero. You cannot fancy what such cold is, but it may give you an idea when I tell you that at 15 degrees lower mercury will freeze and strong brandy will become as thick as syrup. Had you such weather in your damp climate I do not believe anything could live but here we do not feel it so badly. It is however very lucky that even here such extreme cold is rare and never lasts longer than three or four days.

In spite however of the cold and snow cattle although they have neither any food but what they pick up, or any shelter but what they can find have generally done well. Some of mine are good beasts and now the weather is beautiful snow almost all gone and too warm to wear a coat.

Tell Samuel I received his letter 4 or 5 days ago and that I think he done quite right in refusing to come here, so long as the folks at home were unwilling he should come. The same mail also brought me one from Eleanor. I spent part of yesterday evening in replying to her.

We are all expecting to have a regular mail here next summer and I hope we will not be disappointed. We are, some of us at least, also expecting to have a road made but I am afraid we will be disappointed in this matter. At present everything has to be taken in and out of here on horses or mules backs.

Give my best love to father. I will write to him ere long, to Mary, Andrew, Sam and Frank and all my friends and believe me dear Susanna your loving brother [Signed] Sandy Robb.

[8 July 1873, Nicola Lake, BC; to his father]

My dear father, last mail but one brought me 3 letters from home, one from Eleanor, one from Susanna and from yourself. I need not

tell you how much I was pleased to hear from yourself directly once more but I suppose it is my own fault that I do not hear oftener as I know that I have been writing to my sisters much more regularly than I have to you.

You asked me, my Dear father, whether I ever think of home! If you had been as many years as I have been away from home you would not have thought it necessary to ask the question. Since the day I left Dundonald until now, there has never one day or scarcely an hour passed but I *have* thought of home and the dear ones who live there. Situated as I am in a wild country, with nothing but mere acquaintances around me, is it not natural that my thoughts should continually revert to those places where I was once so happy and that my heart should cling to the people whom I love and who I believe love me perhaps much better than I deserve.

For your kind offer to assist me in case I should think of coming to see you, I can only say that I am deeply grateful, and if I can manage it at all I will try and avail myself of it. I think it would make me feel ten years younger to see you all once more. I had intended to try and come home a year from next fall and with the assistance you offer me, I have no doubt that I could manage to do so but for one thing. The fact is that I am afraid I will have [to] go to Victoria this winter. I have not been so well as usual these 4 or 5 months and I am beginning to think that I want change of air. I have now lived 8 years in this high altitude and I think that I want a sniff of the salt water to put me to rights again. Victoria is the capital city of this country. It is situated on the seaside and enjoys a beautiful climate and I have no doubt but a month or so down there will make me all straight again. The only thing that I am sorry about is that it will take money which I had intended for a better purpose; I mean I meant to see you with it. I am almost sorry that I have told you anything about this matter as it may make you uneasy and I can assure that there is no occasion for feeling so, as I am actually not sick. I only feel not so robust as usual.

Times are very dull here this summer and farm produce when it comes to market is likely to be very cheap even if it can be sold at all which I greatly doubt. We were expecting the Canadian Pacific Railroad would be started this summer which would have made things quite lively but the way things look now it is not likely to be started for a year yet if then, and everything has fallen in consequence. Bullocks which last year would bring £12 cannot now be sold for £8, the few

which are sold fetching not more than 2-1/2d. per lb. dead weight. This is quite different from the prices you mention in your letter but they would pay very well here even at that figure if we had only a ready sale. It cost little or nothing to raise cattle here and one can keep an almost unlimited number. Lots of people who started ten or twelve years ago with only a few head of stock have now from 1 to 4,000 each. It would do you good to see the stock in this valley now. Not that the breed is any extra but the condition is surprising and the abundance of feed makes them grow very large. I sold a two year old bullock last year which weighed between 900 and 1,000 lbs. of beef sinking offal and I never fed him 1 lb. of anything since the day he was calved.

We have had a very backward season for so far and very cold and what is more surprising a great deal of rain. This last week however has been fair and very warm and everything is growing very fast. The grass is better than I ever saw it and when I tell you there is about 70 miles long and 10 or 15 miles wide of it for a few hundred cattle to run over you will agree with me in thinking they are not likely to starve to death. Mine now can scarcely walk they are so fat.

I mean to start haying tomorrow. The hay we get here is a natural grass which we call rye grass. It is however nothing like the grass of the same name at home. It grows very tall from 5 to 8 or 10 feet high and it is awful hard work to mow it as the stems are almost as thick as pipe shanks and very hard and tough. It makes pretty good hay when cut in season and keeps cattle in the winter even if not cut as the stems are so strong that the snow cannot break it down and cover it.

Tell Susannah that I have not been getting any papers these last few weeks and that I am going to write to her and scold her about it. Supper is just ready so I must finish. Give my love to John, Eleanor and all at home and believe me dear father your affectionate son
[Signed] Alexander Robb.