



"CYMRY" SINGING — Welsh singing for the St. David's Day Banquet in The Salem Presbyterian Church, Venedocia, is traditionally in parts. This custom of singing in harmony originated and developed in Wales. The above picture shows the interior of the church and participants during Thursday night's program. (Staff photo)

St. David's Day celebrated

By JEANNINE C. ROEDIGER
Times-Bulletin Staff Writer

If your name's O'Malley, you've got to be Irish, and the month of March is special because of St. Patrick's Day.

But, if your name is Lloyd, Breese, Owens, Evans, Morris, Jones, Davis, Williams, or Ebb, you're Welsh and everyone who's Welsh knows that March commemorates Dewi Sant, or St. David.

St. David was born around 520 A.D. and his death is assumed to be March 1, 589 A.D., and it has been commemorated even in early liturgical calendars.

This saint was dedicated to establishing Christianity in Wales in the early sixth century, and founded many monasteries. In 1120 A.D. he was canonized by Pope Callixtus II as the patron saint of Wales.

Wales, a small mountainous country located on the western coast of the island of Great Britain, has been part of the United Kingdom for over 400 years, but has always retained the Welsh language even though English is the official language of Wales.

On or near March 1, St. David's Day has been celebrated in America since 1729, and many communities in Ohio still celebrate the day with banquets and programs. Celebrations have been recently held in Ottawa, Gomer, and Columbus.

IN 1847, the families of William Bebb of Rhiwgriafol, Darowen, N. Wales; Thomas Morris of Dolygweiddil, Trefeglwys, N. Wales; and Richard Jervis of Llanbrynmair, N. Wales, left their homeland with their families. By October of 1897, they began a journey through the Midwest, looking for a place to settle.

They briefly stayed near Rockland, Ill., then traveled to Allen and Van Wert counties in Ohio where they purchased land in York Township in Van Wert County. This was the beginning of the community of Venedocia.

Jervis compiled and translated his recollections in 1894, (from the "Y Cyfaill," or "By a Friend") and the following excerpt taken from the Centenary History of the Salem

Presbyterian Church of Venedocia, published in 1948, tells of life in that early community:

"AT THAT TIME the land was thick with trees, and it was wet and uninhabited. No doubt it had been the hunting ground of the Indians and the habitation of owls, wolves, and ravenous beasts throughout the centuries. The Indians had departed for some years before we arrived, but rapacious beasts were still here, such as panthers, wolves, and wildcats.

"In regard to traveling conveniences there was no railroad within one hundred miles of us. The only means of transporting goods to the communities was by the slow boat; and when the canal would freeze at the beginning of winter, everything had to be at a standstill until the ice would melt again.

"There was a good flour mill in Section Ten, which is Delphos today, and there were two stores and a Post Office there. When we had some butter and eggs to sell, we often took them there in a basket. It was about nine miles away, through thick forests, and along wet, winding paths.

"After we arrived there we were given five or six cents a pound for the butter, and five cents a dozen for the eggs in trade. To have any money was out of the question. When we went to the mill, we would start about noontime in order to reach there by nightfall. We would tie the horses to the wagon, and we ourselves would stay in the mill loft until next morning. The flour would be ready by the time it would be light enough for us to return home, so we could see our way through the woods. We always remembered to carry an axe along with us, in case we would want to open a new track so as to escape some of the swamps. Sometimes we ventured too much; the horses could not go on and we had to empty the wagon."

Gymanfa Ganu, or festival of

sacred song, on the Sunday before Labor Day.

Many travel to other St. David celebrations and Gymanfa Ganu festivals, singing the old songs in the Welsh language.

Many Welsh communities have continued singing and speaking the Welsh language, but as Marvin Evans noted, the younger members of these communities have not learned to sing or read in Welsh, and the custom may be lost.

THE ANNUAL ST. DAVID'S Day Banquet was held Thursday evening in the Salem Presbyterian Church. The banquet, served by the ladies of the church, was attended by 120 people.

Vaughn Morgan, a member of Salem and a Van Wert County commissioner, gave the "croeso" or welcome. Morgan stated that he recalls the banquets have been held since the early 1920s and

have been a continuing tradition for the church.

Pronounced a typical group of Welshman by Morgan, the group was led in Welsh songs by Lee Lare of Venedocia. The Welsh are especially known for their singing, and this group was no exception as they keep their singing heritage alive. Writing in 1188, Giraldus, a historian of the period, spoke of the Welsh skill in vocal music, which they sing in parts, not in unison.

Mr. and Mrs. David Britt of Gomer, provided special music for the evening and Dr. Dale Dickey, a professor of Bluffton College, was the speaker.

Dr. Dickey, a supply pastor for the Presbyterian Church, called the Welsh "wonderful people" and noted the legacy left by St. David.

"ST. DAVID, he said, lived his faith, witnessed wherever he went without knowing the result, and left the rest in God's hands.

This legacy and the rich heritage of the Welsh people are revived each year as this community commemorates St. David's Day and holds the Gymanfa Ganu.

The Welsh, considered a friendly people, invite you to "Deuwch, Canwn I'r Arglwydd," or Come, Sing to the Lord, during their Gymanfa Ganu festival and "Gaf fi ddymuno i bawb yng Ngogledd America, Dydd Gwyl Dewi Dedwydd," which means A Happy St. David's Day to all in North America!