

MAC OR Mc?

Mac, Gaelic for "son", is the most common element of Scottish and Irish surnames. In both countries, *Mc* is **always** an abbreviation of *Mac*. There is absolutely no truth to the American myth that *Mac* is Scottish and *Mc* is Irish. In the United States, early census takers were often instructed to abbreviate *Mac* to *Mc*. *Mac* also used to be abbreviated *M'* although this spelling is not common now. At times, all three versions can be seen. In an early book on Highland music, the author spelled his own family name three different ways on the first two pages - "MacDonald", "McDonald", and "M' Donald."

Black's **The Surnames of Scotland** and MacLysaght's **The Surnames of Ireland** both treat *Mac* in the same way-as the only and original spelling. Persons seeking a name spelled "*Mc*" are expected to know that it is a conventional abbreviation for *Mac*. This same approach is used in **Tartan For Me!** To find "McDeal" look for "MacDeal."

The following excerpt from the **Highlands and Islands Telephone Directory - 1996** (p. 276) illustrates the point. Note that **Mac** and **Mc** are used interchangeably with the alphabetization done on the personal names or initials.

MCNAB JOHN	Thurso	MACNEDL A	Castlebay
MACNABJ& A.....	Wick	MCNEIL A	Spean Bridge
MCNAB JAMES A. W.,Jun....	Lerwick	MACNEDL A	Callanish
MACNABK.J.R.	DingwaU	MCNEIL A.	MuirofOrd
MCNAB L.	Wick	MACNEIL A	Kinlochleven
MACNAB MARGARET	Dingwall	MACNEIL A	Castlebay
MACNABM.R.	Broadford	MACNEIL A	Stomoway

Mac is always considered an addition to a name. Before there was a "Donald's Son" there was a 'Donald'. Some Gaelic speakers simply translated their names, **MacDonald** to **Donaldson**.

In both Scotland and Nova Scotia, names beginning with *Mac* were traditionally alphabetized under the first letter of the second name - *MacArthur* under "A", *MacZeal* under "Z". Many Scots dropped "Mac" as they became Anglicized or emigrated, "Mac Wyeth" becoming simply "Wyeth". "Kinzie" is from "MacKenzie". The one notable exception is the Innes and Machines families, each quite distinct. The Innes family have Pictish roots and are from the east coast of Scotland with a red tartan. The MacInnes are of Gaelic origin from the west coast and wear a green tartan.

Mac takes a variety of pronunciations. Where *Mac* is usually pronounced /mahk/, in Islay Gaelic, *Mac* is pronounced like /meyk/. In the United States one hears it as "mick". Preceding a word beginning with a vowel or /g/ sound, *Mac* can become Mag- (Magaskill).

It became the practice in both the south of Scotland and in Ireland to write two words as one (MacGill to Magill; MacHale to Makale). In other names the /k/ sound of *Mac* is duplicated and attached to the front of a following word if it begins in a vowel (MacArter to MacCarter), /l/ (MacLintock to MacClintock) or /n/ (MacNachten to MacRackten to MacCracken). The reverse also occurs. If the second name begins with a /k/ or /g/, producing two /k/ sounds together, one may disappear (MacGill to Magill; MacKenzie to MacEnzee). *Mac* is at times pronounced "muck" and written that way (MacGilroy to Muckleroy).

Tartan For Me!-7th Edition; Heritage Books, 1540-1E Pointer Ridge Pl.,Bowie, MD.