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LEWIS COUNTY, N. Y.

[A paper read by the Rev. Lewis Williams of Utica, N. Y. at the Centennial services held at Collinsville, N. Y., August 26-27.]

The County of Lewis was set off as a separate portion, adopting the name of Lewis County in the spring of 1805; hence the centennial celebration this year, 1905, at Lowville, August 30. The county was named in honor of General Morgan Lewis, son of Francis Lewis, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He was of Welsh origin, and was prominent as soldier, statesman, citizen; born in 1754, died 1844. His pure life and patriotic disinterestedness are worthy of all imitation, and a bright example to those who follow him. Prior to the year 1800 there were quite a large number of Welsh in Oneida County, as we know from its histories. Utica had its Welsh churches and Steuben and other localities very early in the years prior to 1805. No doubt several of these pioneers from "over the sea," found their way into Lewis County, as we learn of families settling near Boonville, in Leyden, Denmark, Watson, Martinsburg, Lowville and on the hills west of Turin and Constableville.

William Reese, a pioneer, located on a large farm near Lyon Falls, was among the most "well to do" farmers many years before the advent of any considerable number of his own Welsh friends. Owen J. Owens had been residing in Collinsville, and was well established in trade long before the year 1842. There were also Rowland Jones, near the line of the Black River canal, in the town of Leyden; Richard Williams, a tanner on the Black River, where the "Davis Bridge" is located, and John Hughes, blacksmith, with two or more other families at Collinsville; also William Roberts and William Wynn, not far from Lowville, Daniel Williams and others across the river in the town of Watson. Daniel Williams had several sons, one of whom was a student at Lowville Academy for some time, moved west, and was a member of the Legislature and a county judge for a term of years in one of the western states. A grandson, Charles Williams, is at present proprietor of the hotel at Big Moose, in the Adirondacks. There were Phillips and Hughes and a few others on the hills west of Turin and Martinsburg. But in 1842 there came a large company of godly men and women, most of them from North Wales, and settled in the towns of West Turin, Leyden and Greig. They came in the sailship *Queen*, being six weeks and a few days over making the transit. Prior to this advent of the Welsh in 1842 and 1843, there were no distinctively Welsh religious services in the county. Some of those who came on the *Queen* went on west, and several families remained in Utica and on the hills of Floyd and Steuben.

But the families which became the chief factors in the Welsh churches of Lewis County, nearly all of them located within a radius of six miles, Collinsville as center. My father, Robert Williams, took up a tract of land on the east side of Black River, not far from Lyon Falls. Two other families were located a mile or two beyond, and it was at his house in the forest that the first Welsh Sunday School was had in that section of the county. Soon after a Methodist preacher by the name of Sprague passed through the several districts and preached the gospel. The Forest Presbyterian Church had been organized in Pinny Settlement in 1826. There were churches in Turin, Leyden, West Turin, etc., among the English. But how earnestly did these Welsh hearts hunger after the old songs, and services of prayer and preaching in the native tongue. A few

families had settled on the east side of Black River in the town of Lyonsdale. Services were held in this new settlement, called "Coed Pella," (the far off woods). On Sunday morning prayer meeting and Sunday School at the house of Edward Jones, who with his neighbor, John Williams, shoemaker, were fellow passengers with my father's family on the Queen. E. Jones stammered much in common conversation, but never while uttering a prayer. The settlement at that point, necessitating a walk of at least four miles to reach from Port Leyden, did not long continue. There was nothing congenial in soil or surroundings to induce people to locate, and so nearly all of them moved away after an experience of two or three years.

In 1843 a Congregational church in the vicinity of Turin was started by S. A. Williams of Deerfield. Services were held on occasional Sabbaths at the house of Griffith Jones, located not far from the village of Turin. This led to a legal organization in 1847, with Rev. D. E. Pritchard pastor; Robert Williams, John O. Jones, deacons. The church in Turin was also connected with the branch on the hill west of Turin, where in 1847 a church building was erected and named Nebo, Rev. D. E. Pritchard, John L. Roberts. William Roberts. Jr., David W. Roberts and Robert Williams, trustees. The Calvinistic brethren erected a house of worship in 1848 on the same hill and called it "Seion," William Roberts, shoemaker, one of the chief leaders, Rowland Pritchard and Evan, father of the sweet singers, Pritchard brothers. The Congregation Church of Turin, organized in 1843, had no house of worship, but the little band met at private homes, as at the house of Griffith Jones, Evan Evans and for some time in the stone school house, located on the west road, between Turin and Constableville. At this place I recollect a bright Sabbath when Rev. W. D. Williams of Deerfield preached. He stood on the front seat of a row of benches or sittings, and some of us younger ones were very anxious lest he come down with a break as the board seemed to bend under his weight. We were quite as much concerned about the seat as about the sermon. Nothing occurred, however, to mar the inspiration of the meeting. Later the place of worship was the Turin school house or academy, as it was called. Then the use of the Baptist Church was given the society, which house in due time was purchased by the Congregational Society. Rev. D. E. Pritchard labored with this church in Turin and on the hill for twenty-one years, doing excellent work and being very faithful throughout the years. Many were added to the church on profession of faith and by letter, as several came over from the old country. Rev. William Roberts, father of David W. Roberts, was also a faithful and godly minister in those parts of the county covered by this sketch. Rev. Mr. Pritchard was called to the Congregational Church in Rome, where he still resides, and left Turin in 1864.

Then followed the faithful ministry of Rev. Hugh R. Williams, Picton Jones, Thomas M. Owen and Thomas M. Griffith, now of Sharon, Pa., all of whom have passed away except Pritchard and Griffith. These churches did much good. There were many difficulties in the pathway of large increase, distance, lack of means, removals and deaths, the younger people uniting with the Presbyterian and M. E. Churches, about 1885, and they were finally dissolved, some of the members going to the Presbyterian and C. M. churches. But who will say that a great and good work was not accomplished. The good seed was sown. God has the record of its worth and increase.

But we have been following only one of the branches, sustained in part by Robert Williams, who had to travel at least five miles to reach the church, who also was the leader in singing, being the author of several tunes still used in the Welsh churches in this country and the old. He

was also a superior reader, teacher in the Sunday School. Others were John O. Jones, Edward Jones, R. M. Price, John T. Jones, Lewis Jones, Thomas and Edward Williams, David W. Roberts, Henry Perry, Richard Davis, whose grandson, Oscar, is an elder in Forest Presbyterian Church, Lyons Falls, Owen Jones and John Jones, William Lewis; yes, many others, whose names we have not at hand, among whom were Joseph Rowland and William Jones, or William "Abercaseg." Many young men and women also were interested in these churches. The mothers, too, all true and loyal to the gospel of our Lord. On the other side the Calvinistics were noble men and women, working in the same cause and loyal to the same master. Soon after the advent of many families in 1842 and Collinsville became a central point to the Calvinistic Methodists. Meetings were held in 1843-5 at the house of Thomas Lewis, then located between Lyons Falls and Port Leyden. An excellent Sunday School was held, occasional preaching by Rev. Edward Rees and others. Rees had come to Port Leyden in 1841 and resided on the east side of Black River. William Ap Rees of New York City, an eminently useful and intelligent worker in the church even to this day, is a son of Rev. Edward Rees, and he has a grand-daughter, Mrs. S. D. Jones, member of Moriah Church, Utica. Later services were held in the Stone School House, Collinsville, and all the "big meetings" in the Stone Church; also in a shop owned by Mr. Brinckerhoff. Benches were provided of the rough boards and plank. I have listened to many telling sermons as given by earnest men in those unique places of worship.

The Calvinistic Methodist Church of Collinsville was fully organized March 13, 1848, and that of Constableville the same year. John Hughes, Evan Roberts, Edward Reese, Robert Evans and Robert Morris were trustees. A small edifice was erected in the village of Constableville and duly dedicated, with Evan Evans, Ellis Lewis and William Roberts, leaders. The new church building at Collinsville was dedicated in 1855 and a new organization perfected. Rev. Thomas Williams, Thomas Lewis, Evan Evans, John Lloyd, father of the late Prof. J. J. Lloyd, John Hughes and G. T. Williams were trustees. Large congregations were gathered with an excellent Sunday School, superior singing and preaching. These churches grew in numbers and influence, and as many came over the sea from the old country along the years 1845-1870, there were sunny days of worth and prosperity among the Welsh churches of Lewis County.

The little settlements near Lowville were also remembered. Rev. Edward Reese and others paid them occasional visits and preached the word in the Welsh tongue. Also, now and then, services were had on the hill west of Martinsburg. Near Lowville meetings were held in the school house at William Wynn's. In 1855 the Calvinistic Methodists put up a small church building in Port Leyden, but the members moving away, the organization did not long continue. Collinsville became the center of strong Christian work and influence. All the annual conventions were held there, where the people came from every part of the county in large numbers to the rich feasts of religious services. This church hail strong supporters in the families of Thomas and Owen Lewis, William Hughes, father of Hon. Hugh Hughes, David and brothers, John Edwards, Pierce Owens, John Owens, Evan Evans, Evan Jones, the miller, John Evans, Thomas T. Williams, father of W. T. Williams, deacon in Bethel, Alder Creek, and the Roberts family, which included David Roberts, a faithful leader in the church until its dissolution in 1903. He is the father of Rev. D. L. Roberts, Whitesboro. Others were John E. Jones, Hugh S. Jones, father of the late Samuel Jones, mayor of Toledo, O., Owen Williams, Hugh D. Jones, etc. At Constableville there were eminently good men with their wives, as Ellis Lewis, father of W.

D. Lewis, Owen and Evan Evans, Robert Morris, Robert Roberts, William Roberts and many others. Later on there were Richard Jones and family, now of Utica, John Roberts, etc.

Far across the river lived Robert Davis, who had been living on a small farm in Greig some years prior to 1842. When religious services in the Welsh tongue were instituted, his companion and himself became deeply interested. The old man could not read, yet at the little Sunday School in my father's house he was taught to read the New Testament. He was wont to attend church at Collinsville. After going the distance of six miles with his oxen and rough sled in winter time, on one occasion, while Mrs. Davis and himself were passing along over a fairly smooth road, suddenly the oxen started on a run. Of course, he had nothing to do but call out "Whoa" at the top of his voice, and trying to get off the sled, he fell into the snow and was left. The old lady sat composedly on the bottom of the sled till the animals came to a standstill. The journey was made, however, in safety, but he afterward said: "I think I have been feeding the oxen too much corn." On one Sunday in summer, a large hog upset the old man. In those earlier days of the Welsh settlements and churches, there were many privations. The people as a rule were poor, yet temperate and industrious. Most of them rented farms, several became owners. There were carpenters, stone masons and tradesmen. Several had large families, children to educate, land to clear up. Farm produce was low, butter ten cents per pound; wages low; often discouraging outlook as to how to make the ends meet. Theirs was the pioneer work in a strange country, but they were loyal to the Bible and the truth, though there were at times lengthy arguments between Congregational and Calvinistic Methodist brethren relative to the doctrine of election, the atonement, etc. Some of the fathers carried on a warm discussion into the small hours of night and were not exhausted, yet they remained friends to one another. They held on to the old gospel of good will to men. They prayed, they sung, preached the word, were rigid in Sunday observance, and sought to avoid the paths of evil and to teach their children the fear of God. Collinsville had Revs. Thomas Williams, Daniel Rowlands, Richard Isaac, James Jarret, as leaders in the pulpit. Richard Jones, who was in the employ of John Hughes as blacksmith, began to preach in Collinsville, and in a few years became a strong and eloquent minister of the New Testament, laboring among the Welsh in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. He is not living, neither any of the men whose names are given above. Robert Williams died in 1874, but the song passed on. Others took up the tune and the music still whispers peace.

Much could be said of all the dear families whose ranks have been broken by the march of time and the destroyer death. Only a few of the many have been mentioned. Others were just as worthy, but we lack space, and names are gone from us. It is evident that this people came from the old country with a grand purpose to better their circumstances and to exalt the Bible and the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Also to become loyal citizens of the United States. How faithfully the several families in the midst of toil, some poverty, much to discourage, at the same time much to cheer and make glad, followed on in the religious life. There were also Wesleyans in the settlements, and Rev. John Jones (Big John Wesley, as he was called), was quite an able preacher. Having no special place of worship, these brethren assimilated with the Calvinistic Methodists and Congregational brethren. Rev. Mr. Jones was called to conduct the opening service at the "big meetings" quite often. He invariably read the ninth chapter of the gospel of John. There were many happy hours spent as visitors came to these homes at the season of religious gatherings when all were made welcome. Neither were the Welsh people confined to the Welsh churches alone. There were many useful men and women attached to the Presbyterian,

Methodist Episcopal and Baptist churches in the county, men filling responsible positions in every department of Christian work. They became eminent in every branch of trade and industry, and many have held high positions in the county through the gift of franchise, etc. Today, children and grandchildren of the pioneers of 1842, and before and later on, are scattered among the several villages and country homes of Lewis County and in other states, in comfortable circumstances. Well educated farmers, mechanics, teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, merchants, preachers, etc., loyal and patriotic citizens, and as a rule being worthy as examples of industrious and temperate habits and of a higher moral and spiritual character.

From these early homes of the Welsh went forth fathers and sons also to defend the old flag in answer to their country's call in '61-4. Some fell on southern soil, many came back and are still in Lewis County, as its honored veterans and faithful patriots. Many of the first preachers of Wales and America have been heard in the Welsh settlements of Lewis County, and have given testimony bearing upon the good name and splendid record of the churches planted there among the Welsh. Rev. E. C. Evans of Remsen supplied the Collinsville church for a term of years. But deaths, removals, assimilation with the American churches on the part of the younger people and other unavoidable conditions brought about the disbanding in 1903. Members united with the Presbyterian churches in Turin, Lyon Falls and Utica. From these churches along a period of 60 years there have gone forth noble characters into all parts of the land, sailing on o'er some rough seas, yet sailing on as the star guided them. And we are assured that most of them—for the children had a fine start in religious training—can look back to earlier days, and say that the fathers and mothers, most of whom are in heaven, labored not in vain.