

Kirkin' o' the Tartan

A Kirk is a Scottish word for Church. The Kirkin' o' the Tartans is the traditional blessing of the tartans by the Clergy.

Following the failure of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 when the English at Culloden defeated the Jacobites, the Disarming Act of 1746 forbade the Scots from wearing their tartans. The traditional Clan System, with its representative tartans, was declared forbidden as troops loyal to the Duke of Cumberland and the House of Hanover ravaged the Scottish Highlands, searching out Jacobite supporters.

The legend goes the Highlanders hid swatches of tartan fabric among their clothing when they went to church, and at a predetermined time, they secretly touched their tartan material during the worship service.

With the coming of the 18th Century, many of these Scots faced the Highland Clearances. Thousands of Highland tenant farmers were forced into becoming pioneers in the New World as their former aristocratic lords drove them off their land, so that they could conduct the much more profitable business of raising sheep. The Highlander, losing many of these traditions, became a victim of the Industrial Revolution.

The Kirkin' o' Tartans was revived during WWII by Reverend Peter Marshall, then the Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. To encourage Scottish Americans to sign up to fight on behalf of Great Britain, Peter Marshall recreated the Kirkin' o' the Tartans ceremony in 1943 to try to instill pride among Scottish Americans in their Scottish homeland. The Kirkin' o' the Tartans ceremony was then held in Presbyterian churches across the USA. Today, the Kirkin' o' the Tartans is not limited to Presbyterian Churches, but can be observed in other Protestant and Roman Catholic services where the ceremony is a great social occasion for people of Scottish origin to congregate and worship God.