

A Chief for Clan Ewen? – Part I

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In my Chancellor's Message in the last issue of this *Journal*¹ I announced that the Lord Lyon² plans to hold a 'family convention'³ in Scotland to determine whether a chiefship for Clan Ewen should be officially re-established. The family convention is to include 'leading members' of families with names related to Ewing, including Ewings, McEwens, Ewans, etc.⁴ The Clan Ewen Society in Scotland has been trying to get the Lord Lyon to do this for something like twenty years, and finally he has expressed the intention of doing so. Though he has not yet announced a date for this convention, our impression is that it will occur sometime this year. I invited interested members of the *Ewing Family Association (EFA)* to begin a discussion about whether we should take a position as an organization with respect to this matter, and if so, what it should be. There was a good discussion of this on the *EFA Forum* at

(*EwingFamilyAssociation@GoogleGroups.com*),

where a parallel discussion arose regarding the name of the *Ewing Family Association*. This article addresses only the matter of the Lord Lyon. See my Chancellor's Message on page 45 for some thoughts about the issue of our organization's name.

What is a Clan?

One thing that became clear to me in the course of the discussion is that people mean a lot of different things when they say the word 'clan', and they don't all mean the same thing even when they say 'Scottish Clan'. I urge everyone to read at least the Wikipedia article about Scottish Clans⁵ and Thor Ewing's articles on his Scottish Clans website⁶ and page 20 of this issue of the *Journal*. The meaning and nature of clans in Scotland has evolved over the years, but the Court of the Lord Lyon in Edinburgh remains the well-established and longstanding authority on what constitutes a Scottish Clan and who is in charge. To be sure, we could ignore how the word 'clan' is and has been used in Scotland, but to me

¹ Ewing, David Neal. Chancellor's Message, *Ewing Family J.*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (May 2011), pp. 49-51.

² From Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyon_Court):

The Court of the Lord Lyon, also known as the Lyon Court, is a standing court of law which regulates heraldry in Scotland. Like the College of Arms in England it maintains the register of grants of arms, known as the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland, as well as records of genealogies.

The Lyon Court is a public body, and the fees for grants of arms are paid to HM Treasury. It is headed by the Lord Lyon King of Arms, who must be legally qualified, as he has criminal jurisdiction in heraldic matters, and the court is fully integrated into the Scottish legal system, including having a dedicated prosecutor, known in Scotland as a Procurator Fiscal.

³ www.lyon-court.com/lordlyon/656.html

⁴ You can find a definition of 'leading members' in the material linked to in footnote 3, specifically in the language: "It does seem appropriate, however, to consult with a well established clan or family association where such exists." I have corresponded with the Lord Lyon and it is plain that he considers the *EFA* to be one such; the *Clan Ewen Society of Scotland* is another.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_clans

⁶ <http://ThorEwing.net/clans/clanorigins>



Lord Lyon King of Arms (left) and the Duke of York (centre) proceeding to St Giles' Cathedral in 1933

this seems incompatible with honoring our Scottish heritage. We could certainly start an American clan without regard to what the Lord Lyon might think, but what relationship would this have with membership in a Scottish Clan?

Clan Ewing, Clan Ewen, Clan MacEwan: What is the Difference?

As far as I know, 'Clan Ewing' with 'Ewing' spelled in just this way first appeared in print with the publication of E. W. R. Ewing's 1922 book, *Clan Ewing of Scotland*.⁷ I have seen no evidence that anyone in Scotland has ever used the expression 'Clan Ewing'. Obviously, there is plenty that I do not know, and I would be interested to see any references to the contrary. Thor Ewing and the Ewings still in Scotland identify with Clan Ewen. Some participants in the *EFA* Forum discussion have made much of the distinction in spelling between 'Ewing' and 'Ewen'. The problem is that the spellings of names change and they are not very reliable guides to family or clan membership.⁸

The Wikipedia article on Scottish Clans has a list of recognized Scottish Clans with chiefs and a list of so-called 'armigerous' clans which are recognized clans that have no chief. Neither Clan Ewing nor Clan Ewen appears on either of these lists, but among the armigerous clans Clan MacEwan is listed. There is a link from that to a Wikipedia article on Clan MacEwan,⁹ which shows the sprouting oak stump crest and *Reviresco* motto used by many modern day McEwen families, and speaks about Clan Ewan of Otter. There are serious problems with the accuracy of this article; interested persons should at least read Thor Ewing's article, *Who Were the Ewings?*, which appeared in this journal last year.¹⁰ Thor gives credible evidence that many McEwen families are unlikely to have any connection with Clan Ewen¹¹ of Otter, while he believes that Clan Ewing of Lennox is in fact descended from Clan Ewen of Otter.

Perhaps I should mention here that Ellsworth Samuel Ewing, who founded *Clan Ewing in America*, did not believe the Ewings he was interested in had any connection with Clan Ewen of Otter or any other Highland clan, and though he thought some 'Highland' Ewings might be connected with Clan Ewen of Otter, he had no interest in them.¹² He followed E. W. R. Ewing in believing that a culturally and 'racially'

⁷ Ewing, Elbert William R. *Clan Ewing of Scotland*, Corben Publishing Co. (Ballston, Virginia), 1922. Available for purchase from www.HigginsonBooks.com and online at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/books/EwingEWR/index_ewr.htm

⁸ Technically, 'Ewing', 'MacEwen' and 'Euanson' are just different ways of saying "child of Ewen," using, respectively, Anglo-Saxon, Gaelic and Scandinavian patronymic naming systems.

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clan_MacEwan

¹⁰ Ewing, Thor. *Who Were the Ewings?* *Ewing Family J.*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (February 2010), pp. 1-9, which is posted online at www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org/documents/Ewing_Thor/Ewing_Thor_WhoWere.html. A more detailed resource is Thor's book, *New Notes on Clan Ewing*, which is not available online, but can be ordered from him at www.ClanEwen.org/shop/newnotes.

¹¹ It is always a challenge to decide what spelling to use. When Thor and others talk of 'Clan Ewen of Otter' and the Wikipedia article and others talk of 'Clan MacEwan of Otter', they are talking about the same thing.

¹² If you doubt this and are a long-time member who has kept what Ellsworth sent you, have a look at his March 22, 1992, 'Dear Cousins' letter, in which he says, "...There are several Ewing lines that are probably tied in – but also there are a number of Ewing Families out there that have no evidence of ties to us, especially those associated with the Highland Clan of McEwing of Otter. It is sometimes embarrassing to have to disassociate ourselves from them." You can also hear an audiotape of Ellsworth's views on this matter and other Ewing history at http://dl.dropbox.com/u/431003/Ellsworth_Ewing_audiotape.mp3 and you can see David C. Ewing's videotape of

distinct Ewing family originated over a thousand years ago in the Scottish Lowlands among Brythonic-speaking Celts. Further, he used the name 'Clan Ewing' to refer to members of one specific genealogically-related family, supposedly all descended from one William Ewing of Stirling, and his original idea was to accept for membership in *Clan Ewing in America* only those who could prove their descent from one of the fifteen men he thought were grandsons of William of Stirling that had immigrated to America.

I am not sure what constraints the Lord Lyon might be operating under or how much latitude he has with respect to clan names. Does he have to choose from the present list or can he add a new name or spelling to it? I imagine that he can do what he likes, but I have no idea how to anticipate what he might like.

Discussion on the EFA Forum

By my tally, sixty-odd messages have been posted to the *Chief for Clan Ewen* discussion thread and I received another dozen messages off list. Many of these were well reasoned and some were lengthy.

One aspect of the discussion that was especially interesting to me is how frequently the same arguments were used to argue for different conclusions – participants were more in agreement about what they wished to accomplish than what they thought we should do. I had thought to cite excerpts of arguments from the discussion in this article, but the unedited discussion is readily available to interested persons,¹³ so I have decided not to do that. Several list subscribers withdrew from the list because there were so many messages, and I certainly don't want this happening with the *Journal*.

I think it might be helpful, though, to answer some practical questions raised by Martin Ewing in his posting on March 19th:

I have a small question. If there is such a thing as Clan Ewing (or Ewen) with a chief and all that, [and] what relationship does an individual have to the Clan? That is, does one apply for membership? Is there a registry? Does one have to prove something, as with the DAR? Have a [Y-DNA] test? Or can you just go around telling people, "That's my Clan"? If I show up in Scotland, would I have any particular rights or privileges? ... Is the chiefship and the elevation of things Ewen/Ewing in Scotland a matter of symbolism and pride or something that has a practical impact on us here in the trenches. ...

One does not 'join' a Scottish Clan, but is born into the Clan. Persons of a specific surname or group of related surnames are presumed to be members of the clan of that name, but anyone can join a clan simply by claiming it as their heritage. There is no 'application' and no 'registry'. One does not have to prove anything, and one can indeed announce their membership in any clan they choose but they can choose membership in only one clan – or at least one at a time. There are no dues, taxes or ownership of property involved with clan membership. The chief of a modern-day clan speaks for the clan but has no authority over individual members of the clan. Clan membership is a matter of symbolism and pride, and it has no 'practical' impact in the sense that Martin uses the word. But symbolism and pride are very important, and we should give them due consideration and respect.

Ellsworth's talk at the first gathering of his Ewing Family at Vincennes, Indiana, in 1988 at http://dl.dropbox.com/u/431003/Ellsworth_Ewing_video.mp4.

¹³ Go to <http://Groups.google.com/group/EwingFamilyAssociation> and search for whatever you are interested in.

What are our Options with Respect to the Lord Lyon?

Though I welcome anyone to offer more alternatives, there seem to be five main possible courses of action.

1. We can ignore the proceedings in Scotland and ignore whatever the Lord Lyon might decide. We are Americans. We do not have to abide by any decision the Lord Lyon might make, and we don't even have to take an interest in the matter. We can either just not participate at all in the discussion, or we can send the Lord Lyon a letter telling him that we do not care what he does. Arguments for this position mostly turn on some things about the Scottish Clan system that make many Americans uncomfortable, including especially the fact that the position of Chief in Scottish Clans is traditionally heritable and that it is virtually certain that the Lord Lyon will insist on recognizing a Scot as Chief.
2. We can argue that the Lord Lyon should do nothing because there is not enough evidence about what he should do. Or we might take the more focused position that he can do what he likes about the McEwens, but in the absence of compelling evidence, he must not allow any all-inclusive Clan Ewen or Clan MacEwan to make a claim of descent from Clan Ewen of Otter. This option is basically to argue for perpetuation of the *status quo*, in which the status of Clan Ewing in Scotland (or if you prefer, Clan Ewen of Lennox) is very uncertain but at least it has not been formally subsumed in another clan.
3. We can argue that Clan Ewing has existed as a separate Scottish Clan using a crest like the one on our homepage (www.EwingFamilyAssociation.org) and the motto *Audaciter!* at least as far back the sixteenth century, and it should be accorded separate and equal status as an official Scottish Clan under the name 'Clan Ewing' or 'Clan Ewing of Lennox'. Evidently, the Lord Lyon certifies both Highland and Lowland clans, but I think we do not have to make a case for Clan Ewing being one or the other of these. We can argue that Clan Ewing should not be subsumed or assimilated by a clan governed by demonstrably unrelated McEwens, who use a crest showing an oak stump with new growth and the motto *Reviresco*. In this option, we do not have to make any claims about whether we or others are descended from Clan MacEwan of Otter.
4. We can argue that Loch Lomond Ewings are the lineal descendants of Clan Ewen of Otter and should be recognized under that name or perhaps as Clan Ewen of Lennox. We can point out that there are several apparently unrelated historical McEwen Clans who also claim descent from Clan Ewen of Otter, and either express no opinion as to whether this may be true or argue that it is not true and the Ewings of Lennox have the only legitimate claim of descent from Clan Ewen of Otter. In some ways, this option is a straw man. I see no possibility that the Lord Lyon will accept any argument that the Ewings are the only extant descendants of Clan MacEwan of Otter and the only thing likely to come of an argument like this is offending McEwens who strongly believe that they are also descended from Clan MacEwan of Otter.
5. We can support the Scottish organization, the *Clan Ewen Society*, in recommending that 'one clan' be formed to include people from any of a large number of variant spellings of the name thought to have the same root. They argue that many if not most people with these surnames do not know their personal genealogy well enough to connect definitively with any of the several unrelated McEwen and Ewing branches. Making one 'Clan Ewen' or 'Clan MacEwan' that embraces all these traditions would reduce confusion and uncertainty, and allows everyone to have an 'officially recognized clan' to identify with and be proud of, notwithstanding that the only thing we can be

certain of is that not only was there never any such clan in history; what history we do have reveals that the historical clans subsumed in the newly conceived 'one clan' had very different cultural traditions and were almost certainly at war with one another as recently as the seventeenth century.

In options three, four or five we still have to talk about succession of chiefs. Traditionally, this is hereditary and I believe that most of the active clans still have hereditary chiefs. I think all of the Americans, and many of the Scots, would rather have a system of electing chiefs at specified intervals. It is unclear whether the Lord Lyon would approve a system like that or what the rules governing elections might be. In any case, the role of chief is entirely ceremonial and symbolic; he does not handle money and has no real power over members of the clan. Presently, the only declared candidate for the position of Chief is John McEwen, the current Chairman of the *Clan Ewen Society* in Scotland.

Please remember that this discussion is not about what name we use for the *EFA*. Many of our members are members of the so-far 'unofficial' 'Clan Ewen' or 'Clan Ewing' of Scotland. The decision of the Lord Lyon could make 'Clan Ewing' or 'Clan Ewen of Lennox' official or it could become officially amalgamated into a name-based 'Clan Ewen' or 'Clan MacEwan' in Scotland. Of course, if we do not like what the Lord Lyon decides, we can ignore him and say or do what we please. And regardless of what the Lord Lyon decides, we can use whatever name we prefer for the *EFA*.

A Final Decision

A special meeting of the Board of Directors will be convened toward the end of June to make a final decision in this matter. Anyone wishing to comment further before that should post to the *EFA Forum* (EwingFamilyAssociation@GoogleGroups.com) or send a message to a member or members of the *EFA* Board ([EFA_Board at EwingFamilyAssociation dot org](mailto:EFA_Board@EwingFamilyAssociation.org)).



David Neal Ewing has been a member of the Ewing Family Association since 1996 and has served as its Chancellor since 2006. He previously served as Chair of its Board of Directors from 2004-2006. He is also Administrator of the Ewing Surname Y-DNA Project, which he founded in 2004, and he is a regular contributor to the Ewing Family Journal. Dr. Ewing has a private practice in clinical geriatric neuropsychiatry in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He received his M.D. degree from the University of New Mexico and did his residency training at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan.