

Kingdom of An Tir
BARONIAL POLLING PROCESSES

Version 2
February 2006

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Baronial Polling Processes

Change can be stressful, even a positive change. The change in Baronial Coronets can create anxiety and unrest in a branch under the best of circumstances. If the change was not a planned one, knowing what to do and when to do it can help bring order to chaos. A polling will need to be conducted providing all paid members within your zip codes a voice to the Crown. You may have local customs, but any conflicts with the information below will need to be resolved with the Crown and Kingdom Seneschal prior to beginning the selection process. Ultimately, the decision on the appropriate Baron or Baroness for your branch belongs to the Crown. Be sure you are clear with your populace that **a polling is not a vote.**

Corpora V.A.1. states:

“The Crown shall appoint a territorial Baron and/or Baroness according to the laws and customs of the kingdom when a branch is granted baronial status, or whenever a new Baron and/or Baroness is required. The barony’s opinion on the matter must be requested and received in writing, and the appointments must not be substantively opposed by the populace of the barony. Territorial Barons and Baronesses are officers and must maintain appropriate membership status.”

An Tir Kingdom Law gives the framework for the Baronial Selection Process. It does not provide much detail on how to administer it. Kingdom Law published in Summer 2003 says:

ARTICLE VII - SUBORDINATE GROUPS

B. Baronies

6. In the Event of Baronial Polling:

- a. The Crown or a representative chosen by the Crown shall be responsible for the polling of the populace.
- b. The Kingdom Seneschal or a representative thereof shall be present also.
- c. Both of the persons conducting the polling shall be from outside the barony
- d. The scheduling of the baronial polling is subject to approval of the Crown. The polling should be completed within 90 days of the official announcement at a Baronial meeting. Notification of the polling is to appear in the next available issue of the Crier. Ideally, the process should begin and end within a single reign.
- e. Before the polling is conducted nominees shall present themselves before the Crown and populace for the purpose of discussing their intentions should they be chosen as Baron and/or Baroness.
- f. A baronial officer should serve as fair witness to the distribution and collection of polling forms.
- g. A standardized polling form shall be used (See Appendix A).
- h. Polling forms will be distributed only to members within the baronies zip code range. Officers, Sergeants, Courtiers, Gallants, Yeomen and Lancers who live outside the zip code range of the branch, and are members, will be included in the polling.
- i. Other input may be submitted in writing via email, postal mail or in person.
- j. The results of the polling shall be delivered directly to the Crown for their consideration.
- k. The final decision and appointment of the new Baron and/or Baroness rests solely with the Crown.

So let's break this down.....

a. The Crown or a representative chosen by the Crown shall be responsible for the polling of the populace.

The Baronial Coronets are the Crown's representative. If the Crown is unable to attend the polling, They will select a person (usually a Royal Peer) from outside the area to act in Their stead. The Crown representative is responsible for getting the polling ballots to the Crown unless otherwise indicated.

b. The Kingdom Seneschal or a representative thereof shall be present also.

If the Kingdom Seneschal is unable to attend in person they will designate someone to oversee the process. Usually, but not always, this is a Kingdom Deputy, a former Kingdom Seneschal, or a Principality Seneschal, if applicable.

c. Both of the persons conducting the polling shall be from outside the barony.

This is self explanatory. No one who is participating in the actual polling can be directly responsible for collecting the polling forms.

d. The scheduling of the baronial polling is subject to approval of the Crown. The polling should be completed within 90 days of the official announcement at a Baronial meeting.

Notification of the polling is to appear in the next available issue of the Crier. Ideally, the process should begin and end within a single reign.

To fulfill the notification requirement, your options are to put notice in the Crier (including full polling details: time, place and date) or to send out individual postcards (with labels from the Registry). Either alternative will work; postcards have administrative advantages, but can be costly. The Crier is the preferred method of announcement. The baronial newsletter is not sufficient notification. As we see later on, the opinion of the membership must be requested. SCA membership is not a criterion for subscription to branch newsletters. The Crier is the only publication based in An Tir that qualifies as "official".

The scheduling of the Polling is largely a matter between the outgoing Baron/Baroness and the Crown. Plans can begin well before the announcement. Consideration should be given to what would be meaningful to the Barony and convenient for the Crown. Once that is established, the announcement is made and the matter resolved within 90 days unless otherwise directed by the Crown.

e. Before the polling is conducted nominees shall present themselves before the Crown and populace for the purpose of discussing their intentions should they be chosen as Baron and/or Baroness.

This can be in person at a 'meet and greet', at an event, or via published resumes in your local newsletter/website. Or it can be a combination of all of them. The Crown should instruct you on how they want to handle the presentation part. Otherwise, a presentation can take place immediately prior to the polling on the same night, although this is not recommended. All candidates must be acceptable to the Crown.

f. A baronial officer should serve as fair witness to the distribution and collection of polling forms.

Usually the branch seneschal serves this function. They are responsible for setting up and coordinating the events leading up to the polling and the preparation of the Polling forms themselves.

g. A standardized polling form shall be used (See Appendix A).

Unless otherwise instructed, use Appendix A. Often the Crown will want to preview the Polling Form prior to the Polling.

h. Polling forms will be distributed only to members within the baronies zip code range. Officers, Sergeants, Courtiers, Gallants, Yeomen and Lancers who live outside the zip code range of the branch, and are members, will be included in the polling.

With regard to notification, Corpora III.D.2. states, “The Society permits very broad participation by people who are not members as defined in the By-Laws. However no part of the Society can be required to solicit or heed their views regarding branch status, or any other situation where the opinion of the populace is to be consulted. Law, custom, or actual practice may allow consultation with nonmembers, but it cannot be required.”

This paragraph refers specifically to advancement of branches but then speaks more globally on the matter of soliciting opinion of the populace. The interpretation of the above quote from Corpora is that you must make the information regarding the polling available to all paid society members residing in your area.

Regardless of what local customs may be, even if you have ‘naturalized’ citizens, only members within your zip codes are eligible to participate in the polling. The only exceptions are those listed above and the Baronial Candidates, if applicable. Any questions should be directed to the Crown.

i. Other input may be submitted in writing via email, postal mail or in person.

The polling eligibility is specific, but other people are invited to provide input on what might be best for the Barony. This could include Champions, participants outside the zip codes, or non-members from within or outside the Barony.

j. The results of the polling shall be delivered directly to the Crown for their consideration.

The actual results are not disclosed. “Numbers” are not provided. It is the sole decision of the Crown and is based on a variety of factors, comments, and considerations. **A polling is not a vote.**

k. The final decision and appointment of the new Baron and/or Baroness rests solely with the Crown.

Clear enough? Did I mention **A polling is not a vote?** Please make sure this is conveyed strongly to your branch populace. They are expressing an ‘opinion’ to the Crown.

The Polling Process: Administration

The Announcement

The Baron/Baroness have decided to step down. They have spoken to the Crown, established when the changeover will occur, and an announcement is made at a business meeting. They solicit applications from interested candidates.

Polling Date

The projected dates should be determined between the Baronial Coronets and the Crown. The Baronial Seneschal will take the information and secure a suitable site. Any difficulties will need to be reported to the Baronial Coronets who will discuss them with the Crown. From the time of first announcement, the process takes a minimum of 90 days and should begin and end within a single reign.

Candidates

Candidates are nominated by themselves or by members of the populace. Be sure to confirm nominations before announcing them to the populace. Some Baronies have an outside person handle the confirmation process, this is not required. The Baronial Seneschal is responsible for producing the polling form. Unless the Baronial Seneschal is a candidate, they can handle the confirmation process. Couples are the traditional choice and generally preferred. The couple need not be married to each other. A single candidate is an option, but all candidates must be acceptable to the Crown. Prior to the nomination of candidates, ask the Crown to clarify whether single candidates are acceptable. The same is true of a choice that would result in two Barons or two Baronesses. This will save frustration and embarrassment later.

Candidates must provide a modern and SCA resume to the Crown and the populace in an appropriate format. Web pages, local newsletters, special mailings have all been used to provide a venue for distributing information. Some candidates provide their own brochures to be passed out to the populace. Although the process can start to look like a campaign, remember: **a polling is not a vote**. All candidates must be acceptable to the Crown. All candidates must be paid members of the SCA and should provide proof of membership to the Crown with their resume.

The Notification of the Membership

Proper notification must be received by the membership as to the time and place of the polling.

The Crier is the default method listed in Kingdom Law. It is the only An Tir publication that satisfies the criteria of 'official' notification. You may use your local newsletters and web pages as additional notification sources.

Another means of notification is using postcards with labels from the SCA Registry in Milpitas, CA. Labels must be ordered by the Kingdom Seneschal and the zip codes are provided by the Baronial seneschal. Labels can take anywhere from a week to a month to receive after they are ordered. Once received, the labels must be used within 10 days and can not be Xeroxed. This method is more costly, but can have its advantages. Some provision must be made to ensure that only members within the zip codes participate. Polling participants should be prepared to prove both membership and residency. This is where the postcards really help. The label on the postcard supplies both.

The Polling Form

It is the responsibility of the branch seneschal (or branch representative if the seneschal is one of the candidates) to prepare and make available the polling forms. They do not handle the polling forms after they are collected, but may serve as fair witness to the distribution and collection process. Unless the Crown specifies differently, the format is found in Appendix A of An Tir Kingdom Law.

Absentee Polling

Providing Absentee Polling forms is recommended, but not specifically required by An Tir Kingdom Law. It may be a requirement of the Crown. In which case, they will be sent directly to the Crown or to the Crown's designee.

Who Conducts the Polling?

The Crown and Kingdom Seneschal (or their designees) must conduct the polling. A representative of the branch provides fair witness. The Baronial Seneschal generally serves as the branch representative. This would change if the Seneschal was one of the candidates or directly related to one of the candidates. If you are concerned about a conflict of interest, consult the Kingdom Seneschal.

Meeting the Candidates

Try to arrange events that allow the Crown and the populace to meet the candidates. 'Meet and Greet' are a great way to get to know each other in an informal setting. Encourage the candidates to publish their modern and SCA resumes in the newsletter and ask them to share their goals and aspirations for the Barony. At the very least, the Candidates should be prepared to present themselves prior to the polling. It is not uncommon for the Crown to ask the candidates questions in a public forum prior to the polling.

In a large Barony, a series of Meet the Candidates can be planned at various locations. The needs of the Barony, time constraints of the Candidates, and the wishes of the Crown must all be considered when planning this phase of the selection process.

The Polling Night/Event

Unless mailed directly to the Crown or the Kingdom Seneschal (or their representative), all polling forms will be collected on the night of the official polling. No one from the branch may handle the completed polling forms. Failure to comply can result in the polling being considered invalid. You must have a way of ensuring that only members within the Zip Codes return the form. The only exceptions would be the Baronial candidates, the Baronial officers, and Sergeants, Courtiers, Gallants, Yeomen and Lancers. Those who are not eligible to participate formally in the polling are encouraged to write the Crown directly.

If the Crown is not present at the polling, the forms will be collected and sealed in a large envelope(s). The Crown's representative will ensure the forms make it to the Crown in a timely manner. All comments on the Polling forms must be signed with modern and SCA name to be given consideration, but if no comments are made, no identification of the participant is required.

All comments provided to the Crown are kept confidential. 'Numbers' are not released; comments are not shared with the branch. After the polling, the documents are destroyed. Do not expect to see the 'numbers'. It is important to understand that the factors used to make the decision vary from Crown to Crown. You will not be privy to the letters, emails, and polling forms received by the Crown. Understanding this to begin with, will help set expectations for the Barony.

What if ...

The Selection process is not a popular vote. Corpora leaves the decision solely with the Crown. Unless there is 'substantive' opposition, any candidate may be selected. Unfortunately 'substantive' opposition is loosely defined. Once the decision is made it is important to give those who are selected your support. Concerns should be addressed to the Crown and the Kingdom Seneschal.

The Process in Outline Form (Who talks to whom?)

- ✓ The Baron/Baroness discussed their stepping down with the Crown. Preferences are discussed and a general timeline is decided. Qualifications of the candidates, polling date, and stepping down dates discussed. This is the time to determine whether or not the Crown or their representative will be conducting the polling.
- ✓ The Baron/Baroness meets with the Baronial Seneschal and discusses plans to step down. Potential dates and locations are discussed. Details as to notification of the membership, location of the polling (securing the site), and preferences of the Crown are discussed.
- ✓ Baronial Seneschal contacts the Kingdom Seneschal for additional directions.
- ✓ Baron/Baroness announce stepping down to the Barony
- ✓ Candidates are nominated and confirmed. Resumes are provided.
- ✓ Notification of the polling to membership is arranged (Crier/ postcards, etc). Absentee procedure is established if applicable.
- ✓ Candidates present themselves to the branch and the Crown. Polling forms are prepared.
- ✓ Polling takes place with the Crown and Kingdom Seneschal (or their designees) in attendance.
- ✓ Crown evaluates opinion polling and announces Their decision.
- ✓ New Baron/Baroness invested by the Crown.

The Process in Timeline Form

4 to 6 months before the proposed Investiture date:

- * The Baronial Coronets contact the Crown with their intent to step down.
- * The Baronial Coronets and Their Majesties set a date, time, and place for the polling, in consultation with the Baronial Seneschal.
- * The Baronial Seneschal must contact the Kingdom Seneschal.
- * If neither of Their Majesties will be present at the polling They need to name a representative.
- * If the Kingdom Seneschal will not be present at the polling, s/he needs to name a representative.

3 months (90 days) before the polling date:

- * The Baronial Coronets announce to the populace their decision to step down.
- * The Baronial Coronets announce the date, time, and place of the polling to the populace.
- * The Baronial Coronets invite the populace to nominate worthy individuals to succeed them.
- * The Baronial Coronets appoint a "wrangler", usually the Seneschal/e, whose job will be to take care of certain administrative tasks associated with the polling process.

2 months before the polling date:

- * Get the announcement into the next available "Crier". Due to the 2-month lead time the "Crier" requires, this means that you might get only one official announcement, but you have to have it.
- * Set a deadline for nominations - ideally no later than one month before the polling date, for the sake of your sanity and adequate notice to the populace.
- * Find out from the Kingdom Seneschal what the current policy is for obtaining labels from Milpitas for polling notices.

1 month before the polling date:

- * Nominations should cease.
- * Make sure that all nominees are current members, and are acceptable to the Crown.
- * Collect letters of intent, SCA resumés, and modern resumés from the candidates. Send or deliver these originals to Their Majesties, after first making copies of the letters of intent and the SCA resumés for distribution to the populace.
- * Distribute the candidates' letters of intent and SCA resumés to the populace via special publication and/or baronial website. The populace should not have access to the candidates' modern resumés due to certain privacy laws, at least in the USA.
- * Send out polling notices.
- * Confirm availability of polling site.
- * Publish times and dates of any meet and greets in the local newsletter.

Two weeks before the polling date:

- * Hold a 'Meet and Greet the Candidates'.
- * Begin distributing absentee ballots to those who request them, making sure that you have a means to account for them so people don't poll twice.

One week before the polling date:

- Make enough copies of the (hopefully) new and improved standard form to allow all eligible members of your populace to poll.

Term limits and Confidence Polling

From An Tir Kingdom Law:

Baronial Term Limits

Landed Barons and Baronesses shall be limited to not more than two consecutive terms of three years.

An opinion poll shall be performed at least every three years to evaluate the relationship between the Baronial Coronets and their populace. This poll shall be similar to the selection polling but without the addition of candidates.

Official notification of the time and place of the Confidence Poll must appear as described in the Selection Polling process. Polling can be done in person or via mail as directed by the Crown and the Kingdom Seneschal.

The Polling form will list the names of the Baron/Baroness with a place to indicate 'Support' 'Do not Support' and a place for comments. All comments must be signed with modern and SCA names to be considered.

As of the effective date of this law, Barons and Baronesses who have served for six or more consecutive years shall have one year to conduct a polling which will help enable the Crown to determine their successors.

The Process

After reviewing the Baronial Selection document, you should have a fairly clear idea of how to conduct a Confidence Polling. With a Confidence Polling there are no additional candidates. The Polling Form lists the name of the Baron/Baroness and the choices of "support" or "do not support". You will need to add a place for comments, which will need to be signed by the member completing the poll. Only paid members will participate in the Confidence Polling. All SCA participants are free to communicate directly with the Crown.

Coordination will still need to take place between the Baronial Coronets and the Crown. Proper notification is still necessary by official channels. The Kingdom Seneschal will need to officiate, or provide a designee.

Confidence pollings tend to be more relaxed. Often they are conducted at a regular business meeting, sometimes at a local event. Some confidence pollings are conducted by a mail-in polling form using the labels from the SCA Registry. How the polling is conducted is sometimes decided by the local 'climate'. If you are uncertain as to the best option, the Baron/Baroness are encouraged to discuss concerns with the Crown. The Baronial Seneschal should likewise contact the Kingdom Seneschal.

