

# Clan MacLaren Society of North America (CMSNA)

Low / Lowe and  
Lowry / Lowery / Lowrey



An ancient clan with origins that predate the use of surnames, Clan MacLaren derives its name from Labhran (Laurin or Lawrence) of Ardveche, the hereditary Abbot of Achthus in Balquhiddy in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Many variations have been accumulated through translations from Gaelic as well as transcribed records. Other surnames adopted by Clan families can be traced to different sources though not in all cases.

The collection of surnames within a clan are often called *septs* though this term should not be applied to those derived from the name of the clan. More correctly, it designates affiliated groups that have joined by acknowledging the authority of the clan's chief. The *sept* word is used much more loosely today.

Many Scottish surnames have deviated from their earliest origins from a basic trend among Indo-European languages called *ellipsis*, the dropping of a final sound in a word. Lack of "Mac" or "Mc" (meaning "child of" or simply "of") beginning is not a matter of concern. The desire to obscure association with a highland clan from British authorities during times of trouble prompted such foreshortening. Spelling variations are also insignificant. The widespread maintenance of written records, a relatively recent practice, lacked standardized spelling of names. Choices were often based on the decisions of those recording life events such as birth and marriage.

The previous Chief of Clan MacLaren was the late Donald MacLaren of MacLaren. Donald, who was a retired member of the British Foreign Service, succeeded his father as Chief in 1966. The former Chief's family holds property that includes Creag an Tuirc, the hill overlooking the village of Balquhiddy, and the ancient rallying point of the Clan.

The CMSNA continues to follow the process of the Lyon Court relative to

establishing a new Chief for Clan MacLaren. Establishing a new Chief and the granting of Arms is a lengthy process.

## About the Low Surnames

Various spellings of the Low surname, including Lowe, Lowis, Lowse and McLoy, are generally English or Scottish without a single clear derivation. Possibilities range from description of a physical attribute (short stature), combat performance (from the Germanic word for *lion* and/or the Anglo-Norman French word for *wolf*) or topography near homesite location (from the Old English word for a tumulus mound). In Scotland, a shortened version of *Lawrence* is more likely. The surname might be derived from the Scots word *lowis*, borrowed from Gaelic to denote places where multiple lochs are adjacent or connected, evidenced by Loch of the Lowes – a designated wildlife reserve near Dunkeld.

## About the Lowry Surnames

Various spellings of the Lowry surname, ranging from Lawrie through Loughrie to Lowry, are commonly found in English-speaking countries throughout the world and generally accepted as a diminutive form of Lawrence (spelled Labhran in Scottish Gaelic). Recorded in medieval documents throughout what is today the United Kingdom, the surname has also been tied to the Gaelic word "Labhras" which translates to "influential" or "illustrious." In Ireland the Lowry surname

was often associated with Gaelic nobility with Lowry families recognized for their social and cultural contributions to the regions in which they settled.

### **What DNA Tells Us**

There is no known connection between Low and Lowry families beyond the possible derivation from a common source word. To date, DNA studies have shown no basis for linking the names. Interestingly, many, but certainly not all, Lowrys have ancestors from ancient Scandinavian kingdoms, probably meaning they descend from Vikings who settled in Scotland in the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire.

### **Migration**

Lows and Lowrys migrated to America, Australia, Canada and South Africa the same ways as other Highland Scots: transported as Jacobites and other classes of criminals, military veterans enamored with the areas they had been assigned and others in pursuit of economic opportunities unavailable in their homeland. Unlike Scottish Lows, many Lowry families migrated first to the Plantation of Ulster in what we know today as Northern Ireland. Conflicts and increasing land rents compelled later generations to leave in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

The earliest Lows and Lowrys found in North American records arrived in the

American and Canadian colonies during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **MacLaren Genealogy Project**

The Clan MacLaren Society of North America (CMSNA) maintains a vigorous program to research the genealogy of Clan families. Society members are encouraged to contribute their own research to our growing database to preserve their family histories or, if they are new to genealogy, use our members-only genealogy website as a starting point for their work. The online database holds records on tens of thousands of individuals spanning centuries from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup>. The numbers will increase as family lines are connected and documented, more information becomes publicly available and ongoing research efforts produce results.

To augment our efforts in genealogy, CMSNA participates in a Y-DNA project at FamilyTree DNA. The project is open to all males bearing a Clan surname regardless of spelling or CMSNA membership. The goal of the project is to gain a better understanding of the deep ancestry forming the Clan's origins and history.

Clan MacLaren's Genealogist is Arthur D. Lowe.  
[genealogist@maclarengenealogy.org](mailto:genealogist@maclarengenealogy.org)

### **About CMSNA**

The Clan MacLaren Society of North America was chartered in Georgia in 1981.

The CMSNA set broad goals in support of Clan MacLaren and the Scottish community in general. The CMSNA has a multifaceted purpose:

- 1) to support, promote, and publicize the Clan MacLaren in the US and Canada;
- 2) to promote celebration of the family heritage of MacLarens;
- 3) to inform members and others about the history, traditions, and accomplishments of Clan MacLaren;
- 4) to provide a vehicle for interaction and a common bond among North American MacLarens;
- 5) to promote education.

### **Eligibility for Membership**

One automatically becomes a member of Clan MacLaren by birth, marriage, or adoption. Joining the CMSNA enables full participation in Clan activities and celebrations. To become a member, simply visit a CMSNA tent at one of the many Highland Games in the US and Canada or contact the Membership Secretary Debbie Patterson.

Email: [membership@clanmaclarena.org](mailto:membership@clanmaclarena.org)

(Revision: 12 Feb 2025)