

X. THE MINNESOTA GYMANVA

THE immigration of Welsh people into Minnesota marks a departure in the nature of Welsh migration. When the Eastern and North Central States were populated by the Welsh they were, for the most part, inhabited by those who emigrated from Wales. Minnesota, on the other hand, was settled by Welshmen who emigrated from other Welsh settlements in states east of the Mississippi River. Some of them, to be sure, had resided but a few years in these older Welsh colonies before leaving for the newly opened territory. Others—many of them—represented the second, some even the third, generation of Welsh in America.

The coming of the Welsh into Minnesota is a thrilling story—a story which would require a bulging volume adequately to relate. The experiences of the early Welsh upon entering the new territory were many and various, and typical of the deeds of heroism characteristic of the pioneers. The hazards of fording bridgeless sloughs and rivers, of wending their way through trackless swamps and prairies, of tramping through unblazed forests, of facing blinding blizzards during seasons of extreme cold, of battling with prairie fires in spring and hailstorms and windstorms on the open prairie during summer, made life indeed a veritable battle with the elements. Nor were the forces of nature the only difficulties and hindrances to be encountered and overcome by these pioneers in an effort to establish homes. They were threatened by assaults from the aborigines whose land they had come to possess. The Welsh settlers of the Blue Earth region played a brave part in suppressing the Indian uprisings in 1862, and many a Welsh frontiersman lost his life in the conflict.

Furthermore, their lack of skill in building, with the scant materials at their disposal, made home-making very difficult. Lack of materials and shortage of money with which to purchase the implements and appliances necessary for a successful pursuit

of their work made the task of the Minnesota pioneers anything but easy. Some of the first shelters built by early Welsh settlers were scarcely the equivalent of a shanty or hut. They were made of logs, piled crisscross upon each other in a most crude fashion, without window or floor, and with a quilt stretched across an opening which served as a door. From this extremely primitive shelter the earliest pioneers soon advanced to more substantial log houses, which were attractive and comfortable. Within a decade or two commodious and elaborate farmhouses were to be seen on their farms. To-day the Minnesota Welsh farm home is equipped with every modern rural convenience.

The Minnesota Territory was organized in 1849. There were a few Welshmen located in St. Paul at that time, among them Major John P. Owens, who arrived in May, 1849. Major Owens started *The Minnesota Register*, the first newspaper ever published in Minnesota. Another Welshman to arrive in St. Paul about the same time was Thomas Thomas, a stonemason and contractor. In 1850 four other Welshmen, John L. Jones, Griffith Jones, John Roberts, and Enoch Mason came, and in 1851 they were joined by four others, two by the name of David Jones, one by the name of Evans, and the other by the name of Williams.

Four of the eight Welshmen who arrived in 1850 and 1851—John Roberts, David Jones, Griffith Jones, and John L. Jones—located on farms a short distance northeast of St. Paul. In 1852 John C. Evans joined them, and two of his sisters soon followed him. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Evans; a brother, Edward S. Evans, Jr.; and two other sisters soon came to live with him in his newly established home in New Canada Township, Ramsey County.

It was not long before the Welsh settlers concluded that the soil in their vicinity was of poor quality. At that very time the land in the Blue Earth region was being loudly proclaimed as the richest soil in the world. The Government, as a result of the treaties made with the Indians in 1851, had recently released the Blue Earth area for occupation and settlement. Attracted by the glowing publicity of the Blue Earth land, John C. Evans, David Jones, and John Roberts, in May, 1853, left their homes

in Ramsey County, bent on exploring conditions in the Blue Earth region. After a voyage of seven days up the Minnesota River, they reached Mankato, then a village consisting of three log cabins. After scouting about and prospecting for a few days, the men returned to St. Paul afoot, satisfied that the rich soil they had examined in the vicinity of Traverse des Sioux was the region they desired for permanent location.

After a brief period of rest, during which they assembled some materials, Evans, Jones, and Roberts, on May 31, 1853, started back for the Blue Earth country, accompanied this time by Edward S. Evans, Jr., and Miss Elizabeth Evans, brother and sister to John C. Evans. The company, equipped with three wagons and four yoke of oxen, arrived at the site of what is now the village of Kasota and, after spending some days in further reconnoitering, decided upon Le Sueur Prairie as the site for staking their claims. In the month of August of the same year the remainder of the Edward Evans family came and joined the two sons and daughter in the newly established home in Le Sueur County. That same month one of the settlers, Griffith Jones, died, and in October another, John Roberts, left for Wisconsin. There remained only the immediate members of the Edward Evans family. But with the opening of spring, 1854, Thomas Davies, from Pomeroy, Ohio, arrived with his family and in 1855 three other Welsh families entered the settlement. On April 14, 1856, a company of one hundred and twenty-one Welsh people, practically all of whom were Calvinistic Methodists, left Jackson County, Ohio, for Minnesota. They engaged a boat at Cincinnati and made the voyage to St. Paul, then up the Minnesota River, reaching South Bend on May 14. Fifteen families of this company settled in Le Sueur County. Thus, briefly stated, the Coed Mawr (Big Woods) settlement in Le Sueur County had its beginning.

THE BLUE EARTH COUNTY SETTLEMENT

At the very time that John C. Evans was arranging for settlement in the Big Woods vicinity, David C. Evans, of La Crosse, Wisconsin, was making plans for settling in the vicinity of the big bend of the Minnesota River in Blue Earth County. It was

on July 26, 1853, that the latter left La Crosse for the new territory which had recently been opened by Congress for settlement. Going by boat up the Minnesota River to what was then known as Babcock's Landing, a little above the site of the present city of St. Peter, he walked to the spot which later became known as the village of South Bend. On August 7, satisfied with the condition of the soil, he started back for La Crosse with the intention of arranging his affairs for an immediate return. His plans were frustrated, however, by the announcement of the serious illness and death of his father in Palmyra, Ohio. This delayed his return to the big bend of the Minnesota until the middle of November. The bend in the river suggested the name South Bend, and the village was so named by its first settler.

The first Welshman to visit David Evans in his new home was John Jones, from the Welsh settlement near Oshkosh, in Winnebago County, Wisconsin, who with his son-in-law, Griffith Jones, arrived in July, 1854. The Joneses went back to Wisconsin and returned to South Bend, arriving on August 17 of the same summer, accompanied by their families. Early in February, 1855, three Welshmen from Jefferson County, Wisconsin, arrived. In April eight Welshmen chanced to meet at Galena, Illinois, and all of them were bound for the Blue Earth region in Minnesota. Some of those who arrived from Jackson County, Ohio, in May, 1856, also settled in the vicinity of South Bend and in other sections of Blue Earth County. The Blue Earth trek was now established and for many years Welshmen were trudging their way to the valley of the Minnesota so widely proclaimed the richest soil in the world.

THE LIME SPRINGS SETTLEMENT

A Welsh settlement was established in two border counties, namely, Fillmore County, Minnesota, and Howard County, Iowa, in the late 1850's. Lime Springs¹ is a single Welsh settlement, although located geographically in two different states—state boundaries form no barrier to Welsh brotherhood.

The first Welshman to enter the settlement was Richard W.

¹ The railway station is named Lime Spring, but the village, settlement, and presbytery are usually referred to by the name Lime Springs.

Jones, of Dodgeville, Wisconsin, who arrived in the summer of 1856. His stay was short, for in the autumn of the same year Mr. Jones returned to Dodgeville. Favorable impressions of the Lime Springs area—its fine soil and future possibilities under proper conditions of cultivation—lingered in his mind, and in the spring of 1858 he brought his family back and with them his friend Thomas Evans and his family. Mr. Jones located in York Township. In 1861 four others—John J. Jones, J. R. Williams, O. D. Owens, and R. W. Thomas, most or all of whom were related to the Richard W. Jones family—located in York and Bristol Townships. In the same year David Jones Davies and his brother, William Davies, arrived with their families from Proscairon, Wisconsin. In 1862 Hugh Edwards (Bodwrog) and John Roberts came from Cambria and Proscairon, Wisconsin. For several years following 1862 newcomers were few, if any, in number. But beginning with the year 1867 the Welsh crowded into the Lime Springs settlement in ever-increasing numbers for three or four years, so that Lime Springs became one of the most prosperous Welsh settlements in America, although smaller numerically than some others.

THE WELSH IN MINNEAPOLIS

The first Welshman on record as settling in Minneapolis was Dr. O. J. Evans, a native of Remsen, Oneida County, New York. He arrived at the close of the Civil War, in 1865, and had an important part in the building of Minneapolis and the State of Minnesota. Aside from carrying on his professional duties, he served on the city council and was a member of the state legislature. He served also on important boards, among them the Board of Education and the Board of Health. The second Welsh person to settle in Minneapolis was Miss Frances Jones, coming from Lewis County, New York, in 1867. David Williams, the miller, from Lime Springs, Iowa, arrived in the early '70's, and was soon followed by others from the same place. Beginning with the year 1880, Welsh from many states east of the Mississippi settled in the city. The Welsh occupied responsible positions in business and industry in Minneapolis and have gained a reputation for integrity and progress. Among them may be mentioned R. H.

Jones, one of the organizers of the Minneapolis-Harvester Company and for many years its secretary and treasurer. The name of J. L. Owens, inventor and manufacturer of machinery, is well-known. Welshmen are also found among the most prominent professional men of the city.

There are other Welsh settlements in Minnesota quite worthy of mention, but these referred to are the settlements in which the Calvinistic Methodist Church, as a denomination, had a prominent place. With this brief outline of general conditions prevailing when the Calvinistic Methodist Church began its work, we now turn to the story of the Church in Minnesota.

THE GYMANVA

The career of the Minnesota Gymanva as a church organization was different from that of the older gymanvas in America, in that it began with the organization of a presbytery rather than with the gymanva itself. In the states east of the Mississippi the gymanva was the first thing heard of after the organization of two, three, or more small churches. These early gymanvas, to be sure, were nothing more than preaching festivals (*cyfarfod pregethu*) at the beginning; but they constituted the germ of what later developed into a state body, or gymanva, with its complete form of organization. As new local settlements increased in number and extent of area, the necessity for subdivisions was realized and presbyteries were formed to meet the need. In Minnesota the order of organization was reversed. A presbytery was established as a bond of union between the churches within a limited area before there was a gymanva even of the limited preaching-festival type. The Calvinistic Methodist churches in Minnesota began their associated career as a presbytery, and not as a gymanva. When the first three churches—Sharon, Horeb, and Zion—had been organized, the ruling elders assembled to organize a presbytery consisting of these churches, and decided that the presbytery should meet in each church in turn. When the presbytery convened for the fourth time, the question of becoming identified with some Calvinistic Methodist gymanva was discussed. Some favored uniting as a presbytery with a gymanva in another state; others declared that such an arrange-

ment would be impractical because of their distance from any such body. Action in the matter was deferred for the time, but later it was decided to organize a gymanva in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Gymanva was organized in the newly built Zion Church on September 15-16, 1858. As Zion was the most centrally located of the Minnesota churches, it was therefore resolved to hold the gymanva annually at that church. Here is a case of a gymanva organized three years after the presbytery was organized. The presbytery consisted of three churches and the gymanva consisted of one presbytery. At first such an arrangement appears incongruous, but in the light of subsequent development it is clear that leaders in Minnesota were laying a broad foundation for future growth; for before the end of its career the Minnesota Gymanva had within its bounds four presbyteries. Evan Griffiths, an elder of Sharon Church, was elected moderator of the first gymanva and Edward Thomas, clerk. The second gymanva was held September 14-15, 1859. Rev. Robert Williams, of La Crosse, was present at this gymanva and acted as moderator. Mr. Williams was in the settlement only a short time, but he preached fifteen times while there and the people, thirsty for the gospel, followed him from place to place to hear his message.

The Minnesota Gymanva was scheduled to convene annually in the month of June, or during the week following the spring meeting of the Wisconsin Gymanva. There was an exception to this for a brief period of three years, 1897-1899, during which it convened semiannually. The reason for the semiannual arrangement was that the Dakota Presbytery insisted on having gymanva sessions within its bounds. To meet this demand an autumn meeting was introduced. The Dakota Presbytery soon became too weak to entertain the gymanva and a return was made to the old schedule of one gymanva in the year.

There was no church in the Welsh settlements of Minnesota large enough to accommodate the multitude which frequented these "big meetings," as they were called. People came from a large radius and traveled great distances to be present at these great assemblies. To meet the emergency of accommodating all who came, the public services of the gymanva were held, for



THE OUT-OF-DOOR PULPIT OF THE MINNESOTA GYMANVA

many years, in a beautiful grove on the farm of Humphrey J. Roberts, Esq., near the old Jerusalem Church in Judson Township. A most unique feature of this meeting place in the grove was the pulpit. It was one of nature's own products, consisting of the stock of a sturdy oak sawed in such a way that a tripod—three roots or limbs—served as supports. From this rugged and crude pulpit some of the greatest divines of Wales and the most distinguished Welsh preachers of America proclaimed the good news of the gospel.

The gymanva was incorporated in 1916, at which time Peter Lloyd, of Mankato; Hugh J. Williams, of Minneapolis; James D. Price, of Cambria; Caradog G. Jones, of Lake Crystal; and W. O. Rowlands, of Ipswich, South Dakota, were elected trustees.

THE PRESBYTERIES OF THE MINNESOTA GYMANVA

The Blue Earth, or the Minnesota, or Minnesota First, Presbytery, as it was originally called, was organized October 8-9, 1856, by Rev. Richard Davies. At that time the only three Calvinistic Methodist churches within the Territory of Minnesota were united to constitute a presbytery. Eleven ruling elders were present on the occasion, representing the churches as follows:

Sharon Church: Evan Griffiths, Thomas J. Jones, Edward Evans.

Horeb Church: D. P. Davies, John Shields, John Walters.

Zion Church: Evan Evans (Y Pant), Evan H. Evans, Edward Thomas, Sr., Thomas Jones (Poples), and John I. Jones.

The ministers who preached on the occasion were Rev. Richard Davies, Rev. Jenkin Jenkins, and Rev. Robert D. Price. Jenkins was a Congregationalist and Price was a Wesleyan preacher. The organizing of Blue Earth Presbytery was a movement on the part of laymen; it was a presbytery of ruling elders. The official sessions were held in the home of Mrs. Elizabeth Jones (Maes Mawr), at South Bend, and the public services were held in a grove near by. The afternoon service was interrupted by a wild prairie fire, and the audience had to go to fight the fire. The evening service was disturbed by a tremendous downpour of rain, so that those in attendance could not leave until after midnight.

Thus it is declared that the Presbytery of Blue Earth was initiated with "a baptism of fire and water."

The second meeting of the Blue Earth Presbytery was held in Sharon Church (Big Woods), Le Sueur County, in February, 1857; the third meeting was held at Horeb Church, in June, 1857. From that time forward the meetings of the presbytery were held in turn in each church within its bounds.

THE CHURCHES OF THE BLUE EARTH PRESBYTERY

The first Welsh sermon ever preached in Minnesota was delivered by Rev. Richard Davies in 1855 to a company of Welsh immigrants who camped for the Sabbath near the banks of the Mississippi River. The first Welsh Sunday School was held in April, 1855, at South Bend, and the first Welsh church was organized in June, 1856.

Sharon Church (Eglwys Saron), in the Big Woods Settlement, Le Sueur County. This was the first Welsh Church of any denomination to be organized in Minnesota. Sharon was organized by Rev. Richard Davies, on June 24, 1856, with twenty-one charter members. Previous to the organization of the church, Sunday School and prayer services had been held in an old carpenter shop, the property of Seth Cadwaladr. Here it was that Rev. Richard Davies preached the first Welsh sermon in the Big Woods settlement, and here too Sharon Church was organized. From that time forward services were regularly held in the settlement: Sunday School and prayer meeting on Sunday, fellowship meeting at two o'clock in the afternoon on Thursday of each week, and a missionary prayer meeting (a service of prayer for missions) at two o'clock in the afternoon on the first Monday of each month. The place of meeting was soon transferred to the home of William E. Jones, and Rev. Richard Davies came to preach and to administer the sacraments one Sunday in the month, when the weather permitted. During severe winter weather, in the absence of a minister, some member of the congregation read a sermon from *The Friend*, or from some other religious magazine. In February, 1857, Sharon Church entertained the Blue Earth Presbytery meeting and, soon after, the congregation decided to build a church, which was erected on Section 32, Town

III. It was built of logs and, when entered for worship in the spring of 1857, was the first Welsh church built in Minnesota and the first church of any religious denomination in Le Sueur County. The entire expense of building was borne by the community itself. In 1880 a new church was built and was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day of that year.

The charter members of Sharon Church were Evan Griffiths, Jane Griffiths, Mary Griffiths, Thomas J. Jones, Eleanor Jones, John C. Jones, Rachel Jones, Edward Evans, Ann Evans, John C. Evans, John D. Jones, David Howell, David Evans, Mary Evans, David Lloyd, Margaret Lloyd, Lewis Jones, Mary Jones, Thomas Davies, William E. Jones, and Margaret Jones. The first elders were Evan Griffiths, Thomas J. Jones, and Edward Evans.

Horeb Church, Blue Earth County. A goodly number of the company which arrived in South Bend from Jackson County, Ohio, on May 17, 1856, located in Cambria Township, Blue Earth County. A Sunday School was organized by the new arrivals on June 15, 1856. On July 2, 1856, Horeb Church was organized by Rev. Richard Davies in the cabin of D. P. Davies. It received its name from the old Horeb Church, in Jackson County, Ohio, from which many of the members had emigrated. The congregation continued to assemble in the homes of the members—D. P. Davies and others—until Horeb Church was built, in 1858. Although the church was built in 1858, the interior was not finished for some time, owing to years of depression and the Indian disturbances of 1862. However, during this period services were maintained and the pulpit was supplied by the local preachers of the settlement. After the Indian wars many more Welsh came into the neighborhood, and Horeb Church resumed activity with vigor.

The charter members of the church were Rev. and Mrs. David Davies and their three children, John, Peter, and Mary; Mr. and Mrs. John Walters and their son, John; Mr. and Mrs. David P. Davies and their sons, Daniel and John; Mr. and Mrs. John Shields; Mr. and Mrs. William P. Jones; Mr. and Mrs. David S. Davies; Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Lloyd; and Mr. and Mrs. James