

## *Unnamed tartan from Prince Edward Isle*

In researching some old specimens in Prince Edward Isle (PEI), Canada I came across a plaid that was instantly recognisable as the pattern identified in various databases as either *A Plaid belonging to Flora MacDonald* or *MacDonald of Prince Edward Isle*. There are three settings of the sett recorded each with an uncertain threadcount.

The *Flora MacDonald* attribution comes from a Wilsons' sample in the Fort William Museum where it is labelled a 'a plaid belong to for a MacDonald' without any evidence to support the claim. We don't know what Wilsons' named the pattern but it is possible that they could have named it *Flora MacDonald* as they were in the habit of naming patterns after famous individuals as it helped sales, and it's easy to imagine how the name could later have been taken literally. There is a small Wilsons' sample in the collection of the Scottish Tartans Society that has been incorrectly recorded as having only white overstripes, probably due to fading. The specimen shown here confirms the correct setting and colours and in particular the fact that the overstripes are white and yellow rather than solely white. The Scottish Tartans Authority has two entries under *MacDonald of Prince Edward Isle* the notes for which question whether it's a modern sett and possibly designed by a (not the) *Flora MacDonald*. It seems likely that the PEI connection comes from someone having seen the plaid being described here which belongs to a family descended from the *MacDonalds of Glenaladale* who had the tradition that it belonged to *Capt John MacDonald of Glenaladale* whom emigrated to PEI in 1771. If it was indeed owned by *Capt John* then it must have been at the end of his life as he died in 1810.



The plaid measures 24" x 120" with a 4" fringe at each end. Its colours and weave confirm that it was woven by Messrs Wilsons of Bannockburn 1790-1830 and represents a fine example of their 'Fine' cloth. It's a balanced weave with one full repeat across the warp and as such could have been used either as shown here or joined to make a double width plaid of two repeat 48" wide. The count to the half sett is:

B/26 K6 B6 K6 B6 K48 B56 K2 W12 K2 B56 K48 B32 R52 B32 K48 G32 R10  
G10 R10 G32 K2 Y12 K2 G32 R10 G10 R10 G32 K48 B6 K6 B6 K6 B/26

The design is based on the Black Watch tartan with additional elements and as a joined piece could easily have been meant for use as a plaid, either military or civilian, although considerably more material would have been required. As this has been fringed at both ends I suspect that it was used as a single width piece either as a narrow plaid or for interior decoration.

Irrespective of what the tartan was/is called, this specimen is a fine example of Wilsons' early C19th weaving that settles once and for all the correct setting.

