

Culloden and Clan Tartan

Say the word Culloden and a mental picture forms in the mind. Highland clans lined up facing the English invader. Bonnie Prince Charlie on his gallant steed, sword in hand ready to lead. All clans in their appropriate clan tartans. A blazing field of clan tartans.

The unfortunate truth is, this did not happen as clan tartan did not exist as such, at this time. Tartan did exist but not with clan names attached to it. Tartan existed but as a pattern of colors in warp and weft. The clansmen were wearing tartan, but not the more romantic clan tartan. There were no MacDonald's in clan tartan of modern, ancient, weathered or muted colors.

Some may have worn similar patterns, but not because it was their clan tartan. Maybe a similar like for the colors or pattern but nothing to do with the clan. Anyway Bonnie Prince Charlie fled the field before the end of the battle and left his Scottish army to die or survive on it's own. The bravery of the Scots at Culloden will never be in question, but the use of clan tartan just did not happen at Culloden.

One year after Culloden came the "Act of Proscription", on August 1, 1747. Go to any clan tent and someone will tell you how their clan tartan was banned on penalty of death and dismemberment. Great story, but not what really happened. The Act of Proscription states that no man or boy, within that part of Great Britain called Scotland, other than those employed as officers and soldiers in his majesty's forces, shall on any pretence whatsoever, wear or put on clothes commonly called Highland clothes (that is to say) the plaid, Philabeg or little kilt, trews, shoulder belts or anything that belongs to

Highland garb. No tartan or party-colored plaid or stuff shall be used for great coats or upper coats. There is no mention of clan tartan. Remember clan tartan did not exist at Culloden 1746 and it did not exist as such in 1747 with the “Act of Proscription”.

As far as death and dismemberment “not so” For the first offence of this act one would suffer imprisonment for six months without bail. The second offense would cause you to be transported to any of his majesty’s plantations beyond the seas, there to remain for seven years. End of story.