



Chiefs, Clans, Families, Societies

Editorial Comment

In this issue are two groups of Scottish Americans, each of which has multiple organizations claiming to represent their clanfolk. Clan Bell North America and Clan Bell Society each claim to represent members of Clan Bell, an historic Border Name. Clan MacTavish and Clan MacThomas both claim to represent highland Thomsons, but there also exists an American Association of Border Thomsons with whom they are in dispute. These groups are in the throes of clarifying these issues. And all are COSCA members.

Discussions are helpful and desirable in these situations. And there are discussions about different spellings of similar names that represent the same or separate kin groups that are as old as the Clans themselves

This issue lays out in detail the status of the dispute between the two organizations representing Clan Bell who are both COSCA members. These two groups have now moved beyond the discussion phase and into litigation. At stake among other issues is the right to use the clan name and rights to intellectual property.

The Standing Council Of Scottish Chiefs has taken positions on some of these issues. Of particular interest to them, are the issues of clan creep and sept proliferation. As found on their website:

The now fashionable pursuit of trying to turn any Scottish name into a clan risks devaluating all. It undermines and fails to respect the distinctions that run through Scottish history, and in the end, seeks to replace that history through "clan creation". False history; false romance. Much of this may be driven by commercial considerations, though not all. To use the famous caveat, itself from the world of commerce: Beware Imitation. *Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs*

We have plenty to be proud of. In celebrating that, there is always room for innovation. There is no need for invention. Societies and associations will normally have a council, headed by a chairma or, as is often found overseas, President. A chief can occupy that position. But the office does not turn a President into a chief. *Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs*

*Bruce Whyte
Editor
Claymore*

CLAN CREEP

For generations now, Clan Chiefs have been coming to Highland Games and Scottish festivals in the United States as Honored Guests. Those Chiefs are always surprised, and delighted, to see dozens of Clan tents, which are on show at such events. They are the very heart of such Games, a proud statement of enduring tradition.

But, in recent years, the Chiefs have started to notice that a few tents are appearing under names that were never clans and never had a chief.

One example of this is “Clan Thompson”, which holds itself out to be the sole authorized representative of all Thompsons and Thomsons. There has never been a clan in Scotland called Thompson. In Scotland, Thompson is considered an English name. Thom(p)son is not a recognised clan within the global clan network.

The confusion in America about the status of Clan Thompson International, Inc., seems to have come about after that society received a grant of arms from the Lord Lyon in Scotland. The granting of arms by the Lord Lyon to Clan Thompson International, Inc., neither recognises that there is a clan Thompson nor that the society is the only one which is the legitimate society of that name. It is not for the Lord Lyon to determine the name of an organisation which approaches him for a grant of arms.

Thomson is accepted as an English language variant of the name of two existing real clans, MacTavish and MacThomas. The MacTavishes come from Argyll in the Western Highlands, and MacThomasas hail from the counties of Angus, Aberdeenshire and Perthshire in the Eastern Highlands. Neither of these ancient clans claim all Scottish Thomsons for themselves. They always try to ensure that there is an ancestral link back to the Western or Eastern Highlands before accepting a candidate for clan membership.

Clan MacTavish and Clan MacThomas both accept that there may have been a local family with the surname of Thomson in the Borders of Scotland. Thomsons emigrating south from the Highlands, following the industrialisation of the 19th century, may have become attached, together with any English Thompsons who came north during this period. But this Thomson family group is not recognised as a clan and has never had a chief. It is important to appreciate that a family name group and a clan have always been two distinct entities.

One of the aims of the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs is to ensure that information about clans and their societies is authentic and truthful. To this end, the Council has written to Clan Thompson International Inc., asking them to cease making inaccurate claims. Such “clan creep” is divisive and undermines the genuine institutions of clan and kindred, which bring such meaning and identity to all our lives.



STEVEN MACTAVISH OF DUNARDRY
27th Chief of MacTavish (left)

ANDREW MACTHOMAS OF FINEGAND
19th Chief of MacThomas (right)

