

Dick Davis, author of “Welsh Bynames on the Allegheny”

I was born in Ebensburg, PA, a wilderness hamlet founded in 1796 by monolingual Welsh immigrants, and I attended its common schools. The City College of New York awarded me an A.B., Honors, in French; in absentia because I had already gone to the American Embassy in Egypt as a military attaché. I subsequently served at our embassies in Mexico, Paris, and Brussels.

Along the way I took Mario Pei’s course in comparative linguistics at Columbia, graduated from the Defense Language Institute in Spanish, and studied music theory at the Mexican National Conservatory of Music.

My longest conventional academic affiliation is Saint Francis College (now University), Loretto, PA, where my main concerns were French and Spanish literature and structural linguistics. I also taught at the City College of New York and at Pennsylvania State University.

My mother’s friends had unusual names like Mary Sherm, Martha Tim, Emily Tom, and Liza Gate. My father was Harry Davis Pepper, my grandfather Dick Davies Barber, my great grandfather Tom Davis Mason, my twice-great grandfather Davy Davis Watchmaker, and my thrice-great grandfather Roland Davis Blaen-y-Cwm. In youth my sisters and I thought no more about these names than a fish does about water, but in time I realized that the endless bynames of this little Welsh enclave merited serious notice and I began to sort them out, mainly for myself, but also to promote an understanding of the community’s past. It was then that my wife began to say of me: “You can talk to him but don’t ask him his name; it takes him two hours to explain it.”

I was led deep into a tiny world lost in a misty century of Welsh language use so I undertook translating to English all its known records (which are now in print). The Independent Church sang Welsh in parts (harmony) over that hundred years without a single written note surviving, but the windfall discovery of an 1836 music deacon’s manuscript has allowed me to reconstruct and publish nearly 100 pieces of previously lost music.

I am a longtime member of the board of the Cambria County Historical Society, and author, under the sponsorship of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, of its standard guide brochures *Historic Ebensburg* and *On the Pioneer Trail in Cambria County*. I was BBC Wales’ on-site consultant for their dual language documentary, *Sion Cymry* ‘Welsh Zion’, filmed in Ebensburg. I also design, build, and fly radio-controlled aircraft. I am a life member of the Retired Officers Association of the United States and the Society of the 84th Infantry Division.

W. R. Davis
415 East High Street
Ebensburg PA 15931
wrdavisrc@earthlink.net