

Where did the Ewing name come from?

Scholars tell us that the use of surnames, or family names, was not common prior to about the year 1050. Before that, individuals were generally identified by their tribal connections first, then by their descent. As tribes became larger, individuals grouped together and used a common family name.

In early times, lots of people were illiterate and names were often spelled the way they sounded, which meant that the spelling was subject to the interpretation of the person writing it. Therefore, names that appear in historical records are often misspelled. In our case, spellings of the name include Ewen, Ewan, Ewene, Ewin, Euan, Euing, or the Gaelic version... Eoghuin, sometimes spelled Eogan or Eogain... or the Latin version, Eugein — not to mention Hewin, Hewing, Huin, Huing and a host of other variants.

There's little doubt that the Ewing family name originated in Scotland. But there's a major disagreement among historians and researchers about the precise location of our first ancestors and when and how the Ewing name came into being. With at least two major schools of thought each putting forth a theory, the controversy has been ongoing for a long time, and probably won't be agreed upon any time soon. To get a glimpse of the disagreement, one needs to first look into Scottish history.

Scotland's early history (prior to the eleventh century) is not easy to verify because much of it was never written. During that time most of Scotland was under the influence of the Druids, whose Celtic religion believed in the cultivation of memory and written records were forbidden. Instead, religion, history, tradition and law were taught by designated instructors and passed on by bards and poets who were trained to memorize huge amounts of information. Researchers have to rely on early writings of other cultures (Roman, Greek, etc.) who were more literate and who recorded some information based upon their observations or their early dealings with the British isles (the Romans ruled most of England and southern Scotland from about 80 A.D. until about 481 A.D.). The earliest writings were often in old languages, many of which went out of use centuries ago, and have been interpreted by historians, often hundreds of years after the fact.

It has been determined that there were four major groups of people that occupied the land that is now Scotland from about the sixth to the eleventh centuries... the Picts in most of the northern region (later to be known as the Highlands) which was called Alba; the Scotti in Dalriada, or the

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west-central coastal area; the Britons in Strathclyde, or southwest area; and the Angles in the southeast, or Lothian. In addition to these groups, the Vikings (Norse and Danes) and the Saxons from England controlled parts of Scotland at various times. During most of this time, two or more of these groups were fighting for supremacy, either against each other or against invaders from other nations. With all the raiding, killing, looting and burning that occurred during that period, there's little wonder that records are scarce.

By the eleventh century these warring groups had either overrun each other or their members had intermarried enough that Scotland finally became a unified nation (somewhat). Many "kings" had attempted to rule the entire country up to this point, with various amounts of success but it wasn't until 1057, when Malcolm Ceanmore ascended the throne, that Scotland's Highland clan system came into being. Malcolm's second wife, Margaret, granddaughter of England's King Edmund, is credited with convincing him to abandon the Celtic Patriarchal system that had been in place for centuries. Under that system, the land belonged to each tribe, or clan, that inhabited it, and each tribe governed their local area. Under the new system, or feudalism, all land passed into the possession of the King and he could parcel it out as he saw fit, in some cases to English nobles. Along with this major change, Malcolm also abandoned Gaelic as the official language of the Court and substituted many Roman Catholic practices for those that differed in the Celtic church. Needless to say, the crown's Gaelic subjects were not thrilled.

The Highland regions were divided into districts with specific clans being assigned to their own territory, and most of the larger clans were broken up, forming many smaller entities. While the "new" system persisted through the reign of succeeding monarchs for the next 600 years, clans clung to their traditional structure, fighting for the crown when they felt the monarch was fair to them, and fighting against him when they didn't. Conflict and rebellion of the Clans would persist until 1746 when the uprisings would end in defeat and the Clan system was abandoned.

THEORY #1

Some historians tell us that around the year 1200, a Ewen clan lived in the Otter parish on the coastal Loch Fyne, about 40 miles west of present-day Glasgow. These people were of Scotti descent and in later years were known as Clan MacEwen. Their ancestry is closely tied to the MacLachlans and the MacNeills, and are counted among the Highland clans. About 1470, after having their number severely reduced by conflicts with the Duke of Gordon and the Marquis of Atholl, the Clan MacEwen was "broken," or split up, and some historians believe that a group of the clan members eventually migrated eastward and settled on the shores of Loch Lomond (about 30 miles northwest of Glasgow). It is believed that some of those people adopted Saxon customs and changed the spelling of the name to Ewing, thus becoming the ancestors of all the Ewing families that exist today.

Most of the researchers that subscribe to this theory agree that when the Clan Ewen of Otter broke up, it virtually disappeared. Most think that its members were absorbed into other Highland clans or intermarried into various Lowland groups and were dispersed across southern Scotland.

THEORY #2

Other researchers agree that, indeed, some of the Ewings today are descended from the Clan Ewen of Otter but assert that in all the Highland clan records there is no genealogy, indeed no mention, of the Ewing name. Instead, the name may have been adopted by some members of the broken Highland clan. The proponents of this theory assert that when Clan Ewen of Otter dispersed in the mid-fifteenth century, the Ewing name was already in existence in the southern part of Scotland (the Lowlands) and had been there for hundreds of years before the end of the Clan system. This part of Scotland had been more influenced by early invaders and monarchs, so "clans" or families were more dispersed here, unlike the distinct regions allotted to the High-

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landers. When the MacEwens settled at Loch Lomond, they were very near the Ewings that had been there and around Glasgow and Stirling Castle for many years.

In the book *Our Ewing Heritage*, by Carson and Wooley, much space is devoted to presenting a compelling case for this version of the Ewing name's origin. Numerous examples are cited from ancient writings that point to the name being of Cymric Briton (Lowland) origin, not Gaelic Highland (Pictish or Scotti). In historic poems, some written as early as the seventh century in the ancient Cymric Briton language, the names Owein, Owain and Ewein appear frequently. These names equate to "Owen" in present day English translation of Cymric Welsh. The Owens family of Wales were Ewenes (or Ewings) according to the pronunciation of the Cymric language. When the Normans conquered England in the eleventh century, the Ewin and Ewing families of Scotland and the Owens families of Wales were all mustered under a banner that bore a common insignia (similar to a coat of arms). This banner would be different from the coat of arms later borne by the Ewen Clan of Otter.

ADDITIONAL HISTORY

Regardless of which theory one chooses to believe about the origin of the Ewing name, the fact remains that Ewing families proliferated in the Lowlands and the border Highlands of Scotland. Mention of the name is frequent in all manner of public, church and military records, once such records were kept.

By the late 1500s and early 1600s, England had become a major force and was influencing most of the lives in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Land ownership and religious practice were often dictated by the ruling power. In 1605, King James of England seized control of Ulster province in northern Ireland, forcing the Catholic Irish people from their land. He then induced English and Scotch protestants to migrate to northern Ireland to occupy the land in what has been called the "Ulster Plantation." Over the next few years 30,000 to 40,000 people, some of them Ewings and most of them Presbyterian, moved from Scotland to Ireland. Most of those people did not mix with the native Irish, but married within their own group and raised generations of Scotch-Irish descendants... Scottish families born and living in Ireland.

Throughout this period, turmoil engulfed the British isles. England's Parliament was at odds with their King and forced him out of power. Meanwhile, the Irish Catholics and Protestants had separated into at least four groups, each with an army, and were fighting for supremacy. The English sent Cromwell and his troops to Ireland to squash the local opposition and to force them all into allegiance to England's Parliament and their Anglican church (an early version of the Episcopal church). Bloodshed and tyranny were the order of the day.

Although the leaders changed, the strife and discrimination continued throughout the 1600s, making life difficult and creating an environment that was not conducive to industry or commerce. Poverty and starvation were very common, especially in Ulster. With each change of power came a new emphasis on the ruler's beliefs and anyone who differed would suffer. By the end of the 1600s and into the early 1700s, almost all religious groups had suffered greatly. So when the colonies of the "new world" (America) were being established, it's no wonder that so many were willing to endure the hardships in a new land many miles away from the British influence. In fact, many of the rebellious Scotch and Irish leaders had been deported by the English to the colonies, to get them out of the way.

It is not known with certainty when the first Ewings came to America, but the names of Ewens, Euans and other variations (along with strange spellings of other words) appear in colonial and maritime records as early as 1609, coinciding with the establishment of the Virginia colony, and in later records that relate to many other locations in New England. Unfortunately, there are no records that tie these early Ewings to any of the families that are later traced in this country. Some of the earliest records, old family Bibles, tombstones, wills, deeds, etc., tend to indicate that Ewing families began settling here around 1700 or shortly thereafter, mostly in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, North Carolina and Virginia.