

2018 Theme Hiraeth

Tangible Heritage Connections

*by Merch o Fanceinion***

I especially treasure a few family heirlooms including a table, a set of dishes, an old photograph, a book, and plants in a shay corner of our garden. All spark interest in family history. These possessions generate a longing to know more about family origins, *hiraeth* that encourages understanding, sharing, and celebrating heritage.

We cherish a cherry Pembroke table said to have been in my father's family since before the Revolutionary War. When I was in high school, I researched family history and found the grave of White Griswold, an ancestor nine generations back, who served in the Continental Army. During his military service he traveled from his family's farm in Manchester, Connecticut, to Pennsylvania. A marker by his headstone in a Manchester cemetery acknowledges his Revolutionary War service. Since he was willing to fight to help secure freedom for his nation, I feel compelled to do my duty as a citizen by never failing to exercise my responsibility to vote. I think of him when I vote in each and every local, state, and national election and have done so since I was 21.

I treasure a set of dishes that once belonged to my father's mother. They were given to my mother and she passed them on to me. We chose our dining room wallpaper to coordinate with the china pattern, *Florentine Green* from Johnson Brothers. I do not use the set every day because the gold trim would be damaged by the microwave oven. I do bring it out for family gatherings. Their use serves to connect us with past generations who used these dishes.

A faded photograph of my mother's Welsh grandparents, Jane (Price) and John Jones, hangs among other family pictures near my desk at home. Jane's *Book of Common Prayer*, purchased in a Mold bookshop and inscribed as a gift from her father, is on display with other favorite books. Jane and John were married 160 years ago at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, the parish church in Mold, Flintshire, North Wales. Jones family belongings are primarily responsible for galvanizing my interest in Welsh culture, history, and language.

John had worked as a "gentleman's servant" in nearby Denbighshire, but shortly after marriage he and Jane emigrated to East Hartford, Connecticut. There John began his own greenhouse and nursery business. When their daughter Mary Anne married in 1887, John gave her a lily-of-the-valley plant from his business for her garden. My mother took root stock from this planting in 1940 for her own garden, and we transplanted some of its root stock from that garden to our own almost 20 years ago. Each spring's blooming serves as a fragrant living link to family.

Learning about Jane, John, and their family, reading Jane's prayer book, and nurturing their plants in our garden provided powerful incentive to connect with the family's Welsh origin. Wondering whether or not Jane and John had spoken Welsh before they came to America was my initial inspiration to begin to learn to speak Welsh myself. Curiosity about their homeland was the reason we planned a family trip to Wales. When we visited the church where Jane had

sung in the choir and had married John, I felt that we had connected. I felt at home on the High Street in Mold where Jane had shared a home with her brothers and sisters. The countryside surrounding Mold and Denbigh was also welcoming.

The connection I feel to Wales is the reason I participate in Welsh-heritage events such as *cymanfaoedd canu* and maintain correspondence with friends in Wales. ***Hiraeth*** has been my motivation for ongoing participation in many Welsh-heritage activities. While searching for connections to my own heritage, I have expanded my own knowledge and worked to help others do the same.

I firmly believe that people should strive to be in touch with their own ethnic origins and join in celebrations of the heritage of others. Cultural festivals are wonderful ways to explore diversity. Learning other languages is an ideal way to expand understanding of other cultures in their own words. Learning needs to begin as early as possible within families and in schools. The world needs citizens fully in touch with their own history and enthusiastic to embrace the wisdom that other cultures have to offer. We would do well to expand the concept of ***hiraeth*** to encompass longing for cultural appreciation worldwide.

**Ffugenw of Mary Williams-Norton