

## Another Welsh Tract

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IN THE MARCH, 1963, issue of *Names* Ruth L. Pearce writes engagingly of the Welsh Tract,<sup>1</sup> a 40,000-acre portion of Penn's grant from Charles II<sup>2</sup> which soon after 1681 was occupied by settlers from Wales.<sup>3</sup> In the course of her article Mrs. Pearce comments on the quality of the Welsh immigrant, the value he placed upon freedom of worship, his impact on the new colony as a whole, and his success in preserving and fostering his native language – at least for a time; but her chief concern is with geographical names which were either transferred from Wales to features in those portions of Chester and Delaware Counties comprising the Welsh Tract, or formed on the scene from Celtic elements,<sup>4</sup> or which were applied along the Main Line “long after Welsh immigration had ceased here and long after all Welsh tradition had died out,” primarily by George Roberts, a late-nineteenth-century president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, some of whose ancestors had been among the original Welsh settlers.

My purpose here is not merely to compliment Mrs. Pearce on a job well done, but also to carry the discussion a little farther south in Penn's territories to an area a few miles below the present

<sup>1</sup> “Welsh Place-names in Southeastern Pennsylvania,” *Names*, 11, 31–43.

<sup>2</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, 1st series (Philadelphia, 1856), 12, 280; cf. *ibid.*, 279.

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that Penn chose *New Wales* as a name for his territories, but the King overruled him in favor of *Pennsylvania*. (Manuscript letter, William Penn to Robert Turner, dated May 5, 1680/1, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; published by Catherine O. Peare in *William Penn* [Philadelphia, 1957], p. 215.)

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Pearce discusses two Welsh names which were so formed in the early period of Welsh colonization: *Duffryn Mawr* and *Tredyffrin*, and a third, *Uwchlan*, compounded of a Celtic preposition and a Teutonic noun. Incidentally, her attempt, in her comments on *Uwchlan*, to go beyond the influence of a possible Swedish model *Upland* to that of a possible Dutch model *Oplandt* (her spelling), is hardly warranted if my discussion of *Fort Oplandt*, in *Dutch and Swedish Place-names in Delaware* (Newark, Delaware, 1956), p. 29, has any validity.

Delaware-Pennsylvania boundary which became another Welsh Tract, occupied by seekers after religious freedom who were predominantly Baptist and Presbyterian rather than Quaker in persuasion. At the very beginning of the eighteenth century William Penn issued a warrant to his Surveyor-General, Edward Penington (sic), to survey a large tract of land in New Castle County, as follows:

At the request of William Davies, David Evans, and William Willis in behalf of themselves and company of new Welsh purchasers that I would grant them to take up in the County of New Castle thirty thousand acres of land or so much as there is to be had beginning at a line distant westward from Newcastle seven miles and from there extending northwards and southwards by streight lines as near as may be, sufficient to comprehend the said number of acres upon the terms already agreed on under their hands. These are to require thee forthwith to survey or cause to be surveyed to them the said number of acres in the said place and make particular returns of the subdivisions to each man under his proper name into my secretaries office. The whole to be laid out according to the method of townships by me appointed. Given under my hand and seal at Philadelphia the 15th day of October 1701.<sup>5</sup>

Although this grant was located largely within the limits of New Castle County (northwestern corner), it was made at a time when jurisdictional rights were being tested, and authorities in Maryland were not slow to remind Penn that it spilled over into Cecil County (northeastern corner).<sup>6</sup>

In addition to differences in size and location,<sup>7</sup> and in the religious affiliation of the settlers, there were a number of other differences between the two Welsh tracts in Penn's territories. For one thing, there is very meager information about the backgrounds of those who came early to the southern tract. The records are specific about the ministers of religion but reveal little or nothing about the

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<sup>5</sup> From a manuscript copy in the Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware. For the agreement mentioned in the warrant, plus accompanying documents, see New Castle County Deed Book I Q, p. 81; and for a survey of the tract in question see New Castle County Land Surveys: 1760-1769, p. 586f.

<sup>6</sup> *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia, 1852), 2, 393-4. See also George Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Maryland* (Elkton, 1881), pp. 161-3.

<sup>7</sup> The separateness of the two tracts was unfortunately not realized by A. H. Dodd in his useful booklet entitled *The Character of Early Welsh Emigration to the United States* (Cardiff, 1957), p. 13.

vocations and social status of the others before they crossed the Atlantic. Here, whatever they had been beforehand, they took up land and became tillers of the soil. With the development of educational opportunities in the colonies, some settlers gradually entered professions, but the pattern of their vocational spread probably differed little, if at all, from the general colonial pattern. The scantiness of our information leaves many questions unanswered, but, in any event, it would hardly be possible to say, as Mrs. Pearce was able to say of the Welsh in nearby Pennsylvania, that they were "people of means and education" and that their impact "upon the new colony was tremendous and cannot be overestimated." Another point of difference is that the Welsh who came to settle the southern tract were not predominantly from the eastern part of Wales as were the earlier northern-tract immigrants, but were from the southwestern sector of the country, principally Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. This geographical ancestry meant that, removed as they were from the neighborhood of the English border, they were more likely to be monolingual than bilingual, and thus that their hold on the Welsh language was to a degree tighter than that of their fellow immigrants from eastern Wales. A. H. Dodd has shown that, whereas the Welsh language was receding in the northern tract during the opening decades of the eighteenth century, "the congregation on the Delaware still clung to Welsh" until the 1730's.<sup>8</sup> After that decade there was apparently a steady decline, and there is no reason to think that Welsh continued in use in Delaware much beyond the year 1800.<sup>9</sup>

The final point of difference that I shall comment on is in the number of Celtic geographical names established in the neighboring Welsh Tracts. An area three-fourths the size of the northern tract might be expected to have three-fourths the number of Celtic

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 33-5. The early records of the Welsh Tract Baptist Church are written chiefly in Welsh down to the year 1732. See *Records of the Welsh Tract Baptist Meeting . . . 1701-1828* (Wilmington, Delaware, 1904), pp. 4, 26; Morgan Edwards, "History of the Baptists in Delaware," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, (1885), 12, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Preaching in Welsh continued until about 1800, according to the editor of the records of the Welsh Tract Baptist Church. See *Records . . .*, p. 4, and cf. R. C. Evans, "Welsh Settlers of Pencader, Delaware," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, (1878), 2, 343-5, and W. T. Skinner, *History of the Pencader Presbyterian Church* (Wilmington, Delaware, 1899), pp. 36, 43.

names, but such is far from being the case. In fact, the only Celtic place-name that I have been able to find in the records pertaining to the southern tract, or to any other part of Delaware for that matter, is *Pencader*,<sup>10</sup> which was applied for a time to the community known today as Glasgow,<sup>11</sup> and which is still used to designate the political subdivision including Glasgow, namely, Pencader Hundred.<sup>12</sup> *Pen* means "chief," "high," and *cader* "chair," (also "stronghold")<sup>13</sup>; and the two elements together could possibly have reference to Iron Hill, a high place or seat, the first noticeable rising of the Welsh Tract land area as the foothills begin to push up above the coastal plain. On the other hand, the name *Pencader* could have been imported from Carmarthenshire, Wales,<sup>14</sup> and its topographical appropriateness in this instance might have been a mere accident. Whatever the reason for applying the Delaware name, the explanation seems not to have been recorded.

If one is at all conscious of the blending of cultures which produces the cultural fabric of our nation, he is likely to be made aware of the Welsh strain in Delaware's background by historical markers at points where the main highways intersect the boundaries of the ancient tract, by the survival of the Celtic name *Pencader* within the

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<sup>10</sup> Delaware names like *Milford* and *Newport* appear to have had no connection with conceivable counterparts in Wales; cf. J. T. Scharf, *History of Delaware* (Philadelphia, 1888), pp. 893, 1188, 1190. A few plantation names imported from Wales or from the border zone between Wales and England may be found in Delaware archival records, e.g., Abergany (or Abberconway, as it was spelled when applied to a different piece of land by another landowner), Brecknock, Canarvan, Cardiff, and Denbigh (all sic); none, however, became established as full-fledged geographical names. Another type of Welsh name that might be mentioned is Brynson, or Bryn (i.e., "mount") plus Zion, which was once the designation of a church in Kent County, Delaware; see Morgan Edwards, *op. cit.*, 9, 202. None of the names mentioned in this footnote, it should be realized, has any connection with the Delaware Welsh Tract.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, an indenture dated September 10, 1798, between James Boulden and Thomas Marsh, in New Castle County Deed Book II S, p. 367.

<sup>12</sup> D. G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Delaware* (Philadelphia, 1868), p. 27; cf. *United States Geological Survey, Wilmington Quadrangle*, 1906.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Morgan, *The Place-Names of Wales*, revised edition (Newport, Monmouthshire, 1912), pp. 35, 114. Cf. the letter from William Penn to Robert Turner mentioned in footnote 3 above.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> *Records . . .*, p. 126f.

bounds of the tract, by the continuing existence of the Welsh Tract Baptist Church, and by tombstones with Welsh inscriptions found not only in the burial ground of the church just mentioned (which is about four miles south of Newark, Delaware<sup>15</sup> but also in that of the Pencader Presbyterian Church, in Glasgow.<sup>16</sup> By and large, however, except for these reminders and for the presence in the area of surnames like Bevan, Lloyd, Owens, Powell, Price, Roberts, Thomas, Vaughan, and Wynn, the Delaware Welsh, along with their language and other cultural manifestations, have long since been absorbed into the mainstream of American life.

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<sup>16</sup> H. G. Welbon, *A History of Pencader Presbyterian Church* (Newark, Delaware, 1936), p. 56.