

Clan MacLaren Society of North America (CMSNA)

MacLaren Family Convention



Coats of Arms

Heraldry is poorly understood outside Europe simply because it was far less significant in local history. The most common misconception to correct is that a coat of arms belongs to a family. No, it belongs solely to one person. Rationale becomes clear when recognizing that the coat of arms was a vital tool for communications on ancient battlefields. With their Chief's symbol held high by someone standing near him warriors could

follow his movements, knew where to look for direction when conditions changed, orient themselves when confused and recognize the need to fall back to defend the Chief should opposition forces unexpectedly advance on his position.

Traditionally, upon the death of a Chief his arms would pass to his eldest surviving son. When there were no living offspring, arms would pass to another male family member, sometimes with much conflict and bloodshed when rights of inheritance were disputed. To eliminate such deadly conflicts, Scotland established a heraldic authority.

The Court of Lord Lyon

Established in 1592 during the reign of King James VI, the Court of Lord Lyon is the public body charged with maintaining the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland and also the responsibility for establishment of rights to a coat of arms and pedigree.

Lord Lyon King of Arms chooses the rightful heir to undifferenced arms and grants the heraldic title *Chief of the Name and Arms*. The title and its meaning contribute significantly to the second misconception – that Lord Lyon selects the Chief of a clan. While the *Chief of the Name and Arms* is traditionally the same person as the Chief of the clan, Lord Lyon does not have authority to designate a clan's Chief. No government court has jurisdiction to resolve competing claims for chief of a clan. The Chief of a clan derives authority from the

members of the clan. Distinction between the two roles can be significant.

Clan Fraser provides an example. On 1 May 1984, the Court of Lord Lyon decreed the 21st Lady Saltoun *Chief of the name and arms of the whole of Clan Fraser* though she was not descended from any Clan Fraser chief. Her ancestor was the older brother of the clan's first Chief. At the time of the decree, Simon Christopher Joseph Fraser, 15th Lord Lovat, had been Chief of Clan Fraser for decades. He continued in that role until his death in 1995. His line remains the line of the chief despite the award of arms to a separate family branch.

Impact on Clan MacLaren

Clan MacLaren has had no Chief since the passing Chief Donald MacLaren on 22 Jul 2023. While Donald had resolved his intentions on a successor, he had not yet completed the documents to establish the transfer of his arms. Since Donald's passing, multiple claimants have submitted applications to be *Chief of Name and Arms*. When Lord Lyon completes the process of reviewing the applications and issues a decree, the ruling will be strictly a heraldic matter without bearing on who becomes Chief of Clan MacLaren. It is not incumbent upon any clan to await such a decree from Lord Lyon.

Family Convention

A formal process exists, called a Family Convention, by which a clan facing our situation may select a new Chief without

resorting to the violence of ancient disputes. Derbhfine (pronounced DERR-iv-EE-nee), derived from Old Irish Law, is sometimes used as an alternate name for a Family Convention.

A Family Convention is initiated by submitting a petition to Lord Lyon. Granting the petition means appointing a supervisor chosen from the Officers of the Court of Lord Lyon. The supervisor's main responsibilities are ensuring that the selection process is fair, not subject to undue influence from any party or organization and the results clearly show an affirmative selection from the eligible voters participating then submitting a report to Lord Lyon. If appropriate, Lord Lyon will affirm that the clan has chosen a new Chief. This process bears no impact on Lord Lyon's selection of *Chief of the Name and Arms*.

Members of the Derbhfine Committee of Clan MacLaren have drafted a petition and begun collecting online signatures. A representative willing and able to present the petition will be identified. Should Lord Lyon accept our petition and appoint a supervisor, a date and location for our family Convention will be selected.

Appeal for Petition Signatures

Please sign our digital petition by the following link: [Clan MacLaren Family Convention Petition](#). All who sign the petition and provide a valid email address will receive updates on progress and developments. They will be notified when the presentation of the petition to Lord

Lyon has been scheduled, when a supervisor is assigned, when applications from candidates are approved, the scheduled date and location of the Family Convention and voting deadlines.

Candidates for Chief

Those seeking to receive consideration as Chief of Clan MacLaren must apply at least thirty (30) days before the date of the Family Convention via email to candidates@maclarengenealogy.org. Any lineal descendant of a former Chief of Clan MacLaren is eligible. Documentation proving the line must be submitted. A brief biography and a statement supporting candidacy will be required no later than fifteen (15) days prior to the Family Convention to ensure timely distribution to eligible voters. Candidates will be expected to personally address the Family Convention before votes are tabulated.

Voting

Those wishing to vote must register at least thirty (30) days before the date of the Family Convention via email to voters@maclarengenealogy.org. Eligibility requires a documented line of descent from a Clan MacLaren family. Birth with the surname of a Clan family (as found on the websites of the three Clan MacLaren societies) is not required; female lines of descent are equally valid. (NOTE: Those with family in the Clan MacLaren genealogy database may cite the Person ID of their closest lineal ancestor then document

descent from that person. Others registering must provide a more complete pedigree.) Signing the petition is not a requirement. Membership in a Clan society is not a requirement.

Clan MacLaren Societies

Founded more than six decades ago, the Scotland-based Clan MacLaren Society (<https://www.clanmaclarensociety.com>) boasts worldwide membership in its quest to support traditions and foster kinship.

The Clan MacLaren Society of North America (<https://www.clanmaclarena.org>) was founded more than three decades ago to promote the history, arts and traditions of Scotland and the Clan. CMSNA funds the MacLaren Surname DNA Project at Family Tree DNA (<https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/mac-laren>), the Clan MacLaren Genealogy database (<https://maclarengenealogy.org>) and the Clan MacLaren History website (<https://clanmaclaren-history.org>).

The Clan MacLaren Society of Australia (<https://clanmaclarenau.org>) is dedicated to promoting Scottish and MacLaren history and traditions among the descendants of Clan immigrants to Australia and New Zealand.