

2023 Christmas Gymanfa Ganu

By Jan Jones Batty and Ann Lemmenes—full article originally published in the January/February 2024 issue of Ninnau.

On November 12, the Welsh Gymanfa Ganu Association of Wisconsin (WGGAW) held its annual Christmas Gymanfa Ganu at the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Redgranite. Rev. Jennifer Czarnota provided a welcome and devotions for the afternoon and WGGAW's Dale Hughes was the session moderator.

This year we celebrated the contributions and memory of Edward D. and Barbara Jane Jones, who were very involved members of the church and encouraged the WGGAW to hold an annual gymanfa ganu there. The first was held in 2001.



Ed and Barb were both descendants of farm families that emigrated from Wales in the 1800s. Ed, a veteran who piloted B-17s during WWII, earned a PhD in Plant Pathology. He established the Uihlein Seed Potato Research Farm near Lake Placid, NY

during his career at Cornell University. Barb earned a BS/RN degree. She worked in the same field as Ed while raising their four children in Ithaca, NY. In retirement, they returned to central Wisconsin and settled on Big Hills Lake.

During the gymanfa ganu, their son David Rees Jones presented recollections of his parents and family life. Respect was a big element in their growing up. His sisters and brother, and Barb's sister Sandy Jones Stanicek, were in attendance, as were their children and grandchildren.

About half of our songs were in the church's hymnal (many were Welsh) and the rest were from the

WGGAW Christmas hymnal. Three of the songs had descants led by Lori Page, our soloist, who chose to play the clarinet on "Good Christian Men, Rejoice." Lori also sang "Bless This House" and "Gesu Bambino" accompanied by Ann. On "Watcher, Tell Us of The Night" (Aberystwyth), Ann divided us into two groups and had us face each other. One side sang lines one and three and the other side sang lines two and four. So, the song came alive with the Traveler talking to the Watcher and the Watcher responding to the Traveler.

Ann brought out her large hand-held drum which she made under the direction of a Native American. It had a bass sound. We then sang "Twas in The Moon of Wintertime," the Huron carol, while she led us softly playing the drum. She explained that the song was written by a Jesuit priest to tell the Christmas story in Native American terms. Mighty Gitchi Manitu, Rabbit skins, beaver pelts... etc. It was sung in unison with the men on verse two and the women on verse three and all on verse four with a haunting descant in the hymnbook sung by Lori. Very effective. A new favorite for many of us. Of course, we sang Stille Nacht in German, English and Welsh and the third verse a cappella.

Hymns were organized by Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, and Angel Proclamation and ended with Diadem at the request of the Ed and Barbara Jones family. "Deck the Hall" was sung after the benediction.

The te bach in the fellowship hall left us wanting for nothing – there were plenty of sandwiches, accompaniments, and sweet treats to overfeed us for our journey home. Tea, coffee and lemonade flowed.

The Jones family had several displays of their family memorabilia as well as a slide show of family pictures, including their early Welsh ancestors who settled in central and southwestern Wisconsin. There was a surprise free drawing for a basket of Welsh goodies provided by Linda Evans.



Many thanks to Dale Hughes for initiating and planning this event; Sandy Jones Stanicek and the Jones family for organizing the recollections of Ed and Barb and setting up the presentation; Jenny and her church crew for a wonderful te bach; and to Ann, Tom and Lori for sharing their musical talents.