



TEXTILE HERITAGE MUSEUM

April 14, 2024
By Sarah Dunn

Blog Post # 002

Plaid and Tartan: Complicated Cousins



The Glencoe Mill opened in 1882 and quickly became known for quality plaid fabric. However, if you wanted a tartan, you would have been out of luck. Mr. Holt would have politely explained that Glencoe did not weave tartans.

Today we tend to use the words plaid and tartan interchangeably, but they are not actually the same thing.

Read on to find out more!

What is the difference between plaid and tartan?

To get to the bottom of this question, we need to explore the history and heritage of the tartan.

Most often associated with Scotland, the use of a tartan may have traditionally been part of a family's identity. Today there are many sites where you can find your family's tartan (No Scottish ancestry required!).



But tartans weren't always so easily cataloged. Tartan was originally worn by the inhabitants of the Highlands, the mountainous region of northern Scotland. In 1746, certain types of tartan clothing were outlawed after the Jacobites, angry Catholic Scots, rebelled against England's Protestant King George II. The ban lasted 35 years and cemented the tartan's reputation as a symbol of rebellion.



Surprisingly, the association of specific tartans with specific clans began in the early 19th century, long after many of us assume it started (*Braveheart*, anyone?). Evidence shows it may be the result of a remarkable campaign started in the 1820s by the son of a Scottish merchant. He wanted to standardize (and capitalize on) the tartan clan associations. Others joined in, and by the 1840s, several books were published purporting to have the 'real truth' about what tartan belonged to who.

There may not have been a consensus, but tartan's popularity was on the rise and weavers were keen to encourage the movement. They created sample books and eventually set the standards that are still in place now.

Today, tartans are alive and well, and tamer than Johnny Rotten ever was. Tartans can be found everywhere from bedding to dog collars to the skeleton on our front porch last Halloween (perhaps one of those Jacobites?).



Scottish history lesson over...almost. Here's the thing: our word *plaid* is based on an old Scottish Gaelic word, *plaid*, meaning blanket. It was a large rectangular cloth worn in any number of ways, including pleated and held in place at the waist by a belt. Sound familiar? Yep, it was an early form of the kilt. And everyone knows kilts are typically tartans.

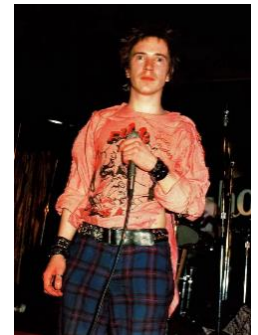
What's going on? Where is the difference?

PUNK TARTAN

Tartan flourished during the punk era of the 1970s.

Fashion designer [Vivienne Westwood](#) used it when she dressed bands like the Sex Pistols. Pictured here is Sex Pistols

lead singer, Johnny Rotten, in a fetching pair of tartan trousers.



The difference is in the pattern itself. Let's compare a tartan and a plaid made up of the same four colors: red, blue, brown, and white.

The Carr family tartan



A modern plaid



Colors	
The colors blend to create new colors.	The colors are more distinct and create shades instead of new colors
Thin Stripes/Wide Bands	
All colors, without regard to width, run in parallel lines, in both directions. Both sizes of lines repeat at the same interval in both the warp and the weft (See this post for more about weaving terminology)	Colors can be thin or wide in either direction, but not necessarily both
Geometry	
The only shapes created will be squares.	Both squares and rectangles can be created.
Symmetry	
The pattern is always symmetrical. The pattern's repeat can be seen both vertically and horizontally. This sample shows two full repeats in both directions.	Symmetry is not a requirement of the plaid pattern so it may or may not be present. This sample's repeat forms stripes.

All tartans are plaids, but not all plaids are tartans.

Now you know the difference. Whether you lean towards the history of the tartan or the versatility of plaid, you'll always know which one you're wearing!

Curious to know more about plaids (and tartans)? Come check out the museum, open Tuesday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm! Join us as we weave the story of North Carolina's textile industry and celebrate the spirit of the people who shaped it.



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Blog Post # 001

Fabric: how do they make that stuff?

Glencoe Mill was famous for their cotton fabric, famously producing beautiful plaids for over 70 years. But how much do you know about how fabric is made?

Let's meet the major players:

- The cotton – to make into thread.
- The loom – to weave the thread into fabric.
- The patterns – to make the fabric pretty through color or texture (or both!)

The Cotton

Cotton has grown in North America for upwards of [7000 years](#). It wouldn't be until the 1790s, and Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin, that cotton would take off as a staple on weaving looms in the newly formed United States of America.

To [spin cotton](#) into thread requires its own set of tools, such as the spinning wheel and carding paddles. You 'card,' or comb, the cotton with two [paddles](#) with hundreds of tiny spikes. This lines up all the fibers, just like brushing your hair.



Then you feed the straightened bunches of fibers into the [spinning wheel](#), which twists the cotton tightly into thread.

By the time Glencoe Mill opened, hand spinning thread wasn't necessary anymore. The invention of large machinery did the work on many spinners in a fraction of the time.

Glencoe Mill was a 'bale to bolt' mill. Bales of ginned cotton, weighing an average of 480 pounds, entered the mill, were spun into thread, and woven into cloth, leaving the doors as bolts of fabric.



The Loom

Weaving is done on a loom. Looms are wooden or metal frames which hold the threads to be woven. The tension created by the loom is an essential part of the weaving process.



Looms can be small enough to sit on table...

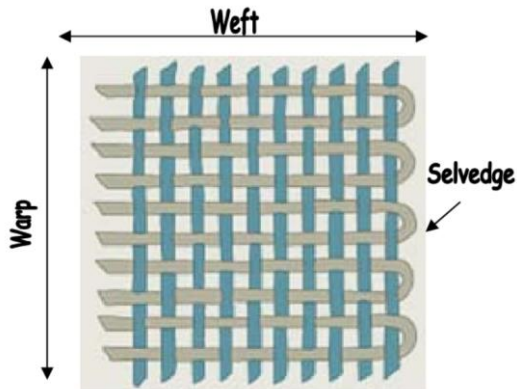


...or big enough to fill up a room.

Or they can be bigger still and fill up factory floors like here at the Glencoe Mill!

No matter the size, they all work the same way:

1. The loom is set up with threads running up and down (vertically), called the **warp**.
2. The warp threads are carefully rolled up, so they are out of the way of weaving. They will unroll as the weaving process starts.
3. Weaving begins when new threads are added running side to side, or horizontally. These threads are called the **weft**. Weft threads are never cut so they form an edge to the fabric called the **selvedge**.



**Struggling to keep warp and weft apart?
Remember the weft goes from
weft to wight...**

I mean, left to right!

Check out this start-to-finish fast motion loom project from Australian weaver Kelly Casanova. She condenses weeks and weeks of work into just 9 minutes! The pegs on the wall at the beginning of the video are for measuring out the warp threads before setting up the loom. Enjoy!



The patterns

The user must manipulate the loom to make the weft threads go over and under the warp threads in a pattern. The simplest of these patterns is the over-under pattern we learn as kids when we weave [placemats](#) or [potholders](#).

This gives us cloth. If the warp and the weft are the same color, we get solid colored fabric.

But fancier fabrics like [damask](#) are made by manipulating the over-under pattern into complex and beautiful images like flowers and swirls. Shiny warp and weft threads give the fabric subtle shine. The use of different colors of warp and weft give us a myriad of geometric, repeating patterns, such as plaid, gingham, or check.



Final thoughts

Now you have a better idea of how fabric is manufactured. The process has been modernized since the time of the Glencoe Mill to make bigger and faster looms but the basics remain the same. Consider that worldwide, approximately 113.8 million metric tons of fabric are manufactured each year. What an amazing legacy for a product with such humble beginnings.

Curious to know more about weaving and fabric? Come check out the museum, open Tuesday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm! Join us as we weave the story of North Carolina's textile industry and celebrate the industry and spirit of the people who shaped it.



textileheritagemuseum
Textile Heritage Museum, Inc.



Exciting news!



textileheritiagemuseum Got questions about cloth? We have the answers to everything you always wanted to know about fabric but were afraid to ask. Check out the new blog over at our website: www.textileheritagemuseum.com

April 11, 2024

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Fabric: how do they make that stuff? blog post

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Addendum

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of our blog is to provide additional context about information available at the museum to a larger digital audience. The blog will help drive traffic to the rest of the website and to our physical location.

Interactor Analysis

1. **Age:** Our audience is of any age.
2. **Gender:** Our audience is of any sex.
3. **Education:** Our audience can be of any educational level, but the tone of the blog appeals to those with a high school education or above.
4. **Context:** Our audience is likely from the areas surrounding Alamance County, North Carolina, but could also reach anyone interested in history, specifically textile history and information. Blog posts can be enjoyed by domestic and international readers.
5. **Cultural Perspective:** Our audience may be from anywhere in the world. Their cultures and heritages will be varied and mixed.
6. **Socio-Economic:** Our audience may be of any socio-economic class. They must have sufficient disposable income to travel to the museum.
7. **Expertise:** Our audience has a curiosity about history, textiles, or both. They will have varying levels of expertise.
8. **Attitudes:** Our audience already has a positive attitude toward the subjects of history, textiles, and/or textile mills. They will have a curiosity to read more about those subjects.

Trusted Writer Review

1. name of reviewer: London
2. date/time: April 15, 2024 11am MST/2 pm EDT
3. email address: ASU Writing Center
4. your questions for the reviewer:

General impressions.

Check over references.

Review opening of plaid/tartan post to brainstorm better intro/transitions

5. a brief reflection about your experience with the other writer, what you gained, and how it has affected your writing (1-2 paragraphs).

London and I worked mostly on the opening of the plaid/tartan post because I was really unhappy with the way it was reading. She helped me brainstorm some ideas for how to reorganize the existing sentences into a more effective way. It was nice to have that kind of sounding board. She also confirmed that the posts were informative since she didn't really know anything about either topic.

We also spent a little time discussing the look of the posts because I was struggling with hitting a balance with breaking up the text.

After spending two hours with my dad last week, the 30 minutes with London went by very quickly! I wish we had more time, but I think we spent it as productively as possible.