

## From the Mailbox

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### We need the words!

I thoroughly enjoyed my sail on the Empire Sandy last Sunday and have to congratulate the organizers for a great event. You made a good job of putting on first-class weather too. But here's a suggestion -- how about handing out song-sheets so we can have a good old singalong? Makes it easy when you know the words. Just a thought.

Mary Fletcher,  
Oshawa, Ontario

Ed: OK will pass it on. Makes sense as long as we're all on the same page!

### The mystery of the "mhic"

Just a note to the Editor: Thoroughly enjoy continuing receipt of *The Scots Canadian*. Thank you for the excellent quality.

Nevertheless, a wee quibble about *From the Mailbox* in the Summer edition. I believe that our Gaelic for Mac is *mac*, not *mhic* (which would require the pronunciation, at least in Uist, of "vìchk"), when *mac* is used simply as the descriptive "son of". If one is addressing the *mac*, however, then one can make a better case for *mhic* - if you'll pardon the pun.

*leis gach beannachd bho Antony Cunningham, Patron.  
Toronto, Ontario*

Ed: Oops! Sorry about that Antony. I'm afraid my comment was a bit confusing. Here's another letter:

I agree with your analysis of the "Mac or Mc?" question in the Issue X letters. You might refer to Philip D. Smith's excellent *Tartan for Me!* (page 3). I note that Unicorn, Ltd., of Bruceton WV, an excellent Scottish book supplier, regularly uses the "M" convention. I disagree, however, with your addition, "Mac (in gaelic: mhic)." In gaelic (actually, "a' Ghàidhlig na h-Alba") it is still "mac." The "mhic" you provide is the genitive case, so you might see Anndra MacDhòmhnaill mhic an t-Saoir, "Andrew, son of Donald the carpenter's son." (Remember, the final "i" in a masculine noun itself almost always represents the genitive case.)

To me, however, a bigger problem seems to be to be reflected in the two fine people on page 3: Kathy Macmillan and Michael MacMillan. Following the 1745 Stewart debacle, among the English reprisals was the forbidding of the Scottish custom of using the upper case in the middle of the patronymic word. As indicated above, the "Mac" introduces "son of"; so we should have MacAoidh (MacKay), son of Aodh; MacDhòmhnaill (MacDonald), son of Donald. As this was clearly a Scottish, and more so a Highland, custom, it was anathema to the English and their subsequent imposition of a school system. It is they who

required that the upper case be dropped.

So, it would seem to me that, if we of Scottish descent wish to recognize our earlier Scottish customs, we should at least revert to the upper case convention. This is not that easy, however, in our computer age with its mail-merge systems. They do not like an upper case letter in the "middle" of a word. (Let's have the French with their "du-" and "de-" join us in this battle.) We have to fight to get mailers to use it. After all, "MacAoidh" just doesn't cut it.

So, let's see that upper case spelling. That is, of course, if we do not wish to use the Gaelic spelling of our names, as was my choice. Alba gu bràth!

*le deagh dhùrachd,  
Andrew MacAoidh Jergens  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

Ed: OK. Now that we seem to have got the Mac/Mc Scots/Irish issue straightened out, let's move on to the "mhic." (Although I have a sneaking suspicion that we will be hearing about the upper case/lower case issue soon!)

As Andrew MacAoidh points out, "mhic" is the genitive case which indicates possession. We encounter this frequently in Scottish place names and in complex patronymic (a name derived from the father or paternal ancestor) surnames.

For example, the name MacIntyre in Gaelic is Mac an t-Saoir (son of the carpenter). But Clan MacIntyre in Gaelic would be Clann Mhic an t-Saoir (Clan (or children) of the MacIntyres.)

The vocative case of "mac" is also "mhic." So when calling or speaking to someone, one would say "a mhic" as Antony Cunningham points out in his letter.

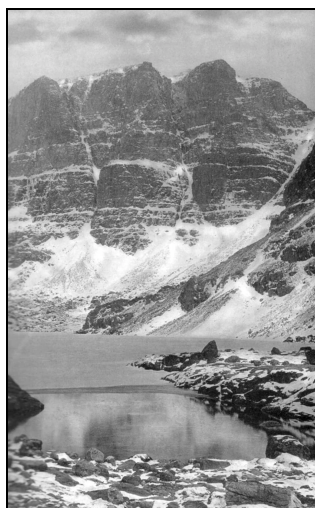
Thanks to Rhoda MacRitchie of Willowdale, Ontario and Colin Blyth of Kingston, Ontario for their help with this.

## A couple of famous Scottish "Mhics"



*Clach Mhic Leoid (MacLeod's Stone)*

People first came to the Island of Harris during the Bronze Age leaving many standing stones which can now be visited. MacLeod's Stone (Clach Mhic Leoid) is a 3-metre high standing stone likely located on the site of a previous burial cairn. The stone seems to tilt in the direction of St Kilda. The island in the background is Taransay.



*Coire Mhic Fhearchair (Farquharson's Corrie)*

On the north side of Beinne Eighe in the Torridon Highlands, it is one of the most impressive natural amphitheatres in Scotland. (By the way, a corrie is a steep-walled, bowl-shaped basin carved out of a mountain.)

## Two Generation Patronymic Byname

Two-generation patronymic bynames were sometimes used in both Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. These bynames are formed from the names of the individual's father and grandfather (father's father).

The standard way to form a name using a two generation patronymic byname for men is:

<single given name> mac <father's given name> mhic <grandfather's given name>

which means:

<given name> son <of father's given name> (of) son <of grandfather's given name>

for example, Donnchadh who is the son of Fearchar mac Domhnaill would be: Donnchadh mac Fearchair mhic Dhomhnaill

which means:

Donnchadh son of Fearchar son of Domhnaill or, fully Anglicized: Duncan son of Farquhar son of Donald)