

Midwest Welsh History Knowledge Expanded By Another Vital Translation

Review by Mary Morris Mergenthal

The Welsh-American community near and far owes a great debt to the translation ability and energy of Martha A. Davies of Lincoln, Neb. Those who enjoyed her earlier volume of Wisconsin Welsh history, can follow some of those same immigrants to the next stage of their journey—southern Minnesota or northern Iowa.

That book, *Early History of the Welsh in Proscairon District of Wisconsin* [a translation by Martha A. Davies of *Hanes Boreul Ardal Proscairon*, Wisconsin, 1894, by Daniel Williams], was referenced in this new book by several of the "Old Settlers" in Lake Crystal, Minn., or Lime Springs, Iowa.

The original copies of the new book, *Hanes Cymry Minnesota* [History of the Welsh in Minnesota], did include some portions in English. But Martha's special gift has been to translate those original portions never before available to English-only speakers. Her work shows that these stories are completely new material as well. The original book's title was *Hanes Cymry Minnesota, Foreston and Lime Springs, Iowa, as told by the Old Settlers* (1895). In this English version, one can read over 60 vignettes by "The Old Settlers," tales of the named northern Iowa settlements and more, as well as the southern Minnesota Welsh settlements in Butternut, Cambria, Judson, Lake Crystal, and South Bend; as well as Cleveland, Eagle Lake, Kasota, Otowa [sic], and Tracy. The shopping towns of Mankato, St. Peter, and New Ulm are also referenced. A good number of Welsh leaders in the Twin Cities are listed, including praise for the Welsh Church there and its Willing Workers group and the many Welsh people in positions of esteem in those cities.

There are stories of misery because of the extreme cold, the difficulty getting supplies, grasshoppers, drought, drafty cabins, and more. Perhaps it is surprising, then, to read of the importance of getting chapels built, and before that, establishing a Sunday School and naming deacons. Those Sunday Schools were no modern-day establishment of classes for children apart from elders. Those Schools were for everyone at once, usually held in homes...and often lasting the entire Sabbath day, it seems!

Those chapels burned to the ground more than once, one the day before it was to be used for the first time! Amidst the difficulties, those Welsh settlers also continued to hold literary accomplishment in high regard, just as their forebears had in Wales. Though the first Eisteddfod [Welsh singing and poetry competition] in 1871 in one area was completely routed by fleas (!), the spirit for such efforts wasn't dimmed in the least. Throughout the book there are many fine photos of settlers. Given the original publishing date, most are men, but some women were included, plus even the Indian Little Crow. Of course, no book about southern Minnesota at that time could fail to remark on the presence of the Indians.

For the most part, it seems the settlers had calm relationships with Indians who came by their homes. [This was written long before the term Native Americans or First People were "invented" so we will maintain the terms of the book.] There are a number of references to the largest mass murder in U.S. history, the hanging of 38 Indians in 1862 in Mankato, but, thankfully, no description of that vindictive event. Researchers will find this indexed volume a treasure trove. People with personal roots in southern Minnesota or northern Iowa, or those with Welsh roots elsewhere, will find much of interest.

History of the Welsh in Minnesota, Foreston and Lime Springs, Iowa.

Translated from the Welsh by Martha A. Davies.

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Great Plains Welsh Heritage Project (Box 254, 307 S. 7th St., Wymore, NE 68466) is a registered publisher. Its four books of Welsh-American history, translated from the Welsh language, are available for purchase on www.welshheritageproject.org.

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