

# Clan MacLaren Society of North America

Lawrence/Law/Lawson



## About Clan MacLaren Family Names

An ancient clan with origins that predate the use of surnames, Clan MacLaren derives its name from Labhran (pronounced in Gaelic as Laurin or Lawrence) of Ardveche, the hereditary Abbot of Achthus in Balquhiddy in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Abbot Laurence established his Celtic church in Perthshire. Many spelling variations have been accumulated through translations from Gaelic as well as transcribed records.

Other surnames adopted by clan families trace to others though not in all cases.

The collection of surnames of a clan are known as *septs*. The word, which means branches or divisions, was originally used to designate a small group affiliated with a clan and acknowledging the authority of the clan's chief. The word is used much more loosely today.

The current Chief of Clan MacLaren is Donald MacLaren of MacLaren. Donald, who is a retired member of the British Foreign Service, succeeded his father as Chief in 1966. Donald and his wife Maida have five children. The family property includes Creag an Tuirc, the hill overlooking the village of Balquhiddy, and the ancient rallying point of the Clan.

## About the Lawrence based Surnames

Whether spelled Lawrence, Law, Lawson, or some other way, the name declares the bearer to be a son or daughter of the Labhran. The prime origin of the Law surname would appear to stem from a basic trend that Indo-European languages share: ellipsis (dropping of a final sound in a word). The lack of a "Mac" or "Mc" beginning of the name (meaning "child of" or simply "of") should not be a matter of concern. A desire to obscure association with Clan MacLaren from British authorities during times of trouble for the Clan prompted foreshortening. Spelling variations are also not especially significant. The widespread maintenance

of written records, a relatively recent practice, caused standardized spelling of names, often based on choices of the people recording life events such as birth and marriage.

## Origins and Some History

The Lawrence or Laurence family names are not native to Scotland and find their roots in pre-Christian, Roman Italy. The Italian city of Laurentium gave rise to the male given name Laurentius, meaning 'the man from the city of laurels'. The laurel was a symbol of victory, it is likely a prime reason for the popularity of the name. Among early Christians, the name gained favor due to the martyred Archdeacon of Rome, St. Laurence. The (bay) laurel is also the plant badge of Clan MacLaren. From these roots are derived a multitude of spelling and pronunciation variations.

The Law surname might arise as a truncation or ellipsis (successive dropping of the final sounds) of Lawrence; a Medieval diminutive of Laurence. Patronymic sources are only one possible origin of the Law surname. Law (Laws and Lawes) is also a place name, referring to a mound, hillock, or burial ground with its origins in Old English "hlaw" or Northern Medieval English 'law'. Persons dwelling proximate to such topographic features might have been bestowed these toponymic surnames as family names. These conventions were spread by Anglo-Saxon and Norman conquests of Britain, and the administration of Scotland that

followed. There are ten or more places widely spread around Scotland with the topographical elements of 'law', and so there may be a general location aspect to the origin of the surname as well.

The name Lawson is a more complex patronymic of the names Law or Lawrence, and it carries the same relationship as the surname MacLaren. The term "son" is used in surnames throughout Scotland and is sometimes referred to as a means for Anglicizing a Scottish clan name.

From the discussion above, it can be seen how the surnames Law, Lawson, and particularly Lawrence, are connected with the surname MacLaren. The surname Law is a patronymic of names Lawrence or Lawrin.

The names Law, Lawson, and Lawrence were found in more than 20 counties in Scotland over the period from 1500 through the 1700's. They have spread far from their origins in the years since.

### **CMSNA 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 15th through the 21st. 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.

The CMSNA Genealogist is Arthur D. Lowe.

Email: [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. 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 Dave Elkin.

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

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