

# Clan Leslie Society INTERNATIONAL

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## Clan Leslie Septs: *Laing/Lang*

This family, with the two spellings of the name, is claimed as a sept by Clans Gordon and MacDonald as well as Leslie. The Office of the Lord Lyon, the final authority on Scottish heraldic and genealogical matters, on inquiry would say only that the family appears on several lists as a Leslie sept. A standard reference guide on Scottish family history lists only two families, Laing of Orkney and Lang of Selkirk, which is in the Border area. But without question there were Langs and Laings much further north, in Fife and Aberdeenshire.

There is a Laing museum in Fife, founded by a bequest from Alexander Laing (1808-1892), a banker and student of history. It is in Newburgh, close to Lindores, which is identified with Leslie history. In the 16th Century a daughter of Andrew Leslie, Fifth Laird of New Leslie, married Michael Lang of Auchindoir in Aberdeenshire. The sept has produced notable personages.

Alexander Gordon Laing, born in Orkney, in his time (1793-1826) was a famous explorer of Africa, the first European to reach Timbuktu. A soldier by profession, with a valiant combat record, he primarily was assigned to exploration in northern Africa and to suppress the slave trade. He was a captain when he was crossing the Sahara Desert in 1826 and was murdered by Arabs who were running that nefarious trade.

Malcolm Laing (1762-1818), born in Orkney, was a lawyer and historian who wrote about Scottish history. He also served as the Member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland.

Samuel Laing (1810-1897), born in Edinburgh, started out in early railroad administration, then went into government work and politics. He held high positions in Britain and India, and also served as M.P. for Orkney and Shetland.

Andrew Lang (1844-1912), born in Selkirk, was a scholar, writer, poet and historian, considered the greatest journalist in the Britain of his time. His published works were many, including a four-volume history of Scotland, biographies of Queen Mary and John Knox. His prose translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey brought him fame outside of Britain.

Cosmo Gordon Lang (1864-1945), first Baron of Lambeth, was born in Aberdeen. A scholar and Anglican churchman, he became known internationally because as Archbishop of Canterbury he successfully exercised pressure on King Edward VIII to abdicate in the affair with Mrs. Wallis Simpson. Following a brilliant academic clerical career he was appointed Archbishop of York. As a member of the House of Lords he enjoyed much influence, attributable not only to his great learning and position, but mainly because of his eloquence and common sense. In 1928 Lang became Archbishop of Canterbury. He earned wide recognition for his social work in industrial areas.

What about Laings in America? David Laing of Rancho Bernardo, California, supplied us with information about the first-known member of the family to reach our shores. This was John Laing, who with his wife Margaret, came over in the summer of 1685 from Aberdeenshire and settled a few miles south of the present center of Plainsfield, New Jersey. New Jersey, first settled by Swedes and Dutch, then already was under English rule, that part of the future state being granted to Sir George Carteret. The colony reverted to the crown at the onset of the reign of Queen Anne. The Laings remained in New Jersey for three generations. The progenitor's grandson, John III. married into a Quaker family, one of whom was a very early abolitionist. John III and his family became Quakers, members of a Meeting House sited near the place where an ancient Indian trail which ran from Delaware to the Atlantic crossed the Request River. In time, three Laing families, those of George. Levi and Samuel were active in that community.

With the beginning of the 19th Century children of the Laings in New Jersey moved west. first to Illinois. then further away to Montana, Minnesota and Idaho. Others moved to Canada, gradually away from farming, into business and the professions. Throughout the generations the family was what the poet calls "rich in children." Three centuries after the original John Laing established his first homestead in New Jersey, around 230 direct, documented descendants had spread widely over the United States.

— Alexander Leslie Klieforth