

Carbondale's Welsh Roots

By S. Robert Powell

The City of Carbondale has very deep Welsh roots.

Shortly after the opening of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company's Gravity Railroad from Carbondale to Honesdale, on October 9, 1829, the D&H, in order to meet market demands for anthracite coal, made the decision to conduct deep underground mining by means of shafts. To secure the expertise needed to establish shaft mines, the D&H, in the summer of 1830, recruited in Wales twenty mining families and brought them to Carbondale, where they arrived on July 14, 1830.

Those Welsh miners established for the D&H in June 1831 in Carbondale the first deep underground anthracite shaft mine in America. The mining engineer in charge was Archibald Law. That mine opening was on the north side of Seventh Avenue on the west side of the D&H tracks, at the D&H Seventh Avenue crossing in Carbondale.

Additional Welsh miners were soon recruited by the D&H and, in October and November of 1832, a party of seventy Welsh miners and their families came to Carbondale. Those Welsh pioneers were soon followed by many thousands of Welsh men and women and their families who came to Carbondale and the Lackawanna and Wyoming valleys to work in the anthracite coal mines and to begin in America new lives for themselves.

The Welsh roots of Carbondale can all be traced to those 90 families of Welsh pioneers. Associated with those pioneer Welsh settlers and their descendants are two very interesting and important "firsts" for Carbondale in the history of the Welsh in America.

1. The first Welsh *eisteddfod* (a festival with a focus on language, literature, music, and scholarly contests) to be held in America took place in Carbondale on Christmas Day, 1850. Among the literarians and musicians who participated were Daniel Davies, Rev. John Moses, Thomas Eynon, Rev. Thomas J. Phillips, and Edward Jones. These were the pioneer *eisteddfodwyr* of America.

2. The first lodge in America of the ancient Welsh fraternal order, The Philanthropic Order of True Ivorites, was established in Carbondale in the fall of 1853, with the first public Ivorite celebration in America taking place in Carbondale in August 1855, when a procession through the principal streets of Carbondale and other public exercises took place, under the direction of Thomas Voyle, Esquire, chief marshal, and Edward Roberts, Esquire. Other members of the Order were Robert S. Roberts, Esq., Enoch Jones, Thomas M. Jones, William E. Jones, John Jenkins, Sen., Thomas J. Phillips, Evan Lumley, Llewelyn Hughes, Rev. David Williams, and Rev. William Evans.

In addition, these Welsh pioneer settlers in Carbondale established here three Welsh churches:

Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church. This church was organized as early as 1832 or 1833. The original leaders in Carbondale were Evan Price, John Evans, Daniel Moses and Daniel Scurry. For some time before building the church, meetings were held every Sabbath, alternately at the houses of the members. The first minister was Rev. John Davis, and the first regular preacher was Rev. John Griffiths. A Sunday-school was held in the church nearly every Sunday.

First Baptist Church of Carbondale. This church, with 43 constituent members, was organized in the spring of 1833. The house of worship was on South Church Street. In 1880, there were 120 members of this church, with William Davies as superintendent of the Sunday School.

Welsh Congregational Church. This church was organized around 1835. The church building was on South Church Street. The pastor, in 1880, was Rev. L. Williams.

In celebration of Carbondale's Welsh roots, the Carbondale Historical Society established, in 2004, a Saint David's Day Committee (Barbara James Campbell, Jeffrey Nepa, Joseph Pascoe, S. Robert Powell, and Eleanor Spellman) and on March 1, 2004 hosted the first Saint David's Day Dinner, Concert, and Historical Program in Carbondale. Since then, Welsh Heritage Evenings have been held annually in Carbondale on Saint David's Day. At all of these celebrations, the Saint David's Welsh Male Chorus of Scranton, under the direction of Mrs. Fran Justin, has performed. This chorus, which was organized in 1949 by William R. Hughes, is very active throughout the year in Scranton and northeastern Pennsylvania.

These concerts in Carbondale and Scranton in October 2015 by the Swansea Valley Celebration Male Choir are a wonderful celebration of Carbondale's Welsh roots and of the Welsh heritage of northeastern Pennsylvania. Those ninety Welsh families who came to Carbondale in the 1830s are with us in spirit tonight. Let's remember them always, and especially here and now, as we celebrate our Welsh heritage, knowing, as we do, that

To be born Welsh is to be born privileged,
not with a silver spoon in your mouth, but
with music in your blood and poetry in your soul.

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