



Martha Bigham/Times-Bulletin  
Salem Presbyterian Church is celebrating the 100th birthday of the church building this year. The congregation itself is 150 years old.

# Venedocia celebrates rich Welsh heritage

By **MARTHA BIGHAM**  
Times-Bulletin Staff Writer

**VENEDOCIA** — Preserving their town's rich Welsh heritage has been the goal of Venedocia citizens for more than 150 years. As the small hamlet celebrates the 150th birthday of Salem Church, residents in the community have participated in activities throughout the year to commemorate their Welsh ancestry and history.

According to the Rev. Wendy Pratt of Salem Presbyterian Church, it was in April 1848 that three families who had temporarily emigrated to Cincinnati from Wales journeyed up the Miami and Erie canals to Delphos in search of land to form a new Welsh settlement. The original three families settling in the area were the William Bebb, the Thomas Morris and the J.R. "Richard" Jervis families.

Pratt said one of the reasons why William Bebb — the cousin of Ohio's Governor William Bebb — and his family came to the United States was for the sake of religious freedom. According to the Bebb genealogy, William Bebb was gifted in the area of music and was teaching church children of his district in North Wales to sing four-part harmony.

The more traditional people in the local congregation objected and demanded that all singing within the church be done in unison. Church leaders went as far as threatening to excommunicate Bebb and his family if he didn't stop teaching his "unacceptable" style of singing.

Not long after the Bebb and Morris families arrived Van Wert

County, the Jervis family joined them. There was already a log cabin for shelter and about a quarter of an acre of land that had been cleared.

"At that time, the Venedocia area was wild, with thick woods and swamp land," Pratt said, adding that the early settlers were often awakened in the night due to the cries and howls of beasts like panthers, wolves and wildcats.

Pratt explained that on the first night when the Jervis family arrived, they were frightened by the sounds of animals scratching at the door and the clay chimney of their cabin. When Richard summoned the courage to investigate, he picked up his gun and headed for the door while his wife followed close behind carrying a candle to light the way. When they caught a glimpse of the two culprits, Richard shot his gun and hit one of the beasts as the other fled. They later discovered that the "frightening" animals were porcupines.

During those early years, settlers faced a number of hardships as they attempted to carve out an existence in their new home, Pratt noted. As they went back and forth to Delphos to trade their goods or take grain to the mill, they literally cleared the trail as they went. Each time settlers went to Delphos, they would plan a two-day journey because their wagons would often get stuck in the mire that covered so much of the non-irrigated land.

However, from the very beginning, settlers in Venedocia relied on their god to see them through difficult times. They met regularly