

KIRKIN' O' THE TARTANS

The History

The ceremony of Kirkin' o' the Tartans is of American origin, though based on Scottish history and legend. After Bonnie Prince Charlie's Scottish forces were defeated by the English at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, Scotland once again came under British rule. To control the Scots, a special Act was passed that forbade the carrying of arms and the wearing of kilts, plain or any tartan, which represented Scottish heritage. Orders were given for British troops to kill upon sight any person dressed in Highland garb or displaying the tartan. This Act prompted the stubborn Scots to secretly carry with them a piece of their tartan as they went to the Kirk. The minister then slipped a blessing (a Kirkin') into the service for the tartans. The prohibition against the tartan lasted for nearly 50 years. At the repeal of the Act, the Church of Scotland celebrated with a Service of Family Covenant, at which time the tartan of each family was offered as a covenant expression for the Lord's blessing.

The First Kirkin'

The Saint Andrew's Society of Washington, D.C. held the first Kirkin' during the early years of World War II. The late Dr. Peter Marshall, an eloquent Scot, then pastor of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and later chaplain of the U.S. Senate, led the service in 1943, choosing "Kirkin' o' the Tartan" for the title of his sermon. He had preached many sermons in support of the British War Relief and the Scottish Clans Evacuation Plan. His sermons were so popular that a request was made for their publication, with the proceeds from the sales designated for war relief programs. As the war continued, the D.C. Saint Andrew's Society continued to hold services of unified prayer for the subjects of the British Isles. These became known as Kirkins. In 1947, he was elected Chaplain of the U.S. Senate.

The Service

The worship service is for traditional content, using much of the Church of Scotland form. Central to its theme is the presentation of various tartans - through flags and the wearing of tartans for a blessing. Clans were simply a gathering of peoples for their protection and for economic, political, and social support. Clansmen demonstrated a true brotherhood of man, and the tartan is a symbol of this love and togetherness. The Kirkin' is intended to encourage all participants to reflect with thanksgiving on their own family and ethnic heritage, and to celebrate God's grace poured out for all generations.

The Beadle

A kilted Beadle leads the worship procession carrying the Bible to the front of the sanctuary and the pulpit. Reminiscent of an old custom of the Church of Scotland, this tradition highlights the Bible as the Word of our Lord and the center of our faith.

But What is a Beadle?

The ancient office of "doorkeeper" - with origins dating back to the early synagogues of Galilee and Judea, and the early Christian church - was, no doubt, the seed from which the Beadle grew. In the Roman Catholic Church of pre-Reformation times, the doorkeeper was ordained to his office. Post-Reformation, he lost his ecclesiastical standing, but gained more social status. In the earliest days, his charge was to open church doors at the correct times to the faithful; close them always to the unfaithful.

As discipline became less of an issue, the function developed toward a messenger role for the Minister and Session. By the time the Reformation took hold, the position became known by the Latin "Bedellus," a word referring to a messenger or summoner of parties to court, in this case the session. The term Bedellus was too cumbersome for the Scots, and over time it evolved into Beadle.

When church attendance was compulsory, every absentee was hunted down by the Beadle to appear before the Session. The Beadle was indispensable, and a difficult position to fill, requiring moral, mental, and physical strength, in addition to knowledge of the townsfolk, church liturgy, and the Bible.

In addition to his service as messenger, his Sunday mornings were full. Once the church doors were opened - and by now the doorkeeper reported to the Beadle - the Beadle began by ringing the bell. He then fetched the Bible from the Session-house, took it to the pulpit, and escorted the Minister to the same. During the service, he monitored the sanctuary continually for laggards and disturbances.

By the mid-to-late 1800's, the position died out to various paid church staff to be revived during the 1900's throughout much of Scotland and many Presbyterian churches in the United States.

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Clan Crests

The Clan Crest, or Coat of Arms, goes farther back in Scotland's history as a clan identifier than does the tartan. A clan's official crest design was approved and granted to the chief of the clan by the Lord Lyon King of Arms. Its acceptance and authenticity were then recorded in the *Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland* - a register established in 1592 during the reign of James VI (before he also became James I of England) and kept today in the Court of the Lord Lyon in Edinburgh. It is acknowledged as the most magnificent heraldic manuscript in Europe.

In ancient times, it was the custom for clan chiefs to give their relations and followers a metal plate of their crest to wear as a badge indicating clan allegiance. It was affixed to their clothing by a buckle and strap usually inscribed with the Chief's motto. Only a Chief or his direct heir was permitted to wear the crest without the strap and buckle.

The Evolution of the Kilt

No doubt the most identifiable garment worn by the Scots is the kilt, regardless of the fabric. The kilt of modern times is made with eight yards of tartan, pleated together in the back, left unpleated in the front, and designed like a wrap-around apron. Laid out flat, it would have pleats in the middle, with two unpleated, flat sections on either side. In examining its history, it also helps to remember that the modern kilt is made to cover only the lower half of the body, from waist down to the knees.

In the late 1500's, the Feileadh Mor, or the Great Kilt, as we saw on William Wallace in *Braveheart*, was made to cover most of the body, from the knees to the neck, and sometimes even the head. It was made using twice the width of cloth as a modern kilt. One laid out the yardage of the very wide cloth on the ground and proceeded to pleat the center of the fabric, leaving the two flat sections on either side. It would look much the same as the modern kilt when spread out, but with the two flat side sections being twice as long.

Source: Clothing I: What's up with the Guy in the Skirt? (www.Shetlandpiper.com: Volume I, Issue 5, April 30, 2001)

The Scottish National Flag

The "Cross of St. Andrew," also known as the "Saltire" (meaning cross in the shape of an X), is the oldest flag of any country. History suggests that the Romans put the Apostle Andrew to death by being pinned to a cross of this shape.

While there are various tales of the flag's origins, most have its birth at a 9th century battle in East Lothian, when the army of the King of the Picts, Angus MacFergus, assisted by a detachment of Scots, found themselves surrounded by an overwhelming force of Angels under the King of Northumbria. Early in the evening before the battle, King Angus prayed to God that, in spite of his smaller army, he might lead his soldiers to victory. As dusk approached, they saw a formation of clouds resembling a white diagonal cross against the azure blue sky - the very cross-shape on which Andrew was put to death. The king promised that if conquests were granted him through the help of Andrew, then Andrew's name would be adopted forever after as their patron saint. Indeed, he was successful the next day, and the Cross of St. Andrew became the flag of Scotland.

The Second Scottish Flag

This flag - yellow background with red lion in the center and red border - is often more widely associated with Scotland than its actual flag. However, it is the Royal Flag of Scotland, first adopted by William the Lion in 1165. Although older than the Saltire, it is legally for use only by the monarch, Queen Elizabeth, or her representatives in the UK government in Scotland.

The Celts

A part of our own Christian inheritance lies in the ancient tradition of the Celts. Observation of their poetry, prayers, and art - which finally became available through the early Christian teachers - tells us of the Celts' tradition of "spirituality and continuity." All of life, art, and the senses communicated an integration of the spiritual and the material realms. This integration follows through in their prayers.

Source: Hendersonville Presbyterian Church
Hendersonville, NC